

I. Dynasty 761

Chapter 761

A warm breeze wafted in through the windows of the imperial study.

Xiao Ming, toying with his pipe, frowned deeply, “Is this Branden truly foolish or merely pretending?”

Bearing the painful historical memories of modern times, Xiao Ming was naturally very wary of opium. Once addicted, this substance was extremely difficult to eradicate.

If Branden had merely sent opium, or what was currently known as “black incense” in the Great Yu Empire, he might have been able to accept it. After all, it was also a medicinal herb, usable for anesthesia and pain relief.

But what was this fellow’s intention in directly sending a long opium pipe? Perhaps Asian countries, due to their lower cultural development, didn’t understand the dangers of smoking opium, but Europeans, who had dealt with opium for over a hundred years, couldn’t possibly be ignorant.

“Indeed, it’s a needle hidden in cotton, a knife concealed in a smile.”

Xiao Ming sneered repeatedly. If he hadn’t been from modern times, he might have fallen into Branden’s trap, and from then on lived a life of lying in bed, puffing away smoke.

However, thinking of the trend of this era, he felt somewhat uncertain. After all, at this time, many royal families in Asia liked this substance, so perhaps Branden was merely catering to his preferences.

Shaking his head, Xiao Ming temporarily ceased thinking about it. Whether Branden was intentional or unintentional, it was all normal. Relations between nations were always smiling on the surface, but stabbing in the back in private.

Moreover, because he understood the dangers of this “black incense,” he would not consume it. But this matter did provide him with a way to control Goryeo.

Perhaps he could use casinos and opium to control officials in the Goryeo court, or even the King of Goryeo himself.

As far as he knew, the current production areas of this “black incense” were mainly in Ryukyu and Southeast Asia. To obtain this substance, one had to acquire it from these places.

And now, he had not only controlled Goryeo’s maritime trade but also cut off Goryeo’s possibility of obtaining “black incense” by land.

As long as Goryeo’s high-ranking officials became addicted, they would have to obtain it from the Great Yu Empire. At that time, certain conditions would be easier to negotiate.

Although this method was somewhat disreputable, politics was often even darker than this. Compared to massacres at every turn, his method was already very mild, and it was only directed at those Goryeo officials who were not good people to begin with.

Thinking of this, Xiao Ming felt it necessary to expand the cultivation of “black incense” in Ryukyu, after all, whether these things would be used as weapons to counter the West in the future or as medicinal herbs.

At the same time, he would issue a ban in the Great Yu Empire, explicitly prohibiting the common people of the Great Yu Empire from getting involved with this substance.

With a plan in mind, Xiao Ming picked up the steel pen by his hand. This was something he had recently ordered the artisans of the machinery department to produce.

Overall, this fountain pen already had the appearance of a modern fountain pen. The only drawback was that this fountain pen had to be used by dipping it in ink.

Because there was no rubber, the artisans of the machinery department could not manufacture a suction tube. But even so, he was very satisfied.

In recent years, as the amount of written material increased, he increasingly felt that the brush could no longer meet his requirements for handling state affairs, and it also affected his ability to turn the knowledge in his mind into books.

Now with the fountain pen, his work efficiency would be much faster. He planned to first promote writing with fountain pens in the government system after using it for a period, ending the history of brush calligraphy dominating the Great Yu Empire. For him, this was also a point of transition for the Great Yu Empire towards pragmatism.

After writing down the ban articles eloquently, Xiao Ming put down his pen and stood up.

Qian Dafu, seeing this, walked in and said, “Your Majesty, the carriage is ready. The officials who have come to Laiwu have also arrived. It’s time to depart.”

Xiao Ming nodded. He called a young eunuch and had him deliver the ban to Pang Yukun, preparing for its implementation throughout the Great Yu Empire. Then he walked out.

After the successful operation of the steam locomotive, the reform was pushed to a climax. The miraculous locomotive made the scholars of the Great Yu Empire realize that a drastic change was taking place.

And for those who had already participated in the reforms, this was even more of an inspiration. Whether it was the glass workshop or the steam engine workshop, the artisans were all highly enthusiastic.

Xiao Ming naturally couldn’t sit still at this time. It was not easy for him to bring the Great Yu Empire, a country technologically far behind the West, to where it was today.

However, the success of the steam locomotive did not satisfy him; instead, it filled him with an even greater sense of urgency.

Although feudal dynasties like the Golden Tent Khanate, Goryeo, and Tibet were threats to the Great Yu Empire, these countries were still stuck in feudal society, making them relatively easier to deal with.

But dealing with the West, which had made a comprehensive leap in thought and technology, was not so easy. It was precisely for this reason that he dared not relax in the slightest.

This trip to Laiwu was precisely for one of the Great Yu Empire's most important resources: steel.

The construction of the Qingzhou Province railway first extended in two directions. The first was the route towards Chang'an, along which lay large open-pit coal mines.

These coal mines did not require complex mining techniques; the surface coal seams were sufficient to support the First Industrial Revolution.

The second route was southward to Laiwu, for the large iron mine there.

Only after these two routes would the railway extend to other places.

This trip to Laiwu, his primary purpose was to inspect the steel workshop there. When the reform was announced, that place was already required to establish the Laiwu Steel Workshop.

In the future, the Great Yu Empire's steel would primarily rely on the Laiwu Steel Workshop and the Kaiping Steel Workshop.

Upon reaching the outside, Xiao Ming saw a four-wheeled carriage stopped at the entrance.

Unlike the Great Yu Empire's two-wheeled carriages, he had specifically ordered the machinery department to produce this type of four-wheeled carriage, and it was also equipped with spring suspension on the wheels.

This carriage was specifically ordered by him. It was also the Great Yu Empire's first four-wheeled carriage. His purpose was very clear: to familiarize the people of the Great Yu Empire with four-wheeled vehicles.

At the same time, this was also to pave the way for the birth of automobiles. A country that only understood two wheels would not conceive the idea of producing four-wheeled cars.

Boarding the carriage, Xiao Ming headed south under the protection of guards. After four days of travel, he and the officials in charge of mines and workshops arrived in Laiwu.

Unlike Qingzhou Province, on the way to Laiwu, Xiao Ming saw only impoverished common people. At this moment, he suddenly felt that governing such a populous country to be as prosperous as the West would be a very difficult task. For this, he needed to occupy more resources in the world.

As he was thinking, his carriage gradually came to a stop. Xiao Ming then descended from the carriage. What met his eyes was an active iron mine, and beside the iron mine was the Laiwu Steel Workshop.

"Your Majesty, this is the Laiwu Steel Workshop. It is said that it will soon be put into production," Qian Dafu said with a smile.

Qian Dafu used to be in charge of mines. Now, arriving at the mining site, he suddenly felt a long-lost sense of familiarity, and he spoke more.

Xiao Ming was also in a good mood after seeing the bustling mining site. He walked towards the busy mining site, preparing to see how the steam engines were being used in the mine.

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Shi Yunshan felt a bead of sweat in his palm as he watched the young man in dragon robes and officials walk towards the iron mine.

He was formerly a member of the Qingzhou Machinery Department. He used to travel north and south with Qian Dafu. When the imperial court decided to establish a steel workshop and iron mine in Laiwu, he actively requested to come to Laiwu.

Because he was a native of Laiwu and very familiar with the area.

As he stood there, nervous and at a loss, the group had already reached him.

Qian Dafu smiled and said to Xiao Ming, "Your Majesty, this is Shi Yunshan, whom your old servant often mentions. He discovered this Laiwu mine."

On the way, Qian Dafu had already introduced Shi Yunshan. He scrutinized Shi Yunshan, and from Shi Yunshan's dull expression, he could tell that he was an honest and steadfast person.

"This humble official greets Your Majesty." After Qian Dafu's introduction, Shi Yunshan bowed to Xiao Ming.

"Dispense with the formalities." Xiao Ming's interest was now entirely focused on the mine's production. He said, "Qian Dafu says you are shrewd and capable. I will now see how you have managed this iron mine."

Shi Yunshan nodded. "Your Majesty, please follow this humble official."

With that, Shi Yunshan led Xiao Ming and a group of officials to the entrance of the mine. This Laiwu iron mine was surrounded by mountains, with low hills in the vicinity.

Glancing at the surroundings, Xiao Ming looked into the mine pit. The originally flat ground had now formed a five-meter-deep pit.

The mine pit was very large, about a thousand meters in diameter. At this time, over six thousand people were wielding mining tools in the pit, chipping away chunks of ore from the rock body.

"Your Majesty, in the half-month since mining began, our mine has provided the steel workshop with a total of sixty thousand tons of ore. On average, each artisan has mined ten tons of ore," Shi Yunshan said, pointing to the sweating artisans.

