Guo Jia's Feats Summary

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NOTE:

→ This doc will be BRIEFLY covering some of Guo Jia's main feats chronologically over time, **it's a summary and doesn't go in depth sufficiently**, a few arcs are too complex to deeply analyse at this stage, more in depth analyses will be worked on upcoming with the help of more redditors assisting.

→ There may be some inaccuracies with certain interpretations, or our understanding of the narrative.

Use this doc to help you understand the basic framework of Guo Jia's feats, the story itself is extremely vague and doesn't explain things clearly, resulting in RoT requiring very high reading comprehension to even understand any of what each of the characters' concurrent actions or aims are. For more complex depth, contact us for more chat.

You'll really want to watch the video to get the full context—having some background on Three Kingdoms history definitely helps. Three Kingdoms Summary - OverSimplified

The story begins in the dying days of the Han dynasty. The warlord Dong Zhuo seizes control of the young, helpless Emperor and throws China into a bloody, tangled civil war between dozens of ambitious warlords.

The Ravages of Time centers on Sima Yi, a young prodigy from the merchant Sima clan, and his most lethal asset: Liaoyuan Huo, the brilliant leader of the Crippled Legion—a group of disabled but extraordinarily dangerous assassins who carry out the clan's bidding. Though exceptionally intelligent, Sima Yi is notoriously lazy and

mainly concerned with how the Sima clan can profit from the chaos. To that end, he repeatedly sends Huo across China on assassination missions.

Liaoyuan Huo is loyal, but increasingly restless. During his missions, he encounters a man renowned for his integrity: **Liu Bei**. Huo gradually grows to admire him. Before long, both Huo and Sima Yi are drawn into nearly every major conflict depicted in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

The Eight Geniuses

These eight extraordinary advisors are students of the renowned scholar **Sima Hui**, known as “Water-Mirror.” A legendary teacher of the previous generation, he trained many of the era’s greatest strategists. The Eight Geniuses possess abilities far beyond those of ordinary men, making them highly sought after by the various warlords. Whichever faction one of them chooses—even a minor one—immediately becomes a serious contender in the struggle to reunify China.

Once a Genius selects the lord he wishes to serve, he removes the identical mask and uniform used to conceal his identity at the academy and departs to begin his work.

Background

Guo Jia is one of these Eight Geniuses—the elite students of Water-Mirror Academy. Although Chan Mou doesn’t reveal much about the academy itself, we can infer its curriculum from the feats of the Geniuses and the distinguished teachers who appear throughout the story. Subjects include:

- Geography
- Astronomy
- Climatology
- Psychology
- Mathematics
- Poetry and correspondence

- Ritual and ceremony
- Ethics
- History
- Politics
- Philosophy
- Military strategy
- Religion
- Technical arts
- Chess
- Painting

All eight Geniuses master every discipline. Some, like Pang Tong and Zhuge Liang, even go on to teach other students and mid-level strategists. Over time, however, each student discovers their own truth—shaping their ideals and strengths. Though they study under the same master and share a sibling-like bond, they ultimately pursue very different paths.

This context is important to understand just how formidable Guo Jia is. Even without resorting to his “Dark Strategy,” he would still be a terrifyingly capable strategist.

Among the Eight, Guo Jia embraces a unique philosophy. He believes in using ruthless force to gain power quickly, then governing with benevolence once unity is achieved. In his view:

“To save the world, you must first push it into the abyss, so that future generations truly value peace.”

His ideal stems from a desire to end the war as quickly as possible. Mercy, he argues, would only prolong the conflict and increase the death toll. Zhang Fei once summarized Guo Jia’s intent as “Kill one, threaten ten”—but a more accurate description is:

“Kill one, save ten.”

