

I. Dynasty 791

Chapter 791

“Boom, boom, boom...”

Artillery fire roared like thunder.

All the muzzle-loading cannons and mortars were concentrated in front of Pingzhou City. In an instant, dense cannonballs formed a barrage flying towards Pingzhou City.

Beishan and Best, who were still arguing, were utterly horrified. At this moment, they dared not linger on the city wall and scrambled to run into the city.

Behind them, the cannonballs striking the city wall produced a tremendous sound of metal colliding with stone. The lime bombs and explosive shells fired by the mortars exploded simultaneously, brilliant like fireworks.

Outside the city, plate-armored soldiers and musketeers simultaneously charged towards Pingzhou City. They shouted, seemingly venting the anger accumulated over several days.

Barbarian soldiers also charged out from the city at this time. They entered the trenches and engaged in fierce combat with the Great Yu Empire soldiers. For a time, the entire battlefield fell into chaos.

Wuzhugu was stunned. He had not expected the Great Yu Empire soldiers to launch such a sudden attack, and this fierce momentum was clearly an all-out final battle.

At this point, he suddenly regretted dispatching a portion of his cavalry to Jinzhou, but there was no time for him to think now. Because under the fierce artillery fire of the Great Yu Empire, they were caught in a passive position, and the trenches in front of Pingzhou City were being seized bit by bit.

“Woo woo...”

At his signal, a bugle call sounded in the cavalry unit. A chiliarch led the cavalry to charge towards the city front. Although the Great Yu Empire’s chariot formation blocked their way, now was the time for a desperate fight.

Outside the Great Yu Empire camp, Lei Ming had already assembled 30,000 cavalry. Looking at the barbarian cavalry staring at them, he shouted loudly, “Brothers, now is our time to fight desperately! We have trained soldiers for a thousand days to use them for a short while! For the Emperor, for the glory of the Great Yu Empire, kill!”

“Kill!” At this moment, the cavalry raised their sabers, their morale soaring.

At the same time, on the right flank of the cavalry, five hollow square formations composed of musketeers were forming. This formation consisted of two divisions from the Huben 3rd Army.

In this siege, Lu Fei was using two divisions from his Huben 1st Army and two divisions from the Huben 2nd Army in the fierce fighting.

The other two divisions of the Huben 2nd Army, meanwhile, were, under Luo Xin’s command, blocking the barbarian cavalry’s assault.

As the battle for Pingzhou City grew fiercer, the battlefield centered around Pingzhou City became increasingly chaotic.

If viewed from above, the soldiers of both sides on the vast battlefield resembled dense swarms of marching ants engaged in combat.

As the charge bugle sounded, the hollow square formation formed by the Huben 2nd Division marched in neat steps towards the barbarian cavalry. Lei Ming, meanwhile, led his cavalry on both flanks of the square formation.

Their purpose was not to annihilate this batch of cavalry, but to prevent them from intervening in the battle. So Lei Ming decided to use musketeers to gradually force them back.

This time, the cavalry led by Wuzhugu was short of thirty thousand men, but even so, ninety thousand was not something they could shake.

Precisely because of this, he could only use musketeers to offset Wuzhugu's advantage.

Facing Lei Ming's tactics, Wuzhugu frowned.

He was not afraid of a head-on clash with Great Yu Empire cavalry, but he feared this peculiar musket square formation.

On the first day of battle, he had tested the power of firearms. The result was that the charging cavalry fell completely without even touching a single soldier.

However, although he knew the formidable nature of this musket formation, he now had no choice. If this continued, Pingzhou City would only fall. If that happened, they would lose Pingzhou, this frontline fortress, and Jinzhou would directly face the threat of the Great Yu Empire.

“Kill!”

Wuzhugu shouted loudly. Hooves thundered as a tide of barbarian cavalry began to charge in Lei Ming’s direction.

Seeing this, the soldiers of the hollow square formation halted. In fact, to avoid being shot, barbarian cavalry had always stayed five hundred meters away.

Now, their choice to engage meant closing the distance. After entering the 500-meter effective range of the Conqueror Musket, the musketeers were ordered to open fire.

Although Pingzhou City was very open, so many cavalry gathered together could not disperse at all. And once they dispersed, the barbarian cavalry would be unable to effectively counter the collective charge of the Great Yu Empire cavalry.

“Bang, bang, bang...”

The hollow square formation performed three-stage firing. Bullets flew over a distance of five hundred meters, landing on the bodies of barbarian soldiers and their horses.

After the first round of firing, a large number of continuously advancing barbarian cavalry fell, causing some confusion among the marching barbarians.

Lei Ming calmly observed the barbarian cavalry's movements. The hollow square formation performed well. If this continued, even if the barbarian cavalry charged to their front, they would suffer heavy losses, which would greatly reduce the barbarian cavalry's morale.

"Bang, bang, bang..."

Gunfire rang out again. Another batch of barbarian cavalry fell, and the distance of the barbarian cavalry continuously narrowed.

From five hundred meters to three hundred meters, the barbarian cavalry suffered immense casualties. Three to four thousand barbarian cavalry fell on the charging path.

When the barbarians reached two hundred meters, the division commander commanding the hollow square formation shouted, "First rank, kneel down! Bayonets angled upwards! Second rank, continue firing!"

Looking at the continuously closing barbarian cavalry, Lei Ming, wielding his saber, charged ahead. This war was a destined battle for the Great Yu Empire.

And if they won, the balance of power between the Great Yu Empire and the barbarians would change forever. Then, the vast grasslands would become the Great Yu Empire's horse-breeding grounds.

At this time, the battle below Pingzhou City also entered a white-hot phase.

Under the artillery bombardment, a large section of the Pingzhou city wall had now collapsed. The entire Pingzhou City was exposed before Lu Fei and the others.

With his flanks protected by Luo Xin and Lei Ming, Lu Fei concentrated all his efforts on seizing the trenches.

Two ten thousand plate-armored new recruits, plus twenty thousand elite musketeers, fought simultaneously at the city gate.

Facing the Great Yu Empire soldiers who were clad in full plate armor, like iron barrels, the barbarian soldiers had no effective methods. Often, it took three men to deal with one, otherwise these armored Great Yu Empire soldiers would easily kill them.

However, after several days of fierce fighting, the musketeers who first charged into the trenches made them realize that they were even more terrifying than these plate-armored soldiers.

These soldiers, wielding bayonet-fixed firearms, were experienced and ruthless, killing people as calmly as cutting vegetables.

Moreover, some musketeers, after seizing a trench, immediately occupied the wall in the middle of the trench. Standing on the wall, they continuously fired at the soldiers coming as reinforcements from inside the city.

As more and more Great Yu Empire musketeers arrived, the barbarian soldiers inside the city could no longer reinforce, because they were killed before even reaching the trenches.

With fewer and fewer reinforcements, the trenches became a one-sided slaughter. After two hours of fierce fighting, the soldiers under Lu Fei finally captured the trenches.

Looking at the large section of the Pingzhou city wall that had collapsed, Lu Fei grinned and laughed. He cursed, "Why are you still standing there? Go and capture Pingzhou City!"

Chapter 792

The soaring and stirring sound of the charge bugle swirled above the battlefield.

The order for a full assault was relayed. The Great Yu Empire soldiers let out angry roars and charged towards Pingzhou City.

At this moment, they forgot about life and death. In their hearts, there was only hatred for the barbarians.

It was they who raised their butcher knives and killed the common people of the Great Yu Empire, making them lose parents, wives, and children.

It was they who plundered the Great Yu Empire every year on horseback, leaving them without enough food to eat!

It was they who took away the land that once belonged to the Great Yu Empire, leaving them with no land to cultivate.

In their eyes, no race in history was more cruel than the barbarians. Under their butcher knives, the Great Yu Empire constantly faced national annihilation and ethnic extinction.

This was a destruction of an advanced civilization by a barbaric one. Now, they would absolutely not let this happen!

“Kill!”

