

Stranger 451

Chapter 451: You Win

Life truly was fickle. One thing could change everything.

He didn't think that it was a human, at least not directly. Gao Ningan, Lin Yuhuai and Chu Nianjiu were out of the question not just because he knew them like the back of his hand, but also because they lacked the strength or ability to do this.

Chu Qingli's followers couldn't be the ones either. They were weak enough that he saw through them with ease.

It could be the doing of an exceptionally powerful warrior, but if they were that strong, then they wouldn't need to go through the trouble. They could just snuff him out like an ant.

If it wasn't a person, then it could only be an object. His intuition immediately pointed him toward the strange food he ate, specifically Where Goes The Soul.

The reason he arrived at this conclusion was because his companions had partaken in every strange dish on the table except Where Goes The Soul. More accurately, they had exactly one spoonful of the soup.

That was most likely the reason why he was the only one who had succumbed to the influence.

Ye Qing immediately dashed toward the back kitchens.

"He's trying to run away! Stop him!"

The three shadow guards thought Ye Qing was trying to escape and blocked his path immediately. However, Ye Qing easily knocked them out by tapping the space in front of him with his finger.

Ye Qing found the waiter immediately after he entered the back kitchens. He rushed forward and grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Customer?" The waiter recognized him and asked in a puzzled voice, "Can I help you with something?"

The back kitchens were a fair distance away from the dining hall. Clearly, neither he nor the kitchen staff was aware that a prince had just died in their establishment.

Ye Qing frowned. His demonic thought told him that the waiter wasn't really feeling anything, and he especially couldn't sense a shred of fear, worry or guilt from him. It didn't fit the mentality of a person harboring malicious designs at all.

He couldn't say he was surprised. If the waiter really was the culprit, then he would've booked it a long time ago. He wouldn't be staying here and waiting for Ye Qing to catch him.

"Did you encounter anyone when you were carrying that Where Goes The Soul to my table? Or did something unusual happen?" Ye Qing asked.

“I don’t understand...”

“Answer me!” Ye Qing raised his voice and released his aura.

Blood draining away from his face, the waiter stuttered, “N-No, warrior. I-I mean, I carried the Where Goes The Soul to you as soon as it was ready. I did walk past a few waiters on the way, but as far as I’m aware, nothing out of the ordinary had happened.”

Ye Qing’s brows knitted deeper. “Who’s the chef of this dish? Where is he right now?”

Besides the waiter, the only one who had many opportunities to make contact with the dish without arousing suspicion was the chef themselves.

“It’s... It’s... Chef Yun Wu. He’s working in Kitchen No. 9 right now,” the waiter answered.

Every strange chef had their own signature dish, and they hoarded the recipes and cooking methods like their own life for obvious reasons. That was why they were afforded individual kitchens to work at.

Ye Qing let go of the waiter and appeared at Kitchen No. 9. As expected, it was conspicuously empty.

Got you!

Ye Qing’s triumph only lasted an instant, however. This discovery confirmed that his guess was true, and that this was yet another attempt to take his life. But so what? The culprit was already long gone. Moreover, the fact that this person dared to conspire against him and the prince meant that he must be fully prepared. The chance he would leave behind some sort of clue for him to pursue was exactly zero.

Yun Wu was obviously a fake name. Even his appearance could be fake. He could be a she for all he knew.

Since the culprit had joined Food Is Heaven just a few days ago, he highly doubted that they knew much about his background either.

He might have figured out how his enemy had put him in this situation, but it didn’t help his predicament one bit.

It reminded him of the day the Corpse Ship had kidnapped him, and the moment Zhao Lan had suddenly transformed into the Hanba. Both dangers had happened without warning, and there were no clues left behind to be traced afterward.

This incident reeked of the same modus operandi. Yes, he was certain that this was done by the same person behind the two incidents.

“What a careful, devious bastard,” Ye Qing muttered darkly. He looked calm on the outside, but on the inside he was a raging sea of shock, indignation, and cold fury.

A web of cause and effect slowly appeared in his head. The mastermind wanted to kill him through Zhao Lan, but he defied everyone’s expectations and successfully overcame the crisis. So, they came up with a different plan.

The mastermind was well-studied in the potency and effects of the Hanba's blood essence. They also knew what kind of damage it inflicted upon its victims. That was why they secretly joined Food Is Heaven to spread the news about Where Goes The Soul, a strange dish that could supposedly treat such wounds. They knew he wouldn't be able to resist if he heard about the news, and he had fallen for it hook, line and sinker.

Was it a coincidence or a deliberate effort that Chu Qingli had died in his hands? Having experienced the mastermind's death traps not once, but twice during the short time he was participating in the Hidden Dragon Meet, he had to believe that it was the latter.

The mastermind had learned of the Corpse Ship's appearance at Yonghe Lake before the Pacification Bureau. They also played Zhao Lan like a fiddle. If he was anyone else, he would be dead already, and even then, the real reason he survived those two ordeals was, frankly, luck.

Considering how meticulous the mastermind was, there was no reason to believe that Chu Qingli had appeared here by chance. In fact, the whole plan was to manipulate him into killing Chu Qingli, son of the Harmony King, in public and earning himself the death sentence.

Despite knowing full well that someone was conspiring against him, he didn't have a shred of evidence to support his theory whatsoever. His opponent was like a veteran strange hunter who concealed themselves perfectly in the shadows while laying bait after bait to lure their preys into their death traps. No matter what choice they made, they were always moving toward a death trap that would rip their bodies into pieces. They weren't even given the satisfaction of knowing who their killer was before their souls were delivered to the Western Paradise.

He had been lucky enough to survive the hunter's first two death traps. He didn't know if he would survive a third. He truly didn't.

Hong Jianglong would believe him because he was a member of the Pacification Bureau. But what about the others?

Would the Harmony King believe that he was innocent?

Would Lei Xiaodan believe that he was innocent?

The people only believed in what they saw, and at least a hundred pairs of eyes had seen him killing Chu Qingli with his own two hands. He could commit suicide this instant, and he still wouldn't be able to clear his name.

"You win."

Ye Qing looked up and exhaled deeply.

Rumble!

Someone kicked open the door to the back kitchen. The next moment, a troop of soldiers filed through the entrance. They were wearing heavy armor and wielding a heavy shield and a heavy crossbow.

When the squad leader spotted Ye Qing, he yelled harshly, "The punishment for killing a prince is death! Kill him!"

Twang twang twang!

The soldiers pulled the triggers and sent a hail of crossbow bolts sailing through the air. The kitchen staff was still in the kitchen, but the soldiers couldn't care less about them. Every room, every piece of furniture in the back kitchen was turned into pincushions, and everyone except Ye Qing died not because they were guilty, but because they were simply at the wrong place at the wrong time.

"The Hengshan Army?!"

Ye Qing slowly thrust his fist forward. Space shook, and the crossbow bolts flying toward him abruptly changed directions and planted themselves in the floor.

These soldiers belonged to the Hengshan Army, and his demonic thought told him that the whole restaurant was surrounded. Considering that it had only been minutes since the prince died, their appearance clearly wasn't a coincidence. This must be another one of the mastermind's gifts.

The mastermind had included the Hengshan Army into their scheme. They certainly planned for everything and left nothing to chance.

On a related note, the Hengshan Army had tried to kill him as soon as they saw him. There were only two possibilities. One, the mastermind was part of the Hengshan Army. Two, the Hengshan Army was driven by their hatred for the Pacification Bureau. Hong Jianglong had rubbed their faces on the floor not long ago, and Zhou Hengshan made it crystal clear that he was against Hong Jianglong and the Pacification Bureau. Now that a golden opportunity to take the Pacification Bureau down a peg had fallen into their laps, of course they were going to wring it for all its worth.

Whatever the truth might be, he was in a terrible spot. Surrender wasn't an option, so the only path left for him was to escape.

Chapter 452: A Blood Debt Can Only Be Repaid With Blood

No time like the present.

After blowing away the crossbow bolts, Ye Qing bulldozed through the wall beside him and out of Food Is Heaven like a dragon-elephant.

Loose!

A loud cry pierced through the air, and even more crossbow bolts sailed toward Ye Qing from every direction. It was like the world's biggest and deadliest downpour.

Thanks to the Nine Impetus of Tai Chi, none of the crossbow bolts managed to hit him. They missed him by mere inches almost as if the soldiers had intentionally missed their shots.

Not only that, he knew exactly how the troops were positioned thanks to his demonic thought. That was why he chose to escape through a narrow gap set between two platoons. When they fired their crossbows, they inevitably shot their own men.

Bloodcurdling screams filled the air in an instant. At least a dozen soldiers were turned into pincushions, and the rest of the troops fell into disarray.

Ye Qing immediately seized the opportunity to charge toward a different platoon. His heavy footsteps shook the ground like an earthquake, and the soldiers were knocked off their feet long before he even got close.

As for the rest of the platoons, they had learned from their lesson. No one dared to fire their crossbows willy-nilly anymore.

Using the soldiers themselves as cover, Ye Qing was able to slip through their ranks like a phantom. Before they knew it, he was almost out of the encirclement.

Right before he would break out of the encirclement, a dazzling saber force flashed from above and flew straight toward Ye Qing's head.

Instead of slowing down, Ye Qing waited until the saber force was almost directly on top of him. Then, he raised his left hand, crushed the attack with his bare hand, and moved his clenched fist upward by another inch.

That moment of distraction was all Ye Qing needed to break out of the encirclement. He was gone in just the blink of an eye.

Dammit! The garrison commandment that Ye Qing sent flying just now swore when he saw that his target had escaped. While clutching his sunken chest, he spat out a mouthful of blood before ordering, Notify all patrolling units that Ye Qing had killed Chu Qingli, prince and son of the Harmony King! Not only that, he resisted arrest and injured a good number of our people! They are to kill him on sight!

Also, I want men on every route leading to the Pacification Bureau! He must not be allowed to escape back to his hideout!

At once! Someone answered. A flare was soon shot into the sky.

Not far away, Ye Qing also saw the flare. Despite knowing what it meant, he remained calm and took a moment to manipulate his body and aura until he looked like a completely different person. Then, he resumed his great escape.

He didn't try escaping toward the Pacification Bureau because he was certain that the routes were guarded and booby-trapped to the max. To escape in that direction was to deliver himself to the slaughter. Even if that wasn't the case, he didn't think that the Pacification Bureau would be able to defend him this time. This was nothing like the time where Gu Suitang had pushed back against all opposition in Luo Shui. In fact, there was a distinct possibility that the Pacification Bureau might cave to external pressure and surrender him to his killers. He couldn't and wouldn't take that chance.

This meant that there was only one way he might survive this.

He must escape from Tian Yong.

What, my son died?

At his residence, the Harmony King was fishing beside a pond. It was his favorite activity of the day. Every noon after he finished his lunch, he would go to his pond to feed his fishes or fish them.

The Harmony King let out a careless chuckle and shifted to a more comfortable position after listening to the shadow guard leaders report. He said lazily, That's great news! It's about time the heavens strike him in the ass and teach him a lesson in life!

So? What did he do this time? Did he lose a bet and beat up his debtors? Did he kidnap a young woman that caught his fancy? Or did he rob a house like the bandit he is?