Part 1: Xuzhou Slaughter arc

The next topic I want to discuss is **Cao Cao's campaign against Xuzhou**, one of the most brutal conflicts in Chinese history due to the staggering number of civilians killed. First, Cao Cao needed a reason to attack Xuzhou, and one of the Eight Geniuses, Guo Jia, suggested that Cao Cao use his father's death as a reason, accusing Tao Qian, the governor of Xuzhou, of killing his father and stealing his wealth.


BUT SUPPOSE HE WAS MURDERED FOR HIS WEALTH...
I HEARD THAT DAREN'S FATHER PASSED AWAY FROM ILLNESS WHILE ON HIS WAY TO JUANCHENG.



Under Guo Jia's direction, Cao Cao's forces launched a devastating assault on Xuzhou:

- **Sishui**, one of Tao Qian's cities, was obliterated. Over **10,000 civilians** were killed.
- Guo Jia ordered **all farmland in Xuzhou burned**—not only to cripple the region, but also to bait Lü Bu.
- He then **blocked the flow of the Si River**, cutting off water and food supplies.

The brutality escalated. Guo Jia's forces massacred the population around the city of **"30,000"** (the name of the city, not a number), killing another **10,000 civilians**. At Sishui alone, casualties reached **190,000**. By this point, Cao Cao's faction had seized ten strongholds and was advancing toward Pengcheng.

The soldiers themselves were terrified and begged Guo Jia to end the slaughter. Guo Jia paused, looked up at the sky, and eventually ordered a halt—not out of mercy, but because he had determined that a **three-month dry season** was about to begin. He erected a ceasefire and established a long encampment.

To the army, this decision seemed incomprehensible. Delaying the war would:

1. Destroy the momentum of Cao Cao's victories
2. Squander their psychological advantage over the shattered Xuzhou defenders
3. Give Tao Qian's forces time to reorganize and prepare

But Guo Jia saw further than anyone else. He intended to crush Xuzhou **strategically, psychologically, politically, and environmentally**—all at once.

During the truce, Guo Jia spoke privately with Jia Xu. Xun Yu, horrified by the massacre, had isolated himself in his room. Jia Xu—himself a student of the "Dark Strategy"—understood Guo Jia's intent immediately.

Guo Jia's worldview was stark: **"There are no good people in this world."**
Allowing Cao Cao to massacre civilians was not just military strategy—it was a test of the surrounding factions. If everyone remained silent in the face of such slaughter, then their moral claims were empty. Guo Jia's philosophy remained consistent:

"To save the world, you must first kill the world."
Blood and suffering would remind future generations of the horrors of war, making lasting peace possible.

3 months later...

Three months later, Mi Zhu fled to Pingyuan to seek Liu Bei's help. At this moment we understand the meaning of Guo Jia's plan: **Right Time, Right Place, Right People**.

Mi Zhu's reaction also reveals something important: Liu Bei's royal lineage had recently been made public. This was orchestrated by Zhao Yun, who had obtained an imperial decree after the assassination attempt on Dong Zhuo. Now recognized as an imperial relative, Liu Bei—valued for his benevolence—was a natural rallying point for the desperate people of Xuzhou.

Mi Zhu reported the current situation:

