

Mythical 471

Chapter 471: Capture the King...

Guo Jia lay in a pool of blood, but he didn't feel any severe discomfort. Although he had vomited blood, there was no sense of life slipping away, just a bit of dizziness, indicating that his core wasn't damaged.

Guo Jia, feeling dizzy, realized that his attempt to capture a fleeting opportunity by activating his spiritual talent had backfired, hurting him before it could harm anyone else.

"Just prescribe me some blood-replenishing medicine," Guo Jia said as he steadied himself and sat up, addressing Li Dangzhi.

"Guo Chief Clerk, please allow me to take your pulse before anything else. Although you appear to be suffering from blood loss without any physical injury, I've never seen such a case before. Let me verify your condition first," Li Dangzhi insisted, not at all upset by being hauled in by Wei Yan.

Guo Jia extended his left arm, casually placing it on the bloodstained table. His white silk robe quickly soaked up the blood.

"Strange, very strange..." Li Dangzhi muttered, puzzled as he examined Guo Jia.

"I already told you, just give me something to replenish my blood," Guo Jia grumbled, displeased.

"Some nourishing food should suffice. Porridge or soup will do; the maids at the Chief Clerk's residence can prepare it," Li Dangzhi said with a frustrated sigh before leaving.

Afterward, Guo Jia and Guan Yu switched to a different table and continued eating and drinking. Before long, one of Guan Yu's maids brought over a bowl of three-ingredient blood-replenishing porridge. Guo Jia eyed the odd color of the dish but drank it anyway under Guan Yu's stern gaze.

"Now, tell me, what happened earlier?" Guan Yu demanded with a commanding presence after seeing Guo Jia finish the porridge.

“The negative effects of my spiritual talent. If it’s unconsciously triggered, it usually has no consequences. But this time, even with the weakening effect of the lord’s talent, I still got hurt. Still, it was worth it,” Guo Jia said with a smile as he casually placed the bowl aside.

“Don’t take such risks again. Others may not know your abilities, but I, Guan Yu, do. As long as you’re here, Yuan Shao in the north won’t pose a threat to Qingzhou unless he sends his full army,” Guan Yu said, nodding in acknowledgment.

“If there’s a next time, I’ll do it again. It’s worth it. Even if it costs me my life, if it can bring about a unified world ten years sooner, I’ll gladly do it. And this time, it was just a mouthful of blood,” Guo Jia said with a broad smile. “Zichuan, I’ve already paved the way. Now, it’s up to you.”

Guan Yu remained silent. Although he didn’t fully grasp Guo Jia’s words, he sensed the resolve behind them. Such a person couldn’t be swayed by words, whether from a comrade or an enemy.

Guo Jia continued to calculate silently. As for his sealed spiritual talent, he didn’t feel too concerned—it wasn’t his primary reliance anyway.

What Guo Jia didn’t know was that if it hadn’t been for Liu Bei’s talent counteracting the effects this time, Guo Jia might not have survived. Even if he did, his lifespan would have been significantly shortened, much like Xi Zhicai’s.

After all, using a talent that can determine the outcome of nations requires immense energy. Deciding the fate of a beggar and determining the future of an empire are worlds apart in terms of the toll it takes. Though Guo Jia carefully used Cui Lie as a stepping stone to influence the Cui family and then the Hebei aristocracy, eventually using them to undermine Yuan Shao, it didn’t change the fact that he had forcibly altered the course of history.

Guo Jia instinctively gazed northward. Regardless of their opposition, he couldn’t help but acknowledge Yuan Shao as a formidable ruler. But since they were enemies, no matter how great Yuan Shao was, he would still have to fall before his lord, Liu Bei.

Meanwhile, Chen Xi had no idea what had transpired in the past quarter of an hour. He only knew that Zhou Yu had arrived, and both their forces and commanders were on par with, if not stronger than, his

own. Zhuge Liang's words had already made it clear that the enemy had at least two top strategists and three Inner Qi masters.

"A friend from Lumen Academy? Who are you talking about?" Chen Xi asked, puzzled. "Who from Lumen Academy has graduated at this time?"

Chen Xi's question made Zhuge Liang a bit embarrassed. Although Lumen Academy was one of the two most prestigious academies in the world, it hadn't produced any notable disciples lately, unlike Yingchuan Academy, whose alumni formed the backbone of all major powers.

"Pang Shiyuan, a talent no less than myself," Zhuge Liang replied, clearly displeased. At his young age, he wasn't yet capable of self-effacing humility.

"Pang Shiyuan?" Chen Xi raised an eyebrow. "He's your responsibility. I'll handle Zhou Yu. Just make sure you can keep Pang Shiyuan in check—can you do that?"

Zhuce Liang frowned slightly but eventually nodded. "Alright, I'll keep Pang Shiyuan occupied. I can do that."

"What's wrong, Shiyuan?" Zhou Yu also noticed the slight discomfort on Pang Tong's face and asked with some concern.

"Opposite us is not only Chen Zichuan but also Zhuge Kongming. Leave him to me!" Pang Tong sneered as he spoke, immediately activating his spiritual talent to drain Zhuge Liang's intelligence.

"Zhuge Kongming?" Zhou Yu asked, puzzled.

"He's someone who irritates me. I think you'll find him equally vexing once you meet him. This time, I'll make him regret it," Pang Tong sneered. "I'll start by completely dispersing the fog. The river charts you gave me are accurate, right?"

"They are," Zhou Yu confirmed with a nod.

“Good. The river is swift and filled with hidden currents. Who knows if they might hit a reef?” Pang Tong grinned wickedly. “This battlefield is perfect. Watch me sink their ships.”

“Gan Xingba, do you dare to face me in battle on the river?” A booming voice echoed across the fog-covered river.

“Zhou Youping, is your injury healed?” Gan Ning responded with a loud laugh.

“A mere scratch! Today, we’ll settle this once and for all!” Zhou Tai’s thunderous voice rang out again along the river.

“As a commander, fighting a mere defeated general and bodyguard really diminishes my stature!” Gan Ning’s taunting voice echoed through the fleet, followed by waves of laughter.

“Ziyi, things don’t seem right. Zhou Youping is also a skilled naval commander. He’ll likely lead his forces straight at us. When the battle starts, reposition the central forces to block their charge. I’ll lead the left flank and strike at their center. Although Sun Bofu is young, his strength hasn’t peaked yet. With the strategist and Kongming holding off their advisors, I’ll quickly capture Sun Bofu,” Gan Ning said with a serious expression.

Although Gan Ning hadn’t confirmed the exact number of enemy ships, Zhou Tai’s momentum alone told him it wouldn’t be a small number. In this situation, the best course of action was to capture the leader—capture the king to capture the thieves!

Chapter 472: Risky Tactics

"Gan Xingba, if you're too scared, just admit it. No one will mock you for it," Zhou Tai's booming voice echoed across the river from the opposite side.

"Gan Xingba, let me charge in. You stay here and command. After all, you're the navy commander," Taishi Ci said as he shook his head, but Gan Ning handed him the command token and leaped towards the ships on the left flank.

"Ziyi, you take command. There are some things that Xingba dares to do that you might hesitate over," Chen Xi said as he dispersed the fog and began adjusting the cloud formations with his spiritual energy. Soon, the fog that had shrouded the Yangtze River lifted, and daylight illuminated the waters.

"Alright, leave it to me!" Taishi Ci, always decisive, knew this was no time for hesitation.

"You think I'll just let you do as you please? The river's water vapor is plentiful; let's see how you disperse it!" Pang Tong sneered. Instead of competing with Chen Xi in a direct battle of spiritual energy, he drew on the river's moisture to reform the fog. The moment Chen Xi cleared the fog, Pang Tong brought it back, once again concealing their ships.