I'm not joking, Your Highness. The prince really is dead. He was murdered.

The shadow guard leader was wearing a golden mask, so it was impossible to see his expression. Even so, his voice was clearly marked with gravity and austerity. I just received word that the prince was caught up in an argument with Ye Qing of the Pacification Bureau at Food Is Heaven. That argument ended up with Ye Qing killing him in a fit of rage.

... Are you serious? You're not playing me, are you? The Harmony King slowly rose to his feet when he realized that his shadow guard leader wasn't joking. My son is dead?

I'm sorry, Your Highness, but it's true. He died on the spot after Ye Qing disemboweled him, the shadow guard leader replied.

The Harmony King stumbled and nearly collapsed on the ground. His maids caught him in time and asked worriedly, Are you alright, Your Highness?

My son is dead? My son is dead? The Harmony King muttered in distraught as the blood slowly drained away from his face.

What's wrong, father? It was at this moment Chu Qingge walked up to her disfather and asked, What happened?

Chu Qingge's voice injected some life back into his shaking body. The Harmony King staggered toward her, grabbed her arms and burst into tears. Qingge Qingge! Your brother is dead! He was murdered!

My brother's dead? How is that possible? Chu Qingge too wobbled on her feet, though she recovered much faster than her father had. The gleam in her eyes turned murderous as she asked, Who killed my brother?

Right. Right! Who killed my son? Who killed Qingli?! The Harmony King suddenly looked up and glared at the shadow guard leader with crazed, bloodshot eyes. I will rip them to pieces! I will scatter their ashes across the world! I will make it so that they will never be reborn!!!

It's Ye Qing, sir. Ye Qing of the Pacification Bureau, the shadow guard leader repeated.

Joyless? That caught Chu Qingge completely off guard. Impossible! There has to be a misunderstanding!

The shadow guard leader shook his head. It's him. Everyone in Food Is Heaven saw it when it happened.

The prince was going to Food Is Heaven for lunch when he saw Ye Qing. He decided to provoke the man because of what happened to Wine Are Songs Boat. As a result, Ye Qing lost his head and killed him.

Ye Qing killed Qingli over such a petty matter?! The Harmony King screamed. T-The shadow guards! What were the shadow guards doing when Ye Qing killed my son? Why didn't they do anything?!

It happened all too suddenly, Your Highness. The prince was dead before they could react, the shadow guard leader reported.

Useless! Useless! They will die for this failure! The Harmony King roared. What about Ye Qing? Have they caught him yet?

The shadow guard leader shook his head. No, Your Highness. The shadow guards protecting the prince was no match for him. But do not worry. The Hengshan Army happened to be patrolling the area at the time. They will surely apprehend him.

Meanwhile, Chu Qingge was shaking her head. Joyless is not an impulsive man. I cannot believe that he would kill my brother over a petty conflict. There has to be some sort of misunderstanding.

I don't care! The Harmony King uttered through gritted teeth. He killed Qingli, so he must die! That's all there is to it!

Chu Hao, you have my permission to mobilize every shadow guard and keeper in my court. I don't care what you do, but you will bring Ye Qing before me no matter the cost, dead or alive!

At once. The shadow guard leader saluted the Harmony King and prepared to leave, but Chu Qingli stopped him.

Wait. Father, please allow me to go with uncle.

Very well. Qingge, promise me you will catch Ye Qing? Promise me you will take revenge for your brother? The Harmony King asked with lightless, reddened eyes. He looked like he had aged a decade in an instant, and he was clutching Chu Qingge's hands with a death grip. He would probably never let go if Chu Qingge didn't agree to his request.

Don't worry, father. I will find the true murderer and take revenge for big brother, Chu Qingge replied solemnly.

Good girl. Good girl. The Harmony King finally let go of Chu Qingge's hand, and in that moment, it was like all life had left his body. His eyes were dim and unfocused, and he shambled away like a dying man with one foot on his grave.

Pain and sorrow gripped Chu Qingge's heart like death itself as she stared at her father's back. The Harmony King might not be a good person, but he was definitely a good father. He gave them everything he had from the moment they were born, and he loved them more than he cherished his own life.

Her older brother was also the best brother she could ask for. To others, Chu Qingli was a spoiled, unambitious brat who did far more harm than he ever did good. But to her, he was a dear brother who cherished her deeply and was protective of her almost as much as their father. He would sooner see the world die than let her suffer even the slightest bit of grievances.

But now, one of the two most important people in her life was dead, and the other was crushed by grief. To make things worse, the killer was none other than her own friend. To say that Chu Qingge was currently gripped by a kaleidoscope of emotions would be an understatement. She desperately needed an outlet for her sorrow, guilt, regret, anger and other emotions.

I will give you and brother the justice you deserve, father.

Determination flickered in her eyes as Chu Qingge glanced at the azure sky above her head.

Chapter 453: I'll Play With You

At the general's headquarters, Zhou Hengshan was listening to his subordinate's report. His fat cheeks kept twitching harder and harder until he burst out laughing like a madman. "Hahahaha! This is the best news I've heard all year long! So, have we caught him yet?"

“Not yet. Ye Qing is no ordinary warrior. He injured a dozen or so men and escaped in the end,” a deputy general replied.

“Useless! Over one hundred men, and still you fail to catch Ye Qing? Truly useless!” Zhou Hengshan grunted. “Spread the news that Ye Qing killed the prince and our men when we tried to arrest him. He is to be treated as a rebel and killed on sight.”

“General, don’t you think we’re going a little too far?” The deputy general hesitated.

“Too far?” Zhou Hengshan leaned forward and looked down on the deputy general. “Ye Qing killed the Harmony King’s son, a prince of Chu. That’s a death sentence, isn’t it? He also killed members of the Hengshan Army and escaped. That’s treason, isn’t it? What’s there to be afraid of?”

“One more thing. Tell our people that those who claimed Ye Qing’s head will receive a three-rank promotion and ten thousand silvers.”

“At once.” The deputy general nodded and left the room.

“Humiliating me has a price, Hong Jianglong. Today’s the day I pay back what you did to me tenfold!”

Zhou Hengshan’s mad laughter resounded throughout the room. “Hahahahahahaha...”

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“Ye Qing killed the Harmony King’s son? Are you sure about this?”

At the Punishment Hall in the Intelligence Department, Lei Xiaodan was gently and carefully caring for his treasures. They weren’t valuable antiques, paintings or the like, however. They were living people that were being subjected to all kinds of horrible torture.

One man was encased in wax. Another was turned into a human swine[1]. A third man’s hands and legs were swapped. A woman had her limbs replaced with a Stranger’s. There was a skinless man and a boneless woman chained to a nearby wall.

His collection was numerous, and all of them inhuman. The fact that the victims were all alive—screaming in pain or cursing their tormentor’s name from time to time—only added to the horror.

“I’m sure. Nearly everyone in Food Is Heaven saw it when it happened. The duo were butting heads until Ye Qing killed the prince in a fit of rage,” Chu Renhe said with a hint of excitement.

While carefully wiping away the dust on one of his “treasures”, Lei Xiaodan asked casually, “Do you have a hand in this incident?”

The question didn’t register in Chu Renhe’s head at first. Then, he broke out in cold sweat and denied the accusation immediately, “Absolutely not. This has nothing to do with me.”

“Are you suggesting that Ye Qing hadn’t killed the prince out of rage, master?”

“Let’s pretend you are Ye Qing for a second. Do you think you would lose your cool and kill the prince in a fit of rage?” Lei Xiaodan countered.

“No, I don’t believe I would,” Chu Renhe replied.

“If even you wouldn’t succumb to such base impulses, why would Ye Qing? Someone must be behind this incident. But if it’s not you, then who else wants to kill Ye Qing?”

When Lei Xiaodan rose to his feet, Chu Renhe hurriedly received the cloth he was using to wipe down his “treasures”. After waiting for a bit and hearing no other response from his master, Chu Renhe said quietly, “What should we do, master?”

“What do you want to do?” Lei Xiaodan smiled at Chu Renhe.

“Ye Qing killed the prince in public. That’s obviously a death sentence. We are the Intelligence Department, so we have a duty to...” Chu Renhe hurriedly voiced the justification he had prepared a while ago, but he trailed off when his master continued to smile at him as if he knew his plans already. He slowly bowed his head and said, “I’ll do whatever you want me to do, master.”

“I know what you seek. You want to eliminate Ye Qing, do you not?” Lei Xiaodan shook his head with a wry smile. “However, we can’t be too proactive in this matter, at least not now.”

“Why not, master?” Chu Renhe asked.

“If we are too proactive, then the Pacification Bureau would think that we’re the ones behind this incident. The reward is not worth the risk.”

“Besides, Ye Qing killed the prince in broad daylight. Knowing the Harmony King, I’m sure he would spare no effort to apprehend or kill him. Besides, the Hengshan Army is getting involved as well, so there is nowhere Ye Qing could run. Why expend the effort when it is completely unnecessary?”

“All we need to do is to watch from the sidelines.”

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“Joyless killed the Harmony King’s son?”

At the Pacification Bureau, Hong Jianglong felt like the sky had fallen after hearing the news from Gao Ningang.

“Could it be...”

Suddenly, Hong Jianglong recalled the hidden blade that had tried to drive Ye Qing into a dead end repeatedly. He was almost certain that they were behind this incident as well.

Knowing that there was no time to waste, Hong Jianglong hurriedly got up and strode toward the exit.

“Where are you going, Jianglong?”

He had just stepped out of the door when a grave, authoritative voice entered his ears.

Hong Jianglong felt a twitch in his left eyelid as he turned around to face the speaker. “Chief! I need to head out for something.”

The newcomer wore a soap green-colored robe and a tall hat. Not a speck of dust could be seen on his clothes, and not a piece of fabric was out of place. He also possessed a stern, rigid countenance.

He was the Chief of Bureau of the Tian Yong Pacification Bureau, Tu Yulei.

Tu Yulei looked to be in his forties, but in reality he was almost a hundred years old. He had ascended to his position several decades ago, and he had accrued such power and prestige that even the unruly, fearless Hong Jianglong respected him deeply.

But unlike most Chief of Bureaus, Tu Yulei once studied in the Yuelu Academy. He also worked both as a student and a teacher in many Confucianist academies. As a result, he came to cultivate a severe, conscientious, and meticulous personality. In more secular terms, he was a rigid, inflexible man. If he was going to accuse someone of a crime, he must have evidence. If he was going to carry out a certain action, he would abide by the rules and laws to the letter. He was averse toward unruly, showy, and highly independent people like say, Ye Qing.

Besides that, Tu Yulei valued the Pacification Bureau’s reputation more than even most Chiefs of Bureau. If a member of the Pacification Bureau dared to abuse their authority or threaten their department’s reputation for whatever reason, then he would put them through hell to put it mildly.

That was why Hong Jianglong didn’t really want to tell Tu Yulei about Ye Qing’s predicament. If he did, he would have to explain the ins and outs of the situation, and if he explained the ins and outs of the situation, there was a high chance Tu Yulei would actually stop him to preserve the Pacification Bureau’s reputation. Even if he didn’t, the delay could mean the difference between life and death for Ye Qing.

