

Finest 241

Chapter 241 The Assault

Hundreds of men, hauling several carts of provisions and two heavy cannons, were bound to travel slowly. Furthermore, General Lin intentionally delayed their march, causing them to stop and start, dividing their time between marching and training. It was a very leisurely journey.

Du Xiuyuan and Hu Bugui had put in great efforts to train these few hundred soldiers into an elite force. Both men seemed to have their own unique approach; after training individual soldiers, they began to practice formations, refusing to let anyone lag behind. Their strict implementation of a 'last place elimination' system was uncompromising. Indeed, on the first day, nearly twenty percent of the soldiers didn't get dinner. This fueled a marked rise in enthusiasm for training on the second day, and even more so on the third. The two officers were delighted by the progress, giving a thumbs-up and praising General Lin's methods as an exemplary model for soldiers.

Lin Wanrong, however, held a different perspective; he trained his soldiers not for the purpose of killing the enemy, but to have a fallback plan in case they needed to retreat. He entrusted Hu Bugui and Du Xiuyuan with his men, allowing himself a relaxed and leisurely attitude.

They made slow progress on this journey, passing through Fengyang, Suzhou, Huaibei, and other places, and only reached Xuzhou after five days. Upon arrival, they learned that Xu Wei had set out the previous night for Feng County. With no other choice, Lin Wanrong had to lead his troops forward, embarking on what seemed more like a sightseeing tour than a military expedition.

"Starting from yesterday, Master Xu led cavalry and infantry from Zhejiang and Shandong, attacking from the north through Yuncheng, Ningyang, and Sishui, and from the south through Dingtao, Tengzhou, and Shanting. They are squeezing the White Lotus Sect's forces between Ju Ye, Jining, and Zou Cheng, effectively surrounding them. Master Xu just sent the latest orders, instructing us to reach Feng County tomorrow to join his main force," Hu Bugui explained, pointing at the crude military map.

Having been born and bred in the field, he was quite familiar with the topography and took the lead in explaining the current situation to Lin Wanrong, Li Sheng, and Du Xiuyuan.

The current position of Lin Wanrong's three camps was in Pei County, just a few dozen li away from Xu Wei's frontline camp in Feng County. Lin Wanrong wasn't particularly interested in these

geographical details, yet he listened to Hu Bugui's explanation, all the while suppressing several yawns.

Du Xiuyuan said, "We're only fifty to sixty li away from Master Xu's camp. If we march early tomorrow, we can deliver the provisions and cannons to Master Xu, and our mission will be accomplished."

Hu Bugui, however, had a different view: "Looking at the situation, our army just closed in yesterday. The White Lotus Sect didn't even have time to resist. By the time we deliver these supplies tomorrow, Master Xu might have already reached Jining and wiped out the White Lotus Sect's stronghold. Our lads have trained hard these days, yet they haven't had the chance to test their skills in battle. It's quite a disappointment."

Lin Wanrong patted Hu Bugui's shoulder, laughing: "Brother Hu, I understand how you feel. But war means people die, and these are all our brothers. I would grieve if any of them got hurt. It's better for everyone to be safe and sound. Ideally, this war would never reach us, and everyone could go back home to celebrate the New Year in peace."

Although General Lin was efficient in his duties, these words revealed a lack of ambition. Hu Bugui couldn't help but shake his head, a hint of disdain seeping into his thoughts.

"Brothers, give the order. We will camp here today. We'll set up camp in the formations practiced under Du Xiuyuan's guidance and reinforce our defenses, especially outside the generals camps. We must strengthen our patrols. After all, this is a war zone. It's always good to be prepared. In case there's any disturbance, the safety of our general is paramount. Ah, haha, let's leave it at that," Lin Wanrong said earnestly.

"Just admit you're scared of dying instead of making excuses," Hu Bugui muttered disdainfully, a hint of contempt flashing in his eyes. In contrast, Du Xiuyuan voiced his agreement, "General Lin is absolutely correct. This place is currently under the control of the White Lotus Cult and is located close to Weishan Lake. These bandits are familiar with the terrain and could potentially launch a sneak attack under cover of night, which would be difficult to prevent."

Hu Bugui was candid, and despite his demotion from a commander of a thousand men to a commander of a hundred, he hadn't become any more restrained. But then again, anyone competent tended to have a strong personality. Just like me, thought Lin Wanrong with a smirk as he ordered his troops to set up camp securely.

Pei County was adjacent to Weishan Lake. It was dusk, and as the setting sun cast its last light and the cool breeze blew, Lin Wanrong exhaled comfortably. Suddenly remembering a popular old song, he began to sing in a loud voice, "Oh, Weishan Lake, shimmering golden light, fluffy clouds floating like cotton "

He had only sung a few lines when laughter erupted from his soldiers, who were practicing their drills and found his unusual tune amusing.

General Lin was well known for his camaraderie, and his lack of pretentiousness, sincere treatment of his soldiers, and willingness to share their daily lives had earned him a reputation for cherishing his men like his own children. While his last-place elimination system may have seemed harsh, the improvement that the soldiers could feel in themselves through these days of training had actually ignited their passion. They no longer resented the system as much.

"Laugh all you want. Anyone who can sing better should step forward. I bet you guys are only good at singing in the brothels," Lin Wanrong jested lewdly.

Hearing the general joke with them, the soldiers cheered loudly, creating a lively atmosphere. Lin Wanrong had already taken Hu Bugui's advice, mixing the soldiers from Zhejiang and Shandong in a one-to-one ratio for training, and the results had been excellent. Among the cheering crowd were the educated soldiers from Zhejiang and the rugged ones from Shandong.

Seeing the young soldier who had stopped him during a night patrol, Lin Wanrong smiled and asked, "You're Xu Zhen, right?"

"Reporting to the general, I am indeed Xu Zhen," replied the boy, who was a standard-bearer despite being only fourteen or fifteen. He was competent enough to train a group of men much older than him.

Patting his shoulder, Lin Wanrong said, "Good job, Xu Zhen. At such a young age, you have shown great ability. You have a promising future. Keep training the men well. If you do well, I will recommend you to Marshal Xu to lead a group of a hundred or a thousand soldiers."

Xu Zhen was deeply moved by this young general's magnanimity and kindness, and he voiced out loud, "I am grateful for the general's nurturing kindness."

Lin Wanrong nodded approvingly, thinking to himself that although he was not particularly adept in battlefield warfare, nurturing talents were well within his capabilities. Fortunately, the three

Commanders under him were all capable individuals, and Xu Zhen was an emerging talent. He definitely needed to recommend Xu Zhen to Xu Wei.

Gao Qiu, who followed Lin Wanrong closely, noticed a satisfied grin on his face. Unable to contain himself, he chuckled, "Brother Lin, you seem particularly cheerful today."

Lin Wanrong let out a hearty laugh, "Brother Gao, the beauty of Weishan Lake is simply delightful. Why not enjoy a little boat ride with me?" Seeing Lin Wanrong in such high spirits, Gao Qiu didn't protest, and found a small boat nearby. Hu Bugui, noticing the two were about to venture onto the lake, quickly warned, "General Lin, it's getting late and Weishan Lake might not be safe. If there are bandits lurking, it would spell trouble."

Lin Wanrong, with a face of righteousness, responded, "Brother Hu, you misunderstand. My intention in exploring the lake is to investigate the potential bandit presence. I suspect..." His eyes flickered, then he mysteriously added, "The lake could be a hiding place for the enemy."

Upon hearing Lin Wanrong's conjecture, Hu Bugui expressed his skepticism, "General Lin, there's something you don't understand. It's already winter. If these bandits were hiding in Weishan Lake, it would certainly be a dead end for them."

"Why is that so?" Lin Wanrong asked curiously.

"Please look, General," Hu Bugui pointed at the dense reeds in the lake and declared loudly, "I was born near Weishan Lake and I'm very familiar with its terrain. The lake stretches tens of miles, and the reeds are a good hiding place. But now it's winter and the reeds have withered. If they are truly hiding in Weishan Lake, all I have to do is set the reeds on fire, and they will have nowhere to hide. Even if we can't annihilate them all with fire, as long as our army stands firm and adopts a scorched-earth policy, within a month, when the heavy snow falls, the bandits hiding in the lake will die from hunger and cold. They won't be able to survive this winter, even without us hunting them down. Therefore, I don't believe they would be foolish enough to choose a path to their own deaths." Hu Bugui's reasoning seemed sound.

