

Es. Benefits 181

Chapter 181 Pawn_1

How many people are there in the entirety of North City, and what is its annual tax revenue?

Moreover, it's simply not possible to breed enough horses for fifty thousand heavy cavalry in less than a year.

Most importantly, there is just no money.

Though the business of the North Prince Mansion is profitable, no matter how you calculate it, it's still not enough to forge the armor required for fifty thousand heavy cavalry.

Another thing is that North City doesn't have that many craftsmen.

In the whole of Great Sum, there is only one person who can forge weaponry for fifty thousand heavy cavalry, only he has such resources.

Who is that person?

One could guess it without even thinking.

That person is inside the Imperial Palace.

After Lu Shuyun came to his senses, he realized how foolish he had been.

He actually thought that North Prince had suddenly awakened, to the extent that he couldn't sleep at night, filled with panic every time he thought of the bloodbath at his mansion a while ago.

Now thinking about it, Lu Shuyun feels it's a disgrace to fear the mere North Prince.

At that moment, Wang Yong, who was beside Lu Shuyun, spoke, "Your Highness, rest assured, in my opinion, the Sum Emperor doesn't have any intention of letting North Prince become Crown Prince. In the eyes of the Emperor, North Prince is nothing more than a chess piece."

"It's clear to everyone that the Sum Emperor is in his prime and has no plans of naming a Crown Prince. Now that North Prince has suddenly gained fifty thousand heavy cavalry, almost all factions and forces within Great Sum are keeping an eye on him. If North Prince is truly so favored by the Emperor, he would not let North Prince become a target for all."

Hearing Wang Yong's words, Lu Shuyun's lips curled up slightly; he had the same thoughts. He no longer believed that his father, the Emperor, really liked his ninth brother that much.

If he did like him, he would not have made North Prince stand out at a time when conflict with the Aristocratic Families was imminent.

North Prince currently controls fifty thousand heavy cavalry. Once his father makes a move against the Aristocratic Families within Great Sum, these fifty thousand heavy cavalry are highly likely to become a knife at North Prince's throat, putting him in grave danger.

His father had no intention of naming a Crown Prince so soon; how could he possibly let his preferred candidate for Crown Prince be exposed so early? That would make North Prince an easy target.

As for whether his father was trying to temper North Prince, that was even less likely. At such a time, how could his father put his chosen Crown Prince through such trials?

In today's turbulent undercurrents, one misstep could cost North Prince his

life.

So North Prince can only be a chess piece.

And specifically, a chess piece used against the Aristocratic Families.

The mother's family of North Prince is the Chu Family. By pushing North Prince forward, it's very likely to cause a rift in the Chu Family, which is the first effect.

Secondly, North Prince is a dispensable royal. His death would not sadden the Sum Emperor, so he's the perfect pawn.

At that time, Lu Shuyun sneered and said, "I originally intended to reconcile with him and work together on great endeavors. I did not expect he would

actually reject me."

"It's laughable. He thinks that now he has our father's favor, the position of Crown Prince is his for the taking. Truly ignorant."

"Since he has refused to drink a toast, he must drink a forfeit. He cannot blame me for not being courteous."

Wang Yong said, "Your Highness, in my opinion, as all the princes are now guarding against North Prince, why don't we take this opportunity to join hands with the other princes and eliminate him first?"

Lu Shuyun said indifferently, "There's no need for that. Initially, I wanted to kill him to make the Chu Family wholly support me. Now that all the Aristocratic Families in the South are backing me, whether North Prince is dead or alive has become irrelevant; after all, he is just a disposable chess piece to

our father."

Wang Yong said, “But the fifty thousand heavy cavalry of North City remain a huge threat to us. If we don’t find a way to dissolve those fifty thousand heavy cavalry, it could greatly affect your Highness’s ambitions.”

What’s most important is that I have heard that Shadow Guards have gone to North City. With the State Preceptor and the Shadow Guards appearing in North City at the same time, the Emperor probably has evidence of our dealings with the Barbarian Tribes. It won’t be long before the Emperor uses the Wang Family’s collusion with the Barbarian Tribes as an excuse to strike at us.”

Hearing Wang Yong’s words, Lu Shuyun fell silent.

He initially just wanted to compete for the throne through legitimate succession, never intending to directly start a rebellion.

However, his own father held great bias against the Aristocratic Families and was evidently preparing to strike at them.

Theoretically, he should distance himself from the Aristocratic Families at this time to avoid being implicated.

But his mother is from the Wang Family. If the Wang Family were to rebel, it would definitely affect him, and he would lose his chance at the throne just the same.

Furthermore, the Aristocratic Families are his biggest asset at the moment; his interests are already tied with theirs.

He’s reached a point where it’s impossible to sever ties with the Aristocratic Families.

If his father were to strike at the Aristocratic Families in the South, he would inevitably be affected. Thus, he's left with only one path-rebellion.

However, a son rebelling against his father is bound to be condemned by the public.

Leaving success aside, even if he were to succeed, he would likely be cursed for a thousand years.

Even if he managed to govern Great Sum well, the fact that he rebelled would always be a stain on his reputation.

If possible, Lu Shuyun would still prefer not to rebel directly but rather force his father through various pressures to abandon the idea of striking at the

Aristocratic Families.

After a moment of silence, Lu Shuyun spoke, "If the fifty thousand heavy cavalry of North City were dismantled, would my father abandon his plan to strike at the Aristocratic Families?"

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Upon hearing this question, Wang Yong said, "Your Highness, indeed there is such a possibility. The Emperor has long been plotting to eliminate our ancient families, but due to concerns over our power and influence, he has been able to suppress us only at court, never daring to directly lay hands on any ancient family."

“Even after the Emperor reclaimed the military power, he still hesitated to take action against the families.”

“But with the fifty thousand heavy cavalry from North City, it’s different. These troops are entirely the Emperor’s own, and none of the families can intervene in matters of this cavalry, not even able to plant a single spy within. It can be said this is the Emperor’s strongest card and the greatest confidence he holds in acting against the families.”

“Without this card, the Emperor would no longer have such confidence. If at this time our families were to unite with other dynasties to pressure the Emperor, he would ultimately be left with no option but to compromise.”

After listening to Wang Yong’s analysis, Lu Shuyun fell into thought for a moment, then said, “In that case, our next step is to join forces with several of my brothers and find a way to dismantle the fifty thousand heavy cavalry of North City, ideally forcing my father to abandon his original plans.”

“Rising in rebellion is always the last resort. I believe my brothers are also very wary of that fifty thousand heavy cavalry.”

Wang Yong echoed, “What Your Highness says is true.”

Subsequently, they gathered to discuss some plans on how to dismantle the fifty thousand heavy cavalry of North City.

Meanwhile.

Imperial Palace.

Royal Garden.

The Sun Emperor, clad in a yellow dragon robe, stood beside the lotus pond, watching the fish swim to and fro. At this time, Situ Ce was in the pavilion beside the lotus pond.

The Emperor opened his mouth and asked, “You met with Chen recently. What do you think of him?”

Situ Ce answered in one sentence, “He possesses the ambition of the Great Ancestor.”

Hearing this, the Emperor’s face immediately darkened, naturally averse to hearing Situ Ce’s praise for Lu Chen, who was his least favorite child.

Yet the Emperor did not delve deeper; he chuckled and said, “I didn’t expect the State Preceptor to hold Chen in such high regard.”

Continuing, the Emperor asked, “State Preceptor, having spent some time in North City, you must have learned something of its affairs. There are several points that puzzle me, and I would like to ask you to dispel my doubts.”