Zhou Hengshan was a petty, vengeful man. It hadn’t been long since he disparaged Zhou Hengshan’s man and even shamed him in his own headquarters, and he had no doubt that the general would take out his frustrations on Ye Qing. He might even kill the young man.

Zhou Hengshan wasn’t the only threat either. The Harmony King would spare no effort to see his son avenged. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Ye Qing was currently facing the greatest danger of his life.

“You’re going to save Ye Qing, aren’t you?” Tu Yulei asked calmly.

Hong Jianglong’s heart skipped a beat. “You found out, chief?”

“What do you think?” Tu Yulei snorted.

Hong Jianglong hurriedly began, “Before you say anything, please listen to my explanation. It’s like —”

Tu Yulei interrupted him before he could finish. “Go. Make sure you bring him back safe and sound.”

“... What?” Shock and disbelief appeared on Hong Jianglong’s face. Of all the responses he expected from Tu Yulei, this was the absolute last one on the list. “Chief, you...”

Tu Yulei said expressionlessly, “You thought I would stop you, didn’t you?”

Hong Jianglong didn’t say anything, but his silence was basically a form of admission.

Tu Yulei didn’t take offense. He explained seriously, “I believe in your eye for people, and I believe that the man who fought for the people and saved the realm multiple times cannot be a villain or an idiot. I am certain that there is a conspiracy behind this.”

“So go. Go and bring him back to us.”

Heartened, Hong Jianglong declared solemnly, “Thank you, chief! I swear I won’t disappoint you!”

“One more thing. You are a member of the Pacification Bureau, and as a member of the Pacification Bureau, you bow to no one except the emperor himself. If someone dares to stand in your way, beat the crap out of them. I will bear any and all consequences that may stem from it, so don’t hold back on my account!” Tu Yulei declared in a harsh voice.

“Understood, chief!” Hong Jianglong turned around, took two steps toward the exit, before turning back to Tu Yulei again. “I never knew you’re such a wise and manly man, chief! I hope to work with you for many more seasons to come!”

With that, Hong Jianglong finally took off and disappeared in the blink of an eye.

After the Pacification Commissioner was gone, Tu Yulei stroked his beard and smiled elegantly. “Why is he stating the obvious? I’ve always been a wise and manly man.”

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Pop!

A flare streaked across the sky like a meteor before exploding with a blinding flash.

“Traces of Ye Qing have been found at the southside of the city, Wolf Commander.”

At the Azure Dragon Street, a man with loose hair and long, narrow eyes that resembled a wolf was sitting in the middle of the street. He was wearing a set of bright pixiu armor[2], and he was currently rolling a human head back and forth with his right foot. A dozen or so corpses were lined up on the edge of the street.

Suddenly, the head exploded into chunks of red and white. After the commander climbed back to his feet, he walked over to one end of the and began stomping on every head in his path. It was almost like he was playing a game or something.

The soldier who brought the news didn’t dare to urge his commander. He remained in his half-kneeling posture and kept his head low.

The Hengshan Army had two assistant regional commanders under the general, and four battalion commanders under the two assistant regional commanders. The four battalion commanders were in charge of the Tiger Battalion, Leopard Battalion, Wolf Battalion and Dog Battalion.

The Tiger Battalion was made up of Zhou Hengshan's personal guards, and they were responsible for keeping him safe. The Leopard Battalion was made up of heavy cavalry, and they were normally deployed in wide plains and guerilla warfare. The Wolf Battalion was made up of heavy infantry and were normally deployed in mountainous terrains. They were the main force and meat grinder of the Hengshan Army. Finally, the Dog Battalion was made up of light cavalry. Their main responsibility was scouting, spying, and collecting intelligence.

The man before the soldier was the Wolf Commander, commander of the ruthless and bloodthirsty Wolf Battalion. His name was Fei Chuan.

"The south, huh?"

After Fei Chuan stomped every head to bits, he finally looked up with a hint of scarlet in his dark pupils. He asked slowly, "Have they caught him yet?"

"No. They've only discovered traces of him," the soldier answered.

"I see. How useless," Fei Chuan said lightly. His voice was fairly low-pitched, and it made him sound like a viper baring its fangs at its prey from the shadows. It was terrifying to say the least.

"Continue the search. Ye Qing must be caught no matter what." Fei Chuan licked his lips and chuckled darkly. "I will not fail the general. If I did, then you will all lose your heads. Understand?"

"We understand. We will carry out your orders without fail, Wolf Commander!" The surrounding soldiers dropped to one knee and declared.

"Good. Now go." Fei Chuan waved them away.

After the men were gone, Fei Chuan looked at the corpse beneath his foot and sighed. "Hang these uncooperative, unruly *jianghu* warriors where everyone can see. Let's hope that'll be enough to keep the rest of their ilk out of our way."

"At once!" A soldier saluted. He then organized some men to hang the headless bodies on stakes. From a distance, the bodies almost looked like meat skewers.

It was at this moment another flare lit up in the sky.

"We found more traces of Ye Qing in the east, Wolf Commander," someone reported. "However, we still haven't managed to catch him. Commandant Sun is investigating right now."

"The east?" Feng Chan rubbed his clean, hairless chin and said, "Ye Qing must have figured out that we've prepared a death trap for him to the east. He's planning to escape the city!"

"I guess he's not too stupid. He knows that the only way he might survive this is to escape Tian Yong!"

"Okay. I'll play with you. Let's see how tenacious you are, hmm?"

"Ye Qing won't go to the north since that is where our main force is garrisoned. Therefore, Ye Qing can only leave through the east, south and west gates. In that case..." Feng Chuan let out a cold chuckle. "Send word to the gate commander to close the gates. If anyone tries to pass through the gates, kill them."

"Also, have Brigade One, Two and Three perform a thorough search of the east, south and west side of the city starting from Azure Dragon Street all the way to the gates. Don't miss even a single fly."

"Brigade Four will remain here and operate as companies. You will search the north just in case Ye Qing decides to pull a fast one on us."

"At once!"

The cries of acknowledgement shook the clouds above.

Chapter 454: Black Water Cavalry

At the northside of the city, a squad of Hengshan soldiers wielding heavy sabers were searching for Ye Qing. Some of them were dragging their blades across the floor and sending sparks everywhere.

Maybe it was because the boredom got to him, but one soldier suddenly spoke up, "Why do you guys think Ye Qing killed Lord Chu? Did he lose his mind or something?"

"It's either that, or he's plain stupid. Even if he wants the guy dead, he should have done it in a no man's land. Instead, he killed him under broad daylight. If he's not stupid, then who is?"

"I know right? Qing Emperor Junior my ass. His nickname sounds impressive, but we know now that he's just a brainless idiot."

"Shut up and stay alert. Ye Qing is no ordinary warrior. Don't say I didn't warn you if he snuck up on you and killed you."

"I don't know what you're afraid of, captain. The whole city is surrounded by our army. There is no way Ye Qing can escape us even if he has three heads and six arms."

"Yeah, captain. You worry too much."

"Have you already forgotten about the general's order? Never let your guard down no matter what. Also, do you want that three-rank promotion and ten thousand silver or not? Because you are not getting that reward the way you're acting right now."

“You must be joking, captain. Ye Qing is stupid, but he’s not *that* stupid. He knows that coming to the northside of the city is suicide. Brigade One and Two lucked out big time.”

“Did they? Promotion and money are great things, but what’s the point if you’re not alive to enjoy them? The Qing Emperor Junior is hardly a girl in the Beauty Pageant Palace, soft and easy to push down.”

“I get what you’re saying, but at least they have a shot at a better life. We don’t even get that choice. If I can kill Ye Qing, I don’t even want the three-rank promotion. I just want that ten thousand silver so I can build a wonderful family with a dozen beauties.”

“You and your loins. One day, you’re gonna die on top of a woman. As for me, I want that three-rank promotion. After all, money and women come easy when you’re an official.”

“Arrest this man, captain! He just admitted that he wants to become a corrupt official!”

The captain snorted. “Alright, enough with the crap. If you really want to get rich and get promoted, then focus on the job. With the way you guys are behaving, Ye Qing could bare his neck to you, and you’re still going to miss the target.”

Despite what he said, the captain himself didn’t believe that Ye Qing would show up in the northside of the city. It just didn’t make sense.

He was wrong. Just a few seconds later, he suddenly realized that his men hadn’t responded to his words. In fact, his surroundings were completely silent. Realizing something, he abruptly gripped his saber with both hands, drove his left foot into the ground, and unleashed a mighty horizontal sweep.

“Total Decimation”

The Wolf Battalion wore heavy armor and wielded a heavy saber and a heavy shield. What they lacked in mobility, they made up with sheer destructive power and immovability. The bottom half of their saber was narrow, and the top half was broad. It was a straight blade that was several times wider and heavier than the standard heng saber and Yanling saber. It could literally split open a rock assuming the soldier knew what he was doing.

“Total Decimation” was a technique the captain had practiced thousands of times during his training. Combined with his heavy saber, it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that he could cut down every soul within his range like grass.

However, the attack came to an abrupt stop when the saber had just reached the halfway point. It was because the blade was caught firmly between a pair of fingers.

The technique could’ve split a rock like butter, but the fingers had caught it so easily you would think that he was holding a weightless feather, not a heavy saber.

The captain blanched again when a young, smiling face entered his vision. He also noticed his four comrades staring blankly into the distance and doing nothing like puppets.

“Ye Qing?!” The captain gulped as the last drop of blood drained away from his face.

“You got it. I can’t give you a promotion or my silver, but I can give you a flame. Here you go.”

Ye Qing snapped his fingers, and the captain’s eyes glazed over just like the rest of the soldiers. Then, he burst into flames and crumbled into a pile of ash in the blink of an eye.

“You have quite the valuable head on your shoulders, don’t you boy?” A voice full of schadenfreude suddenly rang beside his ears. “A three-rank promotion and ten thousand silver? Tsk tsk...”

“It’s not my head that’s valuable. It’s Chu Qingli’s head and the Pacification Bureau’s reputation that’s valuable.”

“By the way, what *are* you doing coming here? I thought you were planning to escape from Tian Yong, but instead you ran to the east, the west and now the northside of the city? Have you finally gotten tired of living or something?” The Fog Demon asked.

At the beginning, Ye Qing purposely showed his face at the east side of the city. Then, he ran to the south. He thought Ye Qing was luring the Hengshan Army away so he would encounter less opposition when he made his great escape, but once again he purposely revealed himself to his enemies. Finally, he ran all the way to the north before the Hengshan Army could form an encirclement. Just what the hell was he thinking?

“It’s difficult for me to explain it in a way that you can understand,” Ye Qing said indifferently.

“I can tell you’re insulting me, boy!” The Fog Demon bubbled with displeasure. “You’re gonna regret it when I turn my back on you!”

“You don’t have a back,” Ye Qing retorted before asking, “Are you done controlling the four men yet? We’re wasting time here.”

“Are you kidding me? I might not be fully recovered, but it’s child’s play for me to control a couple of Vessel Augmentors,” The Fog Demon scoffed. “Speaking of which, why the hell am I controlling a bunch of useless trash? Why didn’t we just kill them and dispose of the body?”

Ye Qing replied calmly, “I have use for them, of course.”

