

## Longevity 274

Chapter 274: Breaking Through Handan! One Battle to Decide the World!

"How is the situation in the city?" Zhao Yan asked anxiously.

Almost every hour, Zhao Yan would inquire.

"Reporting to the Great King," Guo Kai replied with a smile. "Senior General Pang Xuan sent word an hour ago, assuring the Great King to be at ease. With the old General here, Handan will certainly not fall."

"That is good."

"The Qin Army surely hasn't breached the city walls yet, have they?" Zhao Yan immediately pressed.

Obviously, Zhao Yan was still uneasy about Guo Kai's words. If any other state were attacking, perhaps he wouldn't be so panicked. But now he was facing his arch-nemesis from Qin, Ying Zheng, whom he had bullied since childhood. Once the city fell, he, the one who had once tormented Ying Zheng, would undoubtedly meet a terrible fate.

"That shouldn't be the case. After all, Senior General Pang Xuan is personally commanding the defense," Guo Kai hesitated a moment before replying.

He was not very clear about the situation outside the city himself. Of course, he was also somewhat panicked. Since Pang Xuan had been granted military authority over all of Handan, even taking control of distributing provisions, Guo Kai was left in an awkward position. Unable to help Qin even if he wanted to, he could only wait quietly within the city.

"Prime Minister, you must personally send someone to tell the old General to report to me immediately if anything happens in the city," Zhao Yan ordered sternly.

He was, of course, primarily concerned for his own life. If the Qin Army truly breached the city, he wouldn't think twice before fleeing Handan for the Dai Territory. After all, if it hadn't been for the prior trouble with Li Mu, Zhao Yan would have already considered escaping to the Dai Territory. Now that Li Mu was dealt with and military power was in his hands, Zhao Yan naturally had little to worry about. If not for his concerns about the full court of civil and military officials, he might have long ago proposed that Pang Xuan defend the city while he departed. But the implications were too significant, and he didn't dare to speak out.

"This subject understands," Guo Kai immediately acknowledged the command.

Time gradually slipped away.

A day passed.

Two days passed.

Three days passed.

For a full three days and nights, the battle for Handan City raged on. However, the city walls had already been overtaken by the elite soldiers of the Qin army. Two hundred thousand Qin soldiers had poured into the city, and Handan's outer city was on the verge of collapse.

Seeing that the defense of the outer city was hopeless, Pang Xuan immediately ordered a full retreat to defend the inner city. Although the Supervisory Army was present, faced with the genuine despair of a crushing defeat, not even the Zhao Jun Supervisory Army could maintain control.

"Senior General," a Zhao general reported to Pang Xuan, his face dejected. "The Qin Army has temporarily halted their offensive. After days of fighting, they seem to be exhausted. Outside the city, our Frontier Army cavalry has also suffered devastating losses. The Qin Army had already set up archers and spearmen in defense."

"The Qin Army's combat strength is superior; Zhao simply can't compare," Pang Xuan sighed. The confidence he had once expressed to Zhao Yan had vanished, leaving only despondency.

In three days, the outer city was lost. And this was with him having made preparations in advance. He had exhausted all his efforts against the Qin offensive, but ultimately, he could not stop them. The defeat was like a landslide that not even the Supervisory Army could reverse.

"Senior General, can we really hold out?" another Zhao general asked, his face a mask of conflict.

"Back in Wu'an City, we were all generals on the run," Pang Xuan sighed. "But this is the capital of Zhao. We have nowhere left to retreat."

"The Great King presses us daily for results, yet we have not reported the battle's true state," the general said gravely. "If we truly cannot hold out, are we to let the Great King also...?"

His meaning was clear.

Pang Xuan gave a wry smile. "Indeed. As a subject of the realm, how could I not protect the Great King? The Great King placed such great trust in this old man, handing over Handan's entire three hundred thousand-strong army, yet in the end, I have disappointed him."

"General Wu," Pang Xuan continued, "I must trouble you to send someone to the Prime Minister. Have him report to the Great King, requesting that the Great King take the Crown Prince, the other princes, and the Royal Family and retreat to the Dai Territory to preserve the vital spark of Zhao."

"The Dai Territory is a plain, a realm made for Zhao's cavalry," Pang Xuan said solemnly. "Even the Qin Cavalry would be no match for Zhao's horse-mounted archers. It is more than enough to protect the nation."

"Is the old General truly prepared to die in defense?" the general asked, unable to bear it. "As you said, Zhao can still preserve the nation in the Dai Territory with the Frontier Army. You could retreat with the Great King to protect the very foundation of Zhao."

"This old man has already fled once. I do not wish to flee again," Pang Xuan said sternly. "This time, let me fulfill my final duty to Zhao."

He then waved his hand, signaling the general beside him to go and deliver the report.

"Pass my command!" Pang Xuan ordered loudly. "Aside from the soldiers on guard duty, let all other soldiers eat and drink their fill before we proceed!"

"Understood," the surrounding Zhao generals responded, but their listless voices made it clear they had already lost their will to fight.

Seeing this, the gloom in Pang Xuan's eyes deepened.

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"Prime Minister," the general who had just been with Pang Xuan reported to Guo Kai. "Senior General Pang Xuan sends word. The Qin offensive is too overwhelming; the inner city will not hold for more than a few days. He asks you to report to the Great King, requesting that the Great King lead the Hundred Officials and the Royal Family to retreat to the Dai Territory. Senior General Pang wishes to show his final loyalty to the Great King."

Upon hearing this, Guo Kai felt a surge of joy, but his expression remained unchanged.

"I understand," Guo Kai nodded. "I will report to the Great King immediately so that he may prepare without delay."

"This general takes his leave," the Zhao general said respectfully as he withdrew, trusting the current Prime Minister implicitly.