"Shiyuan, you handle the other one; I'll take on Chen Zichuan," Zhou Yu said as he took over from Pang Tong, manipulating the water vapor to conceal their forces. "But where's Bofu?"

"He's already sailed ahead in a small boat," Pang Tong said indifferently. "Generals Huang, Han, and Cheng are with him. They have only about a dozen small boats and one warship for cover."

"At least they know to provide cover. Send word to Ling Cao to lead the vanguard to reinforce them," Zhou Yu sighed in relief. "You've already mapped out the currents, right? Don't manipulate them right away—wait until the tide turns in our favor."

"No need to remind me; I know. I'll focus on our defenses first," Pang Tong quickly fortified their ships with cloud energy, reinforcing their strength.

Chen Xi, seeing the fog dissipate and then reappear, smirked slightly before focusing on fortifying his own ships' defenses. Gan Xingba could use the thick fog to launch a surprise attack on the enemy's central forces—this was enough for now.

"I can't see anything!" Taishi Ci called out as he ordered the fleet to close ranks around the flagship and prepared the crossbows for an attack. But after completing the preparations, he realized there was no way to target anything.

"Fire a test shot in that direction!" Chen Xi said, frowning. After extending his spiritual energy, he sensed something unusual on the right side.

"Archers, ready!" Despite the heavy fog, Taishi Ci unleashed a glowing strike with his spear, hitting something in the river with a loud crash and hearing chaotic shouts in response.

"Everyone, fire to the right!" Taishi Ci ordered. He couldn't afford to be cautious now. Even if it was just bait, he was ready to take the risk. "Small boats, prepare to board!"

Arrows rained down, and before Sun Ce and his men could react, they were showered with projectiles. Realizing their ambush had failed, Sun Ce roared, "Generals, follow me and charge the enemy!"

With a mighty shout, Sun Ce leaped from his ship, bounding several times in midair to reach the enemy vessel. But Taishi Ci had anticipated this move. As soon as Sun Ce appeared, Taishi Ci nocked an arrow and fired at his chest. The glowing projectile shot toward Sun Bofu.

Caught in mid-leap, Sun Ce barely managed to deflect the arrow with his spear, but the immense force sent him spiraling into the river.

"So Sun Bofu is here," Taishi Ci muttered as he watched his ships surround Sun Ce's small fleet.

With a thunderous crash, Sun Ce emerged from the river, swinging his spear to create a massive wave that overturned two of the nearby boats.

"This is a nuisance. Compared to land battles, where individual strength matters less, naval battles amplify the impact of elite warriors, especially with fewer ships," Chen Xi said as he waved his hand, trying to calm the waters that Sun Ce had disturbed.

"There's nothing we can do. On land, armies form a cohesive whole, but at sea, each ship is its own entity. Naval combat amplifies ship strength rather than individual prowess. After all, on the river, cloud energy allows ships to channel attacks into the water, even using it as a weapon," Taishi Ci explained, keeping his focus on Sun Ce's position despite the fog. Though visibility was low, he could still sense Sun Ce's presence.

"So top-tier warriors are weaker in naval battles, but they can still overturn small boats, even if cloud energy weakens them?" Chen Xi asked, clearly less familiar with naval warfare.

"Yes, they can, but only against small boats, and only if the boats are unprepared. If the ships are linked with cloud energy, it's impossible to overturn them without breaking the connection—just like on land, where I could kill thousands by surprise, but once they form a battle formation, it's much harder."

"Is it possible to break their cloud energy?" Zhuge Liang asked curiously.

"Haven't you seen me doing that already? Kongming, clear some of the fog in front. I need to dismantle their energy quickly; capturing Sun Bofu alive is valuable!" Taishi Ci had already silenced all the enemy drummers, making it difficult for Sun Ce to maneuver his few ships.

With one swift stroke, Cheng Pu and Huang Gai killed a Gan Ning soldier and regrouped. As the fog began to lift, Taishi Ci's control over the battlefield grew, and soon he had split Sun Ce's fleet into scattered fragments. The enemy's cloud energy started to crumble.

"Bofu, retreat!" Han Dang shouted. They had hoped to ambush Gan Ning under the cover of fog, but now they were the ones trapped.

"No need! Gongjin must have a plan!" Sun Ce shouted, kicking a soldier into the river. Had it not been for the cloud energy, that kick would have obliterated the unfortunate man.

Huang Gai and Cheng Pu exchanged glances. Cheng Pu charged forward while Huang Gai called for the ships to close in around Sun Ce.

A loud bang echoed as Huang Gai leaped back several feet. He looked down to see a large hole where he had just stood. Before he could recover, five arrows landed around him, each one narrowly missing. Even in the thick fog, Taishi Ci's skill at locating his target by sound alone was undeniable.

With a flick of his spear, Sun Ce deflected the arrows aimed at Huang Gai, then pulled him back, dodging more incoming shots.

Chapter 473: Zhou Yu's Legion Talent

"This is the first time I've encountered a general with such exceptional archery skills," Sun Ce remarked with a frown.

"Thank you, young lord. But you mentioned that Gongjin would have a plan. Did you notify him before we came?" Huang Gai asked, still shaken by the earlier barrage of arrows. If it weren't for Sun Ce's sharp eyes and strong skills, Huang Gai might not have survived.

"I didn't notify him, but it doesn't matter. He'll definitely send someone to assist us," Sun Ce replied nonchalantly as he impaled a water soldier with his spear. "For now, let's regroup on the warship. I underestimated Gan Xingba."

Huang Gai was speechless but followed Sun Ce closely, leaping onto the warship as well. Despite Sun Ce's lack of communication with Zhou Yu, Huang Gai trusted that Zhou Yu would come through.

Taishi Ci's movements were swift and precise, quickly breaking up Sun Ce's fleet of small boats and preparing to board the warship to capture Sun Ce and his generals alive.

"Hmph, you're quite tenacious, but this is the end. Ready the ballistae!" Taishi Ci, dissatisfied with Sun Ce's troops' stubborn resistance, prepared to personally take action.

"Don't worry, my lord! Ling Cao is here!" Just as Taishi Ci was about to board, a booming voice echoed across the river, halting his movements.

"Fire the ballistae!" Taishi Ci didn't hesitate, ordering the ballistae to fire in the direction of the voice, intending to destroy Sun Ce's warship.

Chen Xi suddenly waved his hand, parting the fog on the river to reveal Ling Cao leading over a hundred ships, ranging from small boats to warships. Though their largest vessels were merely warships and smaller crafts like rowboats and yachts, their sheer numbers were intimidating.

Ling Cao's fleet charged forward, and seeing the situation turn unfavorable, Taishi Ci ordered his smaller boats to retreat. As Sun Ce's forces and Ling Cao's navy joined forces, their morale surged, and a vast cloud of water-blue and gold energy spread across the river.

"This situation is getting tricky. Where did Xingba go?" Chen Xi frowned at the sight of the enemy's numerous small boats—there were at least three to four thousand sailors. "Ziyi, can you break through their cloud energy?"

"Breaking through their cloud energy would be difficult. Our forces are evenly matched, and even if I break through, it would be hard to disperse their formation unless they lose control themselves. Otherwise, it's nearly impossible to scatter them," Taishi Ci shook his head. Naval warfare was far more complicated than land battles.

"However, it will be equally difficult for them to take us down. In the end, it might come down to boarding actions, where they won't have the advantage. Our ships have higher decks, and our archers can suppress them. If they try a decapitation strike, I'll be here waiting. Let them come," Taishi Ci added confidently, perhaps to counter his earlier pessimism.

"By formation, do you mean the arrangement of their ships?" Chen Xi asked as he continued to suppress Zhou Yu while pondering the situation. Suddenly, he felt a mental shock, and Zhuge Liang's movements slowed for a moment before returning to normal. At that moment, both Zhou Yu and Pang Tong seemed to grow stronger.