With earth-shattering roars, the soldiers bravely charged forward. They would use their swords and spears to win eternal glory for their parents behind them, and for their nation.

The barbarian soldiers watched in terror as the Great Yu Empire soldiers, fearless of death, charged towards them. On the battlefield, what they feared most was the sound of the Great Yu Empire soldiers' charge bugle.

This bugle seemed to possess a magic power. Once it was blown, the Great Yu Empire soldiers' morale would soar, and they would become incredibly fierce.

And what they experienced most was fear.

In front of the city, Lu Fei's heart surged with fervor. He drew the ceremonial sword from his waist and, leading his soldiers, charged into Pingzhou City.

Having fought the barbarians for many years, he had thoroughly understood their nature.

This was a backward and barbaric tribe. It was precisely because of their savagery that they fought fearlessly.

But this did not mean they were not afraid of death.

In fact, just as the strong fear the reckless, and the reckless fear the desperate, once the Great Yu Empire soldiers displayed even greater bloodlust than them, these barbarian soldiers would also collapse.

On the other side, the barbarian cavalry furiously charged the chariot formation protecting their flank.

But under Luo Xin's command, each charge of these cavalry was repelled. The chariot formation, as usual, became a barrier preventing the cavalry from overrunning them.

The musketeers within the chariot formation formed hollow squares, just like in the Battle of Jizhou last time. They would sometimes fire from outside the chariot formation, and at other times retreat inside.

In less than an hour, many barbarian cavalry corpses had already piled up outside the chariot formation.

After the first ten-thousand-man unit's charge failed, the unwilling barbarian cavalry again dispatched two units to fiercely attack the chariot formation. A portion of the cavalry dismounted and charged directly towards the chariot formation, attempting to get close and open a breach.

However, the slowly charging barbarian soldiers were the best targets for the musketeers. Unlike the Battle of Jizhou, the Great Yu Empire army was now equipped with rifled muskets.

Both their range and power far surpassed the previous smoothbore guns.

After a cloud of gunpowder smoke dispersed, barbarian soldiers fell one after another. Under the dense firepower, the barbarians were unable to approach the chariot formation.

Compared to Lu Fei and Luo Xin, Lei Ming's situation was extremely difficult. Wuzhugu had concentrated most of his cavalry, attempting to annihilate them all.

Now, after the initial clash of cavalry, they were locked in a chaotic melee. Barbarians were intertwined with Great Yu Empire soldiers, and Great Yu Empire soldiers with barbarian cavalry.

Sabers flashed, blood splattered. Both sides, in the chaotic melee, fought with bloodshot eyes. Some enraged soldiers directly pounced on barbarian soldiers, rolling on the ground and continuing to fight. Some soldiers, wielding sabers, repeatedly charged and fought.

While dispatching a portion of his cavalry to engage Lei Ming, Wuzhugu also concentrated 30,000 cavalry to launch a death charge against the hollow square formation.

Facing the barbarians, who charged as if they had no fear of death, the first hollow square formation, after unleashing all its firepower, managed to withstand the first impact of the barbarian cavalry through sheer brute force.

But what they faced next were the second and third impacts.

With their numbers at a disadvantage, during the fourth barbarian charge, their hollow square formation was torn apart by the barbarians. Soldiers holding firearms also fell into a melee with the barbarians.

“Retreat, retreat to the rear!”

After the formation was torn apart, the division commander commanding the formation shouted anxiously. Once the formation was disrupted, what followed would be a massacre of infantry by cavalry.

These soldiers were all battle-hardened veterans. They immediately reacted and ran into the gaps between other formations.

The barbarian cavalry pursued relentlessly. At this point, the other formations began to unleash firepower, causing the pursuing barbarians to fall one after another. At this point, another wave of barbarian cavalry charged towards them.

The division commanders in the middle of the hollow square formations all looked grim. They knew very well that if the barbarian cavalry continued to launch death charges, they would quickly be unable to hold out.

But no matter what, they could not retreat now. Because if they retreated, Lu Fei's army would suffer a massacre by the barbarian cavalry, and the battle for Pingzhou City would end in defeat.

"Hold on! Even if there's only one of us left, we must hold this position!" A resolute order came from a division commander.

The soldiers gripped their firearms tightly. They looked at the charging barbarian cavalry, gritting their teeth.

No one was fearless of death, but for them, some things were more important than death. This was the reason they persevered here without collapsing.

The fierce fighting continued. The entire Pingzhou City battlefield became a world of blood and fire.

In front of Pingzhou City, Lu Fei's sword pierced through the chest of a barbarian myriarch. Facing the collapsing barbarian soldiers, he shouted loudly and led his soldiers into Pingzhou City.

“Plant the Great Yu Empire’s dragon flag on the city wall! Hurry!” Lu Fei said to his personal guard beside him as he ran.

Receiving the order, the personal guard immediately took the dragon flag in his hand and climbed to the top of the broken city wall. Then, he stood on the city wall and vigorously waved the dragon flag.

This scene was quickly noticed by both sides on the battlefield.

Luo Xin, seeing the dragon flag on the city wall, laughed loudly, “As expected of Lu Fei; he’s still as brave as ever in battle.”

Then he looked at Lei Ming, whose situation was somewhat unfavorable, and said, “Immediately reinforce the Huben 3rd Army!”

Now that Lu Fei’s army had breached the city, there was no need to protect their flanks, because cavalry could not launch large-scale attacks within the city, posing little threat to Lu Fei.

Wuzhugu also saw the dragon flag on the city wall, just like Lei Ming. Lei Ming, seeing this, immediately felt a surge of morale. He wielded his saber even more fiercely, and the charging barbarian cavalry fell one by one under his saber.

In contrast to Lei Ming’s reaction, Wuzhugu’s heart turned cold. After defending for so long, they ultimately failed to hold Pingzhou City.

“Retreat!” Without the slightest hesitation, Wuzhugu gave the order.

The Great Yu Empire army entering the city meant a complete rout of the army within Pingzhou City. Now, the Great Yu Empire army could fully concentrate all its forces to deal with his cavalry.

If they did not leave now, his losses would be even more severe. Moreover, after this battle, he realized one thing even more clearly: only cavalry could pose a threat to the Great Yu Empire.

Other armies wielding swords and sabers simply could not stop the Great Yu Empire army armed with firearms.

Chapter 793

“Woo woo woo...”

Amidst the chaotic battlefield, the barbarians blew their ox-horn trumpets for retreat.

The barbarian soldiers, who were fiercely battling the Great Yu Empire soldiers, no longer desired to fight. Instead, they turned their horses and headed towards Jinzhou City.

For a time, the battlefield was filled with fleeing barbarian cavalry.

Lei Ming was overjoyed. He immediately led his cavalry in pursuit. Some barbarian cavalry, too slow to escape, were cut down from their horses by the cuirassiers.

However, the barbarian cavalry retreated very quickly. And to prevent the Great Yu Empire's cavalry from pursuing, Wuzhugu specifically left a portion of cavalry to cover their retreat.

After killing all these rearguard barbarian cavalry, when Lei Ming looked again, most of the barbarian cavalry had already fled a long distance.

"Army Commander, should we continue the pursuit?" a cavalry division commander asked.

"No need. Although Wuzhugu has retreated, his strength remains considerable. A rash pursuit might play right into Wuzhugu's hands. You are to now clear the battlefield and count the casualties," Lei Ming said.

The cavalry division commander took the order and left. At this point, Lei Ming headed towards the chariot formation. Luo Xin also emerged from the chariot formation.

"Lei Ming, we won."

Luo Xin did not shout. His tone was very calm, as if he was stating a very ordinary thing, but anyone could see from his trembling hands how excited he was.

Lei Ming lightly nodded. Suppressing the wild joy in his heart, he said, "Yes, we won. On the grasslands, we defeated the barbarians. From now on, we will continuously achieve victory."

The two simultaneously looked at Pingzhou City. Exchanging glances, they headed into the city.

After days of fierce fighting, this city on the grasslands finally fell into their hands.

