

## I. Dynasty 551

### Chapter 551

The setting sun was like blood, and the Bian River was dyed a vivid red, whether by the reflection of the sunset or by actual blood, it was unclear.

After setting up camp on the north bank of the Bian River, in the evening, Luo Hong and Luo Xin appeared at the end of the Pengzhou official road. After joining forces with Lu Fei, the main army did not immediately attack the city but instead set up camp along the official road of Pengzhou City.

Just as the intelligence provided by Li San stated, the land in front of Pengzhou City was very narrow, unsuitable for large-scale military deployment.

That night, Lu Fei and the generals once again confirmed the strategy for the next day's siege, to avoid any command confusion.

"The soldiers in Pengzhou City number as many as fifty thousand. Adding the private armies of the powerful families in the city, the estimated total is eighty to ninety thousand. The city gate of Pengzhou City is easy to blast open, but the soldiers will encounter street fighting upon entering the city, which is most unfavorable for us," Lu Fei said, frowning.

Luo Hong nodded. He understood what Lu Fei meant. The ideal battlefield for musketeers was open ground, which was convenient for deploying formations. Once they entered a city with many buildings, it would be difficult to utilize the advantage of musketry volleys, leading to close-quarters combat.

"So His Highness told us not to be eager for quick success, but to proceed steadily. After the city is breached, we must first control the city gate, and then occupy the city wall based on the city gate. This

way, we establish a position from which we can slowly erode Pengzhou City,” Luo Xin said, holding his arms.

Lu Fei nodded and said to Luo Xin, “Tomorrow, your lime bombs must be fired with all your might, and the grape shot too. No matter how tough Pengzhou City is, can it be tougher than Shanhai Pass?”

“That’s right, Shanhai Pass was taken, so what’s there to fear about a mere Pengzhou City?” Luo Xin echoed, and the two immediately burst into laughter.

Luo Hong looked at the two with some envy. The Qingzhou Army’s reputation resonated throughout Great Yu Empire, and he was also envious. “Don’t forget me. The soldiers of our Firearm Battalion are not cowards either.”

As the three were discussing the next day’s siege, the atmosphere inside Pengzhou City grew increasingly tense. They had initially thought that this attack would only involve the three warships, but they hadn’t expected so many soldiers to arrive successively in the evening.

The gunshots in the afternoon and the artillery bombardment of the Pengzhou Navy also spread fear and pessimism throughout the city. Before everyone’s eyes, the Pengzhou Navy, known for its ferocity, was utterly defeated.

“Chief Clerk Mi, how can we fight this battle without cannons and firearms? You’ve seen it, the King Qi’s army outside the city has both firearms and cannons. Our soldiers are being routed before they even touch the enemy. Now the navy’s soldiers are so scared they don’t dare to fight again. What should we do?” The head of the Lu family sighed heavily.

Unlike their optimism in the morning, the clan leaders in the city were now sighing one after another. They clearly knew what had happened on the city wall and could not imagine fighting such an army.

“Let’s escape, there’s still time. If King Qi’s army enters the city, we’ll be finished,” someone said.

“That’s right, pack up your gold and silver now, otherwise there won’t be enough time to escape.”

“Everyone, let’s just flee for our lives.”

“...”

One person mentioned fleeing and immediately received responses from everyone. They were usually very cruel to the common people, but facing an army fiercer than themselves, they felt only fear at this moment.

Mi Wenyi’s face was grim. Everyone else could flee without a fight, but he could not. He was the Chief Clerk of the Prince of Wei’s residence, and Pengzhou City was the foundation of the Mi family’s power. If Pengzhou City was lost, his Mi family would lose its value in the Prince of Wei’s eyes.

“Bang!” Mi Wenyi slammed the table. “Flee? Where can you flee to? King Qi’s ambition is not limited to our Wei territory; he wants the entire world. By then, where else can you flee?”

Everyone immediately fell silent. Mi Wenyi was not unreasonable. With the world in chaos now, where else could they flee to?

One clan leader said, "It's not that we are cowards who cling to life, but King Qi's army's firearms are truly too powerful. Chief Clerk Mi, if you can get the Prince of Wei to dispatch a batch of cannons and firearms, we might be able to fight. But fighting like this now will only increase casualties."

Mi Wenyi sighed, feeling regret. He had underestimated the power of firearms too much. It wasn't that he hadn't valued firearms; he had seen the Prince of Wei's firearms in Jinling City.

After the demonstration by the firearm unit in Jinling City, he felt that firearms were not invincible.

But now he understood he was wrong, because in his opinion, there was no comparison between the Qingzhou musketeers and the Prince of Wei's musketeers. The Qingzhou Army was not only proficient in operation but also disciplined. This could be seen just from their encampment.

The army tents outside the city were all in straight lines, and the soldiers on patrol walked in pairs, in rows of three, with no idle or undisciplined soldiers.

"As long as you can hold out for half a month, I can get the cannons and matchlock guns." Mi Wenyi hesitated, then made up his mind.

"Half a month!" Everyone looked at each other, no one confident.

With a heavy snort, Mi Wenyi said, "This is the only way now. It's up to you whether you want to die at King Qi's hands or fight hard."

With that, Mi Wenyi flicked his sleeve and left.

Seeing Mi Wenyi leave in anger, everyone else sighed and dispersed.

The next day, the morning in Pengzhou City was shattered by the booming of cannons.

The warships docked on the north bank of the Bian River were the first to attack. The cannons directly bombarded the city gate of Pengzhou City. After three rounds of bombardment, the city gate of Pengzhou City became a beehive, on the verge of collapsing at any moment.

Luo Xin, on the opposite bank of the Bian River, looked at this scene with some envy. Commander Niu's decision was truly brilliant. This single warship was simply a maritime fortress, and this volley of cannon fire was immensely powerful.

Lu Fei looked through his telescope at the opposite side. Compared to yesterday, the defenders of Pengzhou City were clearly much smarter. Not a single general or soldier dared to show their head; all of them were hiding behind the city battlements.

"Boom, boom, boom..."

The galleons on the water continued to bombard the city gate of Pengzhou City. After two more volleys, the city gate of Pengzhou City suddenly tilted and collapsed. It was then that everyone discovered a pile of stones stacked behind the city gate.

With the city gate breached, Lu Fei looked at Luo Xin and said, “Now it’s your turn.”

“Bring up the mortars!” Luo Xin shouted. Soon, sixty soldiers, in pairs, lifted the mortars placed on metal bases to the front. At the same time, the field cannons were also arranged neatly by the artillerymen in linear formation.

“Lime bombs!” Luo Xin commanded again.

At his command, the soldiers loaded lime bombs, contained within hollow cannonballs, into the mortars. At the same time, the artillerymen began to measure the distance and adjust the length of the wooden fuses on the cannonballs.

“Fire!” With Luo Xin’s command, thirty mortars simultaneously fired from a distance of three hundred meters towards the opposite side.

“Boom, boom, boom...”

The lime bombs exploded near the city wall, and white lime dust spread like smoke, obscuring the vision of the Pengzhou City defenders. At the same time, the three galleons on the water began to adjust their positions. The three warships spread out across the river, with two iron chains connecting the two galleons. The soldiers on the ships laid wooden planks on the iron chains, forming a temporary bridge.

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On the city wall, the Pengzhou army fell into chaos.

With each cannonball impacting the city gate, the hearts of the Pengzhou defenders grew colder. Especially when black cannonballs pierced through the city gate and shook the stone wall, their fear intensified.

This stone wall was built overnight, aiming to prevent the city gate from being blasted open by cannons, but now it was clear that this stone wall was completely useless.

During the warship's bombardment, the Pengzhou army soldiers could barely hold on. The warship's target was the city gate, not them, which gave them a sense of luck. But when white lime dust covered the city wall, they could no longer remain calm.

Soldiers whose eyes were burned by the lime dust wailed on the city wall, and lime bombs exploded one after another over their heads. White dust, like mist, enveloped the front of the city wall.

Facing the omnipresent lime dust, the Pengzhou army soldiers on the city wall covered their eyes and screamed in batches. Although the lime dust could not cause them severe injuries, it was enough to make them lose their combat effectiveness.

On the other side of the Bian River, Lu Fei and Luo Xin observed the situation on the city wall. Large numbers of Pengzhou soldiers were being replaced, and then large numbers of new soldiers were brought up.

"Luo Xin, it's time to switch to field cannons." Lu Fei said calmly.

Unlike the fixed-angle naval guns on warships, field cannons were much more flexible, and soldiers could adjust the angle of the cannons at any time according to the target.

Luo Xin understood. Lu Fei meant for him to bombard the city wall with both solid shot and lime bombs simultaneously, which would disable some soldiers while also killing others, thus creating a greater psychological deterrence for the Pengzhou army.

Turning his head to look at the ready field cannons, Luo Xin said, "Fire at the enemies hiding behind the battlements!"