Ye Qing began stripping off the captain’s heavy armor. Once he donned the armor, he morphed his body and assumed the man’s appearance.

“Ohh! I get it now! You’re planning to disguise yourself as a member of the Hengshan Army, infiltrate their headquarters, and slip through the northern gate!”

The Fog Demon exclaimed in realization, “That’s why you showed yourself in the east and south side of the city earlier! You wanted to trick them into thinking that you’re planning to escape through the eastern or southern gate and draw the majority of their forces to those locations. They wouldn’t think that you would dare to leave through the northern gate, so this is your opportunity to leave through the northern gate while they are undermanned!”

“If you say so,” Ye Qing replied smilingly but didn’t confirm the Fog Demon’s theory.

“You can’t hide your plans from me! I’m the Fog Demon of the Nine Nethers!” The Fog Demon declared proudly before a question hit him. “But wait, why are you subverting this squad when you can just disguise yourself and infiltrate their base alone? It would be easier, and it would be less likely for you to expose yourself, isn’t it?”

“Not at all. The Hengshan Army usually operates in a five-man squad, and they are never apart from each other barring exceptional circumstances. This is the iron law of the Hengshan Army. Had I operated alone, they would most likely notice that something is amiss,” Ye Qing explained. This was why he killed only the captain and left the other four soldiers alive.

At first, he was able to slip past multiple companies with his movement art, his ability to change his appearance, and his ability to conceal his aura with ease. He was hoping that Plan A—getting out of Tian Yong before the Hengshan Army or the Harmony King’s men could react—would work.

Unfortunately, he quickly found that he had underestimated the Hengshan Army’s control over Tian Yong. In less than half a teatime, they had set up all sorts of roadblocks in various key locations. They carefully vetted everyone who passed through these roadblocks and started a city-wide search at the same time.

This meant that it was impossible to leave Tian Yong city via normal means. He would have to find some other way. Currently, his Plan B was to masquerade as a member of the Hengshan Army and escape from right under their noses.

“Let’s go. Just make them follow me and don’t try anything. Leave the acting to me.”

After he was ready, Ye Qing openly appeared on the street and walked toward the northern gate. To avoid drawing suspicion, he pretended to search the surrounding area thoroughly before moving onto the next area. Slowly but surely, he was able to get closer to his destination while passing through several roadblocks unhindered.

“Halt! Which brigade do you belong to?”

Ye Qing had just passed through a roadblock when a guard of cavalymen showed up and blocked his path. They numbered around one hundred and twenty five men.

The cavalymen wore heavy armor with leopard heads on the shoulder area, and their faces were covered by masks. The Scale Horses they rode were also covered in thick, black-colored scale armor. Sparks flew when their hoofs smashed against the floor.

The Scale Horse was a Red-class Stranger that was shaped like a horse, but instead of fur, they were covered in thick scale armor that were shaped like fish scales. In terms of toughness, the scales

could rival that of metal. It galloped as swift as the wind, and it was one of the rare Strangers that could be tamed.

That said, the success rate of taming a Scale Horse was mind-bogglingly low, so low that the Black Water Cavalry of the Leopard Battalion was the only brigade in the entire Hengshan Army that had Scale Horses as mounts.

The Black Water Cavalry was given its name because they wore black armor, wore black masks, and rode the black Scale Horses. When they mounted a charge, it was like a tide of black water washing over the land and dyeing everything black. Hence the name.

Clearly, the guard of cavalymen before him belonged to the Black Water Cavalry.

Chapter 455: I Feel Like Dying Today

“We belong to Brigade Four of the Wolf Battalion, my lord. Our orders are to search north for Ye Qing,” Ye Qing bowed his head and replied calmly.

“So, you haven’t found Ye Qing yet? Hah... trash.” The garrison commandant snorted.

Ye Qing kept his head low and didn’t respond.

When the garrison commandant—his name was Wu Jian—heard no response from Ye Qing, he slowly added, “Oh, don’t misunderstand. I’m not calling you trash. I’m saying that everyone in the Wolf Battalion is trash.”

His men burst out laughing as well. With that, Wu Jian waved his hand and declared, “Let’s go.”

The guard of Black Water Cavalry trotted past Ye Qing’s company, some of them still laughing and muttering insults under their breaths.

However, the cavalry had just traveled a short distance when suddenly, Wu Jian looked back at Ye Qing and said, “Oh right, I almost forgot. Tell your commandant, Wang Xiu, that I’m inviting him for a drink at Apricot Inn tomorrow night. If he doesn’t show up, then I won’t be paying him back the one hundred tael I owe him.”

“I’m sorry, my lord, but our commandant isn’t called Wang Xiu!” Ye Qing replied while scoffing mentally. He was certain that the commandant of Brigade Four wasn’t named Wang Xiu. If he answered affirmatively, then Wu Jian would know that he was, in fact, a fake. He had witnessed this trick way too many times both in real life and TV to fall for it.

Besides, Wang Xiu was obviously a girl’s name. What kind of parents would name their son Wang Xiu? The guy thought he could trick him when he couldn’t even be bothered to come up with a better name? What a lazy piece of shit! Hmph!

“What?” But to Ye Qing’s surprise, Wu Jian suddenly turned around with a look of confusion on his face. “You don’t know your own commandant’s name? Are you a new guy, or... are you not one of us?”

Realization struck him as he blurted, “You’re—!”

Before Wu Jian could say anything else, his eyes suddenly grew unfocused, and whatever he was going to say was forgotten. At the same time, he fell right off his horse.

“Commandant!”

“Commandant, what’s wrong?!”

Things had happened so quickly that most of the cavalymen didn’t notice anything amiss until their garrison commandant fell over. Panic and confusion gripped them for a moment.

Then, Wu Jian abruptly snapped out of his daze, pushed himself back to his feet, and roared on top of his lungs, “Kill him! He’s Ye Qing!”

Wu Jian’s heart thudded inside his chest like a drum. If he didn’t have a Mind Shielding Jade, he would be dead already. But after he regained his calm, a hint of excitement began budding inside his heart. If he could kill Ye Qing here, he would gain a three-rank promotion and ten thousand silver. It was the opportunity of a lifetime!

“Kill him now!”

The Black Water Cavalry immediately spun around and charged him. The sound of the Scale Horses’ hoofs thudding against the ground reminded Ye Qing of a raging thunderstorm.

“What the hell was that, boy?”

The Fog Demon appeared next to Ye Qing and needled him mercilessly for the mistake.

“I thought that he was testing me! Who would’ve thought that there are still honest scumbags in this day and age!” Ye Qing rubbed his nose aggrievedly.

As soon as he noticed his mistake, Ye Qing had executed “Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul” to kill his opponent. He was hoping to run away while the cavalymen were panicking. However, luck truly wasn’t on his side today. Wu Jian had a mind shielding Strange Artifact that saved his life and ruined even his backup plan.

“What do we do now?” The Fog Demon asked.

“What else?” Ye Qing stared at the incoming cavalymen with narrowed eyes.

Rumble rumble rumble!

Some people would choose to run when facing down a cavalry charge. Since they were in a city, it wasn’t a bad plan. However, Ye Qing remained exactly where he was. The Black Water Cavalry was famous for their speed, and hundreds of them combined created a rumbling tide that shook the entire street and the buildings around them.

When the nearest cavalryman was merely three inches away from him, Ye Qing abruptly took a step forward. The shaking street quieted immediately like an invisible hand had forcibly quelled its shaking. More importantly, the foremost cavalymen abruptly lost their footing and crashed to the ground.

Caught completely off guard, the cavalymen at the back were unable to stop in time and crashed into their fallen comrades. They too crashed to the ground and tripped up the rest of the guys behind

them. What was a devastating charge had turned into a self-sabotaging stampede that no one could stop.

While the Black Water Cavalry was struggling to regain control, Ye Qing leaped into the air and landed on top of the skull of a cavalryman like a meteor.

Thud!

There was a soft thud, and the cavalryman's eyes abruptly turned glassy and lifeless. At the same time, the Scale Horse beneath him let out a mournful cry. Its hoofs sank into the ground like it was tofu, and its body abruptly exploded into chunks of flesh and blood. The chunks were traveling at such velocity that the nearest cavalymen were skewered and killed.

As the commandant, Wu Jian knew full well that his men had more or less been incapacitated. They were no more but prey that Ye Qing could toy with as he pleased.

“Dammit!”

White-faced but overflowing with anger and hatred, Wu Jian didn't hesitate to kick off the ground and escape in the opposite direction of the battle. However, he had just covered about half the distance when he heard a whistling noise from behind his back. The next thing he knew, a long saber pierced his stomach from behind, launched him forward, and nailed him to a wooden door.

“Hah! Hah! Hah!”

His vision grew blurry, and blood slowly trickled down his lips. Wu Jian could feel his life slowly draining away from his body. He regretted his decision. He shouldn't have allowed his greed to get the better of him. As soon as he discovered Ye Qing, he should've shot a flare and stalled the battle out until reinforcements showed up. Had he done that, he might still live to see tomorrow's sun. Unfortunately, there was no medicine for regret.

“No! There's still one thing I can do. I will take you to the grave with me if it's the last thing I do!”

Eyes bloodshot, Wu Jian gritted his teeth and slapped his fingers on the flare token inside his sleeves. A red flare immediately shot up to the sky and exploded.

“Hahaha! You're dead, Ye Qing! Dead!”

Wu Jian laughed like a madman when his last ditch effort succeeded.

Ye Qing didn't seem to notice his action, however. Red Sleeve resting snugly in his palm, he continued to cut down the Black Water Cavalry like a gust of spring wind that bloomed countless red flowers.

Words couldn't describe how angry Wu Jian felt when he saw his men falling one after another. He roared, “You're a monster, Ye Qing! A monster!”

“You done yelling?” A few breaths later, Ye Qing appeared in front of Wu Jian with a grin on his face. “Relax, I didn’t kill all of your men. I kept some of them alive since living people are more useful than dead people.”

“What... What does that mean?” Wu Jian suddenly had a bad feeling about this.

Ye Qing chuckled. “Nothing. I’m just recycling the trash, that’s all.”

“You won’t escape, Ye Qing! I’ve already shot a flare! When the rest of the Hengshan Army shows up, not even the heavens could save you from death!”

Wu Jian didn’t know what Ye Qing was planning, but he was certain that there was nothing the young man could do to avert his demise. “You will not escape, Ye Qing!”

“That’s for me to worry about, not you. Goodbye.” Ye Qing tapped Wu Jian on the throat, and every bone in his neck shattered into smithereens. The garrison commandant was dead in the blink of an eye.

After Wu Jian was dead, Ye Qing’s smile was replaced by grim determination.

“Why didn’t you stop him, boy?” The Fog Demon appeared beside Ye Qing and asked.

“He was too fast,” Ye Qing replied indifferently.

“Do you think I’m stupid?” The Fog Demon sneered. “I know you sensed his actions earlier. You absolutely could’ve stopped him if you wanted to. What on earth are you planning? You’re not actually planning to commit suicide, are you?”

“In fact, I am. I’m tired of living like this, so...”

Ye Qing’s facial muscles relaxed as an enigmatic smile bloomed across his face. “I think I’m gonna die now!”

Chapter 456: Leopard Commander

Swoosh swoosh!