Inside the city, Lu Fei was surrounded by cheering soldiers. They had fought from the South City to the North City. Now, Pingzhou City was completely under their control.

Looking at the excited soldiers, Lu Fei laughed heartily. Niu Ben had given them three days, and now they had captured Pingzhou City in just one day.

With this city on the grasslands, they now had a fortress for attacking the barbarian heartland.

However, he was not carried away by victory. After capturing the city, he still had many things to do. The barbarians might return at any time. Now, he needed to repair the city walls and at the same time transform Pingzhou City into a fortress for the Great Yu Empire.

So he gathered his subordinate generals and, after assigning them their respective tasks, finally felt at ease.

And at this moment, Luo Xin and Lei Ming also arrived in the city. The three exchanged glances and laughed heartily. Their fighting together these past few days had made them even closer.

“Now I can finally get a good night’s sleep,” Lu Fei said.

Lei Ming yawned. He said, "Now that you mention it, I really am tired. These past few days have been really tough."

"No matter how tough, it's over now. I have already dispatched hunter cavalry to send the battle report to Shanhai Pass. I wonder what orders His Majesty will give next," Luo Xin said.

Lu Fei looked at the smoke-filled battlefield. At this time, a dim light enveloped the entire battlefield. Smoke, shattered flags, and wounded soldiers helping each other, while others cleaned the battlefield, formed a tragic picture of the aftermath of war.

After a moment of thought, he said, "The barbarians suffered heavy losses this time, and our casualties are not small either. The soldiers need time to rest. This Jinzhou City is different from Pingzhou City; taking it will be more difficult."

Lei Ming and Luo Xin nodded. Although the barbarians had retreated this time, they still retained a large number of troops. If these troops gathered in Jinzhou, it would again be a tough battle.

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The next day, a hunter cavalryman from Pingzhou, shouting about the great victory in Pingzhou City, rushed into Shanhai Pass.

The soldiers guarding Shanhai Pass immediately cheered upon receiving this news. The message quickly reached Xiao Ming and the others.

Upon receiving this news, Xiao Ming immediately summoned Niu Ben and Luo Quan.

The three, in the General Staff Department, planted the Great Yu Empire's dragon flag on Pingzhou City on the sand table. Now, this place would be the territory of the Great Yu Empire.

"Something's not right. How did the barbarians reinforce Jinzhou just as Luo Hong's men set off?" Despite the victory, Niu Ben was still puzzled.

Xiao Ming said, "It's simple. Qi Guangyi must have done what we intended to do. This general has always been bold and resourceful. This allowed us to reclaim Pingzhou City two days ahead of schedule."

Niu Ben nodded. That was the only possibility now.

Luo Quan's expression was excited. At first, he harbored pessimistic thoughts about the northern expedition, because in his view, the Great Yu Empire's military strength was almost equal to the barbarians'.

The Great Yu Empire had firearms, but the barbarians had excellent cavalry. Now, the war turning out this way indeed surprised him somewhat.

“Now that Pingzhou City has been captured, and Liaozhou City should also be taken if nothing unexpected happens, Jinzhou City is effectively under attack from two sides. Your Majesty, should we launch an attack on Jinzhou now?” Luo Quan asked.

After a moment of thought, he said, “Temporarily halt the attack. With the barbarians’ defeat this time, their morale will surely be dampened; they will no longer be as rampant as before. Moreover, although we won, according to the hunter cavalry, Lu Fei and his men also suffered considerable losses. Most importantly, Liaozhou and Pingzhou are not yet stable enough. Don’t forget the barbarians in the city; they will seize every opportunity to create chaos.”

“Your Majesty is absolutely right. Continuous combat will make the soldiers discontent. Why not let Lu Fei and his men rest in Pingzhou City for a month before taking action again?” Niu Ben said.

Xiao Ming agreed, and he had another purpose. He said, “I have received news that the military machinery department has manufactured the first batch of aiming scopes. I need time to train a group of sharpshooters.”

Luo Quan and Niu Ben exchanged glances. Although they didn’t understand what aiming scopes were, they knew it would certainly help in warfare.

As the three were speaking, a hunter cavalryman suddenly appeared outside the door and loudly said, “Reporting to Your Majesty, Army Commander Ye Qingyun has sent word that they have successfully captured Liaozhou.”

“Hahaha... Ye Qingyun truly did not disappoint us!” Niu Ben took the dragon flag and planted it on Liaozhou City on the sand table.

Xiao Ming smiled slightly. Pingzhou City was in the south, Liaozhou City in the north, and Jinzhou was in the middle. If Jinzhou were captured, then half of the Northeast would be under his control.

Looking down at the sand table, Xiao Ming was ambitious. The victory in the war gave him hope of reclaiming the entire Northeast. For him, this place was currently a source of urgently needed slaves.

At the same time, this was also the foundation of the Golden Tent Khanate's power. Once lost, the barbarians would lose ninety percent of their population and once again become purely nomadic tribes.

By then, the barbarians would no longer have enough population to wage wars of attrition with him.

Thinking of this, he said to the hunter cavalryman, "You go back and tell Ye Qingyun to keep the usable barbarians in Liaozhou City and send all the unusable ones back to the Great Yu Empire."

"Yes, Your Majesty," the hunter cavalryman took the order and left.

At this point, Xiao Ming said, "Since the war is going smoothly, I will not linger at Shanhai Pass. I will visit the soldiers in Pingzhou City for the next two days and then prepare to return to Qingzhou Province. This barbarian defeat will surely force them into a defensive stance. After recuperation, we will attack Jinzhou, giving the barbarians no breathing room."

Chapter 794

Winter gave way to spring, and the weather grew warmer day by day.

Receiving good news one after another, Xiao Ming's mood brightened considerably. He left the General Staff Department, with Niu Ben and Luo Quan following him, responding with affirmations as they walked.

It was clear that conquering the six cities in a short time was impossible. War needed time. This vast northeastern land, from south to north, would take months to traverse in a circle.

However, precisely because of this vast area, if the entire Northeast were under the Great Yu Empire's control, its rich resources and land would provide significant assistance to the Great Yu Empire's industry.

The three ascended the steps to the Shanhai Pass city wall. Niu Ben continued to ask, "Your Majesty, if that's the case, what about Qi Guangyi?"

"The barbarians have just suffered a defeat and are surely in a panic, with no intention of attacking Qi Guangyi. Moreover, with Luo Hong's men there, Qi Guangyi now has an impregnable camp. This way, there's no need to worry about supplies or retreat routes. So, let him remain in Jinzhou to continue disrupting the barbarians' spring plowing. However, this time, he can expand his range a bit and plunder further afield," Xiao Ming said.

Luo Quan also said, "That's right. Moreover, Liaozhou and Pingzhou are both in our hands. Qi Guangyi can also go to these two cities at any time. Thus, with these three places connected, the barbarians' days will be even harder."

With that, the three burst into laughter simultaneously.

Having settled the strategy for occupying the Northeast, Xiao Ming, Niu Ben, and Luo Quan, protected by imperial guards, set off for Pingzhou City at noon that day. At the same time, Xiao Ming had the accompanying newspaper reporters send news of the great victory in Pingzhou City back to Qingzhou Province.

This war had stirred the hearts of countless people throughout the court. It was time for them to cheer. The next day at noon, Xiao Ming and his entourage arrived at Pingzhou City.

After a day of busy work, the Pingzhou battlefield was basically cleared, and apart from the bloodstains on the ground, everything was back to normal.

Learning of Xiao Ming's arrival in Pingzhou, Lu Fei and the other two were already waiting outside the city.

"We, your humble servants, greet Your Majesty."

In front of the still-being-repaired city gate, Lu Fei and the other two bowed.

"Dispense with the formalities!"

Xiao Ming looked at the trenches in front of the city gate. This scene made him frown.

In cold weapon warfare, armies rarely used trenches, but it was not unprecedented in history. After all, the trenches dug by the barbarians now were in no way comparable to the trenches of World War I.