"Yes."

Upon receiving the order, the field cannons immediately adjusted their angles and aimed at the city wall. Then the field cannons simultaneously unleashed solid shots onto the city wall. The battlements on the city gate were instantly shattered by the solid shots. These stone-built city walls simply could not withstand the bombardment of solid shots.

"Boom, boom, boom..."

Solid shot after solid shot flew towards the city wall. In a very short time, the city wall of Pengzhou City became riddled with holes. The battlements fell one by one, and the soldiers on the city wall no longer had anywhere to hide.

This round of bombardment made the city wall even more chaotic, but Lu Fei was not in a hurry to let the soldiers cross the temporary bridge and rush into the city. He was waiting, waiting for these soldiers' morale to completely collapse.

Luo Hong, on the other hand, was waiting for Lu Fei's order, while at the same time looking enviously at Luo Xin's artillery. The field cannons and various types of shells of these artillerymen were truly coveted.



The bombardment continued without any sign of stopping, but the Pengzhou army on the city wall gradually became scarcer.

Behind the city wall, Mi Kuang, his eyes red, urged the soldiers to climb the city wall, but not a single soldier was willing to go up and die.

“Go up! Go up!”

Mi Kuang urged another batch to the city wall, while simultaneously he killed a soldier who had fled from the city wall in front of them.

Blood splattered. The soldiers looked at their comrade killed by Mi Kuang, their eyes gradually reddening. At this moment, someone, they knew not who, shouted loudly, “Brothers, don’t die for these powerful families anymore! Do you see? Our lives are worth less than nothing in their eyes! Our brothers didn’t die under Qingzhou’s cannon fire, but at the hands of these powerful families!”

“Brothers, King Qi’s army will enter the city to kill these powerful families who oppress the common people. We common people will only gain land and live like the people of Qingzhou. Don’t die in vain! We cannot stop the Qingzhou Army!” The voice rang out again.

“Who! Who is it!”

Mi Kuang's eyes grew redder. They frantically searched among the crowded soldiers. Any soldier blocking his way was fiercely pushed aside.

Finally, he found the source of the voice. It was a group of common people helping to move defensive materials below the city. One middle-aged man looked directly at Mi Kuang without fear.

"It's you?" Mi Kuang demanded.

"It is me." The middle aged man's eyes gleamed with hatred. "Mi Kuang, you seized my land and stole my wife and daughters. Today, you still want me to defend the city for you? Bah! You ruthless bastards should be killed one by one, just like the powerful families in Qingzhou!"

Mi Kuang's face twisted. The Qingzhou Army's attack had driven him into a frenzy. He cursed, "So it's you, you dog thief! Today I will kill you and send you to meet those harlots underground!"

Hearing this, the middle-aged man's eyes instantly turned bloodshot. Mi Kuang's words had just confirmed what happened to his wife and daughters.

Just as Mi Kuang raised his dripping sword and rushed towards the middle-aged man, the middle-aged man suddenly pulled out a short-barreled firearm from his sleeve and fired a shot at Mi Kuang.

After the gunshot, Mi Kuang looked incredulously at the firearm in the middle-aged man's hand. He lowered his gaze to his chest, and blood gushed out. After a moment of dizziness, he collapsed.

At this moment, among the common people accompanying the middle-aged man, someone suddenly took out a firework and lit it. The firework instantly shot into the sky, exploding in mid-air.

The middle-aged man shouted, "Mi Kuang is dead! Are you still deluded? Brothers, drive these powerful families out of Pengzhou City! From now on, the land here will be ours!"

How could the other soldiers from powerful families allow the middle-aged man to continue inciting rebellion? The hundreds of soldiers following Mi Kuang immediately charged at these common people.

However, as they made their move, the soldiers from impoverished common families also moved. They surrounded the middle-aged man, protecting him. Just then, a passionate bugle call suddenly rang out from outside the city gate.

The common people around the middle-aged man exchanged knowing smiles. This was the Qingzhou Army's charge bugle. Unlike the middle-aged man, they were from the secret service, and this operation was entirely planned by Li San.

"Kill!"

The earth-shattering roar from outside the city gate grew closer and closer. The soldiers on the city wall saw soldiers climbing onto the warships, then directly rushing towards the city gate along the warships.

These soldiers, having climbed from the other side of the warships and disembarked from the third warship, immediately formed a formation with silver-armored soldiers in the front and musketeers behind.

Maintaining a tight formation, they charged towards the city gate.

Lu Fei watched the situation on the battlefield without blinking. Every member of the Southern Expedition Army knew the secret service's signal. The signal just now indicated that the secret service must have achieved a significant victory within the city.

At this moment, he immediately ordered the soldiers to charge and seize the city gate. As long as the city gate was taken and the cable bridge was re-established, the subsequent cavalry could smoothly enter the city.

"Bang, bang..."

After the first batch of soldiers entered the city, they immediately found a large number of Pengzhou army soldiers gathered behind the city gate. At this point, the sword and shield bearers protecting the musketeers immediately crouched down, and the musketeers immediately employed three-stage firing, shooting down the charging soldiers.

Amidst the gunpowder and white smoke, the charging Pengzhou army soldiers fell in droves, but more soldiers rushed towards them.

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"Bang, bang, bang..."

The sound of firearms covered the sounds of the charging Pengzhou army soldiers.

After entering the city gate, the Qingzhou Army did not linger in battle. Instead, under the command of their generals, they attacked from both sides to seize the city gate, while also opening up the battlefield for subsequent troops.

The Pengzhou army soldiers were still charging, but clearly without any tactical coherence. Mi Kuang was dead, and this group of Pengzhou soldiers were like headless flies, not knowing what to do. They merely instinctively charged repeatedly at the enemy in their eyes.

However, this blind charge quickly turned into a rout under the volley of firearms. Unlike the Qi region army, which had been on the battlefield and seen blood, the Pengzhou City army had been at ease for too long. Even if the soldiers were fierce, a true battlefield was far from a street brawl.

After a brief surge of adrenaline, the ground full of corpses and blood made them realize what death was. Especially those soldiers from impoverished families, they had no reason to fight for these powerful families.

Now that the Qingzhou Army had breached the city and entered, they only thought of fleeing to save their own lives.

One Pengzhou army soldier ran, then a second, then a group. The Qingzhou army, unstoppable, quickly occupied the open areas on both sides of the city gate.

After gaining the upper hand, subsequent musketeers continuously poured into the city, and their arrival further increased the density of firepower. The Pengzhou City army became increasingly overwhelmed in the face of long-range firearms, retreating step by step.

As more and more Qi region troops poured into the city, some soldiers found the iron chains of the bridge. They lifted the chains out of the city gate and, with the help of the warships, fastened the chains from the wooden stakes at the Pengzhou city gate to the opposite bank.

After the iron chains were completed, the soldiers then laid thick wooden planks one by one. At this point, the warships had completed all their tasks and were all docked on the north bank.

With the iron chains restored, the artillery and cavalry immediately moved into the city along the iron chain bridge.

Following the last cavalryman into Pengzhou City, Lu Fei arrived at the makeshift tent in front of the city gate. This battle had lasted from morning until evening, and darkness was about to fall.

“General, it’s getting dark. Should we press on with the pursuit?” Luo Xin said to Lu Fei.

Lu Fei was now the Southern Expedition General. Although they often bickered in peacetime, on the battlefield, he still had to strictly obey military orders and submit to Lu Fei’s command.

“No, night is very disadvantageous for us. The obscured visibility is inconvenient for the musketeer’s advance. Now, let’s set up camp and guard against enemy sneak attacks.” Having suffered a few losses, Lu Fei had now learned his lesson.

“But if we do that, the powerful families in the city will likely escape completely,” Luo Xin said.

Lu Fei mused, "These powerful families can at most take some gold, silver, and valuables with them. They can't take the land, houses, cattle, and sheep."

Luo Xin could only nod upon hearing this, but he reminded, "General Lu, His Highness mentioned that there will be a bounty for this attack on Pengzhou City. The more spoils of war obtained, the higher the bounty will be. Don't blame this humble general for not reminding you then."

"Get lost! I'm much more distressed than you are!" Lu Fei's facial muscles twitched.

Ever since the chaos in Chang'an, Xiao Ming had announced a bounty system in the army. The system stipulated that 10% of all spoils of war obtained during the conquest of cities would be awarded to the soldiers and generals who participated in the siege.

Moreover, different proportions of the bounty would be distributed according to different military ranks.

For example, if Lu Fei captured Pengzhou City and obtained one million taels of silver, the army would allocate one hundred thousand taels of silver to the soldiers of this southern campaign. Basically, each soldier would then receive five taels of silver.

And after this bounty system was announced, it was deeply supported by soldiers and generals, which also stimulated their desire to participate in the southern campaign.

