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Chapter 311 Such a Large Snake

When General Lin showed his anger, his momentum was extraordinary, instilling a touch of unease in Hu Bugui and the others. They became as quiet as cicadas in the cold, not daring to speak.

When it came to the matter of military strategy, Lin Wanrong was not a master. However, he held a truth applicable across all matters—if simply memorizing some military strategy could make a successful general, wouldn't everyone who read military books be an undefeated commander?

Du Xiuyuan was the only one among them who had passed the examination. Lin Wanrong, feeling somewhat calmer, asked, "Brother Du, what do you think of this military strategy test?"

Du Xiuyuan shook his head and said, "Military strategies have practical significance only when combined with real combat experience. While the format of this examination is novel, it is still teaching from the book without flexibility. By simply memorizing the texts of military books, one can pass. Brother Hu and others have been battling for many years, and their combat experience is rich. Their assumptions deviate greatly from the theories in the books, hence they were judged as unqualified."

Lin Wanrong nodded, fell silent, and gazed into the distance, deep in thought.

From afar, a little white horse approached. It was Li Wuling returning from a long journey. He had traveled quite far, crossing the entire training field, dust and sand covering his body. But his face was full of joy and excitement.

"Little Li, why are you so happy?" Lin Wanrong asked with a smile.

Li Wuling steadied his saddle, leaped down, and laughed, "Lin San, I spoke to my grandfather, and he granted me permission to participate in this military drill. But for Brother Hu and Brother Li, you'll have to wait a little longer—"

Lin Wanrong looked puzzled at Hu Bugui and the others behind him. Du Xiuyuan opened his mouth with a smile, "That's the case. We were quite upset about being excluded from the drills. Just when we were about to voice our grievances to General Lin, this kid stopped us."

"Oh, why did he stop you?" Seeing Li Wuling's round, innocent face, Lin Wanrong couldn't help but feel fondness for the child. He patted Little Li's head and asked.

Hu Bugui carelessly said, "What else could he be doing? The kid's boasting, saying that as long as you, General Lin, were here, he would find a way to get us into the drill. But now you're here, General Lin, and there's no sign of what he promised."

‘What the hell, me being here would get you into the drill? I'm not the Emperor, whose word is gold, who can do anything with a single utterance. This little Li's boast is way too far-fetched.’

Everyone glared at Li Wuling, deeply dissatisfied with his broken promise. Li Wuling chuckled triumphantly, saying, "Why are you in such a hurry? The drill has just started, and there will be plenty of opportunities. Look, haven't I already been allowed to participate? Just wait a little while, and someone will invite you to participate. Hehe, if my promise comes true, remember what you promised me. I won't go anywhere else, just find me the largest courtyard in the Eight Great Hutongs, choose some of the best looking courtesans, and let them serve me drinks."

Hu Bugui, Xu Zhen and the others all scoffed, expressing their disbelief at his words. Lin Wanrong laughed heartily. "Looking for a courtesan in the Eight Great Hutongs, huh? You're quite bold. I fear that you, a mere child, might not return in one piece." However, Li Wuling was a descendant of a loyal and righteous family, and his personality was bold and adorable, which indeed made him likable.

Everyone took Li Wuling's words as a joke and didn't pay much attention. They found the battle on the drill field invigorating. Suddenly, they heard the rapid sound of horse hooves. Looking in the direction of the sound, they saw several fast horses crossing the camp square, piercing through the swirling sand of the battlefield, and galloping towards them.

Hu Bugui was the most anxious of all. After taking a look, he immediately exclaimed, "It's General Li Tai coming."

On one of the front horses sat an imposing, elder general clad in a bronze helmet and iron armor. With a long spear in his hand and his horse galloping at full speed, he was rushing towards them. It was none other than General Li Tai, who had berated Lin Wanrong in broad daylight.

What was the old man here for? Hadn't they already broken off their negotiations? Seeing the smug smile on Li Wuling's face, Lin Wanrong was puzzled.

Beside Li Tai, there was a graceful white horse. On its back sat a female rider, her face concealed by a white veil, making it impossible to discern her features. However, her figure was particularly enchanting. The horse followed closely behind Li Tai, and the woman's horsemanship was not weak. The white veil, however, was covered in a thick layer of dust.

"Little Lin San meet General Li. How have you been, old general?" Seeing Li Tai dismount, Lin Wanrong greeted him with a smile.

Li Tai glanced at him, his face serious, and snorted, "This is a battlefield, and military discipline is strict. There should be no noise or laughter. What sort of image do you think you're presenting, soldier?" With his many years of experience on the battlefield, he exuded an aura of authority and a killing spirit that made people's hearts tremble.

'I'm not a soldier anymore, old man,' Lin Wanrong muttered to himself, laughing and crying at the same time. This old General Li, who was so used to commanding soldiers, seemed to treat everyone like his subordinates. While Lin Wanrong was generally talkative, he deeply respected this iron-blooded famous general. After being scolded, he simply nodded in acknowledgment without arguing back, leaving Hu Bugui and the others secretly amazed. It seemed that even the fearless General Lin, who couldn't be controlled by even Master Xu Wei, behaved quite obediently in front of General Li.

"Greetings, General," said Hu Bugui and the others, who were all officers under Li Tai. They didn't dare to behave as casually as Lin Wanrong and all saluted respectfully.

Li Tai nodded slightly, his hand resting on his sword hilt. His gaze fell on Lin Wanrong. "Lin San," he said, "I heard that you volunteered to participate in this military drill. Is that true?"

'What?' Lin Wanrong's mouth fell open. 'Damn, when did I say that? Don't I look too casual to participate in a military drill? Are you playing with me?'

Hu Bugui and the others were taken aback at first, then they all looked at Lin Wanrong in delight. So, General Lin had this up his sleeve. What a cool-headed fellow, they hadn't noticed a single flaw.

"Old General, when did I ever say that? Did you mishear?" Lin Wanrong hastily retorted.

Li Tai sternly said, "Nonsense, how could I possibly have misheard? It was Wuling who just now personally reported to me that you wished to lead the troops in a military exercise, to conduct a real

battle simulation. That's why I hurried over. Are you trying to back out now? This is the army, there is no room for jest."

Lin Wanrong looked at Li Wuling in astonishment, only to see the boy grinning triumphantly, his face filled with smugness as he glanced at Hu Bugui and the others.

Du Xiuyuan and the others finally understood Li Wuling's intent for Lin Wanrong. This move of 'pushing the duck onto the perch, forcing the sow onto the tree,' was truly ingenious. The young Li Wuling had such a shrewd scheme at such a young age, truly a tiger's son, living up to his reputation.

Lin Wanrong glared hard at Li Wuling. No wonder this Li Wuling said that as long as he come, he would have a way to get Hu Bugui and the others to participate in the exercise, so he was the bait.

Seeing his hesitation, Li Tai loudly said, "Every moment in the army can affect the state. Lin San, quickly say what you have decided." His imposing authority deliberately pressured Lin San, forcing him to comply.

Damn it, there was no preparation at all for a live combat exercise, this was clearly a setup. Seeing the hopeful gaze of Hu Bugui and the others, Lin Wanrong gritted his teeth. 'Damn it, it's just an exercise, who am I, Lin San, afraid of?' A glint of determination flashed in his eyes, he snorted and said, "Alright, I'll do it."

A hint of amusement rose in Li Tai's eyes, but he quickly concealed it. He turned to the woman beside him and said, "Zhiqing, you can decide how these two should be assigned."

'Zhiqing? Damn it, no wonder she looks familiar. So it is Miss Xu, dressing up in a vest and a face veil and I wouldn't recognize you?' He laughed and said with a fist salute, "It turns out to be Miss Xu, tsk tsk, I didn't recognize you. You look even better with your face covered than with it exposed."

"Nonsense," Li Wuling retorted, "Aunt Xu looks a hundred times better when her face is revealed." His words were sincere but he didn't realize that he had fallen into Lin San's trap, while Hu Bugui and the others were holding back their laughter. What goes around comes around, and it was happening fast. This young Li Wuling had just set up Lin San, only to be played back in an instant.

Xu Zhiqing snorted lightly and smiled, "Today's military exercise, the sand and wind are strong, I, being weak, covered my face. General Lin, please don't mind. Although you volunteered to join, you can't command the soldiers on the battlefield, but you can choose the rest."

Hu Bugui and the others immediately rolled up their sleeves and snickered, their gratitude to Li Wuling was evident. The matter of asking him to visit the Eight Great Hutongs was settled. Li Wuling was also eager to look at Lin Wanrong. As an extra, only with Lin San's approval could he join as a soldier.

Lin Wanrong sighed lightly and said with a grimace, "The well-versed and strong commanders have been chosen by the assistant general, and I have to choose these self-taught wild commanders, alas, it's so unfair. Oh, by the way, Miss Xu, have you seen the military exam hosted by the assistant general?"

Xu Zhiqing shook her head slightly, "I only found out yesterday, I took a quick glance."

Lin Wanrong laughed and said, "I wonder how it would turn out if Miss Xu were to take the exam?"

Xu Zhiqing confidently said, "I have read the military strategy books, The Art of War and Liu Tao, thoroughly. If the questions are from these books, I am confident that no one can stump me."

Lin Wanrong raised his thumb and declared, "Impressive! With that in mind, Miss Xu, having read through military books and being a scholar of many talents, when it comes to fighting, naturally you are the top general in the world."

Xu Zhiqing, extremely intelligent, understood his thoughts perfectly. She smiled and said, "Military books are formed in actual combat and refined into text, the hard-earned wisdom of our ancestors, with great reference value." She paused slightly and continued, "However, with the change of eras and environments, military strategy must also adapt. We must not blindly believe in books, or simply follow their teachings."

Upon hearing these words, the people like Hu Bugui felt reassured. Li Tai, a seasoned general with profound experience on the battlefield, didn't need to elaborate on his application of military strategies. He cast a deep glance at Lin Wanrong and inquired, "Lin San, in your opinion, what is the relationship between military strategy and actual combat?"

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Military strategies are the precious wisdom left by our ancestors and are invaluable. They are the best examples for us juniors to learn from. We are right to study military

strategies. However, the method of study varies significantly. Military strategy is not just about studying, passing exams, or memorizing standard phrases. It's a profound theory. But soldiers are tricksters. As time and locations change, our battle strategies must change accordingly. Simply put, it's just like learning to read and write. Everyone can do it. But few can produce timeless verses. Although anyone can learn military strategies, few can truly master them in their entirety. So, military strategy is a basic subject to delve into but cannot be deemed right or wrong. It should be integrated into actual combat, learning from battles and battling during learning. Only when we thoroughly understand this can we truly be invincible."

Li Tai stroked his beard, nodding in approval. A glint of admiration passed his eyes, quickly masked, and his solemn expression returned. "This military exam is conducted by my assistant to select the leaders for the military exercise. The practice will be led by him. I will not interfere. All your talk is futile, mere lip service. If you are capable, prove yourself on the battlefield by defeating him."

Having started, Lin Wanrong couldn't back out. He had no idea who Li Tai's assistant was. It was almost a real battle, a genuine encounter. His heart pounded at the thought, but the thrill was exhilarating.

Hu Bugui and the others had already rushed off to put on their armor. Li Tai glanced at Lin Wanrong, a trace of anticipation showing in his eyes. "Lin San, fight well in this battle. There will be rewards."

Li Tai had rarely spoken to him, and when he did, he was always serious and stern. His current amiability was unusual.

