

Mythical 561

Chapter 561: Zhang Wen Yuan of Yanmen

Guan Yu glanced at the sky, nodded, and agreed with Guo Jia's suggestion. He then ordered the scouts to spread out and made camp on the spot.

Meanwhile, Zhang Liao, after deciding to withdraw from Zhang Fei's position, intended to regroup with Lu Bu. He had full confidence that Lu Bu had already defeated the Hebei forces, as this was his belief in Lu Bu's strength.

"A force of about ten thousand troops ahead?" Zhang Liao looked at his scout in surprise. "Can you tell whose banner they are flying?"

"The distance was too great, and the enemy was extremely cautious, with scouts everywhere. Our men couldn't get close, but we could vaguely see a large banner with the character 'Guan' on it," the scout replied with his head lowered.

Guan Yu's scouts were spread far and wide, making it difficult for Zhang Liao's men to approach. However, thanks to Zhang Liao's familiarity with the terrain, he managed to get close enough to Guan Yu's camp to roughly estimate the number of soldiers it could hold.

"Guan? In that case, it must be Liu Xuande's second brother, Guan Yunchang," Zhang Liao muttered to himself, his expression turning serious.

Feeling a sense of unease, Zhang Liao looked toward the north and suddenly realized the possibility that Hebei's army and Liu Bei's forces might be acting in concert. This thought sent a chill down his spine.

Zhang Liao's eyes flickered as he pondered the situation. He had suspected that Chen Gong's strategy of playing both sides might be unreliable.

Zhang Liao's mind worked quickly. With the reality before him, he soon understood Chen Gong's intentions.

He sighed deeply, feeling the frustration of a weaker position. Even if one could win temporarily, in the end, they would still be forced to rely on stronger forces.

Compared to the other skilled generals under Lu Bu, Zhang Liao had a sharp mind, excelling in strategy, grand tactics, martial prowess, and intelligence. Upon realizing that the opponent was Guan Yu, he quickly grasped the implications.

"Zhang Xing, Zhang Yu, you two take a few men each and disguise yourselves as woodcutters or hunters. Carefully investigate Guan Yunchang's camp and try to memorize the layout of the entire encampment," Zhang Liao ordered decisively. Understanding Guan Yu's purpose, he prepared to strike a heavy blow, aiming for a surprise attack.

"Understood," Zhang Xing and Zhang Yu, two of Zhang Liao's personal guards from Yanmen, saluted and quickly selected a few lean-looking soldiers. They removed their armor, donned tattered clothes, and grabbed axes before boldly heading toward Guan Yu's camp.

"Everyone else, follow me. Hide the horses behind the hills so that Guan Yunchang's scouts don't spot us," Zhang Liao commanded after Zhang Xing and Zhang Yu had left. Leading the wolf riders, he found a shaded spot behind the hills, evading Guan Yu's scouts by leveraging his knowledge of the terrain. Of course, he also had to silently eliminate a few sharp-eyed scouts along the way.

"I wonder how Guan Yunchang has deployed his scouts. Killing over a dozen of them shouldn't attract too much attention," Zhang Liao muttered to himself, feeling a bit helpless. Guan Yu's scouts were well-trained and vigilant. Had Zhang Liao not possessed the strength of an internal energy expert, the scouts would have likely fired signal arrows.

"General, why don't we attack before midnight instead of waiting for a night raid?" a Sima suggested. Night raids were tricky for their elite troops, as the lack of visibility posed a significant challenge.

"A night raid would be difficult for us. When dusk falls, Guan Yunchang will surely prepare to cook dinner. We'll strike then, catching them off guard. We don't need to kill too many; we just need to break their morale," Zhang Liao replied with a smile. After all, who said night raids had to happen at midnight or during the hour of the ox? The purpose of a night raid was to surprise the enemy, and as long as that was achieved, the timing didn't matter.

Meanwhile, after separating, Zhang Xing and Zhang Yu each carried a large bundle of firewood and sang loudly, naturally attracting the attention of Guan Yu's scouts.

"Who are you?" A group of scouts quickly surrounded Zhang Xing and his fellow woodcutters.

"We're just locals from nearby villages, gathering firewood to prepare for winter. If we don't collect enough now, we won't survive the winter," Zhang Xing replied quickly, as if startled by the soldiers.

"Oh, our army's camp is ahead. You'd better take a detour or rest here for the night and head home tomorrow," the scout leader advised, trying to be somewhat considerate.

"But what should we do? Our homes are over there. If we take a detour and it gets dark, we might lose our way, and our families are waiting for us to return," Zhang Xing said anxiously.

The scouts exchanged glances. Being too harsh would seem unreasonable. After a brief discussion, they decided to escort the woodcutters through the area instead.

"Follow us and don't wander off. We serve Lord Xuande, and we won't trouble you, but if you cause any problems, we won't show mercy," the scout warned before leading Zhang Xing and his group across the front of the camp. Soon after, another group of scouts escorted Zhang Yu and his group through the rear of the camp.

By the time Zhang Yu and Zhang Xing returned with information about Guan Yu's camp, the sun had already dipped, leaving only a small crescent in the sky.

"So, that's how Guan Yunchang deploys his scouts," Zhang Liao listened to Zhang Yu and Zhang Xing's excited reports, noting their enthusiasm for the apparent foolishness of Guan Yu's scouts.

"Yes, those fools only checked our identities briefly and then let us pass. We easily observed the entire camp's outer defenses, and combined with what we saw earlier while gathering firewood, we now have a good grasp of the entire camp's layout," Zhang Xing and Zhang Yu reported excitedly.

They had disguised themselves as scouts many times before, but this had been the easiest. In the past, such tactics could have led to them being beheaded on the spot, but this time, the enemy hadn't investigated too thoroughly.

Gazing at the sky, Zhang Liao felt a slight tremor in his heart but quickly calmed himself. He knew this wasn't the time for second thoughts.

Chapter 562: Unpredictable

"Have Wang Wu and Wang Heng not returned yet? How many of the other scouts have made it back so far?" the scout commander asked the squad leader who was tallying the returns. Although the commander was also keeping track of the returning scouts, he needed a second confirmation.

"Wang Wu and Wang Heng have not returned yet, likely because they were conducting a thorough investigation. Out of the 273 scout teams we deployed, 264 have returned. We are still missing nine teams," the squad leader replied as he continued his tally. It was already late, and soon it would be time to start cooking dinner.

"Whoa!" A sound of horses reining in could be heard in the distance. Both the scout commander and the squad leader turned to see that two more scouts had returned.

"That makes 265 teams returned, with eight still missing. No special military information reported," the squad leader informed.

"Good. Continue monitoring the returns. I'll go report to the general and the strategist," the scout commander said after glancing at the two newly returned scouts. He wasn't overly concerned about the eight missing teams.

"Report!" Guo Jia and Guan Yu were sitting inside the command tent, discussing their march plans after linking up with Zhang Fei. Although they had reviewed the strategy multiple times, Guo Jia would often bring it up for discussion when they had nothing else to do.

"Speak!" Guan Yu glanced at the scout commander and uttered a single word. The scout commander immediately felt an overwhelming aura of majesty and coldness. Despite having reported to Guan Yu many times before, each time he saw the imposing figure stroking his long beard and gazing at him with

slightly opened eyes, the scout commander couldn't help but feel the weight of Guan Yu's imposing presence—majestic and aloof. It was a testament to how one's image could be built over time.

Lowering his head, the scout commander recounted all the information he had gathered. After confirming he had not missed anything, he stood by, awaiting Guan Yu's orders.

"Out of 273 teams, 265 have returned, with eight still missing?" Guo Jia muttered as he mentally calculated. Satisfied that this was within normal expectations, he nodded toward Guan Yu.

"Present the information on the missing scouts and you may leave," Guan Yu's deep voice commanded.

The scout commander quickly handed over the prepared bamboo slip. Guo Jia glanced at it and hesitated. He set down the wine cup he had just picked up and carefully examined the slip, his expression turning somber.

"Is there a problem?" Guan Yu, who had worked with Guo Jia for a long time, immediately noticed the shift in Guo Jia's demeanor. He knew there was trouble when Guo Jia didn't drink and instead focused on the bamboo slip. Guan Yu asked directly.

"I suspect there may be an ambush nearby," Guo Jia sighed. Having seven or eight scout teams fail to return was common. After all, scouts often ventured deep into enemy territory, and delays were not unusual. With two or three hundred two-man teams, having seven or eight go missing wasn't out of the ordinary.

"The enemy's numbers won't be large. They'll likely be positioned to our west, with no more than a thousand men. They're probably well-hidden, and an attack is possible. The leader is likely at the level of an internal energy expert," Guo Jia continued, though he framed it as speculation. Yet, just from examining the bamboo slip, he had deduced much of the situation.

"Very well, we shall prepare accordingly!" Guan Yu didn't doubt Guo Jia's judgment. Having worked together for so long, Guan Yu knew that Guo Jia's predictions were rarely wrong. The fact that Guo Jia could deduce so much from a single bamboo slip was impressive, but Guan Yu had absolute trust in him.

Guo Jia sighed. He enjoyed explaining his reasoning, but after working with Guan Yu for so long, Guan Yu no longer questioned him as much as before.

"Show me the map. Let's pinpoint their location and identify their troops. If we can, we should ambush them instead," Guo Jia said, feeling a bit bored.

Guan Yu rummaged through his belongings and handed Guo Jia a leather map. Guo Jia used his finger to measure distances on the map, then sighed, "I underestimated them."