Several people fell from the sky and landed in front of the defeated guard that was the Black Water Cavalry. The leader of the group was none other than the Harmony King’s shadow guard leader, Chu Hao.

Chu Hao was followed by an old woman, an old dwarf, and Chu Qingge.

Complex, indecipherable thoughts flitted across Chu Hao’s eyes as he stared at the pile of bloody mess in front of him. He appeared in front of an unconscious cavalryman and tapped on several bodily points. Once the man was awake, he asked, “I am Chu Hao, the shadow guard leader who serves the Harmony King. What happened?”

The cavalryman was seriously injured. He replied weakly, “It... It’s Ye Qing... He... pretended to be one of us and...”

He fainted before he could finish his sentence, but everyone understood his meaning anyway.

“Ye Qing disguised himself as a member of the Hengshan Army and tried to escape through the northern gate? He’s an audacious one, isn’t he?” The old dwarf stood next to Chu Hao and stroked his beard. He was short and fat, and his hair and beard were completely white.

“He created a diversion and lured the main bulk of his enemies away. Then, he struck their headquarters while they’re undermanned. The Qing Emperor Junior truly deserves his fame!” the old woman commented.

The old woman had spotty, yellowish hair, a wrinkly face, and a crooked back. However, her dark, anomalous aura made it clear that she was no one to be trifled with.

“Whose side are you on, old hag? How can you praise our enemy and undermine our own?” The old dwarf seemed quite displeased with the old woman’s comment.

“I’m just speaking the truth,” Granny Ghost replied. “Ye Qing played Fei Chuan and us like a fiddle. Am I supposed to underestimate him and treat him lightly?”

“Joy—Ye Qing is definitely not someone we can afford to underestimate. You mustn’t be careless, Grandpa Wasp,” Chu Qingge chimed in, though it was clear that her focus wasn’t on their argument. She was furrowing her brows and thinking about something.

The old dwarf harrumphed but didn’t deny their words. “So, what should we do now, lead—”

“Watch out!”

Before Grandpa Wasp could finish, Chu Hao suddenly blocked in front of him and grabbed an arrow that would’ve shot through the old dwarf’s head with his bare hands.

Bang!

Chu Hao didn’t budge from his spot, but the spreading cracks beneath his feet showed just how powerful the shot was. It was only now they heard the sharp whistle of an arrow.

Somehow, the arrow moved faster than sound itself.

“An arrow that moves faster than sound itself and so may as well be soundless? It’s Duan Zipao’s Soundless Shot,” Chu Hao muttered while staring at the arrow he just caught.

As soon as he finished, the ground began shaking unnaturally. It was quickly followed by the sound of hoofs thudding against the floor. A terrible, powerful black tide quickly approached from the distance.

When the black tide was ten meters away from Chu Hao’s group, it abruptly stopped as if an invisible wall was blocking their way. Even the rumbling noises had disappeared in the blink of an eye.

Now that the black tide had stopped, the group could finally see them for who they were. They were a group of black-armored, black-masked soldiers riding Scale Horses. They were none other than the Black Water Cavalry.

But unlike the dead or injured cavalymen on the ground, this group wore armor with darker and more exquisite patterns on it. Their presence was generally stronger as well. Their energies combined to form the gigantic, howling silhouette of a leopard above their heads.

These were the elites of the Black Water Cavalry commanded by the Leopard Commander, Duan Zipao himself.

The elites numbered only three hundred, but each and every cavalryman was an elite who had fought at least a hundred battles. Powerful and experienced, they could give even an ordinary Half-Step Grandmaster a run for their money.

“Leopard Commander.”

Chu Hao saluted the cavalryman riding at the forefront of the group.

The Leopard Commander wore the same armor as his elites, but his Scale Horse was obviously bigger, stronger, and almost a head taller than an ordinary Scale Horse. There was also a huge, swollen bump at the top of his head.

When a Scale Horse had matured to a certain degree, it would start growing a horn on its head. If it was successful, then it would evolve from a Red-class Scale Horse to a Malice-class Unihorn Scale Horse.

A huge bow with a limb as thick as a baby’s arm was hanging on one side of the Unihorn Scale Horse. Clearly, this was the bow Duan Zipao had used to shoot the arrow earlier.

“It’s you, Chu Hao?” Duan Zipao shot the shadow guard leader a look before scanning the dead and wounded around him. A hint of murder entered his eyes as he asked, “Did you do this?”

“You misunderstand, Commander Duan. It is Ye Qing who did this. You can question your own men if you don’t believe me,” Chu Hao answered calmly.

“Ye Qing? You’re really telling me that Ye Qing can kill an entire guard of Black Water Cavalry all by himself?” Duan Zipao didn’t look like he believed Chu Hao. The Black Water Cavalry was considered an elite unit even in the Hengshan Army, and a full guard—one hundred and twenty five cavalymen in total—could threaten even a Spirit Master. However, it hadn’t even been half a teatime since he received the call for help. Was it really possible for Ye Qing to trounce an entire guard in such a short time?

“Question the survivors.”

Duan Zipao waved his hand, and several Black Water Cavalry elites dismounted and did as he ordered. A short while later, they confirmed that Chu Hao was telling the truth.

“How many did we lose?” It looked like a storm was brewing between Duan Zipao’s brows.

“Commander! We have seventy five men killed, twenty five seriously wounded, and twenty six lightly wounded. Garrison Commandant Wu Jian was also killed in action,” one of the elites reported.

“Good. Good! How dare he kill so many of mine! He’s going to wish that he was dead!” Duan Zipao’s eyes turned crimson as he let out a guttural growl. As if infected by their commander’s bloodthirst, the three hundred Dark Water Cavalry elites also roared with bloodlust,

“KILL!”

“KILL!”

“KILL!”

For a moment, it felt like the terrible battle cry would never end.

It was at this moment Fei Chuan showed up at the scene with a group of men. His face turned ugly when he saw the dead and wounded on the ground.

“The general ordered you to capture Ye Qing, and this is how you do it, Fei Chuan?” Duan Zipao immediately questioned his colleague when he saw him.

“That’s my business, not yours,” Fei Chuan retorted. Despite his cold exterior, the Wolf Commander was feeling like shit right now. He could not imagine that he, a brigade commander of the Hengshan Army, had been played by a nobody like a fiddle. Even if they caught Ye Qing and executed him this instant, his reputation was already damaged.

“Not my business? Ye Qing came to my territory and killed my men because you couldn’t catch him, and you say it’s not my business?” The temperature at the scene dropped several degrees lower. “It’s not your call anymore. From now on, I’m joining in the hunt for Ye Qing as well.”

“The general ordered me to search for Ye Qing, Duan Zipao. Are you going to disobey his order?” Fei Chuan said with an unfriendly expression.

“Don’t make me laugh.”

A steely glint entered Fei Chuan’s eyes. “Once again, that’s none of your business. Stay out of this, or else.”

Duan Zipao didn’t give an inch. “Or else, what?”

“Please don’t argue among yourselves, my lords. Right now, our first priority is catching Ye Qing. You can discuss the trivialties after our duty is done, no?”

It was at this moment Chu Hao stepped forward and acted as the mediator. “If Ye Qing manages to escape, then your general would be furious at both of you. Surely you don’t want that to happen?”

Chu Hao didn’t care who caught Ye Qing. All he cared about was taking Ye Qing’s head back to the Harmony King.

“The northside of the city is the Hengshan Army’s territory. Not even the King of Heavens can make us submit, much less Ye Qing!” Duan Zipao scoffed. “Mobilize the rest of the Dark Water Cavalry and begin searching for Ye Qing! I will have revenge for our fallen brothers even if I have to turn every inch of ground in Tian Yong to do so!”

“At once!” Someone left to carry out his orders.

“One company of men will stay behind to treat our wounded and collect the dead. The rest of you, follow me!”

Duan Zipao left the scene as soon as he was done barking orders. He never even glanced in Fei Chuan’s direction.

While glaring daggers at Duan Zipao’s back, Fei Chuan ordered icily, “Inform everyone that they are to capture Ye Qing before Duan Zipao no matter what. Kill him if you must.”

“At once!” Sensing the barely controlled wrath rolling off their leader’s body, Fei Chuan’s men hurriedly left to carry out their orders.

After Duan Zipao and Fei Chuan were both gone, Chu Hao turned to the old dwarf and said, “Grandpa Wasp, can you please inform all shadow guards to come to the northside of the city and search for Ye Qing? The sooner we find him, the less chance there is that something will go wrong.”

Grandpa Wasp replied lazily, “Duan Zipao is an ass, but he’s right that the northside is the Hengshan Army’s territory. There’s no way Ye Qing can escape even if he has three heads and six arms, so you really don’t need to be so tense, commander.”

“It’s always better to be safe than sorry,” Chu Hao replied.

“Cut the bullshit and just do what you’re told, Grandpa Wasp,” Granny Ghost interrupted.

“Fine, fine,” Grandpa Wasp grumbled and produced a palm-sized bronze mirror from his sleeve. He wrote a few lines of words on the mirror that didn’t fade until he was done writing. Then, the words disappeared into the bronze mirror.

“Done. I’ve notified the men with the Thousand Kilometer Mirror. They should show up very soon.”

Chapter 457: Where Is Ye Qing

Chu Hao nodded and turned to Granny Ghost next. “Can you please divine Ye Qing’s current location, Granny Ghost?”

Granny Ghost nodded and sat on the ground. She then closed her eyes and produced a pair of eyeballs from a sack. The eyeballs were rolling about like they were alive, and when they were caught by the old woman, glimmers of anxiety, terror, begging and more emotions actually shone through their pupils.

Granny Ghost paid them no heed, however. She shoved the two eyeballs into her mouth and began chewing them earnestly, spilling blood everywhere. A few seconds later, she spat both the flesh and the blood on the ground.

The flesh began wriggling slowly. A tiny, badly mangled ghost crawled out of one of the flesh chunks before it began consuming the vessel that held its existence. It wasn't long before every chunk of flesh was gone, and its bellies looked as round and big as a pregnant woman's belly.

After the ghost was done feeding, it let out a burp and looked at Granny Ghost. It then began waving its hands about and making these indecipherable noises that only she could understand.

Suddenly, it froze as if some sort of power had come over him. Then, it started writhing and screaming in pain. It immediately threw itself onto Granny Ghost and began feeding on her flesh.

"Granny Ghost!"

"You okay, old hag?!"

Grandpa Wasp, Chu Qingge and Chu Hao flinched a little when they saw this. They were just about to intervene when Granny Ghost shook her head and said, "I'm fine. Just leave it."

By the time the little ghost was finally satisfied, there was almost no spot on her person that looked intact. The little ghost then transformed back into a pool of flesh and blood.

"Are you alright, Granny Ghost?" Chu Qingge asked worriedly.

"I'm fine. It was just a small rebound," Granny Ghost replied in a raspy voice.

"You must have failed to divine Ye Qing's location, didn't you?" Grandpa Wasp taunted.

Granny Ghost ignored him and said to Chu Qingge and Chu Hao, "My deepest apologies, but I failed to divine Ye Qing's location. I reckon that he has some sort of fate concealing Strange Artifact that allows him to disrupt my Ghost Divination and allow him to avoid detection."