"Sixty thousand tons." Xiao Ming nodded in satisfaction. He picked up a piece of iron ore and examined it.

This iron ore was reddish-brown, belonging to hematite. Generally, hematite has an iron content of seventy percent.

These sixty thousand tons of hematite ore should be able to smelt over forty thousand tons of steel.

Shi Yunshan, fearing that Xiao Ming would be displeased with this output, said, “Your Majesty, mining iron ore is very arduous. Artisans sometimes take a long time to break a single piece of ore with their tools, making mining very difficult.”

“I understand. These sixty thousand tons of ore are already quite remarkable,” Xiao Ming said gently. He sensed Shi Yunshan’s worry.

Shi Yunshan breathed a sigh of relief and continued to lead Xiao Ming on the tour. When he reached the steam engines at the mine, he excitedly said, “Your Majesty, the mine can produce so much ore now thanks to these steam engines. With them, artisans can directly place the ore onto mine carts, and use the steam engine to pull the mine carts up.”

Xiao Ming and the officials then saw the railway tracks leading into the mine pit. Mine carts traveled back and forth on the tracks, loaded with ore.

This scene completely reassured Xiao Ming. His main concern was the application of steam engines. Now that the Great Yu Empire had entered the age of steam, it could only advance by leaps and bounds by relying on steam power.

After inspecting the use of steam engines in the mine, Xiao Ming and Shi Yunshan went to the artisans’ living quarters.

Now, in the desolate wilderness, rows of red brick houses had sprung up, clearly forming a settlement.

In contemporary times, towns often formed around mines. Xiao Ming focused on developing Laiwu into a steel workshop and mine, and this place would also form a town that relied on these industries for its survival.

After a brief look at the mine, Xiao Ming and his entourage then went to the Laiwu Steel Workshop.

The steel workshop was now bustling with activity. The transported iron ore was transformed into molten steel, then into various shapes of steel products.

The supervisor of the Laiwu Steel Workshop was named Chang Fei. He was formerly a technical backbone of the Qingzhou Steel Workshop and was dispatched here for this large-scale steel workshop.

Entering the steel workshop, Chang Fei led everyone on a detailed tour of the six production lines within the workshop. Five of these production lines were currently busy.

“Your Majesty, currently, the Laiwu Steel Workshop mainly produces railway parts, in addition to some agricultural implements, daily steel products, and so on. The six production lines are just barely able to meet orders,” Chang Fei said, wiping sweat from his brow, his eyes looking at the converter as if it were his own child.

The “chugging” sound of the steam engines continuously echoed in the steel workshop. Traditional steelmaking methods saved a lot of labor due to the involvement of steam engines.

Xiao Ming looked with satisfaction at this modern steel mill, filled with various machinery. In his plan, the Laiwu Steel Mill would primarily produce civilian steel products.

The Qingzhou workshop and the Kaiping Steel Workshop were mainly for producing military steel, and only after satisfying military needs would they produce civilian goods.

This inspection of Laiwu gave him an estimate of Qingzhou Province’s steel production capacity. In his opinion, the Laiwu Steel Mill alone could produce one million tons of steel annually.

The Kaiping Steel Workshop was estimated to be similar. Adding the Qingzhou Steel Workshop, the Great Yu Empire’s annual steel output should be two point two million tons.

This output could already completely surpass Britain.

However, the Great Yu Empire had a vast territory and a large population. If calculated in detail, he was still inferior to Britain in terms of average output per capita.

Xiao Ming was not discouraged by this. Surpassing in total output was still a form of surpassing. With such a foundation now, he had already surpassed Britain technologically.

After inspecting the mine and the Laiwu Steel Workshop, Xiao Ming rested in Laiwu for two days, then rushed to the Kaiping Steel Workshop.

As expected, the output of the Kaiping Steel Workshop was on par with Laiwu.

Over the next half a year, during the lull in barbarian activity, he successively inspected other workshops required to be built by the reforms, gaining a general understanding of the implementation of the reforms.

Overall, under the strong impetus of Pang Yukun and Fei Ji, the construction of workshops was progressing smoothly. Most of these workshops were now operational, and a portion of them would soon be put into production.

By then, the Great Yu Empire would have formed an industrial chain with official workshops at its core, and this chain would provide a continuous supply of industrial products to the Great Yu Empire.

And most importantly, the nascent industrial sector would provide resources for war.

After half a year of hard work, time transitioned from spring to autumn. In previous years, officials would be terrified at this time of high autumn and fat horses.

Because autumn was often when the barbarians launched attacks on the Great Yu Empire. For the past six months, the barbarians' unusual quietness had kept Xiao Ming on edge; this tranquility made him uneasy.

And this worry was confirmed when he returned from Dengzhou to Qingzhou Province.

The barbarian cavalry suddenly bypassed the northern passes and appeared outside Songzhou City from the direction of Tibet. In just one day, Songzhou City was captured, and the barbarian army marched directly towards Yizhou.

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September 27th, it was a crisp autumn day in Qingzhou Province.

Inside the city, scholars, merchants, and common people went about their daily lives as usual; not a trace of war could be smelled here.

However, the council hall presented a different scene. The battle report from Yizhou would take at least ten days to arrive, and by the time it reached Qingzhou Province, Yizhou would have already been besieged by barbarians for ten days. Whether the city had fallen was also unknown.

After receiving the battle report, Xiao Ming immediately summoned his civil and military officials to prepare for this barbarian invasion.

“Your Majesty, the barbarians’ conquest of Songzhou must be in collusion with Tibet, otherwise the barbarian army could not have appeared so openly outside Songzhou City.”

Zhan Xingchang was the first to step forward and speak after receiving the news.

Xiao Ming frowned deeply. Tibet was the most unstable factor on the southwestern frontier of the Great Yu Empire. Since the founding of the Great Yu Empire, it had fought Tibet at the border three times, with two victories and one defeat. The most recent war was ten years ago.

At that time, Luo Quan personally led his army and attacked the Tibetan camp by night, killing fifteen thousand Tibetan soldiers before frightening the Tibetan army away.

Fei Ji then sighed and said, "Your Majesty, Great Ancestor established the capital in Chang'an precisely to awe foreign barbarians like Tibet and the Golden Tent Khanate. Now, Qingzhou Province is thousands of li away from Tibet, and its deterrent effect on Tibet is far less than before. It is understandable that Tibet has now been bribed by the Golden Tent Khanate."

Niu Ben had long been impatient. He said, "You civil officials are too indecisive. Now the barbarian army has reached Yizhou City. The only course of action is to dispatch a large army to eliminate the barbarian army outside Yizhou City."

Pang Yukun said, "I believe the barbarians' intention this time is plunder. Winter is approaching, and the barbarians, having suffered in previous years, will surely plunder enough supplies before winter arrives. The battle report states that the barbarian army is primarily cavalry, specialized in plunder, which also clearly shows their intention."

The ministers spoke one after another, each with agitated expressions, speaking passionately. Compared to the Chengqing Hall in Chang'an five years ago, the ministers at this time were more focused on discussing how to deal with the enemy, rather than being terrified and at a loss.

Xiao Ming was secretly pleased with this change. The current Great Yu Empire, under his rule, was vastly different from when Xiao Wenxuan was on the throne. The repeated victories in battles against the barbarians had made the ministers shed their fear of them.

Looking at the ministers in the council hall, Xiao Ming said, “Regardless of whether the barbarians are colluding with Tibet, the urgent matter now is to drive the barbarians out of Bashu, lest the thirteen prefectures of Yizhou Province suffer a barbarian pillage.”

The barbarians’ passage through Tibet was utterly unexpected by everyone in the court. At this moment, Xiao Ming recalled that in contemporary history, Kublai Khan once used Tibet as a route to bypass the heavily guarded northern defenses of the Song army to attack Dali. This current event bore striking similarities.

After a moment of contemplation, he continued, “Immediately issue my decree, ordering Lu Fei to lead two tens of thousands of troops to reinforce Yizhou, and Qi Guangyi to lead his three tens of thousands of cavalry to go together, and by all means, annihilate the invading enemy.”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Niu Ben said solemnly.

Having settled this matter, Xiao Ming continued, “Although the affairs of Yizhou Province fall under the jurisdiction of the Grand Council, all you beloved ministers must provide full assistance and not delay the war.”

Fei Ji, Pang Yukun, and the other civil officials immediately bowed in affirmation. They knew in their hearts that the current imperial court was no longer the imperial court of the past.

Now, in the imperial court, ministers each performed their respective duties: those responsible for government affairs handled government affairs, those responsible for fighting handled fighting, and those responsible for laws handled laws.