Luo Xin smiled. He was just saying it, but nightfall was indeed not suitable for continued fighting. After all, the soldiers were somewhat tired after a day of bitter fighting, and there were still many remaining Pengzhou army soldiers.

Of course, Luo Xin's idea also represented the idea of a general, which was Luo Hong's Firearm Battalion. Unlike the other three prefectural armies, this Firearm Battalion was currently a special existence in Qingzhou.

Both soldiers and generals wanted to settle down in Qingzhou, and settling down required silver. If they won this battle, they would be able to make a home in Qingzhou.

So, Luo Hong wanted to prove himself, and the soldiers and generals of the Firearm Battalion all wanted money. The two hit it off, which led to this initiative to fight.

"How was it?" As soon Xin came out, Luo Hong and a group of generals asked.

"No, General Lu refused," Luo Xin said to Luo Hong. "Don't be impatient. I know you're eager for battle, but our objective this time is to take Pengzhou City. If anything goes wrong, no one can bear the responsibility."

Luo Hong nodded. He had a new understanding of Lu Fei and other Qingzhou generals. They were not blindly reckless like other armies in Great Yu Empire, but always remained calm.

Waving his hand, Luo Hong dismissed the others. He said to Luo Xin, "I truly envy you. If only I had come to Qingzhou earlier, I wouldn't have to start all over again."



Luo Xin was well aware of his brother's thoughts. After all, Luo Hong was the eldest son of the Luo family, and now his younger brother was more successful than him, which inevitably made him feel a bit bitter. However, fortunately, Luo Hong was also a person who understood the bigger picture and merely harbored a competitive spirit.

While the two were chatting, Pengzhou City had already erupted into chaos. The powerful families within the city fled overnight with their families.

In the Mi family, Mi Wenyi was disheveled at this time. He had hoped to hold out for half a month, but now King Qi's army had taken the city gate in just one day.

Now with no defensive advantages left, how could he fight against King Qi's army? Most importantly, after the city gate fell, the powerful families in the city lost heart. Each family, only concerned with their own lives, fled with their families and private armies. Who cared if Pengzhou City could be defended?

When Mi Kuang was killed, he was not far away. At that time, he knew that King Qi had been planning in Pengzhou City for a long time, and the assassination of Mi Kuang was part of the plan.

And Mi Kuang's death made him even more terrified. He began to suspect that there were more assassins sent by King Qi around him.

Immediately after, King Qi's army stormed into the city. At this point, he finally couldn't help but flee back to the Mi family.

At this moment, the entire Mi family was also in chaos. Every member of the Mi family was packing up gold, silver, and valuables, preparing to escape. King Qi's army had already entered the city; Pengzhou City had fallen.

“Is heaven truly going to destroy my Mi family?”

Mi Wenyi muttered to himself as if he had gone mad. Even if he fled back to Jinling City, how would he explain himself to the Prince of Wei? Thinking of this, he became even more desperate.

“Wenyi, quickly leave! The people’s hearts are in chaos, spilt water cannot be recovered. As long as the green mountains remain, there’s no fear of lacking firewood.” Mi Wenyi’s father earnestly pleaded.

Letting out a long sigh, Mi Wenyi followed his father out. Outside, the Mi family’s carriage was waiting. He didn’t know when, if ever, he would return from this departure.

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As the first ray of sunlight illuminated the city tower, Lu Fei and the generals walked out of the tent.

They had just planned the next offensive. After discussion, they decided to divide their forces into three routes. Luo Hong and Luo Xin would each lead a route, attacking from north to south along the main roads on both sides of Pengzhou City.

At the same time, Lu Fei ordered Cavalry Commander Bai Mu to lead a small detachment of cavalry to attack southward from the central road, luring the enemy out.

The secret agents in the city had already rendezvoused with them last night. According to the intelligence provided by the secret agents, Pengzhou City only had about a thousand cavalry, and these thousand cavalry had also mostly fled with the powerful families last night.

Overall, those still stubbornly resisting in the city were mainly the clan members of powerful families. These clan members held a higher status than ordinary soldiers in Pengzhou City, but were still below the powerful families.

Therefore, they were also pawns of the powerful families, but Pengzhou City also held their interests. Precisely for this reason, they couldn't escape and could only continue to fight bitterly.

However, the number of these soldiers was small. After excluding the powerful families' private armies, there were only over twenty thousand such soldiers in the Pengzhou army. They were ordered to stay in the city and continue to hold out, but what they didn't know was that they had already become abandoned pawns.

In contrast to the army composed of these powerful family clan members, the soldiers from the common people had secretly come and surrendered to them during the night. The army composed of Pengzhou army clan members and the army composed of common people were two independent armies, and their treatment had always differed greatly in the past.

However, after this siege, Mi Kuang had forced these soldiers from common families to resist at the front, which had already caused dissatisfaction among many soldiers. Under the deliberate propaganda of the secret service, more and more soldiers began to consider surrendering.

For these soldiers, they didn't care who ruled them. As long as they could save their lives and their families had food, it was enough.

So, from last night until dawn, six thousand soldiers had surrendered at the temporary camp in front of the city gate, and some soldiers had simply deserted and gone home.

"Advance!"

Lu Fei commanded. For him, today was the final battle within Pengzhou City. He wanted to completely control Pengzhou City. Last night, he had already sent a victory report to Qingzhou, and he certainly didn't want to lose face in front of Xiao Ming.

Upon receiving the order, Bai Mu led the cavalry galloping towards the south of the city. The cavalry he led were the most elite breastplate cavalry of the Qingzhou Army. Now, besides being equipped with sabers, each cavalryman's horse also had two short, sturdy pulley crossbows hanging on its sides.

The cavalry moved out, and the rumbling sound of hooves immediately echoed throughout Pengzhou City. The common people in the city were all hiding in their homes, not daring to come out. However, Niu Ben had always governed the army with extreme strictness, and not a single soldier harassed the common people during last night's occupation.

In a city filled with buildings, it was difficult for artillery to be effective. Luo Xin could only keep the artillery at the city gate to support them at any time. After Bai Mu departed, they also advanced southward.

At this time, the south of Pengzhou City was deadly silent. Not a single person could be seen on the streets. When Bai Mu led the cavalry to arrive first, a wary expression appeared on his face.

The Qingzhou Army had always strictly followed Xiao Ming's motto and never underestimated any opponent. This time, he likewise did not underestimate the Pengzhou Army. They took the city gate relying on the advantage of artillery, but now it was clear they would be caught in a street battle.

Bai Mu was also a core member of the Qingzhou Army, one of the earliest. He had always been under Lu Fei. This time, Lu Fei felt Bai Mu was capable, so he pleaded with Niu Ben to let Bai Mu go with the expedition.

Speaking of which, Bai Mu had been fighting on battlefields for over ten years, having experienced too many wars. He instinctively sensed the danger from the residential houses on both sides.

At this moment, he suddenly said, "Crossbow arrows!"

As his voice fell, a rapid sound of footsteps suddenly erupted, followed by the Pengzhou army surging out like a tide from the residential quarters on both sides.

"Kill!"

Soldiers wearing red inner linings and scale armor over their outer garments charged at them with swords and sabers, while at this moment, some archers appeared on the rooftops of the residential quarters.

A cold sweat broke out on Bai Mu's back. Fortunately, relying on years of experience, he hadn't gone too deep, otherwise not only would he fail to lure the enemy, but his soldiers would also suffer heavy losses.

Moreover, during the charge, he did not allow the cavalry to maintain a dense formation, but rather advanced dispersed, giving the cavalry ample room to maneuver.

Before these Pengzhou army soldiers charged out, the cavalry had already pulled out their pulley crossbows. They immediately fired at the archers on the rooftops of the civilian houses.

Bai Mu kept in mind that his objective this time was to scout and lure the enemy, which he had achieved. He was not foolish enough to use cavalry and infantry for street fighting, as this would be abandoning the cavalry's most basic advantage.

"Retreat!" After one round of firing, Bai Mu immediately ordered a retreat. It would be too late if they didn't leave now.

Having ascertained the location of the Pengzhou army's ambush, Bai Mu immediately dispatched scouts to inform Luo Xin and Luo Hong, as they were the main force for this street battle.

In his opinion, the battle for Pengzhou City had only just begun.

At this time, Luo Xin and Luo Hong had already heard the commotion on the central street. Soon, the cavalry dispatched by Bai Mu arrived in front of them and conveyed the intelligence.

"Search house by house." Luo Xin frowned tightly.

After his order was given, the soldiers immediately divided into detachments of a thousand men, each responsible for one block, pushing forward from south to north. In the east of the city, Luo Hong also adopted the same formation.

“Bang, bang, bang...”

Gunshots quickly rang out. Under the carpet search, the Pengzhou army’s ambushers had nowhere to hide. The battle quickly unfolded in the civilian blocks. Relying on firearms, bayonets, and strict training discipline, the Qingzhou army easily defeated the Pengzhou army hiding in the civilian blocks by using small linear formations for volley firing.