Damn, all I wanted was a leisurely boat ride, and here's Hu giving me a myriad of reasons not to, Lin Wanrong thought. He responded with a serious face, "Brother Hu, your words make sense. But you're applying conventional wisdom here. These White Lotus rebels are cunning and deceptive. Perhaps they might exploit your line of thought, swiftly moving in and out of the lake, catching us off guard. It's a possibility."

Hu Bugui hesitated for a moment. General Lin's words also seemed to carry a lot of weight. He nodded and said, "Then I will accompany the general on this venture."

Seeing Hu Bugui's determined expression, Lin Wanrong, not wanting to refuse, nodded back with a smile. The three of them embarked on the small boat and set off into the distance. Although Hu Bugui was known for his brashness, he was an excellent swimmer, so he was entrusted with the task of rowing the boat, which moved very steadily. Gao Qiu, despite his martial prowess, was a poor swimmer, so he stood firmly by Lin Wanrong's side.

Nowhere was there a divide between the lake and the sky; they merged into one under the setting sun, which cast a bloody red hue onto the water. A gentle breeze blew, causing the reeds to sway and rustle softly, sounding much like the whimper of a baby. A few late-returning waterbirds flapped their wings, disappearing into the dense clusters of reeds in the blink of an eye. Besides their little boat, the lake was desolate. The soft splashing of their oars against the water seemed to echo from an infinite distance. In the midst of the crimson sunset and lone waterbirds, Weishan Lake appeared as tranquil and serene as a shy maiden.

Lin Wanrong yawned lazily. The continuous marching over the past few days had exhausted him. Today's boat trip on the lake offered a bit of relaxation. Seeing Gao Qiu continuously scanning their surroundings, Lin Wanrong laughed and asked, "Brother Gao, under such scenery, what is it that you wish to do most?"

"Drink wine, visit a brothel!" Gao Qiu answered without hesitation. Hu Bugui, who was rowing the boat, burst into hearty laughter, "Indeed, Brother Gao is a man of forthright character!"

Damn, you two crude individuals, amidst such beautiful scenery, can't you think of something more refined? A bath with your partner would suffice; why would you want to visit a brothel? Lin Wanrong shook his head helplessly. He was indeed more cultured than these two youngsters.

As dusk set in, the trio rowed their boat farther from the shore, close to a reed bed. Hu Bugui began to search the surroundings seriously. The area was desolate and eerily silent, not even a bird's shadow in sight. After listening carefully for a while, he shook his head and said, "General Lin, there's no one in the reeds."

Damn, of course, I know there's no one there. I originally came out to enjoy the scenery, not to look for people. He was about to respond when a soft sound reached his ears. The sound seemed to come from afar, but Lin Wanrong's martial arts skills were decent, and his hearing was exceptional. Although the sound was faint, he could hear it clearly.

"Brother Gao, do you hear any sounds?" Lin Wanrong asked Gao Qiu.

Gao Qiu nodded, "It sounds like the splashing of oars, some distance away from us."

The three looked around but saw no trace of any boats. However, the sound of the oars was becoming increasingly clear and louder. It didn't sound like a single oar, but rather like millions of small oars simultaneously striking the water's surface.

In the distance, several waterbirds that had settled in for the night suddenly flew out from the reeds, their flapping wings making a rustling sound.

"Look!" Hu Bugui exclaimed.

Following the direction of his pointing hand, Lin Wanrong saw countless small boats emerging from the reeds hundreds of yards away. Each boat held dozens of men, holding steel blades, looking murderous. A rough sweep of his gaze estimated at least a hundred boats, nearly a thousand men.

"Brother Hu, for this clearance operation, did Marshal Xu bring any naval forces?" Lin Wanrong asked, his voice shaking slightly.

"Yes, but they are all large ships. This group doesn't match our navy's scale. They look like" his eyes widened as he realized, "White Lotus Cult, these are members of the White Lotus Cult!"

Damn, you're a bit slow on the uptake, old man, Lin Wanrong thought as he swallowed hard.

"What do we do, Brother Lin?" Gao Qiu asked urgently.

"Escape!" General Lin answered promptly, "Brother Hu, what are you waiting for? Start rowing!"

Coming to his senses, Hu Bugui took up the oars and turned the boat around, laughing heartily as he rowed, "General Lin, your foresight is remarkable. As you predicted, the White Lotus Sect indeed set an ambush on the lake. I'm thoroughly impressed." He seemed to grow more gleeful as he laughed, glancing back and spitting excitedly into the lake, "Damn it, I was just worried about not finding those bastards. Who would've thought they'd deliver themselves to us? My lads finally have their chance. Today, I will wipe them all out."

Damn it, Lin Wanrong finally lost his patience, delivering a swift kick to Hu's rear, "If you delay any further, instead of us wiping them out, we'll be the ones to get ravished by them."

Hu Bugui, admiring Lin Wanrong's foresight, simply laughed it off, putting more strength into his strokes. The boat shot towards the shore like an arrow.

Looking back, Lin Wanrong saw hundreds of boats also pushing forward, rapidly closing the distance.

Dammit, he slapped his forehead in frustration. He had only casually suggested a boat ride on the lake, he hadn't anticipated attracting the White Lotus cult, and especially not a thousand of them. Were they trying to kill him?

The three of them pulled their boat ashore, with Lin Wanrong leading the charge. He yelled, "Du Xiuyuan, form up! Li Sheng, aim the cannons, target the lake, prepare to fire--"

"Charge--" A thunderous roar erupted from the White Lotus soldiers chasing them. Hundreds of boats lunged forward. Lin Wanrong and his comrades had just reached the shore when they turned to see an army pressing toward them.

Breathing heavily, Du Xiuyuan arrived, and hundreds of Divine Machine Unit soldiers quickly formed up, bows and arrows aimed at the lake.

"General Lin, where did these enemies come from? There are so many of them!" Du Xiuyuan asked anxiously.

Lin Wanrong's face was ashen. Dammit, they've sprouted out of nowhere, if it wasn't for my bad luck today, I wouldn't have known until they had stabbed me in the ass.

"General Lin saw it coming. He foresaw this enemy attack." Hu Bugui truly admired General Lin at this point. Despite his laid-back appearance, General Lin had been prepared. Waving his hand, Hu said, "My boys, ready your weapons--"

At the critical moment, the daily drills came into play. The soldiers quickly formed their ranks, their eyes fixed nervously on the lake.

Dammit, they're all green recruits, Lin Wanrong thought, watching his six to seven hundred men. Most of them were newly enlisted young soldiers, their faces still showing traces of youth. Although their formation was solid, their eyes betrayed their fear.

"Brother Du, did you send for help?" Lin Wanrong shouted.

"General, as soon as we discovered the enemy attack, I dispatched a fast horse to request aid from Marshal Xu, sixty li away," Du Xiuyuan hastily replied.

General Lin nodded approvingly. This Du Xiuyuan was reliable and instilled a sense of confidence.

Hu Bugui cast a serious glance at the approaching White Lotus army and said, "General Lin, the formation of the White Lotus Army is well-organized and disciplined, certainly not a motley crew. They appear to be their elite troops."

"Elite?" Lin Wanrong almost fainted, "I only have a few hundred straggling soldiers and some hay. What do these elites want with me? They should go to Old Xu if they dare. Damnit, picking on us fresh recruits does not make them heroes."

"Brother Gao, what's the punishment for deserting in the face of battle?" Lin Wanrong quietly asked.

"Immediate execution!" Gao Qiu whispered back.

Damn it, who made such an inhumane rule? Is there no justice left in the world? He thought to himself, If we can't win, I'm certainly going to lead my men to escape.

"General Lin, we're just spare troops transporting warhorses and fodder. We're few in number. How could the elite troops of the White Lotus Army come for us? They seem to have been lurking for quite some time" Du Xiuyuan asked, furrowing his brows. Always calm in the face of crisis and adept at strategizing, he had the makings of a military advisor.