So this battle in Yizhou Province was ultimately the responsibility of the Grand Council. Their only role was to cooperate with the Grand Council by providing grain and fodder and conscripting common people.

The war was urgent, so Xiao Ming said no more. After assigning tasks to the ministers, he had Niu Ben stay and dismissed the other ministers.

After everyone left, he said to Niu Ben, “This time, you will deploy ten thousand musketeers equipped with new firearms to Yizhou to dampen the barbarians’ arrogance.”

Niu Ben’s expression shifted slightly. The six thousand musketeers Xiao Ming spoke of were all equipped with Conqueror Muskets. In the past six months, the military machinery department had delivered a total of fifteen thousand Conqueror Muskets to the army.

Currently, there was still a large batch of firearms being modified in the military machinery department. They were preparing to gradually equip the entire Great Yu Empire army with these long-range rifled muskets.

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Niu Ben nodded heavily.

He could discern from Xiao Ming’s tone how angry he was at this moment. Yizhou Province was known as the “Land of Abundance,” an important production area for raw silk, grain, and tea in the Great Yu Empire.

Moreover, the autumn harvest was about to begin. The barbarians’ disturbance this time would hinder the Great Yu Empire’s recovery and also affect its foreign trade.

“Also, take advantage of this war to deploy twenty thousand men to Juehua Island. I want the barbarians to know that it’s not just them who can burn, kill, and plunder,” Xiao Ming said, gritting his teeth fiercely.

This barbarian sneak attack by way of Tibet caught him off guard. Although he had always been wary of Tibet and had stationed thirty thousand conscripted cold weapon troops in Songzhou, these thirty thousand cold weapon troops were no match under the offensive of sixty thousand barbarian cavalry and eighty thousand slave soldiers.

Niu Ben’s eyes were sharp. He said, “Your Majesty, I believe it is time to expand the army. A mere one hundred thousand troops are simply insufficient to defend the Great Yu Empire’s vast territory. Even if these troops cannot be equipped with firearms, using armor and swords is still better, otherwise, the incident in Songzhou will constantly repeat itself.”

Xiao Ming’s brows furrowed deeply. At this moment, he deeply understood how easy it was to conquer the Great Yu Empire, but how difficult it was to defend it.

Globally, the Great Yu Empire was undoubtedly in the worst geopolitical environment. Compared to island nations like Britain and Japan, which did not border any countries, the Great Yu Empire was surrounded by numerous neighboring countries. Most importantly, not a single one of these countries was benevolent.

To prevent these surrounding barbarians from raiding and leaving, he had to establish a ring of fortresses across the Great Yu Empire’s vast territory to defend against invasions.

Therefore, local defense alone would consume a large amount of the Great Yu Empire's military expenditure. This was also one of the reasons why successive dynasties rarely launched distant expeditions. In an agrarian society, a little domestic turmoil would deplete funds, and distant expeditions would only lead to faster decline.

In contrast, Britain and Japan had no such worries. They simply did not need to defend their homelands; their armies only needed to be used for offense, and their offensives were mostly for plunder.

Simply put, fighting wars was beneficial to them. The more they fought, the richer they became; the richer they became, the more they fought.

"Then how many troops do you think the Great Yu Empire should maintain at present?" Xiao Ming asked.

"If there were no firearms, the Great Yu Empire would need at least one million two hundred thousand troops. Currently, in my opinion, at least five hundred thousand troops are needed: over three hundred thousand for defending our territory, and over one hundred thousand for conquest." Niu Ben said slowly

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"Five hundred thousand."

Sitting on the dragon throne, Xiao Ming's heart clenched. These additional over three hundred thousand men would again be a huge military expenditure.

However, even if Niu Ben didn't say it, he also had the idea of expanding the army. When he was still King Qi, he felt that over one hundred thousand troops under his command was already overloaded, but

now he suddenly felt that these few soldiers were merely like a drop of water in a lake for the Great Yu Empire.

Precisely because of this, it put him in a dilemma, with a feeling of having no troops to use.

“I have long intended this. If that is the case, the Grand Council shall proceed with conscription.”

Xiao Ming said in a deep voice. In fact, the army had never stopped conscripting every year; it was just that the number of conscripts was maintained at a certain standard.

His agreement this time, besides the reason of this barbarian invasion, had a most important underlying factor: in the context of gradually flourishing industry, he had the ability and the necessity to stabilize the surrounding environment and begin the process of contending for colonies with the West.

Moreover, to enable the common people of the Great Yu Empire to live as prosperously as those in the West, he also had to step out of the country and contend with the West for the dividends of the Age of Exploration.

Niu Ben breathed a sigh of relief. He hadn't dared to bring it up in the council hall earlier, because he knew very well that as soon as he proposed expanding the army, the civil officials, led by Fei Ji and Pang Yukun, would argue vehemently.

He knew that the Great Yu Empire needed to recuperate again and that conscription would make the national treasury even more difficult. However, in the hearts of soldiers, defending the homeland and expanding territory was their duty. Only with strong military preparedness could the Great Yu Empire be stable.

Having discussed the expansion of the army, Niu Ben continued, "Your Majesty, I have another request?"

"General Niu, please speak."

"I believe it is inappropriate to leave Luo Quan idle at home. Now is a time when the Great Yu Empire needs capable people, and talents should be utilized to their fullest," Niu Ben said cautiously.

Xiao Ming gently nodded. If Niu Ben hadn't brought it up, he would have forgotten about this cunning military strategist of the Great Yu Empire.

Previously, this old general had refused to join the army to avoid suspicion. And at that time, Xiao Ming, with the army not yet stabilized, was also unwilling to use him. After all, with the three Luo family members all in the military, anyone would be somewhat wary.

But now that the military reform was complete, and he held military power firmly in his own hands, he no longer cared.

After all, if he wished, he could remove any general at any time without causing a military rebellion.

After a moment of thought, he said, "Indeed, it is time for this old general to come out of retirement. During this time, I heard he often attended military academy lectures, so he must have some different insights into the current Great Yu Empire army."

Niu Ben, hearing this, felt a cold sweat break out on his back. Xiao Ming's words clearly told him that Luo Quan's every move was under his watchful eye.

He said honestly, "Luo Quan, after all, is accustomed to leading troops in battle, so he is quite concerned about military affairs. Once, he mentioned to me that he wished to audit classes at the military academy, and I agreed at the time."

"So that's it. That's good too; it saves him from remaining fixated on swords, bows, and horses. Since that's the case, let him also go to Yizhou Province this time, and see if he is still the military strategist he once was," Xiao Ming said.

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Niu Ben bowed and said. His suggestion to activate Luo Quan this time also had his own selfish motives.

With the increasing number of troops and future battles, he alone was somewhat overwhelmed. With Luo Quan as a helper, he would be able to relax a bit.

And for Xiao Ming, he was also willing to have Luo Quan return to the army, because for him, he did not need Luo Quan and Niu Ben to personally command soldiers in direct combat. What he needed was their strategic vision in a war.

After seeing off Niu Ben, Xiao Ming looked towards Yizhou. Now he only hoped that Xiao Zhen and Di Ying could hold out a little longer in Yizhou.

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Yizhou.

Xiao Zhen and Di Ying stood together on the city wall, looking at the barbarian army below the city. Ten days had now passed since the barbarians arrived outside Yizhou City.

In these ten days, barbarian slave soldiers launched daily assaults, wearing down the army within the city. The most important problem was that the army led by Di Ying was suffering severe ammunition depletion. If this continued, they would be unable to use firearms to stop the surging tide of barbarian slave soldiers.

“Damn barbarians! Once reinforcements arrive, I will surely slaughter them all!” Di Ying said, his eyes red.

After executing the King of Shu, he and Xiao Zhen took over the thirteen prefectures of Bashu. After receiving the decree from Qingzhou Province, this area was officially renamed Yizhou Province.

As with the original plan, one was responsible for handling government affairs, and the other was responsible for commanding the army. Bashu was becoming regularized in this year.

But now the barbarians had disrupted everything. He felt as much pain as if he had seen a child he nurtured being killed by the enemy.

Xiao Zhen's gaze swept over the musketeers on the city wall. Now, he suddenly felt that his previous defeat was not unjust at all. In these ten days, he had truly witnessed the might of this firearm army.

After breaching Songzhou, the barbarians consecutively conquered two cities on the route to Yizhou, but their offensive was stalled in Yizhou.

In ten days of intense warfare, Di Ying led these twenty thousand firearm troops in a desperate, unyielding fight against the barbarians. Now, the corpses piled up below the city were far more numerous than their own.

"What a pity. If the thirty thousand soldiers in Songzhou had been musketeers, there would have been no barbarian breaching the city," Xiao Zhen sighed.