Lin Wanrong shook his head, his expression placid. "I don't need rewards—I know you won't believe me, but there are very few instances where I don't take advantage. But if I say I'll do something, I'll definitely do it. General, I've been honest with you. I, Lin San, am content with life as it comes. But I've never backed down from a challenge. The reason I've got involved today is because I don't want to see talents like Brother Hu and Brother Li buried. They are brave and resourceful, with ambition to serve the country. If their talents were wasted, no amount of money or wives could bring me peace."

Listening to Lin Wanrong's words, Xu Zhiqing felt both touched and amused. How had this man managed to craft such inspirational speech that inevitably deviated into jest at the end?

Li Tai, a man weathered by time, had long mastered the skill of discerning one's true nature. Upon seeing Lin Wanrong's expression, a faint smile finally broke through. As Xu Wei said, this Lin Wanrong was a rough man on the outside, but warm at heart. Strip away his flamboyant, gaudy exterior, and you were left with a genuinely passionate man.

Smiling, Li Tai said, "You think I'm senile? I know gold from sand. Relax. Prove yourself today on the battlefield and you will be rewarded."

"What reward? Ten thousand taels of silver?" Lin Wanrong's habitual smirk reappeared after his impassioned speech. Xu Zhiqing shook her head, affirming that the previous Lin San must have been possessed. This one was the real Lin San.

Li Tai, usually stern and serious, couldn't help but laugh at Lin Wanrong's remark, appreciating his spirited nature. "What silver?" Li Tai's face hardened, "It's far more important than silver. Look there —"

The old general pointed into the distance. Following his gesture, Lin Wanrong's eyes landed on a flurry of yellow flags flying over the farthest fortifications under attack. Embroidered on the flags was a long, fearsome creature.

"What a huge snake!" Lin Wanrong exclaimed.

His words left the crowd speechless. Hu Bugui and the others exchanged alarmed glances. Had their general gone mad? Xu Zhiqing bit her lips to stifle her laughter, her small fists clenched and her face flushed red.

Even the normally composed Li Tai was sweating, a vein popping on his forehead. He asked in a trembling voice, "Lin Wanrong, what did you say that is?"

"A giant golden snake." Lin Wanrong confirmed earnestly.

"We've lost today's battle," Li Wuling lamented, his head dropping. With such a commander, winning would be a miracle.

"A man cannot be this ignorant," Li Tai sighed. "I have lived for sixty years, and you're the first I've ever known to mistake a golden dragon for a golden snake. Lin Wanrong, you're unparalleled in this."

A golden dragon? Startled, Lin Wanrong looked again, realizing that the flag had folded in the wind, concealing the dragon's claws. If one didn't look closely, it could indeed resemble a giant snake.

Sweat dripped down Lin Wanrong's forehead. If the golden dragon flag was present, didn't that mean the person atop the tower was— "The Emperor?" Lin Wanrong yelled, jumping to his feet.

A collective sigh of relief escaped the crowd. Thankfully, the boy wasn't entirely hopeless; he recognized the golden dragon as the symbol of the Emperor. Hopefully, he wouldn't mistake it for a "giant snake" in the future.

With his heart pounding, Lin Wanrong thought, 'If it is indeed the Emperor, wouldn't there be an 80% chance it is my father-in-law?'

In the midst of the flying golden dragon flag, a royal chariot was raised above the city tower. Countless guards and followers surrounded the chariot, forming a solid circle. The soldiers practicing on the field, whether standing, running, lying, or crawling, all stood and bowed. Then, tens of thousands of people kneeled and bowed together, chanting, "Long live the Emperor, forever and ever."

Tens of thousands of people kneeling and cheering together, ah, what a sight, Lin Wanrong, standing by the horse's saddle, had never witnessed before. While others were bowing to the Emperor, he took the opportunity to scrutinize the figure on the dragon throne. From a distance, he could only vaguely see a figure wearing a winged coronet and golden dragon robe, but he couldn't see his face. He wondered what this Emperor, his father-in-law, looked like and whether he resembled Qingxuan.

Lost in his daydream, Lin Wanrong noticed that those who had kneeled, including Li Tai and Xu Zhiqing, had stood up. It seemed the Emperor had bid them to rise. After pretending to dust off his knees, Lin Wanrong noticed Xu Zhiqing lifting her head. Her face was covered by a light veil, but her eyes revealed a hint of amusement as if she'd noticed something.

"Now you understand," Li Tai nodded at Lin Wanrong, "As long as you perform well today and leave an impression on the Emperor, your future is limitless."

Lin Wanrong remembered what he had told Xu Wei a few days ago, about going into the palace to find Qingxuan. The only way was to wait for the Emperor to grant his wish. He had been wondering

how to meet the Emperor, but today, by a stroke of luck, he stumbled upon this opportunity. For Qingxuan, this battle was necessary.

Li Tai had to meet with the Emperor, leaving the rest of the arrangements to Xu Zhiqing. Xu Zhiqing, a scholar, had been on the battlefield several times, strategizing against the northern nomads. Not only was she Li Tai's daughter-in-law in name, but she was also the strategist of the hundreds of thousands of soldiers in the Great Hua dynasty.

"Miss Xu, how are we going to fight today? Are there any rules?" Lin Wanrong asked seriously. His mood had shifted from being forced to fight to wanting to fight, and his tone became less unruly and more serious.

"Both sides have a thousand men, with three rounds. It's all about simulating a real battle, no matter the means or strategy, the result is the only thing that matters." Xu Zhiqing's eyes emitted a calm light as she spoke.

Hu Bugui and others had already changed their armor and looked majestic as they led the soldiers. Lin Wanrong nodded. Realistic, no restrictions, these conditions suited the type of battle he wanted.

Facing his robust soldiers, Lin Wanrong felt a heartfelt satisfaction. Each one of them was robust like a calf. Old Hu and Old Du had trained his soldiers well. Most of these were familiar faces, old soldiers who had fought with him in Shandong. Many were elites who had survived the night of fierce battle against the White Lotus. Their loyalty and combat effectiveness were beyond doubt.

Lin Wanrong's palm slightly curled a few times, a subtle excitement rose within him. After suppressing his emotions, he didn't need any more words for his brothers-in-arms. He smiled faintly, "My name is Lin San, has anyone forgotten me?"

A wave of friendly laughter erupted from the thousands of soldiers. The ragtag supply troops of the past had now become the cream of the crop. Seeing the humorous yet valiant and tenacious General Lin standing before them again, many were instantly reminded of their shared experiences in the face of life and death, and the hardships they had weathered together, causing a faint sheen of tears to appear in their eyes.

Lin Wanrong waved his hand nonchalantly, asking, "Are you ready?"

"Charge—" The thousands of soldiers simultaneously let out a neatly unified and powerful roar, so potent it seemed to shake heaven and earth.

Chapter 312 The Ferocious Young General in White

Atop the city walls, banners flapped in the wind and guards and palace maids surrounded in layers, their security measures were severe. Near the edge of the wall, a towering imperial palanquin was erected. Its big yellow canopy swayed in the wind. Right at the center was an enormous golden throne, cushioned with a golden satin. On all four sides were variously expressive, colorful golden dragons carved in vivid detail. Each one was wide-mouthed and dancing claws, exuding an extraordinary momentum.

Seated on the dragon throne was an elderly man with an imposing demeanor and a slightly pale complexion. He was dressed in a satin yellow dragon robe, embroidered with five-clawed golden dragons. Although his face wore a smile, there were points of icy light in his eyes. He radiated an intimidating aura, commanding without anger, and so intimidating that no one dared to meet his gaze.

"Paying respects to His Majesty, long live the Emperor, long live, long live," the ministers lined along the wall bowed down upon seeing the Emperor's imposing demeanor. They didn't dare to glance at the Emperor, fearful of desecrating the divine countenance.

Looking at the ministers kneeling on the ground, the Emperor's face remained unchanged. He nodded and said, "Rise, my ministers."

"Thank the Emperor," the ministers hurriedly bowed and stood up.

Leading the ministers on the left was Prince Cheng, who Lin Wanrong had fortuitously met in the peach garden. This Prince Cheng had a more robust figure than the Emperor, and his face wore a slight smile. Compared to the imposing Emperor, he appeared more amiable. The leader of the ministers on the right was the Minister of Revenue, Xu Wei. Given his position in the Emperor's heart, it was unanimously accepted and reasonable for him to stand there.

Seeing the nervous crowd, the Emperor faintly smiled and opened his mouth, "I heard that the flowers in Grand Prime Minister Temple have bloomed. Due to state affairs, I was unable to spare the time to attend the flower appreciation party yesterday. Did any of you ministers attend?"

Everyone looked at each other, not daring to make a sound. Today was clearly for inspecting the military exercise, so why was the Emperor bringing up the flower appreciation event? While the

flower appreciation event at Grand Prime Minister Temple was renowned far and wide, there was no need to bring it up in court. What did the Emperor mean?

"Minister Xu, you are the number one scholar in the world, a man of literary elegance. Did you attend the flower appreciation event yesterday?" Seeing no minister speak, the Emperor asked Xu Wei.

Xu Wei quickly stepped forward, bowing as he said, "I was drinking with General Li the day before yesterday, and I was so drunk that I was unable to attend the flower appreciation event. I regret it deeply. However, I have heard that Prince Cheng went to Grand Prime Minister Temple yesterday to appreciate the flowers and discuss Buddhism, and he celebrated with the common people. The people's praise was very high."

"Oh?" The Emperor looked at Prince Cheng in surprise, smiling, "My brother seems to be in high spirits. How was the flower appreciation event at Grand Prime Minister Temple? Was there anything interesting?"

Prince Cheng respectfully said, "Reporting to Your Majesty. The flowers at Grand Prime Minister Temple were in full bloom yesterday, with the fragrance of peach and plum blossoms wafting for miles. It was indescribably beautiful. The people were at peace, enjoying the spring scenery together. It was indeed a good omen from the heavens, blessing our Great Hua. It foreshadows that Your Majesty's health is good, the land will prosper for ten thousand years, and our Great Hua will definitely have good weather, national peace, and people's security."

The Emperor coughed lightly, his face slightly pale, and nodded, "Good health? Very good, very good. If what you said is true, this full bloom of a hundred flowers is indeed a great celebration."

The ministers immediately praised and flattered, singing praises of the Emperor's virtues, which made Xu Wei frown deeply. Prince Cheng just smiled faintly without saying a word, appearing very stable.

Hearing the incessant flattery of the crowd, the Emperor's expression remained unchanged. He continued, "I have not been to the Grand Prime Minister Temple for a long time. Back when I was still living in seclusion, I encountered an assassin there and was injured. Thanks to divine protection, I escaped unscathed. Later, when my late father was recuperating in the temple, he issued a decree, instructing me to ascend to the throne. In a way, the Grand Prime Minister Temple is my blessed place." The Emperor seemed to be talking to himself. Prince Cheng, on the other hand, kept silent, his face calm, as if he was listening to a story that had nothing to do with him.

"The Grand Prime Minister Temple is a place of remarkable people and spiritual land, a place to expound on Buddhist doctrine. It is watched over by divine spirits and does not tolerate any unsightly incidents. The presiding master, Monk Huikong, is accomplished in his cultivation, his spiritual attainments profound. When my late father ascended to the heavens, the Buddhist scriptures were chanted there. His late majesty instructed me to cherish the people and treat all beings well. As I count, it has already been over twenty years. His laughter and his voice are still as vivid as ever. Brother Wang, if you find the time in the future, I would like to join you in chanting the Buddhist scriptures for our late father, to express our longing as his descendants," the Emperor said to Prince Cheng.

Prince Cheng's eyes flickered, and he bowed and replied, "I will heed the Emperor's decree. Like the Emperor, I also yearn for our late father's benevolence and wisdom. I am overwhelmed with emotions."