Lin Wanrong was watching Li Sheng adjust the cannon's angle when he abruptly cut his own sentence short, his face turning pale, "The cannons, they're after the cannons"

Jolted by this realization, Du Xiuyuan said, "We're by the lake. After seizing the cannons, they could conveniently transport it away by boat"

"Maybe it's not as simple as fleeing far away" Lin Wanrong shook his head, "We're only fifty or sixty miles from Marshal Xu's main camp. If they turned around and fired the cannon at the main camp"

"Their target is Marshal Xu" The sudden realization made Gao Qiu, Du Xiuyuan, and Hu Bugui jump in surprise. It was a bold conjecture, one that could only come from a person with exceptional intelligence like General Lin. But upon reflection, it made perfect sense.

Originally, Hu Bugui didn't think highly of this seemingly carefree young general. But upon hearing his incisive remarks, he was impressed by Lin Wanrong's true ability. He bowed in reverence, sincerely saying, "General Lin, I, Hu Bugui, acknowledge your superiority wholeheartedly. I will follow your command."

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, holding Hu Bugui up, and loudly said to his soldiers, "Brothers, do not panic! This is a stratagem planned by Marshal Xu. He lured the White Lotus Army here on purpose. Marshal Xu, leading tens of thousands of soldiers, has already encircled the enemy. In an hour, they will be wiped out. All we need to do is hold for an hour! My Divine Machine Unit camp has prepared several giant cannons and thousands of cannonballs. Let's show them the might of the cannons. Li Sheng"

Seeing that the White Lotus Army had entered the range of the cannons, Lin Wanrong shouted, "Fire the cannon"

Li Sheng had already adjusted the angles of the two cannons. Hearing General Lin's command, he lit the fuses simultaneously. The cannonballs roared into the sky, carrying a whistling sound, striking two of the advancing boats. Amidst the thunderous noise, the wooden boats shattered, killing more than twenty White Lotus soldiers instantly.

"Well done!" Li Sheng's successful shot greatly boosted the morale of the troops. The soldiers from the three camps cheered in unison, their fear of the enemy dissipating like smoke.

Li Sheng continued to fire several rounds. Each shot hit its mark, sinking over a dozen of the White Lotus Army's boats in the blink of an eye. At the same time, over a hundred rockets from the Divine Machine Unit were launched simultaneously, causing dozens more White Lotus rebels to fall into the water. In this round of relentless assault, the White Lotus Army had already lost nearly twenty

percent of its forces before they could even reach the shore. The fervor of the soldiers from the three camps rose dramatically, itching to join the fight and engage in a fierce battle with the enemy.

"Brothers, the time has come to make our mark. Hold for an hour, and you'll be promoted to command hundreds, thousands, even tens of thousands. You will have countless lands and beauties at your disposal. What are you waiting for? Charge with me!" Lin Wanrong bellowed.

General Lin's stirring words were brazen and effective. Most of the soldiers were in their mid-teens, brimming with youthful vigor. They couldn't resist such instigation. Their blood was already boiling. Seeing General Lin, holding a short weapon with two barrels, charging bravely at the forefront, they felt greatly encouraged. They charged toward the enemy like a group of fierce tigers descending from the mountain.

"General Lin, you're the leader of the army. You shouldn't rashly charge into battle," Hu Bugui sprinted a few steps to catch up with Lin Wanrong, grabbing his sleeve tightly.

Damn, this guy finally catch up. Otherwise, I would have had no choice but to charge ahead.

"Let go of me, let go of me," Lin Wanrong took a few steps back, his face expressing passionate resolution. "My brothers need me, the country needs me, Great Hua needs me"

"A brave man" Hu Bugui's eyes filled with tears. He forcefully pushed Lin Wanrong back a few steps and raised his hand, "Brothers, charge with me!" His robust figure, like a mountain, lunged forward.

Chapter 242 Burning Beast Blood

"Brother Lin, on the battlefield, your short weapon might be inconvenient. Try this instead," said Gao Qiu, who was close to Lin Wanrong, handing him a gleaming steel blade.

Damn, you think I'm really going to charge into the battle, I'm a man with a brain. Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Brother Gao, please take your blade back. I can't stand such a lethal weapon."

Seeing Lin's smiling face, seemingly devoid of fear, Gao Qiu couldn't help admiring him. "Facing a formidable enemy, yet Brother Lin can remain so calm and composed. I truly admire you," he said.

As they were conversing, the White Lotus Army's boats were overturned again by Li Sheng's artillery fire. However, they had many boats and people, and dozens of vanguard boats had reached the shore. Hundreds of White Lotus soldiers charged forth.

Having experienced numerous battles, Hu Bugui had already formed a formation with his soldiers. Watching the enemy charge, he shouted, "Release the arrows!"

The arrows from the Divine Machine Unit flew like locusts toward the White Lotus soldiers who had landed first. The rigorous training of the Divine Machine Unit over the past few days had paid off, as White Lotus soldiers fell one after another, their screams of agony echoing around.

After five rounds of arrows, the White Lotus soldiers who had landed first suffered heavy losses. The boats still in the lake kept advancing. This time they were smarter, with the remaining dozens of boats attacking from different directions, clearly attempting to disperse the government troops' firepower. The White Lotus Army had lost nearly thirty percent of its force, but the remaining numbers still outnumbered the government troops, and their attacks had become even fiercer and braver. Their speed had increased, making it difficult for Divine Machine Unit's cannons to hit their mark.

Lin Wanrong, guarded by Gao Qiu, was some distance from the lake. After carefully observing for a while, he located a boat in the middle with only four or five people on it, seemingly commanding the White Lotus Army.

"Brother Gao, my vision isn't great. Can you tell me if there's a woman on that boat?" Lin Wanrong asked Gao Qiu.

Gao Qiu also noticed this boat. He stared for a while before shaking his head, "There doesn't seem to be a woman, Brother Lin. What do you want with a woman?"

Damn, what else would you want with a woman other than to make her your wife? Knowing that Xian'er was not on the boat, Lin Wanrong heaved a sigh of relief and shouted to Li Sheng, "Aim for that boat. Fire both cannons simultaneously. You must hit it, sink it!"

"At your command!" Li Sheng roared, quickly turned the cannon, aimed at the boat Lin had pointed out, and fired two shots. Unfortunately, the enemy leader's boat moved swiftly, and both shots missed.

Damn, these guys are even craftier than weasels. Lin Wanrong drew a musket from his pocket. He aimed at the few people on the boat from a distance. Unfortunately, the distance was too far, and the musket was of no use for now. Gao Qiu, seeing him pull out that mysterious short weapon again, asked curiously, "Brother Lin, what kind of weapon is that?"

"A peerless hidden weapon in the world," Lin Wanrong chuckled. He loaded the gunpowder, carefully checked it, and put it back into his pocket.

Gao Qiu was puzzled and confused, about to speak, when he heard Hu Bugui's loud voice from ahead, "The enemy has landed, brothers, prepare"

Upon hearing this, Lin Wanrong hurriedly looked in the direction of the sound. After paying a heavy price, the small boats of the White Lotus Army finally reached the shore. Soldiers surged forward like a tide. These soldiers had white turbans wrapped around their heads, their movements were swift, their expressions fierce, and at a glance, one could tell they were no ordinary men.

Damn, who designed this hairstyle for the White Lotus Sect, trying to look like Arabs? Lin Wanrong quickly walked up to Hu Bugui and asked, "Brother Hu, what's the situation?"

A solemn look crossed Hu Bugui's face as he said, "General Lin, this White Lotus Army is well-trained. Today's battle will be particularly difficult. But our soldiers are not easy to deal with either. Today, we will fight them to the end, without any retreat."

No, no, don't fight to the end. If we can't win, we should run. That's the smart thing to do. As for the heavy and ugly cannons, if we lose them, we lose them. At worst, we'll have Old Xu move quickly. What can the White Lotus Army do?

While he was lost in thought, he heard Du Xiuyuan shout, "Change formation"

After several rounds of arrow rain, the White Lotus Army had desperately charged to the front of the official army. The arrows of the Divine Machine Unit were no longer effective, and the long spear soldiers of the Infantry Camp were the first line of defense.