"Shua!" Chen Xi felt his spiritual energy, which he had been using to weaken Sun Ce's forces, get entangled and abruptly thrown into the river. The chaotic energy killed a large number of fish and shrimp, causing them to leap out of the water.

"Is it the arrangement of their ships? What happened, military advisor?" Taishi Ci asked, noticing Chen Xi's sudden pale complexion.

"We've been tricked, but it's nothing serious. Go and call out the man in the cabin; we need his strength in battle," Chen Xi waved it off, feeling as though he was a child playing with a large hammer—he could swing it, but the risk of injury was high.

Meanwhile, Zhou Yu wasn't faring much better. As soon as Chen Xi's face paled, Zhou Yu's turned green. Although he had managed to throw a significant portion of the chaotic spiritual energy into the river, killing fish and shrimp, the remaining energy still disoriented him.

"Are you okay, Gongjin?" Pang Tong asked as he slowly extended his spiritual energy into the river's undercurrents, biding his time. As Taishi Ci had said, the only way to break an enemy's cloud formation was either to scatter their forces or disrupt their ranks. With the river's unpredictable currents, Pang Tong hoped to use the latter to his advantage.

"I'm fine, but I underestimated Chen Zichuan's spiritual energy. His reserves are tied to his talent, and even though I managed to deflect the worst of it, the lingering effects are disorienting. I've already slowed their reaction and thinking speeds, as well as their spiritual energy flow. It's up to you now," Zhou Yu replied, trying to steady his breathing.

"No problem. I'll give Zhuge Kongming a surprise gift!" Pang Tong's twisted grin spread across his face. "I've connected with several undercurrents. When the time is right, I'll unleash them and scatter their fleet. They think big ships will allow them to dominate the Yangtze."

"Do it quickly. I misjudged Chen Zichuan's strength—his counterattack is stronger than I anticipated!" Zhou Yu's expression darkened as a series of splashes echoed through the river. Chen Xi's spiritual energy reserves far exceeded Zhou Yu's estimates, and if this continued, Zhou Yu would be the first to collapse.

"Zhou Gongjin, let's see how long you can hold out!" Chen Xi taunted as he handled the situation and called Guan Hai onto the deck. Meanwhile, he continued to draw on that mysterious source of spiritual energy, determined to drag the battle into Sun Ce's fleet.

"Get down!" Chen Xi suddenly increased the output of his spiritual energy, even making an involuntary downward motion with his right hand. This time, he managed to pin Zhou Yu's energy onto several of Sun Ce's ships. A chorus of screams followed as an entire ship's crew collapsed, and those nearby were left dizzy.

"Indeed, cloud energy can block internal energy but not spiritual power!" Chen Xi laughed triumphantly, his face flushed as he prepared for another strike. But before he could, a red glow swept across the fog, covering the entire Sun Ce fleet. Chen Xi's spiritual energy was now ineffective.

"Phew, that was unexpectedly strong," Zhou Yu sighed with a wry smile. "That spiritual energy shouldn't belong to any living being, but fortunately, I had a backup plan."

"You're not exactly normal either," Pang Tong muttered under his breath.

The red glow that now shielded Sun Ce's fleet was Zhou Yu's unique legion talent. Unlike other top-tier generals who used their strong will to unite their troops, Zhou Yu lacked such overwhelming willpower. Instead, he used his mental energy as a conduit, drawing on his talent in music to awaken a unified desire for victory in his soldiers, creating an even stronger collective will.

Chapter 474: Sun Ce Battles Taishi Ci

While Chen Xi's manipulation of his spiritual power caused confusion among the soldiers due to the many distracting thoughts, Zhou Yu's unified belief served as the perfect shield against such distractions.

"Kill them!" Taishi Ci knew things had taken a turn for the worse when that fiery red glow swept across Sun Ce's army. As expected, after the glow passed, Sun Ce's soldiers seemed to be invigorated, their morale surging.

"A legion talent!" Taishi Ci grimaced. He had encountered these powerful, almost cheat-like abilities on the battlefield before, but this was the first time he'd seen one that covered such a vast area and so many soldiers.

"Is Xingba still waiting for the right moment?" Chen Xi frowned. The ships of both sides were now intermixed; while the larger ships hadn't been boarded yet, the smaller vessels were already engaged in close combat.

"Military Advisor Chen, I'll stay by your side to ensure your safety. Although I don't know much about naval warfare, it seems unlikely we'll be able to break through the enemy in a short time," Guan Hai said as he exited the cabin and stood behind Chen Xi.

"Thank you. Ziyi, do you have any legion abilities?" Chen Xi asked with a frown.

"I do, but their effect is minimal. I've already used mine, but the navy isn't very in tune with my will. These sailors haven't been with me long enough, and I don't have absolute authority over them," Taishi Ci replied with a bitter smile.

Chen Xi didn't respond immediately, lost in thought about how to turn the situation around. The current situation was not ideal. While defeat wasn't imminent, continuing to sustain losses like this wasn't good either.

"Ganying, you take command and protect the military advisor. I'll break through the enemy lines!" Taishi Ci couldn't help but act when he saw Sun Ce leading a charge onto one of the larger ships. The age-old tactic of 'capturing the leader to win the battle' was still as valid as ever.

"Understood!" Ganying saluted and took Taishi Ci's command token. When Gan Ning left home, his father had ensured he was well-prepared with capable people to safeguard him in dangerous situations. After all, the Gan family had invested all their resources into him and wouldn't allow anything to happen to their heir easily.

With that, Taishi Ci grabbed his Fangtian halberd and leaped towards the large ship where Sun Ce and his men had landed. Despite the cloud energy suppressing half of his power, he only needed a few jumps to land on the ship.

"Clang!" Taishi Ci swung his halberd in a wide arc, locking Sun Ce's spear with the smaller end of the weapon and using a deft maneuver to fling Sun Ce back. "You all deal with the others. I'll handle him!"

"You must be the one who shot those arrows earlier. I didn't expect there to be another skilled general in this navy besides Gan Xingba," Sun Ce said with a slight smile as he gripped his spear tightly, his excitement evident.

"Sun Bofu?" Taishi Ci confirmed the identity of his opponent.

"Are you considering surrendering to me?" Sun Ce asked with a grin. "I never turn away talented warriors. How about it? If you surrender, your chances of breaking through will greatly improve with me here!"

"Remember the name of the man who kills you—Taishi Ci of Donglai!" Taishi Ci showed no emotion as he swung his halberd and charged at Sun Ce.

"Hmph!" Sun Ce laughed and charged at Taishi Ci, his spear vibrating with a powerful force as he thrust it toward Taishi Ci's chest and abdomen.

"Clang!" Taishi Ci's halberd met the spearhead with a resounding clash, the immense force causing his left hand to momentarily go numb. He then swung the halberd in a wide arc toward Sun Ce's throat.

"Thud!" Sun Ce responded by striking the halberd's shaft with his spear, sending Taishi Ci flying backward, creating some distance between them.

As Taishi Ci flew back, he gripped his halberd with both hands, flipped in midair, and kicked the air so hard that it seemed to liquefy, propelling himself toward Sun Ce like a golden blur. Sun Ce, in turn, stomped on the deck and unleashed a flurry of spear thrusts, each one radiating golden energy that surrounded Taishi Ci.

Taishi Ci deflected Sun Ce's spear attacks with a powerful swing of his halberd, then aimed a strike at Sun Ce's waist.

"Boom!" With a loud crash, Sun Ce was sent flying hundreds of meters away like a golf ball, and Taishi Ci turned into a golden streak as he leaped into the air, both men speeding away as the cloud energy around them thinned. They eventually landed in the river.

Sun Ce was the first to land on the water, followed shortly by Taishi Ci. Both men stood on the surface of the river, gripping their weapons and staring each other down, neither showing any signs of fatigue.

