

Mythical 701

Chapter 701: If You Can't Guess, Then Don't Guess

On the other side, Xu You, riding his horse, looked at the moon that was about to reach its zenith. "It's already Hai hour. Our reinforcements should have begun their actions by now. It's wonderful, isn't it? Such a tranquil night; only slaughter can open the curtain of this stage. Speaking of which, the drama in Mount Tai is indeed a form of beauty."

"Strategist, is it really effective to launch a night raid at this time?" Wen Chou asked with a bitter smile. He could see things a mile away, so any surprise effect from a night raid seemed pointless.

"Night raid?" Xu You raised his head to gaze at the bright moon, gently stroking his horse's back with his left hand. "When did I ever say we were going to conduct a night raid? A clever strategy only needs to be unexpected, and this bright moon is the best element of surprise."

Yan Liang was visibly stunned, completely unable to understand what Xu You was talking about. What did this have to do with anything?

"The Hai hour has arrived. The Lu brothers should have already launched their attack on Chiping. They will likely fulfill my requirements by Zi hour. Let's get ready as well." Xu You looked back at Wen Chou with calm confidence written all over his face.

"Alright," Wen Chou nodded. Xu You's confidence was contagious; if the opponent still had the courage to proceed, why should he be afraid?

【They already know I'm here. Chen Zichuan is indeed formidable. Though I don't understand how he figured it out, what does it matter? This full moon of the fifteenth day is my greatest advantage. How could a general not understand the timing?】 Xu You silently mused.

Xu You stroked the mane of his horse, calming himself down. After eliminating three waves of scouts, Xu You realized that his originally flawless plan had somehow been seen through. But he wasn't worried; the core of his strategy did not hinge on that aspect.

After the moon reached its zenith, Chen Xi also started to feel weary. He had been waiting for Xu You's army to strike. Although he knew that under such moonlight, any night raid would be a joke, he still felt a bit uneasy. After all, Xu Ziyuan had planned for so long, only to fail due to the timing. Wasn't that a joke in itself?

"It seems the enemy won't be coming," Chen Xi sighed, gazing at the high moon. He had prepared extensively, but the timing had ruined everything.

Chen Xi quickly ceased talking and began to focus his mental energy to manipulate the weather, solidifying the region's clear skies. Since it was a clear day, let it stay that way. Such cloudless weather was a blessing too.

"Xingba, send more men to guard the camp gates, increase patrols, and set up more hidden posts. In any case, don't give Xu You any opportunity to exploit!" Chen Xi sighed as he gave the order. After watching for so long without any sign of the enemy, he was feeling exhausted.

"Strategist, you should go rest. With me, Gan Xingba, here, I won't give the enemy any chances," Gan Ning replied with a cupped fist.

"Good, I'll leave it to you then. I'll go rest now," Chen Xi, feeling indeed tired, patted Gan Ning on the shoulder and headed back to the central tent to sleep, yawning.

"Gan Luo, assign men to protect the central tent. I have a bad feeling about tonight," Gan Ning ordered his personal guards after Chen Xi left.

"Yes!" Gan Luo responded promptly.

When Chen Xi returned to his tent, he could still hear the voices of Fa Zheng and Zhuge Liang playing chess and chatting in Zhuge's nearby tent.

"Aren't you two going to rest?" Chen Xi asked with a yawn as he opened the door flap.

"Can't sleep," Fa Zheng replied with a sullen face. "Zichuan, aren't you the least bit nervous? I'm very worried."

"You two carry on; I'm going to sleep. If something happens, wake me up," Chen Xi said as he yawned, wobbling back to his tent to rest.

"Zichuan, wake up..." Chen Xi had barely touched his pillow when he was startled awake by Zhuge Liang's urgent voice.

With a sudden motion, Chen Xi sat up straight. "Xu You has come?"

"No, he didn't come here. He's attacking the new city of Linyi!" Zhuge Liang quickly responded.

"What?" Chen Xi was stunned. "Are they looking to die? Do they think they are ten times more ferocious than our army to attack a city at night?"

"Zichuan, the moonlight is bright tonight. Everything is clearly visible. The issue of visibility during a night battle is nonexistent. Moreover, a report from General Xu's Tiger Guard indicates that they were caught off guard by the night attack and nearly lost a section of the wall due to a lapse in vigilance," Zhuge Liang hastily explained the situation.

"What! They really went to attack the city?" Chen Xi exclaimed in disbelief. "How is that possible? With us stationed here, they still dare to attack the city? Are they not afraid of being pincered and annihilated?"

"But the enemy took advantage of the absence of our generals on the city walls and almost stormed in with a single push!" Zhuge Liang was equally incredulous.

"Bring me the Tiger Guard who delivered the message," Chen Xi ordered Zhuge Liang, suspecting that the guard might be a spy sent by Xu You.

When Zhuge Liang brought the Tiger Guard, Chen Xi recognized the man immediately. He was a familiar face, a younger cousin of Xu Chu and one of the brawny men who had traveled with Xu Chu in the past.

"Xu Liang, so it was you who came," Chen Xi said, confirming the truth of the previous report.

"Prefect Wang had my cousin send me over," Xu Liang replied with a naive expression, scratching the back of his head.

After confirming that there was no problem with the situation, Chen Xi became increasingly puzzled about Xu You's intentions. If they could capture the new city of Linyi in one fell swoop, all of Chen Xi's previous efforts would be in vain. But was it worth taking such a huge risk?

"Xiaozhi, what are you thinking?" Chen Xi asked Fa Zheng, though he was still skeptical about the situation. However, it was hard to resist taking advantage of such a good opportunity.

"I'm wondering if this army is truly under Xu You's command," Fa Zheng replied, frowning. "If this force belongs to Xu You, what is his goal? To lure us into an attack? Could it be that tens of thousands of troops from Yanzhou have crossed over?"

"If this force isn't Xu You's, and if it is indeed meant to lure us into an attack, is Xu You's goal to annihilate us?" Zhuge Liang asked incredulously, as Fa Zheng's questions left him equally baffled.

It wasn't that Zhuge Liang underestimated Xu You, but Chen Xi's forces were significant. Even if the enemy had several thousand cavalry, they couldn't annihilate Chen Xi's forces. Moreover, Chen Xi had prepared a large number of strong crossbows to counter the cavalry's advantage. Zhuge Liang didn't believe Xu You could overlook this.

"Impossible. My forces' composition isn't something that a few thousand cavalry could break. Unless they have over ten thousand cavalry, but if they had that many, there would be no need for subterfuge. They could simply present themselves openly," Chen Xi shook his head. "Send orders to the left and right camps to prepare for battle."

"Are you planning to simultaneously attack them from both sides?" Zhuge Liang frowned. "But what if Xiaozhi's concerns are correct?"

"We'll deploy our reserve forces and go all out for victory! After all, our objective is to hold Linyi, not to capture territory. If both sides are worn out, it will be more advantageous for us. Besides, the battle might not be as exhausting as we think," Chen Xi stated firmly. "I want to see what Xu You intends to do, and what he is capable of!"

Chapter 702: So This Is Your Plan

After making up his mind, Chen Xi had nothing more to say. He left Chen Huan, Gan Luo, and others to firmly guard the camp as a second line of defense, and ordered Gan Ning to lead the forces in a coordinated attack to annihilate Yuan Shao's troops, who were attacking the new city of Linyi.

"Get out of my way!" Xu Chu kicked Lu Xiang off the city wall, then turned and slashed through Lu Kuang and Lu Xiang's broadswords, forcing the two to jump off the wall to avoid his strike.

"Damned luck!" Lu Kuang pulled his cousin aside, just in time to see an arrow shot by Xu Chu embed itself deep into the ground.

"I told you we were only feigning an attack, and yet you went to fight that monster head-on. Do you have a death wish?" Lu Xiang and Lu Kuang each grabbed one of Lu Xiang's arms and dodged another thrust from Xu Chu's spear, dragging him back to the front lines.

"Luckily, Xu Chu is strong and powerful, but he's not skilled with a bow. Otherwise, with his strength, even without inner energy, he could pin you to the ground with a ten-stone bow," Lu Xiang scolded as they ran.