Hu Bugui pointed with his sword and shouted, "Boys, charge with me" He led the charge, casually knocking down two enemy soldiers. His full beard stood on end, making him look like a fierce Zhang Fei with a black face, his aura was intimidating, truly impressive. Following him was the young Xu Zhen. Despite his youth, he was not sloppy, his sword whirling, and in the blink of an eye, he had cut down several White Lotus soldiers. Following them were the elite soldiers trained

by Hu Bugui, based on Shandong soldiers and mixed with the best of Zhejiang soldiers. They were paired in twos, cooperating with each other, and were the most powerful force in Lin Wanrong's three camps.

When the two armies clashed, the collision of swords and spears created a huge noise. The shouts of the soldiers from both armies echoed in the ears, interspersed with a few piercing screams. A young Zhejiang soldier and a White Lotus bandit fell at the same time, their blood flowing freely, staining the riverbank red. The fallen soldier's companion, a boy of sixteen or seventeen, saw his brother, who had been laughing and joking with him just the day before, fall under the sword. His face was filled with shock and unwillingness. He seemed to go mad, his eyes bloodshot, and with a loud shout, he threw himself at his opponent with his sword, cutting down the bandit. But in the blink of an eye, he too was cut down by the enemy.

The brutal melee had finally begun. A ragtag government army against the elite of the White Lotus Sect, no one knew what would happen. These young soldiers were about to face a test of life and death. Those who fell would never rise again, and those who survived would become phoenixes reborn from the ashes.

This was Lin Wanrong's first experience in such a true and brutal battle. Although he had fought with Hung Hing before, those were brawls that couldn't compare to the violent spectacle unfolding before his eyes. He had already made up his mind that he would flee if they couldn't hold the enemy back, but he was not one to lack courage. Looking at the heart-wrenching and tragic scenes in front of him, he felt a strange sense of integration, as if it was only at this moment that he truly blended into the army he was leading. If he ran today, he would be utterly unworthy of being a man.

Gazing at the young faces, watching their bodies slowly fall, seeing their blood-soaked bodies, Lin Wanrong felt as if a massive fire was burning within him, his blood boiling. He suddenly had the urge to scream aloud.

Biting his lip, he suddenly asked, "Brother Gao, what do you think of me?"

Gao Qiu was taken aback, not knowing why he asked this out of the blue. Seeing Lin San's eyes blazing red, his body exuding a fierce heat, he couldn't help but give a thumbs-up. "Brother Lin, you're the most extraordinary person I've ever met."

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily. "Well said, Brother Gao. Today, I want to share something about my wives with you. I have a wife in the capital, her name is Xiao Qingxuan. I also have a young wife in Jinling, named Qiaoqiao. And, I have some involvement with the Second Miss of the Xiao family. If I were to fall gloriously today, please tell them to remember me forever."

Gao Qiu exclaimed, "Brother Lin, why are you talking about this out of nowhere? What are you going to do?"

"Do?" Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Haven't you seen an old man kill before?"

He shrugged off his coat, and gripped a sword in his hand, radiating killing intent. He yelled, "Brothers, follow me into battle! Whoever dares to retreat is no son of mine."

While everyone was stunned, General Lin darted forward like the wind, charging straight into the White Lotus sect. Gao Qiu was the first to snap back to reality, shouting "Attack!" and closely followed Lin Wanrong.

Lin Wanrong and Gao Qiu led the charge, meeting two White Lotus soldiers head-on. With a swing of his arm, Lin Wanrong's sword brought a gust of wind that cleanly severed their necks. A gush of blood sprayed into the air, staining his armor.

Seeing this hot, red blood, Lin Wanrong shivered all over. He witnessed a young soldier before him, his spear piercing an enemy's chest, only to have his own abdomen sliced open by an enemy blade, blood and intestines spilling out. "Ah" Lin Wanrong shouted, swiftly swinging his sword, cleaving the sneaky enemy into two.

Seeing General Lin's bravery, Hu Bugui and his soldiers were greatly inspired, their fighting spirit increased tenfold. Though they were new soldiers who had just stepped onto the battlefield, they were evenly matched with the enemy. Both sides' casualties skyrocketed, and in a short period, the ground was awash with blood, turning Lake Weishan a horrifying shade of red.

Lin Wanrong's troops were all fresh recruits, mere greenhorns. Even though they had gone through training, the harsh realities of their first battlefield had dwindled their ranks by more than half within an hour. As he watched the young bodies falling one after another, their unwilling eyes and pained expressions haunting him, a tremor swept over Lin Wanrong. A surge of hot blood rushed to his head, threatening to explode. The burning primal instinct within him made him forget everything else. Only one thought echoed in his mind Kill!

"Screw your ancestors Lin Wanrong roared in fury, his eyes bloodshot. His sword swished into a wall of blades that chopped down several men in the blink of an eye. His internal strength was monstrous, his sword swing fierce, and he stormed into the enemy ranks, unstoppable. None could stand in his path. Gao Qiu, drenched in the blood of their enemies, loyally guarded his side.

Together, they were like gods of death descended from heaven, cutting a swath through the enemy lines. In such a bloody battle, martial arts skills had long since lost their importance, leaving only raw stamina and brutal force.

The attacking elite troops of the White Lotus sect hadn't expected such a fighting force from a ragtag army of elderly, weak, sick, and disabled soldiers. As the two sides were locked in stalemate, a loud shout echoed from the White Lotus ranks. A tall and imposing figure leaped into the air, shouting, "I am Meng Du, the bravest warrior of the White Lotus Sect. Who dares to fight me?"

"Fight your head." Lin Wanrong, already seeing red, shouted back. He pulled out his musket without bothering to aim, relying on instinct alone to fire. With a loud bang, a blossom of blood bloomed on the chest of the brave warrior, who crashed to the ground from mid-air.

The soldiers on both sides could hardly believe their eyes. How could Meng Du, the bravest warrior, be killed before the fight even truly began?

"General Meng is dead." The White Lotus army was suddenly plunged into panic as they lost their leader. Fear was evident on everyone's faces. Lin Wanrong paused, thinking how useless this so-called general was to be taken down so easily.

Hu Bugui, seeing that General Lin had killed the enemy leader, was overjoyed. He shouted, "General Lin's courage is unmatched. He has slain the enemy leader. The enemy will surely be defeated, and we will surely be victorious. Charge!"

The soldiers turned to look at General Lin. With a musket in his right hand and a sword in his left, his uniform stained red with blood, he stood there like an indomitable god of war.

"Burn the beast blood within you. Avenge our fallen brothers," Lin Wanrong rasped, his voice carrying a hint of chilling cruelty that seemed invincible.

"Avenge them!" The soldiers, emboldened by the rallying cry, charged like unleashed tigers at the White Lotus army. With their leader dead and their morale at an all-time low, the White Lotus army crumbled swiftly, becoming spirits beneath the blades of the Three Camps' soldiers.

"General Lin, our reinforcements have arrived." Du Xiuyuan, drenched in blood and grinning widely, came over to report.

"So they've arrived, but what do they expect, a welcoming party from me?" Lin Wanrong threw his long sword on the ground, not a hint of joy in his eyes. After this fierce battle, out of the initial six to seven hundred soldiers of the three camps, less than four hundred survived. Fighting against more than a thousand elite enemy troops with a makeshift army, and in an ambush at that, not only did they annihilate the enemy forces and kill their leader, but they also only suffered slightly over three hundred casualties. It could be seen as a glorious victory.

Yet, Lin Wanrong's face betrayed no signs of exultation. The faces of the three hundred or so fallen brothers were imprinted in his eyes. They were so young, yet they had died before they could even taste the sweetness of life.

A soft sobbing sound echoed ahead, accompanied by angry curses. Lin Wanrong looked to see Xu Zhen, his body drenched in blood, quietly weeping, while Hu Bugui was berating him, "What's there to cry about? People die in wars. If you want to avenge our brothers, kill more enemies next time."

Lin Wanrong approached them, "Xu, what happened?"

Through his tears, Xu Zhen managed, "General Lin, all my flag bearers are gone."

After all, Xu Zhen was just a fourteen or fifteen-year-old kid. The thought of his sixty flag bearers dying so suddenly was devastating.

"You are a soldier fighting for our nation, sobbing like this, what kind of example are you setting?" Hu Bugui scolded.

"Cry, so what? Who said soldiers aren't allowed to cry? I want to cry too, so what?" Lin Wanrong roared back, his eyes reddening.

Seeing General Lin on the brink of tears, the other soldiers could not hold back their own sorrow. The ferocity of the battle had turned them from fresh soldiers into veterans overnight.