For Xiao Ming, this was merely similar to the Battle of the Trench in 627 AD.

In that year, the Bedouin tribe of Ghatafan and the Jewish mercenaries of Khaybar, led by Abu Sufyan, besieged Medina.

Despite the vast disparity in numbers, the defenders, led by Muhammad, organized the defense by digging trenches around the outskirts of Medina, successfully thwarting the enemy's cavalry and infantry siege of the city.

Therefore, in his opinion, it was not surprising that this method was taught to the barbarians by the British. After all, historically, Europe had been entangled in that region for a long time.

"So these are the barbarians' trenches?" Xiao Ming said with emotion.

Lu Fei nodded, "Precisely. If not for these trenches hindering our advance, we wouldn't have taken Pingzhou City in such a short time."

"Did you see any British people in this battle?" Xiao Ming asked.

“Yes, I did. Initially, this British man remained hidden in Pingzhou City, but when we entered the city, we saw him fleeing frantically on horseback. This person looked very different from the barbarians; there’s no mistake.” Lu Fei said decisively.

Lu Fei’s words once again confirmed that the British were involved in the war between the Great Yu Empire and the barbarians. This was nothing less than a provocation for him. Because of the British’s malice, he had now paid a higher price than ever before to defeat the barbarians.

Clenching his fists tightly, Xiao Ming gritted his teeth. When he stabilized East Asia, that would be the time for him to engage in battle with the Western powers. Then, he would surely make the British lose everything.

As he spoke, Xiao Ming and his entourage walked into the city. The soldiers along the way, upon seeing Xiao Ming’s arrival, all looked excited, standing on both sides of the road and saluting Xiao Ming.

Xiao Ming smiled, returning the military salute. His identity was now the Emperor of the Great Yu Empire, and also the commander-in-chief of this expedition.

After the Battle of Pingzhou City concluded, the soldiers were all stationed within the city. To comfort the soldiers, Xiao Ming specifically walked around the city with everyone.

When he came this time, he also had Niu Ben prepare a lot of mutton and pork. At each location, he would have Niu Ben distribute these meats to the commanding generals, instructing them to make meat porridge for the soldiers.

Along the way, Lu Fei and the others were all beaming with joy.

For a soldier, the most disheartening thing was to be buried in a foreign land, forgotten. Now, the Emperor of the Great Yu Empire personally came to Pingzhou City to visit the soldiers of this battle. How could they not be excited?

After comforting the soldiers, Xiao Ming then went to Lu Fei and the other two's camp.

At this point, Xiao Ming asked a grave question, "How many casualties did the barbarians suffer in this battle, and how many soldiers did we lose?"

At the mention of this question, the joy of victory faded from everyone's faces. Lu Fei was silent for a moment, then said, "Yesterday, we cleared the battlefield. This time, over forty thousand barbarian cavalry were lost. Our cavalry suffered about eight thousand casualties. On the infantry side, including slave soldiers and barbarian soldiers, we found a total of one hundred and seventy thousand corpses, and we lost thirteen thousand six hundred men."

Niu Ben, hearing this, said, "Your Majesty, this is already incredible for a battle."

"That's right, Your Majesty. Since the founding of the Great Yu Empire, no one has ever been able to kill over two hundred thousand barbarians at the cost of over twenty thousand casualties," Luo Quan said excitedly.

They had expected heavy casualties, but this result exceeded their expectations.

Xiao Ming felt a pang of pain. These were all his soldiers. However, he also understood that war meant death; his soldiers could not be invulnerable.

“Ensure that every fallen soldier’s remains are returned home. Do not let the families of the soldiers feel disheartened.”

Xiao Ming said solemnly. He understood that this casualty ratio was extremely exaggerated. The ratio of losses between the two sides basically reached ten to one. To achieve such a huge strategic victory with so few casualties, any emperor of the Great Yu Empire throughout history would probably wake up laughing.

But for him, this was not enough. After all, these were still barbarians in the cold weapon era. If they were to fight Japan or Western powers, the losses would be even greater.

At this moment, he finally understood how much his ancestors had sacrificed to achieve a peaceful and prosperous era.

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Lu Fei responded. “As Your Majesty commanded, every soldier now wears his dog tag around his neck. We will find their families based on these dog tags.”

Xiao Ming nodded. This “dog tag” was what was commonly referred to as a dog tag in modern times, used to identify soldiers.

Looking at the map Lu Fei had spread on the table, Xiao Ming’s expression became resolute. “This time, we must eliminate the northern border threat and no longer let the common people of the Great Yu Empire suffer massacres. The blood of our soldiers must not be shed in vain.”

Chapter 795

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

In the camp, the generals shouted loudly, each with a serious expression. For them, the current task was arduous and the road to completely solving the barbarian problem was still long.

However, this victory gave them full confidence. In their view, the capture of Jinzhou was only a matter of time.

After assigning the task of attacking Jinzhou, the generals had their plans in mind, clearly knowing what to do next.

At this point, Lu Fei suddenly said, “Your Majesty, I have one more matter to report.”

“Speak.”

“This time, capturing Pingzhou resulted in many barbarians and barbarian slaves being taken. What should be done with these people?” Lu Fei asked. “If they are kept in Pingzhou City, they will not only consume grain but also be a hidden danger.”

Xiao Ming’s purpose for coming to Pingzhou also included this matter. He had already made a decision in Shanhai Pass. So he said, “Mines and railways are in urgent need of manpower, and what the Great Yu Empire currently lacks are precisely slaves. Therefore, I believe all these barbarians should be demoted

to slaves and escorted back to the Great Yu Empire, to atone for the crimes they committed against the Great Yu Empire with lifelong labor. What do you beloved ministers think?”

Niu Ben said, “Barbarian soldiers all come from the barbarian people. When the barbarians invaded the Great Yu Empire, these barbarians were also extremely supportive. So, in my opinion, since these barbarians supported the war, it is only right that they accept punishment after defeat.”

“Leaving these barbarians on this land might lead to another barbarian rising a hundred years later. Throughout history, every time grassland tribes were defeated, there was always a method of internal relocation. However, this method still harbors many hidden dangers. It would be better to directly demote them to slaves, once and for all.”

Lei Ming frowned. He said, “Your Majesty, if that’s the case, wouldn’t this vast land become uninhabited? What if other foreign tribes arrive?”

Xiao Ming had already made up his mind. He said, “Among the barbarian slaves, there are quite a few who possess Great Yu Empire bloodlines. I plan to revoke their slave status and bestow upon them the identity of ‘Guandong people’ of the Great Yu Empire. This way, they will surely be grateful and willingly guard the Guandong region for the Great Yu Empire.”

Everyone, hearing this, immediately showed expressions of admiration. Their Emperor always thought more profoundly than them.

Lu Fei said, “If that’s the case, I will immediately gather these slaves and at the same time escort the barbarians to Shanhai Pass.”

Xiao Ming nodded gently.

At this, everyone exited the camp. Lu Fei ordered his soldiers to drive all the slave soldiers to an open ground outside Pingzhou City.

To prevent these slaves from escaping, Lu Fei had them all tied with ropes. Now that they were to be given the identity of Guandong people, he immediately untied them all.

Freed from their restraints, the barbarian slaves each showed uneasy expressions, like startled birds.

Under the barbarians' brutal rule, their lives were very miserable; their lives were often worth less than a sheep. Now, captured by the Great Yu Empire, they basically thought they had no chance of survival.

While the slaves were in a state of unease, Xiao Ming and a group of generals ascended the city wall.

Xiao Ming signaled Qian Dafu. At this, Qian Dafu's shrill and loud voice echoed in the distance.

"By order of the Emperor of the Great Yu Empire, all slaves below the city who possess Great Yu Empire bloodlines shall be exempted from slave status. After registering in Pingzhou City, they may obtain freedom and receive appropriate farmland according to the Great Yu Empire's laws. Non-Great Yu Empire slaves shall be spared from death, inducted into the Great Yu Empire to perform labor, and those who perform exceptionally may also be exempted from slave status."