Right Time

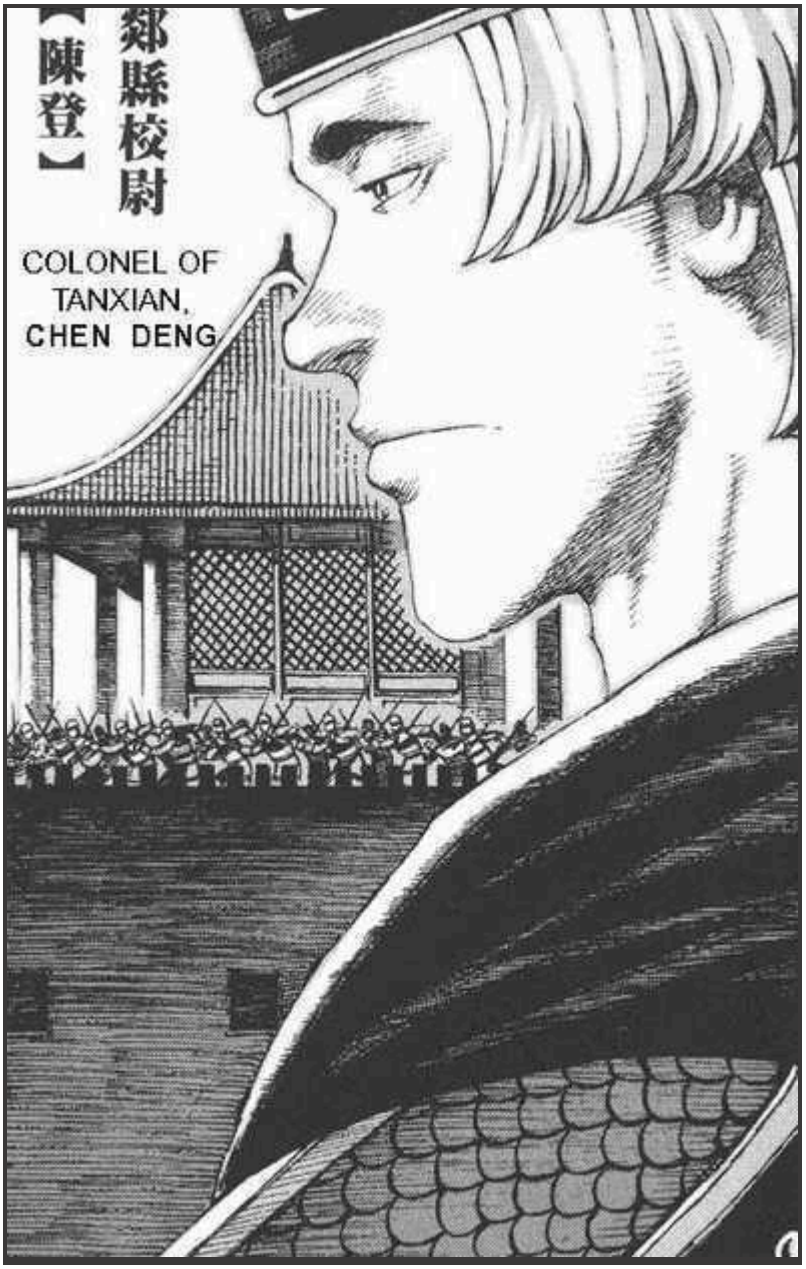
Xuzhou had entered the dry season exactly as Guo Jia had predicted. Combined with Cao Cao's blockade of the Si River, the population was now suffering extreme shortages of drinking water.

How did Guo Jia predict this?
Because he had mastered:

- Chinese monsoon patterns

- Seasonal air currents
- The effects of the Tropic of Cancer
- Ancient meteorology

Ancient Chinese observers used several methods to forecast weather—rainbows, stars, wind, clouds, thunder, fog, color patterns. Guo Jia relied on **wind**, the only method capable of predicting long-term seasonal shifts. With this knowledge, he conquered **Pengcheng and ten other cities without casualties.**



One city still resisted: **Tan County**, commanded officially by Chen Deng but strategically by **Zhao Yun**, leader of the Handicapped Warriors under Sima Yi.

Although the Sima clan were allied with Cao Cao, they also had deep business ties with Xuzhou. This forced their agents—like Zhao Yun—to oppose Cao Cao from the shadows.