"What's this? Even you can make mistakes, Fengxiao?" Guan Yu teased, stroking his beard. He was always interested when Guo Jia faced challenges.

"It's not exactly a mistake. It's just that they're farther away than expected, and all of them are cavalry. There are probably about a thousand of them, hiding in the northwest hills. They've been marching parallel to us, and their target is indeed us," Guo Jia marveled, impressed by the enemy's audacity.

"You can even estimate the troop type now?" Guan Yu was surprised.

"They're far away, but they plan to charge and attack us. If the scouts don't return, we'll grow suspicious, so they can't afford delays. Our numbers give us a strong advantage, so even in a night raid, they'll focus on demoralizing us rather than fighting to the death. Given their audacity and meticulousness, a quick strike and retreat would be their best strategy," Guo Jia explained calmly, and Guan Yu understood.

"So, they're all cavalry. If it's cavalry in this area, it must be Lu Bu's forces. That means it's the wolf riders. Given their advantage in terrain, if they don't fall into our trap, they'll likely succeed in escaping," Guan Yu concluded.

"I'm curious which of Lu Bu's generals has such courage and caution," Guo Jia mused. "It's a shame that with our recent focus on the north and the battles in Hebei, we haven't had much time to gather intelligence from across the land. Otherwise, we might have guessed who it is."

"But this much is enough!" Guan Yu's eyes gleamed coldly. "I'll order the men to increase their vigilance."

Guo Jia said nothing further. He was deeply curious about a top-tier general who could silently kill two scouts from a distance, giving them no chance to react, and who still planned an ambush knowing that the opponent was Guan Yu—yet was leading only a thousand men!

Guo Jia carefully reviewed the directions in which the eight missing scout teams had been dispatched and concluded that the enemy had indeed killed one team and was marching parallel to them.

Guo Jia silently evaluated the situation. For someone he had yet to meet, he was giving Zhang Liao extremely high marks from this first encounter.

Guo Jia smirked to himself.

Little did Zhang Liao know that even before making a move, Guo Jia had already deduced his plan, laying bare his strategy.

Chapter 563: Scheming

After summoning his subordinate officers one by one and giving them instructions, Guan Yu ordered Zhou Cang to prepare his five hundred elite guards, the "Xiaodao Troop," and be ready to swarm the enemy when they charge in, following Guo Jia's plan to capture them alive.

"What a pity," Guo Jia remarked as he looked around the camp. When they set up the camp, they had chosen an open and flat area, a terrain that provided a broad view to avoid ambushes. However, this also made it difficult to ambush others.

"What's the matter?" Guan Yu rarely served Guo Jia a cup of wine, but Guo Jia had no choice but to drink it. Once he finished, Guan Yu took away the wine cup and jug, replacing them with a teapot, teacup, and some snacks.

Guo Jia, resigned, picked up the teacup and imagined it tasted like wine. Before every battle, Guan Yu would offer Guo Jia a single cup of wine, but after that, Guo Jia wouldn't see any more alcohol until the battle was over. That was Guan Yu's rule. He allowed some special privileges in the camp, but he never tolerated drinking that could interfere with duties.

"The enemy is smart. Our plan to surround them won't work; they won't come in too deep. Position the archers and ballistae. Let's see how much damage we can do. This area is too flat—it has both advantages and disadvantages," Guo Jia sighed, pointing out the limitations of the terrain.

"Indeed. In that case, let's avoid entanglement. Deploy the archers and ballistae at the front lines. When the enemy shows up, hit them hard. After that, our cavalry will charge from both flanks. Capture or kill as many as possible, but don't pursue them too far if they retreat," Guan Yu decisively ordered, understanding the situation. The camp's location was too open. While it offered a clear view, it also gave the enemy the same advantage, and with the enemy's cautious nature, they could easily see through any traps.

"That's the best we can do. They came too fast for us to prepare thoroughly. If we leave the camp now, we'd have to go quite far to find suitable terrain for an ambush. It's better to confront them head-on," Guo Jia lamented. "Better to meet them on our own terms."

"Agreed. Ready the archers at the front camp, and have the cavalry on both flanks prepared. We'll strike hard when they appear. If we can't hold them, don't chase too far," Guan Yu decided with finality.

Meanwhile, Zhang Liao silently finished the remaining dry rations, counted his men, and waited for nightfall.

Zhang Liao washed down the dry food with some water, then poured the rest over his face, letting the coldness sharpen his focus. Now wasn't the time for distracting thoughts. He had to defeat Guan Yu before considering anything else.

As Guan Yu's troops prepared dinner, he had already stationed archers around the camp's perimeter, with the ballistae in position. Unlike the usual two-layered camp walls, this time the barricades were only half a man's height but were densely packed, leaving no gaps. The archers and ballistae were crouched behind these solid walls, invisible from the front.

Guan Yu ordered Zhou Cang to stand by with the Xiaodao Troop, guarding the camp while feasting with the soldiers. Meanwhile, Jiang Gong and others were positioned along the camp walls.

With these preparations, even if the night raid proved stronger than expected and the archers couldn't fend off the enemy, the Xiaodao Troop in the center of the camp, along with Guan Yu's presence, could quickly stabilize the situation and counterattack.

"Yuan Shao, any news?" Guan Yu glanced at Pei Yuanshao, who, unlike Zhou Cang, had sharp ears and was currently eavesdropping with a bowl turned upside down on the ground.

"Not yet..." Pei Yuanshao shook his head. Then, his eyes suddenly widened with excitement. "Here they come! Just as the strategist predicted—about a thousand riders!"

"Fengxiao predicted this," Guan Yu boasted. Though he often appeared disdainful of scholars, that attitude didn't extend to those who truly demonstrated their abilities. With strategists like Chen Xi, Guo Jia, and even the transferred Liu Ye, Guan Yu held great respect. He despised only the corrupt scholars, not those with true wisdom.

"Go, inform Jiang Gong to be ready," Guan Yu ordered Pei Yuanshao.

As for the Yellow Turban soldiers under his command, Guan Yu treated them fairly out of respect for Guan Hai's loyalty. Many of the Yellow Turban leaders were battle-hardened. Although they lacked the strategic vision of higher-ranking officers, they were more than capable of commanding a thousand men in battle. Moreover, these leaders possessed considerable martial skills, making them well-suited as captains or sergeants. As a result, many mid-level officers in Taishan's forces were former Yellow Turban leaders.

As twilight descended, Zhang Liao began wrapping the horses' hooves and slowly advanced towards Guan Yu's camp, maintaining a slow pace to minimize noise.

When they were about a mile from the camp, Zhang Liao could already smell the scent of meat and wine. Though Guan Yu had only given each soldier a bowl of wine, the sheer number of men—nearly ten thousand—meant the aroma of the wine wafted far and wide.

As Zhang Liao caught a whiff of the scent, a faint smile appeared on his face. Even if Zhang Liao had goodwill toward Liu Bei's side, or even plans to join him, he wouldn't hold back in this moment.

As they drew closer, Zhang Liao could hear the shouts and sounds of wrestling within the camp. His heart swelled with excitement. He quietly ordered his men, "Mount up and prepare to attack."

Zhang Liao mounted his horse, and his men followed suit, grim-faced as they leaped onto their steeds. Without further concealment, they charged toward Guan Yu's camp. In the blink of an eye, the swift wolf riders had covered the mile distance.

As Zhang Liao approached the camp, he instinctively glanced at the camp walls, and what he saw sent cold sweat dripping down his back—those dark glints weren't just shadows; they were the reflections of crossbow bolts!

"Fall back!" Zhang Liao shouted at the top of his lungs, unleashing his internal energy. In the firelight, his expression turned ferocious. At the same moment, a barrage of arrows, crossbow bolts, and massive ballista bolts the size of spears rained down upon Zhang Liao and his men.

In an instant, chaos ensued, with men and horses toppling everywhere. Just as Guo Jia had predicted, Zhang Liao, to keep his men from scattering in the night raid, had kept them tightly grouped. But in this dense formation, the hail of projectiles caused devastating losses.

Chapter 564: Soft Inner Energy

As the rain of arrows fell upon the enemy from the front lines, the cavalry hidden in the left and right camps swiftly mounted their horses and charged out with a roar, forming a large encirclement.

"Retreat quickly!" Zhang Liao desperately swatted away the incoming arrows. Despite his efforts, after deflecting several massive ballista bolts, his strength waned, and he was hit by a few arrows. Fortunately, Zhang Liao was strong enough to pull out the arrows, suppress his injuries, and use his inner energy to lead his troops in a slanted charge away from Guan Yu's camp.

"If you've come, don't think of leaving!" Guan Yu's powerful voice echoed through the battlefield, its imposing presence striking fear into Zhang Liao's elite troops.

Zhang Liao didn't respond. A hint of dread crept into his heart as he glanced in Guan Yu's direction. Silvery-gray inner energy began to flow into his spear, but it didn't emit any visible glow. Instead, it condensed into thin, silvery threads within the weapon.

"Take this!" Guan Yu shouted, wielding the Green Dragon Crescent Blade. With a mighty swing, he unleashed a hundred-meter-long blade of green energy that sliced through the air.

"Break it!" Zhang Liao, seeing the enormous energy blade, swept his spear with all his might. The countless thin threads of energy exploded outward, violently clashing with Guan Yu's attack, diverting it just before it reached him.

A loud boom echoed across the battlefield as Guan Yu's energy blade slammed into the ground, carving out a massive trench over a hundred meters long.

