

IRON DYNASTY

Chapter 6: The Application of Iron Caltrops

The twelve blacksmiths worked tirelessly, producing three hundred iron caltrops within an hour.

At that moment, Lu Fei sent word to Xiao Ming that the barbarian cavalry seemed to be preparing to leave.

“Have Captain Lu lead our cavalry to engage them, drawing them in with a feigned attack before retreating south. I will scatter iron caltrops at the central east gate and set up an ambush to encircle the barbarian cavalry,” Xiao Ming ordered the soldiers.

The soldier acknowledged with a swift “Yes” and rode north toward the city gate.

The Armory and the King of Qi's residence were close to each other and nearest to the east gate.

Leading the soldiers carrying the iron caltrops, Xiao Ming headed straight to the east gate, which was guarded by Qingzhou's Bold Captain, Li Kaiyuan.

In Xiao Ming's memory, Li Kaiyuan had an unremarkable face, a bulbous nose, and a large mouth. He lacked real ability, was slippery in character, but at least obedient.

That was why Xiao Ming preferred to assign him tasks rather than dealing with Lu Fei.

"Your Highness, the barbarian cavalry is just outside the city. This is far too dangerous. For your safety, please return to the royal estate and rest," Li Kaiyuan said with his usual fawning smile as he stepped forward to greet Xiao Ming.

"Your Highness, Captain Li has a point. The iron caltrops are ready—let Captain Li set them up and position the soldiers for the ambush," Qian Dafu added anxiously.

As soon as these words were spoken, Li Kaiyuan's expression turned even more dramatic than Lu Fei's. While Lu Fei merely had a change of face, Li Kaiyuan went pale, his legs trembling—he was practically about to wet himself.

“Your Highness... this...” Li Kaiyuan stammered.

Xiao Ming sighed—this was exactly why, despite Lu Fei's rebellious streak, he still kept him around.

One was like Pigsy (Zhu Bajie), the other like the Monkey King (Sun Wukong). Li Kaiyuan was useful for bullying commoners, but when it came to real battle, he was utterly useless.

However, it wasn't entirely Li Kaiyuan or Lu Fei's fault—the barbarian cavalry had a fearsome reputation deeply ingrained in the people of the Da Yu Empire.

At the end of the Dai Dynasty, more than twenty states were embroiled in constant warfare. The Central Plains were too preoccupied with internal conflicts to deal with the northern steppe barbarians.

During this period, the barbarians grew stronger than ever. Those who migrated to the Changbai Mountains settled down, adopting a semi-nomadic, semi-agricultural lifestyle, leading to a stable population increase.

One particular tribe, the Batur, led by Chief Zatu Batur, rose to power, gradually conquering other tribes and establishing their own kingdom, spanning the vast northern grasslands to the Changbai Mountains.

Once strengthened, the barbarians launched continuous invasions into the Da Yu Empire, waging over a hundred battles in the past century.

Da Yu lost far more battles than it won. The regions of Youzhou, Shuozhou, and Lingzhou were completely lost—in today's terms, they had surrendered all land north of the Great Wall.

The very mention of these barbarians struck fear into the hearts of Da Yu's people.

Three years ago, Cangzhou fell—not because the walls weren't strong enough, but because the city's commander was so terrified by a mere thousand barbarian cavalymen that he abandoned the city without a fight.

Had Lu Fei not led the remaining 3,000 soldiers from five cities in a desperate counterattack, retaking Cangzhou before enemy reinforcements arrived, the consequences would have been unimaginable.

If he had failed, Xiao Wenxuan (the Emperor) wouldn't have just whipped him—he would have had him executed.

Xiao Ming never expected Li Kaiyuan to handle things alone—he had only promoted him to Bold Captain to annoy Lu Fei.

The east gate was manned by a hundred soldiers, all equipped with swords and shields. Unlike the elite troops at the north gate, they lacked a variety of weapons.

Xiao Ming ordered ten soldiers to hide on the city walls. Once Lu Fei's cavalry passed through, they were to scatter iron caltrops below, sealing off the barbarians' escape routes.

He then directed the remaining sword-and-shield troops to hide behind the city gate. Once the signal was given, they would charge out and overwhelm the barbarians.

Watching Xiao Ming issue orders so methodically, Qian Dafu slapped himself, grimacing in pain. "This isn't a dream!"

Li Kaiyuan was equally stunned. After a moment's hesitation, he jogged after Xiao Ming and started his usual flattery.

"Heh heh! Your Highness is truly wise and mighty! A reincarnation of the God of War! My admiration is boundless, as vast as the moon reflecting on the great river, as eternal as the heavens and earth...!"

From the north gate to the east gate was a short ten-mile distance. Just as Li Kaiyuan was pouring on the flattery, the sound of galloping hooves echoed from the distance.

The soldiers hiding on the city wall sharpened their gazes.

Three years ago, they had witnessed the barbarian massacres across the Six Provinces. The hatred still burned in their hearts, but their impoverished fief had left them too weak to seek revenge.

Outside the city, Lu Fei led the charge. He shot arrows behind him while hurling curses at the barbarian cavalry, thoroughly insulting their entire lineage.

Following his lead, Qingzhou's last thirty elite cavalymen joined in, hurling insults as they rode.

The barbarian riders, infuriated by the taunts, pursued them relentlessly, firing arrows as they rode.

As Lu Fei approached the east gate, he glanced up at the city walls. Not a single figure could be seen.

Suspicion crept into his mind “That damn King of Qi has always resented me. Could this be a trap? Did he lure me out just to get me killed? If that’s the case, once I shake off these barbarians, I swear I’ll come back and cut him down before turning bandit!”

Just as this thought crossed his mind, he saw a soldier rise from the city gate—then, in a sudden flurry, iron caltrops rained down like snowflakes.

The caltrops landed perfectly behind him.

The barbarian cavalry, unaware of the trap, kept up their pursuit. But before they could reach the gate, the lead horse suddenly shrieked and collapsed.

Before the riders in the rear could react, nine more soldiers emerged from the walls, dumping baskets of caltrops onto the road, sealing off their retreat.

The barbarians lost control of their mounts. One after another, horses and riders crashed to the ground.

As the fallen soldiers stumbled, they stepped onto the caltrops—thin leather boots were no match for the sharp iron spikes. Agonized screams filled the air.

“Capture them!”

From behind the battlements, Xiao Ming shouted the command.

The east gate swung open, and the sword-and-shield troops charged out, roaring as they surged toward the incapacitated barbarians.

“Your Highness, watch from the walls! I will personally capture every last one of these barbarians!”

Seeing the once-feared cavalry crippled, Li Kaiyuan saw an opportunity for glory.

With a heroic yell, he raised his sword and charged forward.

Just as he did, Lu Fei, who had completed his feint, turned his horse around. Spotting Li Kaiyuan recklessly rushing ahead, he rode past and kicked him aside.

At that moment, an arrow whizzed past, grazing Li Kaiyuan's shoulder.

"You idiot! Are you trying to die? FORM A SHIELD WALL!" Lu Fei bellowed.

The sword-and-shield troops instantly tightened their formation, raising their shields as they advanced on the struggling barbarian cavalry.

Lu Fei had fought these barbarians in blood-soaked battle three years ago. He knew all too well how ferocious they could be.