Qian Dafu's voice fell. In front of the city, silence reigned. The barbarian slaves seemed to not have reacted yet, looking at each other.

For them, they had grown accustomed to a life of slavery. Suddenly becoming normal people made them uncomfortable.

And out of fear, no one dared to step forward.

Xiao Ming was not surprised by the slaves' reaction. Anyone who had been subjected to cruel oppression for a long time would find it hard to believe if they were suddenly told they were free.

"The one before you is the current Emperor of the Great Yu Empire. His word is law. What are you still standing there for?"

Lu Fei roared loudly, seeing the slaves standing dumbfounded.

Startled by Lu Fei's roar, the slaves all recoiled. This god of slaughter had terrified them during the siege.

However, there were also some bolder ones among the slaves. A young, strong slave hesitated for a moment, then stepped forward to register at the city gate, leaving behind information such as his ancestral home.

With the first came the second. For them, the worst outcome was death; it was worth a try.

One after another, many slaves with Great Yu Empire bloodlines registered at the city gate.

To stabilize the newly conquered land as quickly as possible, Xiao Ming had the registering general directly write out a household registration for these slaves on the spot.

However, unlike the Great Yu Empire's general household registration, these household registrations temporarily fixed the slaves in Pingzhou, not allowing them to wander.

Receiving their household registrations, the slaves finally gradually believed the truth. In the excitement of regaining their freedom, they knelt before Xiao Ming, repeatedly kowtowing.

Seeing this, Xiao Ming breathed a sigh of relief. Conquering barbarian land was easy; defending it was the real challenge. It was precisely for this reason that he made this decision.

Once these Guandong people had their own land and settled down to live and multiply, they would risk their lives to resist foreign enemies.

After dealing with the slaves in Pingzhou City, Xiao Ming sent someone to deliver this order to Ye Qingyun. While attacking Jinzhou was important, stabilizing the two conquered cities was also crucial.

Three days later, the news arrived in Liaozhou.

At this time, Ye Qingyun was on the city wall, observing the barbarian cavalry outside Liaozhou City through his telescope.

Seemingly unable to find a way to deal with the Great Yu Empire army defending the city, these cavalry eventually chose to leave after hovering for an hour.

This scene made Ye Qingyun sneer scornfully. Immediately after occupying Liaozhou City, he had repaired the city gate. Now, the barbarians had no way to deal with him.

His only concern now was the barbarians inside the city.

However, after thinking for a few days, he quickly found a way to stabilize Liaozhou City.

Among the Golden Tent Khanate's population, barbarians only accounted for thirty percent, while the remaining seventy percent were slaves.

The situation was similar in Liaozhou City. However, barbarians generally had slaves cultivate their own land, so there were not many slaves remaining in the city.

But even so, after counting the number of people in the city, he found one hundred and sixty thousand barbarian slaves.

These slaves had long suffered barbarian bullying, and were as wretched as disaster victims. For Ye Qingyun, he could exploit this to control the barbarians.

In fact, after he invaded Liaozhou City, some slaves had already revolted, killed their masters, and surrendered to him.

“Leaving the barbarians inside Liaozhou City will always be a hidden danger. Once Liang Dahai arrives, we will escort them back to the Great Yu Empire in batches.”

Ye Qingyun mused to Zou Cheng. After the military reform, he had promoted this capable general to division commander.

Zou Cheng said, “Liang Dahai must be happy now.”

As the two were speaking, hunter cavalry arrived with Xiao Ming’s order on the city wall. Receiving Xiao Ming’s message, Ye Qingyun laughed heartily, “His Majesty’s order arrived just in time! Now Liaozhou City is stable.”

Chapter 796

Suwon City.

This was a city located two hundred li across the river from Haigucheng.

During the war with Japan, this city completely fell and now became Japan’s northernmost fortress in Goryeo.

At this time, Japanese soldiers shuttled back and forth in Suwon City, continuously transporting various supplies from the wharf outside the city.

At the wharf, ships from Japan were docked here. Suwon City's flag-leader, Edo Ichiaki, was inspecting new firearms from Japan.

"My Lord Flag-Leader, is this the flintlock gun the British spoke of?" asked the samurai Koizumi Junichi.

Edo Ichiaki picked up a flintlock gun and aimed it into the distance. He said, "That's right, this is the British flintlock gun. After Earl Claire met with Lord Yamada last time, he promised to teach our blacksmiths how to produce this firearm, and he even sent us a ship full of flints."

"This firearm looks very complex in structure; it must be even more difficult to produce than the teppo (matchlock gun)," Koizumi Junichi said, stroking the flintlock gun's metal lock.

"It is indeed a bit complex, but we have enough blacksmiths. As long as we have flints, producing this firearm is not a problem," Edo Ichiaki raised the flintlock gun again.

At this point, he pulled the trigger at an elderly Goryeo man who was moving goods.

Because of the close distance, the old man was hit in the chest. With a scream, the Goryeo old man fell to the ground.

The surrounding Goryeo laborers, seeing this scene, trembled with fear. Not one of them dared to speak; they only continued to frantically move goods.

The Japanese soldiers all laughed at this sight. Edo Ichiaki said contemptuously, "These Goryeo people are truly weak. There isn't a single real man among them."

"How can these Goryeo people compare to us, the Yamato people? Even killing these Goryeo people would only dirty my Lord Flag-Leader's hands," Koizumi Junichi flattered.

Domestically, the daimyo relied on the leading flag-leaders, and below the flag-leaders were the samurai. Edo Ichiaki was one of the flag-leaders greatly valued by Lord Yamada.

And in this war in Goryeo, Edo Ichiaki once again proved his capability.

Sometimes, he would secretly envy Edo Ichiaki, imagining the day he too could be promoted to flag-leader.

Being flattered by Koizumi Junichi, Edo Ichiaki merely smiled. He said, "How boring. I truly don't understand why the daimyo made peace with the Golden Tent Khanate. Otherwise, Goryeo would all be ours. Perhaps even Youzhou of the Great Yu Empire would be ours."

"My Lord Flag-Leader is absolutely right. The Goryeo people are vulnerable, and the Great Yu Empire people are nothing but weaklings. A small number of us can plunder a city. However, I heard that the Great Yu Empire's firearms are very powerful now, and Sakai also lost to the Great Yu Empire's army."

"Bastard! Can a pirate like Sakai be compared to us?" Edo Ichiaki suddenly became angry.

As the two were speaking, a Japanese soldier walked towards them. He said, "My Lord Flag-Leader, we have received news that the Great Yu Empire has defeated the barbarians and now occupies Liaozhou."

"What!" Edo Ichiaki grabbed the Japanese soldier's collar. "Say that again!"

The Japanese soldier knew that this flag-leader always had a terrible temper. He had no choice but to repeat it word by word.

"So that's it. If that's the case, it seems we don't need to abide by our promise to the Golden Tent Khanate anymore," Edo Ichiaki said, stroking his chin.

After thinking for a moment, he said, "Now, immediately send this news back. This is a good opportunity for us. The Great Yu Empire and the Golden Tent Khanate are both severely weakened. They certainly won't have time to bother with Goryeo."

"But the Great Yu Empire's occupation of Haigucheng is somewhat troublesome. This is already the Great Yu Empire's territory. If we want to attack it, we need a reason," Koizumi Junichi said worriedly.

Edo Ichiaki frowned. Like the Great Yu Empire, Japan sometimes needed a legitimate reason for war. These reasons were merely to comfort the soldiers into fighting.

He said, "This matter is simple. You now prepare a Goryeo person, have them impersonate our people. If the daimyo decides to occupy Goryeo, then use this Goryeo person to create trouble."

“Yes, My Lord Flag-Leader.” Koizumi Junichi nodded in affirmation.

With that, he had a soldier send the information about the Great Yu Empire and the Golden Tent Khanate back.

Four days later, the news reached the daimyo’s mansion in Nagasaki, Japan.