Situ Ce replied, “Please speak, Your Majesty.”

The Emperor went straight to the point and asked, “Based on intelligence from various sources, I have a rough understanding of the battle at Wanning Valley, but I just can’t fathom how Chen, even

with the fifty thousand heavy cavalry, could so easily defeat the barbarian tribe's three-hundred-thousand strong army."

"Moreover, according to General Lin's report, North City lost only twenty to thirty thousand soldiers, an unbelievable casualty rate when compared to the history of great dynasties. But the battlefield was indeed cleaned by the Imperial Army, and the number of dead counted by the Imperial Army, leaving no doubt as to its truth."

"I am very curious as to what kind of troops Chen commands that he could defeat three hundred thousand barbarian cavalry with a mere casualty of twenty to thirty thousand, especially in Wanning Valley, terrain that limits maneuverability and necessitates a head-on confrontation."

"State Preceptor, having been in North City for some time now, you must have seen Chen's cavalry and be familiar with their condition."

The Emperor had tasked Situ Ce to go to North City, evidently not just to relay a message to Lu Chen or entice him with grand promises; he wanted Situ Ce to see for himself what sort of demons and monsters North City harbored, allowing the North Prince to raise fifty thousand heavy cavalry in such a short span of time.

As a Grandmaster, it was easy for Situ Ce to infiltrate anywhere, and even if someone spotted him, he could leave effortlessly.

Upon hearing the Emperor's words, Situ Ce smiled slightly, well aware of what the Emperor was seeking to know, and he said directly, "Your Majesty, I indeed saw the heavy cavalry under the North Prince's command. And upon observation, the strength of most soldiers in this cavalry seemed to be above first tier."

On hearing this from Situ Ce, the Emperor's brow immediately knitted into a "J I|" shape. Where had his son found so many Martial Artists to form a force of approximately fifty thousand first-tier soldiers?

Situ Ce continued, "Of course, I believe that Your Majesty is not really concerned about this heavy cavalry. What you truly care about is the possibility of a Grandmaster's presence in North City."

Indeed, what the Emperor really wanted to know was whether there was a Grandmaster in North City. General Lin Xiuming's report mentioned a suspected appearance of a Grandmaster on the battlefield, but he was unable to confirm it.

If a Grandmaster truly emerged, the victory of the battle wouldn't seem so strange. But Grandmasters were not commonplace, so how could North City possibly have one?

This was what the Emperor couldn't fathom.

Moreover, the Emperor had already ordered the Shadow Guards to investigate. According to the intelligence he received, Mysterious Moon Palace had only begun making contact with his son and had provided no aid to North City.

It could be said that Mysterious Moon Palace chose to invest in the North Prince due to his potential, not because it assisted him, which is why the North Prince augmented his power.

This prompted the question—if it was not Mysterious Moon Palace aiding Lu Chen, then what power was secretly assisting him, allowing him to suddenly command fifty thousand heavy cavalry and even leading to the suspected traces of a Grandmaster in North City.

The Sum Emperor then asked, “So, does the State Preceptor believe that a Grandmaster really did appear in North City?”

Situ Ce answered, “I dare not assert for certain, but judging from the situation on the battlefield, it is indeed possible that a Grandmaster was involved in the battle at Wanning Valley.”

Hearing Situ Ce’s response, the Sum Emperor fell into deep thought.

Why did he now feel that his wretched son was becoming more and more mysterious?

Could it be that he was truly not his child?

At this thought, the Sum Emperor’s face turned very ugly.

Back when Lu Chen was born, he had suspected that Lu Chen was not his child. After all, he had never been fully conscious when he was with Chu Yue, their times together always shrouded in haziness. Who could say whether the child Chu Yue conceived was genuinely his?

If it were not for the need to secure the support of the Chu Family, he would have never married Chu Yue, for he felt no affection towards her.

Moreover, he could sense that Chu Yue did not wish to serve him either; their encounters had been extremely rare, making the chances of her conceiving his child very low. This made the Sum Emperor always suspect that Chu Yue had an affair with another man, and Lu Chen was that man’s child.

Yet he could never find proof. Over the years, he had dwelt on this matter persistently. Even after Chu Yue's death, he had the Shadow Guard continue investigating men who were close to Chu Yue, trying to identify Lu Chen's biological father, but to no avail.

Fortunately, Lu Chen had always been rather useless, so the Sum Emperor simply assigned him to North City. However, once in North City, Lu Chen rose unexpectedly, even becoming a force that could threaten the Great Sum.

This only deepened the Sum Emperor's suspicions. It was highly possible that Lu Chen was not his own, and the reason for Lu Chen's rapid rise might be the assistance of Lu Chen's biological father. Such thoughts made the Sum Emperor feel as though he had eaten excrement.

Even though Chu Yue was already dead, he still felt greatly humiliated.

Remembering how he had, due to the circumstances of the time, been compelled to marry a woman he did not love, and even accept a child conceived by another man in her womb—a woman who ultimately caused the death of the woman he loved—he felt exceedingly tormented.

Despite his torment, now was not the time to act against the North Prince. He had borne the humiliation for so many years; a few more would not matter.

He would deal with Lu Chen after resolving the issues with the Aristocratic Families.

For now, he still needed Lu Chen's fifty thousand Heavy Cavalry to intimidate those Aristocratic Families.

Ever since word spread that North City had fifty thousand Heavy Cavalry, almost all the Aristocratic Families believed that these soldiers belonged to him, the Sum Emperor, and they suddenly became much more compliant.

With the deterrence of the fifty thousand Heavy Cavalry, if he were to discipline one Aristocratic Family, other families would have to carefully weigh their strength before considering rebellion.

This was a good thing for him.

Thinking this, the Sum Emperor sneered, “Who would have thought that I, the Emperor, would end up relying on the power in my own son’s hands to intimidate the Aristocratic Families? What an ineffectual Emperor I have become.”

When the Sum Emperor suddenly stopped talking about the Grandmaster, Situ Ce, curious, asked, “Does Your Majesty not wonder where the Grandmaster in North City came from?”

The Sum Emperor said indifferently, “Let matters of North City be set aside for now. The Shadow Guard has already gathered enough evidence of the Wang Family’s collusion with the Barbarian Tribe.”

“I have suffered humiliations for so many years; it is time to put an end to it all!”

Chapter 184 From now on, I’ll surely help you punish Nanyan more

North Prince Mansion.

Spring Sound Court, Xiao Wen Yao’s room.

Xiao Wenyao lay sprawled all over the bed, her head buried in the pillow, not daring to lift her head and look at the man beside her.

Seeing Xiao Wenyao like this, Lu Chen by her side, said with a smile, “Yaoyao, now that you are my woman, why are you still so shy?”

On hearing this, Xiao Wenyao didn’t speak; she still kept her head buried in the pillow.

At this moment, Xiao Wenyao felt unbearably shy.

She had believed what Yelv Nanyan had told her before: as long as she held on to Lu Chen’s weakness, he would have no way to deal with her, and at that point, it would be her victory.

Eventually, she used Yelv Nanyan’s method, and it seemed as though she had trapped Lu Chen.

But she quickly realized that this was not trapping Lu Chen at all; he was completely free to come and go as he pleased.

Yelv Nanyan, that liar, had even told her that people cry out in victory.

This had nothing to do with victory at all; she cried out simply because... because...

As soon as she thought about how she had just become like Nanyan, Xiao Wen Yao's face felt scorchingly hot.

Those so-called cries of victory, she couldn't control them at all.