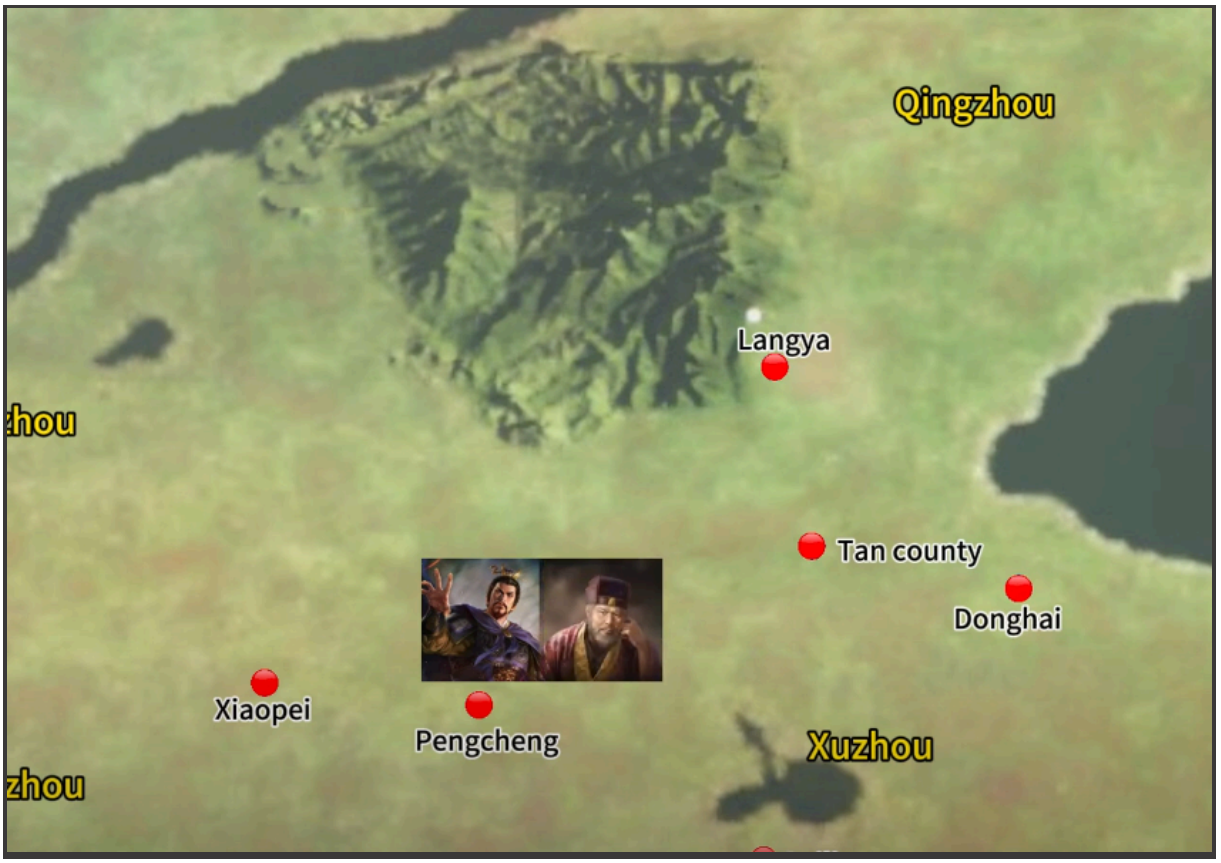


Zhao Yun devised a clever defensive plan:

- Loosen the wall's defenses to lure Cao Cao's siege towers in

- Kill an enemy general during the approach
- Use catapults to destroy the siege towers and the dense cluster of soldiers around them
- Exploit the unstable terrain around the city so that the *only* accessible entry point was the debris-filled front gate

At night, Guo Jia uses the snake formation for his army to break through the defenses : It's a formation that literally simulates a snake; if you attack the tail, the head will bite you, if you attack the head, the tail will attack you, if you attack the middle, both the tail and the head will attack you. He uses it not for battle, but for high maneuverability, focusing almost entirely on getting close to the Tan County front gate walls as quickly as possible, using the darkness of the night as an advantage.
https://i.imgur.com/aLnN2i2.png
And it worked quite well, because by the time Zhao Yun realized Guo Jia's strategy of attacking at night, they were already out of range of the catapult and archer, very close to the walls, and started another battle.