Everyone listened as the Emperor recalled the past, talking about the assassination attempt and his succession to the throne, and they were somewhat startled. As he mentioned the late Emperor's ascension to heaven and the Buddhist scriptures at the Grand Prime Minister Temple, their hearts filled with anxiety. The thoughts of an Emperor were the most difficult to fathom. There must be profound implications in his words spoken on the golden hall. But what did the Emperor mean by mentioning these incidents today? What did he want to say?

Despite being adept at figuring out the Emperor's thoughts, the officials were clueless about the enigma. Apart from a few people, no one could understand its taste.

The Emperor seemed to have realized something and smiled, "These are just some thoughts triggered by my yearning for my late father. You all just listen." His face became solemn as he said, "Today is the day of Li Tai's military drill. Our Great Hua has been harassed by nomads for years. This expedition of Li Tai is meant to eradicate the strong enemy once and for all. Now that the Grand Prime Minister Temple has auspicious signs, our mighty army of a million, grand and heroic, are sure to march forward bravely, fight the enemy fiercely, establish remarkable merit, and ensure the security of our Great Hua for ten thousand years."

"Grand and heroic, march forward bravely, establish merits, and ensure the country's security for ten thousand years," the officials shouted in unison.

A hint of sternness flashed in the Emperor's eyes as he demanded, "Li Tai, how did you arrange today's military inspection?"

Li Tai, who had just galloped over, quickly stepped forward and reported, "Your Majesty, today's military inspection is a practical test. It involves two generals fighting against each other. No matter the means or tactics, the winner will be determined in three rounds."

"Oh?" The Emperor smiled slightly, "Three rounds to decide the winner? This is interesting. Are these two men your subordinates?"

"Your Majesty, one of them is the assistant general assigned to my command by Your Majesty a while ago."

Li Tai responded with a fist to his chest, his white hair and beard, wide tiger eyes, and full of momentum. Despite his advanced age, he commanded respect and was not to be underestimated.

The Emperor's face broke into a slight smile as he nodded, "Is it him? Very well. General Li, your labors and merits are vast and your loyalty to our realm spans generations. It is heartening to see you still willing to take to the battlefield to achieve new victories for our Great Hua, yet it fills me with remorse. If there are young men who can assist you, sharing the burden, allow them to do so. This is a reflection of my appreciation for your service. Please, treat them kindly."

"Thank you, Your Majesty, for your kind consideration," Li Tai expressed gratefully, fist to his chest.

"And the other one? Is he also an officer in your army?" the Emperor inquired further.

"The other one?" Li Tai hesitated momentarily before shaking his head, "He is not a top general under my command, but was recommended by Minister Xu Wei. That being said, he is not an outsider either."

The Emperor glanced at Xu Wei, who quickly responded, "Your Majesty, during the suppression of the White Lotus in Shandong, he was the commander of my right-wing army. He led a motley crew of over a thousand supply soldiers, killed the bravest warrior of the White Lotus on Weishan Lake, captured the White Lotus leader Lu Kanli, and reclaimed the city of Jining. His contribution to the eradication of the White Lotus was foremost."

The Emperor nodded, "Now that you mention it, I do recall. He is the unsung hero who made a great contribution but didn't seek rewards or fame, isn't he? If it is indeed him, I am indeed looking forward to it."

"Indeed, it's him," Xu Wei replied respectfully. "He is a unique character, possessing exceptional talent, yet outwardly cunning and indifferent to public opinion. He was like a fish in the water in the secular world, a perfect embodiment of the saying, 'true hermits hide in the city'. His insights into military affairs are astounding, yet he is unwilling to join the army. I had to resort to some tactics this time, and had General Li's beloved grandson put on a show to bring him out. The other party in today's real combat confrontation is this man."

Had Lin Wanrong been there and heard that all of this was arranged by Xu Wei, he would have been furious. You old man, you've done me dirty again.

Xu Wei was a formidable character with unmatched learning and shrewd judgment. Hearing him recommend this "extraordinary man", the court officials began to discuss among themselves. Even the usually composed Prince Cheng's eyes widened slightly, the light in his eyes shimmering. It was hard to tell what he was thinking.

The Emperor laughed heartily, "From what you describe, this man sounds remarkably talented. Where is he? I want to see what kind of remarkable person he is." As he spoke, the Emperor got up from the dragon couch and hurried towards the city wall. His attendants quickly supported him, and the imperial procession moved forward. The court officials followed, rushing towards the wall to catch a glimpse of this extraordinary man.

"Dare I request something from Your Majesty," Xu Wei stepped forward, stopping in front of the imperial procession, and bowed.

"Minister Xu," the Emperor said impatiently, "Are you trying to pique my interest? If you have something to say, say it quickly."

Xu Wei chuckled awkwardly, "It's not that I'm trying to tantalize Your Majesty. It's just that this extraordinary man often disregards convention and is audaciously unconventional. There is little in this world that he wouldn't dare do. I can't guarantee he won't do something outrageous during the upcoming live combat. Anything is possible with him, and whatever happens would be considered normal. I merely ask Your Majesty and my colleagues to be aware of this, and not blame him for any surprises."

The Emperor's expression was enigmatic as he gave a meaningful smile. He replied cryptically, "It matters not. All extraordinary people are bound to act out of the ordinary. The mock battle today, being similar to a real one, naturally allows for unpredictable actions. No matter what he does, I pardon him of all offenses."

Seemingly intrigued by this unusual character, the Emperor hurriedly moved closer to the wall after finishing his sentence and began looking into the distance.

There, over a thousand soldiers stood strong and majestic. After squinting at them for a moment, the Emperor pointed towards a figure within the formation and asked, "Minister Xu, is that white-robed young general the unknown hero, the extraordinary man of the marketplace you speak of?"

"A white-robed young general?" Xu Wei was taken aback. When did a man in a white robe appear? He quickly moved beside the Emperor and looked into the distance. Among the new army of soldiers clad in yellow armor, one man donned a white cloak, moving to and fro. His presence was commanding, indeed an eye-catching sight.

Although he couldn't make out the man's face from the distance, his flashy demeanor was a dead giveaway. Ah, the white-robed Lin San, Xu Wei thought with a smile, anticipation growing within him.

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"Do you know who your opponent is?" Miss Xu asked Lin San, who was brimming with an impressive aura. This shook her a little, and she quickly followed with her question.

"This is a skirmish, who the opponent is doesn't matter. I trust my brothers," Lin Wanrong answered righteously. However, his face suddenly lit up with a mischievous smile. "Hey, Miss Xu, don't take what I said seriously. That's just something to say on the battlefield, to boost morale — who is that guy on the other side? Why does he seem so clueless?"

His changing moods were difficult to comprehend, which amused Miss Xu. Without setting foot on the battlefield, she wondered who was indeed clueless here.

"The one on the other side is the assistant general who was assigned by the Emperor to assist General Li some time ago. I only met him yesterday, and interestingly, you also know him," Xu Zhiqing responded with a mysterious smile.

"I know him?" Lin Wanrong asked in surprise, "It's not the Top Scholar, is it?"

Xu Zhiqing nodded, "It is indeed Top Scholar Su. Don't underestimate him. He is well-versed in military strategies and tactics, having thousands of stratagems at his disposal. He has been forming up impressive formations during the recent drills in the army, which even General Li praised."

"Really, Top Scholar Su? Damn, he's got some real talent. From wielding a writing brush to commanding the army, he's truly versatile," Lin Wanrong said with a slight smile, "Thank you, Miss Xu, for providing this vital information. However, he's out of luck encountering me. When I was fighting in Shandong, my brothers gave me a nickname, 'One with a thousand knots in the heart, employing myriad tricks daily.' Oh, 'employing myriad tricks daily,' do you understand what it means, Miss Xu?"

Seeing the mischievous smile on his face, Xu Zhiqing knew his words couldn't be anything decent. She shot him a glare and decided to ignore his comment.

"General, please instruct us," Hu Bugui stepped forward, speaking loudly. Lin Wanrong nodded, then glanced down at himself. While his brothers were all dressed in impressive armors, he had yet to properly equip himself.

"Won't you wear armor?" Xu Zhiqing asked as she saw that Lin Wanrong's troops were all assembled and ready, but he, their commander, was the only one dressed casually, which made her frown.

"I don't have armor." Lin Wanrong chuckled, turned around, and shouted, "Xu Zhen, bring me my battle robe."

"At your command!" Xu Zhen spurred his horse forward, reined in, and respectfully handed over a set of garments. Miss Xu swept her gaze over them to find a white cloak and a tattered feather fan sourced from who knows where.

Lin Wanrong donned the cloak and gave it a light shake; it billowed in the wind, giving him an imposing air. Holding the small feather fan, he swayed it slightly, presenting himself as a figure of Taoist elegance. "Miss Xu, what do you think of my attire? Do I resemble the Dragon of Changshan (Zhao Yun), the Brightness of Zhuge, or the Virtuous Minister from the dream

"What do you mean by the Dragon of Changshan, the Brightness of Zhuge, and the Virtuous Minister from the dream?" Miss Xu shook her head slightly. This man's words were odd and hard to understand. Lin Wanrong's complexion was quite dark, so this White Cloak Young General attire made him stand out as if snowflakes had lightly dusted a piece of coal. Xu Zhiqing suppressed her laughter, asking, "Are you ready?"

'Damn it,' Lin Wanrong just remembered that this world had neither Zhao Yun and Zhuge Liang, nor did it contain "The Legend of Sui and Tang" and Xue Rengui. Naturally, nobody recognized his outfit. No wonder Xu Zhen looked puzzled when he gave the order earlier. Damn it, he originally planned to perform a drama of the "White Cloak Young General" and the "Virtuous Minister from the dream". But now, he had made himself a laughingstock. The show-off had utterly failed.

Right now, he couldn't afford to worry about that. Lin Wanrong strolled around the front of the formation of thousands of soldiers. Seeing the expectation on the soldiers' faces, he gently waved his feather fan and softly asked, "Brothers, do you know what we are here to do?"

"Practice drill!" the crowd chorused in response.

"Hiss——" A black horse before Lin Wanrong reared, its forehooves leaping into the air, as Lin Wanrong's sword landed on its hindquarters. Its long neigh overshadowed the crowd's voices. Lin Wanrong's eyes showed a ruthless light as he shouted fiercely, "I didn't hear clearly. Say it again!"

"Practice drill!" The crowd repeated in unison.

"Hiss——" Another startling neigh echoed, followed by a burst of bloody light soaring several feet high. The neighing ceased abruptly as the war horse's head separated from its body. It was Lin General's swift sword strike, beheading the war horse.

"Drill? Is this a drill?" Lin Wanrong held his long sword, drops of blood dripping down from the blade. His eyes were bloodshot, emitting a murderous aura. "You won't find the word 'drill' in a soldier's dictionary. This is war, it's kill or be killed. Understand?"

Upon seeing the bloody scene, the old soldiers who had experienced bloody battles instantly woke up, their blood boiling. They understood General Lin's intentions at once. Lin Wanrong's gaze became calm, his face expressionless, "I'll ask one more time, what are we going to do?"

"Kill or be killed!" The soldiers drew their long swords and a shocking murderous aura erupted instantly.

Those behind Lin Wanrong, like Du Xiuyuan, were trembling in fear. While a war game was indeed meant to emulate real warfare, after all, this was still a drill. If they followed General Lin's style, it would turn into a real fight.

Only Hu Bugui and Li Wuling looked satisfied. Li Wuling was filled with boiling passion, shouting, "Damn, let's fight!"

