

Mythical 55

Chapter 55: The Affairs of the Han Dynasty

After half an hour, Zhang Fei had eaten and drank his fill, and sat with his snake spear at the edge of the crater, waiting for Xu Chu to come out.

"Hey, big guy, how about we fight on foot? Weapons are dangerous, let's see who's better at hand-to-hand combat," Xu Chu suggested as he emerged, not riding a horse this time and speaking less aggressively, though still not wanting to back down. Since he couldn't find a suitable weapon in the village, he had to think of a different tactic.

"Alright, I never take advantage of others!" Zhang Fei thrust his snake spear into the ground, stood up, and stretched his arms. His muscles bulged even more, making him look even more formidable.

"Although I don't know who you are, my father said that if I win, you'll let me join you, and you won't treat me poorly because of this," Xu Chu said, pounding his chest loudly.

"Bring it on! I won't hold any grudge against you regardless of the outcome!" Zhang Fei roared, stomping his foot and charging at Xu Chu.

"Boom!" Xu Chu's body emitted a black glow similar to Zhang Fei's. He didn't dodge Zhang Fei's punch, meeting it with his own fist. They exchanged blows, the sound of fists hitting flesh echoing through the air.

Xu Chu kicked Zhang Fei in the chest, who grabbed his leg and tried to throw him, but Xu Chu jumped and kicked Zhang Fei again in the chest, leaving Zhang Fei winded.

"You're going to see what I'm made of," Xu Chu said confidently. Seeing that Zhang Fei had taken two solid kicks, he assumed that his opponent must have sustained significant internal damage, even if he had used internal energy to mitigate some of the force.

Xu Chu pounced, pinning Zhang Fei to the ground. He intended to subdue his opponent, believing his raw strength was unmatched on solid ground.

Zhang Fei felt dazed as he was pressed into the earth, forming a human-shaped crater. He regained his senses to find Xu Chu about to punch him in the face. Enraged, Zhang Fei caught Xu Chu's fists and took a deep breath, then let out a thunderous roar directly into Xu Chu's face.

Chen Xi covered his ears, even at a distance, the roar made his heart race. It was like a sonic weapon, and Xu Chu, who took the full force of it, probably felt nauseous.

Chen Xi guessed correctly. Xu Chu, unable to dodge at such close range, took the roar head-on. Dizzy and nauseous, he steadied himself, his head glowing black, and slammed his forehead into Zhang Fei's, driving Zhang Fei's head into the ground.

Afterward, Xu Chu struggled to stand but was punched in the face by the barely conscious Zhang Fei. Xu Chu tumbled and lay flat on the ground, next to Zhang Fei, who was embedded in the earth up to his shoulders.

Both men were dizzy and disoriented but continued to shout at each other until they burst out laughing.

"Xu Chu, you're impressive. Zhang Yide of Yan invites you to join us in Taishan. My brother needs warriors like you to restore the Han dynasty. There, you'll find endless Yellow Turbans to fight," Zhang Fei extended a hand in invitation.

"Alright!" Xu Chu slapped Zhang Fei's hand and laughed, "I believe you won't mistake me for someone else."

After spending a night in Xu Family Village, Liu Bei left with Xu Chu, his brother Xu Ding, and a dozen other burly men. It was unclear what the village fed these men, but they all had the build of warriors, comparable to Zhang Fei. The village head promised to move the entire family to Taishan once it was stable, showing their commitment to Liu Bei.

No further significant events occurred as Liu Bei and his entourage made their way back to Taishan, their headquarters. Despite the chaos in the land and the lack of immediate consequences for not meeting deadlines, Liu Bei, who still held respect for the Han laws, did not wish to disrupt the remaining order. As a member of the imperial family, he saw it as his duty to uphold the law.

“Is Sun Jian dead?” Liu Bei asked, reading the report in his hand. The news took time to reach him due to the lack of an efficient information network.

“Didn’t we predict this? He was shot like a sieve,” Chen Xi chuckled, “Bet on any oath, and someone will carry it out. The Han dynasty hasn’t fallen yet; Sun Jian was too arrogant.”

“As you predicted, but do you know who took in Sun Jian’s family and soldiers?” Liu Bei asked, testing Chen Xi.

“Yuan Shu, of course. Despite his bad reputation, he has the spirit of a hero. If he gives his word seriously, he won’t go back on it. Sun Jian ensured his family had a protector,” Chen Xi said with interest, “If Sun Jian were alive, Yuan Shu might have seized the Seal, but now he won’t. Yuan Shu values his reputation.”

Liu Bei smiled wryly. Chen Xi’s analysis was more accurate and detailed than his reports. “You’re remarkably perceptive, deducing so much from Yuan Shu’s character.”

Chen Xi didn’t respond immediately. After a moment, he said, “Li Ru’s plan has failed. Yuan Shu won’t seize the Seal by force, but he won’t let anyone else have it either. The matter is settled for now. Next, it depends on Sun Jian’s sons’ choices. If they are truly heroic, the Seal will end up with Yuan Shu.”

Meanwhile, Li Ru was drinking with Jia Xu, venting his frustration. He was disappointed in Dong Zhuo, who had lost his ambition and wanted to retire peacefully.

Lu Bu had also caused problems, losing more than ten thousand elite cavalry. Now, with increased vigilance from others, Li Ru wanted to eliminate Lu Bu but couldn’t. Lu Bu was too powerful, protected by his cavalry, and had committed no crimes. Killing him without cause would destabilize their army and give the eastern warlords a reason to rejoice.

Killing Lu Bu wasn’t difficult, but the repercussions were. Lu Bu was a symbol in Dong Zhuo’s army. Killing him without justification would demoralize the troops and make the eastern warlords celebrate. Li Ru, being wise, wouldn’t do something that would hurt their cause.

“Drink up, Wenhe,” Li Ru said bitterly, offering Jia Xu a cup. With Jia Xu, he didn’t need to hide his feelings; he could speak freely.

Jia Xu silently drank with Li Ru, listening and remembering everything. He knew the true state of Chang’an, and without Li Ru’s control, the city would have fallen into chaos. The Bingzhou and Xiliang cavalry disliked each other, Lu Bu and the Xiliang generals were at odds, and Dong Zhuo spent his days amassing wealth, leaving Chang’an in disorder.

Li Ru often reflected on his original ideals. Seeing the chaos and hearing the cries of the suffering, his heart ached. His disappointment in Dong Zhuo had turned to hatred. As a commoner, he had wanted to change a world monopolized by aristocrats. He was prepared to sacrifice, including himself, for this cause.

But seeing the tragedies in Chang’an, Li Ru questioned if his path was right. He wanted to end the aristocrats’ monopoly on wealth and knowledge, and he was ready to make sacrifices. Yet, instead of improving lives, he had made things worse.

The aristocrats’ exploitation had caused suffering, but they also provided relief during disasters, maintaining a semblance of order. Dong Zhuo’s actions had torn away this facade, leading to widespread suffering. Li Ru, seeing the devastation, realized he had created this hell.

He had wanted to end the aristocrats’ control and bring change, but now he couldn’t see any light in his path, only endless tragedy. This was not the road he had envisioned. No, it was not!