“The Golden Tent Khanate lost two cities! What is this idiot Best doing?”

Beside Yamada Nobunaga stood a British man. He had arrived in Japan on the same ship as Best. Later, Best was dispatched to the Golden Tent Khanate, while he remained with Yamada Nobunaga to support Japan.

Having witnessed the strength of British ships and cannons, Yamada Nobunaga now relied heavily on the British. He was determined to acquire high-quality firearms from the British.

This way, he could occupy Goryeo, and even the Great Yu Empire, realizing his ambitions. For this, he had also meticulously fabricated a set of lies.

Among the daimyo and samurai, he claimed that the Yamato people were the true descendants of China. The bloodline of the people on the land of the Great Yu Empire had long become impure through historical changes.

Therefore, slaughtering the people on the land of the Great Yu Empire and reclaiming this land was a matter of course.

This rhetoric was very popular among other daimyo and samurai, because the daimyo and samurai, whose eyes were blinded by land and wealth, needed a war to seize enough territory.

“No matter what he’s doing, we must act now. The enemy of our enemy is the friend we should win over. I think at this moment, the Golden Tent Khanate should agree to ally with us,” Yamada Nobunaga said.

When attacking Goryeo, he had already proposed an alliance with the Golden Tent Khanate to deal with the Great Yu Empire. Because whether from his own experience or what the British said, the Great Yu Empire was clearly the most threatening to him now.

Moreover, fifteen years ago, he had killed an envoy dispatched by the Great Yu Empire to humiliate them, so now he was even more wary of the Great Yu Empire.

Just as the British said, once the Great Yu Empire rose, Japan would be doomed.

Doleman adjusted his tailcoat. He said, “This is truly a wise choice. The Golden Tent Khanate was too confident before. Now they should understand the truth: only cooperation can defeat the Great Yu Empire.”

Yamada Nobunaga nodded. He looked at Doleman and asked, puzzled, “I don’t understand why you British are so afraid of the Great Yu Empire.”

Doleman was startled for a moment. In fact, every European feared the rise of the Great Yu Empire, because it was the technological gap between civilizations that allowed them to conquer almost the entire world.

And now, the Great Yu Empire's growth momentum was very similar to Europe's back then. They were very afraid that one day, Great Yu Empire warships would be patrolling the seas of their own countries.

Chapter 797

Liang Dahai stood with his hands on his hips, watching the slaves being loaded onto the ships.

These slaves all came from Liaozhou. After Ye Qingyun occupied Liaozhou, large numbers of slaves arrived at Haigucheng.

Because the slaves numbered over two hundred thousand, they deployed all available ships, including warships, for transport.

Moreover, to prevent slave rebellions, a new contingent of eight thousand soldiers came to Haigucheng to act as escorts.

"Oh my, so many slaves! The Great Yu Empire's current slave shortage is finally covered," Li Kaiyuan was also in Haigucheng. His control over Goryeo's commerce was still ongoing.

Liang Dahai's mouth hung open. The scar on his face twitched with his smile. He said, "Indeed! His Majesty must be overjoyed."

“That’s true, but the matter of conscripting laborers in Goryeo cannot be vague. His Majesty is ambitious now; he isn’t afraid of having too many slaves, only too few.”

With that, the two looked at the slaves and smiled knowingly. In their opinion, with so many slaves, the Great Yu Empire’s development would surely take a leap forward.

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Shanghai Pass, Lu Fei, while implementing the Guandong people policy, had the slaves from Pingzhou City escorted here.

After a period of rest, this group of 120,000 slaves arrived in Qingzhou Province after a seven-day journey.

“Your Majesty, this batch of slaves must be given to our Railway Department. Currently, the railway is severely short of manpower. The few people Liang Dahai recruited from Goryeo are simply not enough.”

In the imperial study, Princess Pingyang assumed an air of stubbornness, unwilling to leave. The moment the slaves arrived in Qingzhou Province, she sought them out like a cat smelling fish.

Xiao Ming had returned to Qingzhou Province two days earlier than this batch of slaves. At this time, the news of the Great Yu Empire army’s victory had already spread far and wide through the newspapers.

When he returned to the city, almost all the common people of Qingzhou Province lined the streets to welcome him, making him truly experience the grandeur and heroism of a triumphant return.

Wielding the might of a great victory, Xiao Ming distinctly felt that the officials' attitude towards him was more respectful than ever. It was just as he had initially predicted.

Coupled with a reputation for being a capable and victorious general, his position in the Great Yu Empire became even more unshakeable. There were even articles in the newspapers comparing him to a sagacious emperor of a thousand ages.

This article was personally written by Fan Zeng. Although the flattery was obvious, it also implicitly demonstrated the shock that this great defeat of the barbarians brought to the people of the Great Yu Empire.

Because this was not only a victory in national strategy but also a re-establishment of national confidence.

Beyond this, a byproduct of this victory was the very purpose of Princess Pingyang's visit: a large number of slaves from the grasslands.

"Aunt need not worry. This batch of slaves is just the beginning. Slaves from Liaozhou will soon arrive in Qingzhou Province, and if we successfully capture Jinzhou, we will acquire even more slaves," Xiao Ming said calmly.

The reason he returned from Shanhai Pass was precisely to deal with this slave issue. For him, the war profits this time were extremely substantial.

This slave tide would bring a large number of precious laborers to the Great Yu Empire. Only with an increase in labor force could he establish large-scale infrastructure projects in the Great Yu Empire.

Princess Pingyang, hearing this, smiled so widely her face was contorted with joy. As the chief official of the Railway Department, she had experienced a shift in mindset from merely coping at the beginning to wholeheartedly building the Great Yu Empire's railway network now.

It wasn't that she had become more noble, but rather that the miraculous effects of railways and the substantial profits they could bring made her feel that her status would be even more secure.

"Your Majesty saying so puts me at ease." Princess Pingyang relaxed. She said to Xiao Ming, "Your Majesty, the railway from Qingzhou Province to Laiwu is already half-built. Give me another hundred thousand slaves, and the Railway Department can connect Qingzhou Province to Laiwu and Qingzhou Province to Kaiping in just one year."

Xiao Ming's eyes lit up. One year was neither long nor short. If this route was opened, it would bring incredible changes to the industry of the six prefectures.

After a moment of contemplation, he said, "These slaves will certainly be prioritized for the Railway Department. However, one year is too long. I want the railway opened by the end of this year."

In fact, building railways on the flat plains of Qingzhou Province was not very difficult. According to records, in contemporary times, on June 9, 1881, China's first self-built railway, the Tangxu Railway from Tangshan to Xugezhuang, took only three months to build.

Although this railway was only twenty li

long, the number of workers used to build it was also very small.

And now, the Railway Department already had over two hundred thousand people building railways. Adding this batch of slaves, the total would probably exceed three hundred thousand.

With so many people, building a railway line over three hundred kilometers long could be completed within a year, even if they only built one kilometer a day.

Of course, the Railway Department was not just building this route; the route from Qingzhou Province to Dengzhou was also under construction simultaneously.

This route would pass through Laizhou, which was rich in gold and silver, and then reach Dengzhou, all the way to the port.

“Although the end of the year will be a bit challenging, it’s not impossible, provided Your Majesty agrees to the hundred thousand slaves,” Princess Pingyang’s eyes darted around.

The reason railway construction was slow in the first year was that the slaves had no experience, and at the same time, the output of railway tracks couldn’t keep up.

Now it was different. They had cultivated a large number of elite artisans for railway construction. These artisans could completely independently lead the slaves in building railways.

Moreover, after the establishment of the Laiwu and Kaiping Steel Workshops, the output of railway tracks had also caught up. Now, there was no need to worry about materials at all.

“Hmm, I agree.” Xiao Ming raised his eyebrows. Railways would be a long-term project for the Great Yu Empire.

In the current era where transportation was not very developed, railway transport would be like a divine tool. And this would also greatly facilitate the deployment of the Great Yu Empire’s army.