Hu Bugui, with his mouth wide open, licked his dry lips and said, "That's right, this is how a war should be fought. Soldiers are made in battle, not from everyday fancy footwork and drills."

Du Xiuyuan worriedly asked, "Brother Hu, if we follow General Lin's style, won't it cause trouble?"

Hu Bugui shook his head, "There's no need for fear. Among all the troops, only General Lin has a real weapon in hand. The rest only have blunted spears and unsharpened swords. The worst that could happen would be a broken arm or leg, or internal bleeding from a few hits. We can't lose many men. The fierceness of the northern nomads is partly due to their valor and worship of the strong, the constant infighting has shaped their current strength."

Du Xiuyuan shook his head, "Even if few would die in this battle, the injuries will surely increase dramatically. Could this lead to a mutiny among the soldiers? Don't forget that the emperor and the officials are watching."

Hu Bugui's eyes widened, "You fool! You are regressing! This is real combat, not a drill. What I admire most about General Lin is exactly that: there's no such word as 'drill' in a soldier's dictionary. Do you think the northern nomads would show mercy just because the Emperor and the officials are watching? This is a lesson for the soldiers, so they can bleed less when they fight the northern nomads in the future."

Lin Wanrong, hearing the argument behind him, remained silent. He handed his blood-streaked sword to Xu Zhen and said quietly, "Bury this warhorse with generous rites."

Xu Zhiqing was stunned by this. His change of temperament was so swift. He had been laughing and joking just now, but in the blink of an eye, he executed the horse without moving an eyeball. If one wanted to see what brutality was, this was it!

Fighting real battles instead of drills, it was a completely different military concept, pragmatic with strong utilitarian undertones. It was both terrifying and exhilarating. Had he fought wars this way in Shandong? Xu Zhiqing was beginning to understand.

Everything was ready. Seeing Xu Zhiqing riding off into the distance, Lin Wanrong solemnly asked Li Sheng, "Brother Li, have you prepared everything I asked for?"

Li Sheng replied, "There wasn't much time, so I didn't find much. But there's plenty of hay!" He pointed around, and they saw piles of hay stacks, "These are the rations for the horses during the drill, enough for at least three days."

Lin Wanrong whispered something in his ear. Li Sheng exclaimed, "This... how could this be?"

Lin Wanrong's eyes sparkled with determination. He said sternly, "In real combat, anything can happen. Brother Li, just do as I said."

After receiving the order, Li Sheng left. Lin Wanrong finished arranging his troops, and they stood in line, ready to move.

Just as General Lin was about to give the order, a cannon sounded from the opposing side. This was followed by earth-shattering battle cries. Uncountable soldiers with raised weapons rushed forward like a tide.

Damn it, they're coming! Lin Wanrong took one glance, cursed in his heart, then felt something was off. He counted with disbelief in his eyes. Unable to keep track, he smacked his feather fan down and roared angrily, "Damn it, we've been duped! They claimed it's a thousand men, but this is clearly five thousand!"

Chapter 313 First Victory

"What's going on here?" Standing on the city wall, Xu Zhiqing, who was watching the exercise with Xu Wei and Li Tai, saw the scene before her, and couldn't help but frown slightly, whispering, "Wasn't it agreed that each side would have a thousand people? Why has General Su's side suddenly gained so many more troops?"

Xu Wei was also puzzled. Looking at Li Tai, the old general's weather-beaten face showed no expression, and he said solemnly, "Everything is close to actual combat, and any unexpected occurrence is normal. War does not negotiate terms. On this point, Su Mubai is doing well. I'm afraid Lin San is going to suffer a disadvantage."

Xu Zhiqing clenched her teeth. Just now, she had personally told Lin San that each side would have a thousand men. Who knew that in the blink of an eye, Su Mubai had produced five times the troops? By calculation, although it was unintentional, she had misreported the information, putting Lin San in a dangerous situation. She felt somewhat confused, could Lin San hold out in this round?

The Emperor heard the conversation and suddenly became interested. "Oh? Minister Xu, General Li, are you saying that this troop movement was improvised by Su Mubai? And none of you knew about it?"

Li Tai bowed and said, "Your Majesty, the art of war is deceptive. Su Mubai's move is in line with military principles and has surprised everyone. This actual combat exercise might turn out to be quite lively."

The Emperor's face showed a hint of a smile, and he nodded, "Those who accomplish great things do not adhere to the trivial. Su Mubai's unexpected move is not in vain. I put him next to the old general to learn. Very good, very good. Minister Xu, what do you think of the comparison between Su Mubai and the unique person you recommended? Who is superior?"

Xu Wei thought for a while, bowed and said, "Your Majesty, Top Scholar Su uses troops in a miraculous way, he indeed has exceptional talent. But the person I recommended is not easily defeated, there might be quite a fight in this battle."

"There should be a fight, a good one." The Emperor laughed loudly, a mysterious smile in his eyes, "My dear ministers, today's military exercise has this unexpected situation, so we can witness with our own eyes the real battle of our Great Hua's lions. This is a rare sight in a century. Let's just watch the changes here." The ministers saw the Emperor's high spirits and all responded loudly, then shifted their attention back to the training field.

Xu Wei anxiously looked at the distance, only to see Su Mubai's five thousand troops far away, their formation steady and dense, like a tide going against the opponent. Although Lin San was at a disadvantage, his army was in good order and showed no rashness. He felt a glimmer of hope rising in his heart: 'Little Brother Lin, you must not disappoint me.'

Seeing Xu Zhiqing's worried face, Li Tai asked, "Zhiqing, who do you think will win this battle, Su Mubai or Lin San?"

Xu Zhiqing remained silent, then sighed after a long time, "Who wins and who loses, I dare not to judge rashly. I only know one thing. Even if Su Mubai wins, it will be a Pyrrhic victory."

Xu Wei looked at Xu Zhiqing and nodded, smiling, "Zhiqing, you really have seen through Lin San. This man does not conform to norms in his actions and character, always exceeding expectations." He turned to Li Tai and said, "General Li, let's make a bet. If Lin San wins today's battle, I will invite you to my home for three days of wine."

Before Li Tai could answer, the Emperor, thoroughly intrigued by the conversation, laughed and said, "Minister Xu, given your words, could it be that you have no confidence in the talented individual you recommended, and are now favoring Su Mubai? Otherwise, why would you willingly offer to foot the bill for the drinks?"

Xu Wei shook his head, saying, "Not at all, not at all. This old servant would be more than glad to pay for the drinks. If Lin San emerges victorious, even if it costs me a fortune to treat all my colleagues to ten days and nights of drinking, I would be more than willing."

The Emperor chuckled, "This is truly interesting. Minister Xu, count me in for your banquet, I too wish to taste that Daughter Red you have kept in your cellar for so long."

This statement elicited laughter from everyone present, causing Xu Zhiqing's face to redden with embarrassment. The 'Daughter Red' that Xu Wei kept in his cellar was a special wine reserved for his daughter's wedding. Regrettably, Xu Zhiqing, who had lost her betrothed to the ravages of war before they could even meet, had left this special wine without an occasion to be uncorked.

The Emperor's words were intended as a light jest at the female strategist's expense, causing everyone to roar with laughter. Everyone, except for Li Tai, who sighed and shook his head. Xu Zhiqing's marital mishap was indeed a fault on the part of the Li family. He glanced at Xu Zhiqing and said, "Zhiqing, if there is someone you fancy, just let your uncle know. Your uncle will help arrange the marriage for you. You are the precious daughter of the Xu family, and also my own dear girl. We will definitely see you married off in a grand fashion."

Xu Zhiqing, her face slightly flushed, gave a graceful smile and replied, "Thank you, Your Majesty, and Uncle Li for your kindness. I, Zhiqing, am devoted to the world and have no lingering attachment to the matters of marriage. As for the fine wines of the Xu family, I ask everyone to enjoy them freely."

"Quick, look—" Xu Wei, who had been intently watching the distant battlefield, suddenly cried out in surprise, drawing everyone's attention. As they turned their gaze to the field, they saw the flags of Lin San's army fluttering, the figures moving, Lin San was starting to make his move.

Upon hearing Lin Wanrong's words, Hu Bugui and Du Xiuyuan looked over, only to see dust whirling up on the battlefield, countless heads bobbing in a sea of soldiers. Amidst the thunderous galloping of thousands of horses, an innumerable wave of soldiers surged towards them like a raging tide.

"Damn, at least five thousand men." Hu Bugui smirked, a flash of excitement in his eyes, "This is going to be a real fight. That Top Scholar knows how to play this hand, he's not a simpleton after all."

It was Li Wuling's first time witnessing such a grand scene. Although young, he came from a military family. Seeing the current situation, he waved the long saber in his hand, let out a battle cry, his horse neighed, and he began to shout excitedly, "Let's fight, a good fight."

"These two are truly war fanatics," Du Xiuyuan gave a bitter smile. He was known for his tactical brilliance, always calm and collected in the face of adversity. With the opposing force five times their number, charging at them with an overwhelming momentum, he glanced at Lin Wanrong with concern, and quietly asked, "General, what should we do?"

'Damn, this Su fellow looks sophisticated, but I didn't expect him to be such an expert in covert operations,' Lin Wanrong swallowed, moistening his dry throat, and asked, "Brother Du, if we were to clash head-on with them, what are our chances of victory?"

Du Xiuyuan and Hu Bugui often trained with the opposing soldiers, so they had a deep understanding of their combat capabilities. Upon hearing this, Du Xiuyuan pondered and said, "If it's one against two, our men would surely win. Against three, we might be slightly outmatched."

"Even if it's one against three, there won't be any problems," Hu Bugui strongly countered, "General Lin, none of the soldiers under my command are cowards who fear death."

Unlike Hu Bugui, the belligerent one, Lin Wanrong dared not believe his words. It was more reliable to listen to Du Xiuyuan's advice. Lin Wanrong had implemented the last elimination system, and it had been faithfully executed by Hu Bugui and Du Xiuyuan. This nearly ruthless method greatly enhanced the combat effectiveness of the soldiers. The assertion that one could battle two was no empty claim. However, the soldiers on the opposing side were also the elites of the Great Hua and should not be taken lightly.

During the momentary quiet as they all fell into contemplation, Lin Wanrong looked across the field. He saw Su Mubai's force of 5,000 soldiers, at least 1,500 of whom were cavalry, rushing forward with horse neighs and sword swings. Their formation was solid and well-coordinated, clearly the result of extensive practice. The long spears of the infantry followed closely, in a strict formation and appearing indomitable, proving that they were no ordinary foes. The distance of several dozen feet between the cavalry and infantry was the standard arrangement for a combined attack formation.

Witnessing the thousands of enemy cavalry charging in front, Lin Wanrong gritted his teeth. "Dammit," he thought. "Good thing I've got tricks up my sleeve and had prepared something with Li Sheng in advance. Otherwise, I wouldn't even know I was being trampled by that Su fellow."

"Li Sheng—" Lin Wanrong shouted.

"Present—" Li Sheng came rushing over, his face filled with both excitement and anticipation. Behind him were hundreds of horses, pulling dozens of large wagons laden with bundles of hay, surprisingly provisions for the warhorses.

"Brother Li, I won't say much. The honor and life of my thousands of brothers are in your hands," Lin Wanrong said after a brief pause. Hu Bugui and Du Xiuyuan exchanged puzzled looks, wondering what General Lin meant. Were they going to send the Divine Machine Unit into the fray?

Li Sheng bowed, saying, "General, your foresight is unmatched. I am fully convinced."

Lin Wanrong chuckled without explaining, straightened his face and bellowed, "Where is the Divine Machine Unit?"