"How was I supposed to know he was such a freak!" Lu Xiang spat out blood as he spoke. Even though the suppressive energy had lessened the impact, the fact that he was still able to talk so vigorously after being kicked by Xu Chu showed just how tough he was.

"I told you that monster has inner energy that leaves the body, but you still went after him." Lu Xiang was furious. If it weren't for the fact that Lu Xiang was his cousin and the only surviving male in his family, he would have let him be killed.

"Wasn't the suppressive energy supposed to prevent the use of that kind of inner energy?" Lu Xiang laughed while spitting blood. "My greatest aspiration in life is to defeat an expert with inner energy that leaves the body."

Lu Kuang and his brother fell silent. Their cousin had much greater talent in martial arts than they did, but a setback had prevented him from reaching the level of inner energy that leaves the body, even after overcoming the fear of death.

"Don't throw your life away. Even the weakest among those with inner energy that leaves the body is beyond your capabilities," Lu Kuang said, slapping Lu Xiang on the back. "Next time, if you go into battle, bring your personal guards. You're a general, not a wandering warrior!"

"But what are we really here to do?" Lu Xiang muttered, clearly not taking his cousin's words seriously. If given another chance, he would still challenge someone with inner energy, especially under the suppression of the energy field.

"Why we're here? I don't know. We'll find out when we meet with Strategist Xu. We just need to follow his orders," Lu Kuang replied indifferently.

"But you, make sure you're prepared for an attack from the rear," Lu Xiang pointed to the back lines, clearly dissatisfied.

"Fine, we're just here to be bait, aren't we?" Lu Xiang grumbled, hefting his broadsword and riding off to the rear camp.

"That was close..." Lu Kuang looked at Xu Chu on the city wall, swinging his broadsword with such force that no ordinary soldier could get near him. Even with the suppression of inner energy, the three of them together couldn't defeat him.

"But with Xiang's reckless charge, everyone now probably thinks that our goal was to take the city," Lu Xiang said with a fearful expression. His cousin had charged up the city wall in a single breath, startling not only Wang Xiu's men but also Lu Kuang's own forces.

"We can't let him do that again. He's the only male heir left in our family," Lu Kuang said, turning to give his brother a stern warning.

"Report, Commander! Scouts report that Yuan Shao's forces have been spotted ten miles away," Gan Ning reported to Chen Xi from horseback.

"Raise our banners and prepare for the attack. Xingba, you know what to do, right?" Chen Xi asked, staring at Gan Ning.

"No problem," Gan Ning replied with a wild grin. He dropped all pretense, unleashing his aura, and led his troops in a charge toward the enemy. The overwhelming momentum he unleashed was a clear signal to both Xu Chu that reinforcements had arrived and to Lu Kuang and his men that the enemy was here.

"Charge!" Gan Ning shouted as he led his infantry in a direct assault on Yuan Shao's rear forces. The two armies collided with a resounding crash.

"They've finally come!" Lu Xiang and Lu Kuang exchanged glances and roared in unison. The cavalry on both flanks charged with all their might, unleashing volleys of crossbow bolts, while the infantry under Lu Xiang's command clashed fiercely with Liu Bei's forces.

"Annihilate them!" Gan Ning laughed maniacally as a watery blue aura swept over his soldiers, instantly boosting their courage, morale, and defenses.

"Die!" Gan Ning roared as he charged into Yuan Shao's troops, cutting through the enemy lines with his broadsword and iron chain, tearing a path toward the enemy's command banner. His personal guards followed, aiming straight for the enemy's leadership.

"Gan Xingba, you finally made it," Xu Chu bellowed, leaping down from the city wall. The gates of Linyi's new city swung open, and hundreds of cavalry, led by Zhang Yan, charged out, with Xu Chu standing at the gate like a god of war, protecting the entrance.

"Hold the line!" Lu Kuang and Lu Xiang shouted, rallying their forces to encircle and suppress Gan Ning's charge, but their maneuver left the center wide open.

Zhang Yan led his cavalry in a direct assault on Lu Xiang's central forces. In an instant, the previously arced formation crumpled like dough.

Seeing the center in jeopardy, Lu Xiang immediately led his personal guards to plug the gap. When the two elite units clashed, the outcome was clear. Even under Zhang Yan's command, Xu Chu's Tiger Guards tore through the enemy like tigers down a mountain, while Lu Xiang's personal guards, though fighting desperately, could not withstand their ferocity.

"Strategist, if you don't come soon, we won't be able to break through!" Lu Kuang cursed as he tried to maintain control. Although he was a decent general, he was far from a great one. If it weren't for their numerical superiority and his two brothers fighting in the front lines, his army might have already crumbled.

The chaotic sound of galloping hooves mixed with the rumble of thunder as thousands of cavalry charged toward Linyi's new city, like a dark cloud pressing down on the battlefield. The thunderous roar of hooves and the oppressive atmosphere weighed heavily on the hearts of both warring armies.

"So this is Xu You's plan?" Chen Xi wondered, watching the advancing army. Though the sight of thousands of dual-horse cavalry charging was indeed terrifying, if this was the extent of Xu You's plan, it was nothing more than a fierce but evenly matched battle.

"Reinforcements have arrived! Charge!" Lu Kuang shouted, all his previous worries gone. He led his personal guards in a charge toward Xu Chu. "Break through the defenses of Linyi's new city and take it!"

"Charge!" Yuan Shao's forces, seeing the bright "Wen" character on their banner, surged with renewed morale and launched an attack on Liu Bei's troops. Unfortunately for them, Chen Xi had anticipated this. Their assault could at most slow down Liu Bei's forces, but it could never push them back.

Chapter 703: Fighting Bloodily

"Heh, they really have the guts to come!" Gan Ning laughed wildly. He immediately pulled out a massive arrow from under his horse's belly, then drew his ten-stone strong bow and fired a signal arrow into the sky, which exploded into a burst of flames.

【This ten-stone strong bow is really not meant for ordinary people without the use of inner energy.】
After shooting the arrow, Gan Ning was clearly out of breath.

There aren't many who can still fight effectively without inner energy, even among those whose inner energy has left their bodies. Not everyone is like Xu Chu, Dian Wei, or Wu Anguo, who can wield weapons weighing hundreds of pounds as if they were toys. This is what true natural strength means.

When both sides have inner energy, a difference of a thousand or eight hundred pounds of strength isn't much. But without inner energy, that difference is enough to kill someone.

For example, when both have inner energy, Gan Ning might need hundreds of moves to determine the winner against Xu Chu. But with the military formation restricting inner energy, Xu Chu could potentially defeat him in just over a hundred moves.

"Heh, were they prepared for this?" Xu You observed the signal arrow, now a burst of flame, with a calm expression.

"Strategist, is it really okay to charge in like this?" Wen Chou asked as he led his troops in a charge, recalling a moment of hesitation.

"It's fine. Charging in will achieve our strategy; the rest doesn't matter." At that moment, Xu You was extremely calm, as if nothing could shake him. His goal was to achieve the strategic objective, regardless of how many would die because of his plan. It simply didn't matter.

"Alright!" Wen Chou glanced back at Xu You and then, without any more doubt, roared as he led the charge.

This was the first time Chen Xi had seen cavalry launching a desperate charge without any prior probing. There was no hesitation; it was as if they had been prepared from the moment they appeared. Shouting madly, they ignored all the crossbows and arrows and charged straight into the heart of Chen Xi's forces.

There were no long-range volleys, no flanking maneuvers, no probing for weak points. All that remained was a world-shaking collision as Wen Chou's cavalry, with him at the forefront, crashed directly into Chen Xi's center.

In that moment, men and horses were sent flying, and blood and flesh splattered everywhere. Yuan Shao's army and Liu Bei's army launched an all-out assault under the walls of Linyi's new city without

any probing or hesitation. At that moment, all combat experience was rendered useless. What remained was a clash of iron will and determination.

Shields were shattered, horse necks were twisted, spears were broken, and riders were thrown. From the very start of the battle, Wen Chou fulfilled his vow, fighting to the death without retreat, leading soldiers united by bonds of loyalty and righteousness. In that moment, they fulfilled their oath to the heavens with a frenzied and bloody fight.

"How dare you!" Gan Ning roared, abandoning his original opponent and charging directly towards the cavalry that was about to cut his army in two. His soldiers followed him, shouting battle cries as they moved to block Wen Chou.