Fighting through one civilian block after another, Luo Xin and the others set out in the morning, and by evening, they had pushed the front line to the south city gate. After a day of fierce fighting, they finally completely occupied Pengzhou City. The stubbornly resisting Pengzhou army suffered over thirteen thousand casualties and over three thousand were captured. The Southern Expedition Army also paid the price of a thousand casualties.

“General, we have completely occupied Pengzhou City.”

In the lingering glow of the setting sun, Lu Fei appeared in front of the Mi family manor gate. At this moment, soldiers were searching for spoils of war in the Peng family manor.

Lu Fei nodded. On his way here, the road was littered with the bodies of Pengzhou soldiers, showing the intensity of today’s battle.

Just now, Luo Xin and Luo Hong were discussing the issue of prisoners of war. He then said to Lu Fei, “General, we have captured three thousand people. How should these people be handled?”

“Kill them all!” Lu Fei’s eyes suddenly became extremely cold.

“Kill them all!” Luo Xin’s heart skipped a beat.

Luo Hong, on the other hand, said, “General Lu, killing prisoners is inauspicious. I hope the General will think twice.”

Lu Fei’s will seemed very firm. He said, “No need to say more. These prisoners must be killed!”

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“General Lu!”

Luo Hong’s face was a bit grim.

Just as Luo Hong was about to say something, Luo Xin suddenly pulled him, signaling him to stop speaking.

Glancing at Luo Hong, Lu Fei said, “I don’t care about the inauspiciousness of killing captives. I only know that these people are the remnants of powerful families. Precisely because they are willing to be the powerful families’ pawns, they stubbornly resisted in the city. I was merciful to them, but did they ever sympathize with our fallen soldiers?”

After a pause, Luo Hong said, “These three thousand people are just the beginning. During the siege, I already said: either surrender, or after the city falls, not a single powerful family member in the city will be spared.”



When he first arrived in Qingzhou, Luo Xin was also puzzled by the Qingzhou Army's hatred for powerful families. Later, he gradually understood when he learned that Xiao Ming had almost died several times at the hands of powerful families, and that the local powerful families had even colluded with the barbarians.

"Brother, don't say anymore. This is His Highness's consistent policy. Wherever His Highness rules, no powerful families can exist," Luo Xin said.

Luo Hong sighed upon hearing this. 'One emperor, one set of ministers.' If it were in the past, they would only rely on the local powerful families to manage the city after conquering it, but now everything had changed.

He said, "General Lu, I was reckless."

"Battalion Commander Luo, you will gradually understand His Highness's original intention in doing this," Lu Fei said.

As the setting sun cast its last rays, gunshots echoed outside Pengzhou City. The last batch of powerful family clan members within Pengzhou City were all executed. Then, Lu Fei ordered the Southern Expedition Army to search house by house, leaving no powerful family remnants untouched.

It wasn't that Lu Fei was cruel, but that he clearly remembered the destruction caused by the powerful family remnants within the six prefectures back then. The powerful families who were pardoned by Xiao Ming at that time not only showed no gratitude but also plotted to assassinate Xiao Ming.

From this alone, he could see that these powerful families are all venomous snakes; their temporary submission was merely like snakes hibernating in winter, and they would still bite once awake.

The order to kill the captives was his own decision. Although Xiao Ming had left him leeway, allowing powerful families who willingly disbanded their private armies and surrendered their land to live in Pengzhou City, for him, who harbored extreme hatred for powerful families, choosing to kill them was more practical.

The next day, the Southern Expeditionary Army did not remain idle. While Lu Fei dispatched a portion of his soldiers to collect spoils of war, he also sent Luo Hong and Luo Xin to the six counties belonging to Pengzhou. These six counties were under the jurisdiction of Pengzhou City, and now that Pengzhou City had been captured, he naturally had to take these six counties as well.

On June 25th, Luo Xin captured Pei County, and Luo Hong captured Pi County. On June 27th, Luo Xin captured Xin County, and Luo Hong captured Tong County. On June 30th, Luo Xin captured Sui County, and Luo Hong captured Hongshan County. In a short time, all the counties and villages within the Pengzhou City area were occupied by the Southern Expeditionary Army.

And on July 1st, upon learning that Xiao Ming had arrived at Pengzhou City with a group of officials, Xiao Ming looked at the city wall, which had been blasted to ruins by cannons, and said, "Alas, Luo Xin, that boy, should have saved some cannonballs. Look at what he's done to this city wall. I still have to send people to repair it."

"Hahahaha..." Fiji laughed upon hearing this. He said to Xiao Ming, "Your Highness obtaining this strategic town is well worth the expenditure of some cannonballs."

Xiao Ming was, of course, just joking. The smooth capture of Pengzhou City meant that the southern gate to Wei's territory was now open to him, and taking the other cities in Wei's territory was only a matter of time.

However, he could not immediately attack the next city. He did not want to bite off more than he could chew. The most important thing now was to stabilize Pengzhou City and establish an administrative system similar to his fief.

Additionally, he needed to recruit a batch of local soldiers to join the Southern Expedition Army; otherwise, his soldiers would only dwindle in number.

“Your Highness.”

Upon learning of Xiao Ming’s arrival, Lu Fei, accompanied by a group of generals, came out to greet him.

Seeing Lu Fei, Xiao Ming heavily patted his shoulder, “Lu Fei, you did not disappoint me by leading the army alone this time. It seems this Southern Expedition General position still needs you to continue serving.”

“Your Highness, when have I ever disappointed you? I have corrected many bad habits in the past two years and no longer want to be confined to the dark cell.” Lu Fei said with a bitter smile.

“Hmm, to correct a mistake is to be truly good. There will be many battles to fight in the future. I hope you can command independently like Commander Niu.” Xiao Ming smiled. Lu Fei was one of the earliest generals to follow Xiao Ming.

In the past two years, Xiao Ming had kept Lu Fei somewhat in the background, not promoting him, not because he disliked him. On the contrary, Xiao Ming wanted to temper Lu Fei's character, otherwise, he could only remain a cavalry commander.

After speaking with Lu Fei, Xiao Ming looked at Luo Hong and Luo Xin. He said, "They say that in war, brothers fight together, and fathers and sons go into battle. This time, it is said that you two cooperated well on the battlefield."

Luo Xin and Luo Hong cupped their hands and said, "Thank you, Your Highness, for your praise."

After greeting the generals, Xiao Ming and Fiji walked into Pengzhou City together. At this time, the common people in the city dared to walk on the streets. The Southern Expedition Army had not committed any offenses these days, which put the common people at ease and made them bolder.

Xiao Ming's purpose in coming to Pengzhou City this time was to bring the officials who would take over Pengzhou City. After these officials took office, they would reform Pengzhou City, completely bringing it under Qingzhou's administration.

"Your Highness, this is the Mi family's courtyard, a powerful family in Pengzhou City." Lu Fei directly led the officials to the Mi family manor.

Upon entering the courtyard, Xiao Ming couldn't help but shake his head and say, "This Mi family manor is much grander than my royal residence. Look, the vermilion lacquered corridors, the rock gardens, the carp in the pond, and the exotic flowers and plants in this courtyard."

“Indeed. Just the area of this courtyard is three or four times that of the royal residence, isn’t it? When I was in Chang’an, I heard about the Mi family of Pengzhou City. Seeing it today, it is indeed an extremely wealthy and powerful family. It’s just a pity that this Mi family was so obstinate and still couldn’t see through the current situation.”

As the two were inspecting the courtyard, Lu Fei brought over an account book. He said, “Your Highness, this is the property of the thirty-six powerful families in Pengzhou City. I have sent people to tally it all. It’s all here.”

Xiao Ming took the account book and glanced at it. It recorded real estate, land, warehouses, and a lot of gold and silver that they hadn’t had time to take away.

Glancing at Lu Fei, Xiao Ming said, “You’re so eager to send the account book. Could it be that you want to distribute the bounty now?”

“Your Highness, it’s not that I want to distribute it, but the soldiers are feeling anxious, wondering if this bounty system is real or fake.” Lu Fei said with a bitter smile.

Xiao Ming handed the account book to Fiji and said, “Grand Councillor Fei, you tally up how much silver these properties are worth, and then, according to the bounty system, allocate a portion of it to be distributed among the soldiers.”

“Yes, Your Highness!” Fiji said with a smile. At this moment, he couldn’t help but admire.

In war, many generals condoned soldiers looting, but this would lead to military indiscipline and unnecessary losses. Now, Xiao Ming had Lu Fei submit all spoils of war, and then issued bounties. This

not only showed strict military discipline but also provided practical benefits to the soldiers involved in the war, stimulating their fighting will.

#### Chapter 556

The scorching sun baked Pengzhou City, making people unwilling to stay outdoors.