"Here, we can fight without holding back," Sun Ce said with a smile. "I love battling skilled opponents."

"So do I!" Taishi Ci laughed as golden energy flared from his body, and Sun Ce responded in kind, unleashing his own golden aura. The river's surface roiled with turbulent waves.

"Hmph, I hate it when someone has the same energy as me!" Sun Ce said, annoyed, as he tightened his grip on his spear. He had always considered himself unique, so seeing someone else with similar power irritated him.

"Once I take your head, I'll be the only one!" Taishi Ci sneered as he stomped on the water, creating a massive whirlpool beneath his feet. He charged at Sun Ce like a golden streak, his halberd poised to strike.

"I feel the same way!" Sun Ce roared, compressing all his energy into a single shout that sent shockwaves across the river, clearing the mist.

"Boom!" Taishi Ci's energy slash tore through the sound wave, descending on Sun Ce with the force of a mountain. The strike hit Sun Ce's spear with overwhelming power, sending him crashing into the river, creating a massive wave that rose dozens of meters high. Taishi Ci used the recoil to flip in midair and land gracefully on the water's surface.

"Rumble!" As soon as Taishi Ci landed, a barrage of golden spears shot out from beneath the water, targeting his position.

Taishi Ci swung his halberd horizontally, cutting through several golden spears, and used the momentum to propel himself out of Sun Ce's attack range. He hovered in the air, let out a fierce shout, and slashed down at the water, parting it with his strike. Through the gap in the water, Taishi Ci spotted Sun Ce preparing to leap out.

"Die!" Taishi Ci drew his bow and aimed at Sun Ce's location. Golden threads materialized on the bowstring, and as he released the arrow, it split into countless tiny threads that rained down on the river like a storm, leaving Sun Ce no room to escape.

"I refuse to die here!" Sun Ce's eyes turned blood-red as he found himself cornered. With no other options, he unleashed all his inner energy, gripping his spear tightly and charging toward the densest cluster of golden threads. "Break through!"

Chapter 475: Battle, Battle, Battle

While Sun Ce and Taishi Ci were locked in their intense battle, elsewhere, Zhuge Liang had already easily suppressed Pang Tong's harassing attacks. However, it was precisely because he had managed to suppress Pang Tong's spiritual counterattacks that Zhuge Liang began to feel something was off.

The familiarity between Zhuge Liang and Pang Tong allowed Zhuge Liang to know that Pang Tong's abilities were not inferior to his own. Therefore, Zhuge Liang found it hard to believe that he had managed to suppress Pang Tong so effortlessly.

Meanwhile, although Zhou Yu had weakened Zhuge Liang's mental capabilities and enhanced Pang Tong's abilities, Pang Tong was still multitasking. Given the situation, he was already doing exceptionally well to hold out to this extent.

If their intelligence levels were to be translated into numerical values, even after being subtly weakened by Zhou Yu, Zhuge Liang still hovered around ninety, while the boosted Pang Tong had yet to reach a hundred. He wasn't at the level where he could effortlessly overwhelm Zhuge Liang. However, Pang Tong was never aiming for a direct confrontation; he knew that the outcome of his duel with Zhuge Liang was far less important than the overall battle. After all, he had faced Zhuge Liang countless times.

"Kongming, you look troubled. Is there something you're unsure about?" Now that Zhou Yu was no longer disrupting him, Chen Xi finally had the chance to speak.

Zhou Yu's legion talent, which bolstered the morale of his troops, had left Gan Ning and Chen Xi slightly bewildered. After all, in this era where morale played a critical role, Zhou Yu's talent had raised his troops' fighting spirit to such an extent that Gan Ning's navy was struggling to hold its ground.

However, Chen Xi didn't lose heart. Zhou Yu's legion talent seemed strange in several ways. According to Zhao Yun, without reaching the level of an inner-energy expert, it was impossible to unify a legion's will to such an extent. And Chen Xi refused to believe that Zhou Yu was not only a top strategist but also a top-tier martial artist!

With this in mind, Chen Xi didn't stop his spiritual intrusion. As he poured more spiritual power into the fight, he began to erode Zhou Yu's legion talent. It didn't take long for Chen Xi to understand the essence of Zhou Yu's talent.

Although he couldn't immediately find a way to counter it, he realized that Zhou Yu's talent essentially used an unknown method to align his spiritual will with that of his soldiers, boosting their morale. And that was all Chen Xi needed to start disrupting it.

Such feats are challenging to achieve; otherwise, more people would be able to infuse their will into their troops. Zhou Yu's method of doing so without relying on his own will as the focal point was unique.

Unfortunately for Zhou Yu, Chen Xi's spiritual talent naturally fostered affinity with others' spiritual wills. By harnessing his immense spiritual power, it didn't take long for a pale, moonlit glow to spread from Chen Xi, connecting the wills of Liu Bei's forces.

Whereas Zhou Yu had used his musical talent to resonate with his soldiers' beliefs, forming a power akin to a legion talent, Chen Xi employed his vast spiritual power to forcibly link the similar wills of his soldiers, merging them.

With both sides activating their talents, Liu Bei's forces, which had been fragmented, seized the opportunity to surround several of Sun Ce's attacking points as they withdrew. The battle became less clear-cut.

"Pang Shiyuan has a backup plan, but I don't know what it is!" Zhuge Liang hesitated.

"Then let's force it out!" Chen Xi cleared a patch of fog and turned to Gan Yi, asking, "Can we deploy fire ships now? If we can, force them back. Our large ships lack agility."

Gan Yi glanced at the area where Cheng Pu's forces were engaged and hesitated. "Military Advisor, we need to divert the enemy's commanding general first, or it will be difficult to succeed."

Cheng Pu and Huang Gai were both excellent naval commanders, but due to Sun Ce's impulsive charge, they had followed him. As a result, they were now reduced to acting as combatants rather than commanders, leaving Ling Cao to take command of the fleet. Despite this, Ling Cao's command was impressive enough that Gan Yi's forces were starting to falter.

In a battle involving hundreds of ships, albeit small ones, the fact that Ling Cao could gain the upper hand so quickly showed he was no pushover.

"It's up to you now. Their forces aren't weak," Chen Xi said, turning to Guan Hai. "But don't worry, no one knows who you are."

"Leave it to me. He's weaker than me, with unstable energy—he must have just recently broken through!" Guan Hai sneered. Despite not having the strongest foundation, his spirit was incredibly resilient due to his commitment to sacrifice, making his inner energy exceptionally pure, rivaling even top-tier martial artists like Guan Yu, though lacking in quantity.

With that, Guan Hai leaped off the flagship and charged toward Ling Cao's warship, avoiding the dense fog. He burst through the clouds of energy and landed on the ship. "Ling Cao, dare to face me in battle?" Guan Hai's roar echoed across the river as he landed on the warship.

"Zi Heng, take command! There's no room to fight here; I'll deal with him!" Ling Cao handed over the command to Lu Fan and leaped into the river, heading northward. For Sun Ce, every warship was a crucial asset that could not be wasted.

As Ling Cao glanced back at Guan Hai, who was following closely behind, he sneered, realizing they were evenly matched in strength—both having just recently broken through.

"Chen Zichuan must be extremely important to Liu Bei, bringing a force capable of waging a war just for a journey." Zhou Yu, who had also heard the echoing roar from the river, couldn't help but smile.

Zhou Yu had anticipated that Chen Xi would try to divert Ling Cao. After all, for someone from the north, skilled naval commanders were scarce, making it crucial to draw away the enemy's navy commander. However, Zhou Yu also knew that Lu Fan was even more adept at naval command than Ling Cao.