Then Guo Jia struck at the supply chain.
He sent a messenger ahead to spread false intelligence, tricking Xuzhou's transport

team into believing enemy soldiers were lying in ambush on the mountain path. Because it was too dark to identify friend from foe, the confused transport team shot arrows up the mountain and **killed the very rescuers who had come to protect them**.

Meanwhile, Guo Jia set the stage for the true killing blow.



On a nearby hill, Guo Jia explained to Yue Jin that he had predicted a **monsoon**—scheduled to arrive that very day.

A monsoon is a seasonal wind reversal. In summer, moist winds blow inland; in winter, dry winds blow outward. Observing subtle meteorological signs, Guo Jia had timed the siege to the monsoon's arrival.

He then surrounded the other three gates of Tan County with **fire**. When the monsoon wind shifted, smoke engulfed the city. The defenders were suffocating. Their only escape route was the **front gate**, where Cao Cao's forces were already attacking.

It was a perfect trap: every choice led to death.

And yes—this operation was also part of a much larger trap aimed at **luring out Lü Bu**.



The mountains behind Tan County are the key to the entire campaign. They serve as:

- A supply route
- A natural fortress
- A deployment zone
- A strategic observation point

Whoever controlled the mountain controlled the war.

Cao Cao's invasion of Xuzhou was never purely about territory—it was a bait operation to lure Lü Bu into attacking Cao Cao's main city. By leaving his capital intentionally underprotected, Cao Cao planned to ambush and eliminate Lü Bu.

To bait Lü Bu effectively, Guo Jia ensured that Cao Cao's army appeared to carry **very limited rations**, even though Cao Cao had secretly harvested enormous supplies from Xuzhou before burning it. This misinformation played directly into Lü Bu's habit of attacking only when he knew the enemy was low on provisions.

However, one obstacle remained: **Sima Yi**.
He could not allow Xuzhou—and especially Tan County—to be destroyed, yet he could not openly oppose Cao Cao, whose current position had been secured through the Sima clan's support. Sima Yi had to restrain Cao Cao **indirectly**, without ever striking at him.



So the most important question remains: Where are Cao Cao's rations?
Guo Jia first moved supplies along the **western route**, the most obvious and safest path. But this route was actually a **decoy**, and one of Lü Bu's commanders—Zhang Liao—fell for it with hidden soldiers instead of supplies.



This proves Lü Bu had already learned of Cao Cao's second, secret supply line, but Guo Jia's trap prevented him from seizing it.

When the wind shifted, fire from the surrounding regions destroyed multiple routes—except for **Makeng Valley**.

Unfortunately for Guo Jia, he was outmaneuvered by **Zhuge Liang**, forcing him to flee. But in his defeat, Guo Jia noticed something extraordinary: **Sima Yi and Zhuge Liang were cooperating**, just as they had long ago when they solved a puzzle no other genius in China could solve.

Realizing this, Guo Jia saw a new opportunity:
if Sima Yi could think on the same wavelength as Zhuge Liang—the greatest mind of the era—Cao Cao's faction might gain an unimaginable strategic advantage.

He also needs Sima Yi for his businessman status, which will be hugely crucial for what's about to happen in his Guandu strategy.

Part 2: Yan Province Arc (Both Guo Jia and Cao Cao made this plan)