Feeling a sting in his nose, Lin Wanrong called out, "Du Xiuyuan, Du Xiuyuan."

"Here, General!" Du Xiuyuan hurriedly replied.

"Gather the bodies of our fallen brothers. Leave nothing behind, not even a single hair, or you will face martial punishment," Lin Wanrong commanded sternly. Du Xiuyuan quickly acknowledged the order and set off to fulfill it.

Hu Bugui approached and reported, "General Lin, the Deputy General of the Cavalry Unit, Zhai Canghai, has brought five thousand reinforcements."

As Hu Bugui finished, the sound of hooves thundered from the distance, and countless cavalry rushed in. The general in front, with his clean, proud face, spurred his horse forward, "Are you the ones who requested reinforcements?"

Annoyed at the man's presumptuous face, Lin Wanrong grunted and remained silent. Hu Bugui responded, "General, we have just had a fierce battle with several thousand elite troops of the White Lotus Sect, and have annihilated all the bandits. We are now tallying the results of the battle."

"Annihilated? You, a bunch of forage transport?" Zhai Canghai and his officers burst into laughter at the report.

Chapter 243 No One Can Humiliate My Brother

Hu Bugui's face turned ashen, ready to lash out. But he was stopped by a tug on his sleeve. Turning his head, he saw General Lin shaking his head expressionlessly and walking away without a word. Hu Bugui let out a disgruntled grunt and followed behind Lin Wanrong.

Seeing that the two men in front of him ignored him, Zhai Canghai shouted, "You two are audacious! How dare you disrespect this general. What are your names?"

Without turning his head, Lin Wanrong continued forward. One of Zhai Canghai's officers flew into a rage, spurred his horse, and raised his whip at the two men, "How audacious of you! Our general is speaking to you"

"Shut your!" Lin Wanrong turned around suddenly, pulled the captain off his horse, and slammed his fist into his face. The wind from his fury-laden punch sent the officer reeling backward, a cry of agony echoing through the air as a bloom of blood erupted from his face. Lin Wanrong then kicked him away, a cruel glint in his eyes. His action stunned everyone. The cavalry soldiers were immediately riled up, and Zhai Canghai bellowed, "You dare to assault my subordinate, you worthless officer. Seize him"

Lin Wanrong had already returned to Li Sheng's side. Hu Bugui gritted his teeth, "This dog of mixed breed insulted my soldiers, I wish I could end him with one stroke."

Lin Wanrong's face was steely, and with a cold laugh, he said, "Brother Li, turn the cannons toward this cavalry, and let's have a couple of shots"

At this order, not only Li Sheng but also the chattering Hu Bugui was taken aback. Li Sheng hurriedly said, "General Lin, we mustn't. If we start infighting, we'll be the ones to suffer."

Lin Wanrong chuckled coldly, "Brother Li, just fire when I tell you to. I'll bear all the responsibility."

Hu Bugui's face flushed, "General Lin, you are the person I admire most. Fire at that son of a bitch. Count me in."

Gao Qiu said, "This Zhai guy is just a petty cavalry general, nothing to be impressed with. Fire a few shots, let him have a taste." As an imperial guard, he had seen countless senior officials and naturally looked down on someone as insignificant as Zhai Canghai.

Li Sheng gritted his teeth, aimed the cannons at the cavalry, and carefully fired two shots. The shells exploded just in front of the cavalry, only a few yards away from Zhai Canghai. His horse, frightened by the noise, reared up and almost unseated him. The horses of the cavalry soldiers who were about to seize Lin Wanrong also began to neigh and prance, nearly throwing their riders off.

"You've got some nerve, firing at my cavalry!" Zhai Canghai roared in rage, "If I don't teach you cowards a lesson today, I"

Just as he was speaking, he saw several platoons of soldiers approaching from afar. Their uniforms were tattered, and their bodies were covered in wounds. In pairs, they carried the bodies of fallen soldiers, slowly placing them in front of the camp. The surviving soldiers, their faces grimy and blood-stained, couldn't even maintain formation, looking like the true remnants of a battered army.

Then they looked at the fallen soldiers, their bodies bearing no unscathed spot. Some had lost limbs, heads, their innards ripped apart, some even lay entwined with their foes, dead yet inseparable. Most of these fallen warriors were but adolescents, their faces still bearing youthful innocence. The pain and resentment in their eyes pierced everyone's hearts like sharp needles.

The troop that had been responsible for delivering the supplies only consisted of six to seven hundred men. Yet, within one night, half had perished. The horrific scene sent a shiver down the spine of every cavalry commander.

"Reporting to the general, we lost 303 soldiers in this battle, and another 75 are seriously injured," Du Xiuyuan reported, his face grave.

Lin Wanrong clenched his teeth so hard they could've shattered. He stared at Zhai Canghai and asked through gritted teeth, "Is your surname Zhai?"

Zhai Canghai, unsure of his intention, arrogantly replied, "Yes, I am General Zhai-"

"Kneel!" Lin Wanrong suddenly roared.

Zhai Canghai paused, not knowing who he was addressing. Lin Wanrong pulled out his musket and fired a shot into the ground, creating a cloud of dust in front of Zhai's horse. "I told you to kneel!" he growled. Fresh from battle, his body was covered in blood, his expression ferocious, he looked like a god of death descended from the heavens.

"Kneel!" The surviving soldiers from the three battalions, clutching their notched steel blades and spears, despite the blood flowing from their bodies, screamed together at the cavalry. The resounding roar even startled the cavalry. These men, mere novices yesterday, had now transformed into grim reapers. They had never retreated when faced with enemies outnumbering them, never showing fear. Their fervor made them oblivious to the pain of their wounds. Though they were battered and bruised, the potent aura of death they emitted after the bloody battle was unstoppable, stunning the cavalry.

Startled, Zhai Canghai quickly backed away, "What are you doing? I am the deputy general of the cavalry, commanding five thousand soldiers-"

Ignoring him, Lin Wanrong lunged forward and yanked Zhai Canghai from his horse, growling, "I told you to kneel!"

"Kneel!" Gao Qiu, standing beside Lin Wanrong, bellowed and kicked Zhai Canghai in the knee. Canghai let out a scream and fell to his knees.

The cavalry commanders came to their senses and quickly surrounded the two men, "Arrest them, arrest them all--"

"For General Lin, charge!" Hu Bugui and Du Xiuyuan yelled together. The remaining three hundred warriors, their eyes bloodshot, charged into the cavalry's encirclement, protecting Lin Wanrong. The bloody battle the night before had united these soldiers who previously had held some reservations about each other. No matter where they came from - Zhejiang, Shandong, or the Divine Machine Unit - they were comrades-in-arms, and General Lin was their war god.

Unfazed by the encirclement, Lin Wanrong kicked Zhai Canghai, who had fallen on the ground, stepping on his face. He smirked and coldly ordered, "Tell your cavalry to dismount."

"How audacious! Are you planning a mutiny?" Several officers from the Cavalry Regiment surrounded the three hundred ragtag soldiers, shouting loudly.

Gao Qiu flashed his golden token and bellowed, "Nonsense! I'm a first-class imperial guard given by the Emperor himself. I am here to protect General Lin. Who dares to cross swords with me? Anyone not afraid of having their family seized may come forth!"

Upon revealing his identity, the cavalymen fell silent. Everyone knew the stature of a palace guard. If this General Lin had a first-class guard protecting him, his status must be significant indeed.

The trampled Zhai Canghai cried out, "You disrespect a superior officer, I will discipline you--"

"Your superior--" Lin Wanrong shouted, abruptly kicking out and yelling, "All cavalymen, dismount at once!"

Upon witnessing this young general who appeared fearless, the cavalymen were shocked. However, with their leader held captive, they had no choice but to follow the order. Five thousand men dismounted their horses.

Lin Wanrong roared, "Look carefully! Remember my face. I am Lin San, a military strategist under Xu Wei's command. Don't pretend not to recognize me in the future."