"Heh, I knew that your Ghost Divination is fake, old hag! It's totally useless!" Grandpa Wasp taunted again.

"Can you shut the hell up? I'm not done talking yet!" Granny Ghost finally lost her patience and rebuked Grandpa Wasp.

"What, I can't criticize you even though you suck?" Grandpa Wasp muttered under his breath.

Unwilling to engage Grandpa Wasp any longer, Granny Ghost looked at Chu Qingge and Chu Hao again and said, "However, my ghost servant told me that Ye Qing is somewhere within five hundred meters from our current location."

“Five hundred meters? It looks like Ye Qing hasn’t gone far. That’s good.”

Chu Qingge said quietly, “Grandpa Wasp, you can cover a five-hundred-meter radius with your Poison Wasps, right? Plus, this part of the city doesn’t have many tall buildings or people because it’s where the Hengshan Army is based. It should be very difficult for Ye Qing to find a proper hiding spot. Please keep an eye out for anyone who’s operating alone. There is a huge chance that they might be Ye Qing.”

“Understood. I’ll get it done, Your Highness!” Grandpa Wasp stroked his beard and swayed on his feet. Then, wasps the size of a human thumb began crawling out of his sleeves.

The sky was filled with buzzing noises in just the blink of an eye. Grandpa Wasp was completely covered in wasps as well.

“Go, my babies!”

Grandpa Wasp waved, and the wasps scattered in every direction.

Grandpa Wasp looked much, much thinner without his wasps. In fact, one could vaguely see that his body was riddled with hexagonal holes underneath his wide, black robe. There were plenty of larvae crawling in and out of the holes as well.

Some time passed, and dozens of men wearing embroidered robes joined the group from multiple directions. They then saluted Chu Qingge and Chu Hao and greeted, “Your Highness. Commander.”

“At ease. Pair up and search the northern area within one kilometer from this location. If you find anyone who piques your suspicion, don’t hesitate to message me immediately,” Chu Hao instructed.

“As you command!” The shadow guards received their orders before disappearing without a sound like smoke.

“Are you sure searching the northern area alone is okay, commander? What if Ye Qing tries to pull the same trick as before?” Grandpa Wasp asked.

“Don’t worry, Grandpa Wasp. Fei Chuan isn’t an idiot. He won’t make the same mistake a second time,” Chu Qingge replied. “Also, the east, south, and westside of the city are under the Hengshan Army’s full control right now. It would be suicide if Ye Qing tries to pull the same trick, and I’m sure he knows about this.”

“The only thing he can do now is to walk his chosen path until the end.”

“I see. Intelligently deduced, Your Highness,” Granny Wasp exclaimed in realization and paid Chu Qingge a compliment at the same time.

“Of course Her Highness is intelligent. Unlike you, her head isn’t one-half water and one-half flour,” Granny Ghost sneered.

Surprisingly, Grandpa Wasp didn't argue this point. "Sure. Of course I'm not as intelligent as Her Highness."

"You flatter me, Granny Ghost, Grandpa Wasp. I just want to find Ye Qing and give my father and my brother an answer as soon as possible."

Chu Qingge gazed into the distance with indifferent eyes, but hiding behind the veil of indifference was a simmering pot of emotions as unstable as the ever shifting clouds in the sky.

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Half a teatime later, Grandpa Wasp asked while communicating with his Poison Wasps, "Are you sure you performed your Ghost Divination correctly, old hag? My babies have already searched every nook and cranny within a five-hundred-meter radius from here, but Ye Qing is still nowhere to be found."

"Of course. My Ghost Divination may fail, but it's never incorrect," Granny Ghost declared with certainty.

"I'm not sure what's going on then. He's not just missing, I can't find anything that's even remotely out of place. It's like he's disappeared into thin air." Grandpa Wasp scratched his head with a deep frown on his face. "What the hell is going on here?"

"It's not just us. The Hengshan Army hasn't been able to find anything either." Chu Hao's brows were locked tightly as well.

"I know right? It's one thing if we couldn't find him. There's only a handful of us after all. But the Hengshan Army?"

Grandpa Wasp complained, "My babies told me that the Hengshan Army is everywhere right now. Literally. There's a post every five steps, and a sentry every ten steps. Forget a human, they could've flushed out every ant and rat in the city. Even if Ye Qing has three heads and six arms, it shouldn't be possible for him to elude his pursuers so thoroughly?"

"Seriously, just where did Ye Qing go? Is he hiding in the underground like a mole, or did he die and ascend to the heavens?"

"What did you just say, Grandpa Wasp?" Chu Qingge suddenly glanced in the old dwarf's direction.

"Excuse me?" Grandpa Wasp was startled out of his rant. "I'm just talking nonsense, Your Highness. Please don't mind me."

"No, it's not nonsense. Ye Qing is dead, though he didn't ascend to the heavens." Chu Qingge's eyes lit up. "I've figured out his plan."

She looked at Chu Hao and said, "Uncle Chu, please notify Fei Chuan and Duan Zipao and tell them to stop the carts transporting the dead Black Water Cavalry out of the city right now. Ye Qing is hiding among the bodies."

“Your Highness, are you saying that...” Chu Hao’s pupils contracted slowly as realization struck him. Assuming Chu Qingge was correct, Ye Qing had disguised himself as one of the dead bodies so that the Hengshan Army would carry him out of the city themselves.

The plan looked extremely risky, but in reality it was both intelligent and safe. A normal person would’ve run as far away from the scene of the crime as possible after killing the guard of Dark Water Cavalry. However, Ye Qing chose to hide right under their noses. No one noticed this because it was a blindspot, not to mention that none of them were in their best state of mind right now.

This would explain why Granny Ghost’s Ghost Divination told her that Ye Qing was within five hundred meters of them. In fact, he was right there with them until the soldiers carried him away.

This would also explain why Ye Qing was able to remain hidden even though the northside of the city was crawling with his pursuers right now. After all, who would try to spot a living person among the dead? They hadn’t thought about it, and definitely not the Hengshan Army.

Ye Qing’s plan wasn’t just audacious, he knew exactly how they would act under these circumstances and exploited their weakness to the fullest. What a scary man.

“There’s no time, Uncle Chu. Please notify Fei Chuan and Duan Zipao now,” Chu Qingge urged Chu Hao again when she noticed that the guy was still processing what she told him. Then, she vanished into the distance in a puff of purple qi.

After Chu Hao snapped out of his thoughts, he ordered, “Granny Ghost, Grandpa Wasp, follow her. Make sure you protect her with your life.”

Then, he channeled a terrible amount of power and shot into the sky like an arrow.

Chapter 458: The Flames of War Horn Blows

The northside of the city, Black Tortoise Street. Squadrons of Hengshan soldiers wielding sabers, spears, swords and more were crawling through the streets like ants. The atmosphere was solemn, and the light reflecting off their armor and weapon was ice cold.

Right now, five Black Water Cavalry elites were riding side by side on the street, their mounts drawing five creaky wooden carts behind them. The carts were filled with heaps and heaps of dead bodies. As the bodies were still fresh, their blood seeped through the cracks and painted red winter plums on the limestone floor. Despite their grim work, they almost looked relaxed compared to the rest of their colleagues.

“It’s been a while since we found the bodies. Why is it so quiet? Is the Leopard Commander still searching for Ye Qing?” One of the elites glanced at the Hengshan infantry still searching for signs of Ye Qing and asked.

“Isn’t it obvious? If he had found Ye Qing, we would have heard or seen some commotion already,” his comrade answered.

“Where on earth is he hiding?”

“Doesn’t matter. Ye Qing is already a dead man. The general has issued the kill order, and both the Leopard Commander and the Wolf Commander are involved. He could be a god, and there is still no way he can escape this situation alive.”

“Hmph. Killing him would be too easy a punishment. Did you see how many he killed? If I was the general, I would skin him alive, rip out his bones, and light his soul on fire so he may atone for his sins for eternity.”

“Hmph. And what’s the point? Will torturing him bring back our dead brothers?”

“Everyone who dons this armor knows that they will die someday. It’s just a matter of when. You’ve been a soldier for more than half a lifetime, and you still can’t get over this?”

“I’m not thinking about me! I’m thinking about our brothers! As a soldier, we can die for our country, the people, and our families. But to die in the hands of nobody? How can that be an honorable death?”

“Enough. The dead are dead. Let’s just focus on putting them to rest, shall we?”

The five men fell silent and continued toward the exit.

The Hengshan Army’s headquarters was located within the city, but their morgue was located outside the city. There were several reasons. One, it made collecting their dead more convenient. Two, it was easier to bury or cremate the bodies outside the city. And three, no harm would come to the populace if an epidemic or other accidents were to break out.

Right now, the five elites were transporting the bodies to the morgue outside the city. They would notify the families and bury the bodies later.

Creak... creak...

The wooden carts made creaky noises as they got closer and closer to the northern gate. Then—

“Halt!”

Five soldiers stepped away from the gates and blocked their way.

“Identify yourselves and state the reason you’re leaving the city!”

One of the elites handed his identity tag to the soldiers while explaining, “We are the elite units of the Black Water Cavalry, and we serve the Leopard Commander. Our orders are to transport our dead brothers to the morgue outside the city.”

The soldier checked the identity tag closely. After he confirmed that the identity was genuine, he returned it to the cavalryman and waved his hand. “You may pass!”

Shuffle shuffle...

The soldiers guarding the gate immediately stepped away so that the five carts could pass through unhindered. The Black Water Cavalry elite nodded and said, “Thank you.”

Since the Hengshan Army's headquarters was located at the northside of the city, they were in charge of guarding the northern gate as a matter of course. Since they were a military unit, there were strict rules and rigid protocol one must follow to use the northern gate. This applied even to the Hengshan Army themselves.

The five cavalymen slowly walked along the long, narrow passage under the gate soldiers' watchful gaze. They were about halfway there when suddenly—

OoooOOooooOoOOO!

The long, low-pitched, desolate sound of a war horn deafened the ears and shook heaven and earth. The clouds above the city stirred ominously as if the invisible smoke of war was disturbing its formation, and millions of soldiers were fighting each other on the ground.

“That's the Flames of War Horn!”

The blood drained away from every soldier's face when they heard the war horn. The gate commandant immediately shouted, ““The Flames of War Horn is blown! All units, close the gate immediately! Starting now, no one is to enter or leave the city without the general's order! Anyone who disobeys this order will be executed without mercy!”

The Flames of War Horn was blown only and only during situations of grave importance. When it was blown, it meant that something terrible had happened, and all Hengshan soldiers must don their armor and enter a battle ready state immediately. The northern gate must also be shut at first notice, and no one was allowed to pass through it without permission. Those who disobeyed would die.

Tian Yong was the hinterland of Chu, so the Flames of War Horn was used only three times since the Hengshan Army was formed. However, every incident that triggered the horn was as serious as it could get.

The first time the Flames of War Horn was used, the current Grand Mentor was patrolling the realm on the emperor's orders. When he reached Tian Yong, he encountered an assassination attempt. The Hengshan Army used the Flames of War Horn to mobilize all their soldiers and slay a total of seventy eight assassins.

The second time it was used was a decade ago. Constant rain had resulted in a devastating flood that hadn't happened to Tian Yong in a century, and at least hundreds of thousands of civilians lost their homes.