The veteran soldiers of Mount Tai, seeing Wen Chou's charge, instinctively nocked their arrows and fired three volleys. Shields were raised at the front, but the next moment, instead of facing a rain of arrows, they were met with the thunderous roar of charging hooves.

"Boom!" A dull impact rang out as the front-line shield-bearers were sent flying, taking down the archers behind them. Then, countless cavalry charged over them, turning everything under their hooves into bloody pulp.

Crossbows and arrows, the most effective weapons against cavalry, were rendered useless in that instant.

"Kill!" It was unclear which soldier first shouted the battle cry, but the Mount Tai soldiers, who had been intimidated by the overwhelming momentum of the cavalry, threw themselves at Wen Chou's cavalry with a desperate resolve.

At that moment, both sides abandoned all defense, attacking each other with their very lives. Human blood and horse blood soaked the entire battlefield.

Gan Ning, leading his personal guards, charged madly at Wen Chou. That brief span of time, no longer than a single incense stick's burn, felt like an eternity to Gan Ning. All he could remember was swinging his broadsword and iron chain wildly, killing every enemy in front of him, charging with reckless abandon. He didn't know if he had successfully blocked the enemy.

Emerging from the mass of enemy troops, the dark shadows and bloody slaughter gave way to the serene glow of the moon.

"Whoa," Gan Ning reined in his horse. Only a handful of his personal guards and soldiers remained, barely a dozen. The rest lay in the river of blood carved out by the thousands of cavalry.

As Gan Ning turned his horse, he finally felt the excruciating pain throughout his body. His armor was in tatters, and there were dozens of deep wounds, some to the bone. If not for his mastery of inner energy, he would surely have died.

Wen Chou also turned his horse around, his armor equally in shreds, with several deep wounds visible. However, he had come prepared, and with Chen Xi's forces lacking significant cavalry, the injuries he sustained weren't life-threatening. But this charge had made him realize something very clearly: in war, he could also die.

From Wen Chou's charge to the breach of Chen Xi's forces, only the time it takes for an incense stick to burn had passed. In that brief span, the casualties on both sides were almost equal, but in terms of morale, this was probably the first time Chen Xi had felt a sense of inevitable defeat.

"Kill!" Wen Chou gazed coldly at Gan Ning and the dozen or so remaining soldiers on the other side of the blood river. He had no fear of the now-divided Liu Bei forces. Killing all the small fry present was less exciting to him than killing Gan Ning to avenge his disgrace.

"No!" Chen Xi's vision darkened. Although he was dazed, his mind was clearer than ever. Wen Chou's roar made him realize that there could be no further hesitation.

"Beat the drums! Full attack! Stop Wen Chou at all costs!" Chen Xi immediately unfurled his command banner and stood beneath it, drawing his sword and using his seal to rally the troops.

At this moment, Chen Xi could no longer worry about whether the enemy would charge up and kill him. He knew only one thing: if he didn't stand out now, the morale of his troops would collapse, and this battle would be completely lost!

"Charge!" Chen Xi used everything at his disposal, directly resonating with his spiritual will. This time, what resonated was his desire to survive and the peace of Mount Tai. For the first time, Chen Xi's army exhibited its true potential.

At this moment, the generals in Linyi's new city also reacted. Even if it meant abandoning the city, they couldn't allow anything to happen to Chen Xi. They immediately gave up the defense of Linyi and ordered all their troops to rush out of the city.

"We must block them!" Chen Xi roared as he charged forward.

Under Chen Xi's leadership, the Mount Tai soldiers clashed once more with Wen Chou's cavalry. The cavalry remained as fierce as before, and even with the added strength from Chen Xi's abilities, their relentless attacks continued to break through the formations.

Countless cavalry fell, countless brave soldiers died, but Wen Chou's cavalry gradually began to slow down...

Chapter 704: Defeat Chen Xi by the Jishui River?

"Fight to the death, never retreat!" Chen Xi's soldiers, even after being pierced by spears, gripped the spears tightly and hacked at the enemy horses' legs with all their strength.

Some soldiers, determined to the point of being trampled into the ground, rolled under the horses' bellies, sacrificing their lives to cut off the horses' legs and stop the cavalry charge.

Slowly, the speed of the cavalry began to decrease, but so did the number of Chen Xi's soldiers. Some cavalry even made it to within ten steps of Chen Xi, only to be unseated before they could get any closer.

"Get out of my way!" Xu Chu roared as he cleaved through several of Yuan Shao's officers, carving a path through the army of the Lu brothers, who were fighting desperately to block his way.

"Ugh!" Xu Chu was struck in the shoulder by an arrow, but without even glancing at it, he gutted the opposing officer with one swing, decapitated another on his flank with the next, and then, with all his might, picked up a broken spear and hurled it forward, skewering three enemies in a row.

Such ferocity quickly cleared a path for Xu Chu, with no one daring to stand in his way. However, the soldiers under the Lu brothers' command had successfully joined forces with Wen Chou's troops and were now fiercely encircling the few remaining soldiers under Chen Xi's command.

By this time, Chen Xi had managed to stabilize the defensive line, and Wen Chou ceased his suicidal charges, intending instead to annihilate the surrounded Chen Xi with his superior forces. The "Chen" character on the command banner was too conspicuous, and even Xu You hadn't expected Chen Xi to personally lead his troops.

"Strategist, retreat quickly!" Xu Chu roared towards Chen Xi after breaking through the encirclement. He had lost many of his men to carve out this passage.

"No need," Chen Xi said coldly, his eyes fixed on the direction behind Wen Chou. "Reinforcements have arrived!"

Zhuge Liang and Fa Zheng, upon receiving reports from the scouts after the signal arrow was fired, immediately followed Chen Xi's orders and led all the reserve soldiers out in full force. However, due to the distance, it still took some time for them to arrive.

"What a pity," Xu You said, frowning as he observed the reinforcements approaching from the rear. Although the intended effect had been achieved, he was still reluctant to let Chen Xi escape so easily.

"It seems they were prepared, but they didn't expect me to trade cavalry for infantry," Xu You remarked, glancing back at Liu Bei's army, which had originally dispersed for quicker marching but had now reformed into a solid formation. The adjustments in their formation were clearly designed to counter cavalry.

"Wen Chou, try to shoot him!" Xu You's eyes flashed with a cold gleam as he gave the order to Wen Chou.

"It won't work. I tried before. His spiritual power must be immense; all arrows veer off course when they come within ten meters of him. Moreover, any soldier who gets too close inexplicably collapses," Wen Chou replied, shaking his head. "It's impossible to kill him."

"What about the command banner? In this situation, at best, we've only slightly outmaneuvered him," Xu You inquired. The failure to kill Chen Xi was a significant regret, and if all they could achieve was a minor victory, Xu You would be far from satisfied.

"No luck. Every arrow aimed at the banner has been deflected. There must be another expert by his side," Wen Chou said gravely.

"If we continue fighting, we won't win. They were prepared. Although my original strategic objective wasn't focused here, retreating like this leaves a bitter taste," Xu You sighed.

"Then let's keep fighting. We might still have a chance to wipe them out," Wen Chou said, completely ignoring the gaping wounds on his body, his eyes bloodshot with rage.

"The chances are too slim," Xu You replied, shaking his head. He glanced up at the moon, which had shifted to the west, and then at the still-bleeding wounds on Wen Chou. Sighing deeply, he continued, "Since the strategy has been accomplished, there's no need to waste more soldiers. Pull back and create some distance. I'll meet with Chen Zichuan and see how he talks now, which will make it easier to deal with him in the future."

Reluctant though he was, Wen Chou obeyed the order. He and Lu Kuang immediately sounded the retreat, quickly distancing themselves from Liu Bei's forces. Similarly, Chen Xi ordered his remaining soldiers to retreat and form a defensive formation rather than pursue the enemy.

Soon, Zhuge Liang and Zhang Yan's forces joined up with Chen Xi's remaining troops, shielding the central group. Both sides stood ready, with spears and swords pointed at each other, the atmosphere tense and oppressive.

"Zichuan, are you alright?" Zhuge Liang and Fa Zheng immediately understood that things hadn't gone well upon surveying the battlefield.