Yelv Nanyan, that wicked woman, actually deceived her, pure and kind as she was.

Seeing that Xiao Wen Yao still kept her head on the pillow, Lu Chen reached out and slapped her buttocks, then said, "If you don't get up now, I'll have to do that thing we did just now again."

Hearing this, Xiao Wen Yao quickly turned over, her eyes filled with Autumn waters as she looked at Lu Chen, then softly said, "Prince... Your Highness, this servant..."

Before Xiao Wen Yao could finish her sentence, Lu Chen directly pulled her body into his arms, and Xiao Wen Yao's heart suddenly fluttered like a startled fawn.

Although she was naive in the past, always thinking that her father was tormenting her mother and those Great Sum women, and always believed that Lu Chen had gone to Yelv Nanyan's room merely to torment Yelv Nanyan, but after experiencing it herself, her mentality had fully matured, and she finally understood that it was not torment at all.

Of course, it was also not as Yelv Nanyan had told her before, about how people cheer out loud upon victory.

It was purely Yelv Nanyan deceiving her.

And Yelv Nanyan was not trapping Lu Chen at his weak spot at all, Xiao Wenyao was also clear in her heart that Lu Chen had no weakness; the weakness lay in herself.

No wonder her mother had always taught her not to expose her weaknesses to a man other than the one she liked. Now she understood why her mother so often said this to her.

Even if she were formidable and held a high Realm, once she exposed her weakness, she could very well lose to the other party.

For instance, after Lu Chen targeted her weak spot just now, she immediately felt powerless, not knowing North from South.

Thinking about this, Xiao Wenyao's face turned scorchingly hot again; she would only be able to expose her weaknesses to Lu Chen in the future to show her loyalty to him.

If Lu Chen wanted to use her weakness against her, she would have to accept it.

At this moment, Xiao Wenyao curled up in Lu Chen's embrace, not daring to move. Lu Chen slapped Xiao Wenyao's buttocks again and said with a laugh, "I must say, you steppe women really do have well-developed leg muscles. Could it really have something to do with frequent horseback riding?"

Xiao Wenyao replied softly, "Hmm, it should be the case."

Listening to Xiao Wenyao's soft reply, Lu Chen chuckled, clearly aware that Xiao Wenyao didn't understand his implication, but he didn't mind.

Lu Chen then asked, “Yaoyao, do you still hate me?”

“After all, I was the one who killed your father. If your father was still alive, you would still be a princess of the Sky Wolf King tribe.”

Upon hearing this, Xiao Wenyao was slightly stunned, but she quickly regained her composure and immediately replied, “Your Highness, this servant... this servant has never harbored any hatred towards you in her heart. My father’s death has nothing to do with Your Highness; he brought it upon himself for the sake of a woman, and even caused the death of over a hundred thousand people from the Sky Wolf King tribe.”

Lu Chen stroked Xiao Wenyao’s hair, saying with a smile, “Oh? So, do you hold any grudge against Nanyan now?”

Xiao Wenyao answered, “This servant did indeed hate Sister Nanyan a few days ago, but I have let it go in my heart. Sister Nanyan is just a woman; she cannot decide her own fate.”

“If my father insisted on marrying her, Sister Nanyan had to accept. Sister Nanyan’s previous declaration to marry my father only after defeating North City was merely an attempt to buy time.”

After calming down, Xiao Wenyao realized that she and Yelv Nanyan were very similar, and that Yelv Nanyan had already experienced something she did not wish to experience; after all, she had yet to marry the North Fre King, but Yelv Nanyan had already married the former Sky Wolf King.

The former Sky Wolf King was much like the North Fre King, an old lecher.

Xiao Wenyao thought to herself that the reason Yelv Nanyan had made such a promise was just to discourage her father; who would have imagined that her father would actually assemble an army of three hundred thousand and come to attack North City, only to meet with a disastrous defeat.

Moreover, Xiao Wenyao now felt only hatred for her father, for he had poisoned her beloved mother. In her heart, her father was a demon..

Chapter 185 Then I'll definitely help you punish Nanyan more (Part 2)

Lu Chen had killed her father, the king, but in doing so, he had avenged her. Of course, there was another reason why Xiao Wenyao was particularly grateful to Lu Chen: he had helped her escape a life of suffering. She would no longer have to marry the North Pre King, that dreadful old man who devoured people and never bathed.

Although “North Fre King” and “North Prince” differed by only one character in their titles, the difference between them was as vast as heaven and earth.

She would rather expose her weaknesses to Lu Chen every day, letting Lu Chen scoff at her, than marry the North Fre King and become his queen.

The North Fre King's queens had died in such numbers that she couldn't even count them. If she married the North Fre King, she couldn't imagine the treatment she would endure.

Besides, life in the North Prince Mansion was something she had always longed for. Since arriving at the mansion, her days had been much more comfortable than those on the grasslands.

Of course, there was a downside to living in the North Prince Mansion—it wasn't as free. She couldn't run around wherever she wanted and had to stay in the mansion every day. She couldn't even go out riding whenever she wished.

Thinking about it, she was now nothing but a female slave to the North Prince. How could Lu Chen possibly let her run around? What if she tried to escape? Although, she wouldn't really try to escape at all.

Hearing Xiao Wen Yao's words, Lu Chen's mouth curved up slightly. He couldn't be happier with her thinking this way after all, he had also been concerned that Xiao Wen Yao might harbor resentment towards Yelv Nanyan.

Now that both women were his, constant conflict in his harem, with mutual hatred, would certainly not be a pleasant situation for him.

Xiao Wen Yao being able to let go of her hatred for Yelv Nanyan filled Lu Chen with joy.

At that moment, Xiao Wen Yao, with blushing cheeks, said, "Moreover, the Prince has already punished Nanyan for me. Even if I had any anger, it has dissipated."

Lu Chen instantly understood the punishment Xiao Wen Yao referred to and followed up with, "Then from now on, I'll make sure to punish Nanyan more for you, to vent your feelings."

"I... I thank the Prince," Xiao Wen Yao replied embarrassingly.

Hearing Xiao Wen Yao's consistent reference to herself as a female slave, Lu Chen laughed and said, "You are also considered a concubine I have taken in. Why do you so enjoy considering yourself a female slave?"

As he spoke, Lu Chen leaned in close to Xiao Wenyao's ear and said in a low and magnetic voice, "Could it be that you want me to treat you like a female slave?"

As his voice trailed off, Lu Chen blew into Xiao Wenyao's ear, and she immediately felt her body break out in goosebumps.

Xiao Wenyao was about to speak when suddenly Lu Chen wrapped his arms around her and turned her over. She hurriedly said, "My Prince, I..."

Xiao Wenyao hadn't finished her sentence when she was cut off by Lu Chen, "Since you love acting like a female slave, then I'll let you know what a female slave must do. Especially since that vixen next door has been frightened away by me and dares not return."

Hearing Lu Chen's words, Xiao Wenyao instantly felt an ominous premonition and urgently said, "My Prince, I... mmm..."

Before Xiao Wenyao could finish, Lu Chen again silenced her mouth.

When Lu Chen went to his study, it was almost night, and a certain person who claimed to be a female slave had completely collapsed. In the end, it was Yelv Nanyan who had the maids come in to take care of her.

As soon as Lu Chen arrived at the doorway of his study, he saw the cold and detached Bai Qingqing waiting at the door.

Seeing Lu Chen approaching the study, Bai Qingqing immediately bowed and said, "This servant greets the Prince."