After entrusting the bounty matter to Fiji, Xiao Ming and the others went to the main hall of the Mi family. The smooth progress of the battle for Pengzhou City this time somewhat surprised Xiao Ming.

After inquiring about the details of the battle from Lu Fei and Luo Xin, he gradually understood. The reason for the rapid collapse of the Pengzhou army was entirely due to their unfamiliarity with the Southern Expedition Army's tactics. They still employed traditional combat methods against his army.

Therefore, under the long-range firepower of cannons and firearms, the Pengzhou army suffered heavy casualties, which further exacerbated the soldiers' fear, leading to a significant drop in morale after the city gate was captured.

Given this, Xiao Ming said to Lu Fei, "Now that Pengzhou City has been taken by us, Wei's territory will no longer have natural defenses. From now on, it will be a flat plain. You are to use Pengzhou City as a base to continue southward, conquering cities and seizing land, while also replenishing troops." Xiao Ming said contemplatively.

These days, he had been pondering the current strategy. According to his plan, he wanted to annex Wei's territory as quickly as possible. This way, he would not be attacked from the flank and could focus on dealing with the vassal kings in the west.

"Yes, Your Highness." Lu Fei bowed.

After giving the order to Lu Fei, Xiao Ming said to Fiji and the other officials, "Now that the Southern Expedition Army has taken Pengzhou City, managing it is your responsibility. In these two days, you are to tally the land and actual population of Pengzhou City and distribute the land to the common people."

Equal distribution of land was a policy Xiao Ming insisted on. It was precisely this policy that gained Xiao Ming the support of the people in his fief. Fiji, after arriving in Qingzhou, had truly felt the benefits brought by the changes this policy brought.

Fiji nodded and suggested, "Your Highness, in addition to the normal equal distribution of land, I believe that a portion of good land should also be awarded to the common people who join the army to encourage local people to join the Southern Expedition Army. This way, the Southern Expedition Army can continuously grow stronger."

"Hmm, you're right. That's exactly what I am thinking. The fief can no longer continue to provide soldiers for the Southern Expedition Army. We can only rely on recruiting from the captured cities. Besides setting aside a portion of good land, you must also post notices to appease the common people and win their hearts as quickly as possible." Xiao Ming said sternly.

Fiji and the other officials bowed in agreement.

With that, he led the officials to the Pengzhou government office to formally take over the administration of Pengzhou City and its surrounding counties and villages.

...

Jinling City.

News of the great defeat in Pengzhou City arrived here, accompanying the fleeing powerful families.

When Mi Wenyi told the Prince of Wei everything that had happened, the teacup in the Prince of Wei's hand fell to the ground, and the Prince of Wei's face turned pale, his body trembling slightly.

"Royal Uncle!" Xiao Qi immediately stepped forward to support the Prince of Wei.

"Fifty thousand elite troops from Pengzhou City, plus the private armies of the local powerful families, couldn't even hold out for a single day! What use are you all to me?" After gasping for a few breaths, the Prince of Wei angrily said, "Guards, take Mi Wenyi away! Execute him tomorrow!"

"Your Highness, it wasn't my dereliction of duty or premature collapse. It was truly because King Qi's firearms and cannons were too powerful. Although the soldiers resisted with their flesh and blood, it was completely useless." Mi Wenyi was greatly alarmed.

"I don't need your explanation! I valued your Mi family in vain; I didn't expect you were just a bunch of useless scoundrels! No need to speak! Pengzhou City is the gateway to Wei territory, and now that it's lost, Wei territory has no natural defenses left. If I don't kill you, won't the generals guarding other cities all imitate you!" The Prince of Wei cursed.

"Your Highness, spare my life!" Mi Wenyi cried out as he was dragged away by the guards.



Xiao Qi sighed. He said to the Prince of Wei, "Royal Uncle, calm your anger. The current priority is how to preserve the fief's territory. This time, Xiao Ming came prepared and is very aggressive. We cannot sit idly by."

The Prince of Wei's chubby face was filled with despair. He said, "Pengzhou City was breached in just one day. How many days can other cities hold out? Is heaven truly going to destroy me?"

"Royal Uncle, is this the time for self-pity? Xiao Ming has little land and few people, and has many enemies. Most of his troops are currently used to defend against the Prince of Zhao. Although Pengzhou has fallen this time, King Qi's army has also suffered casualties. It's impossible for them to fight again without a period of rest. We should seize this opportunity to make horizontal and vertical alliances, leaving King Qi with no time to move southward."

"How do you mean that?"

"Mi Wenyi said that King Qi's army did not violate the common people after entering the city, which shows that Xiao Ming's ambition lies in unifying the world. This action is to win the hearts of the people. If so, King Qi's next target after Wei's territory must be Yan's territory. I believe that we should now send an envoy to ally with the Prince of Yan to jointly resist King Qi." Xiao Qi said.

The Prince of Wei frowned, "But I and the Prince of Yan have always been at odds. Will he agree?"

"If Wei's territory falls, the Prince of Yan will directly face Xiao Ming's military might. The Prince of Yan naturally knows what is more important. Wei and Yan are comparable in strength; even with some friction, they cannot overthrow each other. But Xiao Ming is different. His ability to easily take Pengzhou City is enough to show his strength. Facing such a powerful enemy, only by joining forces can we resist."

“Hmm, you’re right. Not only the Prince of Yan, but I will also send envoys to Chang’an and Liang. If we can successfully form an alliance, we will destroy Xiao Ming!” The Prince of Wei said hatefully.

Xiao Qi nodded and bowed, saying, “Royal Uncle, I am willing to undertake the mission, to repay Royal Uncle’s kindness in taking me in.”

The Prince of Wei looked at Xiao Qi with pity. He said, “Why would you personally undertake such a task? Sending a few officials would suffice.”

“Royal Uncle, this matter is of great importance. If other officials go, I’m afraid it will ruin the alliance. I have no other abilities, except for having studied the art of vertical and horizontal alliances from ‘Gui Guzi’.” Xiao Qi said.

The Prince of Wei sighed, “Virtuous nephew, I had wanted to seize the imperial throne of Great Yu Empire for you, but now I cannot even protect myself. I am truly ashamed towards you.”

Hearing this, Xiao Qi hesitated. He said, “Royal Uncle, I have long since let go. Why can’t Royal Uncle let go? If Royal Uncle can listen to my words, why not submit to King Qi from now on and become a carefree prince? This way, you can preserve your honor for the rest of your life. In my opinion, only King Qi can restore the former lands of the imperial family.”

“Xiao Qi, this is boosting others’ morale and diminishing our own prestige!” The Prince of Wei said angrily, “I will not submit to that young Xiao Ming!”

Sighing, Xiao Qi said, “In that case, I will follow Royal Uncle to the very end.”

Gazing steadily at Xiao Qi, the Prince of Wei wanted to say something but ultimately did not. Waving his hand, he dismissed Xiao Qi.

Although he was unwilling to admit it, ever since the Battle of Cangzhou, he had understood that he would forever live under Xiao Ming’s shadow. And now, everything proved his intuition was correct.

But as a highly favored vassal king, how could he bow to Xiao Ming?

Chapter 557

After staying in Pengzhou City for three days, Xiao Ming returned to Qingzhou.

He came to Pengzhou this time simply to see this “Dragon’s Rise” land of Liu Bang. Like many others, he also harbored a dream of the Han Dynasty. The iron and blood and glory of the past always made his blood boil every time he dreamed at midnight, now at the pinnacle of power. He, too, desired such a prosperous era.

However, he also understood that this path was still long. The domestic problems in Great Yu Empire were now a tangled mess, and expanding territory was still far off, but the victory in the Battle of Pengzhou gave him hope.

To secure internal stability, he must first address the problem of numerous vassal kings. Only by controlling a unified Great Yu Empire would he be able to contend for resources in the cutthroat world of the Age of Exploration.

He had originally planned to stay in Pengzhou City for a week, but another piece of news arrived, forcing him to return early.

According to this year's shipbuilding plan, the Dengzhou Shipyard officially delivered twenty-four warships to the fleet a few days ago. Coupled with the previous fifteen warships, the Dengzhou Army now possessed thirty-nine warships.

For him, these thirty-nine warships would truly ensure his unhindered movement in the East Asian waters and could further guarantee the safety of the shipping lanes.

His return to Qingzhou this time was naturally not to observe the warships, but for the naval cadets from Bowen Academy who were preparing to depart for Dengzhou.

Warships were dead, but naval cadets were alive. Weapons could only unleash their maximum power when wielded by people. Therefore, before each batch of naval cadets boarded the ships, Xiao Ming would personally come to Bowen Academy to meet them.

Firstly, he wanted to make himself familiar and strengthen his presence. Secondly, it was to increase the loyalty of the soldiers.