"I'm fine," Chen Xi replied, his eyes cold as he glanced at them before turning to stare at Xu You on the opposite side.

"Marquis Chen, would you dare to come out from under your command banner?" Xu You called out, observing the semicircular formation of Liu Bei's troops with a heavy heart, though his expression remained calm.

"Xu Ziyuan, the officer of Jizhou?" Chen Xi urged his horse forward, stepping out of the formation. For the first time, there were bloodstains on his white robes, which glowed eerily under the moonlight.

"Strategist," Xu Chu said nervously, but he saw Chen Xi wave him off with a slight gesture. Although Xu Chu was uneasy, he did not follow as he usually would.

"A nobody like me is honored to receive such attention from Marquis Chen," Xu You said, cupping his hands towards Chen Xi in a gesture of respect. His tone was calm and his manner refined, but Chen Xi could clearly sense the underlying mockery.

"So you are Xu Ziyuan?" Chen Xi frowned, showing no signs of anger at Xu You's taunting. The victor has the right to mock the defeated, and at this moment, it seemed that this was indeed the case.

"Who else would I be if not Xu You? Did Marquis Chen expect someone else?" Xu You's refined silk robe fluttered gracefully in the night breeze, giving him an almost otherworldly presence.

"Now you seem to match the description," Chen Xi replied, nodding slightly. The wind and sand obscured his expression, making it hard for Xu You to read.

Chen Xi was surprised to find that Xu You was entirely different from the intelligence reports. The reports described him as greedy and unprincipled, but in reality, he exuded an aura of ethereal grace and command, a far cry from the image of a corrupt official.

"Hahaha, people often say that Chen Zichuan plans for the worst, but did you ever consider that the Jishui River crossing would be cut off by me, Chiping would be taken by me, and Feicheng's granary would be set ablaze?" Xu You laughed, making no effort to hide his actions.

"Oh? And what are you trying to say? That you defeated Chen Zichuan at Linyi?" Chen Xi asked calmly.

"Do you really want to fight another battle here, sacrificing your soldiers' lives just to save face? Even now, your forces are still outnumbered by mine, and your cavalry is even fewer," Xu You sneered, his voice loud enough for all the soldiers on both sides to hear.

Chapter 705: A Night of Murder Under the Black Moon and High Winds

"What surprises me is the ruthlessness of your actions and the decisiveness in trading cavalry for infantry. It truly shocked me, but as long as I am here, I will not lose!" Chen Xi's eyes were cold as he quickly adjusted his spiritual energy. The once-bright moonlight was gradually obscured by clouds, plunging the night into darkness, leaving Yuan Shao's army unable to see five steps ahead.

"Kill Xu You for me!" Chen Xi commanded furiously in the darkness.

For the first time, Chen Xi had suffered such a significant loss. If not for the desperate efforts of his soldiers, Xu You's strategy of trading cavalry for infantry could have destroyed his entire army in a short time. If not for the second desperate struggle, Chen Xi would have been completely overwhelmed the moment his battle formation was shattered, even if he had blocked out all the moonlight.

However, even if Chen Xi had blocked the moonlight in that situation, it wouldn't have stopped Wen Chou's cavalry charge. In the end, strategies are only effective when backed by strength. A single plan might stop a hundred thousand troops, but it could also crash into an unyielding wall of iron.

Chen Xi knew that his strategy was correct, but when Wen Chou's iron cavalry broke through the formation, he realized that no amount of strategy could avoid a final deadly blow. If that step couldn't be achieved, all strategies were nothing but jokes.

When Zhuge Liang's army arrived, Chen Xi knew the battle should have ended. However, at that moment, it was clear that Xu You had the upper hand. With Wen Chou's cavalry breaking through the center, Zhuge Liang's forces, originally meant to encircle, came up behind Chen Xi, failing to block Xu You's retreat.

What frustrated Chen Xi even more was that as soon as Zhuge Liang arrived, Xu You, despite having the upper hand, immediately sounded the retreat, regrouped his forces, and joined up with Lu Kuang's army, waiting for Chen Xi and Zhuge Liang to combine their forces.

This made Chen Xi understand what Guo Jia had meant when he said Xu You was incredibly decisive. It was clear that Chen Xi's reinforcements had arrived, and the bravery of the Taishan soldiers surpassed that of Yuan Shao's troops. With Yuan Shao's numerical advantage, continuing the fight would only lead to a stalemate. Thus, Xu You chose to retreat, claiming a small victory.

Had Xu You retreated earlier, no matter what tactics Chen Xi employed, he would have been limited. At that point, even if Xu You's army had fallen into chaos during the retreat, they wouldn't have been surrounded and blocked by Chen Xi's forces, with losses amounting to no more than thirty percent, and certainly not the subsequent rout.

Unfortunately, Xu You was fixated on striking a blow against Chen Xi. As a result, even though the armies of Wen Chou and Lu Kuang had distanced themselves by a hundred steps from Chen Xi's forces, they hadn't retreated entirely, and this was Chen Xi's opportunity.

The moment the clouds covered the moon, the bright moonlight was swallowed by darkness, making the night even more silent. However, in the next moment, a fierce battle erupted.

"Archers, nock your arrows! Cavalry, charge! Block Yuan Shao's forces! Shield bearers, get to the front!" Chen Xi shouted, ordering his troops. Compared to Yuan Shao's soldiers, who were virtually blind in the night, Chen Xi had long studied how to prevent night blindness among his troops.

Well, preventing night blindness among all civilians was something Chen Xi could only try to achieve, but preventing night blindness among soldiers was a must. Fish soup, liver, and any other methods that could prevent night blindness had all been tried by Chen Xi. By now, there were no soldiers in Liu Bei's army who turned blind at night.

Xu You was stunned, but before he could mock Chen Xi, he saw that Liu Bei's soldiers had accurately followed Chen Xi's orders, with none of the chaos he had anticipated.

"This is bad!" Xu You was shocked. Without any hesitation, he immediately turned his horse around and shouted to Wen Chou, "Order the troops to retreat!"

As night fell, the brave soldiers under Wen Chou and Lu Kuang suddenly found their vision shrinking. By the time darkness fully enveloped them, they couldn't even see the comrades next to them.

"Retreat!" Wen Chou shouted. In this situation, the advantage in numbers meant nothing; even ten thousand men would lose to a thousand in the dark if they were effectively blind.

Wen Chou's desperate cry instantly threw Yuan Shao's army, already disoriented by the loss of vision, into chaos. A barrage of crossbow bolts rained down, and Yuan Shao's forces collapsed almost instantly. The once-dense formation turned into a death trap, with soldiers pushing, shoving, and trampling each other in a panic.

"Open up!" At this moment, Xu You abandoned all previous composure, frantically channeling his spiritual energy. He tore a huge gap in the clouds, letting the bright moonlight shine down once again. The chaotic Yuan Shao army suddenly halted.

"Quickly, retreat to Chiping and hold the crossing!" Xu You roared. The moment he tore open the clouds, he felt an overwhelming force pressing down on him.

"Trying to escape?" Chen Xi clasped his hands together, and the clouds that Xu You had torn apart merged back into one. Darkness returned, and Xu You saw the last sliver of moonlight fall upon Chen Xi before vanishing. At that moment, Chen Xi's smile was cold and full of mockery.

"Strategist, retreat!" Wen Chou shouted as he rushed back with Xu You. The army was already in chaos; although the brief moment of light had shown Yuan Shao's soldiers where to go, the subsequent return to darkness threw them back into disarray.

"Advance, capture Xu You alive!" Chen Xi shouted.

The soldiers under Chen Xi, who had been beaten back by Yuan Shao's forces earlier, now seized the opportunity to retaliate. Shouting "Capture Xu You alive!" they abandoned their formations and pursued Yuan Shao's troops. The chaotic battlefield had already determined the outcome.

"Wen Chou, order the troops to follow the moonlight!" Xu You almost spat blood upon hearing Liu Bei's soldiers' shouts from behind. He had just been mocking Chen Xi, only for the situation to reverse in an instant. The saying "you reap what you sow" was never more apt.