"Hmph, you're no different," Pang Tong grumbled. "Zhuge Kongming must be suspicious by now. I'm very familiar with him, so he's probably guessing what my next move is. Although I'm confident he won't think of targeting the river beneath our feet, you can never be too sure with that guy—he always comes up with something unexpected."

"Let's test out the fire ships first. I think I understand what Xingba is planning. That guy really is bold yet meticulous!" Chen Xi laughed as he glanced at the dozens of small ships docked beneath his supply vessels.

Chapter 476: Zhuge Liang Activates His Ability

Zhuge Liang thought for a moment before retracting his spiritual power that was clashing with Pang Tong's. Compared to Chen Xi, who could incapacitate enemy soldiers with his sheer spiritual force,

Zhuge Liang, Pang Tong, and Zhou Yu's spiritual power clearly lacked that particular effect. Zhuge Liang hesitated whether or not to activate his own spiritual talent. As the battle with Pang Tong dragged on, Zhuge Liang became increasingly uneasy—Pang Tong was not someone easy to deal with.

Activate! Zhuge Liang made up his mind. If I lose to Pang Tong like this, I won't be able to stand it! I'm stronger than him! Plus, I'm only fourteen—what's a little lifespan when there's so much to gain?

As Chen Xi and Zhuge Liang worked together to change the weather, Zhuge Liang's resolve strengthened. The sudden gust of a fierce western wind swept across the river, and Gan Yi had already ordered the horn to be sounded. The command to abandon the ships and jump into the water had been relayed to the front lines, and in an instant, flames erupted where the first line of ships engaged Sun Ce's forces.

"Send orders to General Cheng, General Han, and General Huang: abandon the attacking ships and retreat the remaining ships gradually," Lu Fan commanded as soon as he noticed the sudden red line of fire on the river and felt the strong west wind. Despite his quick decision, many ships, already too close to Gan Ning's fleet, were set ablaze.

On the other side, hidden in the mist, Gan Ning finally moved as the western wind picked up. Earlier, while navigating, he had spotted Ling Cao's large fleet, which made him realize that Sun Ce likely had a plan similar to his own. But then, Gan Ning thought of an even better strategy.

"Everyone, be ready! Stabilize the ships at full speed and crush the enemy vessels!" Gan Ning ordered his crew and sent word to the captains of the six large ships.

"It's almost time!" Chen Xi observed the distance that had formed between their large ships and Sun Ce's fleet. Both sides were now rescuing their own sailors. Once the burning ships were extinguished, a larger battle would commence. However, by that time, Gan Ning should have already completed his mission.

Chen Xi didn't notice that Zhuge Liang's face had paled slightly, but his eyes were gleaming with determination.

"This feels incredible," Zhuge Liang calmly remarked as he watched the line of fire. "It feels like everything is within my grasp."

"Zichuan, leave the next step to me!" Zhuge Liang looked up, a gentle smile on his face, as he spoke to Chen Xi. "Though I know little about naval warfare, defeating them now shouldn't be difficult. If it's a matter of courage, we won't lose to them. Moreover, I recall Boyan once telling me that our ships are somewhat fire-resistant. Isn't that right, Boyan?"

Zhuce Liang didn't turn around, but Lu Xun, hiding nearby, felt as though Zhuge Liang was staring right at him, sending chills down his spine. Silently stepping forward, Lu Xun nodded. "Yes, but only to a certain extent. If exposed to fire for too long, they will still ignite."

"Then we'll crush them. The line of fire isn't wide—at most, two hundred paces. Our ships, at full sail, with the wind at our backs, will cross it in just a few breaths. And our large ships don't need to be too close together. At that point, it won't be about formations but speed. Once we break through, their formation will be shattered," Zhuge Liang suggested with a gentle smile.

"A breakthrough, huh?" Chen Xi wasn't entirely sure it could be done. After a moment of thought, he decided to trust Zhuge Liang's judgment. "Gan Yi, can we do what Kongming suggested?"

"Ramming ships is our specialty!" Gan Yi laughed heartily.

"Prepare all ships! Full sail! Helmsmen, ready! Ballistae, ready! Archers, ready! Fire oil, ready!"

"Everyone, prepare for the cold," Zhuge Liang ordered, turning to Gan Yi. Though Gan Yi didn't fully understand the command, he glanced at Chen Xi, who nodded in agreement, so he relayed the order to the fleet without question.

"Zichuan, join me in controlling the river's currents. That's also within our control. Pang Shiyuan's plan was likely to manipulate the currents during our advance to break our formation. There are plenty of reefs here," Zhuge Liang said calmly, gazing at the line of fire through the mist.

Zhuce Liang had never felt so at ease. With each move he made, predicting the future based on past events, every plan seemed laughable in the face of his rising intellect.

"The river currents?" Chen Xi was initially confused, then suddenly alarmed. Indeed, if the water beneath their speeding ships were suddenly pulled away, the ships would instinctively veer toward the gap. If they hit a reef at that speed, the ships would be done for.

"So ruthless!" Chen Xi's expression darkened. "Alright, I'll stabilize the currents to prevent any sudden shifts!"

"Yes, by now, General Gan should have seized the opportunity to take down Zhou Yu and his men. That west wind wasn't just for the fire ships," Zhuge Liang said with a smile, as if he were Gan Ning himself.

"If everything goes as planned, then yes. Let's make our move!" Chen Xi unleashed a massive wave of spiritual energy. Unlike Pang Tong, who cautiously manipulated the river currents bit by bit, Chen Xi used his terrifying spiritual power to directly interfere with the flow of the water.

"Advance! I can't hold out much longer," Zhuge Liang said quietly, watching the distant line of fire and feeling the ship's increasing speed. He couldn't help but glance at Chen Xi beside him. At this moment, Zhuge Liang possessed the spiritual talents of nearly everyone on Liu Bei's side—everyone except the person standing next to him.

On the other side, Pang Tong was already sensing that things were going awry. Although his intellect had suddenly surged, reaching near one hundred, this only made him more aware of what was happening on the enemy's side.

"Damn it! Gongjin, our vanguard is in trouble! My plan to manipulate the currents won't work. I tested it earlier, and it's already been countered by Chen Zichuan," Pang Tong said, his face pale.

"Don't worry. With Zi Heng in command, the most they can do is break through. They won't cause much damage to our main forces. The Jiangxia navy is almost here," Zhou Yu said with a smile. "The purpose of this battle was to clear out internal threats and test Liu Bei's navy. We've accomplished that. Now let's see how they break through."

Pang Tong glared at Zhou Yu gloomily, saying nothing more. He wasn't yet able to see things as clearly as Zhou Yu did.

Chapter 477: The Dance of Ice and Frost

As Zhou Yu was speaking, he suddenly felt a cold wave sweeping across the area. The fog that once enveloped the entire river quickly transformed into frost, and even the sky began to freeze due to the dense fog. Ice shards started drifting down, and the unprepared Zhou Yu's navy felt their bodies becoming less responsive in this sudden chill.

"Now it's up to you!" Zhuge Liang, sensing something amiss, immediately stopped using his spiritual talent. Although his face turned pale, he did not feel his lifespan depleting as he had feared. Leaning on the side of the ship, he burst into laughter.

"This sensation..." Chen Xi wrapped himself in his spiritual power, reaching out to touch the falling ice flowers from the sky. For the first time, he wondered if such power truly belonged to this era. If calling forth wind and rain was impressive, then making it snow in the heat of summer was certainly beyond ordinary abilities.

"Hahaha! Zichuan, this is the first time I've seen you look so shocked. Isn't it just a snowstorm in midsummer?" Zhuge Liang laughed heartily, clearly pleased with Chen Xi's astonished expression.

"Charge forward! Take advantage of their confusion and crush them!" Chen Xi, quickly recovering from his initial shock, shouted orders to Gan Yi. Regardless of how Zhuge Liang had accomplished this, it was an excellent opportunity—a perfect chance to strike!