After all, once a warship entered the sea, it was like a wild horse unbridled. In the Age of Exploration, many regular warships were eventually led onto the path of piracy by their captains, and this was not what he wanted to see.

"Your Highness, there are a total of one hundred sixty or seventy cadets boarding the ships this time."

Yue Yun also rushed back from Dengzhou for this matter. Looking at the energetic cadets, he couldn't stop smiling. For him, there was nothing happier than expanding the fleet.

All the cadets about to depart for Dengzhou stood in three rows. These cadets would play extremely important roles on the warships, such as captain, first mate, second mate, navigator, boatswain, and other management positions.

As for the ordinary sailors and gunners on the warships, they did not need specialized training at Bowen Academy; they only needed to be recruited and trained in Dengzhou.

"From today onwards, you will become members of the navy, but this does not mean you are qualified now. For me, only soldiers who can bravely protect Great Yu Empire's maritime borders and shipping routes are qualified to be called true naval soldiers. And now is the time to test you." Xiao Ming said loudly.

Xiao Ming nodded. The soldiers were increasingly resembling modern soldiers.

Yue Yun watched Xiao Ming's speech with a smile. After Xiao Ming finished speaking, he led the naval cadets in saying to Xiao Ming, "Our glory is loyalty!"

Whether in Bowen Academy or the military, the loyalty of soldiers and officials to Xiao Ming was paramount. Precisely because of this, Xiao Ming made this phrase a common saying among generals and soldiers. It was a subtle suggestion, making loyalty an instinct for every general and soldier.

After meeting each of the cadets boarding the ships this time, Xiao Ming dismissed the naval cadets. At this point, Yue Yun said to Xiao Ming, "Your Highness must already know about the Tongzhou port

incident. The Prince of Wei cut off supplies to the port, which has caused some difficulties for the warships' patrols."

Xiao Ming nodded gently. "The Prince of Wei's envoy made that very clear to me. Since he won't give, we'll take. After returning this time, you will lead the fleet to bombard Tongzhou and cooperate with the Dengzhou Army to take Tongzhou City."

"Your Highness, I have wanted to do that for a long time. Why should we tolerate the Prince of Wei's petty anger?" Yue Yun said with a smile.

Xiao Ming sighed and said, "Before, it was about maintaining superficial harmony. Now, the gloves are completely off. By the way, taking Tongzhou is one thing, but don't forget the most important thing: keep a close watch on Goryeo."

"Yes, Your Highness." Yue Yun bowed.

After instructing Yue Yun on the two matters, Xiao Ming walked towards the royal residence. Along the way, he occasionally encountered children of powerful families whom he could only have seen in Chang'an before.

Since the chaos in Chang'an, more and more Chang'an nobles had fled to Qingzhou. It was precisely for this reason that there had been a surge in merchants and children of powerful families in Qingzhou.

However, these children of powerful families were now like phoenixes with plucked feathers, worse off than chickens. Before, they relied on their connections in Chang'an City, but upon arriving in Qingzhou, they suddenly became solitary figures.

At first, they were very unaccustomed to it, but soon, for survival, they became merchants.

Even Princess Pingyang was now diligently doing business in the Chamber of Commerce. However, with the title of princess, her business grew larger and larger.

During this time, she was busy building white sugar workshops and opening dye houses, enjoying herself immensely.

Xiao Ming hadn't expected that the chaos in Chang'an would bring such prosperity to Qingzhou. Because these nobles, even when fleeing, carried a large amount of gold, silver, and valuables with them, and spending this silver in Qingzhou greatly stimulated local consumption.

According to Pang Yukun, the price of even residential houses within Qingzhou City had more than tripled.

Thinking all the way, Xiao Ming returned to the royal residence. At this time, Fei Yue'er and Concubine Zhen were laughing in the pavilion in front of the pond.

After the initial grief, Concubine Zhen's emotions gradually recovered, which relieved Xiao Ming. Although Concubine Zhen was only the mother of the former Xiao Ming, she had genuinely helped Xiao Ming ever since he arrived here.

He maintained the most basic respect for such a kind and benevolent woman.

Glancing at the two, Xiao Ming did not disturb them but went directly to his study.

War continued, but technological development could not stagnate. After all, Qingzhou's technological level was not yet comprehensive enough, so he would compile scientific materials whenever he had free time.

This time, Xiao Ming wanted to introduce the Bessemer steelmaking technology. With the advent of steam engines, more and more industries required steel, and the original crucible ironmaking method could no longer meet the current demand.

Xiao Ming had not promoted this technology before because there was no qualified oxygen blowing equipment before the advent of the steam engine. Now with the steam engine, he could utilize it to solve this difficulty.

Arriving at the study, Xiao Ming picked up his brush and began to describe the unfinished part. He had already completed a portion a few days ago, and now a quarter of the drawings remained.

Once these drawings were completed, they could be delivered to the steel workshop for the production of steelmaking equipment. Once the Bessemer steelmaking technology broke through, Qingzhou's steel quality would soar, and gun barrels would also be able to withstand higher-strength gunpowder.

Chapter 558

The study was quiet.



Soon, Xiao Ming had almost finished the drawings. At this moment, footsteps suddenly came from outside the study.

“Your Highness, this old servant is back.”

A smile touched Xiao Ming’s lips upon hearing this voice. The person was none other than Qian Dafu.

Xiao Ming’s sudden thought of Bessemer steelmaking this time was not a whim. The most important reason was that Qian Dafu had discovered a magnesite mine in the fief, and this ore was precisely the material needed for alkaline furnace lining.

In the contemporary year of 1856, the Englishman Bessemer invented the bottom-blown acid Bessemer steelmaking method. This method was the beginning of modern steelmaking and produced a large amount of cheap steel for Europe, further promoting the Industrial Revolution in Europe.

However, because this method could not remove sulfur and phosphorus, its development was limited. In 1879, the Thomas bottom-blown alkaline Bessemer steelmaking method appeared in Europe. This method used a Bessemer converter with an alkaline furnace lining to process high-phosphorus pig iron, further improving the quality of steel.

Having learned from previous experience, Xiao Ming transitioned from acidic furnace lining to alkaline furnace lining. Previously, he had not introduced the Bessemer steelmaking method due to material limitations, but now that magnesite ore had been found, the material for the furnace lining would not be an issue.

“Come in,” Xiao Ming said.

At this, the study door was pushed open, and Qian Dafu walked in, travel-worn. He was beaming, and reaching into his pocket, he took out a stone and said to Xiao Ming, “Your Highness, this is magnesite ore, isn’t it?”

Xiao Ming nodded. The ore in Qian Dafu’s hand was square, with a very smooth surface, somewhat resembling salt crystals, but Xiao Ming recognized it as magnesite ore at a glance.

“That’s right, this is magnesite.” Xiao Ming grinned. He said, “Your prospecting team is getting more and more experienced now. Your recent gains in Laizhou are quite good.”

Qian Dafu’s face was now somewhat dark, and he revealed a mouthful of white teeth as he smiled. He said, “Your Highness, this is also a matter of practice makes perfect. But Laizhou truly is a treasure trove. Not only this magnesite, but also quite a bit of gold and silver ore have been found. Now we’re just waiting to start mining.”

“The gold and silver mines will remain untouched for now. This magnesite must be exploited; at least some needs to be collected for use. Now that the world is in chaos, you can’t buy things with silver alone. Bartering is the right path.” Xiao Ming said contemplatively.

As Qian Dafu said, Laizhou was indeed a treasure trove. Not only did it have the largest gold reserves in the country, but its magnesite reserves were also the second largest. This discovery of magnesite was an unexpected find while searching for gold and silver mines.

“Yes, Your Highness, I will arrange this matter upon my return.” Qian Dafu said.

In the past three years, from being an old steward to a master of minerals, Qian Dafu had truly suffered a lot. It was precisely his hard work that helped Xiao Ming through the initial most difficult times.

And during this period, the prospecting team had also matured. After consideration, he decided not to let Qian Dafu personally run the mines anymore, as Qian Dafu was now over fifty years old.

After a moment of thought, he said, "Dafu, when you return this time, you don't need to run around with the prospecting team anymore. I have established a Department of Minerals in Qingzhou. From now on, you will be in charge of the Department of Minerals and just manage the mines within the fief."

"Your Highness, did I do something wrong?" Qian Dafu asked, looking very apprehensive.

Smiling wryly, Xiao Ming shook his head and said, "What are you thinking? It's just that you are getting old now, and Mother Concubine has returned from Chang'an without anyone close to talk to. You have served Mother Concubine for over ten years, and having you there can also keep Mother Concubine company."

At the mention of Concubine Zhen, Qian Dafu sighed. "This chaos in Chang'an has truly been hard on Her Highness. Since that's the case, I will entrust the task of prospecting to my nephew. He has achieved success in his studies at Bowen Academy now, and it's time for him to go out and gain some experience."