"Open up!" Xu You made a gesture, and the clouds in the sky suddenly dispersed, letting the moonlight shine down again. In the darkness, people become extremely sensitive to light, and Yuan Shao's soldiers all looked up toward the source of the light. They couldn't see their surroundings, but they could see the place where the light shone.

"All troops, follow the moonlight!" Wen Chou shouted, but the next moment, the moonlight was cut off again, and a more distant patch of clouds dissipated, letting another beam of moonlight shine through.

Chen Xi had a vast amount of spiritual energy, but Xu You wasn't directly competing with him. Xu You would clear a patch of clouds, and if Chen Xi tried to cover it up, Xu You would quickly find another weak spot in Chen Xi's spiritual energy and create another opening. He knew his soldiers only needed a guide, and that one beam of light was enough.

【This terrifying amount of spiritual energy...】 Blood trickled from the corner of Xu You's mouth. Even though his spiritual energy retreated quickly each time, the repeated clashes with Chen Xi's spiritual energy still took a toll on him.

"Hand over your monthly tickets and recommendation votes, by the way, isn't the new version of Point Daughter (Dian Niang) pretty terrible?"

Chapter 706: Defeat Leading to Victory

"Damn it, it seems I won't be able to annihilate them today," Chen Xi's expression darkened as he repaired another patch of cloud cover, only to see Xu You tear another hole in the clouds ahead. Even though Chen Xi's spiritual energy was thousands of times greater than Xu You's, the limitations of his own endurance prevented him from completely sealing off the sky.

"Kongming, it looks like your strategy won't be able to finish them off. I've already become the bait; whether we can wipe them out depends on today!" Chen Xi roared at Zhuge Liang, who stood beside him.

"I never asked you to be the bait, and I even suggested you stay with me! How did you end up getting pierced through?" Zhuge Liang retorted, his face darkening at Chen Xi's outburst.

Zhuge Liang hadn't expected the enemy to break his plan with such a simple tactic. Although he had mentioned that even without moonlight, their army could still see at night, while Yuan Shao's troops would be blind without it, he hadn't anticipated the simplicity of the method.

However, if things continued like this, even if they managed to wipe out over 20,000 enemy soldiers, they wouldn't achieve their goal. What's more, with the enemy following the moonlight, Wen Chou's elite cavalry would likely escape, making it impossible to achieve a total victory, only a mere rout at best.

"You idiot, can't you create a few gaps? Blocking them is less effective than confusing them. If they're following the light, open up several holes in the clouds and let their army fall into complete disarray. If we can't destroy them all, we should at least take out as many as possible," Fa Zheng quickly suggested. As he spoke, two small gaps appeared in the clouds.

"I'll handle it. You two order our troops to quickly subdue Yuan Shao's soldiers," Chen Xi said hastily. "And Kongming, order the rear guard's medics to treat the wounded soldiers. The rest, follow me in pursuit of Yuan Shao's forces."

The moonlight that filtered through the gaps in the clouds threw Yuan Shao's army into confusion. By this time, the army had completely lost its cohesion, having already collapsed into chaos. Following the beams of light, Yuan Shao's forces split into several scattered groups.

Unfortunately, the cavalry followed their instincts and charged in a single direction, not confused by the starlight shining through the gaps in the clouds. Nevertheless, the situation left Xu You trembling with rage.

"Retreat! Forget about them. If we don't leave now, we won't be able to leave at all!" Xu You gritted his teeth and ordered Wen Chou.

By now, Xu You was out of options. Behind them, Liu Bei's soldiers were already blocking groups of tens of Yuan Shao's soldiers with only three or five men. Some had even pulled cavalry off their horses and mounted them to pursue the fleeing cavalry. If this continued, the entire Yuan Shao army would be trapped here without exception.

Wen Chou gritted his teeth, no longer hesitating. His sharp eyes took in the situation—his soldiers were charging blindly like headless chickens, some driven mad by the darkness and the sound of battle, drawing their swords and slashing wildly at those around them, friend or foe.

This was the epitome of a complete military collapse. Xu You had calculated everything but hadn't considered that Liu Bei's soldiers could truly fight at night, while his own troops were rendered blind in the darkness.

This small difference led to Xu You's failure being so complete. What could have been a full retreat ended in a crushing defeat.

After a night of bloody battle, Liu Bei's army emerged victorious, capturing nearly ten thousand of Yuan Shao's soldiers and thousands of fine horses. Yuan Shao's forces had been reduced to a small contingent led by Wen Chou, who retreated to Chiping, relying on the city's defenses to repel Chen Xi's counterattack.

"Phew..." Chen Xi gazed at Wen Chou atop the walls of Chiping and felt a growing hatred for cavalry.

Most of Yuan Shao's soldiers who were killed last night died not in direct combat but due to the pitch-black darkness that caused panic and trampling. The cavalry, despite being blind, managed to escape, but many soldiers were trampled to death by their own horses.

"How many of our soldiers were lost?" Chen Xi, mounted on his horse, turned to ask the quartermaster who was tallying the casualties below the walls of Chiping.

"We lost over 3,600 men, most of whom died under the walls of Linyi's new city. Another 1,300 were wounded, but most of the injuries are minor," the quartermaster reported quickly to Chen Xi.

The danger before the counterattack was still fresh in Chen Xi's mind, and the loss of over 3,600 men weighed heavily on him, especially since most had died under the iron hooves of the enemy cavalry in the first wave. As for the counterattack, fatalities were rare, and most injuries were due to accidents.

“Ensure that the families of those who died in battle receive full compensation. Survivors of the first wave who fought bravely against Yuan Shao’s army should be promoted one rank, and the compensation for the fallen should be doubled,” Chen Xi said after a moment of silence.

“For those who fought alongside Xingba against Wen Chou’s cavalry, survivors should be promoted two ranks, and the compensation for the fallen should be doubled. Allow one of their children to take a civilian position of equal rank,” Chen Xi continued as the quartermaster noted down his orders.

“Many bones must bleach for a general’s success,” Chen Xi sighed as the quartermaster left, noticing Fa Zheng approaching on horseback.

“Yesterday was truly dangerous,” Fa Zheng remarked, glancing at Chen Xi before turning to look at the figures atop the city walls. “Xingba sustained dozens of wounds, some of which have reached his internal organs, and you nearly died under the hooves of those horses.”

“I wouldn’t have,” Chen Xi said quietly.

“That’s an impressive confidence. Despite the danger yesterday, I never saw you panic,” Fa Zheng said, still facing the city walls.

“...” Chen Xi murmured, but he didn’t respond. Was it really confidence? No, he didn’t trust that he wouldn’t fail, but rather that as he stood in the rain of arrows, without making any move, the arrows would naturally veer away when they came within ten steps of him.

At that moment, Chen Xi knew that it wasn’t just a celestial being or a hidden master protecting him, but the will of millions of people.

“At least I know whether what I’m doing is right or wrong, and that’s enough,” Chen Xi said calmly.

“Hey...” A bandaged left hand landed on Fa Zheng’s shoulder. “Xiaozhi, I just heard you badmouthing me.”

“Xingba, are you alright?” Chen Xi glanced at Gan Ning.

"I won't die. The wounds are severe, but with my inner energy, I'll recover in just over ten days. But it's a shame about my old brothers; they followed me through thick and thin, only to fall in this battle," Gan Ning said, a hint of sadness in his voice, though he didn't seem deeply grieved. For him, dying in battle and being wrapped in a horse's hide was the fate of a soldier.

Chapter 707: Elite Willpower and Army Talents

"It was my carelessness," Chen Xi finally spoke after a long silence.

"It's nothing. At least we avenged them, and last night was a resounding victory for our army," Gan Ning shook his head, trying to comfort him.

"Yes, at least we won," Chen Xi murmured, his resolve strengthening once more. He lifted his gaze toward the defenders atop Chiping, where both Xu You and Wen Chou had appeared on the city wall.

"Chen Zichuan..." Xu You's voice was filled with gritted teeth, and his pale face made Chen Xi almost want to mock him.

"Xiaozhi, do you think we should attack the city?" Chen Xi asked, frowning as he looked at Wen Chou and Xu You atop Chiping.

"Isn't Kongming leading troops to attack the Jishui crossing? As for Chiping..." Fa Zheng hesitated. While their morale was high, capturing a well-defended city like Chiping wouldn't be easy. On the other hand, after last night's battle, they had thoroughly decimated Yuan Shao's army. Letting them go now would feel unsatisfying.