Hundreds of archers promptly lined up, forming a combat formation with their powerful bows in hand. They took their positions at the front, their eyes sharp, directly facing the thousands of enemy cavalry charging towards them.

Hu Bugui and Du Xiuyuan both went pale. How could these hundreds of archers withstand the charge of the enemy's thousand cavalry? Had General Lin gone mad?

"General Lin—" A worried Hu Bugui was about to speak when Lin Wanrong raised his hand and said, "Follow orders, obey commands, archers prepare."

Over a hundred archers drew their bows and readied their arrows. The opponent cavalry, advancing at a furious pace, had quickly entered the range of the arrows. Lin Wanrong roared, "Release arrows."

Hundreds of arrows, like a storm of locusts, flew toward the charging cavalry. These were arrows used in actual combat, with blunt, unsharpened tips instead of sharp points, so their lethality was extremely limited. However, the Divine Machine Unit in Li Sheng's army was composed of select archers, and their aim was very accurate. Half of the arrows hit the horses' eyes directly. Hundreds of warhorses neighed, suffering in pain, they stumbled and fell, throwing dozens of cavalymen off. Their cries of pain were incessant.

"Well struck!" Li Wuling shouted excitedly. Witnessing such a battlefield scene for the first time, his childlike enthusiasm naturally knew no bounds. However, Du Xiuyuan and Hu Bugui remained deeply concerned. The method of targeting the horse's eyes with arrows, learned from Hu Bugui's own experience fighting against the northern nomads and supplemented by the exceptional archers of the Divine Machine Unit, had achieved a decent effect. Nevertheless, the opposing force had at least one thousand five hundred cavalymen, and a loss of a few hundred would hardly scratch the surface, but only provoke their murderous spirit.

Sure enough, having lost some of their men, the enemy cavalry seemed to grow more ferocious. Their charge was faster, and they cleverly changed their formation in mid-gallop, switching from horizontal to vertical to disrupt the targeting of the archers. The arrows of the Divine Machine Unit suddenly lost their potency. By the time one volley of arrows was over, the damage to the enemy cavalry had been limited.

"Charge!" The opposing cavalymen roared, their horses flying. They switched from vertical back to horizontal, rushing in like a surging tide.

"Divine Machine Unit, fall back, Li Sheng--" Lin Wanrong roared his orders.

"Understood!" Li Sheng, poised and ready, had already prepared his men. At Lin Wanrong's command, several hundred cavalymen spurred their horses, rapidly dragging wagons loaded with grain and forming a barrier of hay bales before the enemy cavalry in the blink of an eye.

No sooner had the grain been positioned than the enemy cavalry came charging. Panicking, Li Sheng yelled, "Retreat, retreat quickly!"

True to their discipline, hundreds of Lin San's cavalymen obeyed the command to retreat. They swiftly leaped onto their horses, galloping away as though flying. Although their movement was extremely coordinated, using such skill for fleeing was regrettable.

The Emperor and his ministers on the city tower watched everything unfold clearly. They thought Lin San too pitiful, retreating hastily after just one volley of arrows. Could these grain wagons standing in the way really stop Su Mubai's unstoppable cavalry charge? It seemed far too naive.

All eyes turned to Xu Wei. Minister Xu was highly educated and insightful, but it seemed today he had misjudged, fervently recommending such an incompetent individual to the Emperor, which was truly disappointing.

"General Li, how is Su Mubai's military deployment? Is there any mistake?" The Emperor, while watching the two battling parties, asked Li Tai beside him.

Li Tai shook his head, "Su Mubai's conduct in this battle is a classic military strategy from the textbooks – cavalry charging with infantry following. It's well executed. The cavalry formation changes swiftly and strikes powerfully, and the infantry is also fast, but--"

On this city wall, there were few who knew military strategy. Li Tai, being the top general in Great Hua, had been through thousands of battles and had a wealth of experience. His words could hardly be doubted.

Hearing him praising Su Mubai, the Emperor nodded slightly. Noticing his change in tone, the Emperor smiled, "Old general, don't be so courteous when pointing out the mistakes of a junior. Just speak your mind."

After observing for a while, Li Tai said, "The only flaw is the distance maintained between the cavalry and the infantry, it's slightly too far. According to the military books, this distance is not wrong. But in my experience in real battles, it's somewhat inappropriate. In a plain battle like this, the infantry and the cavalry should be closely connected to prevent the cavalry from being cut off and annihilated. What do you think, Miss Xu?"

The Emperor smiled and glanced at Xu Zhiqing. The young lady bowed and said, "I deeply agree with Uncle Li's opinion. Today's battle, I'm afraid, will bring about unexpected developments."

The Emperor nodded. "Now that we're done discussing Su Mubai, let's move on to the prodigy recommended by you, Minister Xu. General Li, what do you think of his performance?"

Li Tai gazed at the heap of hay obstructing the cavalry's path in the distance and shook his head. "I don't understand Lin San's actions. This strategy of using hay bales to block the soldiers isn't from any military book I've read. However, looking at the current situation, one thing is certain..."

"What is certain?" The Emperor, intrigued by the veteran general's analysis of the battlefield, quickly asked.

Li Tai smiled and said, "Miss Xu, why don't you share your thoughts?" All eyes turned to Xu Zhiqing, even the usually silent Prince Cheng attentively listened to her words.

Xu Zhiqing slightly smiled and said, "During the chaos of battle, Lin San's tactic of using hay bales to block the soldiers, and then retreat without fighting, could only mean two things."

The Emperor chuckled bitterly. "Miss Xu, don't keep me in suspense. I'll keep your Daughter Red in mind."

The court roared with laughter, causing Xu Zhiqing's cheeks to flush. She quietly said, "If it's not that Lin San is incompetent, then he is feigning weakness to plan a counterattack."

Plan a counterattack? The court was shocked. What could possibly be threatening about the supplies? And furthermore, Lin San's entire army had already withdrawn. Could there possibly be people hidden within the supplies?

Boom—Boom—Two massive explosions shook the ground, and even the Emperor's imperial tent trembled slightly.

"Who's firing? Protect the Emperor—Quickly protect the Emperor—" The court officials yelled in alarm. A few palace guards rushed over to shield the Emperor.

Experienced soldiers like Xu Wei and Li Tai remained calm, while the emperor laughed. "Protect what? This is real battle, are a couple of cannon shots not normal?" He looked towards the distance, where flames flickered. Lin San's troops were nowhere to be seen.

Su Mubai's cavalry moved extremely quickly. In the blink of an eye, they arrived in front of the supply wagons. Seeing Lin San's soldiers abandon their wagons, a hint of contempt flashed across the faces of the cavalymen. They didn't stop their horses and charged straight through the blockage, causing thousands of pieces of hay to scatter and form a long trail. It was a sight to behold. In a split second, the cavalry had broken through the hay bale line and charged straight into Lin San's army.

"Boom—" A shrill scream echoed, and a large cannonball seemed to find its target on the haystack behind the cavalry. The haystack instantly ignited.

A cold sweat broke out on the cavalry commander of Su Mubai's unit. This was a drill, not a real battle, yet Lin San dared to fire like this. Had he gone mad?

Before he could finish his thoughts, another explosion shook the ground. The haystacks were blowing up one after another, like a chain of fireworks, releasing waves of heat. In a blink of an eye, the haystacks exploded and ignited, forming a long line of fire, instantly separating the cavalry from the infantry.

Explosives! The cavalry commander instantly understood. The haystacks were hiding layers of explosives. To feign weakness, Lin San intentionally abandoned the hay bales, to make them lower their guard, then ignited the explosives with the cannons. Damn it, was this a drill? Lin San was trying to kill them!

A wave of searing heat swept over, and the warhorses leading the charge felt the rolling inferno at their rear. Panicked, they neighed loudly and sprinted forward with all their might. These horses, well-trained in regular times, would usually respond obediently to the reins, but in the face of the roaring flames behind them, even their riders could not control their pace despite pulling the reins desperately. Thousands of horses ran wild, bolting forward as if possessed.

The few dozen horses at the front stumbled after a few strides forward. Their front legs folded, heads pitched forward, and they toppled over, sending dozens of riders flying and crashing to the ground.

"Tripwires!" The commander exclaimed in horror. He hoisted his long sword and yanked the reins frantically, bellowing, "Halt, halt! There are tripwires ahead!"

The more than a thousand cavalries knew the danger of tripwires, but with the intensifying flames behind, the normally docile horses had gone mad. Hundreds of horses surged forward, only to tumble before the ropes. The horses at the back could not stop, leaping high and stepping on their fallen comrades, one after another crashing to the ground. Those barely controlled by their reins

reared high on their hind legs, their cries filling the air, and violently unseated their riders. In an instant, men and horses were strewn about, cries of pain echoing around the horrific scene.

Du Xiuyuan watched the scene in front of him with a heavy heart. These men were his brothers, and although they would not lose their lives, the severe injuries would take months to heal, and he feared their recovery was uncertain.

Lin Wanrong also understood his feelings. How could he bear to see such a sight? But this was the reality of warfare. He had already shown mercy today. If not, the cavalry in the field, trapped between ropes in the front and fire at the back, would become easy targets for archers. Wiping them out would be a cinch.

He patted Du Xiuyuan's shoulder and said with a bitter smile, "Brother Du, think of us as the northern nomads. That way, it might feel a little better. Today, these brothers have been injured, but they have learned a valuable lesson. In the future, if they encounter fierce northern nomads, they can shed less blood. Don't you think?"

Du Xiuyuan responded with a hearty smile, "General Lin, you're absolutely right. Let's just think of ourselves as the bad guys and teach them a lesson. I pride myself on knowing military strategies, but when it comes to tactics, I am no match for you. Only you would dare to hide explosives in the haystack. However, we have fired cannons today in the presence of the Emperor. It's quite disrespectful. Could this lead to trouble?"

Lin Wanrong shook his head, saying, "I can't be sure about that. But having made my move, should I wait to be completely annihilated by my opponent?"

Du Xiuyuan, a meticulous thinker, nodded helplessly. His question was truly out of concern, "Firing the cannon is one thing, but there's another matter that still worries me."

Lin Wanrong laughed, "Are you about to ask if I fire a cannon, will Su Mubai also fire a few at us?"

"That's exactly it." Du Xiuyuan nodded, "Since we're the ones who initiated, he wouldn't hold back either."

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "I'm gambling on him not daring to fire. We fired the cannon, but only burnt straw, and up till now, we haven't fought them directly. He's a scholar who aspires to be an official, unlike us who don't have any reservations. If he really dares to fire, then we'd be done for along with his fifteen hundred cavalry. Sure, he would win, but at the cost of killing innocents and treating soldiers like expendable pawns. If word of this spreads, how could he lead troops or become an official? If you were him, would you dare?"

So, this was human nature. Du Xiuyuan sighed in resignation. General Lin's understanding of people hit the nail on the head. On this count alone, who among all the courts and the public could compare with him?

Chapter 314 Surprise Attack

Seeing the path before them blocked, and the elite cavalry ambushed, the infantry battalion behind the cavalry fell into immediate panic. With all their might, they frantically surged forward. They were well aware that only by joining with the cavalry ahead could they possibly turn the tide of their impending defeat.

Before Li Tai's army had set out, they had been rigorously training in this field. The food and fodder in the center were ample enough to feed tens of thousands of warhorses for several days. Such abundant resources were picked up as an easy gain by General Lin, who lit it ablaze with a single cannon shot. The fire grew fiercer, trapping thousands of infantrymen outside the blazing circle. Extinguishing it wasn't as simple as it might have seemed.