Xiao Ming nodded. When he last inspected the mines, Xiao Ming had met Qian Dafu's nephew. Now that Qian Dafu mentioned him, he agreed to the matter.

The master and servant spoke a few more words, then Xiao Ming took Qian Dafu to the backyard. Qian Dafu had been traveling outside all this time and had not yet seen Concubine Zhen.

“Your Highness!”

Seeing Concubine Zhen, Qian Dafu scurried over, then suddenly knelt before her, and tears welled up in his eyes as he began to cry.

Since his escape from death, only two people remained most important in Qian Dafu’s life: Concubine Zhen and his nephew.

Having served Concubine Zhen for over ten years, Concubine Zhen was both a master and a family member to Qian Dafu.

Concubine Zhen was just laughing with Fei Yue’er when a dark figure suddenly knelt before her, startling her to lean back. It wasn’t until she recognized him as Qian Dafu that she relaxed.

She first gave Xiao Ming a glare. “Ming’er, I asked Qian Dafu to come to Qingzhou to serve you. Why did you send him out to do such hard work as prospecting?”

When she arrived in Qingzhou, Concubine Zhen had asked Xiao Ming about Qian Dafu’s whereabouts and knew where Qian Dafu had gone. Seeing Qian Dafu in such a state now, she felt a mixture of amusement and exasperation.

Xiao Ming was about to explain, but Qian Dafu interrupted him, saying, “Your Highness, His Highness trusts me. He isn’t at ease entrusting the prospecting work to anyone else.”

Concubine Zhen sighed, “You always have that temper, always such a good-natured person. It’s good that you’re back this time. When are you planning to go back?”

“His Highness said to let me stay in Qingzhou and not go out anymore,” Qian Dafu said.

Concubine Zhen nodded, looked at Xiao Ming and said, “Hmm, that’s more like it. From now on, you can keep me company and amuse me. I’ve been in Qingzhou for a while now and haven’t even left the royal residence. Another day, you can accompany me on a tour in and around Qingzhou City.”

“Your Highness, please leave that to me,” Qian Dafu said happily.

Xiao Ming breathed a sigh of relief at this. Concubine Zhen had been staying in the royal residence all this time, and her willingness to go out now proved that she was finally gradually overcoming her emotional distress.

After chatting a few more words with Concubine Zhen, Xiao Ming took the drawings and headed to the steel workshop. Qian Dafu’s return confirmed that the magnesite ore was real, and now he could freely set up a Bessemer steelmaking production line.

Once Bessemer steelmaking was put on the agenda, it meant that large quantities of cheap steel would become possible. However, the only drawback was the oxygen blowing technology in Bessemer steelmaking.

In fact, due to technical limitations, early Bessemer steelmaking blew air instead of oxygen. The true oxygen blowing technology only appeared in 1952.

As for industrial oxygen production, he had also researched it. Current Qingzhou simply could not overcome this technology; condensing air to over one hundred degrees below zero and then separating it was a high-tech endeavor.

Therefore, given this, he still decided to adopt the traditional air blowing method. After all, even during World War I, this method was still not outdated and was sufficient for his needs.

Chapter 559

Molten steel mixed with heat flowed in the crucible. In the scorching summer, the steel workshop was as hot as a furnace.

Upon leaving the royal residence, Xiao Ming went directly to the steel workshop. In just a short while, his clothes were soaked with sweat.

“Your Highness, it’s too hot here. Let’s discuss this outside,” Chen Wenlong advised. Ordinary people would find it unbearable to stay in this steel workshop for a while, and he worried that it would be uncomfortable for Xiao Ming.

Looking at the shirtless slave craftsmen working diligently, Xiao Ming said, “No need. I am not that delicate. By the way, I heard the steel workshop has a new supervisor. Where is he?”

Chen Wenlong pointed to the young man who was rushing towards them from not far away and said, "Your Highness, that's him. He is a student from Bowen Academy, specializing in steel production. He took office a month ago. As Your Highness said, he also mentioned Bessemer steelmaking, but later he just said there were no materials, so the matter was not brought up again."

"Oh," Xiao Ming showed an interested expression. After three years of cultivation, more and more students were entering various workshops in Qingzhou. However, due to limited conditions, many things they had mastered but found it difficult to realize.

But this was inevitable. In his contemporary era, his country was also poor and had nothing. At that time, scientists returning from overseas also started from scratch.

However, there was one point where he couldn't compare: at that time, the entire nation was united in production, while the environment he was in was still at war. So, he could only achieve things one by one.

"I greet Your Highness."

The young man calling himself Meng Kuo was scholarly in appearance, looking like a scholar. However, like the craftsmen in the workshop, the young man was also bare-armed, covered in black iron filings.

Xiao Ming looked up and down at Meng Kuo and said, "Chen Wenlong says you are from Bowen Academy. Since that's the case, let me test you. Which produces higher quality iron in Bessemer steelmaking, acid or alkaline?"

"Reporting to Your Highness, it's alkaline." Meng Kuo said, "Acidic furnace lining cannot remove sulfur and phosphorus from the iron, but alkaline furnace lining can."

“Why remove sulfur and phosphorus?”

“For steelmaking, phosphorus is a harmful substance. The presence of phosphorus increases the hardness and brittleness of iron. Good pig iron should have low phosphorus content. Sulfur promotes the combination of iron and carbon, making the iron hard and brittle, and chemically combines with iron to form low-melting point iron sulfide, causing hot brittleness in pig iron and reducing the fluidity of molten iron. Therefore, pig iron with high sulfur content is not suitable for casting fine parts.”

As Meng Kuo spoke, Chen Wenlong’s face was beaming. Xiao Ming couldn’t help but ask, “I asked Meng Kuo, why are you so happy?”

“Your Highness, this Meng Kuo was selected by me from Bowen Academy. His current fluent answers prove that my judgment was correct,” Chen Wenlong said with a chuckle.

Xiao Ming was also very satisfied with Meng Kuo’s answer. Regardless of conditions, at least he had mastered the knowledge. He then asked, “What are the oxidants in Bessemer steelmaking? What are the slagging materials?”

“The oxidants are only iron ore and oxygen. For slagging, there is lime.” Meng Kuo answered calmly and confidently.

Xiao Ming nodded and asked some deeper questions, which Meng Kuo answered promptly, making him even more satisfied.

After a pause, he said, “With you here, I can rest assured and entrust the Bessemer steelmaking production line to you.”



“Bessemer steelmaking?” Meng Kuo exclaimed upon hearing this.

“That’s right. I have found the alkaline lining material for the converter. Now the alkaline Bessemer steelmaking method can be realized. Next, you are to lead the craftsmen of the steel workshop to produce the converter and simultaneously build a production line to increase steel output.” Xiao Ming said this while handing the drawings to Meng Kuo.

Taking the drawings, Meng Kuo eagerly opened them. As Xiao Ming said, they marked all the equipment needed for an entire production line, and the drawings also included detailed structural diagrams of specific equipment.

“Don’t be afraid of failure. If it doesn’t work the first time, you can try a few more times.” Xiao Ming said to Meng Kuo. Any technological innovation would encounter various problems in its early stages. In Xiao Ming’s view, Bessemer steelmaking would also have to fail a few times before the tricks can be summarized from practice.

However, since the conditions for this technology were already in place, its realization was not far off.

And once Qingzhou could obtain a large amount of cheap steel, then building railroads, which required a lot of steel, would become possible, and the operation of steam locomotives in Great Yu Empire would no longer be a luxury.

At the same time, a large increase in steel production would also improve war capability, making weapon production easier, unlike now where most troops are still in the cold weapon era.

Meng Kuo carefully read the drawings once. He said to Xiao Ming, “Your Highness, I have been waiting for such a technology to be realized. Your Highness, rest assured, I will build the production line even if I don’t eat or drink.”

Xiao Ming nodded. The technical difficulties of Bessemer steelmaking were the converter and oxygen blowing. Now that the problems were solved, other issues such as material feeding and molten steel shaping were the same and did not require further research.

Over the next few days, Xiao Ming and Meng Kuo continuously discussed the establishment of the production line. Some of the facilities were also handed over to craftsmen for production. On the fifth day, the first batch of magnesite ore arrived from the mine.

This batch of ore was ordered by Xiao Ming to be mined first for experimentation. After calcination, grinding, and casting, the converter’s lining was formed.

After this step was completed, the remaining matters were a natural progression. Xiao Ming also did not want to continue participating. After all, he did not want to dampen Meng Kuo’s enthusiasm.

Because in his opinion, a leader should be moderately lazy, otherwise if they do everything themselves, subordinates will develop lazy habits.

Stepping away from the Bessemer steelmaking affairs, Xiao Ming continued to shift his focus back to the current chaotic situation.

At this moment, a piece of news brought by Wang Xuan made a cold sweat break out on his body.