Having completed the formalities, Bai Qingqing then said with an expressionless face, “Commander Qin has been here, and he brought intelligence from the North Land; he reminded you to remember to look at it.”

Upon hearing this, Lu Chen was momentarily taken aback.

He had intended to tease the ice-cold beauty before him, but as soon as the intelligence from the North Land was mentioned, Lu Chen immediately lost the inclination to do so.

What important intelligence could there possibly be from the North Land now?

This made Lu Chen somewhat curious.

At present, the entire North Land only had the North Fre King’s slightly larger barbarian tribe, right?

Lu Chen immediately entered the study, picked up the intelligence sent by Qin Yushan, and looked over it carefully.

Reading the content of the intelligence, Lu Chen was somewhat dumbfounded.

The intelligence stated that the remnants of the Sky Wolf King’s tribe who had stayed on the grasslands were found by people from the North Fre King’s tribe, who then issued them a summons to join in attacking North City during the winter.

The result was that the people from the Sky Wolf King's tribe immediately objected, since it was their king's attack on North City that had ultimately led to the entire Sky Wolf King tribe being absorbed by North City, and they had continued their nomadic lifestyle on the grasslands precisely because they did not want to join North City.

So when the North Fre King issued a summons at this time, intending to attack North City again, they thought it was a joke; they certainly did not want to perish in North City.

Some barbarians from the Sky Wolf King's tribe immediately ran to North City and informed Xiao Pengthian of the North Fre King's plan to muster a large army to attack North City in the winter. Xiao Pengthian quickly ordered the Brocade Guard to deliver this intelligence to the North Prince Mansion.

Lu Chen was somewhat speechless.

The North Fre King planning to attack North City in the winter?

Was there something wrong with his brain?

In the past, when the barbarian tribes headed south, it was mostly to snatch some food for the winter before the cold set in, and to capture some women to take back with them.

Once winter arrived, blizzards would howl across the grasslands, making troop movements extremely difficult. The Sky Wolf King's tribe dared not wander about in the winter in the past, yet the North Fre King now had such audacity. However, on second thought, if the North Fre King really did come, especially in two months, then he would absolutely welcome it.

Now the entire North Land was left with only the North Fre King's powerful barbarian tribe; once the North Fre King was dealt with, the rest of the barbarian tribes in the North Land would be small and not worth fearing, making it easy to subdue them all.

Lu Chen had actually long thought about when to deal with the North Fre King's tribe, but it was just a thought.

Attacking the North Fre King's tribe presented one major difficulty: they were not very familiar with the grasslands. Of course, among the captured barbarian soldiers, there were members from the North Fre King's tribe who could lead the way, but now the North Fre King's court would have definitely already left its original location.

The grasslands of the North Land were simply too vast; finding the North Fre King's court in a short period of time was not an easy task, and a rash advance into the grasslands with troops could lead to being encircled by the barbarians there.

But now it was different; the North Fre King was planning to attack North City in the winter, and this was the best opportunity to take down the North Fre King. Lu Chen would definitely not miss this chance.

The thought of the North Fre King walking into the trap made the corners of Lu Chen's lips almost reach the back of his head with glee.

The North Fre King really was a talent, and for a long time afterwards, Lu Chen could not figure out how the North Fre King came up with the idea of leading troops south to attack North City in the winter..

Chapter 186: Xuanyuan Yunqi 1

Time passed quickly, and half a month vanished in the blink of an eye.

Winter had already arrived, and now everyone was wrapped in thick fur clothing, even Lu Chen was no exception.

Martial artists had a certain resistance to the cold, and as a Grandmaster, Lu Chen was not at all afraid of it; even if he didn't wear such thick clothes, he would have been fine. But not fearing the cold did not mean he couldn't feel it —the chilling wind against his skin was somewhat uncomfortable.

Most high-ranking martial artists were like this, such as Bai Qingqing and her companions; they, too, donned thick clothing.

Winter was slightly annoying to Lu Chen, as his women had bundled up in thick furs, their graceful figures obscured by their garments, impossible to showcase their perfect physiques.

But there was nothing he could do about it; after all, he couldn't change the weather.

The arrival of winter also brought a number of problems to North City, and at this point, Lu Chen was completely unaware of the troubles that North City would face in winter. He had spent the recent half-month preparing for the North Fre King's invasion from the south, so he hadn't paid much attention to the governance of North City.

In the early morning, Lu Chen woke up amidst Yelv Nanyan's gentle jade fragrance, and after having breakfast with her, he headed to the study as usual.

When he arrived at the entrance of the study, important officials and military generals of North City were already waiting.

Now, every five days, they would collectively come to the study and report to Lu Chen the recent situation in North City, discussing events that had occurred.

At first, Lu Chen hadn't set a rule for reporting, but gradually, people like Li Rui had formed a habit, so Lu Chen simply decided to discuss North City's significant matters every five days.

Upon seeing Lu Chen's arrival, Li Rui and the others immediately bowed and greeted him, "Greetings to the Prince!"

"May the Prince live thousands of years, thousands of years, thousands upon thousands of years!"

Lu Chen nodded slightly and entered the study, "Come in, everyone."

The crowd then followed Lu Chen into the study, which seemed even more crowded today, as more people were involved in the discussion.

Generally, once an official's loyalty reached ninety, and they held an important position in North City, Lu Chen would allow them to join the council.

Seeing the increasingly packed study, Lu Chen thought to himself that it was a good thing that the construction of the Hall of Political Affairs had begun, and the temporary hall would be set up before long. Then, they wouldn't have to cram into this study anymore.

At that moment, Lu Chen glanced over the crowd and then said, “Old rules, speak one by one if you have any matters.”

Upon hearing this, Li Rui was the first to step forward and said, “Prince, winter has now arrived, and although North City successfully defended against the barbarian tribe’s plundering this year, there are still many commoners lacking clothing and food. Should we distribute porridge this year?”

The commoners of North City had always been poor, and despite Lu Chen having already exempted them from many agricultural taxes, they were still very much impoverished, with most struggling to feed themselves.

This was why, whenever the North Prince Mansion recruited workers, there would always be many people desperately vying to become one of the mansion’s laborers.

Once inside the North Prince Mansion, becoming one of its workers, the commoners of North City would believe they would no longer fear hunger or the cold.

Hearing Li Rui’s words, Lu Chen pondered for a moment and then said, “Continue distributing porridge. However, this year the North Prince Mansion will contribute some silver to buy food, and we will distribute it in the name of the mansion.”

Immediately understanding Lu Chen’s intention, Li Rui realized that Lu Chen was planning to win the hearts of the people. But there was no harm in that; after all, Lu Chen was now the Seignior of North City, and the entire area had become his feudal state. For the king of a feudal state, winning the people’s hearts was quite normal.

Li Rui then responded, “Yes, my Prince.”

Lu Chen inquired, “Lord Li, is there anything else you wish to discuss?”

At this point, Li Rui glanced at the other military generals led by Mu Changtian, then continued, “Prince, lately the common folk inside Yan County have been complaining about the scarcity of timber. They claim that Wanning Valley and some forests have been surrounded by Yan County’s troops, and the woodcutters simply cannot enter to collect wood.”

“Now that winter has come, if there is not enough timber, this year North City may see many freeze to death.”

Hearing this, Lu Chen was taken aback.

As a Grandmaster, although he felt the cold, he was not afraid of it. Because he did not fear the cold, he had no real notion of winter and had completely forgotten the fact that people could freeze to death during this season.

Since it didn’t directly affect him, Lu Chen rarely paid attention, but now that Li Rui had brought it up, Lu Chen quickly realized the significance.