Di Ying's face was grim. He said, "Who would have thought that the conscripted former Shu King's troops would be so vulnerable?"

At the mention of the King of Shu, a trace of guilt flashed in Xiao Zhen's eyes. He didn't want to kill this younger brother, but he had no choice but to kill him.

After the King of Shu was killed, the former Shu King's troops in various prefectures and counties surrendered to Di Ying. Di Ying successively appeased these soldiers and then re-promoted some generals to command these armies.

Especially in Songzhou, he even dispatched his own junior general to take charge, but no one expected the barbarians to lead their army there.

“It’s not that the former Shu King’s troops are vulnerable, but that the barbarians’ tactics this time are different from before. Look at the earthen pits outside Yizhou City; I have never seen such tactics.”

Di Ying’s words were merely spoken in anger. Losing Songzhou would certainly lead to his punishment. As Xiao Zhen said, the barbarians’ tactics this time did indeed surprise him.

Because he discovered that the barbarians had actually learned to use trenches for siege warfare, which was previously a method used by the Great Yu Empire for defending cities.

During these ten days of siege, the barbarian slave soldiers, while attacking the city, also dug trenches around Yizhou City. Soldiers used the trenches to avoid bullet fire. Upon reaching the city walls, they would climb using ladders. This tactic greatly weakened the effectiveness of firearms in this siege battle.

However, this also meant that the barbarian cavalry could not enter the city. But Di Ying knew very well that the barbarians’ purpose this time was plunder.

Therefore, the cavalry had no intention of entering the city. They were merely having the barbarian slave soldiers fiercely attack Yizhou City. If they could breach the city, that would naturally be great. If they couldn’t, they would besiege them here and tie down the Great Yu Empire’s army.

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Bodo looked at the burning village with a cruel smile in his eyes.

After ordering the slave soldiers to besiege Yizhou City, he led 60,000 cavalry, dividing them into six routes to plunder within the Bashu territory.

For the past six months, the Golden Tent Khanate had been quietly preparing this plunder of the Great Yu Empire's Bashu region. Another cold winter was approaching, and none of the Golden Tent Khanate's descendants were willing to see their tribesmen die in cold and hunger.

And to successfully capture Songzhou City, they had sent envoys to Tibet six months ago, finally promising a quarter of the plundered wealth in exchange for passage through Tibet.

"Faster, faster! Don't leave any grain or livestock in the village! There are many more villages to plunder below!" Bodo shouted loudly.

Before him, barbarian soldiers rampaged through the village like wolves, corpses of the Great Yu Empire's common people lay everywhere on the ground. Mixed with the screams of daughters and the cries of children, this place was like hell on earth.

At this time, barbarian soldiers, scimitars in hand, shuttled back and forth in the village. They tied everything they could plunder onto their horses, while the village's cattle and sheep were herded by them towards the next village.

Such a tragic scene made Bodo's eyes gleam with excitement. He had to thank Beishan for being able to pass through Tibet so smoothly this time.

Although Beishan was once again punished by his Father Khan for the defeat in Goryeo, three months after his return to Shengdu, a British man arrived in Shengdu and began teaching them various different battle tactics. This passage through Tibet was also his idea.

“Amazing British people,” Bodo thought to himself. ‘He saved the Golden Tent Khanate.’

As he was in awe, a barbarian general came before him and said, “Prince Bodo, the Khan ordered us not to stay in Bashu for more than twenty days. The time is almost up now. We should withdraw from Songzhou and return to the grasslands.”

Bodo frowned upon hearing this. “We finally managed to penetrate deep into the Great Yu Empire’s territory this time. Wouldn’t leaving so quickly be a waste? The soldiers’ horses are not yet fully laden with grain. Let’s wait a few more days. Even if the Great Yu Empire sends reinforcements, they will first relieve the siege of Yizhou. We can still retreat then.”

The general said worriedly, “Prince, once the Great Yu Empire’s army arrives, I’m afraid we won’t be able to leave.”

“Hmph, has your courage been shattered by the Great Yu Empire’s army? They are only formidable with firearms, but can firearms outrun our horses?” Bodo rejected the general’s suggestion.

Seeing this, the general sighed and no longer tried to persuade him.

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Chang’an. After a day of rest in what was once the capital of the Great Yu Empire, Luo Quan and Qi Guangyi led their cavalry directly towards Songzhou.

After Xiao Ming reinstated him, he did not go to Jinling Province to rendezvous with Lu Fei, but instead, he and Qi Guangyi led their cavalry straight to Songzhou instead of reinforcing Yizhou.

“General Luo, it’s only a day and a half’s journey from Chang’an to Songzhou. Are we truly not going to Yizhou?” Qi Guangyi asked.

Luo Quan’s expression was firm, “Yizhou city has twenty thousand musketeers led by Di Ying, and sufficient grain and fodder in the city. As long as there is no internal chaos, barbarian slave soldiers alone cannot conquer it. Moreover, the barbarians’ purpose this time is plunder; they will not wholeheartedly attack the city. Once they have plundered enough, they will withdraw from Bashu. So now, what we need to do is prevent them from returning to the grasslands from Songzhou City, and then rendezvous with Lu Fei to annihilate this barbarian cavalry in one fell swoop.”

Qi Guangyi nodded upon hearing this. This old general had fought many battles with the barbarians throughout his life and understood their temperament very well.

Luo Quan, seeing that Qi Guangyi still had doubts, continued, “If the cunning Beishan were leading this plunder, they might have already returned to the grasslands. But the battle report says that Bodo is leading this time. I know this person very well; he is very greedy. He will most likely delay the withdrawal.”

“If that’s the case, the sooner the better. General Luo, let’s go,” Qi Guangyi said, looking at the morning glow.

Luo Quan was somewhat excited. Returning to the battlefield seemed to have made him come alive again.

During his time in Qingzhou Province, he had been incredibly bored. He had endured it only to avoid suspicion, but it wasn't until the military reform occurred that he suddenly realized he had no need to avoid suspicion at all.

Spurring their horses, Niu Ben and Qi Guangyi set off again. Although the journey from Qingzhou Province to Chang'an was exhausting, the war was urgent, allowing them no time for excessive rest.

At noon on the second day, Luo Quan and Qi Guangyi led thirty thousand cavalry to Songzhou City. When he saw the barbarian soldiers on the city wall, both of them were immediately delighted.

"The General's foresight is truly divine! I didn't expect Bodo to indeed be greedy for plundered wealth and not withdraw from Bashu," Qi Guangyi said excitedly.

Upon learning that Songzhou had fallen and the barbarians had entered Bashu, all of them, as generals, harbored a burning anger. The Great Yu Empire and the barbarians were ancient enemies; they only wanted to completely annihilate these invaders.

Luo Quan stroked his beard and looked at Songzhou City. He mused, "This Songzhou City is the western gateway to Bashu. It has mountains on both sides and a city in the middle, making it easy to defend but difficult to attack. In the past, when Tibet invaded, they always attacked from this very spot."

After a pause, he continued, “We must immediately blockade Songzhou City to prevent the barbarians from sending intelligence. Additionally, have the soldiers dig trenches outside the city to prevent cavalry from entering.”

Qi Guangyi nodded. He looked at Luo Quan with some surprise, not expecting this old general, who had been out of action for so long, to understand digging trenches at such a moment.

It must be said that Luo Quan’s decision now was very sound. Currently, there were barbarian soldiers inside Songzhou City, and Bodo was leading 60,000 cavalry outside.

If Bodo returned, they would be at a great disadvantage due to being attacked from both inside and outside.

Therefore, digging trenches now would both prevent an ambush by the soldiers inside the city and prevent Bodo from using the barbarians’ cavalry advantage to launch a strong assault on them.

Upon receiving Luo Quan’s orders, the soldiers immediately dismounted. In front of the Songzhou City defenders, they began digging trenches one hundred meters outside the city.

By the time these trenches were completed, the soldiers led by Lu Fei should have arrived. Even if Bodo arrived first, they could still contend with Bodo’s cavalry for a few days.

The Great Yu Empire’s cavalry was no longer afraid of the barbarian cavalry.

The barbarian soldiers inside Songzhou City were terrified by the scene outside the city, but they dared not sally forth to meet the enemy.

Because most of the cavalry had left the city to plunder, there were only 8,000 men left to defend Songzhou City against any unforeseen circumstances. If they sallied forth to meet the enemy, they might lose Songzhou City, which would be far worse than a few trenches.

In the midst of these preparations, four days later, Lu Fei finally arrived with his large army, this time including 10,000 percussion cap gun soldiers from Qingzhou Province.