"Then let's first make a show of preparing to attack the city and surround Chiping," Chen Xi decided after a moment of thought. Chiping was only on par with the defenses of Le Ling back then, but with Wen Chou and Xu You stationed there, taking it wouldn't be easy.

"Sigh, it's a pity. Last night was probably the best chance to completely annihilate them, but since it was our first time doing something like this, we lacked experience," Fa Zheng sighed.

"That reminds me, why could our troops see at night? If I remember correctly, common folk can't see beyond five steps in the dark, which used to be one of the distinctions between ordinary people and the aristocracy," Fa Zheng continued, now curious about the night blindness issue, which had long been an affliction mostly avoided by the wealthy and a marker of the divide between rich and poor.

"Xu You's response was incredibly quick, and we indeed lacked experience. If Kongming hadn't asked, I might have forgotten that my soldiers can see at night," Chen Xi sighed. Some things, even though he had issued the orders himself, had become so routine that he tended to overlook them.

"As for the so-called disease of the poor, I can only say that Zijing and I did a good job—there are no poor people left, so there's no more of this disease," Chen Xi said, clearly a bit proud.

"That's a fair point," Fa Zheng agreed, glancing up at the sky before a hint of pride appeared on his face. "At least in the future, I can tell my descendants that I had a part in the revival of the Han dynasty!"

"You really have thick skin," Chen Xi said with a smirk. "But today, let's not do anything else. Dig trenches around Chiping and get Huang Yueying to prepare the latest trebuchets. We'll bombard the city."

"No problem. We'll leave three thousand soldiers as reserves; the rest will be sent to cut down trees and dig trenches," Fa Zheng ordered Gan Ning. After last night's battle, Chen Xi had already sent Xu Chu to assist Zhuge Liang in securing the Jishui crossing.

Speaking of Xu You's foresight, it was indeed sharp. He had directly cut off one of Chen Xi's supply routes, nearly severing two backup routes as well. But unless absolutely necessary, Chen Xi wasn't willing to activate the final supply line.

"Our cavalry disadvantage is too significant," Chen Xi sighed, watching Wen Chou and Xu You make defensive preparations on the city walls. "Our soldiers are clearly stronger than Yuan Shao's, but the cavalry evened the odds."

"Yuan Shao's cavalry is incredibly fierce," Gan Ning said, pointing to the bandages on his body. "They must possess some sort of elite troop willpower."

"It's a kind of bravery-based attribute," Fa Zheng mused. "Their combat power is overwhelming when charging forward, but it's still not as formidable as when General Guan activates his army talent."

"The three elite northern cavalry units all have inherent elite troop traits, which means they come with their own attributes. The White Horse Cavalry, for example, has speed—whether it's shooting speed, attack speed, or movement speed. As long as it involves speed, once the White Horse Cavalry reaches a certain number, this trait emerges," Chen Xi explained after some thought.

"The Xiliang Cavalry's trait is toughness, which means they can fight without armor. I'm sure you've seen this for yourselves," Chen Xi added with a sigh. "As for the Bingzhou Wolf Cavalry, their trait is versatility, boosting all aspects of their abilities."

"I see. But the downside is that they're not particularly strong in any one area, right?" Fa Zheng frowned at first but then realized what Chen Xi meant.

"Not exactly weak, but not particularly strong in any one area either. They can't compete with the White Horse Cavalry in terms of speed, nor can they outlast the Xiliang Cavalry in a head-on clash. But when it comes to fighting other troops, it's like fighting children. Of course, when facing the other two elite units, they're more likely to end in a stalemate," Chen Xi explained, recalling what Chen Gong had told him. The strength of the Bingzhou Wolf Cavalry lay in their adaptability to any battlefield, with few counters.

"The three great cavalry units of the world are indeed formidable," Gan Ning said, touching his bandages. He had fought hard against the Bingzhou Wolf Cavalry, and his wounds were enough proof of their combat prowess.

"But then, why doesn't Zijian's Xiliang Cavalry seem as ferocious?" Fa Zheng asked, puzzled. In the many battles they had fought, he hadn't seen the Xiliang Cavalry under their command be particularly fierce.

"Because elite troop traits and army talents are different. Generally, army talents are uncontrollable—whether they cover a thousand or three thousand troops, the effect remains the same. But with elite armies, the more soldiers there are, the more pronounced the enhancement. A thousand Xiliang Cavalry and three thousand Xiliang Cavalry exhibit significantly different levels of strength," Chen Xi explained seriously.

"That's why I've been having our best trainers work on the Qingzhou and Danyang troops. We need sufficiently elite forces too, or we'll struggle in large-scale battles," Chen Xi continued, his expression grave.

"So, what you're saying is that we only need one army with a strong soul to serve as the core, while what we really need are vast numbers of powerful elite troops?" Fa Zheng asked, his expression also becoming more serious.

"Exactly. An army with a strong soul primarily serves to boost morale. They're like great generals—raising morale and stepping in when the situation is most dire to turn the tide. In truly large-scale battles, with over two hundred thousand troops, not all can be elite or led by mighty generals," Chen Xi explained calmly.

"At that point, the battle will be decided by the ordinary soldiers," Fa Zheng sighed. "No wonder you've been gathering mid-level officers and civil officials. You're preparing for the war with Hebei, aren't you?"

"Subscription numbers are still important to me. My little money depends on the main site subscriptions. After all, it seems I don't have a wireless option..."

Chapter 708: Worrying Too Much

"Yes, now all we lack is a core unit with an army soul. The other forces, such as the Qingzhou soldiers and the Danyang soldiers, are already well-trained. The only thing left is to determine which aspect they enhance when united. The ten thousand Qingzhou soldiers, for example, are the culmination of Wen Ze's hard work," Chen Xi said with a reflective expression.

The grand plan of conquering the world, which was laid out when they first entered Mount Tai, was now gradually being realized under Chen Xi's careful planning.

"Jizhou is indeed a powerful region," Fa Zheng said after a long period of contemplation.

"Do you think the best place in the world is a joke? It's the largest grain-producing area in the land, and one of the four major horse-producing regions. Aside from the many noble families and the lack of unity among the people, it has no flaws. The preparations I made in the first two years were just to catch up, and the last two years were to surpass them in accumulation," Chen Xi remarked, recalling how Han Fu must have been out of his mind to hand Jizhou over to Yuan Shao.

"So now, we've completely surpassed Yuan Shao in all areas where we can accumulate strength?" Zhuge Liang, who had just arrived, heard Chen Xi's words and chimed in.

"Yes, in all areas where accumulation is possible, we've surpassed Yuan Shao. But..." Chen Xi sighed helplessly, "geographical advantage is what it is, and there's nothing I can do about it."

"A northern war inevitably involves cavalry battles," Zhuge Liang sighed. "Luckily, it's not the Xiliang Cavalry; otherwise, we'd suffer even greater losses in large-scale battles."

"Exactly. How are things at the Jishui crossing?" Chen Xi nodded. He had never denied Yuan Shao's advantages, but his long-term efforts were not in vain. At least, aside from cavalry, he had leveled the playing field wherever possible and surpassed Yuan Shao wherever he could.

"We've captured it. As expected, you didn't attack Chiping," Zhuge Liang reported with a nod. "I've already sent word downstream to Qingzhou to activate the new supply route. Xu Ziyuan is indeed formidable."

"Yes, at least he knew to burn the grain at Feicheng and then strike at Chiping and the Jishui crossing. But it doesn't matter—I prepared three supply routes. He only cut off two, so let him be. In this life, anyone who tries to cut off my supply lines will be the unlucky one," Chen Xi said with a yawn.

Zhuce Liang was visibly startled. "Are you saying you prepared another supply route?"

"Of course. How could I not prepare for such a major flaw? Anyone who tries to scheme against me will regret it. Yesterday was an exception, though—the power of cavalry shouldn't be underestimated," Chen Xi said proudly. "The title of 'Always Prepared' isn't for nothing."

"You should be careful not to get caught off guard by someone. That wouldn't end well," Zhuge Liang replied with a bit of irritation. "So, you're certain we're not attacking Chiping?"