Warming up indeed posed a troublesome issue.

As Li Rui finished speaking, Lu Chen looked over at Mu Changtian and the other military generals. At that moment, Mu Changtian stepped forward and said, “Prince, currently the forests around Yan County contain North City’s military camps or conceal North City’s secrets, so I’ve ordered the soldiers from North City to seal off most of the areas.”

Lu Chen was aware of this, especially since the artillery camp managed by Mu Jingwu took up a large area of forest, mainly to prevent spies from discovering any secrets of North City.

Sealing off those forests was the right action.

However, the issue of the commoners' heating still needed to be addressed.

After some thought, Lu Chen said, "General Mu, when you leave the North Prince Mansion later, open up some of the less critical areas to the common people. We can't let them freeze; if all the common people die from the cold, how are we going to develop North City next year?"

Chapter 187: Xuanyuan Yunqi 2

Mu Changtian said, "Yes, Prince, after leaving the North Prince Mansion, I immediately ordered the soldiers to lift some of the restrictions on forest areas."

As his words fell, Mu Changtian stepped back, and at this time, Li Rui also returned to his original position.

Lu Chen scanned the audience and asked, "Does anyone else have matters to report?"

Mu Changtian stepped forward again and said, "Prince, we have now recruited fifty thousand new soldiers for the army, and together with the original soldiers of North City and the Black Cavalry, we now have a total of one hundred and twenty thousand soldiers. Should we continue to recruit more?" Hearing Mu Changtian's question about soldiers, Lu Chen pondered for a moment and then said, "There's no need for now, North City can't support too many soldiers."

The soldiers in North City were essentially farmer-soldiers, and strictly speaking, those recruited by Mu Changtian could hardly be considered a regular army. They merely trained occasionally and would return to their farm work during the planting season, possessing very weak combat capabilities.

Lu Chen's plan was to professionalize the soldiers of North City in the future, turning them into career soldiers, just like the current Black Cavalry, who were fully supported by the North Prince Mansion.

However, the financial pressure of supporting tens of thousands of professional soldiers was immense for both North City and the North Prince Mansion, and it was not feasible at the moment.

In the end, it all came down to the issues of money and food.

After hearing Lu Chen's words, Mu Changtian said, "This servant understands."

Then Mu Changtian returned to the position where he had previously stood. After Mu Changtian stepped back, Xuanyuan Chen came forward and said, "Prince, the craftsmen you requested have arrived in Yan County. When I came to the North Prince Mansion this morning, those craftsmen were already waiting at the city gate to meet you."

Hearing this, Lu Chen's eyes lit up, "So soon?"

Lu Chen was surprised; he had thought that these craftsmen would need at least a month or two to arrive in Yan County, but they had traveled from Great Yu City in just over half a month. Now, he could start preparing for a large-scale production of gunpowder and Red Tassel Spears.

Perhaps he could even prepare a big surprise for the North Fre King when he led his army to North City.

With this in mind, Lu Chen continued to Xuanyuan Chen, “After the morning meeting ends, I will accompany you to meet them.”

Having discussed the matter of the craftsmen, they went on to discuss other topics related to the development of North City, such as the promotion of potatoes and sweet potatoes, as well as issues related to taxation.

But throughout the meeting, Lu Chen never mentioned the topic of official dismissals.

Lu Chen had long wanted to deal with the officials in North City, but he faced a significant practical issue-dismissing the current officials would essentially leave him with no one he could use, which was a dilemma for him.

Although he despised the corrupt officials of North City, without them, who would do the work? His policies might not even be able to be conveyed down the chain of command, so Lu Chen could only endure the situation for the time being.

After the morning meeting concluded, Lu Chen followed Xuanyuan Chen to the city gate.

At this time, the area outside the northern gate of Yan County was filled with common people, who were curious about the identity of these individuals carrying large and small packages and pushing big and small carts.

Someone let slip the phrase “The Prince has arrived,” causing the common people to clear a path.

Soon, Lu Chen arrived on horseback in front of the Great Yu City craftsmen. In front of the caravan stood two young men in their twenties or thirties, robust and strong, with their muscularity straining against their fur clothing and standing about one meter ninety tall.

Lu Chen then identified these two men's profiles.

[Name: Mo Fei]

(Status: Current leader of North Prince Mansion's craftsmen, formerly a Great Yu City craftsman, who immediately led two thousand craftsmen to Yan County upon learning that the North Prince needed craftsmen.)

[Strength: Fifth Rank]

[Loyalty: too]

[Name: Mo Xing]

[Status: Current North Prince Mansion craftsman, younger brother of Mo Fei, and a former Great Yu City craftsman; followed his elder brother Mo Fei to Yan County to serve the North Prince.]

[Strength: Fifth Rank]

[Loyalty: too]

Seeing the profiles of the two men, Lu Chen was taken aback-is their surname Mo?

Could it be that this world truly has a Mohist school?

After some time getting to know Great Yu City, Lu Chen found that many of the city's concepts were very similar to those of the Mohists, and now the appearance of two individuals with the surname Mo made him even more suspicious.

However, whether they were Mohists was irrelevant. The most important thing was that these craftsmen were one hundred percent loyal to the North Prince Mansion, which reduced the risk of information leaks when they were asked to manufacture weapons.

At this moment, Mo Fei and Mo Xing both approached Lu Chen and then respectfully greeted him, "Commoner Mo Fei, commoner Mo Xing, we pay our respects to the Prince!"

The other craftsmen also followed suit, greeting in unison, "We pay our respects to the Prince!!!"

"Long live the Prince, long live, long live!!!"

Lu Chen nodded, then with a smile said, "Alright, rise."

Just then, Lu Chen's gaze was suddenly drawn to a figure in the distance.

There had been too many people earlier for him to notice, but as the craftsmen all bowed their heads, Lu Chen abruptly saw, on a white horse not far away, a woman dressed in black and red armor.

The woman had her hair tied back in a high ponytail, wore a red cloak, and held a Red Tassel Spear in her hands. She was very beautiful, with delicate features and an air of heroism between her brows, presenting a striking and spirited appearance.

This...

Lu Chen felt very puzzled.

He didn't recall ever seeing this woman among the Black Cavalry before, did he?

Moreover, there weren't any white horses among the Black Cavalry, and most importantly, there were no women.

Noticing the color of the horse, Lu Chen quickly discovered another detail: the horses ridden by the soldiers behind the woman were also white and not the black horses of the Black Cavalry.

Out of curiosity, Lu Chen immediately used the system to identify the woman's information.

[Name: Xuanyuan Yunqi]

[Identity: Daughter of the Xuanyuan Family Head of Great Yu City, 23 years old, sister of Xuanyuan Chen, at the Master Realm. Hearing that Yan County needed craftsmen, she led three thousand light cavalry to escort the craftsmen to Yan County. Her feelings towards the North Prince are somewhat peculiar.]

[Rating: 98]

[Loyalty: too]

[Favorability: 50]

Seeing Xuanyuan Yunqi's information, Lu Chen was again stunned.

9- 98 rating???

Indeed, Xuanyuan Yunqi was very beautiful, but her beauty was distinctive, unlike the beauty of any women Lu Chen had seen before.

Not only was she so beautiful, but she was also a Grandmaster.

This...

The system had never mentioned summoning a third Grandmaster.

Could it be that Xuanyuan Yunki was a reward given to him by the system?

After all, the system considered the fifty thousand citizens of Great Yu City as a summoning reward, so Xuanyuan Yunki should also be counted in, right?