“These damned fellows actually came to plunder the Great Yu Empire! Today, Grandfather Lu will teach them how to behave!” Lu Fei’s first words upon arriving outside Songzhou City were filled with rage.

Chapter 766

The slanting evening sun cast a red hue over Songzhou City.

Dust swirled on the yellow ground, and the battlefield was filled with a sense of grim determination.

Luo Quan, Qi Guangyi, and Lu Fei stood together, using telescopes to observe the defenders on the Songzhou city wall not far away.

After a string of curses directed at Songzhou City, Lu Fei said, “General Luo, from the looks of it, there aren’t many barbarian defenders inside Songzhou City. It’s not too late to attack the city before the sun sets.”

If it had been before, Luo Quan would have certainly thought Lu Fei was boasting. But now, the Great Yu Empire's military reforms and equipment gave the Great Yu Empire the ability to breach the city gate within two hours.

Moreover, this time, Lu Fei was leading soldiers equipped with new weapons.

"If we can capture Songzhou City, that would of course be for the best. That way, we can trap Bodo here and annihilate him little by little." Luo Quan nodded.

Qi Guangyi agreed, "That's right. Coupled with the trenches, the barbarian cavalry will not be able to charge into the city from the trenches under the musket fire."

Lu Fei rubbed his hands together eagerly. He loved fighting the most. During his time in Jinling Province, besides daily training, he was bored to death. Upon receiving the military order, he was so excited he barely slept a wink.

"Hehe, since that's the case, let's try this new firearm provided by the military machinery department." Lu Fei's eyes narrowed into a line.

When he saw these new firearms in Jinling Province, he almost drooled with envy. After trying them out, he was even more eager to equip his soldiers with these firearms.

If not for strict military law, he would have been tempted to keep these firearms.

Having decided to attack the city, the army below Songzhou City immediately moved. Lu Fei had all the soldiers carrying Conqueror Muskets stand at a hundred and fifty meters from the city wall.

According to the information provided by the military machinery department, the Conqueror Musket had a range of nine hundred meters and could maintain accuracy within five hundred meters, but at this distance, its accuracy had dropped to fifty percent. Therefore, the optimal firing position for the Conqueror Musket was three hundred meters, and of course, accuracy within three hundred meters would be higher and higher.

From the time firearms were invented, Lu Fei had followed Xiao Ming on numerous campaigns. He naturally knew how to utilize the characteristics of the Conqueror Musket.

When facing defending infantry, he naturally did not need to extend the distance. The important thing was to ensure accuracy while also protecting his own soldiers from arrow wounds.

So, a distance of one hundred and fifty meters was very suitable.

Under his command, the soldiers carrying Conqueror Muskets formed three ranks in front of the city gate. Within the six hundred-meter range of the city wall, over three thousand soldiers aimed their gun muzzles at the soldiers on the wall.

Unlike previous indiscriminate firing, this time the Conqueror Musketeers carefully aimed at the barbarian defenders on the city wall.

Besides being arrayed in formations, there were also two hundred Conqueror Musketeers acting as skirmishers. They were spread out in different positions, looking for opportunities to shoot down enemy soldiers.

"These are...?" Luo Quan had departed in a hurry and had not yet understood the role of these skirmishers.

Lu Fei explained, "These soldiers are the more accurate shooters selected from the army. They are responsible for shooting down enemy generals under the cover of the main formation."

Luo Quan's eyes lit up. He nodded, "Catching the bandit chief first, excellent!"

While the two were speaking, the formation was quickly completed. Glancing at the sky, Lu Fei roared to Artillery Captain Chen Ting, "Bring up my field cannons! Blast open that city gate for me!"

"Yes, General."

Chen Ting was originally a subordinate of Luo Xin. After the army reform, the artillery was split, and the formerly excellent artillery generals were dispersed among various armies.

Hearing this, he immediately had the soldiers pull up the field cannons, which were pulled by horses, and deploy them directly facing the city gate.

All preparations complete, Lu Fei roared, "Fire!"

As his order was given, the Conqueror Musketeers pulled their triggers one after another. The percussion caps produced sparks that ignited the gunpowder. With a “bang” of gunfire, conical bullets flew straight towards their targets from the muzzles.

As the Great Yu Empire army appeared below Songzhou City, the barbarian soldiers within Songzhou City fell into chaos. Especially with the subsequent arrival of the firearm unit, the barbarian general in charge of defending the city felt even heavier in his heart.

“What are these Great Yu Empire soldiers doing? This is at least a hundred and fifty paces away,” a barbarian chiliarch asked, puzzled.

The myriarch (commander of ten thousand) inside the city shook his head, “As far as I know, the Great Yu Empire’s firearms don’t have such a long range.”

As his words fell, a flash of fire erupted from below the city. The chiliarch (commander of thousand) grunted and suddenly fell. Seeing this, he was greatly alarmed.

And when he looked at the chiliarch, he saw blood continuously gushing from the chiliarch’s chest.

In shock, he looked at the Great Yu Empire army outside the city. At this moment, a bullet flashed past his eyes. Before he could react, the bullet struck him between the eyebrows.

In an instant, the myriarch and chiliarch inside the city fell into pools of blood. The barbarian soldiers, without command, fell into disarray.

As the two fell, any barbarian soldier who exposed themselves continuously dropped, which exacerbated the barbarians' confusion.

The three, Luo Quan, had been observing the top of the city. Luo Quan was shocked. The accuracy and range of the Conqueror Musket had indeed improved greatly this time.

"Hahaha..." Lu Fei laughed heartily. The Conqueror Musket had once again proven its capability on the battlefield. He said to Chen Ting, "Fire the cannons!"

"Boom, boom, boom..."

While the city wall fell into chaos, the artillery began to fiercely bombard the city gate. After three volleys, the Songzhou city gate collapsed with a roar.

"Charge!" Following Lu Fei's order, the musketeers with fixed bayonets swarmed into the trenches and moved towards the city gate.

Climbing out of the trenches, they flowed into Songzhou City like a tide.

And the Conqueror Musketeers were not idle either. They continuously suppressed the barbarian soldiers on the city wall, preventing them from attacking the soldiers at the city gate.

Luo Quan had only theorized about warfare in the military academy, but now he was experiencing firsthand the practical combat of a firearm siege on the battlefield.

Amidst his shock, he realized that the era of swords, bows, and horses was gone forever.

Accompanied by the stirring sound of the charge bugle, the musketeers surged into Songzhou City like a tide.

Inside the city, the remaining barbarians still resisted fiercely. They held scimitars, their faces ferocious, and charged at the invading musketeers.

Facing the barbarian soldiers within the city, the Great Yu Empire soldiers' eyes were grim. National enmity and personal hatred made them even colder and more ruthless than the barbarian soldiers.

Looking at the charging barbarian soldiers, the musketeers flexibly changed formations, sometimes gathering to unleash a volley of fire.

At other times, they collectively raised their bayonets and charged, engaging in close combat with the barbarian soldiers.

In the memory of the Great Yu Empire people, barbarian soldiers had always been savage and fierce, but now, on this battlefield, the Great Yu Empire soldiers performed with even greater bravery.

In six years, the Great Yu Empire army had truly transformed from a flock of sheep into a pack of wolves.

The barbarians had always been fond of fighting fiercely, but at this moment, they suddenly discovered that the formerly weak Great Yu Empire soldiers had become even fiercer than them.

These men, wielding bayonets, were like reapers of death, often killing a barbarian soldier with a single thrust.

Chapter 767

Dusk descended, and the sounds of battle in Songzhou City began to quieten.

Luo Quan, Lu Fei, and Qi Guangyi led the remaining troops from outside the city into Songzhou City. Along the way, the bodies of barbarian soldiers strewn on the ground met their eyes.

Some of these bodies had bullet holes, others bore stab wounds from bayonets. Blood stained the streets of Songzhou City, and a heavy, bloody smell permeated the air.

Luo Quan and the other two felt no pity for these barbarian soldiers. Upon entering the city, besides the barbarian soldiers' corpses, they also saw piles of heads forming small mountains.

These heads belonged to the common people of Songzhou City and the soldiers who defended Songzhou. Their eyes were open, staring at Lu Fei and the others, as if narrating the suffering they had endured.

Walking past one such mound of heads, they saw another. The faces of the three also grew increasingly grim.

“It seems none of the fifty thousand common people and thirty thousand soldiers of Songzhou City escaped.”

Qi Guangyi’s throat was somewhat choked, and he spoke this sentence almost word by word.

Luo Quan’s expression was firm. He had experienced barbarian massacres more than once. For the barbarians, this was an effective strategy to intimidate their opponents. It was precisely by this method that they continuously encroached upon the Great Yu Empire’s cities.