"Now this is how you wage war," Hu Bugui said, his ferocity ignited. He didn't care that his opponents were also the elite of Great Hua. With a lift of his long saber, he cried out, "Brothers, charge!"

His five hundred cavalymen, like a whirlwind, rushed forward. They were the handpicked warriors of Hu Bugui, having been tested in numerous battles. Their fierceness was beyond question, and the saying 'one against three' wasn't an exaggeration in their case.

Su Mubai's cavalry was also Great Hua's finest, but they had taken a heavy blow today. Almost half their numbers had fallen without even engaging in combat, they were a weary and dispirited group, their fighting strength significantly diminished. Despite the desperate resistance under the leadership of their commanding officer, they were no match for Hu Bugui's men. Fresh and high-spirited, Hu Bugui's five hundred cavalymen charged, felling the opposing cavalry like a gust of wind sweeping away fallen leaves. Even though they hadn't exposed their spears or unsheathed their swords, in cavalry combat, to be knocked off one's horse meant defeat.

Though young, Li Wuling, the direct grandson of Li Tai, stubbornly followed Hu Bugui and Xu Zhen into battle, rushing as the third in line. He plunged into the enemy lines, spear stabbing and sweeping aside foes, quickly toppling two men. His formidable prowess was a testament to his reputation as the young tiger of his family.

As the combat on Hu Bugui's side was nearing its end, Du Xiuyuan shifted his gaze to the infantry on the opposite side, and exclaimed in surprise, "General Lin, the enemy troops are about to cross the burning field."

The burning fodder spread incredibly quickly, leaving the three thousand infantrymen no time to extinguish it. They merely managed to block the fire on both ends, creating a narrow passage in the middle. Thousands of troops passed through this passage to assist their cavalry.

Lin Wanrong took a distant look, spotting the thousands of infantry with their gleaming weapons, like a rolling black line charging toward them. He chuckled, lightly fanning himself with his feather fan, "Five times the soldiers can assault a city. Now, we're fighting on a plain. Even though Su Mubai is the main attacker, there's no need for him to use five times the soldiers! This top scholar brother is quite cautious."

Seeing General Lin's relaxed and carefree expression, Du Xiuyuan wondered what plan he had in mind. But he couldn't ignore the fact that the enemy infantry were accumulating rapidly, most of them had already crossed the burning field, assembled into formations, and were advancing in an orderly manner.

One had to admit, Su Mubai's warfare strategies, every move and every action, were deeply rooted in the doctrines of military strategy. The formation of the three thousand infantry was tight, capable of both attacking and defending, displaying a deep understanding of military strategy. It seemed that the Top Scholar brother had indeed studied military strategy diligently.

"Brother Du, tell me, has all of Su Mubai's infantry arrived?" Lin Wanrong asked with a smile.

Du Xiuyuan squinted and reported, "General, over half of the three thousand troops have crossed."

Lin Wanrong nodded, glancing over at the cavalry led by Hu Bugui. The intense battle was nearing its end, with most of the enemy cavalry unhorsed, only a few were still desperately struggling. Warhorses were chaotically scattered, running in all directions, causing much disorder.

General Lin raised an eyebrow and bellowed, "Where is Du Xiuyuan?"

Finally, finally, he was called. Du Xiuyuan felt a tightening in his heart and quickly saluted, loudly responding, "Your servant is here!"

"Lead four hundred infantry to assist Hu Bugui in rounding up the enemy's cavalry horses. Gather any that can still breathe and that have not broken a leg directly in front of the enemy lines. Hand them over to Li Sheng."

"Understood," Du Xiuyuan excitedly replied. Although he did not know what General Lin wanted with these warhorses, seeing the smile between his brows, Du Xiuyuan intuitively felt that the general already had a plan.

The primed four hundred infantry, under Du Xiuyuan's lead, rapidly rushed toward the site of the cavalry battle. Having kept General Lin's instructions in mind, the soldiers rushed to catch the reins of the rampant warhorses in the field. The horses, startled by the fire, were highly unsettled. It took a considerable effort to gather them all, but each soldier ended up leading two horses. With men shouting and horses neighing, it was quite lively.

Hu Bugui, true to his claim of one against three, had quickly reduced the enemy cavalry to a single commander. A blow from the back of Hu Bugui's broad knife sent the enemy leader tumbling from his horse. The leader rolled on the ground, but when he rose, he was glaring angrily, evidently unconvinced of his defeat.

Hu Bugui laughed loudly, "Liu Guoxuan, do you admit defeat?"

Liu Guoxuan glared, "You launched a surprise attack with your cannons, using cunning tricks. I, Liu Guoxuan, do not accept. If you have the guts, fight me in a fair battle."

Hu Bugui sneered, "You have five thousand men to encircle our one thousand, and you have the audacity to talk about cunning tricks? If I were the one unhorsed today, would you still be talking about cunning tricks?"

Liu Guoxuan's face showed a touch of shame, and he fell silent. Lin Wanrong shook his head as he watched. The man was certainly straightforward, but the battlefield was no place for only bravery. Sure, it sounded good to say everyone was open and straightforward, but could war be waged like that?

"Reporting to the general, the enemy cavalry has been annihilated. Awaiting your next orders," Hu Bugui reported enthusiastically, riding up to Lin Wanrong.

Lin Wanrong nodded, only to see Li Sheng also riding up from afar, reporting, "Reporting to the general, our Divine Machine Unit is ready. We are waiting for your command."

Lin Wanrong gave a slight smile and nodded in acknowledgment. Hu Bugui curiously asked, "Li Sheng, what did the general ask you to do?"

Li Sheng had hit the pile of grain in the center with his cannon today, dead center, which was a first-rate achievement. He was feeling quite pleased with himself. Hearing Hu Bugui's question, he laughed and said, "The secrets of the Divine Machine Unit cannot be revealed. If you want to know, ask General Lin."

His admiration for General Lin could no longer be described simply as respect. General Lin was almost a deity, a master of foresight and preparation. He had organized numerous resources in advance, and now, every one of them could be put to use. Although Li Sheng greatly respected General Lin, he had not foreseen that General Lin's principle of 'preparation for the unforeseen' would be brought into play even if the enemy numbered just a thousand. The mantra of General Lin was simple: prefer lying to sitting, use any means at your disposal, and opt for the simplest way.

Lin Wanrong scanned the scene before him. He saw that Du Xiuyuan and his soldiers had gathered around eight hundred war horses, all waiting for his command.

General Lin smirked and leaped onto his horse. His clothes billowed in the wind, and he waved his fan nonchalantly. He exuded a remarkably free and easy demeanor. "Brother Hu, Brother Li, shall we join Brother Du?" No sooner had the words left his mouth than he spurred his horse and took the lead, heading towards Du Xiuyuan and the others.

"The infantry of Su Mubai has crossed the fire line and still holds an overwhelming advantage. General Li, what are your thoughts on the upcoming battle?" The Emperor asked, gazing into the distance with a mild smile playing on his lips. His eyes were a sea of tranquility, giving nothing away about his thoughts.

"Numerical superiority does not necessarily equate to situational advantage. Lin San has managed to cause a significant loss to Su Mubai's elite cavalry, while losing less than a hundred men. His

military strategy is unpredictable and no one can discern his next move. I fear it won't be easy for Su Mubai to turn the tide." Li Tai, a veteran strategist, analyzed the situation clearly, earning nods of agreement from everyone present. Xu Wei sighed inwardly, amazed at Lin San's unconventional strategies and endless surprises.

"However—" Li Tai's words took a turn, expressing his annoyance. "This young man is lawless. He dared to fire the cannon in front of the Emperor and burn the grains that were meant to feed our army's horses for several days. It's infuriating. If it wasn't for the fact that his conduct in the battle is acceptable, I would have surely disciplined him severely."

No one dared to respond. It was clear to the insightful ones among them that while Li Tai appeared to be blaming Lin San, he was actually defending him, taking advantage of the Emperor's good mood.

The Emperor chuckled, "If he wins today's battle, I'll pardon him. But if he loses and has also burnt my grains, well then, old general, you may deal with him strictly."

"Your Majesty is wise!" Xu Wei was the first to respond, saluting hastily. The Emperor laughed heartily, only for Xu Wei to add, "However, there's something I don't understand."

"Speak!"

Xu Wei paused briefly, stealing a glance at the Emperor's face before gently saying, "Today's duel between the two sides was intended to be a demonstration, yet Su Mubai has arbitrarily mobilized his troops. This, this...is quite against the rules."

"No, no." Li Tai shook his head, "Brother Xu, you do not know the full story. Today's military exercise was set up by me to assess Su Mubai, it had already been explained, he is the commander of this field. Today, on the training ground, there are tens of thousands of soldiers, apart from those led by Lin San, the rest were all at his disposal. Assembling five thousand soldiers on the spot was not overstepping his authority. In fact, if he wished, all these soldiers could have been used. Su Mubai studied military tactics extensively, his formations were insightful, and he could adapt on the fly. Attacking with five times the soldiers, it was just the right proportion for our Great Hua to fight against the northern nomads, a steady and mature move. To use an exercise as a proxy for war, it was targeted, he can be regarded as a promising talent. The battle today was also noteworthy, had it not been for Lin San, victory would have been within reach."

Li Tai, as the pillar of the country, loyal and honest, spoke straightforwardly. He did not favor Su Mubai, nor did he assist Lin San. His words made everyone nod in agreement.

The Emperor laughed heartily, "So Lin San unknowingly played the role of the northern nomads, I suppose it's a bit unfair to him. Having a Su Mubai and adding an even more mysterious Lin San, the country has talents, and they are young and promising, this is a blessing for our Great Hua."

Within a round trip, all three thousand foot soldiers from the opposite side had already crossed the line of fire, followed by five hundred cavalry, Su Mubai's reserves. Over three thousand people, a black mass, rushed toward Lin San's army.

Su Mubai, on horseback, looked at the formation of Lin San in the distance. Four hundred foot soldiers stood in the front, followed by five hundred elite cavalry. Amidst the gray sea of armor, there was a man in a white robe, none other than Lin San. This was not because Lin San stood out, but because he wore a striking white robe, a feather fan in his hand, eye-catching. It was quite difficult not to see him.

"Where are the archers?" Su Mubai asked sternly.

Several sharpshooters from the Divine Machine Unit had already aimed their arrows at Lin San. But at this moment, the distance between the two armies was considerable, and that man in the white robe was like a fluttering butterfly among the soldiers, never stationary, how could they aim at him accurately?

Looking at the open plain between the two armies, a hint of a smile finally appeared on Su Mubai's gloomy face. Just now, Lin San had played a trick and seized the initiative to win the first round, which was unspeakably frustrating. 'Now, my numbers still significantly exceed yours, let's see what tactics you have left?'

Lin Wanrong rested his hands on his brow, the black horse beneath him pacing back and forth. He examined the scene for a moment and said, "Huh, why can't I see Su Mubai, The Top Scholar General?"

Hu Bugui laughed, "If you could see him, he'd be an easy target for the sharpshooters. A commander in the army should not show himself so casually."

‘Damn, he’s as cunning as me.’ The man in the white robe shook his feather fan lightly, looking like a scholar, and laughed flirtatiously, "Fair point, fair point. No wonder I can’t see the guy’s face. Brothers, are you all ready?"

The commanders responded in unison, the man in the white robe chuckled, cupped his hands around his mouth, and shouted, "General Su, General Su, are you there? If you are, answer me, let’s chat before we fight—"

His internal strength was not weak; his voice, full of vigor, traveled far. Su Mubai glanced over, only to see that the man in the white robe, Lin San, was calm and composed. There was a gentle smile on his face and an unspeakable flamboyance in his continuously moving feathered fan.