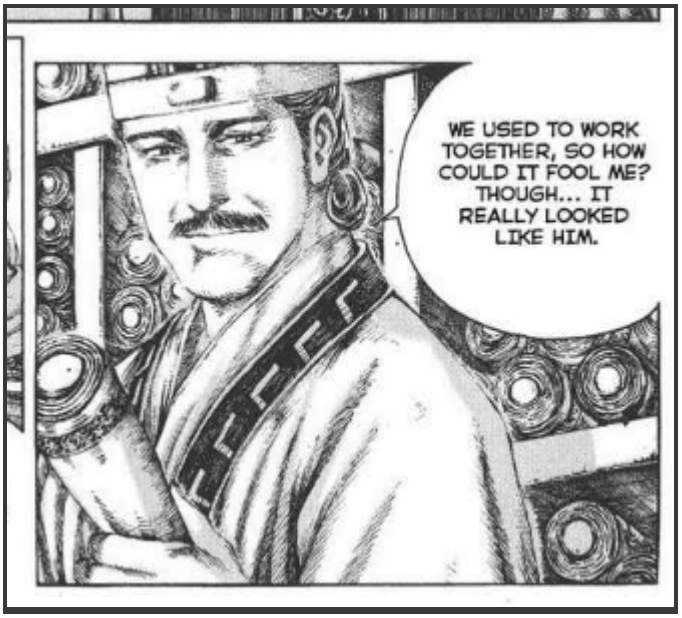
The Yan Province arc is a surprisingly tight and cleverly constructed storyline, but before diving in, there are two things to clarify.

First, the light-blue area on the map represents **Yan Province**, where most of the events unfold. There is also a major location repeatedly referred to as *"West City."* Since its exact position is unknown, we'll assume it corresponds to the red dot on the map and refer to it as **Xicheng** for clarity.

For reference:

- **Lu Bu** and his army are stationed in **Puyang**.
- **Cao Cao** is based in **Xicheng** with his forces.


一百一十回
合時之死
HAHA, WHAT A TIMELY DEATH.



The arc opens with the supposed decapitated head of Cao Cao delivered to Lu Bu—an act orchestrated by **Xu Chu**, one of Lu Bu's spies inside Cao Cao's camp. Neither Lu Bu nor his strategist **Chen Gong** is fooled. They never trusted Xu Chu enough to believe he truly assassinated Cao Cao.

Cao Cao's fake death was a trap—a pretext to provoke Lu Bu, and perhaps even other lords, into attacking Xicheng. But Cao Cao knew such a simple trick wouldn't be enough to move Lu Bu, so he played a deeper game.

Inside his own guard unit was a hidden cell of Lu Bu's spies known as the **Lu Jin Faction**. Cao Cao had known all along. When the Lu Jin spies attempted to assassinate him, **Dian Wei** was already prepared, cutting them down and protecting Cao Cao.

Yet Cao Cao ordered Dian Wei to **spread the rumor that the Lu Jin faction had successfully killed him**. Even those who knew his first "death" was fake were told he was dead *again*. This plunged Xicheng into chaos, and chaos was the bait.

As planned, **Lu Bu mobilized to attack Xicheng**—or so it seemed.