Surrender meant avoiding massacre; otherwise, Songzhou was the fate. This time, Bodo was doing it for all of the Great Yu Empire to see.

Lu Fei’s hand, gripping the reins, turned white from the excessive force. He said, “I will personally cut off Bodo’s head and hang it above the gate of Songzhou City!”

Then he said to his personal guard, “Issue the order: no surrender from barbarian soldiers within Songzhou City shall be accepted! Kill without mercy! The entire army is ordered: Kill!”

Luo Quan did not stop Lu Fei’s order. In a Songzhou City that resembled hell, he had no reason to do so.

More importantly, after seeing this scene, the soldiers’ emotions also seemed to be out of control.

From the moment they entered the city, the soldiers behind him were as silent as the night, making no sound. But their eyes were gradually covered with hatred. Their hands clutching their weapons turned white, and their breathing became heavy.

“Kill!” Upon receiving Lu Fei’s order, the soldiers roared, releasing the anger accumulated in their hearts. They rushed wildly through the city with their firearms, searching for traces of the enemy.

At this moment, they forgot that they carried firearms. It was as if only a bayonet thrust into the enemy’s chest could relieve the hatred in their hearts.

The remaining barbarian soldiers were too late to escape and were swallowed by the vengeful army.

The sky grew darker. Torches began to light up the city, and the figures of barbarian soldiers vanished within Songzhou City.

“Bury the bodies of the common people and the soldiers.”

Having encamped in the Songzhou Grand Camp, Luo Quan ordered the city gate repaired while also beginning to bury the corpses. Plagues were common after wars. As an old general, he knew what he should do now.

Qi Guangyi went to carry out the order. In the tent, only Lu Fei and Luo Quan remained.

Glancing at the grim-faced Lu Fei, Luo Quan patted his shoulder and said, "This is war. Were there few people killed by the barbarians in Youzhou back then? Three million people in the entire Yan-Yun Sixteen Prefectures! They just killed them as they pleased. That was truly rivers of blood and corpses everywhere."

Lu Fei silently nodded. Today's scene evoked memories he wished not to recall. At that time, he was only eighteen, and witnessing that hellish scene kept him awake for three days and three nights.

From that moment, he vowed that in this life, he would avenge the blood debt of the fallen common people of the Great Yu Empire.

"General Luo Quan is absolutely right. However, what I'm worried about now are the thirteen prefectures of Bashu. With Bodo's temperament, the six million Shu common people are in danger!" Lu Fei said sternly.

"Therefore, we cannot stay long in Songzhou City. Early tomorrow morning, I will lead the troops with Qi Guangyi to find Bodo's army. We have trained soldiers for a thousand days to use them for a short while. Now is the time for us to risk our lives and fight the barbarians." Luo Quan's gaze was firm.

Lu Fei stood up and said, "Old General, you stay in Songzhou City. Tomorrow, Qi Guangyi and I will leave the city!"

Luo Quan smiled, "You are more adept at commanding firearm troops, and I am better with cavalry. You should go relieve the siege of Yizhou and join forces with Di Ying, then rendezvous with me."

Lu Fei thought for a moment and nodded deeply.

After a day of rest, Lu Fei left 10,000 Conqueror Musketeers in the city to prevent barbarian cavalry from escaping back to the grasslands by utilizing the trenches.

The two were about to set off when the scout cavalry, dispatched by Luo Quan three days ago to find news of Bodo, returned to Songzhou City.

Upon reaching Luo Quan, the scout cavalryman loudly said, "General, we have found the location of the barbarians' six cavalry routes! Prince Bodo, the commander of the barbarian cavalry, has already reached Yazhou, and he is now waiting for the other five cavalry routes to rendezvous with him!"

"So, we have been discovered by them," Luo Quan said.

Bodo not heading towards Songzhou City but waiting for his cavalry to gather clearly indicated his intention to consolidate his forces.

The scout cavalryman said, "Probably so. Now, the barbarian slave soldiers in Yizhou are also moving towards Yazhou."

Lu Fei and Luo Quan exchanged glances. The intelligence brought by the scout cavalryman had disrupted their plans.

Luo Quan said, "Since Bodo's location has been found, it's much easier. You immediately send someone to Yizhou, ordering Di Ying to advance towards Yazhou."

Then he said to Lu Fei, "Since Bodo is preparing to consolidate his forces, we will not give him this opportunity. We will take Yazhou before his reinforcements arrive and set a trap there, waiting for the other barbarian armies to arrive."

Lu Fei showed a slight smile upon hearing this. This aligned perfectly with his thoughts. So he said, "Speed is of the essence in warfare. Let us set off now."

...

Yazhou.

This was a city located less than a hundred li directly south of Songzhou City. At this time, Bodo was stationed in Yazhou City with over ten thousand men.

He received news the day after the Great Yu Empire cavalry appeared outside Songzhou City. Greatly alarmed, he immediately dispatched cavalry to recall the other five cavalry routes and even ordered the slave soldiers besieging Yizhou to return to Yazhou.

"Is there no other way back to the grasslands besides Songzhou?" Bodo asked.

Beside him were the myriarchs of the tribe. They exchanged glances and slowly shook their heads. "Songzhou is the only passage back to the grasslands."

Bodo paced back and forth. Now, he felt a hint of regret in his heart. It was for the sake of plundering more wealth and causing greater damage to the Great Yu Empire.

During this period, he had rampaged through Bashu without restraint. Wherever he passed, only the corpses of the Great Yu Empire's common people remained. He deeply knew that if he were caught by the Great Yu Empire's army, he would die terribly.

But now, he had no retreat. He was now clearly trapped in a cage by the Great Yu Empire's army.

"I hope the Great Yu Empire's army doesn't come too fast." Bodo's brows furrowed. He only had ten thousand men in Yazhou. Even if he was foolish, he understood that these few men could not stop the Great Yu Empire's army.

Chapter 768

Qiao Dachuan skillfully made his warhorse lie down to avoid being discovered. Then he took out his telescope and began searching for barbarian scouts.

As a member of the hunter cavalry, he primarily carried out two tasks: first, to reconnoiter the enemy's movements, and second, to hunt down enemy scouts to conceal his own army's movements.

After the army from Songzhou City set off, he and his hunter cavalry companions first departed to hunt barbarian scouts, preventing their army's objective from being discovered.

Not long after he set off, he quickly used the advantage of his telescope to discover a team of ten barbarian scouts heading towards them. So, he immediately had his companions ambush on one side of the hill, waiting for this prey to take the bait.

As hunter cavalry, they were the strongest individuals meticulously selected from the army. After training, they possessed a unique reconnaissance capability.

And in terms of firearms, they also received preferential treatment. Besides a sharp saber, they each had a short-barreled firearm on each side of their horse.

They would only use these when hunting enemy scouts.

“Everyone, prepare!”

The barbarian scouts were drawing closer. Qiao Dachuan lowered his voice and said.

The team members, who had also pressed their warhorses behind the hill, immediately became alert, ready to kill this batch of scouts at any moment.

In quiet anticipation, the barbarian scouts drew closer. They could even hear the sound of hoofbeats. At this moment, Qiao Dachuan suddenly shouted loudly and vaulted onto his horse.

Following his movement, the other team members also made their warhorses rise from the ground. They instantly vaulted onto their horses, the entire action seamless.

The barbarian cavalry evidently did not anticipate an ambush along their route. The ten men, seeing the lightly clad hunter cavalry, were first stunned, then hesitated whether to kill these Great Yu Empire scout cavalry.

Because when all the Great Yu Empire soldiers appeared, there were also ten of them in total. More importantly, these people had no armor protection, only cloth clothing.

Just as the barbarians were momentarily stunned, Qiao Dachuan had already led his soldiers to charge at the barbarian scouts. At this point, the two sides were very close. In the blink of an eye, the two sides would make contact.

The barbarian cavalry reacted. At this moment, the Great Yu Empire cavalry had already arrived before them. Having no time to draw their bows and shoot arrows, they drew their scimitars and charged head-on towards Qiao Dachuan and his group.

“Bang, bang, bang...”

Sporadic gunshots rang out. Accompanied by white smoke, barbarian scouts fell one after another from their horses. In a blink of an eye, they were annihilated.

Turning his horse around, Qiao Dachuan glanced at the scouts lying on the ground. Then he took out another firearm and fired another shot at the barbarian soldiers on the ground.

The other team members followed suit. They did this to prevent these individuals from exposing the hunter cavalry's tactics.

After dealing with this batch of barbarian scouts, they continued on their way to find the next batch of barbarian scouts. At the same time, nine other hunter cavalry teams were spread out along a line, searching for traces of barbarian scouts.