"This Zhai cur dared to insult my fallen brothers who gave their lives for the country. If I don't punish him today, I would be betraying the spirits of my countless brothers. My seven hundred brothers fought valiantly against thousands of White Lotus elites. We broke through enemy ranks,

killed the bravest warrior of the White Lotus, Meng Du, and numerous brothers fell here. Many were just teenagers, just teenagers!" Lin Wanrong cried out loudly, his eyes blazing red like a stack of dynamite ready to explode, kicking fiercely at Zhai Canghai's face. "Which one of my brothers wasn't a hero? Who gave you, this Zhai cur, the right to insult them? Damn it, what right do you have? I'll chop you up!"

In his fury, Lin Wanrong snatched a long saber, preparing to slash at Zhai Canghai's face. Gao Qiu desperately held him back, pleading, "Brother Lin, calm yourself!"

Tears filled the eyes of the three hundred ragtag soldiers as they recalled the bloody battle of the previous night. They all held their heads high, gazing at this young general they revered with utmost admiration.

Upon hearing Lin Wanrong's claim of killing the bravest White Lotus warrior, Meng Du, the cavalymen were taken aback. Meng Du and his elite forces were formidable fighters of the White Lotus Army. It was shocking that they were defeated by this group of weak and weary soldiers, and Meng Du himself had been killed. This revelation filled them with awe.

No wonder this young general was so brave. If he could kill Meng Du, how could he be weak? Even if he beheaded General Zhai, none would question his action. Soldiers had always revered the strong, and there was no longer any disdain for this battle-hardened regiment. The fallen soldiers on the ground represented the glory of the Great Hua Army in their eyes.

"Hu Bugui!" Lin Wanrong tossed his saber aside, calling out loudly.

"Present!" came the reply.

"Strike this Zhai cur in the mouth and break both his legs. Let him see who the hell is the real waste. No one can bully my brothers!" Lin Wanrong wiped away his tears, his voice laced with chilling menace that carried far into the distance. The remnants of the three camps cheered thunderously, while the Cavalry Regiment's soldiers remained as silent as cicadas in winter. None dared to respond.

"Understood!" Hu Bugui grabbed a plank and rushed forward, commencing a brutal assault on Zhai Canghai. Beating a superior officer was an indescribably satisfying experience.

Lin Wanrong pulled out the saber from Gao Qiu and, with a swift motion, beheaded Zhai Canghai's mount. Blood spurted out, "Insult my soldiers, I will behead your horse. Offend again, and I will take your dog life."

Despite their numbers, no one from the Cavalry Regiment dared to speak up. With this young general having killed Meng Du, his merit was unquestionable. Who could compare to him?

Lin Wanrong gazed at the fallen brothers and knelt down. Hu Bugui, Gao Chieftain, Du Xiuyuan, Li Sheng, and the remaining soldiers followed suit and knelt beside General Lin. The solemnity in the air was profound, even the warhorses didn't dare to neigh.

After completing the formal salute with utmost respect, Lin Wanrong rose to his feet, and bellowed, "Li Sheng, Hu Bugui, Du Xiuyuan--"

"Present!" the three answered loudly in unison.

"See our brothers off." Lin Wanrong said through gritted teeth.

The four men lifted the bodies of the fallen soldiers high above their heads and slowly proceeded forward. A line of ragtag soldiers followed behind, moving slowly. The well-disciplined five-thousand-strong Cavalry Regiment watched this tattered yet unified force, and they were struck by a strange sensation. This weak group seemed invincible.

Chapter 244 The Unsurpassable

Mounds of yellow soil covered the bodies of the young, drowning the remains of the fallen soldiers in the earth. The surviving three hundred soldiers, supporting each other, fell to their knees in the dirt, breaking into uncontrollable sobs.

Lin Wanrong took a jar of wine from Xu Zhen's hands, pouring the aromatic liquor slowly onto the ground. As he watched the crystal-clear liquid seep into the soil, he clenched his teeth. A sudden wave of sorrow hit him, bringing him to his knees and triggering a flood of tears, like a child.

The cavalry soldiers in the distance watched in silence, their gazes fixed on the weeping of more than three hundred soldiers. No one dared to speak. A few hot-blooded thousand-man commanders took the lead, and five thousand soldiers followed suit, raising their fists in a distant salute, paying their respects to these brave warriors.

Lin Wanrong lifted his head, downed the remaining wine, and with a 'pop', he smashed the jar onto the ground. The crisp sound echoed far and wide.

"Stand up, all of you stand up!" He wiped his face haphazardly, shouting aloud.

At General Lin's call, the more than three hundred survivors of the camps struggled to their feet. His eyes sweeping over them, he roared, "Straighten your backs, stand like men"

The wind blew harshly, and each of the three hundred remaining soldiers stood tall, heads held high, their eyes filled with a determined glow.

"Our fallen brothers, they died standing, they never fell. Regardless of whether they were from Zhejiang or Shandong, young or old, they are all heroes of our Great Hua. The soldiers under my command, not one of them was a coward. Remember this, it's better to die standing than live kneeling."

"Better to die standing than live kneeling!" The three hundred echoed in unison. Their voices were hoarse, but they emanated an awe-inspiring, rainbow-like momentum. It was a sight both tragic and heart-shaking.

Hu Bugui, Du Xiuyuan, and Li Sheng, bare-chested against the cold wind, carried a large stone from the foot of a distant mountain and placed it in front of the soldiers' graves. A craftsman from the Divine Machine Unit, hands trembling and eyes filled with tears, delicately carved the familiar names onto the stone. Lin Wanrong, expressionless, looked at each of those names, his cheeks twitching involuntarily.

"Dammit" He roared, striking a tree beside him with his sword. Amidst the rustling sound, the tree slowly fell. All the soldiers looked at their young general, feeling that serving such a compassionate and righteous general, even death was worth it.

A few thousand-man commanders from the cavalry came over on foot. They raised their fists to Lin Wanrong and said, "General Lin, please allow us to pay tribute to our fallen brothers."

Lin Wanrong returned the salute, "Thank you."

One of the leading thousand-man commanders sighed, "General Lin, your bravery is unmatched, and your loyalty is unquestionable. You are truly a role model for us all. We admire you greatly. We shouldn't bring this up, but we came here today following General Zhai to reinforce your army. Now that General Zhai is unconscious with broken legs, how should we report this to the Marshal?"

Seeing the sincerity in these commanders' demeanor, Lin Wanrong understood they were not ill-intentioned. He saluted everyone around him, "Please be assured, the events of today are my responsibility alone. It has nothing to do with my brothers, and I will not make things difficult for you all. In front of Master Xu, I will reveal everything truthfully. I, Lin San, have no other requests, I only hope that you all will report what you saw today to Marshal Xu as it is."

"General Lin, your righteous spirit reaches the heavens. We admire you greatly," said the commanders, saluting Lin Wanrong in unison. Seeing Lin Wanrong shoulder all the blame, the commanders couldn't help but admire him even more.

The three hundred soldiers at Lin Wanrong's side were unable to continue fighting. To prevent another attack, the cavalry of five thousand settled there, waiting to set off with them to Feng County at dawn to meet with Marshal Xu.

As the thousand-man commanders departed, Du Xiuyuan voiced his concerns, "General Lin, Deputy General Zhai Canghai of the cavalry is a student of Deputy Minister Tie from the Ministry of War. Today you beat him; how are you going to explain this to Marshal Xu? Will there be trouble?"

"What's the big deal about hitting him? In my opinion, even beheading him would be too lenient," Hu Bugui scoffed. "If things really escalate, count me in. I'll take that dog down. See what he dares to do then. You, Du Xiuyuan, always so timid and afraid after reading some books."

Despite his scholarly nature, Du Xiuyuan had proven himself in battle, commanding effectively and fighting at the front lines. His face turned red at Hu Bugui's words, "Old Hu, what are you talking about? When did I show fear? Is it only you who can stand up for the General? If anyone dares to harm the General, I, Du Xiuyuan, am ready to give my life to protect him."

"Always being so cautious, how can you achieve great things?" Hu Bugui retorted.

"And you, always acting recklessly, how will you ever achieve greatness?" Du Xiuyuan shot back.

Seeing the two bickering again, Lin Wanrong shook his head and smiled helplessly. The two of them were a perfect match, yet they were always at odds.

Gao Qiu, who had fought side by side with Lin Wanrong and shared life-and-death situations, couldn't help but laugh, "Don't worry, brothers. Who can outsmart Brother Lin? He's always the one tricking others, no one can trick him"

What kind of statement is that? Am I that bad? I only occasionally play tricks on others.