The refugees traveled to the city to seek refuge, but evil cults such as the Way of Taiping and the Unliving Sect took the opportunity to sow dissent among the people and cause chaos. In the end, the Hengshan Army used the Flames of War Horn, suppressed the budding rebellion in its nascency and slew hundreds of cultists.

The third time it was used was three years ago. Thirty six factions in Tian Yong had come together for a rare meeting with the intention of forming a coalition, so the Intelligence Department commanded the Hengshan Army to cooperate with them. The blood ran like rivers, and the bodies piled like hills that day. It was a stunning, terrifying incident that was still remembered to this day.

That was why the gate commandant didn't hesitate to order the gate shut as soon as he heard the horn blow. If something bad were to happen because of his inaction, he could be beheaded ten times and still not atone for his sins.

The five Black Water Cavalry elites that had just reached the gate came to a stop as well. Just like the gate commandant, they knew full well what the Flames of War Horn meant. Surprised they might be, they didn't hesitate to turn their Scale Horses around and get ready to return into the city.

It was at this moment the pile of corpses lying in the foremost cart suddenly flew into the air and scattered in every direction. There was no sound, but their momentum was so great that the soldiers getting ready to close the gate were knocked off their feet.

At the same time, a single man rose from the center and glided toward the gate like a phantom.

"What the—"

"It's Ye Qing!"

"Message the commanders now! Quickly!" A Black Water Cavalry elite shouted when he finally snapped out of his shock.

Standing on top of the city gate, the gate commandant quickly figured out why the Flames of War Horn was sounded as well. Someone must have figured out that Ye Qing was hiding among the bodies, but they were unable to get the information through in time because the time was too short, and they were too far away. So, they used the Flames of War Horn in hopes of shutting the gate before Ye Qing could slip through.

It was a great idea. Unfortunately, they were still a step too late.

There was one silver lining though. When the Flames of War Horn was sounded, the cart Ye Qing was hiding in still hadn't left the city yet. Otherwise, the trail would be cold long before reinforcements showed up, and they would be blamed for whatever shitshow that might result from their "failure", never mind that they had reacted as well as they could have.

But right now, it still wasn't too late. They could still capture Ye Qing and make up for their mistake.

"We must capture Ye Qing! To me!" The gate commandant declared before racing out of the gate before anyone else.

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Outside the city, Ye Qing felt as if an invisible weight had lifted off his heart.

That was cutting it a little close there, but I ain't complaining.

Although things hadn't gone exactly to plan, he was ultimately able to escape the city. Originally, he wanted to disguise himself as a Hengshan soldier and slip out of the city without anyone the wiser, but as the saying goes, the best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry. A guard of Black Water Cavalry had seen through his disguise because they were too honest for their own good. He had no choice but to destroy them.

Ye Qing knew there was no way he could keep things under wraps of so many no matter how powerful he was. The moment the Hengshan Army discovered the bodies, his escape plan would be snuffed out faster than he could say oops. Moreover, the northside of the city was where the Hengshan Army's headquarters was situated, so he had no doubt that the danger he was currently facing was ten, no, a hundred times worse than what it was before.

Trying to skulk his way back to the other gates wasn't an option either. He had already tricked the Hengshan Army once, and the thought that they might make the same mistake and allow him to fool them a second time was unthinkable.

Hiding definitely wasn't an option. Tian Yong was huge, and its population was massive. He was certain he could hide for a day or two without being discovered. However, it would be no different from drinking blood to stave off one's thirst. Once Tian Yong entered a state of total lockdown, it was only a matter of time before the Hengshan Army or the Harmony King dragged him out of his hidey-hole and killed him.

Therefore, the only way left for him was to pretend to be dead. During one of their idle conversations, Gao Ning'an had briefly told him about the Hengshan Army and how they functioned. So, he knew that the Hengshan Army had a morgue outside the city that they used to keep their dead temporarily. That was why he decided to disguise himself as one of the bodies and let the Hengshan Army themselves deliver him to freedom.

To this end, he purposely left some of the Black Water Cavalry alive and left the area right in front of their eyes. He wanted them to think that he had escaped elsewhere and mislead their comrades. After he snuck back to the crime scene, he destroyed one of the bodies and assumed their identity.

He was hoping to leave Tian Yong without anyone noticing, but his enemy had seen through his ploy faster than he expected. Luckily for him, he was already at the gate when it happened, so he was ultimately able to escape the city.

Ye Qing wasn't worried even though he was discovered. So long as he managed to escape the death trap that was the city, he was certain he would survive one way or another.

Swoosh!

Ye Qing had just taken two steps when suddenly, his instincts warned him of danger. He dashed sideways just in time to avoid an arrow putting a deep hole in the ground. It was after the fact that he heard the sound of an arrow whistling through the air.

A bad feeling suddenly gripped Ye Qing. He looked back and saw a black-armored, black-masked man looking down on him from the top of the gate like he was an ant. He was carrying a huge bow.

"Duan Zipao..."

Ye Qing's heart sank bit by bit. This... wasn't the plan.

The next moment, the earth trembled, and the noise of hoofs thudding against the ground entered his ears. A massive black tide emerged from the distance and rushed toward him with great speed and power. When it was about thirty meters away from him, it split into two and surrounded him in a tight circle.

"The Black Water Cavalry..."

Ye Qing's heart sank completely.

Chapter 459: One Man Versus An Army

"You like to run, don't you? Go on! Run," Duan Zipao taunted while looking down on his surrounded prey.

Ye Qing didn't say anything. He simply frowned as if he was trying to figure something out.

"Are you wondering why I'm here?" Duan Zipao asked as if he wanted to listen to Ye Qing's theories, but answered his own question before the young man could react. "It's simple, really. Rather than running about like headless chickens, I thought that lying in wait at a location you must pass through is much more effective. And I was right."

Ye Qing was still silent, so Duan Zipao continued, "So, how does it feel? To fall to hell, ascend to the Kingdom of Buddha, then fall to hell again? It's quite flavorful, isn't it?"

"Don't you have anything to say? Or are you the type who has nothing to say when your end is near?"

"I would advise you to say something though. Anything is fine. It'll be your last will in this world after all."

Ye Qing raised an eyebrow and scoffed, "You're a talkative one, aren't you?"

Ye Qing disappeared before he finished speaking and charged toward a group of Black Water Cavalry.

A cavalry's greatest weapon was their charge, and they were especially deadly when they sped up to the point where they were the human equivalent of an avalanche.

As if that wasn't bad enough, the Black Water Cavalry in front of him were the cream of the crop. Not only were they stronger than the cavalymen he fought earlier, there were twice as many as them, if not more.

Therefore, the best way to deal with cavalry was to attack them first. One should disrupt their momentum, suppress their strength, and confuse their minds before they could launch a charge. A cavalry troop that couldn't charge was sometimes easier to handle than even a group of infantry.

Ye Qing had been searching for a weak point in the Black Water Cavalry's formation while Duan Zipao was busy talking to himself. Unfortunately, everyone here was a battle-hardened veteran. The encirclement was as tight as it was flawless.

That was fine though. If there were no flaws in his enemy's formation, then he just needed to make one himself.

Ye Qing's energies washed out of him like a fountain as he rushed toward a group of cavalymen.

"Raise spears!"

The cavalymen facing toward him didn't panic. They simply obeyed their captain's orders and raised their spears.

Whoosh!

The cavalymen moved perfectly in sync. They looked like a patch of black cloud when their shoulder plates clattered against their comrades'.

If the black cloud decided to bear down on a city, it might even succeed and crush it.

“Throw!”

The next moment, a rain of short spears whistled through the sky as swift as the wind, falling toward Ye Qing like a downpour of steel. Whoever said that only the heavens could command the weather?

The short spears were forged from heavy metal. They were incredibly sharp, impossibly heavy, and capable of cutting through astral qi. It was why most *jianghu* warriors wouldn’t choose to take such an attack head on.

Ye Qing didn’t have a choice, however. If he withdrew here, he would never break out of this encirclement. While still charging at high speed, he surrounded himself in energies of yin and yang, black and white, hard and soft. Whenever a short spear hit the two energies, they would deflect away from Ye Qing’s body as harmlessly as a falling leaf. But of course, the short spears were anything but harmless. The spears plowed into the ground beside his feet almost all the way to the end, and they were still pouring down on him from every direction.

But still Ye Qing ran like the wind, the black spearfall failing to slow him down even a little, much less wound him. It was like a scholar stepping through a blooming garden with no path, but not a single leaf or petal was able to ruffle up his appearance. If a painter were to draw a painting of this scene, it would probably become famous and be remembered for a long, long time to come.

Every time Ye Qing’s feet hit the ground, the ground would shake a little, and the spears would wobble a little. When he was three meters away from his target, he sucked in a deep breath and brought down his foot with all his might.

At that moment, the world shook. It was like an invisible force had gripped all nine provinces by the throat and shaking them left and right. Every short spear planted in the ground was ejected into the sky, and when Ye Qing raised an arm and clenched his fist, there was a deafening bang that sounded like heaven and earth colliding with each other. The next moment, the sky of spears flipped around and took aim at the Black Water Cavalry.

Ye Qing threw a punch, and the floating spears shot back toward their throwers.

“Mountain Range Formation, now!”

“Raise shield!”

Blanching, the leader of the group hurriedly barked out a series of commands. The cavalrymen facing toward Ye Qing immediately turned their mounts sideways and stacked their shields on top of each other. It was as if a multilayered mountain range had sprung into existence in an instant.

If Ye Qing did nothing, then the Black Water Cavalry would come out of his attack with minimal damage. So, he threw another punch.

“*Break Through*”

Like a lone cavalry aiming to cut through the sea of troops in front of him, Break Through shattered the shields, the Scale Horses, and the cavalrymen closest to him. It was like a giant beast had slammed into their formation at full force. As if on cue, the short spears finally descended from the sky—

Pssh pssh pssh!

Dozens of cavalrymen were turned into pincushions just like that.

Unfortunately, that was the end of Ye Qing's attack. The Mountain Range Formation was a defensive formation the Black Water Cavalry specifically trained to guard against cavalry charges. If the Scale Horses were the base of the mountain range, then the shields were the mountains. No matter how powerful the tsunami was, it couldn't overcome a multilayered mountain range and flood it all.

What this meant was that Ye Qing's Break Through had petered out after punching through just a couple layers of "mountains", and the spearfall was also spent after the one attack.

As soon the fist force was gone, and the rain had ceased, the gap Ye Qing had tried so hard to pry open was immediately filled up by new cavalrymen.

"Blade Mountain Formation, now!"

When the order was given, the ring of cavalrymen closest to Ye Qing immediately drew their long sabers and attacked him from every direction.

Ye Qing deflected the attacks with a punch, but before he could do anything else, his attackers retreated deeper into their ranks, and the second layer of cavalrymen rushed forward to swing their sabers at him.

The yin and yang energies surrounding Ye Qing shuddered a little, but they still managed to redirect the sabers away from his body. But once again, his attackers retreated after the one attack so that the next layer of cavalrymen could unleash their attacks.

Ye Qing frowned. At this rate, they would wring him dry long before he managed to break out of the encirclement.