“The Prince of Wei sent envoys to ally with the Prince of Yan, the Prince of Zhao, and the Prince of Liang?” Xiao Ming asked anxiously.

“Yes, Your Highness.” Wang Xuan’s expression was grave. “And the envoy has already reached the Prince of Yan. This is the news brought back by our secret agent in Bozhou.”

“This time, it seems the Prince of Wei is truly desperate.” Xiao Ming’s face was grim. This was a crisis that could lead to the downfall of his state.

If the four kings attacked him simultaneously, he would surely be unable to resist. After all, in this era, the advantage of firearms could not completely offset the human wave tactics of cold weapon armies.

And in fact, the true weapon that ended cold weapon warfare was the machine gun, but for him, he couldn’t produce that yet.

“Your Highness, if the Prince of Wei’s cunning plan succeeds, it will be a catastrophe for us. I believe we should immediately assassinate the Prince of Wei’s envoy to delay the alliance.” Wang Xuan said.

“This can only treat the symptom, not the root cause. If one envoy dies, there will surely be a second. Now, what we should think about is how to break this alliance.” Xiao Ming said bitterly.

“Does Your Highness intend to assassinate the Prince of Wei?”

“The Prince of Wei has many guards around him; how can assassinating him be easy?” Xiao Ming shook his head. He said, “I must also send envoys to the Prince of Yan, the Prince of Zhao, and the Prince of Liang to resolve this crisis.”

After a pause, he said, “How well do you understand the situations of the Prince of Yan, the Prince of Liang, and the Prince of Zhao now?”

Wang Xuan recalled and said, “The Prince of Wei and the Prince of Yan are old enemies. There have been frictions on the Wei-Yan border more than once, and both sides have suffered casualties among their soldiers. As for the Prince of Yan, he has been very low-key since the chaos in Chang’an. He neither supported a prince like the King of Chu nor openly accused the Prince of Zhao of rebellion. However, according to the information I have received, the local craftsmen in Bozhou have been stepping up the forging of weapons during this period, which shows that the Prince of Yan also has his own ideas now.”

“The Prince of Yan has always been good at enduring. He neither declares independence nor has any conflict with the Prince of Zhao. This clearly shows he’s preparing to be an opportunist,” Xiao Ming frowned.

Wang Xuan continued, “As for the Prince of Zhao, he is currently waging war against the King of Shu. However, Shu is mountainous and easy to defend but difficult to attack. So far, the Prince of Zhao and the King of Shu are merely fighting to a draw. And the Prince of Liang and the Prince of Zhao are equally ambitious and ruthless; both acknowledge thieves as their fathers. However, under the mediation of the barbarians, the Prince of Liang and the Prince of Zhao now seem to be avoiding conflict. But according to the information I have received, the Prince of Liang seems to have intentions of using troops against Your Highness.”

“The Prince of Liang regards the Second Prince as his own son. I had the Second Prince demoted to a commoner, so he naturally holds a grudge. However, if he wants to attack me, he must first get past the Prince of Yong. For now, he is not to be feared. However, he is the most likely to ally with the Prince of Wei.” Xiao Ming said.

Wang Xuan nodded. “As for the barbarians, they now largely resemble opportunists reaping benefits. The Prince of Zhao and the Prince of Liang have been conquering cities and seizing land during this period. The cities in Guanzhong have basically been occupied by the two, and half of their spoils of war have been handed over to the barbarians. If this continues, the barbarians might soon recover their strength.”

This news also worried Xiao Ming. In the Battle of Jizhou, Beishan was demoted, and the Blood Wolf Tribe was much weaker than before. Moreover, in the past two winters, many barbarian cattle and sheep starved to death, and food was scarce. Now, the Prince of Zhao and the Prince of Liang nourishing the barbarians with the wealth of Great Yu Empire was tantamount to feeding a tiger with one’s own body. Once this tiger was full, rested, and gained enough strength, that would be the time for it to extend its claws.

Although he was worried, he could not stop it at this moment. The only way was to strengthen his own power and unify the North as soon as possible. Before that, he had to stably annex Wei’s territory without being besieged.

Thinking of this, he said to Wang Xuan, “Now, quickly call Zhan Xingchang and Pang Yukun. I need to discuss this matter with them.”

Wang Xuan responded with a “yes” and turned to leave.

Half an hour later, Pang Yukun and Zhan Xingchang appeared at the royal residence.

After he relayed the intelligence Wang Xuan had obtained, the two were also greatly alarmed.

Pang Yukun said, "Your Highness, the Prince of Wei's scheme absolutely cannot succeed, otherwise the fief's situation will become extremely difficult."

"Your Highness, since the Prince of Wei can send envoys to form an alliance and attack us, we can also send envoys to dismantle their alliance. Please entrust this matter to me, and I will surely not disappoint Your Highness." Zhan Xingchang said loudly.

Xiao Ming looked at Zhan Xingchang. He said, "I know you are resourceful, but without immense benefits, it will be difficult to thwart the Prince of Wei's scheme. After all, whether it's the Prince of Zhao, the Prince of Liang, or the Prince of Yan, they all see me as a thorn in their side. Previously, the Prince of Zhao hesitated because the Prince of Wei and the Prince of Yong were both my shields. Now that one arm has been severed, it's hard to guarantee he won't be tempted."

"Your Highness is right. However, the Prince of Zhao wants to obtain the Bashu region and has already mobilized one hundred thousand troops to deploy along the border. It will be difficult for him to disengage quickly to deal with us. This time, Zhan Xingchang can openly mention Your Highness's alliance with the King of Chu. If the Prince of Zhao allies with the Prince of Wei, we will sell firearms and cannons to the King of Shu. At that time, he will surely find it difficult to take the Shu region."

"Hmm, that's a plan, but what if the Prince of Zhao is determined to be my enemy?" Xiao Ming asked.

"Your Highness, the King of Shu recognizes the Third Prince as his sovereign, and will undoubtedly obey the Third Prince's command. If the Prince of Zhao attacks, we can use firearms and cannons as bait to have the King of Chu instruct the King of Shu to deploy troops along the border. If the Prince of Zhao attacks then, his rear will surely be vulnerable. With the Prince of Zhao's character, how could he abandon Chang'an at that point?" Zhan Xingchang mused.

“In that case, you might be able to persuade the Prince of Zhao. Now there are only the Prince of Yan and the Prince of Liang left. There’s no need to go to the Prince of Liang; he will definitely collude with the Prince of Wei. Now the most important one is the Prince of Yan.” Xiao Ming said.

Pang Yukun smiled faintly, “Your Highness, the conflict between the Prince of Wei and the Prince of Yan is ultimately just about the fief’s land. The most concentrated area of conflict is Shouzhou. Since the Prince of Wei can persuade the Prince of Yan to attack us, we can also persuade the Prince of Yan to attack Wei with us. However, Your Highness only needs to promise to give Shouzhou and its surrounding prefectures and counties to the Prince of Yan.”

Zhan Xingchang echoed, “Chief Grand Councillor Pang is absolutely right. Shouzhou is rich, and it is also the ancestral home of the Prince of Yan. The Prince of Yan has always harbored a longing for Shouzhou. If we promise Shouzhou to the Prince of Yan, he will certainly consider it. If he still remains obstinate, there is still a way. I can say that whether we are at war or peace with the Prince of Wei is entirely at Your Highness’s discretion. At worst, we can truce with the Prince of Wei and jointly attack Yan. Wei and Yan are already suspicious of each other, and at that time, the alliance will naturally not be achieved.”

As the saying goes, “three humble cobblers make a Zhuge Liang.” Xiao Ming’s purpose in calling Zhan Xingchang and Pang Yukun this time was precisely this. He said, “Since that is the case, you will depart for Yan’s territory tomorrow, and then proceed to Zhao’s territory.”

“Yes, Your Highness.” Zhan Xingchang said.

Pang Yukun stroked his beard with satisfaction. He said, “A great man can bend and extend. Your Highness now understands better than before how to sacrifice immediate small gains for greater benefits.”

“Chief Grand Councillor Pang, do not mock me. In fact, I am merely helpless. If I could single-handedly resist the four kings, why would I need these overt and covert schemes? The current situation of Great Yu Empire is no different from the Warring States period, and we are akin to the rising Qin Dynasty. None of the other vassal kings are our match. At this time, they will surely be afraid of us. However, the advantage of a great power over a small power lies in its ability to deftly manage their relations. Whether to attack or reconcile is within our grasp.” Xiao ming said

Pang Yukun nodded, “Your Highness is absolutely right. However, since the Prince of Wei has harmed Your Highness in such a way, he certainly cannot be allowed to be comfortable. I believe we should teach the Prince of Wei another lesson.”

“This matter has already been entrusted to Yue Yun. Tongzhou is only a hundred li from Jinling City, and one can directly reach Jinling City along the Yangtze River. This time, I will make him unable to advance or retreat.”