"Full speed ahead! Ram their ships, sink them!" Gan Yi bellowed with all his might.

This sudden turn of events gave Gan Ning's forces a crucial opportunity. Although Gan Yi had previously ordered everyone to prepare for the cold, most of them hadn't taken it seriously. However, the slight mental preparation was still better than nothing.

As a result, Gan Ning's troops were in a much better position than Sun Ce's men, who were dressed in light clothing. The sudden drop in temperature made Sun Ce's soldiers' armor stick to their bodies, causing severe discomfort due to the drastic change in temperature.

Meanwhile, Lu Fan quickly realized that the situation had taken a dire turn. He knew that only someone like Gan Ning, who carried a large amount of supplies, would have extra clothing. Even the regular troops would not have prepared warm clothing for battle. Let alone the water bandits—they were

armed with small weapons, and their so-called armor was just layers of thin hemp clothing, offering no protection against the cold.

Zhou Yu had originally planned to purge the disobedient bandit leaders from his forces, so it was no surprise that they hadn't been provided with additional resources.

Once Zhuge Liang, using Fazheng's spiritual talent, accurately deduced Zhou Yu's intentions, he wasted no time in employing Lu Su's talent, utilizing the fog to trigger the frost ability.

To put it simply, if Lu Su's spiritual talent were used to make it rain, the prolonged process of high-altitude rain would have dissipated most of the cold. But by directly harnessing the fog within a radius of several miles, turning the height of summer into a freezing winter wasn't just a possibility—it was a reality. Though the effect wouldn't last long, it was perfect for an ambush or a charge.

"Spread out! Frontline ships, advance! Rear ships, retreat!" Lu Fan shouted. At that moment, his only thought was to abandon the frontline ships to save the main force of the navy.

After giving his orders, Lu Fan began his efforts to disperse the freezing fog. The biting west wind slashed at him like knives, but he had no time to dwell on the pain. If he couldn't break through this icy fog, Sun Ce's navy would either be annihilated or suffer heavy losses.

Lu Fan unleashed his spiritual power, and a significant portion of the freezing mist was dispersed. However, Chen Xi quickly focused on him, and the cold mist that had just been driven away surged back, leaving Lu Fan covered in frost.

"Damn this weather!" Gan Ning shivered as the frost swept over him, instinctively releasing his inner energy. Nearby, Zhou Yu suddenly sensed that Gan Ning, who had been concealing his presence, was now dangerously close. Zhou Yu's expression turned grim.

"Not good, Youping! Prepare to sound the gong and retreat! The enemy is attacking our central forces!" Zhou Yu shouted to Zhou Tai, realizing that this was no time for battle. His soldiers were already freezing, and most had lost their combat effectiveness. Only by gathering their forces and fully activating their army's talents could they resist the spiritual assault.

"This fog is the biggest problem. Without it, the cold would have dissipated long ago. But now, it's only growing colder. And with Chen Zichuan here, we can't dispel this cold!" Pang Tong grumbled with a dark expression. He wasn't personally worried, as the cold caused by spiritual talents could be blocked with spiritual power.

"We're in trouble this time!" Zhou Yu said with a bitter smile. "I made a mistake somewhere. Though I don't know what went wrong, the situation doesn't look good."

Zhou Tai leaped from his ship, leading dozens of small boats in the direction Zhou Yu indicated. However, it was clear that most of his men were already half-frozen. If it weren't for the fog trapping the cold, it would have dissipated by now. Instead, it continued to chill them to the bone, leaving many soldiers shivering uncontrollably.

"Who goes there? Name yourself!" Zhou Tai stood at the bow of his ship, shouting into the fog. He knew that stalling for time was their best chance—if Zhou Yu's forces could regroup and retreat quickly, they could minimize their losses. Small boats were fast, so as long as they stayed together and didn't scatter, they wouldn't suffer too much.

"Zhou Youping! Hahaha! Thank you for pointing out your exact location. Now, let me send you to feed the fish!" Gan Ning's wild laughter echoed across the river. Zhou Tai's heart sank, and then he heard Gan Ning shout, "Ram them! I don't care what's in front of us—just smash through it!"

Gan Ning's fleet, enveloped in a deep blue military aura, surged forward with enhanced speed and strength. Ignoring whatever lay ahead, they charged full steam ahead, as Gan Ning had ordered.

A series of cracking sounds rang out as Gan Ning's ship collided with the enemy vessels. However, the ship's speed didn't decrease at all—after all, a large ship ramming into smaller ones was unstoppable.

Amidst the continuous snapping sounds, Gan Ning didn't even notice the cloud-covered Zhou Tai as he was crushed into the river. His ship then rammed into the middle of Zhou Yu's large vessel with a resounding crash, splitting it in two. But this impact finally brought Gan Ning's ship to a halt.

"Archers! Ballistae! Fire at will! Don't conserve your arrows! Whoever kills Zhou Yu will be rewarded with a hundred thousand coins and a large ship!" Gan Ning shouted, struggling to stay on his feet after the violent collision with Zhou Yu's ship.

Chapter 478: Small Boats, Light Ships—Retreat

Zhou Tai crossed the water and pulled the disheveled Zhou Yu and Pang Tong from the river. He deflected a barrage of arrows from Gan Ning's troops with his inner energy and, with great effort, flew towards a nearby warship.

"Gan Xingba, do you dare face me in a duel!" Zhou Tai shouted as he flew.

"Thud!" Zhou Tai managed to protect Zhou Yu and the shivering Pang Tong from vital hits, but a cyan-colored arrow still cut a deep wound across his chest and abdomen.

"Are you out of your mind? I'm the admiral of the navy, and you want me to duel with a water bandit? That's beneath me! All troops, charge towards the direction of that voice!" Gan Ning laughed heartily. Being a rogue at heart, he always chose whatever benefited him the most. As a scion of a noble family who had once turned to piracy, there was nothing he wouldn't do!

"Gan Xingba, just wait—one day, I'll make you pay!" Zhou Tai, furious, shouted as he set Zhou Yu and the freezing Pang Tong down. Even though they were in retreat, Zhou Tai wasn't going to lose face.

"Tsk, ts, ts. Didn't you say that last time? You've got no hope! All troops, charge! Where Zhou Tai is, Zhou Gongjin must be nearby too!" Gan Ning taunted mercilessly.

Zhou Tai was stunned, but Zhou Yu simply sighed. "We've lost this battle. According to our earlier plan, retreat towards Shouchun. Chen Zichuan's immense spiritual power remains a problem. Breaking through this cold fog is impossible with him present, and that means there's no way to counter the changing weather."

"Don't even mention him. My spiritual talent doesn't work on him," Pang Tong said with a bitter smile. "I can't draw any power from him to enhance my abilities."

"My spiritual talent works, but with the weather against us, we're at a huge disadvantage. Competing in spiritual strength against him is futile," Zhou Yu said, shaking his head as he walked back to the cabin.

"The area he controls may only be around ten miles, but within that range, he can manipulate the weather so effectively that even two or three of us combined couldn't change it. It's like defying the heavens," Pang Tong said with a gloomy expression. He realized that Chen Zichuan's spiritual power was terrifyingly vast.

Pang Tong also knew that if he could boost his abilities to the level of several Zhuge Liangs, he might stand a chance against Chen Zichuan in a short-term fight. After all, Pang Tong had noticed that Chen Zichuan's spiritual power had a limit, not due to a lack of energy, but because of the natural constraints of a living being.

"His spiritual power seems to be stored up for short bursts. I might be able to compete with him for a moment, but he can maintain his peak for much longer than I can. There's no way to counter that," Zhou Yu said with resignation. Both he and Pang Tong could unleash their peak power momentarily, but Chen Zichuan could sustain his indefinitely.