"Go!" Zhang Liao had already noticed the cavalry charging in from both flanks. Without hesitation, he spurred his horse and led his men to retreat in the direction they had come from.

"General, mighty indeed!" Zhou Cang immediately shouted, and the soldiers in the front camp, unaware of the plan to lure Zhang Liao in, echoed his cry, rallying without a hint of panic.

"Hmm!" Guan Yu was surprised. He had encountered enemies who dodged his attacks, those who blocked them, and those who met them head-on. But this was the first time he had seen someone like Zhang Liao.

"Send word to Li Fu and Chen Chuang to pursue them for twenty miles. If they can't make any kills, have them return," Guan Yu ordered Zhou Cang.

"Is something wrong?" Guo Jia asked curiously. His understanding of inner energy was superficial compared to Guan Yu's, and he had no idea what had just happened.

"That man uses soft inner energy. He's the only martial artist I've ever seen with soft inner energy," Guan Yu replied, frowning. While soft inner energy had many benefits, all martial artists knew that it wasn't suitable for combat—it lacked the offensive power needed.

"Oh?" Guo Jia, though not well-versed in inner energy, understood the basic concept. In short, hard inner energy was meant for fighting, while soft inner energy was more for health and longevity—not for battle.

Guan Yu furrowed his brows, thinking about how long it had been since he'd returned to his hometown of Xie County in Hedong. It had been over a decade since he'd heard his native dialect.

Zhang Liao had come and gone quickly. In one swift encounter, half of his thousand-strong wolf cavalry had fallen. Although falling didn't necessarily mean death, those who had fallen had little chance of escape when Zhou Cang's elite troops charged in. They were quickly captured.

Chen Chuang and Li Fu led two thousand cavalry in pursuit, but the distance between them and Zhang Liao's fleeing wolf cavalry only grew. After chasing them for nearly twenty miles, they gave up and returned to the camp.

Looking back at Guan Yu's troops, Zhang Liao steadied the morale of his remaining soldiers. Initially, he had planned to keep drawing out the enemy, stretching their lines, and then launching a counterattack to avenge the earlier arrow strikes. However, his enemies had turned back just as their ranks were beginning to stretch.

As Zhang Liao slowed his pace, he began counting his men. He ordered those uninjured to tend to the wounded, while sending scouts to monitor their surroundings and prevent Guan Yu from launching a surprise attack.

"General, it seems the enemy has indeed retreated. They don't seem interested in pursuing us," Zhang Xing reported cautiously. Earlier, he had mocked Guan Yu's troops, only to realize now how foolish he had been.

"Continue advancing slowly and bring the severely wounded along," Zhang Liao replied with a bitter expression. After years of battle, this was the first time he had been so thoroughly defeated without even touching the enemy. If not for the reflected light from their arrowheads, he might have fallen with the rest.

Zhang Liao infused a trace of his inner energy into each of the gravely injured soldiers, stabilizing their conditions. Soft inner energy had its advantages—it was excellent for healing and maintaining health—but its low combat effectiveness made its users vulnerable in battle.

As Zhang Liao advanced, he pondered over where he had gone wrong. No matter how much he thought about it, he couldn't understand how they had been discovered. He had carefully chosen the time, location, and taken all necessary precautions. How could they have been detected?

"Maintain regular patrols and sentries tonight. They won't come again; their numbers are too few. Not everyone has Gan Xingba's crazy boldness," Guo Jia said to Guan Yu after Zhang Liao's retreat.

"Gan Xingba..." Guan Yu frowned. Although he didn't care much for the brash and reckless Gan Ning, even he had to admit that Gan Ning's courage was beyond ordinary.

"That man has the greatest courage I've ever seen, but don't underestimate him, General. His carefree attitude is just a facade," Guo Jia remarked with a laugh before turning to return to his tent for rest.

Guo Jia silently mused.

Guo Jia held Gan Ning in high regard. He had carefully studied Gan Ning's records and found something intriguing—while Gan Ning's actions seemed reckless, almost every move was carefully calculated in advance. It was only due to the chaotic nature of the battlefield that his actions appeared haphazard.

Guo Jia continued to evaluate Zhang Liao. However, not knowing exactly how Zhang Liao had sensed the ambush, Guo Jia could only attribute it to the man's sharp instincts.

Chapter 565: The Reunion

That night passed uneventfully, and the next morning, Guan Yu broke camp as planned and slowly advanced toward Zhang Fei's position.

After completing their morning sparring session, Zhang Fei and Xu Chu each carried a large bowl of food, devouring their breakfast. Ever since food became plentiful, the traditional two meals a day of the Han Dynasty had been thoroughly replaced by Chen Xi's three-meals-a-day system in Taishan. For warriors like Xu Chu and Zhang Fei, three meals were a necessity.

"Refreshing!" Zhang Fei exclaimed after devouring an entire pork chop. He picked his teeth with a chicken bone, his face full of satisfaction.

"You're something else. I've noticed you're eating more than me lately," Xu Chu remarked in his deep voice. For warriors of their level, eating more meant stronger combat ability. If they couldn't even eat, where would they find the strength to fight?

"After we finish eating, we'll go again. Today, I'm definitely paying you back for those punches you landed on me earlier," Zhang Fei said, rubbing his steel-needle-like beard. He hadn't trimmed it since his battle with Lu Bu, making him look particularly fierce.

"Just wait. I still need to return the favor for your loud voice this morning, which left my head spinning," Xu Chu retorted, quickly finishing the food in his large bowl and pointing at Zhang Fei.

"Let's digest first, then we'll fight again!" Zhang Fei grumbled. He felt he might be stronger than Xu Chu now, although it wasn't too obvious unless it was a life-or-death struggle.

"General Zhang, General Xu, a messenger from General Guan has arrived," Chen Chi announced as he entered the tent. He frowned slightly at the mess inside.

"Second Brother is here!" Zhang Fei's eyes lit up, and an aura of bravery radiated from him. "Hahaha, Second Brother has finally arrived. I've been waiting impatiently! This time, I'll definitely test my skills against that Lu Bu!"

"When will General Guan arrive?" Xu Chu asked, scratching the back of his head. He was quite familiar with Guan Yu.

"He will arrive by noon. As for our camp, when I built it, I considered this situation. It can easily accommodate General Guan's troops," Chen Chi replied proudly.

Both Zhang Fei and Xu Chu felt a bit awkward. The entire camp had been constructed under Chen Chi's supervision, while they spent their days eating, drinking, and sparring.

"No need to feel embarrassed, Generals. I was transferred from Qingzhou specifically to handle these matters. After all, this is Yanzhou, Lu Bu's territory. And Chen Gongtai, that man doesn't make a move often, but when he does, it's a decisive strike. That's why I was sent here as a subordinate commander,"

Chen Chi explained, showing a hint of apprehension when mentioning Chen Gong. Chen Gongtai's impressive track record in Yanzhou had earned him a widespread reputation.

"Thank you, Chief Chen..." Zhang Fei said earnestly. He had always respected civil officials, and for someone like Chen Chi, who built an impenetrable camp, Zhang Fei naturally admired him.

"No need for thanks, General Zhang. But I suggest both you and General Xu prepare yourselves. If General Guan sees you drinking in the camp, hehe..." Chen Chi trailed off, but the implication was clear.

"We'll clean this up right away, and please, Chief Chen, take care of the wine for us," Zhang Fei quickly responded. He valued family loyalty, and he knew his second brother would never allow drinking during a campaign. If caught, Zhang Fei feared Guan Yu's stern gaze would make him feel deeply ashamed.

Chen Chi said nothing more. He had conveyed everything he needed to. His task was to maintain stability after Liu Ye left and before Guo Jia arrived, ensuring that Chen Gong wouldn't exploit any opportunities to defeat Zhang Fei.

Although both Zhang Fei and Guan Yu were excellent commanders, when it came to underhanded tactics, if Chen Gong had a capable general and a sizable army, defeating Guan Yu and Zhang Fei wasn't impossible. Clever strategies sometimes had the power to overturn entire battles.

Meanwhile, Lu Bu, Zhang Liao, and Gao Shun had reunited. However, while Lu Bu was in high spirits and Gao Shun remained as stoic as ever, Zhang Liao felt bitter. He still couldn't understand how he had lost.

"General, I've completed the task you assigned me. The Xian Deng troops won't be returning to the battlefield anytime soon, but Wei Xu and Hou Cheng have both fallen," Gao Shun reported calmly to Lu Bu.

"What? How could that be?" Lu Bu's expression darkened as he glared at Gao Shun. "With your Camp of the Righteous, how could Wei Xu and Hou Cheng die? Didn't you already defeat the Xian Deng? Don't tell me that someone out there could take down your officers despite your superior numbers and wolf cavalry! I won't believe it."

Lu Bu had no doubts about Gao Shun's victory over the Xian Deng. To him, it was a given. What shocked him was that Wei Xu had died. Wei Xu wasn't just one of his Eight Mighty Generals—he was also his brother-in-law. If there had been any real danger, Lu Bu would have intervened.

"General, it wasn't as you think," Hao Meng stepped forward to explain the entire situation.

After all, if Gao Shun was brought down, he'd lose his command. Lu Bu might not like Gao Shun, but aside from stripping him of his command, he wouldn't do much else to him. Gao Shun was used to losing and regaining his command. In the end, Hao Meng feared that he would be the one left holding the blame.

"Hmph!" Lu Bu snorted, the sound like thunder in Hao Meng's ears. Although Lu Bu couldn't unleash his full anger after hearing Hao Meng's explanation, he still made his displeasure known.