"General, Lin San is calling out. Should we respond?" A staff officer whispered at Su Mubai’s side.

Su Mubai shook his head slightly, "In a standoff between two armies, the braver one prevails. At this moment, the field between us is open without any supply resources. His old trick can’t be used again. It’s a diversion, I suspect he’s plotting something. Send my command: the infantry should change from vertical formation to horizontal, maintaining distance, and charge at the enemy – now!"

"Charge!" Like a tide rising, three thousand infantrymen stormed towards the opposing army. Dust flew everywhere, giving them the appearance of a swarm of locusts in the fields.

Lin Wanrong might not be well-versed in military strategy, but observing the orderly and precise charge of Su Mubai’s infantry, he acknowledged the man’s skill. He spurred his horse to the forefront of the formation, scanned the battlefield, and as the enemy forces neared, he spread his cloak, pointed his feathered fan forward, and commanded with great authority, "Listen to my command, infantry scatter, cavalry to the front, Hu Bugui, lead the cavalry – charge!"

The infantry swiftly parted, leaving a wide pathway for Hu Bugui’s cavalry. Hu Bugui bellowed, "Where is the horse herd?" As soon as his voice fell, the noise of hooves rang out from behind. More than eight hundred warhorses, collected by Du Xiuyuan and corralled by the cavalry, charged forward. The horses, in various colors and of robust physique, were excellent runners. They charged like a floating cloud, swiftly advancing.

Su Mubai’s face changed. Despite all his calculations, he hadn’t anticipated this move from Lin San. The charge of a thousand horses would be enormously powerful. Even his three thousand men would struggle to resist such an onslaught.

"Change formation, form vertical ranks!" Su Mubai shouted, passing the orders with urgency. Still, a sliver of hope lingered in his heart – the horses were not yet at full charge, their speed still manageable.

Before he could gather his thoughts, a series of crackling sounds echoed. Smoke rose from the rear of the charging horses, and their neighing intensified. They broke into a mad sprint, charging forward recklessly.

"Change formation, change formation!" Su Mubai shouted, his face pale. Was Lin San some reincarnated deity? How was he capable of such unpredictable strategies?

The horses, neighing in unison, galloped at incredible speed, far beyond what any human could achieve. Before Su Mubai's infantry could adjust their formation, the crackling sounds were already upon them. The oncoming horses treated the soldiers in front of them as nothing more than dirt, charging relentlessly forward. Su Mubai's proud formation was trampled and scattered to the wind. Soldiers fell, armor flew everywhere, and some were even trampled by the horses. In an instant, Su Mubai's army looked like a field after a wildfire, a sight of utter destruction.

"Charge, cavalry! Quickly, dismount!" Amid the chaos, Su Mubai bellowed. The five hundred cavalrymen, kept as reserves by his side, were his last straw. Yet, the soldiers, driven into panic by the galloping warhorses, had blocked the cavalry's way forward in an instant. Behind him was the blazing fodder; the cleared path could not possibly accommodate the retreat of three thousand men and horses at once. The large number of troops, once his advantage, had now become his greatest burden.

The young general clad in white laughed and shook his head, igniting a thin firecracker. Lighting the string of fireworks in his hand, he threw them. After the loud cracks and pops, his black horse was so frightened that it neighed loudly and reared, almost throwing him off. Cold sweat broke out on Lin Wanrong, "Goodness, this thing is so powerful. Damn, I am truly a genius. Who else could have thought of tying fireworks to a horse's tail?"

The commanders behind him were both amused and impressed. This General Lin was bold and daring. Was there anything in the world that could stump him?

The rest was much simpler. Without waiting for General Lin's orders, Hu Bugui, Du Xiuyuan and others had already led their soldiers in the charge. The three thousand infantrymen had been scattered by the thousand warhorses, leaving few organized units. Only Su Mubai's reserve of five hundred elite cavalrymen remained intact. Adding the remaining infantrymen scattered around, they

totaled less than fifteen hundred. With their morale low, how could they stand a chance against General Lin's fierce army?

The white-robed young general was at the forefront of the charge, wielding a blunt blade in his hand. With each rise and fall of his sword, a few men were toppled from their horses. His style was indeed dashing and attractive. Su Mubai's last five hundred elite cavalymen were extremely resilient, but Hu Bugui and the others finally broke them after some struggle. Su Mubai, his face deathly pale, stood in the center. He no longer cared about the danger of being slashed and killed, looking at Lin Wanrong, he said, "Brother Lin, you truly are skilled. However, if we were to fight again, I, Su Mubai, will not lose to you."

"War, you see, it has its victories and defeats. It's perfectly normal," Lin Wanrong laughed. "I rather think that the joy of yesterday's garden tour and discussing orchids is much more pleasant. What do you think, Brother Su?"

"Su Mubai has been completely defeated," Xu Zhiqing sighed deeply, a strange feeling rising in her heart. This Lin San's army tactics were irregular, seemingly using the most unconventional methods. It was hard to find strategies from him that fit the textbooks of military tactics, but he always won. If once was a coincidence, then every time like this spoke of real skill. She asked herself, there was nothing wrong with Su Mubai's disposition today. In fact, from the beginning, his surprise attack had seized the initiative, earning him praise. The later rout, not only did she not expect, but few people on the city tower could predict the outcome. What was the reason for this? If it was her who had to face Lin San in battle, what would the result be?

Few among them could have predicted such an outcome. Originally, they were to fight three battles, but after just two, Su Mubai had been captured by Lin San. The third battle was not needed at all. The scene unfolding before them left them dumbfounded, struggling to find words.

"Surprise attack? What is a surprise attack? This is a surprise attack!" The Emperor sighed softly with his eyes closed. Then, opening his eyes and sweeping them fiercely around, he laughed loudly. "Good, today's battle has allowed me to witness two young heroes. Su Mubai is well-versed in military strategies and excels in battle tactics. Lin San remains calm in the face of danger, and his surprise tactics reveal the bearing of a great general. I am greatly comforted to have such talents in our Great Hua Empire."

"My thousand warhorses!" Li Tai, standing on the city wall, saw the fireworks tied to the horse's rear and felt a pang in his heart. Training warhorses was no easy task, and it would take a

considerable time to rear these thousand horses again for military use. Xu Wei, understanding his thoughts, laughed and patted his shoulder, saying, "General Li, do not fret. Having a general like this is better than having thousands of horses."

"If we could have this general and a thousand warhorses, that would be even better," the old general said discontentedly.

The two of them burst into laughter. Li Tai looked at Xu Wei and said, "Brother Xu, I entrust this matter of Lin San to you. No matter what means you employ, you must bring him into our army."

"The old general need not hurry." Xu Wei laughed, "From what I see, someone is even more anxious than you."

The two exchanged a knowing smile, and when they covertly glanced at the Emperor, they saw his gaze, profound and far-reaching, fixed on the two young heroes in the distance, utterly entranced.

Chapter 315 A Smart Man

In this near-real battle exercise, it was Lin San who emerged overwhelmingly victorious, as if he was the one commanding five thousand soldiers. It indeed left everyone surprised. Despite leading a weaker force against a stronger adversary and under sudden attack, Lin San reacted quickly, made effective deployments, and left everyone in awe.

Observing the puzzled expressions around him, Li Tai chuckled, "Miss Xu, Lin San was at a disadvantage, and Su Mubai launched a sudden attack, but it was the least favored Lin San who emerged victorious. What's your view on this?"

Xu Zhiqing nodded slightly and responded seriously, "In my opinion, Lin San is definitely not an unprepared man. Those firecrackers and fireworks used to drive the war horses were surely prepared in advance. This alone demonstrates his clear understanding of the situation on the field and his adequate preparation. General Su's troop arrangement was indeed excellent, in full accordance with the art of war, truly top-notch. Yet, Lin San was able to anticipate the enemy's actions, spring a surprise attack, and that was a key to his victory. Secondly, from my perspective, Lin San excelled in coordinating his troops, especially in utilizing the Divine Machine Unit to achieve good results. The harmony between his cavalry and infantry was near perfect, and his use of the Divine Machine Unit was simply brilliant. It seemed he could think of every possible method. His ability to command a coordinated battle was unmatched, truly a talent of a great general. In this regard, General Su was somewhat rigid and not flexible enough, slightly inferior."

Prince Cheng, who had been silent all along, suddenly smiled, "Miss Xu, your analysis is very reasonable. However, in my view, while Lin San is indeed good at using surprise tactics, his understanding of military strategy is quite rough, whereas Su Mubai excels in this area. If a real battle ensues, whether surprise tactics or military strategy will prevail is something no one can precisely predict."

Xu Zhiqing just smiled faintly without replying, but Li Tai laughed out loud, "Prince Cheng, since you have never led an army, naturally you don't understand these intricacies. The so-called art of war aims at victory. On the surface, it may appear that Lin San merely used surprise tactics and won by accident, but this is based on his strong prediction skills and his ability to control the overall situation. In fact, he has a thorough understanding of military strategy, which enables him to come up with such an extraordinary tactic. This is the finest military strategy. If Your Highness thinks more about it, you will understand."

Li Tai's words were clearly a lesson to Prince Cheng. However, Li Tai was a distinguished general in Great Hua, and his military prestige was unmatched. Among the ministers present, Prince Cheng feared him more than Xu Wei. Hearing his words, although he was displeased, he only grunted and said nothing more.

The Emperor laughed, "Listening to my beloved officials, it seems that this Lin San has quite a few highlights. I would actually like to meet him—." His words were interrupted as a young eunuch rushed in, whispered a few words in his ear, causing the Emperor's face to change, he angrily snorted, "How audacious! These northern nomads are overly insolent!"

Hearing the Emperor's words that seemed to involve the northern nomads, everyone became silent. At this critical time, every move of the northern nomads was related to the safety of Great Hua. Even Prince Cheng was all ears.

The Emperor snorted, "There's an issue in the palace today. Minister Xu, Brother Cheng, come back to the palace with me to discuss this."

"Your will is my command," Prince Cheng and Xu Wei replied in unison.

The royal carriage was set in motion. The Emperor's face was marked by anger, his mind burdened with grave matters. He intended to return to the palace. Li Tai, seeing this, was deeply worried. He hastily motioned toward Xu Wei. Xu Wei understood his concern and quickly said, "Your Majesty, the matter of today's military exercise—"

The Emperor's steps paused for a moment. He said, "I intended to meet this Lin San today, but now it seems impossible. Minister Xu—"

"I am here!" Xu Wei quickly replied, respectfully bowing his fist.

The Emperor contemplated for a moment, then spoke, "In a few days, ambassadors from all nations will pay homage to the palace. You can bring Lin San along as well." The reception of ambassadors from all nations? What did that have to do with Lin San? Xu Wei was puzzled. However, seeing the Emperor striding away and climbing onto his royal carriage, he set aside his doubts and quickly followed.

‘Having won this battle, the Emperor should meet me. Damn, what excuse should I find to sneak into his harem?’ Lin Wanrong was daydreaming when he saw the royal carriage moving away in the distance. The ministers followed, and the Emperor was about to descend the city tower.

His heart lurched. He spurred his horse and galloped forward, waving his hand and shouting, "Hey, hey, wait! The one waving the flag, wait!" But the royal carriage did not wait for him; no one even spared him a glance, leaving him alone in moments.

"Hey, father-in-law, you can't go!" Lin Wanrong yelled from below the city tower, but the tower was deserted. Who would pay attention to him?

General Lin was extremely annoyed. ‘After I worked so hard to win this battle, you just left without a word? How could you live up to your ancestors, your conscience, and me?’

