

Mythical 61

Chapter 61: First Battle in Taishan

...

"Report!" A lean, slightly sallow man walked in from outside, saluted Liu Bei and Chen Xi, and interrupted Chen Xi's attempt to instill some new ideas in Liu Bei.

"Wen Ze, has the grain shipment been delivered to the storehouse?" Liu Bei asked seriously when he saw Yu Jin coming in.

"All eighty thousand bushels of grain have been delivered to the storehouse. However, the Zhen family wishes to express their gratitude to you, Xuande Gong, for your assistance," Yu Jin replied solemnly, without a hint of pride despite having led the new army to defeat the Taishan bandits.

Liu Bei glanced at Chen Xi, who nodded slightly, indicating his intentions.

"Very well, I will meet with the Zhen family, who are renowned as one of the Five Great Merchants of Ji Province," Liu Bei said with a smile. "Wen Ze, stay here. Zi Chuan likely has some instructions for you." With that, he left, understanding from Chen Xi's expression that the Zhen family intended to place their bet on him. While the noble families remained elusive, wealthy merchants were still willing to invest in his cause.

Chen Xi looked at Yu Jin. Although he had personally promoted this man from among his subordinates, he had only met him once or twice. He had given Yu Jin a conscription order and an appointment letter, sending him off with Liu Bei to train the new army. This rescue mission was a test, and it was clear Yu Jin had performed admirably, living up to his reputation as one of the Five Elite Generals.

"Wen Ze, have a seat. I want to know if the new army is ready for battle. Of course, I don't mean against regular troops, just the Taishan bandits. If there are any rebellions among them..." Chen Xi said with a cold smile, making a gesture of no mercy. He had grown accustomed to his role and understood that in chaotic times, severe measures were necessary.

"If it's just against the ordinary Taishan bandits, there won't be any problem. However, Taishan has four major bandit leaders known as the Four Bandit Chiefs of Taishan. Their forces are managed like a regular army, with formations and bravery that rival standard troops. Right now, we can only hope not to lose against them, but winning would be difficult," Yu Jin replied, truthfully assessing the bandits' combat capabilities without any bravado.

"Don't worry about Chang Xi, Sun Guan, Wu Dun, and Yi Li. Their forces will be dealt with by others. I want you to gather the scattered bandits. After defeating these chiefs, I don't want their followers to scatter and cause trouble. As for Zang Ba, I believe he has already been defeated," Chen Xi said with a smile.

Just as Chen Xi spoke, Zang Ba had been knocked off his horse by Zhang Fei's snake spear, likely breaking half his ribs. Zang Ba's elite guards, said to be on par with the Dan Yang soldiers, were utterly crushed by Hua Xiong and his psychologically scarred troops. With Zhang Fei occasionally assisting, they managed to divide and conquer Zang Ba's forces, leading to Zang Ba's defeat.

It's worth noting that Zang Ba's command was not weak. Despite Hua Xiong and Zhang Fei leading five thousand bandits in an attack on his camp, Zang Ba quickly regained control and countered. However, the clash became a test of bravery and tactical skill, with formations colliding as Hua Xiong linked his troops' energies seamlessly, continuously squeezing Zang Ba's forces.

Hua Xiong's tactical abilities were rather basic, primarily relying on the wedge formation. But his proficiency allowed for rapid changes in formation, even while on the move, which was why he became the commander of Xiliang's cavalry—his ability to change formations quickly left no room for counteraction.

Realizing this, Hua Xiong didn't hesitate. His troops, despite being few, could change formations as needed, even if it meant running into blades. This unwavering obedience enabled Hua Xiong to slice through Zang Ba's forces, costing him two-tenths of his soldiers but resulting in a decisive split of the enemy.

Zhang Fei watched in awe, feeling a chill. He looked at Hua Xiong with reverence, realizing the gravity of their situation. Losing one-tenth of troops without collapse indicated elite status, but Hua Xiong had lost two-tenths without any sign of retreat. This was beyond the capability of ordinary generals.

Zhang Fei didn't know that Hua Xiong's troops had been psychologically broken by their training, fearing Hua Xiong more than death itself. Their unwavering obedience made them seem like elite troops, continuing their slaughter simply because Hua Xiong hadn't ordered them to stop.

Feeling a chill, Zang Ba was already bewildered. He knew some Taishan bandits were former Dan Yang soldiers, their combat power close to the original elite Dan Yang troops. Yet, here they were, being decisively defeated by a much smaller force led by a giant warrior.

Zang Ba's forces had faced defeat before, once by the combined forces of the Four Bandit Chiefs and another time by the Xu Province troops. But never had they been so thoroughly crushed, with no room to maneuver. From the moment the enemy changed formation, Zang Ba's defeat was inevitable, accelerating like a landslide.

Zang Ba wondered what he had done to provoke such a powerful response. Why would anyone send such elite mountain troops to destroy him? Though he had declared himself king of the mountain, his wrongdoings were far less than the Yellow Turbans. This elite force should have been used against them, not him. His forces were nearing collapse after losing one-tenth of their soldiers, while the enemy remained calm, still engaging in slaughter.

Realizing the situation was hopeless, Zang Ba decided to retreat, aiming to break through the weakest part of the encirclement with about a thousand soldiers. He hoped to regroup and escape with his remaining forces.

The breakthrough seemed easy, almost as if the enemy intended it. This realization chilled Zang Ba's heart, but he had no choice but to push through. Facing only one man, a brute with a snake spear, Zang Ba's mind flashed with recognition. Before he could fully recall, the spear struck down on him.