After asking a few more questions about railway construction, Xiao Ming dismissed Princess Pingyang.

Three days later, Liang Dahai successfully brought the barbarian slaves to Qingzhou Province. According to the agreement with Princess Pingyang, he allocated one hundred thousand slaves to her.

The remaining slaves numbered over two hundred thousand. Xiao Ming allocated one hundred and twenty thousand to the Mining Department, and the remaining eighty thousand were given to the slave plantations.

Industry was important, but food was also very important. And with the development of industry, the need for raw materials also increased, such as sugarcane, cotton, and rubber, which were now greatly needed.

While allocating the slaves, Xiao Ming also dispatched artisans from the Mining Department and the steel workshop to Liaozhou. This Liaozhou was contemporary Liaoyang, and the famous Anshan and Benxi iron mines were near Liaoyang.

Among the five major open-pit iron mines in contemporary China, Anshan and Benxi were included. Moreover, Anshan, along with the Benxi iron mine, had proven reserves exceeding 10 billion tons, making them dominant in iron ore.

For these past few years, the barbarians had used these two mines, where one could simply pick up iron ore, to cast cannons.

Precisely because of this, conquering Jinzhou was so important. Once Jinzhou was taken, it would form a straight line, connecting the three points. These two large iron mines would then be under his control, and the Great Yu Empire's initial development would no longer lack iron ore.

Chapter 798

The spring breeze carried a faint fragrance of peach blossoms from outside the imperial study.

After seeing Princess Pingyang off, Xiao Ming stretched his body lazily. A month had passed since his return from Shanhai Pass, and Qingzhou Province was now bursting with spring vitality.

Looking at the peach trees outside, full of crimson blossoms in the setting sun, Xiao Ming prepared to wrap up his day's state affairs and return.

At this point, Qian Dafu came scurrying over, "Your Majesty, Lu Tong and Chen Qi request an audience!"

“They?” Xiao Ming showed an interested expression. He said, “Let them in. If both of them are here, they must have something new.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” Qian Dafu also had a smile on his face. In fact, compared to people like Pang Yukun, he preferred people like Chen Qi, because they always brought good news.

Qian Dafu responded and left. Soon after, Chen Qi and Lu Tong entered the imperial study.

The two looked excited. After bowing, they said, “Your Majesty, the fuse is complete!”

“I knew you two would bring good news when you came,” Xiao Ming said to Qian Dafu. Qian Dafu also smiled cheerfully.

Chen Qi and Lu Tong exchanged smiles. Chen Qi then took out a small, stick-like object. “Your Majesty, this is the trigger-type mechanical fuse.”

Lu Tong explained, “The success of this fuse this time is largely thanks to the percussion cap. After Chen Qi and I pondered for a while, we realized that the principle of the fuse is similar to that of the percussion cap; it just needs an external force to strike the fulminate of mercury. So, we installed a firing pin outside the primer tube that contains the fulminate of mercury. As long as an external force strikes the firing pin cap, the firing pin will strike the fulminate of mercury, which then ignites the explosive in the fuse, thereby igniting the cannonball.”

Carefully taking the fuse, Xiao Ming examined it closely and was very satisfied.

The fuse Chen Qi gave him was a thin metal cylinder, with a metal cap containing a firing pin on its outside.

Opening the metal cap revealed a slender spring inside. This was to ensure that the fuse would not explode due to accidental operation.

In the middle of the spring was a priming device similar to a percussion cap. When the firing pin cap was struck, the firing pin would descend and ignite the fulminate of mercury. At this point, the fuse would cause the cannonball to explode.

Previously, the difficulty of fuses lay in the spring and fulminate of mercury. Now that Qingzhou Province's industry could produce these two items, the manufacturing of fuses also became natural.

However, compared to modern fuses, trigger-type fuses had a relatively high failure rate. If the point of impact was incorrect, it could very likely result in a dud.

But even so, the birth of the fuse was epoch-making, because besides being used in cannonballs, fuses could also be used in landmines.

Thinking of this, a very sinister idea suddenly occurred to Xiao Ming. For trigger-type fuses, a cannonball formed by enclosing it in a spherical hollow shell was actually no different from a landmine.

One needed to be launched and strike, while the other needed to be stepped on. The real difference was only in sensitivity, which simply required reducing the spring's force.

He said, “You are to immediately manufacture a batch of hollow cannonballs with fuses installed for the Pingzhou City front line. I will order Lu Fei to attack the city one month later.”

Chen Qi and Lu Tong exchanged glances. The sinister look on Xiao Ming’s face made their hearts tremble. The two responded with a “Yes.”

After seeing them off, Xiao Ming’s face showed a strange smile. In fact, landmines had been recorded in historical books long ago.

The earliest records can be traced back to 1130, when the Jin army attacked Shanzhou during the Song Dynasty. At that time, the Song army used gunpowder bombs buried in the ground, which were iron-cased landmines, causing heavy casualties to the Jin army.

By the early Ming Dynasty, true landmines with mechanical firing devices appeared in the Great Ming. According to the “Huolong Jing” (Fire Dragon Manual) written by Jiao Yu in 1413, it was recorded: “Detonating cannonballs are cast from raw iron, hollow, filled with pounded medicine, inserted into small bamboo tubes, with a fuse thread running inside. A long thread is run through a fire groove on the outside. Choose the enemy’s inevitable path, bury dozens in pits, connect the medicine groove to a steel wheel, cover with earth, so the enemy does not know. When stepped on, it triggers the mechanism, shaking up, iron pieces fly like mad, and flames surge to the sky.”

The landmines recorded in this classic possessed the characteristics of contemporary pressure-activated landmines. However, these landmines used a steel wheel and flint friction for ignition, similar to the principle of a lighter, and their reliability was still somewhat poor.

In Europe, landmines also began to appear in fortress defense battles in the 15th century. However, it was only after the mid-19th century, with the emergence of various high explosives and detonation technologies, that landmines were widely used in warfare.

The fuses that Chen Qi and Lu Tong had now produced were basically close to 19th-century fuses. Manufacturing landmines with such fuses would be much more reliable.

During the attack on Pingzhou, the Great Yu Empire army was constantly hampered by cavalry. This time, perhaps they could experiment with landmines.

Thinking of this, Xiao Ming became increasingly expectant.

After a brief period of solitary thought, Xiao Ming returned to his bedchamber before the sky completely darkened.

At this time, Fei Yuer was closely following Xiao Yi, who was clumsily learning to walk. Xiao Yi was now one year and three months old, precisely at the age of learning to walk.

Seeing Xiao Ming arrive, Xiao Yi's small face was full of smiles, letting out clear laughter as he pounced towards Xiao Ming.

Cui Xue'er, along with Lu Luo and Ziyuan, stood nearby, all smiling at the sight.

“Your Majesty went to Shanhai Pass, and after returning, Xiao Yi seems to be even more clingy to Your Majesty,” Ziyuan said, her face beaming.

Lu Luo said, “Indeed. Now he doesn’t even bother with us.”

Cui Xue’er was also now familiar with the palace environment. She played mahjong with the three of them daily, and their relationship had become as close as sisters, no longer having the melancholic mood she had when she first entered the palace.

She glanced at Xiao Ming. “But Your Majesty is busy with state affairs and rarely gets to accompany Yi’er. It would be nice if he had an imperial prince of his age to accompany him.”

As her words fell, Lu Luo and Ziyuan both looked at Xiao Ming, their eyes bold and fiery.

They and Xiao Ming had already shared the intimacy of husband and wife, so they were naturally not as shy as young girls. They spoke of this matter as if it were perfectly natural.

Fei Yuer, hearing this, smiled, “You all are shameless! Don’t scare His Majesty away.”

Xiao Ming was somewhat helpless. Now he finally experienced the difference between a young girl and a young woman, but it was truly a joyful pain.

After laughing and playing with the four for a while, Xiao Ming noticed a beautiful jade pendant hanging around Xiao Yi's neck. He asked, "Where did this come from? Why have I never seen it?"