"Gao Shun, your failure to lead the troops effectively means you will return to Puyang and await further orders. As for the Camp of the Righteous..." Lu Bu's gaze swept over the gathered generals before finally settling on Zhang Liao. "Zhang Liao, you will take command of the Camp of the Righteous."

"Understood," Gao Shun replied indifferently, showing no particular reaction to losing his command. He was used to these ups and downs. Even without him, the veteran soldiers in the Camp of the Righteous would continue training new recruits on their own.

Chen Gong furrowed his brows. He had intended to intervene, but Lu Bu had already issued the order. Considering the need to maintain Lu Bu's authority in front of the others, Chen Gong could only sigh inwardly and plan to speak with Lu Bu privately later. He was relieved, however, that Gao Shun showed no resentment toward Lu Bu's decision, further highlighting how valuable such a loyal and courageous subordinate was to Lu Bu, who still hesitated to fully utilize him.

"General, please reconsider. Zhang Liao has already suffered heavy losses on his last campaign and has achieved no significant merit. How could I take command from such a distinguished officer as Gao Shun?" Zhang Liao said, bowing his head. Even now, he still didn't understand how he had been defeated.

"Hmm? You don't want it?" Lu Bu's gaze darkened as he glanced at Zhang Liao, clearly displeased by his reluctance. In Lu Bu's eyes, he had the right to assign command as he saw fit. What gave Zhang Liao the right to refuse?

Chapter 566: The Battle Challenge

No matter what Zhang Liao wanted, right now Lu Bu, who was furious and troubled over Wei Xu's death and struggling to explain it to his wife, would never retract his order. He was like an enraged tiger, impossible to calm down with any reasoning.

"Wen Yuan, the Camp of the Righteous will be under your command," Gao Shun said calmly, glancing at Zhang Liao.

"Gong Zheng..." Zhang Liao looked at Gao Shun in confusion. Others might think Gao Shun didn't care about losing command, but Zhang Liao, who was also from Bingzhou, knew just how much effort Gao Shun had put into the Camp of the Righteous.

"With you leading them, I'm reassured," Gao Shun said, his eyes clearly conveying his trust in Zhang Liao.

"This..." Zhang Liao didn't know what to say, but he had to admit that Gao Shun entrusting the Camp of the Righteous to him was better than handing it over to anyone else present.

"Wen Yuan, take command of the Camp of the Righteous," Chen Gong, who had been silent until now, suddenly spoke. Lu Bu's expression was already showing signs of displeasure, and Zhang Liao and Gao Shun's conversation had only further angered him.

Gao Shun said nothing, and just as Zhang Liao was about to respond, he noticed the meaningful look in Chen Gong's eyes. He instantly understood and said, "In that case, I will temporarily take command of the Camp of the Righteous."

Lu Bu nodded, casting a glance at Gao Shun. Gao Shun clasped his fists in salute and then headed out of the tent. He seldom participated in military discussions, and Lu Bu rarely informed him of such matters.

As Gao Shun passed by Zhang Liao, he patted his shoulder. Zhang Liao felt a moment of suspicion—he had noticed a distinct weakening in the Camp of the Righteous' spirit. However, this wasn't the time or place to question Gao Shun, so he decided to ask him about it after the meeting.

"Alright, I have successfully defeated the Hebei army after departing from Puyang. Gongtai's first phase of the plan is now complete," Lu Bu boasted with pride. And he had reason to be proud—he had decisively beaten the Hebei army with inferior numbers. If it weren't for Xun Chen and his men, the Hebei forces would have been utterly crushed.

"Now that this is done, we must focus on dealing with the Taishan Army. Zhang General has already reported that our enemy has changed from Hua Zijian to Guan Yun Chang," Chen Gong said, mentioning Hua Xiong and Guan Yu with some trepidation. After all, based on the current information, Hua Xiong was undoubtedly a top-tier strategist and commander, and Guan Yu had been in a strategic position of dominance throughout his battles in Licheng and Jizhou.

"Liu Ziyang and Hua Zijian have already headed to Bingzhou. They must have sent forces in response to learning that Cao Cao has gone to Chang'an to support the Emperor. This shows that Liu Xuande's confidence and loyalty to the Han cannot be underestimated," Chen Gong said with a solemn expression. However, he also felt a secret satisfaction—he admired loyalists like Liu Bei.

"Hmph, such audacity! Is he not worried about being surrounded and losing his key ministers?" Lu Bu growled, his tone reflecting his frustration at being underestimated by Liu Bei.

"It's better for us if they underestimate us. That way, we can defeat them more easily," Chen Gong said with a light smile. He knew that Liu Bei wasn't underestimating Lu Bu at all. On the contrary, sending Guan Yu, who had been guarding the north, was a clear sign of how seriously Liu Bei took Lu Bu.

"Once I defeat Yuan Benchu's Hebei forces and Liu Xuande's Taishan army, this vast world will surely be mine to dominate!" Lu Bu declared arrogantly. His recent victory in northern Yanzhou, where he had bested Yuan Shao's forces, had revived his confidence in his ability to conquer the land.

Chen Gong frowned in confusion. Hadn't they agreed to focus all their efforts on defeating Yuan Shao and Liu Bei, then wait for offers from potential allies? Now it seemed that Lu Bu's ambitions were flaring up again. This was ridiculous.

"Guan Yun Chang is Liu Xuande's second brother. He has been stationed in the north, guarding Qingzhou. His personal arrival shows that he intends to eliminate us. However, if we can withstand this thunderous assault, we will become a prized ally between Yuan Benchu and Liu Xuande in the north. This is how we can secure our future interests," Chen Gong said seriously, fixing Lu Bu with a stern gaze.

It wasn't that Chen Gong doubted Lu Bu's abilities—Lu Bu was undoubtedly a powerful warrior and capable leader, especially against non-Han opponents. But as a ruler, Lu Bu lacked the necessary judgment and discipline, and he struggled with inconsistent rewards and punishments.

"Hmph, I'll first defeat Guan Yu. Back at Hulao Pass, they were all defeated by me. Let's see how much they've improved now," Lu Bu said with disdain, casting a dismissive glance at Chen Gong.

Chen Gong sighed inwardly. Lu Bu's biggest flaw was his lack of self-awareness. He was too easily swayed by praise and remained stuck in the mindset that he was still the undisputed number one in the world.

"So be it. Let's first defeat Guan Yu," Chen Gong nodded. He already knew that Guan Yu would be the commander, with Guo Jia as his strategist. Despite this formidable combination, Chen Gong felt no fear. In terms of strategy, he feared no one, and in terms of combat prowess, Lu Bu was unrivaled. Additionally, their wolf cavalry was well-trained, and though provisions were somewhat scarce, their overall strength wasn't inferior to Guan Yu's forces.

"Report!" Just as Lu Bu was about to express his satisfaction after defeating the Hebei army, a messenger rushed into the tent.

"What is it?" Lu Bu glared at the messenger, his gaze so fierce that it made the man's heart skip a beat.

"A challenge letter from Zhang Yide's camp," the messenger said, keeping his head down, not daring to meet Lu Bu's eyes.

"Bring it here," Lu Bu ordered, his expression darkening as he remembered Zhang Fei from Hulao Pass.

Lu Bu took the paper envelope, which had the words "Battle Challenge" written on it. He sneered coldly and tore it open. "Zhang Fei, you wretch! You seek death!"

After reading just a few words, Lu Bu roared in fury and slammed his fist down, shattering the table in front of him into splinters and leaving a large crater in the floor. The letter, however, remained intact at the center of the crater, glowing faintly with a protective light, unharmed by the force of his blow.

"Zhao Zilong, you will die too!" Lu Bu, consumed by rage, ignored where he was and struck again. His immense strength obliterated the letter, creating an even deeper hole in the ground. The entire camp seemed to shake from the impact.

Chen Gong's sharp eyes had caught a glimpse of the letter before Lu Bu destroyed it. The words were clear: "You three-faced slave, a scum without loyalty, honor, or filial piety! If you have the guts, face me in single combat tomorrow!"

Zhao Yun had no idea that by simply preparing a few pieces of special paper for Zhang Fei, he had earned Lu Bu's eternal enmity. But there was no denying that Zhang Fei's insult had struck a nerve, and Lu Bu's failure to destroy Zhao Yun's carefully crafted letter on the first try had only fueled his rage.

With bloodshot eyes, Lu Bu grabbed his Sky Piercer halberd and stormed out of the tent. He was determined to kill Zhang Fei. If he didn't, he wouldn't be able to swallow his anger. He would kill Zhang Fei and then hang him up for all to see!

Chapter 567: Diao Chan

When Zhang Liao, Chen Gong, and the others tried to stop Lu Bu, he was already furious to the point of exploding. He kicked Zhang Liao aside, whistled, and his steed, Red Hare, descended from the sky. Lu Bu immediately mounted his horse, ready to kill Zhang Fei right then and there.

"General, do not fall into their trap!" Chen Gong shouted, unleashing a massive amount of spiritual energy, almost as if he were willing to perish together with Lu Bu.

Lu Bu felt a chill run down his spine. At such close range, there was no way to avoid Chen Gong's attack. If Chen Gong were to pour all of his spiritual will into Lu Bu's mind, Chen Gong would surely die, and Lu Bu would not come out unscathed either.

"Are you trying to stop me?" Lu Bu asked through gritted teeth, his eyes flashing with madness. He couldn't believe that his most trusted strategist was not only refusing to help him but was also standing in his way.