"Chiping would be difficult to take, and don't forget our primary objective," Chen Xi said nonchalantly.

"Yes, I agree. We shouldn't attack Chiping," Zhuge Liang nodded. "However, I think we should consider what Xu You is really trying to do. Don't you think there's something off about last night's battle?"

"What's off?" Chen Xi smirked. "It was just a matter of killing two birds with one stone—Xu You's plan targeted me, but that was secondary. His real goal was to weaken the Yuan family in Yuzhou and drag Yuan Shu into our war with Yuan Shao."

"Oh, I see," Zhuge Liang nodded, finally understanding why something had felt off. "So, last night's battle was entirely about drawing our attention?"

"Exactly. If they could eliminate our forces, all the better. If not, they'd settle for provoking the noble families under our command, leading them to retaliate and draw Yuan Shu into the conflict with us," Chen Xi mused.

"In essence, it's not even about weakening the Yuan family. Whether the plan succeeds or fails, it benefits Yuan Shao. If it works, the two Yuans will join forces against us. If it fails, Xu You sees it as a way to weaken both our army and Yuan Shu's, paving the way for Yuan Shao's unification," Fa Zheng added, shaking his head. He had a better grasp of human nature than Chen Xi.

"So, even if Xu You suffered a major defeat last night, it wouldn't matter much to him," Chen Xi realized after hearing Fa Zheng's analysis. Xu You had clearly intended to kill two birds with one stone; he just hadn't anticipated that Chen Xi would crush their army, turning what was supposed to be a perfect ending into a humiliating rout.

"Shouldn't we do something about it?" Zhuge Liang frowned. Although he knew that Fenggao still had Li You, Jia Xu, and others, his habit was to give his all, making it hard for him not to want to help.

"We're not in charge, so we don't interfere. It's not our concern. Our task is to establish Linyi's new city. As for the matters of Mount Tai, those senior officials can handle it themselves. Kongming, do you not have confidence in them?" Chen Xi asked, his expression revealing a hint of unease.

"I have great confidence in Master Li and Mr. Jia," Zhuge Liang shook his head. "My point is, shouldn't we do something extra to make this situation easier to handle?"

"No. Kongming, you need to learn to delegate. Just because you're in a high position doesn't mean you should do everything below that level. Instead, you should delegate tasks to the right people and let them complete them," Chen Xi sighed.

After spending so much time with Zhuge Liang, Chen Xi had come to understand that Zhuge Liang's issue wasn't a desire for power but rather a lack of trust in others. This led to Zhuge Liang constantly worrying unnecessarily.

To put it simply, most of what Zhuge Liang did wasn't his job. Many tasks should have been delegated to subordinates, but Zhuge Liang's lack of trust meant he handled even minor issues himself, essentially doing the work of everyone under his command.

"..." Zhuge Liang remained silent. "I've been too cautious."

"Being cautious isn't wrong, but a leader must trust the talents they've selected. More importantly, a leader must assign their valued talents to appropriate positions, allowing them to shine, and then manage them, not do the work themselves while the others watch," Chen Xi said, shaking his head.

"Indeed, Kongming, you really don't need to be so busy. The six commandants, including Chen Zhen, were assigned to assist you, not to have you do their work for them," Fa Zheng added, knowing full well how hard Zhuge Liang worked.

"I'll be more mindful from now on," Zhuge Liang said after a moment of deep thought.

"To all readers, I ask you to please subscribe here on Dian Niang. How should I put it... Rewards are optional, but subscriptions are crucial for someone like me. Even if you dislike Dian Niang, please give me a chance. Forgive me for placing this author's note before the main content this time, but it's just too important..."

Chapter 709: The Ultimate Goal

"Alright. Let's not worry about what's happening in Taishan anymore. We've blocked Xu You, and that means we've completed our mission. Focus on our tasks and let those guys handle their own. Taishan will be just fine," Chen Xi said, no longer trying to persuade Zhuge Liang. Some things needed to be understood on one's own.

While Chen Xi and Zhuge Liang could still find time to chat, the situation on the walls of Chiping was much more complicated for Xu You. Although he had achieved his strategic goal, the devastating losses from last night weighed heavily on him. Almost 90% of his infantry was lost, and those who made it back were only the lucky ones. Even more painful for Xu You was the fact that his Wolf Cavalry had been halved, leaving only a little over three thousand.

When they counted the troops in the morning, Xu You nearly coughed up blood from the shock. The losses were simply too great. If not for leaving behind a thousand men to defend Chiping, he wouldn't even have enough infantry to hold the city.

This was why Xu You was glaring resentfully at Chen Xi, who was laughing and chatting below the city walls. He regretted not leaving immediately after accomplishing his strategic goal, even though it might have led to some losses. But there was no medicine for regret in this world.

"Order the soldiers to hold the city firmly. I've already sent a request for help to both Tian Yuanhao in Yanzhou and our lord," Xu You sighed, feeling utterly embarrassed. Originally, he could have left after achieving a minor victory, but now things had turned out like this.

"Last night's defeat was simply too bizarre..." Wen Chou nodded, looking at the exhausted Xu You. Their cavalry had attacked like tigers descending a mountain, only to be forced into retreat.

"I didn't foresee this," Xu You sighed. Taking responsibility was a must. He then took a deep breath, trying to pull himself together. "But it's better to discover such an issue now than during a major battle. We must find a way to solve this problem."

"Why could they see?" Wen Chou sighed. Although he had a temper, he understood that the reason for last night's failure didn't lie with Xu You. In fact, Xu You's plan had been excellent; it just failed due to unforeseen circumstances. Who could have guessed that the enemy could see in the dark?

"I've sent word of what happened here to Jizhou for our lord to decide. As for the relevant issues, we'll need to consult Doctor Hua," Xu You said with a grim face. "If anyone can do something like this, it's Doctor Hua."

Hearing Xu You's words, Wen Chou agreed with his analysis. After all, Hua Tuo had recently performed a feat that made him famous across the land—using mugwort to eradicate a plague that could have killed seven or eight out of every ten people. This showed that Hua Tuo had a knack for tackling widespread illnesses, and he had the skill to do so.

"Why didn't he announce the prescription this time?" Wen Chou asked, sounding somewhat clueless.

"Because this condition isn't fatal and doesn't have a significant impact, unlike the plague that kills most of its victims," Xu You replied with a dark expression. "When we return, we'll also need to establish a medical system. Taishan's soldiers rarely suffer deaths from infected wounds because they have excellent military doctors."

"In the past, we didn't value soldiers much, but now I realize that preserving three trained veterans is more cost-effective than recruiting three new ones. There's no need for funeral expenses, and they're better fighters. When we return to Jizhou, we'll copy the entire Taishan medical system!" Xu You said with determination. Losing wasn't the issue; the real priority was identifying weaknesses and fixing them.

[This noble family's probing will provide enough information for the noble families to transmit all relevant data from Liu Bei's administration to us. This will give Jizhou and places that have long sought reform, like Yizhou, a template to follow. Transplanting Taishan's advantages onto Jizhou will make Jizhou even stronger,] Xu You pondered.

Taishan's prosperity was now evident to all the lords under heaven. But how Chen Xi had achieved this from nothing was not something that could be explained by simply saying he was exploiting the nobility. If it were that simple, Xu You wouldn't hesitate to be ruthless.

Xu You's march on Feicheng wasn't just to signal Jizhou's arrival, to alert the noble families of Qingzhou and Xuzhou, or to prepare Yuan Shu in Yuzhou for attacking Liu Bei. It was also to conduct a comprehensive assessment of Liu Bei's administration and compare it to Jizhou's.

Although Xu You and Ju Shou managed Jizhou's intelligence network, their biggest rival, Taishan, had always been shrouded in mystery. They had never seen it clearly. Therefore, conducting a comparison before the war was essential, and this comparison would influence Yuan Shao's strategy against Liu Bei.

More importantly, Ju Shou needed a more practical political strategy to increase the power of Jizhou, Bingzhou, and Youzhou. In Xu You's view, Taishan's rise was the perfect model. He needed this model, and the noble families of Qingzhou and Xuzhou were the pawns to obtain it. To Xu You, it was worth the trade.