Lu Chen wasn't quite sure.

After all, this surprise was too sudden.

He could never have imagined that there was a female Grandmaster with a rating of 98 in Great Yu City.

Of course, there was something else that surprised Lu Chen.

That was the three thousand white horses of the light cavalry.

The system had never mentioned these three thousand light cavalry; it had merely counted these cavalrymen as ordinary citizens of Great Yu City.

Lu Chen had always thought the Black Cavalry represented all the combat-capable soldiers in Great Yu City. He had no idea Great Yu City also had three thousand light cavalry.

From the beginning, he knew Great Yu City had great potential for war but had not expected its strength to be so substantial.

At this moment, Lu Chen was curious as to why Xuanyuan Yunqi and the three thousand light cavalry she led did not come closer?

While he was thinking this, he saw Xuanyuan Yunqi with her three thousand light cavalymen leaving directly.

Lu Chen frowned.

A female Grandmaster with a rating of 98 just showed up in front of him, took a glance, and then ran off like that?

Could he really let her get away?

Lu Chen quickly turned his head to Xuanyuan Chen and said, “General Xuanyuan, who is that woman in the black and red armor who left with her soldiers without paying her respects to me first?”

Hearing this, Xuanyuan Chen immediately replied, “Prince, that woman is my younger sister; she is Great Yu City’s city defense general, and those three thousand cavalymen are the city’s defense force. They were here to deliver the craftsmen to North City.”

“Now that they have delivered the people, they must hurry back to Great Yu City to avoid any chance of a Barbarian Tribe attack. As for why my sister did not pay her respects...”

At this point, Xuanyuan Chen hesitated for a moment before he bit the bullet and continued, “On behalf of my little sister, I apologize to the prince. My sister has been pampered since childhood and lacks courtesy; I hope the prince can forgive her.”

“The next time my sister comes to Yan County, I will make sure she kowtows in apology to the prince.”

Hearing Xuanyuan Chen’s words, Lu Chen was taken aback for a moment.

Lacks courtesy?

Is it really just a lack of courtesy?

Chapter 188 Cold Winter, Zhou Youyou Pregnant Again 1

Lu Chen wasn't sure whether it was his own misperception, he always felt that Xuanyuan Yunqi was not unaware of etiquette.

After all, her loyalty to him was one hundred, which signified full loyalty.

Even if she lacked etiquette, she should know to at least greet him, especially since he had entered her line of sight.

Wait a moment...

A sudden thought struck Lu Chen.

Typically, when he checked a woman's personal information, her interface would be as follows:

[Name:]

[Status:]

[Rating:]

[Favorability:]

However, Xuanyuan Yunqi's personal information included an additional "Loyalty," which was only found in the data of subordinates.

Her profile displayed the following:

[Name:]

[Status:]

[Rating:]

[Loyalty:]

[Favorability:]

Xuanyuan Yunqi's loyalty to Lu Chen was 100, but her favorability was only 50, which he found somewhat off.

In his past understanding, a woman's favorability towards him was also a reflection of her loyalty. A one-hundred favorability meant one-hundred loyalty; that was how Lu Chen understood it.

But now, an anomaly like Xuanyuan Yunqi had appeared.

With a loyalty of 100 and a favorability of only 50, what did this mean?

Lu Chen immediately queried the system in his mind, "System, why does Xuanyuan Yunqi show both favorability and loyalty? Shouldn't these two be unified?"

[For ordinary women, favorability and loyalty are unified. However, as Xuanyuan Yunqi is a character summoned by the system, summoned characters have one hundred percent loyalty to the host, but this does not mean they have a special liking for the host.]

Upon hearing the system's explanation, Lu Chen quickly understood that favorability and loyalty were not unified in women summoned by the system.

So did this mean that if he wanted Xuanyuan Yunqi to be his woman, he couldn't just look at her loyalty but also find a way to increase her favorability towards him?

But if she was absolutely loyal to him, was there a necessity to increase her favorability? Xuanyuan Yunqi was, after all, his subordinate. Couldn't he simply issue an order for her to become his woman? She would likely have no choice but to agree. With this thought, Lu Chen quickly cast the notion aside, deciding against such a course of action. Other people might do it, but Xuanyuan Yunqi was his subordinate. How could he exploit such an unspoken rule? He was not one of those men who relished workplace exploitation.

Seeing Lu Chen looking somewhat troubled and silent, Xuanyuan Chen started to feel nervous. He quickly spoke up again, "Prince, I will immediately bring my younger sister back and have her apologize to you."

Upon hearing this, Xuanyuan Chen looked as though he was about to chase after Xuanyuan Yunqi, but Lu Chen came back to his senses and coughed to interject, "That won't be necessary, I was merely curious and asking casually."

At that moment, Lu Chen showed a hint of a smile. He patted Xuanyuan Chen on the shoulder and continued, "General Xuanyuan, your younger sister has reached the Grandmaster Realm at only her twenties. Truly a woman who does not pale in comparison to men."

Xuanyuan Chen was taken aback for a moment before saying, "Thank you for your praise, Prince."

Lu Chen went on to say, "Next time I see your younger sister, I must truly seek her guidance on martial arts skills. I have the skill but lack the ability for actual combat." "Ah... this..." Xuanyuan Chen hesitated.

Was his prince truly planning on seeking martial arts guidance from his younger sister?

Why did he feel something seemed suspicious?

Although Xuanyuan Chen's loyalty to Lu Chen was a full one hundred percent, he still had his own thoughts. He was now quite clear about what kind of person the North Prince was, and he had the impression that the North Prince harbored other

intentions towards his younger sister.

Nonetheless, as his sovereign, Xuanyuan Chen didn't feel it was his place to say anything.

Lu Chen then turned to say, "Let's not talk about this anymore. Mo Fei and the others have traveled from afar, and they must be weary. Let's arrange for them to have a place to rest and recover for a few days."

Hearing Lu Chen's words, Mo Fei immediately replied, "Thank you for your concern, Prince!"

Lu Chen did not say anything further and proceeded to take the craftsmen to the accommodations that had been prepared for them in advance.

Fortunately, Lu Chen had asked Qin Yushan to prepare extra houses in anticipation that the craftsmen's families might also come to North City, so having more houses

was no harm done.

To his surprise, where he had only requested a thousand craftsmen, Mo Fei brought over two thousand to North City.

This should pose no significant problem for the production of cannons.

Lu Chen spent nearly a day in the craftsmen's quarters, as he wanted to understand what they could do to better arrange their work.

Seeing how much care the Prince took for the craftsmen, Mo Fei and the others felt

their favorability towards Lu Chen greatly increase.

Even though Great Yu City was relatively independent, they were quite informed about the outside world and aware of the situation in Great Sum.

They also knew that in Great Sum, craftsmen held little status, making Great Yu City, where everyone was a craftsman, a true anomaly.

In Great Sum, four words sufficed to describe the status of craftsmen: "ingenious but frivolous skills."

In this era, most people believed advancements in tools were nothing more than clever tricks, unsuitable for serious consideration. Craftsman ranks were considered lowly, and few paid attention to this group.

Chapter 189 Cold Winter, Zhou Youyou Pregnant Again_2

At first, Mo Fei was somewhat worried that the North Prince's treatment of them would be the same as that of the people from Great Xia, but now it looked as if the North Prince actually cared a great deal for them craftsmen, not considering them as inferiors at all.

Evening.

The evening wind howled as it blew.

It was getting dark early now, so although Lu Chen had set out to return quite early, by the time he got to the Prince's Mansion, it was almost completely dark.