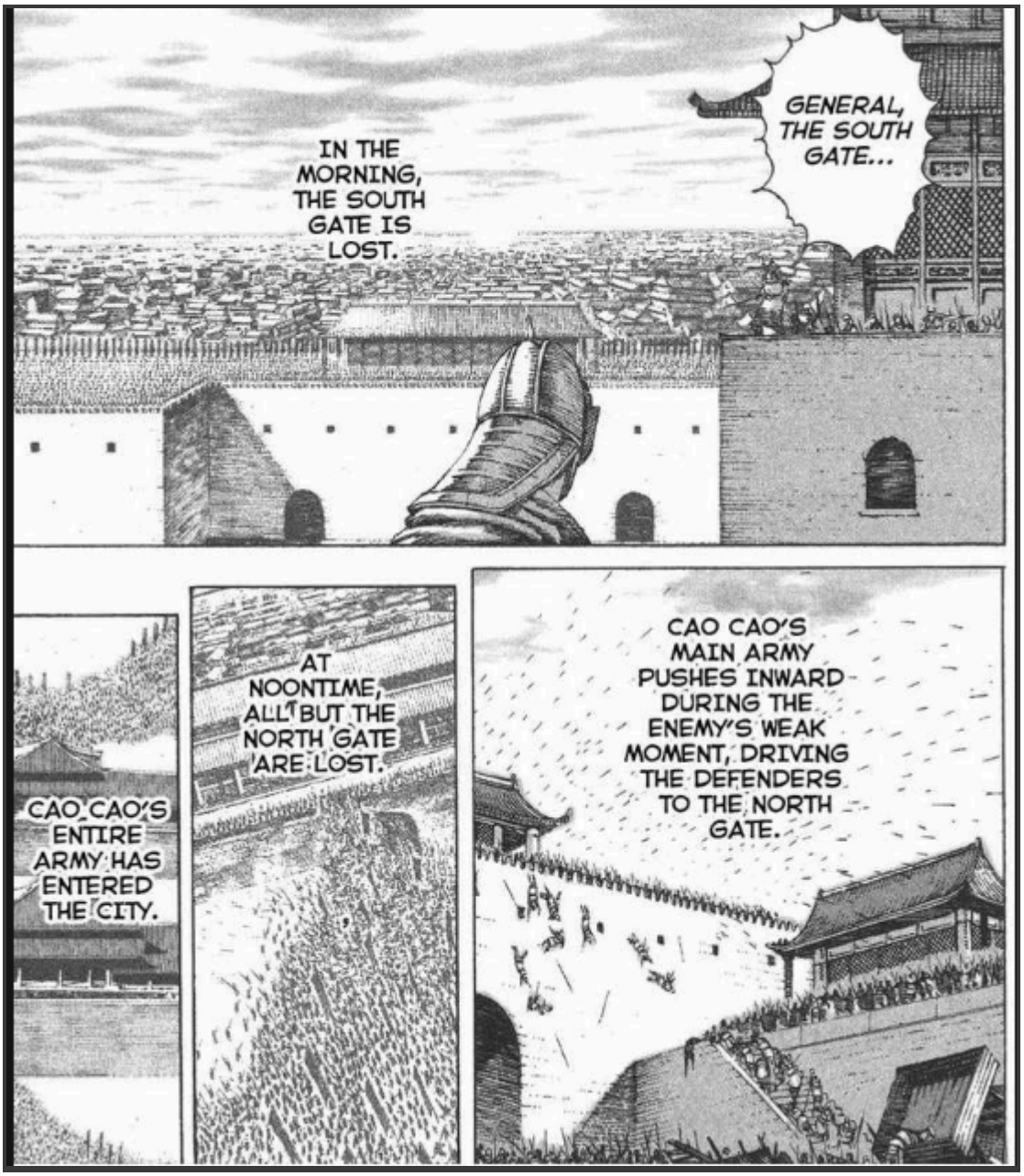
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Cao Cao wanted Lu Bu to march toward Xicheng so he could ambush him there. In reality, Lu Bu had already anticipated this. He moved his army out of Puyang, leaving only a defensive shell, and prepared a counter-trap.



Using the map, the red arrow is Cao Cao's army marching from Xicheng to Puyang, and the blue arrow is Lu Bu's army marching from Puyang to Cao Cao's trap.



Cao Cao seized Puyang rapidly. Only the **North Gate** held out, but the entire city appeared to be under his control.



Yet something was wrong.

Most civilians were missing, including **Mr. Tian**, one of Cao Cao's spies. As Cao Cao pushed deeper, his forces realized too late that:

Lu Bu's entire army had doubled back and surrounded Puyang.
Chen Gong then **burned the entire city**, sealing all gates with walls of fire and trapping Cao Cao inside. It was a perfect reversal of Cao Cao's own tactic.