[But I still need an explanation. The commotion I caused this time was too big, and to have it end in such a humiliating way... Now, I can only hope for turmoil among the Qingzhou and Xuzhou noble families and for Yuan Shu's forces in Yuzhou to march out. This is the only opportunity before the final showdown to accurately assess Taishan and our last chance to perfect our strategy.]

As Xu You considered these matters, his expression was extremely serious. He was already prepared for the possibility of being sidelined by Yuan Shao for a while after returning. After all, this mess needed someone to take the fall, and it certainly couldn't be Wen Chou. That left only himself.

Xu You didn't realize that after receiving that piece of fine jade, his intelligence peak had started to decline. Although still higher than usual, it was no longer at the same level, and his thinking was not as meticulous as it had been. Otherwise, his considerations would have been even more thorough.

"Strategist, are we just going to let them dig trenches outside the city?" Wen Chou asked, noticing that Liu Bei's troops were digging a trench two hundred paces from the city in three directions simultaneously, leaving only the side near the Yellow River untouched.

"We'll dig inside the city as well. Don't let them tunnel in. But aren't you going to try shooting at their soldiers?" Xu You shook his head. Their mission was complete; they just needed to hold Chiping and wait for reinforcements.

"He's been watching me, and his archery is better than mine," Wen Chou said, pointing to Gan Ning, who stood below the city with his body wrapped in bandages, holding a ten-stone strong bow. Although he appeared casual, Wen Chou knew that if he made a move, Gan Ning would undoubtedly retaliate.

"At this distance, neither of us is suppressed by the internal energy. Although both armies are protected by cloud energy..." Wen Chou said as he pulled an arrow from his quiver and shot it towards Gan Ning. However, Gan Ning didn't move an inch, and the arrow lodged itself in the ground at Gan Ning's feet.

Chapter 710: Geniuses and Capable Individuals

"Hmph, provoking me, are you? It's rude not to return the favor!" Gan Ning immediately drew his bow and shot an arrow. Although the internal energy attached to it was dissipated, the sheer power of the ten-stone strong bow still embedded the arrow deep into the beam of the city gate tower.

"Just like that," Wen Chou said helplessly. "If I can do it, so can he. It's not worth it. In situations like this, it's better for both sides to show restraint, or else it'll lead to a full-blown fight."

By the time Chen Xi returned, Wen Chou and Gan Ning had already started fighting in another location. The two were evenly matched, and since both were injured, their battle didn't cause much of an impact.

After handing over the task of surrounding Chiping to Zhuge Liang and seeing the trebuchets being set up, Chen Xi returned to Linyi's new city.

When Chen Xi arrived at Linyi, he found the city bustling with activity. The Black Mountain Yellow Turbans who had relocated there were all diligently working to build the new city, with construction progressing at a brisk pace.

"Gongyou, how much longer until the new city is completed? The situation is looking good. Once Zilong arrives at Linyi, I'll hand over military command, and then I can return to Taishan," Chen Xi said as he observed Sun Qian, who was busy cross-checking blueprints.

"The new city will be finished within three days. After that, we'll start on the outer walls, which is the real heavy lifting. But the basic infrastructure is already planned, so it's just a matter of construction now. You plan to return to Taishan?" Sun Qian frowned. Even though he wasn't fully attuned to the situation in Taishan, he knew things were somewhat chaotic there, and that this chaos was being managed by certain individuals.

"Yes, I've said before that I'd return by May. This autumn, our army's battle against Yuan Shao will commence, and I'm not entirely sure how long it will last. Although I'm confident we'll win, I'm more concerned about Yuan Shao's intentions," Chen Xi nodded.

Chen Xi had long planned to transfer Zhao Yun to this region to defend against Yuan Shao in the north. After all, a battle with the north was inevitable, and a top general was needed as the regional commander. Among them, only Guan Yu met the requirements, but Zhao Yun's advantage was that he wasn't arrogant and was open to listening to others.

"I'm confident as well, but I'm worried about you rushing back. There's a risk of something happening to you on the way," Sun Qian shook his head. Taishan was currently under the control of harsh figures like Li You, Jia Xu, and Man Chong, with all other influential elders sent elsewhere. Lu Su was expected to arrive soon, and the whole situation was being managed by these hardliners.

"The noble families won't dare target me. If they do, I'll make sure they learn a lesson. Besides, once I'm back, I'll be closing my doors to visitors," Chen Xi said, his cold determination hidden from Sun Qian.

"Very well. In that case, Xianghe, Weishuo, and I won't be returning with you. Xianghe and Weishuo will soon need to go..." Sun Qian hesitated but eventually agreed with Chen Xi's plan, making a digging motion as he spoke.

Though Sun Qian, a disciple of Zheng Xuan, wasn't currently engaged in literary work, he still maintained the morals of a scholar. To be honest, if he didn't know what Jian Yong was up to, Sun Qian would never have approved of what Jian Yong and Liu Yan were doing—digging up graves with no heirs, which could be considered a dishonorable act.

"They're progressing so quickly," Chen Xi frowned. This pace seemed a bit too hasty—how had they gone from studying ancient scripts to grave digging so fast?

"Yes, many of the great scholars don't have much money, but they do have ancient bronze tripods or artifacts. With your prompting, they've started to find relevant information inscribed on them. What they once thought were mysterious patterns are now being recognized as scripts, which Xianghe jokingly calls 'tripod inscriptions'," Sun Qian explained with a smile.

Recently, Jian Yong and the others had been focused on finding these inscribed tripods. Fortunately, each great scholar possessed one or two ancient tripods for rituals, and with additional tripods requisitioned from their disciples, they had managed to record many symbols. As more symbols were organized, some scholars had even begun to guess the meanings of these inscriptions.

"Not bad," Chen Xi nodded. "How long until they're done organizing everything?"

"That's uncertain. But they've already unearthed some strange things, like the origins of the Wuhuan and Xianbei people. Based on what they've deciphered from some ancient tripods, it seems those

people are also descendants of the Huaxia," Sun Qian said, sounding somewhat displeased with this conclusion.

"Now that's good news," Chen Xi was surprised at first but then smiled. "Since they're of the same lineage, governing them becomes a natural right. This will make things easier for us. What kind of records are these?"

"Yan Fangong possesses a tripod from the time of King Wu's conquest of Zhou, which records the inventory of treasures King Zhou had collected. Among the records is a note stating that the Xiongnu are descendants of the Xia people. This was why King Wu later moved the merchants to the north," Sun Qian explained. He had seen the tripod himself, and it indeed contained information on this matter.

"Well, there's nothing more to say. It's just a case of internal conflict among the Huaxia," Chen Xi said indifferently. "So, in the future, we should help them out to prevent them from tarnishing the name of Huaxia further. Anything else?"

"Recently, some people involved in feng shui and geomancy have reported vaguely sensing dragon veins nearby," Sun Qian said with a frown. "But as you know, sensing dragon veins is one thing; finding their exact location is another."

"Oh," Chen Xi nodded. By now, he had gained some understanding of these things, and he had begun to put some stock in them. After all, some people in this era were incredibly accurate.

Over the next few days, Chen Xi remained in Linyi to handle administrative matters and waited for Zhao Yun to return for the handover. After all, when they eventually faced Yuan Shao, every position on the northern defense line needed to be filled by a strong figure to hold back Yuan Shao's initial powerful assault, which would allow them to eventually defeat him completely.

During this time, Jiang Wan made a few appearances. It seemed Jiang Wan was balancing work and study, and in the few brief meetings, Chen Xi noticed that Jiang Wan was already gaining some insights. It was undeniable that a genius was indeed a genius.

Chen Xi had also sought out those historically overlooked talents but eventually realized a truth: those who left their mark in chaotic times were not just capable but also lucky. The unnamed but capable

individuals Chen Xi had hoped to find were at best suitable for governing a county or a district. Expecting anything more was unrealistic.

Now, if Li You or others praised someone's abilities, Chen Xi knew that person was likely someone well-known. After all, truly capable people wouldn't fail to protect their lives long enough to make a name for themselves. As a result, Chen Xi gradually abandoned the idea of seeking out unknown talents and instead focused on large-scale basic education.

Since geniuses couldn't be suppressed, it made sense to cultivate capable individuals who could build this world. Even the visions of geniuses required countless capable individuals to bring them to life.