Over there, Du Xiuyuan hurriedly rode over and shouted, "General Lin, General Lin—"

Lin Wanrong turned his head to look. Du Xiuyuan looked troubled, as if he had something difficult to say. He said, "Brother Du, what's the matter?"

Du Xiuyuan hesitated for a moment, but finally plucked up his courage and said, "General Lin, I have something to say, but I don't know if I should."

Lin Wanrong laughed and said, "Brother Du, where did you learn to be so polite? If you have something on your mind and keep it from me, then you're looking down on me."

Du Xiuyuan nodded and said, "In that case, I'll say it. General Lin, don't be angry after you hear it. It's true that we won the battle today, but..." He pointed at the scene in the field and sighed.

Lin Wanrong looked over and saw tall flames in the field. The grains and grass were still burning. More than half of Su Mubai's five thousand elite soldiers were injured, with over a thousand of them seriously wounded. They lay on the ground, unable to move, their moans filled the air. Lin Wanrong was stunned. Honestly, he didn't want to see the situation turn out like this. However, under the circumstances at the time, he had no choice. His tactics might have been harsh, but they were enough to wake people up and lessen the bloodshed on future battlefields.

Du Xiuyuan shook his head repeatedly. Although the thrill of battle had its own allure, once the military drill was over and he saw more than a thousand wounded soldiers wailing on the ground, even the rugged Hu Bugui felt somewhat overwhelmed. Previous drills had also resulted in injuries and deaths, but those were a mere handful. Nothing compared to today – there were burn injuries, trampling injuries, falling injuries, cutting injuries. Thousands of horses and men were severely wounded; it was unprecedented. These were not enemy soldiers but their own brothers. In future battles, they would be relying on each other for survival. Only united could they defeat the enemy and move forward bravely. It was true that drills were meant to simulate real warfare, and weapons were merciless, but these were their brothers in arms. Injuring so many of them today, how could there not be resentment?

If not handled properly, Du Xiuyuan and Hu Bugui might end up isolated within the army. The idea of an isolated unit entering the battlefield was dreadful to contemplate.

Lin Wanrong could have walked away from this situation, but what about Brother Hu and Brother Du? And what about the brothers who followed him back from the battle in Shandong? Lin Wanrong took a deep breath, patted Du Xiuyuan on the shoulder, and genuinely thanked him, "Thank you for the reminder, Brother Du. I know what to do now."

He shouted, "Hu Bugui!"

Hu Bugui hurriedly galloped over, "I am at your command, General."

"Brother Hu, ask our brothers to go over and lend a hand," Lin Wanrong said gently, glancing at the wounded soldiers across from them.

Hu Bugui was stunned, then understood, gratefully saying, "General Lin, I thank you on behalf of our brothers."

"Get lost! We don't need your help!" A clamor rose from the opposing side. Lin Wanrong saw that it was Xu Zhen and others aiding the wounded soldiers under Su Mubai. An infantryman with a bandaged neck was cursing at Xu Zhen.

"Holy shit!" Hu Bugui roared and spurred his horse, galloping over to stand before Xu Zhen, scolding the infantryman, "You were bested in battle, captured by us as a prisoner. We are offering you help out of goodwill, and you dare to rant?"

The infantryman sneered, "Even if we lost, we're still better than you. You turn against your own brothers, are your consciences eaten by dogs?"

"Yeah, so many of our brothers were injured by you. Have your consciences been eaten by dogs?" The thousands of wounded soldiers began cursing in unison. Hu Bugui became angry and lashed out with his whip, intending to strike the infantryman.

But no matter how hard he tried, the whip wouldn't descend. He roared behind him, "Who's holding me back—General Lin?"

Lin Wanrong didn't say a word. He pulled Hu Bugui behind him, looking coldly at the thousand-plus wounded soldiers on the opposite side. He raised his voice, "My name is Lin San. I was the one who commanded today's battle, set the fire, trampled the grain. If anyone has a problem with that, come at me."

Seeing his dark expression and imposing manner, everyone was taken aback for a moment, and no one dared to speak. A cavalry officer captured by Hu Bugui, Liu Guoxuan, walked over, glanced at Lin Wanrong, and snorted, "General Lin, even if you are the victor, you can't humiliate us brothers. We are all part of the Great Hua army, yet you were ruthless against us, injuring many of our brothers. This is unacceptable."

"Ruthless?" Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, looking up at the sky. "Your five thousand men attacked my thousand, and yet you call me ruthless? Esteemed Commander Liu, by your logic, would I only be considered kind if I ordered my men to drop their weapons, allowing you to capture us? Is that it?"

Liu Guoxuan was taken aback, a trace of embarrassment appearing on his face. However, the previously vocal infantry commander retorted loudly, "But the way you fought, you might as well have been northern nomads! Did you ever consider us as brothers?"

With a snap of his whip, Lin Wanrong stilled the crowd. Every nerve was on edge as they listened to this white-robed general. "You fought ineffectively. My thousand men scattered your five thousand. If I had let you off lightly, would that make us brothers? But who would still consider you as brothers on the battlefield tomorrow, sparing your lives? Being brothers doesn't work that way! Where is Hu Bugui?"

"Present!" Hu Bugui bellowed in response.

With a swift motion, Lin Wanrong tore off his long robe, revealing his muscular, sunburnt skin. He coolly handed his whip to Hu Bugui, who was momentarily taken aback.

"General, what are you—?" All eyes were on them, the soldiers from both sides transfixed.

Tearing his robe completely off his body, Lin Wanrong spoke aloud, "Only by sweating more in peacetime, can we bleed less in wartime. I believe that after today's battle, you brothers will lose your arrogance and adopt more grounded attitudes. Should there be a battle drill in the future, I, Lin San, will still strategize without mercy. Today, during the military exercise, I injured my brothers. I am not at ease, but I do not regret it. This matter has nothing to do with my brothers, it was all under my command. If there is any offense, I alone will bear it. Today, my brothers have suffered. I, Lin San, will receive a hundred lashes! Hu Bugui, you carry out the punishment—"

"General, you can't—" Hu Bugui objected hurriedly.

"Ignoring military orders is punishable by death! If a lash doesn't draw blood, then ten more lashes will be added! If you want to ease my suffering, then give it all you've got. I'll make it clear in advance, these lashes I take today are to share the hardships with you, my brothers. In future battles, I will still not show any mercy. Hu Bugui, begin—"

"Damn it!" Hu Bugui's blood boiled. He dropped the whip, tore off his armor, ripped open his shirt to reveal his dark chest, covered in scars. He said in a hearty voice, "I, old Hu, am a rough man. I am willing to give my life for those who are good to my brothers. General Lin is the backbone of my tens of thousands of brothers, and I trust him with my life. I, Hu Bugui, am willing to take this punishment with the general."

"I, Du Xiuyuan (Li Sheng), am willing to be punished with the general," the two men said as they knelt together, their eyes filled with hot tears.

"We are willing to be punished with the general!" The one thousand soldiers under Lin Wanrong's command fell to their knees, pleading in mournful voices.

The situation had progressed to this stage, far beyond what the thousands of men under Su Mubai's command had expected. Among these soldiers, bred on the blood and iron of the battlefield, not many could claim the same devotion to their brothers as General Lin. To take the brunt of the hardship, to willingly risk his life for his brethren was something few could achieve. Although they had lost the battle that day, their defeat was not unjustified. A man like General Lin, brimming with tactical brilliance and unyielding valor, was indeed worth dying for. The troops' hearts were swayed, and their looks of initial defiance towards General Lin slowly transformed into admiration.

"Is this a game to you all?" Lin Wanrong roared. "Are you here to get flogged for fun? Hu Bugui, dare you defy my military order? Do you really think I wouldn't dare to behead you?"

Hu Bugui gritted his teeth, and abruptly stood up. "Xu Zhen, after I execute General Lin's punishment, you can do the same to me. I, Hu Bugui, swear to follow General Lin to the death."

Standing atop the city tower, Xu Zhiqing observed the unfolding drama and couldn't help shaking her head. "This Lin San, sometimes I think he's clever, and other times he does the silliest things."

Laughing heartily at her side, Li Tai said, "This young man, so jovial on regular days, yet has such a side to him. He dares to do and dares to bear. He's a real man. In this aspect, Su Mubai is far behind him. Your father was truly not wrong in his judgment. Even if it cost me my life, I would bring him to the army. Such talent cannot be wasted."

Seeing Hu Bugui preparing to execute the punishment, Xu Zhiqing anxiously interjected, "Uncle Li, stop making idle remarks. That fool is about to be whipped. You should go down and stop them. He'll truly annoy me to death. I've never seen such a stupid person before."

Surprised, Li Tai looked at Miss Xu, who calmly retorted, "Uncle, why are you looking at me? I'm not concerned about him, I just can't bear to see a fool bullied."

Li Tai burst into laughter. "Miss Xu, you're mistaken. This Lin San is no fool. He's a real smart man. The camaraderie between men is something you'll never understand. This round of whipping, do

you know how many people will swear to give their lives for him? It's a huge gain for him. Why would I stop him?"

Amid their conversation, Hu Bugui bit down hard, and his whip lashed fiercely onto Lin Wanrong's back, leaving a vivid scar. Behind Hu Bugui, Xu Zhen also steeled his heart and sent down a lash, marking Hu Bugui's rugged back as well.

The scorching pain radiating from his back caused Lin Wanrong to grit his teeth. Damn it, to be whipped and yet play the hero was a high price to pay. He thought of Hu Bugui as a fool. Why hadn't he smeared some medicinal salve on the whip? It made him suffer, and he wouldn't even be able to sleep properly that night.

The dull sound of the lashes hitting the two men's bodies echoed, but it also struck a chord in everyone's hearts. The soldiers from both sides, especially the veterans under General Lin, were all moved to tears by the sight of the crisscrossing wounds on the general's back. Everyone knelt and watched, with tears in their eyes, yet none bowed their heads.

Seeing how hard Hu Bugui was striking, Xu Zhiqing's heart pounded anxiously. With a huff, she thought to herself, 'You like playing the hero, and today you've taken a beating. You must have earned quite a few tears from Miss Xiao. Fortunately, someone cares about you. Who knows what kind of mess you'd be in otherwise.'

Upon seeing Li Tai engrossed in the spectacle, Xu Zhiqing could no longer stand to watch. Irritated, she said, "That tall and dark Hu Bugui doesn't have enough strength, he's reluctant to strike hard. It's not interesting to watch. Uncle, I'm going back first."

"That's not right. I know how strong Bugui is, and in the army, there are few who could match his strength," Li Tai murmured to himself. "Miss Xu..." He lifted his head, only to find that she had already walked far away in a hurry, seemingly unable to bear staying another moment.

The sight of the whipping stirred the hearts of the onlookers. Over a thousand wounded soldiers from the Su Mubai's army were also secretly impressed. Liu Guoxuan, the commander of the cavalry, hastily knelt and said, "I, Liu Guoxuan, admit defeat today, both in my heart and verbally. Please, general, spare me from the punishment."

Thousands of wounded soldiers, supporting each other, knelt down and said, "We all admit defeat. Please, general, spare us the punishment."

With a big grin, Lin Wanrong managed a weak laugh. "Brother Liu, my fellow soldiers, please rise quickly. Tonight, I will treat you to drinks. We won't return until we're drunk, and even if we're drunk, we won't return — ah, you little rabbit Hu Bugui, can't you be gentler —"

Everyone chuckled at his words, and amidst the laughter, they felt a newfound warmth toward General Lin. He seemed just like a brother to them. The site was filled with a mix of laughter and tears, bustling with extraordinary merriment.