"General, this is surely a plot by Guo Fengxiao to provoke you into a rage, driving you to fight Zhang Yide in a duel. If you do that, you'll certainly fall into their ambush!" Chen Gong didn't hesitate to blame Guo Jia for the scheme.

For some reason, Chen Gong sensed a trace of killing intent from Lu Bu, but given the urgent situation, he didn't dwell on it.

"Ridiculous! Who in this world can defeat me?" Lu Bu declared arrogantly, his eyes filled with the overwhelming confidence of someone who believes they can conquer the world.

"General, you may be invincible, but that doesn't mean the enemy will engage you in a fair one-on-one duel," Chen Gong said tactfully, using words from the Spring and Autumn period to calm Lu Bu's anger as much as possible.

"Hmph, even if they try some petty tricks, with Red Hare under me, no one can stop me!" Lu Bu's rage subsided slightly, and out of respect for Chen Gong, Zhang Liao, and Gao Shun, he refrained from charging out.

"General, you indeed can dominate the battlefield, but Liu Xuande's subordinates are fierce warriors. Let's not even talk about Guan Yun Chang and Zhang Yide. Even Zhao Zilong alone could hold you off for a while, and if two more generals assist him, the outcome might not be in your favor," Chen Gong continued to persuade. If Lu Bu charged out now, all of Chen Gong's careful preparations would become a joke. Who would believe the enemy would fight Lu Bu one-on-one?

Though Lu Bu was angry, he still had some basic sense. If Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, and Zhao Yun really came at him together, it wouldn't just be a matter of winning; even holding his ground would be difficult. Chen Gong's words made Lu Bu pause and consider.

"Thud!" Lu Bu slammed his Sky Piercer halberd into the ground in frustration. A flash of golden light followed as the halberd buried itself into the earth, and the ground around it even began to crystallize from the heat.

Red Hare snorted in dissatisfaction, sensing that the powerful fighting spirit of its rider had dissipated, replaced by a sense of dejection.

"General, please rest tonight. Tomorrow, we will challenge them," Chen Gong said solemnly, a glint of determination in his eyes.

"Fine, I trust you, Gongtai. Tomorrow, I want Zhang Fei's head!" Lu Bu's eyes blazed with fury.

"Very well, I will give you a satisfactory answer tomorrow," Chen Gong replied, locking eyes with Lu Bu.

With a cold snort, Lu Bu stomped on the ground. The Sky Piercer halberd shot back up from the earth, and he grabbed it. With a grim expression, he patted Red Hare, and the horse leaped into the air, creating two fiery rings in the sky before quickly disappearing.

As Zhao Yun's Night Illumination Jade Lion advanced to the level of externalized internal energy, Lu Bu's Red Hare had nearly reached the pinnacle of internal energy itself. Even ordinary warriors at the level of externalized internal energy would struggle against this intelligent horse.

Lu Bu, with a dark expression, returned to his central tent, where his wife, concubines, and daughter awaited him. Unable to vent his anger on the battlefield, he sought other means to dissipate his fury.

"Husband..." Diao Chan greeted him with a gentle bow. "Are you troubled by military affairs again? I've made some chicken soup for you."

Seeing Diao Chan's worried expression, Lu Bu's mood improved slightly. He forced a smile as he took the bowl of soup from her and began to eat.

Diao Chan quietly stood behind Lu Bu, wrapping her arms around his waist. A trace of sadness flickered in her eyes.

"Shall I dance for you?" she whispered, leaning close to his shoulder.

"Go ahead, I'll watch," Lu Bu replied, his tone softening as he embraced her briefly before letting go. His eyes, now calm, watched her with affection.

As Diao Chan danced, Lu Bu once again found himself entranced. Why had he betrayed Dong Zhuo all those years ago? Was it for the greater good? No, it was truly for this woman. Yet, even now, despite the years they had spent together, Diao Chan remained his concubine without an official title, out of respect for his wife, Lady Wei, who had done nothing wrong.

Diao Chan gracefully moved with her feathered fan, lost in thought. She cherished the way Lu Bu looked at her during these moments. The beauty trap, loyalty and filial piety, love and hate—all intertwined in her life.

As she raised her wrist and continued her dance, her mind grew even more peaceful. From the moment she had walked towards Dong Zhuo in the name of loyalty and filial piety, Lu Bu's gaze had shattered her heart. And after Lu Bu had killed Dong Zhuo and rushed to see her with joy in his eyes, she had never been able to forget his expression.

When Lu Bu risked his life to return to Chang'an to save her after his defeat by Li Jue, Diao Chan knew that this man would be her life's companion. He would never betray her, and she was willing to follow him to the end.

When her dance ended, Lu Bu had calmed considerably. Diao Chan's dance had a soothing effect on him, though she was the only one who could see this side of him.

"It seems the general has settled down," Zhang Liao said to Chen Gong, relieved that Lu Bu hadn't stormed out for a reckless duel that would have likely ended in disaster.

"That's good enough for now. Go and reorganize the Camp of the Righteous. You should also temporarily take charge of Wei Xu and Hou Cheng's troops," Chen Gong said with a sigh of relief. He held Zhang Liao in high regard. Unlike Gao Shun, who excelled in special forces, Zhang Liao was the type of general Chen Gong could most effectively utilize.

"Very well," Zhang Liao agreed. "I will take charge of Wei Xu and Hou Cheng's forces for now. As for General Lu, I'll leave it to you to inform him."

"Alright. General Zhang, you've always been one of General Lu's trusted commanders. Please work hard today to integrate Hou Cheng and Wei Xu's forces. We may need them tomorrow," Chen Gong urged, already forming a plan in his mind.

Although Guo Jia excelled in strategy and understanding human nature, commanding troops was not his strong suit. Using this as a starting point, Chen Gong quickly devised a plan. Instead of dragging things out, he aimed to eliminate the enemy's greatest advantage from the outset.

"Tomorrow? We might need them?" Zhang Liao frowned, but seeing Chen Gong's serious expression, he hesitated before saying, "I'll do my best, but I can't guarantee that I'll complete the reorganization in time."

"In that case, General, please do your utmost to integrate Wei Xu and Hou Cheng's remaining forces. Every additional soldier increases our chances of victory," Chen Gong said with a bow, placing even more pressure on Zhang Liao.

Chapter 568: Zhang Fei's Resolve

"Second Brother!" From a considerable distance, Zhang Fei could already be seen riding his horse, Wuyun Tashe, shouting loudly as he charged over.

"Third Brother!" Guan Yu also laughed heartily and spurred his horse forward. Since taking command of the northern defenses, Guan Yu hadn't seen Zhang Fei in a long time.

When the two met, they couldn't help but sigh at how quickly time had passed—it had been ages since they last saw each other.

"General Guan," Xu Chu greeted Guan Yu with a fist salute. They were well acquainted and didn't need too many formalities.

"Greetings, Military Advisor Guo." Both Xu Chu and Zhang Fei respectfully saluted Guo Jia, fully aware of his formidable reputation. Neither dared show the slightest disrespect.

Zhang Fei and Xu Chu led Guan Yu and the others into the main camp. After the two forces merged, Guan Yu took command of both Zhang Fei and Xu Chu's troops, becoming the overall commander of this army—an arrangement that met no resistance.

"This camp is impressively built," Guo Jia remarked as he surveyed the surroundings. "If someone were to try and take it by force in a short amount of time, they'd need to pave the way with lives."

"Thank you, Military Advisor, for the compliment," Chen Chi responded calmly. He had worked with Guo Jia before while managing logistics for Guan Yu in Qingzhou, and he had developed a deep respect for the sickly-looking strategist.

"I'm merely stating the truth," Guo Jia replied with a smile. "With the river as a natural barrier, an outer fortress like this, and such a well-organized inner defense, we can hold our ground against Lu Bu. With this stronghold secured, our only concern is how to deal with Lu Bu himself, which will make things much easier."

Chen Chi didn't respond, maintaining his calm demeanor, though Guo Jia's praise brought a slight feeling of pride to his heart.

"Indeed, it is well done," Guan Yu agreed, nodding. A well-constructed camp directly affected the morale and combat effectiveness of the troops. With the kind of fortifications Chen Chi had built, the soldiers could sleep soundly, ensuring they were ready for battle.

"First, we need to find a way to neutralize Lu Bu. With him around, these fortified hills and crossbows won't be of much use. Just the number of soldiers stationed on these hills won't be enough—he could probably sever a mountain peak with a single strike," Guo Jia shrugged. No matter how formidable a defensive strategy might be, it wouldn't stand up to a monster like Lu Bu.

"Is Lu Bu really that strong?" Chen Chi hesitated. He had previously estimated Lu Bu's combat capabilities, which is why he reinforced the hills and stationed more soldiers there. He even employed cloud formations to block attacks.

"He could probably cleave an ordinary city wall in two," Guo Jia glanced at Guan Yu as he gauged Lu Bu's power.

"..." Chen Chi's face turned as dark as the bottom of a pot. Was this even human? Judging by the expressions of those present, it was clear that Guo Jia wasn't exaggerating.

"Then what's the point of all this defense work?" Chen Chi asked with a grim face.

"It's not just Lu Bu we're facing—there are others too," Guo Jia responded nonchalantly. Ever since he had seen Guan Yu slice open the walls of Le Ling City with one strike, Guo Jia had stopped relying on fortifications to defend against internal energy users. Against such foes, only other warriors could provide a true defense.

"General Zhang, I heard you're planning to challenge Lu Bu to a duel?" Guo Jia asked Zhang Fei, already aware of the situation. Guan Yu had specifically instructed him to make sure Zhang Fei got the opportunity to fight Lu Bu if it arose.