When Lu Chen dismounted, he saw that the lanterns at the entrance of the North Prince Mansion had been extinguished by the cold wind, and at the moment, the servants of the mansion were making an effort to light the candles inside them again. Seeing Lu Chen return, the servants and guards at the door hurriedly greeted him, saying, "We pay our respects to Your Highness!"

Lu Chen nodded, "Mhm, carry on with your work."

"Yes."

The servants continued to light the lanterns.

At that moment, Lu Chen glanced at the servants and the guards at the gate; although they were dressed quite warmly, their bodies continued to tremble nonstop.

Even with the Prince present, they couldn't control their composure and kept shaking uncontrollably.

Lu Chen slightly frowned.

It was understandable for the servants.

The servants of the mansion were mostly ordinary people, so it was normal for them to fear the cold, but the guards of the mansion were mostly martial artists of fifth rank or higher. Should martial artists of such rank also feel so cold, shivering continuously? Lu Chen then turned to one of the soldiers and asked, "Are you very cold?" Seeing Lu Chen focusing on him and asking this question, the soldier was suddenly frightened. He instantly realized his inappropriate behavior, quickly knelt halfway, and said, "Your Highness, it was my lapse of conduct, please punish me!"

Lu Chen spoke indifferently, "Get up. I didn't mean to blame you. I only wanted to know what rank a martial artist must be to withstand the bitter cold."

Relieved by Lu Chen's words, the soldier had thought the North Prince was observing his uncontrollable shivering, deeming it disrespectful and would punish him for it.

The soldier then got up from the ground, "Thank You, Your Highness, for forgiving your subordinate."

Continuing on, the soldier said, "Your Highness, as far as your subordinate knows, only those above the seventh rank can be fearless of severe cold."

"Martial artists below the seventh rank, even if they wear fur clothes, will still feel the chill when outside."

Hearing the soldier's answer, Lu Chen fell into deep thought.

Although he could feel the cold, he did not tremble like the others. For Lu Chen, who had attained the status of a Grandmaster, cold was merely a sensation.

Lu Chen thought to himself, if soldiers of the fifth rank, despite wearing fur, were shivering from the bone-chilling cold, what about the common folks without any skill? Wouldn't they suffer even more?

It was no easy task to develop North City, especially so.

Just this winter chill alone made the commoners huddle in their homes, shivering, too afraid to step outside. Let alone economic development, for the twelve months of the year, construction and production could probably only be managed for a few months.

Better leave these thoughts aside for now.

Lu Chen ceased his wandering thoughts.

At present, he could only take things one step at a time. Having come to North City, it would now serve as his stronghold. No matter how challenging the local conditions might be, he had to develop it well, for only then could North City become a stepping stone for him.

When Lu Chen arrived at the main hall of the main yard, Mu Zixuan and the women of his harem were all waiting for him to come back for dinner.

At that moment, Lu Chen glanced at Yelv Nanyan and Xiao Wenyao, both of whom were joining them for dinner for the first time that day.

After Lu Chen came back, Mu Zixuan and both the young and elder Zhou busied themselves serving Lu Chen, while the other two seemed somewhat at a loss, unsure of what to do.

Lu Chen then asked with a smile, "Nanyan, Yaoyao, is dining with us here much more lively than what you're used to at Spring Sound Court?"

Before, they ate whatever the maids prepared for them, ate a little, and then rested. They certainly didn't gather to dine as they did now.

Moreover, Great Sum originally adopted a separate dining system and did not sit together to eat.

Of course, sitting together like this was certainly lively, anyway it was much more lively than eating alone in their rooms.

Yelv Nanyan immediately said, "Thank you, Prince, the Princess Consort allowed me to attend the feast at the Prince's Mansion."

Lu Chen smiled and said, "This can hardly be counted as a feast. If you two have no other matters, come here for dinner every evening. It's livelier with family."

Yelv Nanyan and Xiao Wenyao said in unison, "Yes, Prince."

After washing his hands, Lu Chen glanced at the braziers burning not far from the hall.

There were three braziers in the entire hall, and with them, the temperature inside the room rose considerably.

However, Lu Chen found that even clad in fur clothes, Zhou Xiaozhou and Zhou Youyou's delicate bodies still trembled slightly.

It was indeed still too cold.

Yelv Nanyan and Xiao Wenyao were martial artists, capable of withstanding a certain amount of cold. Mu Zixuan had recently practiced the Dragon-Phoenix Yin-Yang Spell with him, which transformed her body to a certain extent. Her constitution had greatly improved from before, enhancing her cold resistance as well.

But Zhou Xiaozhou and Zhou Youyou were different; they were completely ordinary

people.

During the meal, Lu Chen looked at Zhou Xiaozhou and Zhou Youyou, asking, "Xiaoxiao, Youyou, do you get cold when sleeping at night?"

Upon hearing this question, the sisters were taken aback. Zhou Xiaoxiao then answered, "Reporting to the Prince, we have maids responsible for burning firewood all night, so it's not very cold."

Hearing this, Lu Chen couldn't help but think that the ordinary people of North City had been living there for so many years, yet their heating method was still braziers, without even a kang bed-stove.

It was the same when building the North Prince Mansion. Basically, the entire structure of the North Prince Mansion was the same as that in the Capital city, all wooden houses with drafty windows and also without kang bed-stoves.

It would be strange if ordinary people weren't freezing at night.

It seemed he needed to come up with a solution to this problem.

After dinner.

Lu Chen took a hot bath and then went directly to the northern courtyard.

At this moment, Xiaozhou was warming herself by the brazier while holding a child. Seeing the door open, Xiaozhou immediately stood up, "Prince, you have arrived." Lu Chen walked over to Youyou and hugged her delicate body. With her height of only one meter sixty, she appeared very petite next to Lu Chen. Lu Chen smiled and said, "Youyou, you must be too cold sleeping alone at night. Let me help you warm up." Hearing this, Youyou and the maidservant responsible for the firewood immediately blushed. How could they not understand the implication of Lu Chen's words? Immediately, Youyou handed the child over to the wet nurse to be taken to her sister, Zhou Xiaoxiao's room. Their rooms were in the northern courtyard and next to each

other.

Usually, when Lu Chen visited Youyou's room, she would hand over the child to Xiaoxiao to look after, and when he went to Xiaoxiao's room, she would do likewise

with Youyou.

After the child was taken away, Youyou whispered in Lu Chen's embrace, "Prince, I'll go warm the bed for you first."

Lu Chen smiled slightly, then swept up the petite and exquisite Youyou in a bridal carry, heading straight toward the bed, "No need, I'm not cold."

"Instead, my precious Youyou has been shivering all day. Let me help raise your

temperature."

Youyou, feeling shy, buried her head in Lu Chen's chest. Even though she was already

Lu Chen's woman, she still felt very timid in front of him, perhaps because he was so

formidable.

Afterwards, Lu Chen indeed helped raise Youyou's temperature, and soon she no longer felt the cold. Instead, she was so warm she broke out in a sweat.

[Host cultivated affection with Zhou Youyou once, Qi Refinement Mantra experience increased by 60, Rejuvenating Skill experience increased by 60, Dragon-Phoenix Yin-Yang Spell experience increased by 60.]

[Zhou Youyou successfully conceived the host's child, rewarded with coal mining and

processing technology.]

[The pregnancy reward is an encouragement, hoping the host will ensure the child's safe birth. A richer reward will be granted upon the safe delivery of the child.] Upon hearing the system prompt, Lu Chen's eyes brightened.