After burying the three hundred brothers, as the sky started to brighten, Lin Wanrong stood by the lake in silence, his sleepless eyes reflecting the cold glow of the water. Du Xiuyuan and the others stood behind him, watching his contemplative silhouette, no one dared to speak.

Finally, after hesitating for a long time, Gao Qiu asked, "Brother Lin, what's the matter? This doesn't seem like you."

Lin Wanrong turned around and smiled, "Brother Gao, I'm still the same, it's just that the battle last night was heartbreaking. I feel uneasy."

Hu Bugui smirked mysteriously, "General Lin, you're not still worried about Zhai Canghai, are you? To be honest, I had it all planned when I beat him last night. I put hidden nails in that plank, and I shattered his leg bones. He won't be able to stand again in his lifetime. Let him dare to insult my brothers, let's see how he'll harm others again."

Lin Wanrong grimaced. So, Hu Bugui could play dirty too. He had underestimated him. Du Xiuyuan gave him a thumbs-up, "Old Hu, this is the best thing you've ever done."

"Of course. Today's actions were absolutely thrilling. In my entire life, I've never done something so satisfying," Hu Bugui proclaimed with immense pride.

Lin Wanrong smiled gently and said, "Brother Hu, you and Brother Du should stop arguing in the future. The two of you, one versed in literature and the other in martial arts, make a perfect team. If you cooperate well, it's nothing to conquer territories and achieve great feats. Brother Li, you need to focus on further improving the firearms of our strategic battalion. Once we meet with Marshal Xu today, I will recommend you all for promotion. There's no question about your promotion to the rank of thousand-man commander, considering your contributions in killing Meng Du."

The three hastily thanked him for his mentorship. Lin Wanrong heaved a slight sigh, "Last night's battle resulted in heavy losses among my brothers. However, the phoenix rises from its ashes. Those who survived are the elites. You must take care of them in the future. And Xu Zhen, he's also a talented individual; make sure you cultivate him."

Hu Bugui nodded in agreement, saying with emotion, "We may have won the battle, but it was a Pyrrhic victory. The White Lotus rebels are fierce, but they're also our fellow countrymen. At its core, this battle was a civil war within our great nation. Even though we won, I'm not exactly jubilant. But the idea of driving out the nomads in the North, that's been my dream for many years. I just don't know when I'll see it realized."

Hu Bugui was from Jining, and many of the vanquished White Lotus rebels were his fellow townsmen, so his sentimentality was inevitable.

"I suddenly have an idea," Du Xiuyuan suddenly announced, excitement visible on his face. "General Lin, you're brilliant and full of strategies, a born military leader. The brothers respect and admire you deeply. Could we ask Marshal Xu to submit a petition to the Emperor, assigning you to lead us in resisting the Northern nomads? You treat the soldiers like your children and command them superbly. Everyone's seen it. As long as you're leading, we brothers have a backbone. Then, we can protect our borders, slay the nomads, and make remarkable achievements for our great nation."

"Yes, indeed," Li Sheng and Hu Bugui agreed enthusiastically. "With General Lin's brilliant strategies and cunning tactics, annihilating the nomads would be a cinch. Please lead us, General Lin."

Lin Wanrong was taken aback. Dammit, my so-called ingenious strategies were merely fortuitous accidents. If I used these tactics in a battle against the nomads, it wouldn't matter if I lost my life, but if it led to the deaths of so many brothers, it would be utterly unforgivable. He quickly interjected, "Well, I don't particularly enjoy war. Plus, casualties are inevitable on the battlefield. Seeing my brothers fall every day would be more painful than death. If you genuinely care about me, please don't bring up these topics. You're all talented individuals. I'll vouch for you in front of Master Xu, and I'm sure you'll have promising futures. From now on, you must take care of these brothers."

Everyone was startled upon hearing the hint of a departure in his words and quickly started to reassure him. Only Gao Qiu seemed undisturbed, he thought, When you were invited to fight the White Lotus, you were also hesitant, weren't you? Eventually, someone will find a way to persuade you to go.

Lin Wanrong had formed deep bonds with these brothers, spending days and nights together, sharing life and death. Chatting by the lakeside with the four of them, listening to Hu Bugui's stories about resisting the nomads, inevitably caused his blood to boil once again, especially after the bloody battle they had endured the previous night.

The team set off early in the morning, heading straight for Feng County. Despite their tattered uniforms and the camp full of wounded soldiers, Lin Wanrong's three battalions walked at the forefront with heads held high and faces radiating confidence. No one would dare to believe that, just the night before, this had been a ragtag army.

More than seventy severely wounded brothers were supposed to be lying on the horse carts, but the extreme jostling caused unbearable pain. Seeing this, Lin Wanrong dismounted, his heart burning with concern. He placed one of the severely injured soldiers on a new stretcher made the previous night, and together with Gao Qiu, one at the front and the other at the back, they carried the man forward.

The injured brother struggled emotionally, "I deserve to die, how dare I burden the general?"

Lin Wanrong retorted angrily, "What nonsense are you spouting? You're my brother, what's wrong with me carrying you? If you utter another word, I'll toss you off this stretcher."

The soldier burst into tears, "The kindness the general has shown me is as vast as the sky and bright as the moon. My life is in the general's hands."

"You cheeky lad, talking too much!" Lin Wanrong muttered, secretly wiping the corner of his eye.

When Hu Bugui and the others saw General Lin's actions, they finally came to their senses. They quickly dismounted, and everyone helped to put the severely injured brothers on stretchers and carry them forward. The team became scattered, instantly growing in size, but the hearts of the three battalions' soldiers became even more united.

Several thousand-man commanders of the cavalry who were following behind, all seasoned military men, were deeply moved by the scene in front of them. They raised their arms and commanded, "All dismount! Cavalry becomes infantry, we march with our brothers"

"We march together" Five thousand cavalymen roared in unison. When they saw the battered soldiers in front, they saw their own reflections. With tears brimming in their eyes, they willingly

dismounted, closely following behind the injured soldiers, not daring to take a single step beyond them.

Chapter 245 A Letter from Home

From Pei County to Feng County, a distance of several dozen li, it had taken them four to six hours to traverse. Upon reaching an area about ten li away from Xu Wei's main camp, they suddenly heard the sound of several cannons firing. Racing towards them from the front were about a dozen elite cavalry. Leading them was an elderly man, his beard streaked with white - none other than Xu Wei, the supreme commander leading the campaign against the White Lotus Army. Following him were several individuals, clad in armor and radiating an aura of deadly intent - evidently, these were all high-ranking generals under Xu Wei's command.

Xu Wei and his men dismounted from their horses from a distance and walked hurriedly toward them. Xu Wei, clasping his hands in a traditional salute, said, "Little Brother Lin, I trust you've been well?"

After a few days apart, Xu Wei seemed to have aged somewhat; it was clear that the campaign was taking a toll on him. Lin Wanrong shook his head and replied, "Mr. Xu, look at my brothers behind me. Do I look unharmed? I am, indeed, harmed. Very much so."

Xu Wei noticed that the soldiers under Lin San's command had worn and tattered uniforms. All of them bore scars of battle - the evidence of last night's fierce combat was ubiquitous. Hastily gesturing with his hand, he ordered his men to take over and carry the severely wounded soldiers into the camp for treatment.

Heaving a sigh, Xu Wei turned to Lin Wanrong with a bitter smile, "Little Brother Lin, the battle last night was truly beyond my expectations. I had ordered a strict defense on Lake Weishan, yet I never expected that the enemy would bypass our defensive lines so cunningly."

Strict defense? Hundreds of small boats, thousands of soldiers spread out on the lake's surface, simply counting heads would show a sea of men. Even a blind man could see the reality. How could Xu Wei's navy have been so negligent?

Anger welled up inside Lin Wanrong, but seeing the elder's worn-out expression, his hair seemingly whiter, he couldn't find it in himself to lash out. He grunted and decided to remain silent.

The generals following Xu Wei were surprised that the person their Marshal had personally gone to greet was a young military strategist barely in his twenties.

Xu Wei took Lin Wanrong by the arm, turned to face the generals, and introduced him, "Gentlemen, allow me to introduce you to someone I often mention - our military strategist, Little Brother Lin. His knowledge and courage are remarkable, and I hold him in high esteem. After several invitations, he finally agreed to come and assist us."