After a day's march, the main army led by Luo Quan successfully arrived outside Yazhou City. Under the cover of night, he stealthily besieged Yazhou City.

The next day, Lu Fei's infantry arrived belatedly. After the three rendezvoused, they prepared to begin the siege.

"It seems Bodo didn't receive news of our arrival. These hunter cavalry are indeed useful," Luo Quan said.

Lu Fei exclaimed, "His Majesty is skilled in both civil and martial arts; he is truly a rare talent throughout history. This hunter cavalry was His Majesty's idea, and it's very effective against these barbarian scouts. Now Bodo is probably blind."

"Not just Bodo, but other barbarian raiding parties have probably become blind too," Qi Guangyi said.

To annihilate this invading enemy force, all hunter cavalry were dispatched this time. Even before the siege began, a silent contest had already started.

The three casually exchanged a few words. Luo Quan said, “Now we must immediately attack the city. Any delay might lead to complications.”

Lu Fei nodded. Before Lu Fei’s infantry arrived, Qi Guangyi had already led his cavalry to besiege Yazhou City in advance. Now, Yazhou City was clearly a cage.

As Lu Fei’s words fell, cannon fire abruptly erupted. Chen Ting ordered the artillerymen to simultaneously bombard the city gate and city walls from the front.

Yazhou City was merely a small city, with weak city walls and a small city gate. Under the artillery attack, the city walls quickly collapsed, and the city gate was also shattered.

Inside the city, Bodo was already like an ant on a hot griddle. The scouts had left a day ago and had not returned. When he opened his eyes the next day, Yazhou City was already surrounded by the Great Yu Empire’s cavalry.

He had prepared two routes: the first was to fiercely attack Songzhou City after consolidating his forces, and the second was to withdraw early if he discovered the Great Yu Empire army before consolidating.

But now, both routes were blocked.

After the sound of cannons erupted outside the city, he drew the scimitar from his waist. “My tribesmen, the Golden Tent Khanate has no weak descendants. Even if we die in battle today, we must not lose our honor. Follow me!”

The barbarian cavalry listened silently to Bodo's words. As his voice fell, the cavalymen let out wild shouts. They followed Bodo and charged out of the city.

Today, it was either die in battle in Yazhou City or break through the encirclement and return to the grasslands.

Seeing the charging barbarian cavalry, Luo Quan's face was calm. Today was different from the past; the Great Yu Empire soldiers would no longer be intimidated by the barbarians.

With the elimination of ideological differences, the two sides now competed on the strength of their weapons and bodies.

The musketeers immediately opened fire on the barbarian cavalry charging out of the city gate. Under three-stage firing, the barbarian cavalry fell in waves.

After finishing their volleys, they retreated. At this moment, Qi Guangyi led his cavalry, like a swift gale, charging towards the cavalry led by Bodo.

Because of the large number of cavalry, the imperial court did not yet have enough short-barreled firearms to equip them. The cavalry were currently still using crossbows.

The two sides charged to a distance of twenty meters. The Great Yu Empire cavalry picked up the crossbows on their horses and fired an arrow at the oncoming barbarian cavalry.

The barbarian cavalry immediately fell into disarray, with men and horses toppling over. The Great Yu Empire's cunning tactics caught them by surprise.

But then, an even more astonishing scene appeared before them: the Great Yu Empire soldiers used the crossbows, which had already fired their arrows, as weapons to smash the remaining cavalry.

Under the attack of crossbow arrows and crossbows, the barbarian cavalry's formation fell into chaos. At this moment, the disciplined and orderly Great Yu Empire cavalry, like a torrent of steel, plunged into the barbarian cavalry's ranks.

Immediately, warhorses neighed, and cries of "kill" shook the heavens.

The cuirassiers, at this moment, displayed the advantage of heavy cavalry. Relying on their armor, they charged and fought through the barbarian cavalry, their sabers flashing, and blood splattering.

Lu Fei did not stop observing the battle at this point. He commanded his musketeers to enter the city through the breach, splitting the barbarian cavalry trapped inside the city into two, completely preventing the barbarian army from supporting each other.

Chapter 769

Gunpowder and smoke filled the battlefield.

Besieged by an enemy six times their number, Bodo gradually began to falter, and his cavalry began to retreat steadily.

This time, he was completely outmatched by the Great Yu Empire's army in terms of both numbers and weaponry. Looking at his continuously falling soldiers, he grew increasingly desperate.

As the main gate was breached, the other three city gates of Yazhou City were also successively breached. Cavalry and musketeers poured in through the city gates, continuously compressing the barbarian cavalry's front line.

From fighting in the morning until noon, Bodo's forces dwindled. Eventually, only a few hundred cavalry remained, surrounded in the center of the city.

At this point, they were being targeted by musketeers. With a single command, they would immediately perish.

Sixty thousand men against ten thousand men—this was a war without surprises. Luo Quan, Lu Fei, and Qi Guangyi now appeared outside the encirclement.

Luo Quan recognized Bodo at a glance.

"Long time no see, Bodo. I didn't expect us to meet here today," Luo Quan said, a hint of sarcasm playing on his lips.

He had fought Bodo many times on the grasslands.

Bodo looked at Luo Quan upon hearing his voice. His pupils briefly dilated before returning to normal. He said to Luo Quan, "So it's you."

Luo Quan snorted coldly, "It is I! I was certain you wouldn't leave Bashu so quickly this time. You are indeed the same greedy Bodo as before. You haven't changed at all in this regard."

Bodo's eyes narrowed. He said angrily, "I never thought I would be defeated at your hands one day."

"You were not defeated at my hands, but at the hands of the Great Yu Empire's soldiers. The era when barbarians could run rampant is over," Luo Quan said calmly.

Bodo suddenly burst into laughter. "Luo Quan, you speak too soon! Do you really think the Great Yu Empire can defeat the Golden Tent Khanate with just firearms? Don't forget, the Golden Tent Khanate spans the entire Silk Road. We are far wealthier than you imagine."

"Gold can't be eaten as food," Luo Quan said satirically.

"But it can be used for trade," Bodo grinned malevolently.

Lu Fei, seeing this, said angrily, "You will soon learn that what you owe the Great Yu Empire will be repaid immediately."

Bodo looked at Lu Fei and said meaningfully, "At that time, with both sides severely weakened, your Great Yu Empire will surely be unable to defend itself."

With that, he said no more.

Lu Fei snorted coldly, "I'm afraid you won't live to see that day."

With that, he waved his hand. The soldiers, receiving the order, opened fire on Bodo and the remaining cavalry. After a volley of gunfire, all the remaining barbarian cavalry fell under the bullets.

The hatred in the soldiers' hearts had not yet dissipated. They rushed forward and continuously stabbed their bayonets into Bodo's body.

Luo Quan and the other two watched quietly. On their way here, they had passed through dozens of villages, and without exception, these villages had been plundered by the barbarians.

The villages were burned, and the villagers who couldn't escape were cruelly massacred. From Songzhou to Yazhou, the soldiers witnessed too many tragedies.

Now, a fire burned in their hearts. It was this butcher who ordered the massacre of the Great Yu Empire's common people. How could they not hate him?

After completely annihilating Bodo and the cavalry he led, Luo Quan, Lu Fei, and the others did not relax. This was because 50,000 barbarian cavalry and nearly 60,000 barbarian slave soldiers were still heading towards Yazhou.

They immediately began to repair the city walls. Based on intelligence from scouts, they ambushed outside the city overnight.

At the same time, to demoralize the barbarian cavalry, Luo Quan ordered Bodo's head to be cut off and hung on the city wall. While the barbarian cavalry might still resist upon seeing Bodo dead, the barbarian slave soldiers would certainly quickly collapse at the sight.

...

Yizhou.

Less than an hour after the barbarian slave soldiers withdrew, a hunter cavalryman entered the city.

"What! Generals Lu Fei and Luo Quan have taken Songzhou City!" Di Ying was overjoyed.

A smile also appeared on the Third Prince's face. These past few days, they had been on edge daily. Now that the main army was coming to their aid, this crisis would surely be resolved quickly.

"It's just that the people of Bashu have suffered. This time, the barbarians must have ravaged them terribly," Xiao Zhen lamented.

He was in charge of the political affairs of Yizhou Province. Now, he had developed deep feelings for this place. First Prince Zhao, and now the barbarians—why was this Land of Abundance so afflicted?

Di Ying had no time for the Third Prince's compassion now. As long as the barbarians in Bashu were not eliminated, the common people here would continue to suffer.

He said to his deputy general, "Immediately gather the troops. Leave five thousand men to defend the city. The rest will follow me to Yazhou to completely wipe out the barbarians with General Luo Quan."