The system was indeed giving him what he needed just when he was worrying about

how to solve the heating problem for ordinary people in winter. He had not expected that the system would reward him so quickly with coal mining and processing technology.

Chapter 190: War Breaks Out i

Early in the morning, at the break of dawn.

The sky was still a dusky grey.

Lu Chen rode his horse straight to the area where the craftsmen lived and handed over some materials on coal mining and processing to Mo Fei for research.

Afterwards, Lu Chen discussed the construction of heated kang beds and heated rooms with Mo Fei, delving into the details for an entire day with the craftsmen.

This once again made the craftsmen of Great Yu City feel the sincerity of the North Prince; ordinarily, when the North Prince wanted to discuss something with them, he would simply have them come to the North Prince Mansion. Yet, early this morning, he braved the cold wind to come to their living quarters to discuss matters with them.

A few days later.

North Prince Mansion.

Lu Chen was perusing intelligence gathered by the Brocade Guard in his study when a maid's voice sounded from the doorway, "Prince, Commander Qin requests an audience."

Lu Chen immediately responded, "Come in."

Following that, Qin Yushan entered, his body covered with snow, the cold having intensified today accompanied by a heavy snowfall.

After stepping into the room, Qin Yushan gave a simple salute.

“Greetings, Prince.”

After bowing, Qin Yushan at once placed the bamboo tube containing intelligence on the desk, “Prince, urgent dispatch from the Capital City!”

Hearing this, Lu Chen, who was looking through Da Yue intelligence, paused for a moment.

Regaining his composure, Lu Chen swiftly brushed aside the other reports on the desk and promptly opened the bamboo tube, extracting the intelligence it contained.

Commander Qin continued, “Winter has arrived, and not a single homing pigeon from the Capital City has reached Yan County; they can only have the Brocade Guard deliver messages on horseback, so the intelligence from the Capital City has been delayed by many days.”

After taking out the intelligence from the bamboo tube, Lu Chen scrutinized the contents carefully. As his gaze traveled down the page, his expression grew more solemn.

Having read the content of the intelligence, Lu Chen pondered for a moment before saying to Commander Qin, “Notify Li Rui and the others to come to the North Prince Mansion immediately to discuss important matters.”

“Yes, Prince.”

An hour later.

Li Rui and other officials along with a host of military generals from North City appeared in Lu Chen’s study.

They were all somewhat curious; today wasn’t the day for a scheduled meeting. Why had the North Prince summoned them? Could it be that the North Fre King had already headed south?

After everyone had arrived, Lu Chen did not speak immediately. His gaze was still scanning the map on the desk, seemingly contemplating something.

Seeing Lu Chen’s serious expression, everyone also kept silent, simply standing in the study watching Lu Chen, waiting for him to speak first.

Awhile later, Lu Chen realized that everyone had assembled. He glanced at them and then said, “The intelligence I’ve just received is that Great Xia and Great Wu have gone to war.”

Upon hearing Lu Chen’s words, everyone was shocked still.

How could this be?

The great dynasties had been at peace for countless years, although there had been constant friction, there had never been a major war.

Why would Great Wu and Great Xia suddenly erupt into war at this time?

Mu Changtian immediately asked, “Prince, was it Great Wu that initiated the attack?”

It was clear to anyone with eyes that the Sum Emperor’s next move was to deal with the Aristocratic Families within Great Sum, so the Sum Emperor would definitely not initiate a war at this time. Therefore, the only possibility was that it was Great Wu that initiated the attack on Great Sum.

Upon hearing Mu Changtian’s question, Lu Chen shook his head and then said, “Strangely enough, it turned out that it was us, Great Sum, who started the war. The intelligence sent from the Capital city took me a moment to digest.”

This...

Everyone in the study room looked at each other, uncertain of what to say.

They also found it hard to believe that Great Sum would initiate a war at this time. Would the Sum Emperor still deal with the Aristocratic Families then?

At this point, Li Rui spoke up, “Prince, could there be an error in the intelligence? With the internal unrest already brewing within Great Sum, how could His Majesty choose to attack Great Wu at this time?”

Lu Chen said, “The intelligence is most likely accurate. The problem lies with the one who provoked the war.”

“A month ago, the major dynasties had already been secretly mobilizing troops, with Great Jue Dynasty having stationed two hundred thousand soldiers at the border with North City.”

“I suspect that someone colluded with Great Wu Dynasty, intentionally provoking the war, thus giving Great Wu a pretext to attack Great Sum,” he said.

With Lu Chen’s explanation, everyone quickly understood.

Indeed, the Sum Emperor would definitely not want to wage a war at this time. He intended to purge the Ancient Families within his realm. If a war were to be waged now, how could he carry out his plans against those Ancient Families?

So, it was more likely that some Aristocratic Family had colluded with Great Wu to instigate the war.

The Great Wu Dynasty might not necessarily aim to defeat the Great Sum Dynasty, but as long as they could pressure Great Sum sufficiently, those Aristocratic Families within would likely offer Great Wu many benefits.

If faced with external pressure, the Sum Emperor would ultimately have to compromise with these families, abandoning the idea of purging the Ancient Families.

However, Lu Chen didn't believe it was that simple.

At that moment, Lu Chen turned to Mu Changtian and said, "General Mu, although you are a Military General, you have served as an official in the Capital city for many years and are familiar with the political environment there. In your analysis, if it were the Aristocratic Families who instigated the war between Great Wu and Great Sum, what would the ultimate goal be?"

On hearing this question, Mu Changtian answered, "According to your subject, there are three possibilities."

"The first possibility is naturally to use external pressure to coerce His Majesty, preventing him from taking major actions against the Aristocratic Families."

"The second possibility is that the Aristocratic Families would like to take this opportunity to unite with other Princes and directly force His Majesty to abdicate the throne for a more compliant Emperor. However, this is the least likely, as current factions led by the Princes are still in existence, and no one will acknowledge the others at this time, so promoting any Prince to the throne could lead to the disintegration of Great Sum."

"As for the third possibility..."

At this point, Mu Changtian hesitated, but ultimately he continued, "Lately, a popular argument I've heard is that you, Prince, were sent to North City by the Emperor himself, so the fifty thousand Black Cavalry aren't actually yours but belong to the Emperor."

"Even the common people of North City believe this, so those Aristocratic Families almost certainly think the same."

“Therefore, I believe the Aristocratic Families might use this opportunity to convince His Majesty to deploy the fifty thousand Heavy Cavalry to the front lines to exhaust themselves against the Great Wu Dynasty,” he postulated.

“The Great Wu Dynasty is known for its aggressive militarism, maintaining an army of several million year-round, and their strength is not inferior to the northern Barbarian Tribe, and they might even be more difficult to deal with.”

“Although the fifty thousand Heavy Cavalry are strong, if they were to be sent to the front lines to wage a war of attrition against Great Wu, within less than a year’s time, they could potentially be completely depleted.”

In fact, not only the common people and the Aristocratic Families, but even Mu Changtian had thought for a time whether Lu Chen was a chess piece specially sent by the Sum Emperor to North City, because Lu Chen did not have the ability to build fifty thousand Heavy Cavalry in a short period.

However, once Mu Changtian learned of the existence of Great Yu City, he dismissed the idea.

But others in Great Sum didn’t know about the existence of Great Yu City, so in their eyes, only the Sum Emperor had the capability to endow North City with fifty thousand Heavy Cavalry. Therefore, to others, these fifty thousand Heavy Cavalry might as well be the private army of the Sum Emperor himself..