Although they lost this battle, Zhou Yu had gained valuable insights into Liu Bei's navy. Their combat prowess was between second and first class, though still not at the highest level. After all, Zhou Yu had only brought water bandits, not his elite troops. His main goal had been to gauge their strength.

But what troubled Zhou Yu more than Liu Bei's navy was Chen Zichuan's spiritual talent. The ability to manipulate the weather so easily made it nearly impossible to counter.

"There's no good solution. When we face him again, we'll have to abandon any hope of controlling the weather. As for that ice ability..." Pang Tong looked at Zhou Yu. "Do you think that's a spiritual talent?"

"It must be. The fact that our spiritual power can protect us means it's a spiritual talent," Zhou Yu confirmed.

"I have a feeling that this isn't Kongming's spiritual talent," Pang Tong said uncertainly. "Though it's powerful, it's not what I expected from him. Based on my understanding of Kongming, this doesn't seem like his ability."

"I'm not sure," Zhou Yu replied. "Maybe someone has two talents. It's not that uncommon."

Zhou Yu's casual remark hit Pang Tong like a blow. Who said it wasn't common? Not everyone was like Zhou Yu, but given Zhou Yu's precedent, Pang Tong couldn't completely dismiss the possibility that Chen Zichuan or Zhuge Liang might have dual talents.

"Liu Bei's large ships and Gan Ning's bold strategy are impressive. If Gan Xingba continues to lead the navy, his boldness could either win great victories or lead to crushing defeats. But his courage and resourcefulness make him someone who can often find a way out of desperate situations," Zhou Yu remarked, shaking his head. "He's indeed a fine general."

"Just like this time, we thought he couldn't locate our main forces in the fog, but he still managed to surprise us. We must have fallen into their trap from the start—an example of luring the enemy into a trap," Pang Tong said, shaking his head.

"It seems Xingba did well!" Chen Xi said with a smile. "Soon, we'll need to start clearing the fog. It's bitterly cold. By the way, why do I feel like this ability is similar to Zijing's? I can manipulate the weather, but this unnatural power seems unique to him, though not usually this strong."

"I can use the spiritual talents of everyone on our side," Zhuge Liang replied with a smile. "This is indeed Zijing's talent. I suppose he never pushed it to this level. I've just tapped into everyone's talents, and they're really useful. Too bad I can't access yours."

"That explains it," Chen Xi said with a laugh. "No wonder you seemed different earlier. But why did you stop? Even without my talent, the others combined are still very powerful."

"Because it's too strong," Zhuge Liang replied with a wry smile. "But strangely, despite using it for a while, there wasn't any backlash. Although my instincts tell me continuing would have been dangerous, nothing odd happened other than feeling a bit uncomfortable."

Zhuce Liang's excitement was evident as he spoke. If he had known it wouldn't cost him years of his life, he would have activated his talent sooner. In that state, he felt he could have easily dominated Pang Tong and anticipated the enemy's every move.

"Oh, Left Yuanfang mentioned that to me before. He said that all living beings have limits. That's probably yours," Chen Xi said with a nod. Zuo Ci had also warned him not to overuse his spiritual power,

explaining that exceeding his limit could harm him. As long as he stayed within his limit, there wouldn't be any problems.

Zhou Yu had anticipated retreating from the start. Though they had gained valuable intelligence, they were now in a dire situation. The small, swift boats of Sun Ce's navy made retreating down the Yangtze River easy with the wind at their backs. As the sound of gongs echoed, the morale of Sun Ce's troops remained low, and they quickly turned their ships to sail downstream.

Chapter 479: The Real Challenge is Yet to Come

As the cold wave swept across, Sun Ce, who was in mid-air battling Taishi Ci, was the first to feel its effects. His body stiffened for a moment, giving Taishi Ci the chance to pierce him with an arrow. However, Taishi Ci didn't escape unscathed either; in the next instant, Sun Ce's explosive shout left him dizzy, with blood streaming from his nose.

On the other side, as the cold wave hit, Ling Cao narrowly avoided being killed by Guan Hai. Ling Cao had underestimated Guan Hai, thinking the latter had exhausted his inner energy. But Guan Hai feigned weakness and took the opportunity to land a fierce strike. If Ling Cao hadn't desperately dodged, Guan Hai's spear would have pierced his head. Even so, Ling Cao wasn't lucky enough to escape unscathed—his neck was slashed, blood spurting out.

When the gongs sounded, Sun Ce and Taishi Ci were locked in a fierce battle that had taken them from the sky to the water, and then from the water to the shore. Despite finding it difficult to fly earlier, Sun Ce had somehow learned how to fight in the air during the fight. It was as if these two were destined opponents, growing stronger with each clash!

"Clang!" Spear met halberd as Taishi Ci and Sun Ce collided in mid-air. Both were bathed in golden light, though it was beginning to wane. They crashed into the water, sliding nearly a hundred meters across the surface before simultaneously leaping back up.

"Taishi Ci, our battle ends here for today. Next time, I will surely kill you!" Sun Ce, breathing heavily, called out as the sound of the gongs reached his ears, leaving him somewhat frustrated.

Despite his natural talent, Sun Ce was still young, and his strength hadn't yet peaked. Though he had made great strides during the fight, he had also suffered numerous injuries.

"I'll kill you right now!" Taishi Ci, his inner energy surging with fury, retorted. Taishi Ci had witnessed Sun Ce's unnaturally rapid improvement and, considering Sun Ce's youth, couldn't help but feel a sense of foreboding.

"I'm done playing with you!" Sun Ce laughed heartily. He wasn't a masochist; continuing the fight might not endanger his life, but it certainly wouldn't be pleasant. With that, he leaped in the direction of Ling Cao's aura.

"Clang!" Sun Ce's spear deflected Guan Hai's attack on Ling Cao. Grabbing Ling Cao, Sun Ce unleashed all his inner energy and sped away along the river with astonishing speed.

"Hum!" Taishi Ci loosed an arrow after them, though he had little hope it would hit its mark. Sun Ce had learned to guard against Taishi Ci's archery after suffering several times from it.

"Ah!" Sun Ce's scream echoed through the air as Taishi Ci's arrow hit him again. Some people may improve quickly, but their brains don't always keep pace.

"You alright?" Taishi Ci asked Guan Hai, unsure how to address him.

"If Sun Bofu hadn't shown up, I would've killed my opponent," Guan Hai replied, annoyed. "He seemed as strong as you."

"Unless it's a prolonged fight, I probably can't defeat him," Taishi Ci admitted with a wry smile. "Let's move on. Chasing them is pointless—they're too determined to escape, and pursuing them could backfire."

"Let's head towards General Gan. He's in that direction!" Guan Hai said, pointing the way before rushing off.

Meanwhile, Chen Xi and Zhuge Liang had begun clearing the cold fog. Though the fog had been useful for covering their surprise attack, they now needed to capitalize on their victory and pursue the enemy.

After the cold fog was cleared, Chen Xi and Zhuge Liang exchanged glances, both realizing the enemy was retreating. "With the wind and current in their favor, their smaller boats are much faster than our larger ones. Forget it. Order the troops to tend to the wounded on both sides, and have Gan Yi tally the losses. Let's regroup with Xingba quickly; we can't afford to linger on the Yangtze River."

"Our navy isn't very strong..." Zhuge Liang murmured.

"Of course not. It'd be surprising if we could produce a strong navy in just two years. Plus, building and upgrading the ships took a lot of time, leaving little for proper training. The river bandits Gongjin mobilized aren't weak, so I'm already satisfied with our current performance. After all, we're still far from conquering Jiangdong," Chen Xi replied, nodding. After all, Gan Ning's navy was still mostly former pirates.

"Sigh, there are problems with the ships, the sailors, and the navy as a whole," Zhuge Liang sighed deeply. "Reality always seems to differ from expectations. I suddenly realize there's so much you haven't done yet."