Fei Yuer said, "Today, the Prince of Yong's consort entered the palace to visit the Empress Dowager, and then came here to visit me. When she left, she gave this jade pendant to Yi'er."

"The Prince of Yong's consort." Xiao Ming raised his eyebrows. "The Prince of Yong's consort never comes without a purpose. This visit must surely be for something she desires."

"The great victory in Pingzhou, Your Majesty's defeat of the barbarians, and your overwhelming prestige within the Great Yu Empire must have made the Prince of Yong feel uneasy," Fei Yuer said.

Xiao Ming nodded lightly. The Prince of Yong's consort entering the palace at this time, it was clear to any discerning eye that it was no coincidence. Since the Prince of Yong's consort first went to the Empress Dowager, the answer was probably with her.

As the two conversed, Cui Xue'er's eyes flickered, and she lowered her head.

Chapter 799

Night's dark curtain gradually enveloped the imperial palace.

As the two were discussing the Prince of Yong's consort, Qian Dafu delivered the evening meal.

Cui Xue'er and the other two knew it was inconvenient at this time and each went to their respective bedchambers. Ziyuan and Lu Luo had always been close, and their bedchamber was together. The two parted ways with Cui Xue'er halfway.

Walking along the brightly lit path, a palace maid beside Cui Xue'er suddenly said faintly, "Your Highness, it is said that the Prince of Yong's consort came this time to probe the intention of reducing the feudal lords' power. After the great victory in Pingzhou City, the ministers suddenly became bolder. Many officials petitioned Elder Fei and Senior Grand Secretary Pang, claiming that to unify the Great Yu Empire, the policy of reducing feudal lords must be implemented."

Cui Xue'er had already felt a faint worry, and it deepened when her maid, who had served her since childhood, spoke. She gently snorted, "These ministers are merely opportunists, crossing the river and tearing down the bridge. Such clamor is only to show loyalty to the Emperor."

After a pause, she sighed, "However, from the Emperor's demeanor, it seems he indeed has the intention of reducing feudal lords' power."

"Then what should we do? His Majesty won't deal with the Prince of Huainan the same way he dealt with Prince Zhao and the others, will he?" the palace maid asked anxiously.

Cui Xue'er frowned slightly. "My imperial father followed His Majesty to pacify the northern rebellion, which is a great merit. I believe His Majesty will certainly not take harsh measures. However, it will at least mean abolishing his military power. But I am not entirely sure if my imperial father and elder brother can accept this. My elder brother also had palace servants inquire about this today, so he must be extremely worried about this matter."

With that, the two stopped speaking and headed to their bedchamber.

The next day, Xiao Ming woke early. It was too late yesterday for him to visit the Empress Dowager, so today he did not delay and went directly to her.

He understood that some ministers now also wanted to gain favor by pushing for the reduction of feudal lords' power, but in his view, this was causing him trouble.

Now, with external threats still present, he did not want to cause internal chaos. Although the Prince of Huainan and the Prince of Yong were vulnerable, if they truly became desperate, they would again cause damage to the Great Yu Empire's industry and commerce, and this was not worth it.

Upon arriving at Ciren Hall, Xiao Ming greeted the Empress Dowager and then inquired about the matter.

Concubine Zhen heard this and smiled gently, "The Prince of Yong is a bit worried. It's all these ministers' fault; they just cause trouble."

"The Empress Dowager is absolutely right. I will reprimand them today, lest they continue to cause me trouble," Xiao Ming said.

Although reducing the feudal lords' power was his original intention, it was not the right time yet. He had to be patient, and Concubine Zhen's words clearly conveyed the same meaning.

Having understood the whole story, Xiao Ming had a plan in mind. He and Qian Dafu went to the Zhengda Guangming Hall on time.

As the court assembly began, Pang Yukun immediately said, "Your Majesty, the Prince of Yong has submitted a memorial requesting to retire to his hometown and live out his old age in peace."

"Your Majesty, my imperial father's letter a few days ago also expressed this intention," Cui Shang'an stepped forward and said as his words fell.

The ministers' expressions varied upon seeing this. Some were overjoyed, some puzzled, and some frowned in deep thought.

Xiao Ming sneered inwardly. As soon as he returned from Shanhai Pass, these two came to probe him. If he agreed to their request to retire to their hometowns, the matter of reducing feudal lords' power would be confirmed.

He would not fall for their trick. So he said, "The Great Yu Empire is in ruins, waiting to be rebuilt, and it is a time when capable people are needed. How can the Prince of Yong and the Prince of Huainan abandon me? I do not grant this request."

Pang Yukun breathed a sigh of relief. He bowed and said, "Yes, Your Majesty."

Cui Shang'an felt a weight lift from his heart upon hearing this, and echoed "Yes" simultaneously.

Having casually dismissed the two, Xiao Ming thought nothing of it. For him, this was just a small interlude. It would not be too late to discuss it again when the main army returned to the capital.

He did not want to kill the Prince of Huainan and the Prince of Yong, but their military power had to be relinquished. He would no longer allow a divided Great Yu Empire to exist.

While he was holding court, a special batch of weapons arrived in Pingzhou City: Conqueror Muskets with aiming scopes.

At this time, Lu Fei was repeatedly examining a Conqueror Musket in his hand. His firearm was a bit different; it had a metal-cased telescope on top.

Accompanying the aiming scopes was Wang Quan, a company commander of the Imperial Guard stationed in Qingzhou Province. After this batch of Conqueror Muskets was manufactured, he had been training soldiers in the military camp and had now mastered how to use this firearm to accurately shoot enemies.

Lei Ming and Luo Xin were also present. Both showed playful expressions. He said, "His Majesty said this firearm's range is very accurate. Is that true?"

Wang Quan was not a very talkative person. He said seriously, "A normal Conqueror Musket's firing accuracy will gradually worsen beyond one hundred meters due to vision issues. So, even though the Conqueror Musket has a range of nine hundred meters, it's most effective for shooting at a distance of one hundred to two hundred meters. However, with this aiming scope, it's different. Soldiers can see much farther."

Lu Fei picked up the aiming scope and looked at the soldiers on the city wall. In his view, the soldiers' bodies appeared greatly magnified.

He said, "Let's see if it's a mule or a horse. Commander Wang, demonstrate it for us."

The Great Yu Empire's military system stipulated that lower-ranking generals and soldiers must obey the orders of higher-ranking generals. This was to ensure that the army could be quickly reorganized if dispersed.

Although Wang Quan was not Lu Fei's subordinate, he still had to obey Lu Fei's orders in terms of military rank.

Everyone went to the city gate. Lu Fei chose three skilled marksmen to go with Wang Quan to the open ground outside the city. Then, he had targets set up at four hundred meters.

The three soldiers without aiming scopes looked distressed. This distance was too far; they could barely see the targets.

Just as the three hesitated, Wang Quan decisively raised his firearm. After aiming, he pulled the trigger.

Lu Fei, who had intentionally made things difficult for Wang Quan, was now stunned.

Soon, a soldier relayed the target information: Wang Quan had hit the fourth ring.

“So accurate!” Lu Fei sighed in admiration. He greedily looked at the Conqueror Musket in Wang Quan’s hand. “Killing a barbarian general from such a distance with one shot will surely throw the barbarians into chaos. It seems capturing Jinzhou is no longer a problem.”

Lei Ming said, “Wang Quan, you have less than a month. We will give you our best shooters from the army. You must train a group of sharpshooters for us.”

“Yes,” Wang Quan saluted Lei Ming.

The three exchanged glances and smiled at each other. If Jinzhou were captured this time, the barbarians would basically lose their most important agricultural and mining regions, and decline would become inevitable.

Having suffered barbarian bullying for decades, the situation had finally reversed. The three were also excited, as they had personally fought the barbarians and knew their former might.

But now, facing the Great Yu Empire’s firearms and cannons, the barbarians gradually lost their advantage. Now, from their hearts, they strongly supported the reforms Xiao Ming was implementing.