"That's right," Zhang Fei replied confidently.

"Oh? Then let's give it a try tomorrow." After confirming Zhang Fei's resolve and spirit, Guo Jia nodded in agreement.

"I knew Military Advisor Guo understood me!" Zhang Fei laughed heartily.

"Good, that's settled," Guo Jia said. "Let's test Lu Bu's strength tomorrow and see what he's truly capable of. Although we know he's the greatest warrior in the land, we can't make any plans until we assess his combat abilities."

"What did you write?" Guan Yu, who had been sitting quietly in the main seat, suddenly asked.

"I called him a three-family slave, a man without a lord or father, a disgrace to the concepts of loyalty and filial piety! I challenged him to a duel tomorrow if he dares!" Zhang Fei recited proudly. Beside him, Xu Chu covered his face, Guan Yu's expression turned red, and Chen Chi felt a sudden wave of embarrassment.

"Well said!" Guo Jia began clapping enthusiastically, thoroughly impressed by Zhang Fei's approach.

"I knew I wrote it well! Xu Chu here said it was beneath my dignity," Zhang Fei's confidence swelled even more after receiving Guo Jia's approval, and he started to scold Xu Chu.

"That wording might be a bit over the top," Guan Yu murmured to himself before finally speaking. Though he despised Lu Bu's character, even he felt that such an insult was a bit much.

"In war, all tactics are fair game. I imagine Lu Bu must be seething with rage after receiving Zhang Fei's letter," Guo Jia chuckled. "But tomorrow, Zhang Fei, you should prepare yourself. Lu Bu is likely to fight you with a 'do or die' mindset."

Zhang Fei's expression darkened, but then his eyes gleamed with a wild determination. "Who's afraid? I'm not scared of Lu Bu. I came here specifically to fight him. If he's not in peak condition, beating him won't be worth it!"

Zhang Fei might have been audacious, but he was speaking from the heart. He had deliberately provoked Lu Bu because he wanted to face Lu Bu's full strength, not rely on tricks like Zhao Yun had done at the Battle of Hulao Pass. He wanted a true, direct clash!

"Very well," Guan Yu remarked, casting a deep look at Zhang Fei. He realized that his younger brother had subtly surpassed him.

"Tonight, the entire army will rest, and tomorrow we will meet Lu Bu in battle. Since the Battle of Hulao Pass, I wonder if Lu Bu still possesses the confidence to face multiple top warriors at once," Guan Yu said coldly. For a top-tier warrior like Lu Bu, every Han Dynasty fighter would inevitably desire a challenge.

"That sounds good," Guo Jia agreed with a nod. "Where will you be fighting?" he asked Zhang Fei.

Guo Jia didn't bother to be polite anymore—this was a duel, plain and simple. The high-minded concept of a "formal battle" had disappeared after the Spring and Autumn period. After all, staking the fate of a nation on two people fighting a duel was absurd!

"In the northwest, about thirty miles away on the plains. The area is wide open, making ambushes difficult," Zhang Fei wasn't foolish. He didn't want to fall into Lu Bu's trap. Although his strength had increased significantly, no warrior in the world dared to claim victory over Lu Bu with absolute certainty.

"The location sounds suitable. Don't bring any infantry, just cavalry. That way, if something goes wrong, retreating will be easier," Guo Jia suggested. On such open terrain, cavalry had a significant advantage.

Guan Yu and the others immediately understood Guo Jia's point. "Understood. But we still need you to make preparations, Military Advisor," they said.

Chapter 569: The Tiger's Restraints

The next morning, Guan Yu sent Zhang Fei as the vanguard, with Xu Chu as the deputy general, leading the three armies under his command towards the plains thirty miles northwest, where the battle was set to take place.

Lu Bu, serving as the main general, with Hao Meng as the vanguard, rode his Red Hare horse while wielding his Sky Piercer halberd. A cold and stern aura radiated from him as he headed towards the agreed battleground. After a night of persuasion from Diao Chan and Chen Gong, Lu Bu had calmed down considerably. At the very least, he now understood what he should and should not do.

Lu Bu's mind replayed the conversation he had with Chen Gong that morning.

"Your kingdom and your family are both important to you!" Lu Bu had declared resolutely. "With my unparalleled strength, I can conquer the world and protect my wife and daughter. Who can possibly defeat me?"

"But what if you could only choose one?" Chen Gong had asked calmly.

"How could that be possible?" Lu Bu had coldly swept his gaze over Chen Gong.

"Western Liang's Dong Zhuo, Hebei's Yuan Shao, Qingzhou's Liu Bei—which one can you truly defeat?" Chen Gong's eyes flashed with determination as he spoke. At this point, he couldn't allow Lu Bu to stray down the wrong path. Even if Lu Bu entertained thoughts of conquering the world, Chen Gong would douse those dreams with cold water.

"That's nonsense! Dong Zhuo is dead, Yuan Shao has been defeated, and tomorrow, I will take Zhang Fei's head!" Lu Bu had boasted arrogantly.

"Dong Zhuo is dead..." Chen Gong's face reflected a moment of reminiscence. He thought back to when Cao Cao, during the assassination of Dong Zhuo, had been so valiant, and how during the pursuit in Luoyang, Cao Cao had been so mighty. But all of that had changed. There was no turning back now. Chen Gong silently extinguished the last bit of admiration he had for Cao Cao. From this point on, he would show no mercy.

"Dong Zhuo is dead, but Lu Bu, can you defeat Li Jue and his forces? Without Dong Zhuo and Li Ru, the Xiliang cavalry has lost most of its strength, but can you still defeat them?" Chen Gong asked quietly, as if speaking to himself.

Lu Bu opened his mouth but said nothing.

Deep down, Lu Bu knew he wasn't a match for Li Jue and his forces. Although Li Jue's martial prowess was average, he could only survive three moves against Lu Bu. However, Li Jue's ability to command cavalry was among the best in the world. There were few who could confidently claim victory over him. And to defeat them with fewer troops would require unparalleled leadership—something that no one in the world could currently achieve.

The consensus among the warlords was that the only way to defeat the Xiliang generals was through strategy. Without internal conflict, unifying the regions of Sili and Yongzhou would be no easy feat.

"Has Yuan Shao truly been defeated?" Chen Gong asked, noticing Lu Bu's pensive expression.

"The provinces of Jizhou, Bingzhou, and Youzhou have nearly ten million people, over half a million soldiers, nearly a hundred thousand cavalry, and stockpiles of grain in the millions. Tian Feng, Ju Shou, Xu You, and Shen Pei are all capable ministers, and Yan Liang and Wen Chou are mighty generals. Even after ten defeats, they wouldn't suffer substantial losses. But for us, just one defeat would be the end!" Chen Gong looked sternly at Lu Bu.

"Our most elite troops are the Bingzhou Wolf Cavalry, but we all know where these soldiers come from. Bingzhou's border regions have been recaptured by Xu You and his men. For Yuan Shao, acquiring the

Bingzhou Wolf Cavalry is as easy as reaching out his hand," Chen Gong continued. "Yuan Shao has everything cavalry needs, and where we can only provide leather armor, Yuan Shao can outfit his men with iron armor. Can we truly win?"

Chen Gong's final question left Lu Bu speechless. The difference between him and Yuan Shao wasn't something that could be changed by a single battle. Even if Yuan Shao were to lose nine times out of ten, winning just once would be enough to strip Lu Bu of everything. But could Yuan Shao really lose nine out of ten times? Lu Bu didn't believe that himself.

"And as for Liu Bei, he is the one I understand the least, yet he holds the most potential among all the warlords. Between Yuan Shao and Liu Bei, my instincts tell me to bet on Liu Bei. Their resources are almost equal, though Liu Bei's territories might have a slightly larger population." Chen Gong didn't delve too deeply into Liu Bei's situation. After all, their intelligence network within Liu Bei's territory had mysteriously collapsed not long ago.

"Dong Zhuo is dead, and now Liu Bei and Yuan Shao are the two dominant forces in this land. We cannot compete with either of them. Our only choice is to align ourselves with one of them," Chen Gong said with a hint of regret in his voice.

"And so, I ask you again—what do you choose, the kingdom or your family?" This time, Chen Gong's expression was calm as he looked at Lu Bu, but his gaze forced Lu Bu to contemplate his options.

"My family..." Lu Bu's words seemed to be forced out between clenched teeth. Saying those words made him feel a sudden sense of relief, but it was immediately followed by a deep sense of humiliation.

"Then, please show mercy this time. Zhang Fei is Liu Bei's sworn brother, and they share a bond of life and death. If Zhang Fei is killed or maimed, we will be left with no other options," Chen Gong said seriously. Even as he spoke, he felt a slight twinge of fear, and sure enough, after saying those words, Chen Gong felt a trace of killing intent wash over him. His entire back was drenched in cold sweat.

"I... understand!" Lu Bu's icy gaze swept over Chen Gong. In the end, the importance of his family kept Lu Bu from acting on his murderous impulse.

After Lu Bu left, Zhang Liao approached Chen Gong. "Military Advisor, you were really risking your life there. Just now, Lu Bu had thoughts of killing you. I almost couldn't hold back. If Lu Bu had attacked, I wouldn't have been able to stop him!"

"If I hadn't done it, how else could we protect everyone, including Lu Bu?" Chen Gong sighed. "As I see it, no one in this world can defeat Lu Bu. If Zhang Fei challenges Lu Bu to a duel, Zhang Fei will certainly lose, and without intervention, he may die. Even if there are two or more warriors with inner energy at the battlefield, they still won't be able to defeat Lu Bu."