Seeing the Marshal hold Lin San in such high regard, the generals courteously responded with a salute, "An honor to meet you!"

What honor indeed, Lin Wanrong thought, understanding his own position. These generals, each commanding troops, were ferocious individuals who wouldn't readily admit inferiority. They might be saying 'an honor,' but they probably didn't even bother looking at his face.

Xu Wei introduced Lin San to each of the generals in turn. Lin Wanrong, with a good memory, quickly became familiar with their faces. Among these generals, he paid particular attention to Tong Cheng, the leader of the cavalry camp. The reason was simple - Zhai Canghai, the man whose leg he had broken and mouth he had smashed the previous night, was Tong Cheng's deputy. These generals, all men of high standing, naturally felt a degree of contempt towards a young military strategist receiving such attention from the Marshal. Their faces couldn't help but show a hint of pride.

Having developed a keen understanding of human nature, Lin Wanrong was well aware of their thoughts. He chuckled coldly and, gesturing grandly to his men, Hu Bugui and others behind him, ordered, "Bring it forward"

Hu Bugui and Du Xiuyuan strode in, their steps resolute as tigers, and threw a corpse in front of the gathered generals. The corpse bore a fierce countenance, with a gaping hole in the chest the size of a baby's fist. It was an alarming sight.

"Meng Du? Is that Meng Du, the bravest warrior of the White Lotus Sect?" A few of the generals who had previously crossed swords with Meng Du exclaimed in unison, their faces pale with shock.

"Oh, so this is Meng Du, who is reputed to be able to tear tigers apart alive?" Xu Wei glanced at the corpse and said.

"Marshal, this is indeed him. Meng Du is a native of Yanzhou, born with tremendous strength. He once tore a fierce tiger to pieces on Jingyang Ridge, earning him the title of the bravest warrior of the White Lotus Sect. Our forces battled him just a few days ago, during which several of the generals under my command fell to him. I didn't expect to see his dead body before us today," the man speaking was the left flank general under Xu Wei, whose name Lin Wanrong remembered was Zuo Zongyou.

Zuo Zongyou bowed slightly toward Lin Wanrong and said, "Brother Lin, was it Meng Du who launched a sneak attack on your camp last night?" He had initially displayed a certain arrogance, but upon seeing Meng Du's body, his demeanor had changed significantly, his words now carried a hint of respect.

Pride was an inevitable part of being a commander, which Lin Wanrong understood all too well. He nodded and said, "Indeed, it was him. Last night, he led thousands of elite White Lotus soldiers to sneak attack our camp from Lake Weishan. Fortunately, we were able to detect them in advance. After a bloody battle, we were finally able to slay him."

Many of the generals around Xu Wei had heard of Meng Du's reputation, some even having personally battled him and understood his prowess. His men were the most loyal and fearless elites of the White Lotus Sect, known for their ferocity. It was hard to believe that a supply convoy could not only defeat such a larger force but also slay Meng Du.

A look of admiration appeared on Zuo Zongyou's face, "Brother Lin, your military strategies are extraordinary. I am impressed. But I am curious as to what kind of weapon inflicted this wound on Meng Du. I've been in wars for many years, but I've never seen such a wound."

"Oh, it's the result of my family's secret technique - the One Yang Finger. I may have practiced it too intensively, which increased its power. During the chaos of last night's battle, I inadvertently caused this large wound. I apologize if it's alarming," Lin Wanrong said with a straight face.

Gao Qiu, hearing his flippant lie, chuckled internally. It was clearly a hidden weapon; this Brother Lin was quite good at bluffing.

Everyone else seemed astounded, indeed, this military strategist was unfathomable.

Lin Wanrong pointed to Hu Bugui, Du Xiuyuan, and Li Sheng and said, "Marshal Xu, in last night's bloody battle, these three brothers were at the forefront, their contribution was the greatest. I would like to request a merit for them."

Xu Wei laughed heartily and said, "Indeed, it should be so. The battle last night not only wiped out the elite of the White Lotus Sect but also killed Meng Du. It is the greatest victory since our army began the suppression campaign, greatly boosting our morale. Brother Lin, leading a weak troop, achieved such a brilliant result. He should indeed be rewarded. Pass on my order: the three whom Brother Lin recommended shall each be promoted two ranks, and appointed as a thousand-man commander (commander of 1000 soldiers). Troops will be reassigned to them tomorrow. The rest shall each be promoted one rank, reward them according to their merits."

"Thank you, General!" Hu, Du, and Li were overjoyed and quickly saluted in gratitude.

"Little Brother Lin, you've brought me quite a significant gift," Xu Wei said, leading Lin Wanrong towards the main camp, his face full of deep emotion. In recent days, Xu Wei's forces had indeed pushed the White Lotus Sect back to the Jining front, but the White Lotus army had used its familiarity with the terrain and avoided direct confrontations with the government forces. As a result, the progress of the suppression campaign had been very slight over the past few days.

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Of course, if I were the White Lotus army, I would also avoid going head-to-head with the government forces. However, once we have them surrounded, there's no need for daily battles. We just need to progressively advance, slowly shrinking the encirclement, leaving them no room to maneuver. Then we attack and occupy Jining, capturing their base and cutting off their retreat. By the time the harsh winter arrives and the heavy snow falls, the White Lotus Sect will inevitably collapse."

Xu Wei was elated, "Little Brother Lin, your thinking aligns perfectly with mine. My choice for a military strategist truly couldn't have been better."

As Lin Wanrong followed Xu Wei into the main camp, he saw countless tents stretching out into the distance, so many they seemed to blur into the horizon. Teams of soldiers were engaged in rigorous training, with several elite units patrolling the camp's perimeters - the defenses were extremely tight. Seeing this army of tens of thousands, their weapons gleaming and troops in high spirits, Lin Wanrong couldn't help but nod in approval. This old Xu Wei might look frail and scholarly, but he was indeed adept at leading an army. The title of the number one scholar in the world was not unjustified.

Xu Wei led him into a tent, chuckling, "Brother Lin, you fought without rest last night and attended the meeting today. There's no need for you to join in the camp's duties today, rest well. I apologize for the simplicity of this big tent."

Lin Wanrong thought wryly, If I were to complain, would you provide me with a mansion? He then asked Xu Wei, "Mr. Xu, how have my brothers been settled?"

Xu Wei gave him a thumbs up, "Little Brother Lin, you are truly a man of integrity. Rest assured, these soldiers are all heroes of great merit. I will not treat them unfairly, the best things in this camp will be given to them."

Lin Wanrong finally relaxed. Although he was brash and cunning, he was absolutely genuine when it came to these brothers he had fought and bled alongside. Xu Wei continued, "Little Brother Lin, with your care for your subordinates and your exceptional talents, why not consider a permanent position in the military? Your brothers would be overjoyed. I would certainly recommend you to the Emperor."

Lin Wanrong was taken aback. Damn, did this old man understand his lofty aspirations? His playful bouts with the Eldest Miss of the Xiao family, his clandestine activities with the Second Miss - these were pleasures Xu Wei couldn't comprehend. Xu Wei had no ambition!

"Let's discuss that later," Lin Wanrong replied, yawning. After the battle of the previous day, a sleepless night, shedding blood and tears, and carrying stretchers over 50 miles this morning, he was utterly exhausted.

Seeing Lin San's fatigue, Xu Wei sighed and was about to leave when he suddenly remembered something. He pulled out a letter from his robes, "I almost forgot something, Little Brother Lin, here's a letter from your home."

"A letter from home?" Lin Wanrong's eyes widened in surprise. Could someone have written to me? Could it be Qiaoqiao? Impossible! That girl had no idea why he had left, even if she had a million thoughts, the letter couldn't have reached Xu Wei.

"Mr. Xu, are you sure there's no mistake? I left Jinling less than ten days ago, my wife at home doesn't even know where I went. How could there be a letter from home?" Lin Wanrong asked, skeptical.

"There's no mistake!" Xu Wei replied, handing the letter to him with a smile. "Little Brother Lin, you'll know once you look at it."

What was this old man up to, being so mysterious? As Lin Wanrong watched Xu Wei's retreating figure, he stood in a daze for a long while before he finally shifted his gaze to the envelope in his hand.