"I'll have to draft another plan when we get back. For now, let's focus on consolidating Qingzhou and Xuzhou. We're almost ready for the northern campaign. Hopefully, there won't be any natural disasters," Chen Xi sighed. "I wonder how far Zijiang has progressed with the Qingzhou Academy plan. There's so much to do when we get back!"

"I get the feeling you're trying to achieve a hundred years' worth of work in one lifetime," Zhuge Liang said with a bitter smile.

"If I can accomplish a hundred years' worth of work in my lifetime, why not? It's not like we're overburdening the people. Once we conquer Jizhou, I'll show you what a legacy for a hundred generations looks like," Chen Xi said with a smug smile.

To turn a barren land into the granary of the realm, that grand canal was indispensable. And to prevent any future east-west or north-south splits, that same canal was necessary. Emperor Yang of Sui may have been a tyrant, but he wasn't a fool.

"A legacy for a hundred generations?" Zhuge Liang felt his eyelids twitch. If Chen Xi said it was a legacy for a hundred generations, it wasn't just talk.

"Yes, but it'll be a colossal project. Even after we achieve peace, it'll take ten to twenty years to complete. Slowly but surely, we'll get there," Chen Xi said with a sigh. "Of course, if the gentry and merchants across the land all pitched in, we might just manage it. The Five Great Merchant Families alone could cover about ten percent. They seem to have endless money."

Zhuge Liang couldn't help but shiver at Chen Xi's words. Only Chen Xi would conceive such grand schemes, while others wouldn't even dare think about them.

"You're not serious, are you?" Zhuge Liang's eyelids twitched uncontrollably. He saw no hint of jest on Chen Xi's face, which meant he really intended to carry out such a plan. Wiping out the wealth of the Five Great Merchant Families would only cover ten percent? What kind of project was this? Was it not going to burden the people?

"I've already made this plan, and there are even crazier ones to come. This is just the preliminary step and hasn't yet been put on the agenda. I'm only telling you so you can look beyond the immediate situation. There's much more to be done. Conquering the land is challenging, but building a nation is even harder," Chen Xi said nonchalantly. In this chaotic era, there were already millions of refugees. Employing them in public works projects could provide relief while laying the groundwork for future infrastructure, such as canals.

Zhuge Liang suddenly felt that the gap between him and Chen Xi was vast. Chen Xi's governance was truly extraordinary.

"Will there be many benefits?" Zhuge Liang asked after some thought.

Chapter 480: Each Has Their Own Aspirations

"An endeavor for a hundred generations! Once Zijing finishes his part, I plan to bundle it up and offer it to the Five Great Merchant Families. Renting it to them for fifty years, they might even fund the project themselves," Chen Xi said seriously. "The economic and political value it holds is immense, so I can't simply hand it over to them..."

"A project costing over a thousand billion coins? Even Emperor Qin's Great Wall didn't reach that figure," Zhuge Liang said with a wry smile. "I really don't know where you get your confidence from."

"Because in matters like this, I believe no one in the world can plan better than I can, and no one sees further than I do," Chen Xi said, placing a hand on Zhuge Liang's shoulder as he gazed confidently at the river. "Besides, I won't lose. History will bear witness to all of this."

"Fine, but when you're ready to present this plan, let me know. I want to assess its feasibility," Zhuge Liang said after a long pause, watching Chen Xi's unwavering confidence.

"The feasibility is a hundred percent; it's only a matter of time and manpower. I just hope Zijing has resolved that," Chen Xi replied with a yawn.

"I suddenly feel sorry for Zijing. He seems to have so much to handle. No wonder he's always working diligently in the administration hall, striving for the prosperity of the territory. Beyond your plans, it's probably Zijing's efforts that contribute the most," Zhuge Liang said with a bitter smile, recalling how every time he saw Lu Su, the man was either shivering from the cold or buried in work.

Back in the administration hall at Mount Tai, Fenggao, Lu Su was busy organizing another round of civilian recruitment for infrastructure projects during the farming off-season.

"Zijing, do we really need so much infrastructure? Mount Tai seems quite prosperous already," Sun Qian asked after receiving his orders. The roads were already well-connected.

"Once the roads are done, we'll move on to water conservation, river dredging, and dam reinforcement. Get some people to study the water systems of the Yangtze, Huai, Yellow, and Ji rivers. Also, have someone examine the waterways of the Si River and Bai River in Xuzhou," Lu Su said without looking up. He couldn't work on a grand canal, but he could start with smaller projects.

Lu Su was the only civil official aware of Chen Xi's massive water conservancy plan. Others didn't even know that Chen Xi was planning such large-scale waterworks.

When Chen Xi first presented the plan, with costs exceeding a thousand billion coins, Lu Su was so shocked that he spilled his tea and dropped his fruit on the table. He had immediately rejected the idea. However, after Chen Xi fully explained the project, Lu Su reluctantly began considering its feasibility. Ultimately, he realized that the project was indeed necessary. Connecting the east, west, north, and south—stretching from Chang'an and Luoyang in the west to Jizhou in the north, and Jianye in the south—would make it difficult for the land to be divided again, ensuring lasting unity.

The benefits were numerous, but so were the costs. As someone with a sharp eye, Lu Su saw the potential gains. With Chen Xi's persistent persuasion, he eventually agreed to take on the task, provided Chen Xi didn't get too carried away.

"Understood," Sun Qian nodded. Given the drought this year, water conservation projects seemed reasonable, so he accepted the orders without further questions.

Lu Su, feeling a bit overwhelmed, continued to think about Chen Xi's short-term plans. But embedded within that 20-year long-term plan were so many short-term tasks that it was enough to drive anyone crazy.

As he managed tax policies, Lu Su reflected on how he had mastered the art of multitasking. If it weren't for his sense of responsibility, he might have already abandoned everything and headed to Qingzhou out of frustration.

"I suddenly feel uneasy mentioning Zijing," Chen Xi muttered.

"I have the same feeling," Zhuge Liang nodded, giving Chen Xi a sideways glance. "I plan to go back and focus on my studies."

"When you return, you should train in administration with Zijing. You've already learned enough; now you just need practical experience," Chen Xi said, patting Zhuge Liang on the shoulder. After all, there weren't many people he could use freely, so having a young Zhuge Liang as an additional resource was invaluable.

"Alright," Zhuge Liang agreed after a moment of contemplation.

Meanwhile, with the cold fog cleared, Taishi Ci and Guan Hai quickly leaped onto Gan Ning's ship. After regrouping, they immediately sent orders to the rear, preparing to advance and pursue the enemy. However, seeing how quickly Sun Ce's forces had fled, Gan Ning realized they wouldn't be able to catch up. Instead, he reflected on the difference between his navy and Sun Ce's, knowing that once the Jiangxia Navy arrived, retreating would be difficult.

"Couldn't capture Sun Ce?" Gan Ning asked Taishi Ci, who looked a bit disheveled. "I thought he wasn't that formidable."

"Couldn't kill him," Taishi Ci replied, shaking his head. "His strength is almost on par with mine. Next time we meet, he'll be even stronger."

"..." Gan Ning frowned, glancing at Taishi Ci's right thumb before sighing. "If you couldn't kill him, there's nothing more to be done. I couldn't take down Zhou Yu either. It seemed they came here only to test us, and with their light boats, it's as if they were ready to retreat from the start. Brother, are you alright?"

"I'm fine," Guan Hai replied curtly. "I'm heading to the cabin. You two continue talking; don't bother me unless it's important."

Taishi Ci looked puzzled as Guan Hai walked away. "What's with him?"

"Ha, don't worry about him. Everyone has their own goals. His current ambition is to sleep in the cabin," Gan Ning explained casually, offering a lighthearted excuse.