This time, Ye Qing swung his sleeves and caught the falling sabers in a bundle of force instead of bouncing them away from him. Then, he pulled the weapons toward him.

Caught off guard, the cavalrymen reacted decisively and abandoned their weapons. However, that slight delay was all Ye Qing needed. Before they could retreat into their ranks, Ye Qing swung his sleeves again and spun the sabers around him like a hurricane, skewering their torsos with their own sabers. Before anyone could react, he pulled several Scale Horses and sent them flying toward his enemies.

The Scale Horses weighed at least hundreds of kilograms. If they hit, they were going to do a ton of damage. So, the captain barked another order,

"Saber out! Black Water Slash!"

Every cavalryman unsheathed their sabers and swung at the Scale Horses. Their saber forces merged together to form several black scars in the air that cut the Scale Horses into bits.

The Scale Horses weren't the only gifts Ye Qing prepared for them, however. The second the Scale Horses split into many tiny chunks, the force hidden within their flesh immediately exploded outward like a hail of arrows. Caught completely off guard, the foremost cavalrymen were skewered and killed just like that.

While the Black Water Cavalry struggled to regain control, Ye Qing leaped into the air and tried to escape. However, his senses suddenly warned him of danger, and he hurriedly gathered his energy and punched directly above his head.

It was at this moment an arrow fell from the sky like the judgment of the heavens. There was no sound, but the arrow was imbued with so much power that it easily tore through his fist force like paper. Then, it continued its course and slammed into Ye Qing's fist.

Boom!

There was a loud boom, and Ye Qing felt a tremendous amount of foreign energy spreading throughout his body and scattering his energies. Then, he was sent crashing back to the ground. The impact was such that a shallow pit spanning about ten meters had taken form around him. It was like a mini meteor had struck the ground.

Ye Qing's expression looked ugly as he gathered himself. When his energies had cycled once throughout his body, and a mouthful of murky breath escaped his lips, the foreign energies wreaking havoc inside his body were fully dispelled.

Obviously, Duan Zipao was the one who shot the arrow. Duan Zipao was a late-stage Spirit Master, so the shot was incredibly powerful as a matter of course.

The good news was that the shot failed to harm him despite its power. The bad news was that the Black Water Cavalry had regained control and surrounded him once more.

Duan Zipao didn't make another move after shooting that arrow. He was back to roleplaying a curious spectator once more.

"Flood Dragon Formation, now!"

The cavalrymen surrounding Ye Qing suddenly split away from each other just enough to reveal two narrow gaps. At the same time, two squads formed up at the end of the gap and charged toward Ye Qing. It was like a flood dragon attempting to skewer him alive with its horns.

Both squads were only ten-man squads, but the threat they represented were unmistakable.

Ye Qing knew he wouldn't be able to break out of the encirclement then, not while Duan Zipao was still watching from the sidelines. Not only that, it was clear that Duan Zipao treated this battle like a clown show. He wanted to wear him down with his Black Water Cavalry before killing him like a clown.

If I can't escape... then I will fight.

Let's see if you can still clown about after I've annihilated your whole army!

Chapter 460: I Will Kill Ye Qing Myself

Ye Qing opened his mouth and sucked in what felt like a cyclone's worth of air into his stomach. For a moment, his abdomen thudded like thunder.

When he bent his knees slightly, his feet slowly sank into the ground as if it couldn't bear his weight.

Right before the two cavalry squads would hit him like two mini avalanches, Ye Qing stretched his arms in front of him and caught the heads of the two foremost Scale Horses.

His muscles groaned, and his bones cracked and popped like fireworks. The ground beneath his feet also undulated like it was made of water, not earth.

Ye Qing didn't budge an inch from his spot, however. Like an unshakeable mountain, he had stopped the avalanche via sheer strength. He then pressed both Scale Horses to the ground.

The squads following closely behind the two lead cavalymen couldn't stop their charge in time. They immediately bowled themselves over and fell all over the place.

"Grr..."

A guttural growl escaped Ye Qing's throat as black fur grew out of his face, and his body grew much bigger and taller than before. Before anyone could react, he raised his elbow and slammed into the pile of fallen cavalymen with all his might.

What happens if you punch a snowball? The snowball would scatter into countless pieces, though in this case it was a shower of flesh and blood instead of pure, white snow.

Ye Qing was just starting, however. After annihilating two squads of cavalymen with a shoulder charge, he continued forward and plunged deep into the enemy ranks.

Ye Qing was much stronger and immune to most weapons after transforming into the Chaos Demon Ape. Against the Black Water Cavalry, he was like a tiger in a den of sheep. Every part of his body was a deadly weapon his enemies couldn't defend against, and even the most casual gesture could send scores of cavalymen flying through the air. Without hesitation, he punched, kicked, slammed, smashed, and scratched every cavalryman in his range into pieces.

Faced with such an unusual opponent, the Black Water Cavalry's formation immediately fell into disarray. Their blood ran like rivers, and their screams seemed like it would never end.

"Dammit!"

Atop the northern gate, Duan Zipao's expression went from gleeful to ugly in an instant. If everything had gone according to plan, his three hundred strong elite Black Water Cavalry would keep Ye Qing pinned down like a fish in the barrel, while he would deal with any shenanigans the young man might pull to escape his predicament. He wanted to deplete Ye Qing's strength bit by bit and subject him to the worst possible torment and despair for as long as possible before finally killing him. Only then could his hatred be quenched.

At first, things did go as he imagined it would. Although his elite Black Water Cavalry suffered some damage, it was well within his predictions and tolerance. Then, things went straight to hell.

Already, his elite Black Water Cavalry was incurring losses that were far beyond his ability to endure. He had personally chosen and trained each and every one of his elites, and in that sense, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that they were his babies. He would've been depressed for half a day if even one of them was killed in action, but for them to be harvested like wheat by the enemy? How could he stand this? How could he not be furious?

"Enough!"

Duan Zipao roared and leaped down from the gate. The second he landed, the ground within ten meters of him collapsed and split into many pieces. As dust clouds surrounded his person, he raised his bow and loosed an arrow straight at Ye Qing.

A massive leopard suddenly appeared in the air. Its footsteps were perfectly silent, but it ran so fast it was almost impossible for the eyes to catch it. Like the wind of the heavens, it reached Ye Qing in just the blink of an eye.

Ye Qing failed to react to the attack in time, and the massive leopard knocked him to the ground. Everyone saw an arrow stuck deep inside his right shoulder when the dust clouds faded a little, and Ye Qing climbed out of the ape-shaped pit he made himself.

Ye Qing grabbed the arrow and ripped it out of his shoulder. The arrowhead was barbed, so he also ripped out an entire chunk of flesh in the process. Despite this, the young man grinned savagely as if he couldn't feel the pain. Then, he looked away from Duan Zipao and charged into another group of cavalymen.

"You bastard!"

Duan Zipao nearly blew his top when he saw this. He kicked off the ground and dashed straight toward Ye Qing like a leopard.

"I was waiting for you."

Ye Qing's lips curled into a devilish grin as he declared, "Come forth, Child of Blood Demon!"

A thick fog immediately surged out of Ye Qing's body. It moved supernaturally quick and enveloped hundreds of meters of land in just the blink of an eye. This included every cavalymen and the gate soldiers on the gate.

Unperturbed, Duan Zipao charged straight toward Ye Qing and swung his massive bow like it was a saber. The young man immediately exploded into a shower of gore.

"What the...?!"

Suddenly, Duan Zipao noticed that the man he killed wasn't Ye Qing. It was a Black Water Cavalry elite.

"Ye Qing is over here! Form up and kill him!"

Before he could figure out what the hell just happened, a cavalry squad rushed out of the fog and charged straight toward him.

"Are you blind? It's me!" Duan Zipao roared at his foolish men, but it was as if they couldn't see or hear him at all. They continued to charge him at full speed.

Anger flickered in his eyes like twin flames as he opened his mouth and let out a mighty roar. The cavalry squad immediately lost their cohesion and fell to the ground, their energies scattered and blood pouring out of every orifice.

Duan Zipao didn't kill them. They were his after all.

"Ye Qing is here! Kill him!"

"We must have revenge for our brothers! Kill him!"

"Kill him!"

“Argh!”

Battle cries were erupting from everywhere. From time to time, they were mixed with screams of pain.

Something about this felt off to Duan Zipao. He glanced at a random direction just in time to see a group of cavalymen fighting against the gate soldiers.

“Have you all lost your minds?!”

Duan Zipao shouted at the same time he cut in between the two groups and released a wave of force that disarmed everyone.

“Wh... what happened?”

“What’s wrong?”

“Leopard Commander...”

The soldiers immediately jolted back to reality. Everyone wore looks of confusion on their faces.

“I just saw Ye Qing at this spot a moment ago! Where did he go?”

“I did too. It’s like he’s suddenly vanished into thin air!”

His cavalymen reported somewhat haphazardly.

“Is it the fog?” Duan Zipao stared at the surrounding fog severely. “Something’s not right with this fog. All units, protect your mind as much as possible and retreat from this fog immediately!”

“What about you, commander?” Someone asked.

“I will kill Ye Qing myself!”

Right now, Duan Zipao’s face was so dark you would think a storm was brewing inside him. The elite Black Water Cavalry was his greatest force, but now they were dying in droves because of Ye Qing. His heart ached so much he wouldn’t be surprised if he was actually bleeding inside.

He already hated Ye Qing to begin with, but now? Not even killing Ye Qing a million times would be enough to appease his anger.

“Roar!”

A terrible, chilly, dark aura slowly poured out of Duan Zipao’s body. When he roared, the fog within several hundred meters of him was dispelled for a moment, and a giant leopard appeared behind his back.

The leopard had night black fur and azure blue eyes. Black water filled with countless malicious ghosts were swimming around it. It was Duan Zipao’s yin god, the Ghost Leopard of Winnowing Waters.

“Found you.”

Duan Zipao's eyes concentrated in a certain direction, and a malicious grin flashed on his face. He took off in a tremendous burst of speed.

While the Ghost Leopard of Winnowing Waters was descending from the sky, the ghosts swimming inside the black stream also spilled out into the open. Blue-faced and long-fanged, they donned battle armor and rode skeletal horses. Like veteran soldiers who had fought countless battles, they formed an entourage around Duan Zipao and charged forward with fearless abandon.

Duan Zipao might be one man, but he was also an army. His yin god, the Ghost Leopard of Winnowing Waters, possessed the ability to convert dying people's souls into Chang ghosts that he might command as he pleased.

Seemingly in awe of Duan Zipao's power, Ye Qing didn't move from his spot. When the commander was about six meters away from him, Ye Qing abruptly shot him a strange, devilish smirk.

"Took you long enough."

A bad feeling suddenly gripped Duan Zipao. Before he could puzzle out what it was, Ye Qing took one step backward and disappeared into the thick fog. Not only that, a familiar rumble could be heard from behind the thick fog.

"What—"

A terrible black stream churned out thick fog. It was headed straight for Duan Zipao. By the time the commander realized what was happening, it was already too late. He could only watch as his ghosts slammed head first into the squad of Black Water Cavalry elites.

The ghosts were smashed apart like nothing, but the souls of the cavalrymen were also snuffed out like a candle.