"I think the same," Zhang Liao said with a bitter smile. "But from what you said, it seems like you're leaning towards Liu Bei?"

Chen Gong glanced at Zhang Liao. "Just because we lean towards one side doesn't mean we're bound to it. The weak must cling to the strong, not act on whims. Only the most powerful warlords can act freely, commanding the stars to revolve around them like a bright moon. We lack that power and can't afford to be picky. We must follow the strongest."

"Oh." Zhang Liao nodded. He realized that another person had joined his camp. In his view, aligning with Liu Bei was far better than siding with Yuan Shao. At least Liu Bei was known for his benevolence, his oaths, and his recruitment of talent, all of which Zhang Liao admired.

"Liu Bei is indeed a virtuous ruler. If he has a chance, I wouldn't mind supporting him," Chen Gong said as he looked at Zhang Liao, offering him a bit of confidence. He could see that Zhang Liao was inclined towards Liu Bei's side.

Seeing the joy on Zhang Liao's face, Chen Gong quietly walked back to the camp, muttering as he went, "But General Zhang, please focus on the task at hand. If you don't want to be underestimated, you must work hard. As of now, you're still a nobody in this world."

Zhang Liao paused, watching Chen Gong's retreating figure. As he reflected on Chen Gong's actions over the past few days, he finally understood what the strategist was doing—he was paving the way for Lu Bu's generals and officials. High Shun's path had already been laid, and now it was Zhang Liao's turn to prove himself.

Understanding this, Zhang Liao bowed deeply towards Chen Gong's back. "Thank you, Military Advisor!"

"Don't thank me. You might die, just like Wei Xu and Hou Cheng did. You know that yourself."

Zhang Liao wasn't aware that in the previous life, Chen Gong had also paved the way for everyone. Unfortunately, Gao Shun didn't understand the importance of showing mercy. He wiped out Guan Yu and Zhang Fei's forces, proving his value but making powerful enemies. When the end came, no one spoke up for him, and he was doomed. Without any general willing to speak for the man who destroyed their army, his fate was sealed.

Zhang Liao, on the other hand, had shown his worth but had spared Guan Yu and Liu Bei during the Battle of Xiapi, earning their favor. In the end, Guan Yu was willing to plead for Zhang Liao's life. That was fate—different choices led to different outcomes.

Chen Gong gazed towards the horizon, where the earth met the sky.

A tiger can only be tamed when bound by chains, and Lu Bu can only show his other side when protecting his family. That is the only way he can be accepted by others, even with the stigma of betrayal.

Lu Bu sat astride his Red Hare, quietly watching the approaching figure of Zhang Fei, whose face was covered in thick facial hair. Although the distance was still great, Lu Bu could clearly see every hair on Zhang Fei's face.

The Red Hare snorted, seemingly sensing its master's hesitation. Lu Bu was jolted awake and stroked the horse's mane.

With that realization, Lu Bu's gaze towards Zhang Fei no longer held the same murderous intent, though it wasn't exactly friendly either.

"Zhang Yide!" Lu Bu's voice carried a powerful aura. "Come, let me see how much you've improved since the Battle of Hulao Pass!"

Zhang Fei felt a bit apprehensive. In his memory, Lu Bu should have already charged at him without a word, not stood there calmly, prepared to fight him fairly.

"Then come and see the power of Zhang Yide of Yan!" Zhang Fei roared, his voice reverberating like a cannon blast towards Lu Bu.

"Trivial tricks," Lu Bu sighed. To Zhang Fei, his voice sounded like thunder. Lu Bu lifted his mighty bow, pulling back the string with ease. A golden-red light flickered, effortlessly canceling out Zhang Fei's attack.

Zhang Fei's heart sank. From that simple move, he realized the gap between him and Lu Bu was terrifyingly large. And this time, Zhang Fei finally understood what that red glow around Lu Bu was—it wasn't fire-based inner energy, as he had always thought. Lu Bu had only one type of inner energy: the golden type. The red glow was simply the manifestation of Lu Bu's blood and energy radiating outward, similar to inner energy.

Zhang Fei recognized just how terrifying Lu Bu truly was. Even more horrifying was that Lu Bu's blood had the same properties as fire-based inner energy. It seemed that Lu Bu was using his blood as if it were inner energy—he was a true monster!

"Lu Bu, take this!" Rather than being intimidated by Lu Bu's overwhelming power, Zhang Fei felt his fighting spirit surge even higher. The stronger Lu Bu was, the stronger Zhang Fei's desire to fight.

"Boom!" Lu Bu calmly watched as the dark figure of Zhang Fei approached with lightning speed. With a simple thrust of his halberd, the two forces collided like a thunderstorm. The impact created a massive crater in the ground, and Lu Bu felt his hand go numb as the Sky Piercer almost slipped from his grasp. Fortunately, the fiery red dragon of energy wrapped around his hand, allowing him to maintain his grip on the weapon.

Lu Bu tightened his hold on the Sky Piercer. It had been a long time since he had faced such a formidable opponent.

"Take this!" Zhang Fei's serpent spear curved like a whip, striking towards Lu Bu's throat.

"Boom!" Lu Bu gripped his halberd with both hands, moving slowly at first but gradually increasing speed. His counterattack struck Zhang Fei's spear with such force that it brought Zhang Fei's attack to an abrupt halt.

"Zhang Yide, show me your full strength. Your skills are far inferior to mine," Lu Bu said calmly, forcing Zhang Fei back with a single strike. His strength had grown significantly since the Battle of Hulao Pass. Although he was still at the pinnacle of inner energy manifestation, even using just a fraction of that power was enough to repel Zhang Fei.

In a vague sense, Lu Bu felt like he was on the verge of reaching a higher realm, but it was as if a thin barrier prevented him from fully grasping it.

Zhang Fei took a deep breath. Lu Bu was as formidable as ever, but that only made the challenge more worthwhile.

"That was just a warm-up. Now the real battle begins," Zhang Fei said as he flexed his arms. A moment later, a surge of dark inner energy erupted from his body, and his muscles began to tremble and swell.

"Is that all?" Lu Bu's eyes showed a hint of disappointment. While Zhang Fei had indeed improved significantly, it wasn't enough. Perhaps this strength would have posed a threat to Lu Bu at the Battle of Hulao Pass, but against the current Lu Bu, who had glimpsed a higher realm, Zhang Fei was still far from being a true challenge.

"You'll see soon enough!" Zhang Fei felt a sting of defiance at the disappointment in Lu Bu's eyes. His eyes flashed with a fierce battle spirit as he gripped his serpent spear and charged towards Lu Bu with all his might.

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Lu Bu effortlessly deflected Zhang Fei's attack with a single sweep of his halberd. In that moment, the Sky Piercer seemed to extend infinitely, and within an instant, it appeared at Zhang Fei's throat.

"Clang!" Zhang Fei's eyes turned blood-red as he desperately used his Serpent Spear to deflect the Sky Piercer, but Lu Bu's halberd still managed to leave a shallow wound on Zhang Fei's neck.

Lu Bu calmly observed his own hand. At some point, his attacks had begun to ignore distance to a certain extent. Within a range of several paces, his halberd had become faster than an arrow.

The cold, indifferent demeanor of Lu Bu caused Zhang Fei's fury to erupt even more fiercely. As Chen Xi had once predicted, when the strength of these top-tier warriors increased tenfold due to their inner energy, the disparity between them would become increasingly apparent. But Chen Xi had underestimated them—these warriors' strength hadn't just increased tenfold, it had increased a hundredfold!

If Lu Bu's previous strength was rated as 5, and Zhang Fei and Guan Yu's as 3, the difference of 2 points still kept them within human limits. In that case, Zhang Fei and Guan Yu together could barely match Lu Bu. But now, Lu Bu's strength had reached a thousand points, while Zhang Fei only had around seven hundred...

This massive gap meant that Lu Bu was practically invincible. Coupled with his Red Hare, his mastery of techniques, and various other factors, Lu Bu's combat prowess now essentially guaranteed crushing victories against any general. Of course, there were a few exceptions, such as Zhao Yun's speed and Dian Wei's brute strength, which operated on a different scale altogether.

As for Huang Zhong, he now had around eight hundred points, making him capable of fighting Lu Bu one-on-one. In a short battle, it might even seem like a draw, but over time, Huang Zhong would eventually fall. And most importantly, Lu Bu was still getting stronger. From the Battle of Hulao Pass to Jingzhou and then to Wancheng, Lu Bu had fought every type of top-tier general in the world.

With each battle, Lu Bu refined his strength further. Now, even if Zhao Yun were to face Lu Bu, even with his superior speed, he wouldn't be able to overpower Lu Bu in a short time. At best, they would fight to a stalemate.

Similarly, if Dian Wei were to fight Lu Bu now, he wouldn't be able to knock Lu Bu away with a single punch as he had in Wancheng. Lu Bu had incorporated the heavy sword technique into his muscles. The crimson energy coursing through his body ensured that each of his attacks, although slightly less powerful than Dian Wei's, were still formidable.

This is why Zhang Fei, despite having strength comparable to Dian Wei in his arms, could not achieve the same results as Dian Wei. Lu Bu no longer had any obvious weaknesses. His speed, strength, and inner energy had all reached their peak. This was why Lu Bu could vaguely see the higher realm, while Huang Zhong could not.