"Yes!" the deputy general shouted. They had been feeling stifled these past few days, tightly besieged in Yizhou City by the barbarian slave soldiers. Now, they finally had a chance to retaliate.

After assembling his army, Di Ying immediately set off. Luo Quan's order was for them to launch a pincer attack on this group of slave soldiers.

After two days of marching, with Yazhou City only half a day away, Di Ying suddenly discovered a large number of barbarian slave soldiers fleeing towards them.

He looked closer and saw Qi Guangyi leading cuirassiers, driving these slave soldiers like ducks.

Seeing this, he grinned widely and immediately ordered his soldiers to cooperate with the cuirassiers to capture the slave soldiers.

With Di Ying's arrival, Qi Guangyi no longer focused his energy on the slave soldiers. Just as Luo Quan had thought, the slave soldiers' morale was already weak. Now that Bodo was dead, they immediately collapsed.

However, to prevent these routed soldiers from causing trouble, they had to capture all of them.

Having disengaged from the task of capturing slave soldiers, Qi Guangyi led his cavalry towards Songzhou City.

Before Di Ying arrived, two ten-thousand-man units had already reached Songzhou City. Seeing Bodo's head hanging on the city gate, these barbarian cavalry experienced a brief moment of confusion.

But at the same time, they also walked into the trap set by Luo Quan. Qi Guangyi, who was lying in ambush outside, led his cavalry to attack the barbarian cavalry. The musketeers inside the city cooperated with them, completely surrounding twenty thousand men.

The battle went very smoothly, because the barbarian cavalry's horses were now laden with plundered goods, which became their burden.

The cattle and sheep they drove now became obstacles in their way.

Bodo's death, coupled with being attacked from front and rear, caused the demoralized barbarian cavalry to lose all will to fight and fall into complete disarray.

After half a day of fierce fighting, the barbarian cavalry suffered eight thousand dead and twelve thousand captured. At this time, they also learned that another three ten-thousand-man units had directly reached Songzhou City.

Now, Qi Guangyi was preparing to rush to Songzhou City to encircle and annihilate this batch of barbarian cavalry.

Chapter 770

A faint, dim afterglow from the western sky fell upon Yazhou City.

On the main street, musketeers, carrying their firearms, marched in neat steps towards Songzhou City. They had just finished an ambush against two barbarian ten-thousand-man units.

Now, they could not rest; they still had to continue pursuing the remaining three ten-thousand-man units.

At this time, the soldiers' morale was high. Seeing that these invaders were about to be completely eliminated, they already felt the joy of victory in their hearts.

Luo Quan did not set off with Lu Fei and Qi Guangyi. He would be responsible for detaining the captives in Yazhou City. Today's ambush outside the city was executed very well.

Besides the barbarian cavalry, 50,000 barbarian slave soldiers were captured. He would work with Di Ying to prevent these slaves from causing chaos in the rear.

He could have simply killed these people, just as they did with the barbarians in Songzhou City, but reason ultimately led him to keep these captives.

This time, Bashu was so severely damaged by these people. Keeping them as lifelong laborers to serve in Bashu would be better than simply killing them.

Of course, this was only for ordinary barbarian soldiers; none of the barbarian generals could escape the Great Yu Empire's judgment.

Watching Lu Fei lead the soldiers away, Luo Quan said to Di Ying, "Escort Bodo's corpse and all the remaining barbarian generals to Qingzhou Province, and await His Majesty's imperial judgment."

"Yes, General."

Di Ying responded. He led the soldiers to drive all the barbarian generals into prisoner carts and dispatched soldiers to send these people to Yizhou, from where they would travel by boat to Qingzhou Province.

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Songzhou City.

Facing the trenches before him, Achige's brows were furrowed. Although he had lost many scouts, one team of scouts returned and told them about Yazhou City.

Learning that Yazhou City had been breached, Achige and even Bodo had no chance of survival. After reuniting with the remaining two ten-thousand-man units, they headed straight for Songzhou, which they believed to be lightly defended, preparing to return to the grasslands.

Achige had long been dissatisfied with Bodo's greedy nature. All the plans made before setting off were completely disrupted by Bodo.

However, since Bodo was leading this time, they could only obey orders. But now that Bodo was either dead or captured, he could no longer care about him.

Winter was fast approaching. If they could not bring back the plundered grain to the grasslands this time, more of their people would die this winter.

Thinking of this, Achige's eyes turned fierce. He shouted loudly, "Dismount! We must take Songzhou City!"

Now, he only had cavalry under his command, but cavalry could not assault cities. So, he had no choice but to order his soldiers to abandon their horses and attack the city on foot.

When he decided to come to Songzhou, he had judged that the defenses here would be few, because most of the forces were besieging Bodo in Yazhou.

Now, looking at the not-so-dense soldiers on the city wall, he couldn't help but feel a little smug. Perhaps he could return to the grasslands this time.

However, he quickly noticed something amiss. After his soldiers launched their charge, layers of firearms suddenly emerged from the trenches in front of the city gate.

With a “bang, bang” of gunshots, charging barbarian soldiers fell in batches. At the same time, the soldiers on the city wall also fired from a long distance.

Bullets flew. The barbarian cavalry were like moths rushing to a flame. But no matter how fierce they were, they often fell on the charging path before even reaching the Great Yu Empire soldiers.

At this moment, the Conqueror Musket fully displayed its long-range advantage. The soldiers in the trenches and the soldiers on the city wall provided covering fire for each other. The barbarian soldiers suffered heavy losses for a time.

Achige was stunned. The first batch of four thousand charging soldiers fell completely before even reaching the trenches.

His body trembled. He then ordered the second batch of soldiers to charge. Now, he had no retreat. If Songzhou City was not breached, he would never be able to return to the grasslands.

However, the five thousand men in this charge once again repeated the fate of the first wave of soldiers. In the dense gunfire, these brave barbarian soldiers still fell into pools of blood.

In one hour, two consecutive attacks completely failed. Achige felt a chill throughout his body.

The Great Yu Empire army he encountered this time was clearly different from before. This advantage in weaponry left him with no way to achieve victory.

Staring silently at Songzhou City, Achige desperately glanced at the remaining barbarian cavalry. He then reined in his horse and headed in the direction of Chang'an.

The remaining barbarian cavalry followed closely.

One day after Achige left, Qi Guangyi led his cavalry to Songzhou City.

Looking at the corpses of barbarian soldiers in front of Songzhou City, he realized he had arrived too late.

"General, the hunter cavalry has been following the barbarians. They went in the direction of Chang'an," a soldier reported to Qi Guangyi.

Upon hearing this, Qi Guangyi snorted angrily. He said, "They are seeking their own demise. Their horses have no fodder to eat. Let's see how far they can go."

With that, he led his troops in pursuit. After a setback in front of Songzhou City, the number of remaining barbarian cavalry was no longer a threat, which made Qi Guangyi even bolder.

While Qi Guangyi continued to encircle and suppress the barbarian cavalry, the commander of Songzhou City also sent this news to Yazhou City.

Learning that the remaining barbarian cavalry were still fleeing, he frowned. He then called a hunter cavalry general and said, "You are to immediately dispatch three teams of hunter cavalry. One team will go to Yizhou, informing the common people along the way that they can claim a bounty of five taels of silver at the various prefectural offices for barbarian soldiers' heads. Another team will go to Chang'an, also spreading this news. The remaining team will go directly to Juyong Pass to inform Luo Hong, ordering him to dispatch cavalry to search for the remaining barbarian cavalry."

"Yes, General," the hunter cavalry general responded and walked out.

Luo Quan waved his hand, telling him to quickly relay the order.

He did this precisely to thoroughly eliminate the barbarian soldiers in Bashu. In yesterday's battle, although they had captured many barbarian soldiers, a portion of them had escaped.

Bashu was vast, and these barbarian soldiers could be anywhere. Therefore, only by having the common people participate in the search for the barbarian cavalry could these scattered remnants be quickly wiped out in one fell swoop.

Going to Chang'an served the same purpose. There were more powerful families there, and they would be happy to use this opportunity to gain favor with the current Emperor.

Having given these instructions, Luo Quan prepared to rest for three days before returning to Qingzhou Province. The army outside had consumed greatly, and Bashu had suffered this calamity. He was unwilling to add further burden to the region.

At the same time, Lu Fei also found nothing outside Songzhou City. According to the predetermined plan, he continued to lead his troops northward. Depending on the situation, he would rest in Chang'an before returning to Jinling Province.

However, to prevent Tibet and the barbarians from attacking Songzhou again, he decided this time to have the musketeers led by Di Ying stationed in Songzhou City, waiting to be replaced after Yizhou Province trained a new batch of soldiers.