Huang Zhong's physical condition had begun to decline. After years of continuously transferring his inner energy to his son, without time to strengthen his own body, his peak physical condition was no longer

attainable. Without that foundation, Huang Zhong had reached the pinnacle of his career, and from here, his path could only decline.

"Zhang Yide, show me your full strength—the extreme of your inner energy, the perfection of your spirit, and the fusion of your mind, body, and spirit!" Lu Bu said calmly. Having chosen to protect his family, he had also abandoned the idea of killing Zhang Fei within fifty moves. Instead, he gave Zhang Fei a piece of advice. Whether Zhang Fei could understand it was up to him.

Zhang Fei was momentarily stunned, looking at Lu Bu across from him. His anger burned even hotter—being advised by someone he despised the most was intolerable for Zhang Fei.

"As you wish!" Black inner energy surged all over Zhang Fei's body, and his Serpent Spear began to tremble and ignite. The black flames flared up as Zhang Fei poured all of his inner energy into the spear, and soon the dark flames spread across his body, making Zhang Fei appear like a demon possessed.

"Roar!" As the black flames fully enveloped Zhang Fei, a pure white tiger emerged behind him. With an earth-shaking roar, the tiger's shadow merged entirely with Zhang Fei's body.

"Boom!" Zhang Fei charged at Lu Bu like a tiger descending from the mountains. The impact caused both men to step back—Zhang Fei by three steps and Lu Bu by two. Zhang Fei's face showed a trace of joy; he was no longer afraid.

"Take to the skies. The wind follows the tiger. Let me see how strong your White Tiger is!" Lu Bu said coldly. Although Zhang Fei's momentum now surpassed his own, Lu Bu didn't care. He was long past the point of worrying about such things.

Lu Bu patted his Red Hare. In this era, not many horses could fly, and Lu Bu didn't want to take advantage of Zhang Fei. He could sense that flying had become instinctual for Zhang Fei at this moment.

"It doesn't matter how strong it is—today, I will kill you!" Zhang Fei shouted, brandishing his spear as he soared after Lu Bu into the sky.

Once airborne, Zhang Fei had no more reservations. He felt as if the sky itself responded to his every move. Each strike carried an astonishing force, and a casual sweep of his spear could tear the earth apart.

Zhang Fei's frenzied attacks filled the sky with black flames, yet at the center, a single point of golden light remained undimmed, though it seemed to sway with the chaos, as if it could be extinguished at any moment.

On the ground, the soldiers of Taishan cheered wildly for Zhang Fei, while Lu Bu's troops were visibly shaken, unable to believe that their commander was being suppressed. Guan Yu, already present to oversee the battle, stroked his beard with satisfaction. His younger brother had grown to this level—such overwhelming power, though costly, had even managed to suppress Lu Bu.

Guan Yu focused on the sky, his eyes filled with battle lust. Lu Bu was indeed powerful, but he no longer seemed as terrifying as he had during the Battle of Hulao Pass.

Guan Yu's eyes narrowed slightly. Back then, the pressure Lu Bu exerted on all the warriors was immense.

Xu Chu watched the sky and saw Lu Bu being suppressed by Zhang Fei. He couldn't reconcile this with the tales he'd heard from Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, Zhao Yun, and Hua Xiong. Lu Bu seemed strong, but clearly not to the overwhelming extent they had described.

As Zhang Fei's inner energy waned, the previously united force of his mind, body, and spirit began to falter. His violent impulses subsided, allowing him to think more clearly.

Glancing at his Red Hare, Lu Bu casually deflected another of Zhang Fei's attacks. His inner energy was nearing its limits, and the protective energy around him was thinning, sometimes even flickering out of existence.

Seeing Lu Bu's weakening defenses and the flickering of his golden aura, Zhang Fei's heart soared with joy.

"Die, you treacherous cur!" Zhang Fei roared. Pouring all his essence into his Serpent Spear, he transformed into a black dragon and lunged at Lu Bu.

At that moment, Lu Bu, who had been on the defensive, paused. Zhang Fei, filled with delight, noticed that Lu Bu had hesitated.

"Zhang Fei, you fool!" Lu Bu roared. In an instant, he exploded with blinding golden light. The overwhelming black flames that Zhang Fei had built up throughout the battle vanished like frost under the scorching sun.

"Crack!" Lu Bu reached out and, to the disbelief of Zhang Fei, Guan Yu, and Xu Chu, grabbed Zhang Fei's spear.

"Now die!" Lu Bu swung his Sky Piercer, aiming for Zhang Fei's waist. As the blade cut through Zhang Fei's armor, about to cleave him in two, Lu Bu's mind flashed back to that earlier question. Instinctively, he flipped the halberd and swatted Zhang Fei away like an insect.

"Boom!" Before Guan Yu or Xu Chu could react, Zhang Fei was sent flying by Lu Bu's strike, crashing into the ground before Guan Yu's army, creating a massive crater.

"Slap!" Zhang Fei's hand emerged from the pit. Although he hadn't suffered any critical injuries from Lu Bu's strike, the blow had shattered his essence, spirit, and energy. He could no longer fly by instinct, but the surrounding winds had cushioned his fall, preventing further injuries. Otherwise, he would have broken half his bones.

"You treacherous cur!" Zhang Fei spat blood and glared at Lu Bu in the sky. Only now did he realize the immense gap between him and Lu Bu, even larger than during the Battle of Hulao Pass!

Before Zhang Fei could ask, "Why didn't you kill me?" Lu Bu threw Zhang Fei's spear back at him and transformed into a streak of light, descending to finish the job.

"Boom!" As Zhang Fei was sent flying, Guan Yu finally reacted. He had clearly seen Lu Bu show mercy, yet Zhang Fei had still insulted him with that infamous phrase. While everyone called Lu Bu a

"treacherous cur," Though this insult had long been used to refer to Lu Bu, saying it to his face was practically inviting death!

Despite Guan Yu's silent scolding of Zhang Fei for his lack of tact, his loyalty to his brother remained unshaken. If Lu Bu sought to kill Zhang Fei, Guan Yu would never stand idly by, regardless of whether Zhang Fei had said something wrong. In Guan Yu's heart, Zhang Fei wasn't wrong at all.

Guan Yu intercepted Lu Bu's strike with his blade. His horse, Zhaohuang Feidian, let out a sorrowful cry—had it been an ordinary steed, it would have been killed instantly by the sheer force of the blow. Lu Bu's fury, ignited by Zhang Fei's repeated insults, had led him to unleash a strike without any restraint. Guan Yu felt his own blood and energy surging violently; the gap between them was now even greater than it had been at Hulao Pass!

Lu Bu glanced at Guan Yu, then at Zhaohuang Feidian, his eyes cold. At that moment, he understood: even if he wished to surrender to Liu Bei, it didn't mean Liu Bei would accept him. Zhang Fei's attitude was, to some extent, reflective of Liu Bei's own stance. And how could Lu Bu tolerate such humiliation?

"Guanyu Chang?" Lu Bu sneered at Guan Yu. "Do you think you can stop me?"

"Who knows until I try?" Guan Yu responded, feeling the immense pressure of Lu Bu's gaze, yet showing no fear. His body radiated a green glow, and his Green Dragon Crescent Blade echoed with the low roar of a dragon.

"I'll kill you in fifty moves." As Lu Bu swung his halberd, he shouted this declaration. Guan Yu's half-closed eyes gleamed with a cold light—when had anyone ever dared speak to him like this?

"Then come!" Guan Yu slashed with his blade, the strike landing squarely on Lu Bu's halberd. Without a foothold in the air, Lu Bu was sent flying back a considerable distance. But Guan Yu, his body now glowing even brighter, followed up with another strike, more powerful than the last, sending Lu Bu retreating another dozen meters. Before Lu Bu could fully stabilize himself, the Green Dragon Crescent Blade had already sliced through the sky, arriving at Lu Bu's chest. The sharp blade almost pierced through the golden aura surrounding Lu Bu.

"Is that all?" Lu Bu gazed calmly at the Green Dragon Crescent Blade, still some distance from him. In this world, there was no warrior he feared. At some point, Red Hare had appeared beneath him once again.

"Boom!" Dust filled the air as Lu Bu took the full force of Guan Yu's most powerful strike. Yet this time, he did not retreat a single step, while Guan Yu was forced back several paces.

Red Hare snorted disdainfully, its eyes flashing with a human-like expression of contempt as it glanced at Zhaohuang Feidian. The reputation of "Man among men, horse among horses" wasn't just for show—it had been earned through countless battles!

"Lu Bu, prepare to face my blade!" Xu Chu, having intercepted the Serpent Spear, witnessed Guan Yu's strongest strike fail to push back Lu Bu. Without hesitation, he charged in, fully convinced that Lu Bu was no ordinary man, but a true monster.

"Another Inner Qi departure!" Lu Bu sneered. "Today, I'll take all your heads!"

He swung his halberd at Xu Chu, having already noticed that speed was Xu Chu's weakness.

"Hmph! Face your death, Lu Bu!" Xu Chu roared, his body swelling as he grew even taller. The halberd, originally aimed at his neck, now slashed toward his chest. Unlike other warriors who possessed Inner Qi, Xu Chu's most terrifying trait was his fearlessness in trading blows. His thick layer of fat had been specially trained to absorb enemy attacks with little to no damage!

Even as Lu Bu's halberd slashed toward Xu Chu's chest, he didn't pull back. But in the next moment, to the shock of everyone watching, Xu Chu's fat seemed to compress inward, causing the halberd to slip past without hitting its mark. Meanwhile, Xu Chu's giant blade, filled with immense power, swung toward Lu Bu.