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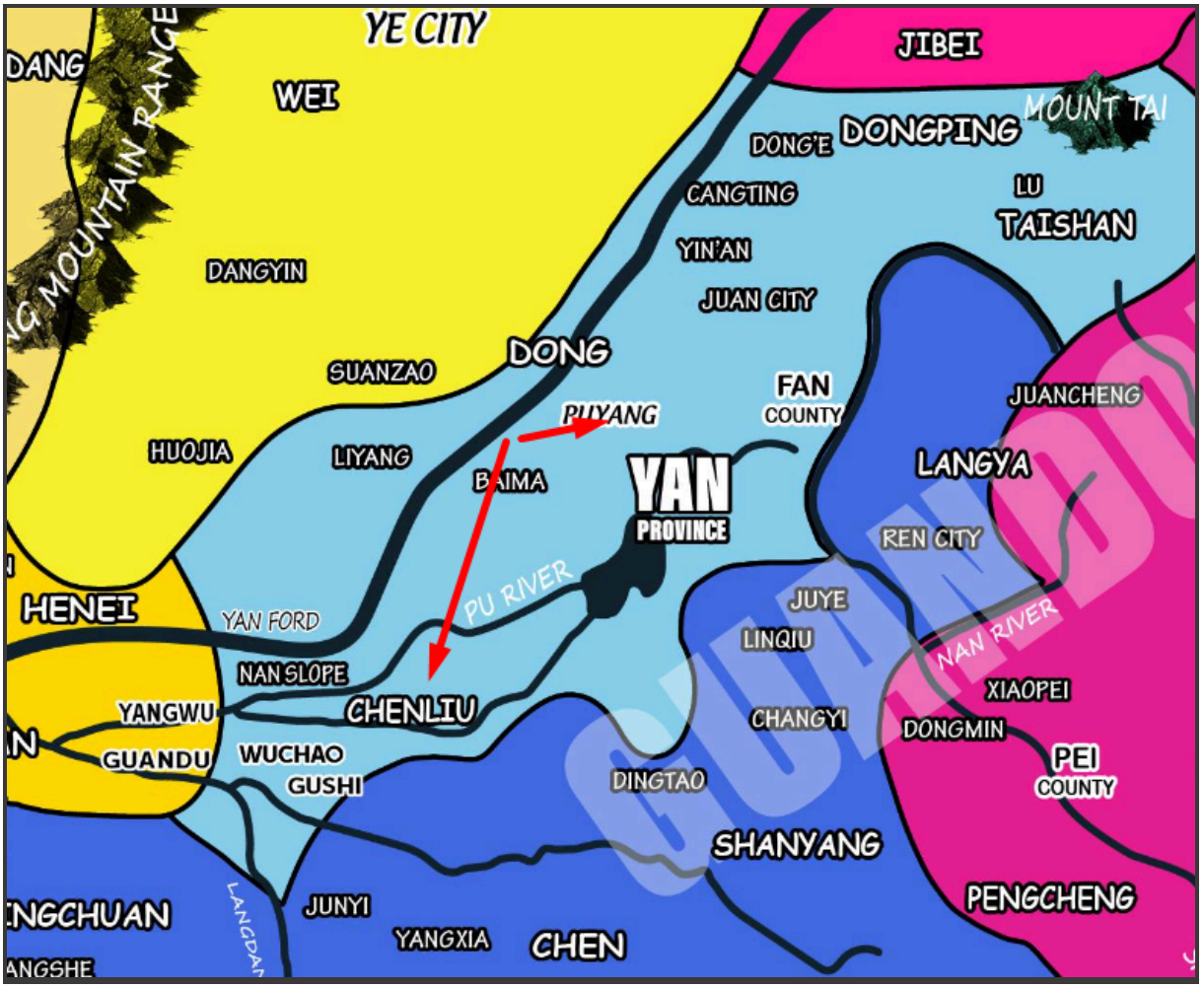




So the With Cao Cao trapped, **Xun Yu**—one of the Eight Geniuses—arrived at Xicheng. Immediately grasping Chen Gong's strategy, he split Cao Cao's forces:

- Half would march to rescue Cao Cao in Puyang.
- Half would attack **Chenliu**, a major city in Yan Province.

This was the classic strategy **"Besiege Wei to rescue Zhao."**
But Chen Gong adapted quickly—he sent half of Lu Bu's army to intercept Xun Yu's march toward Chenliu.

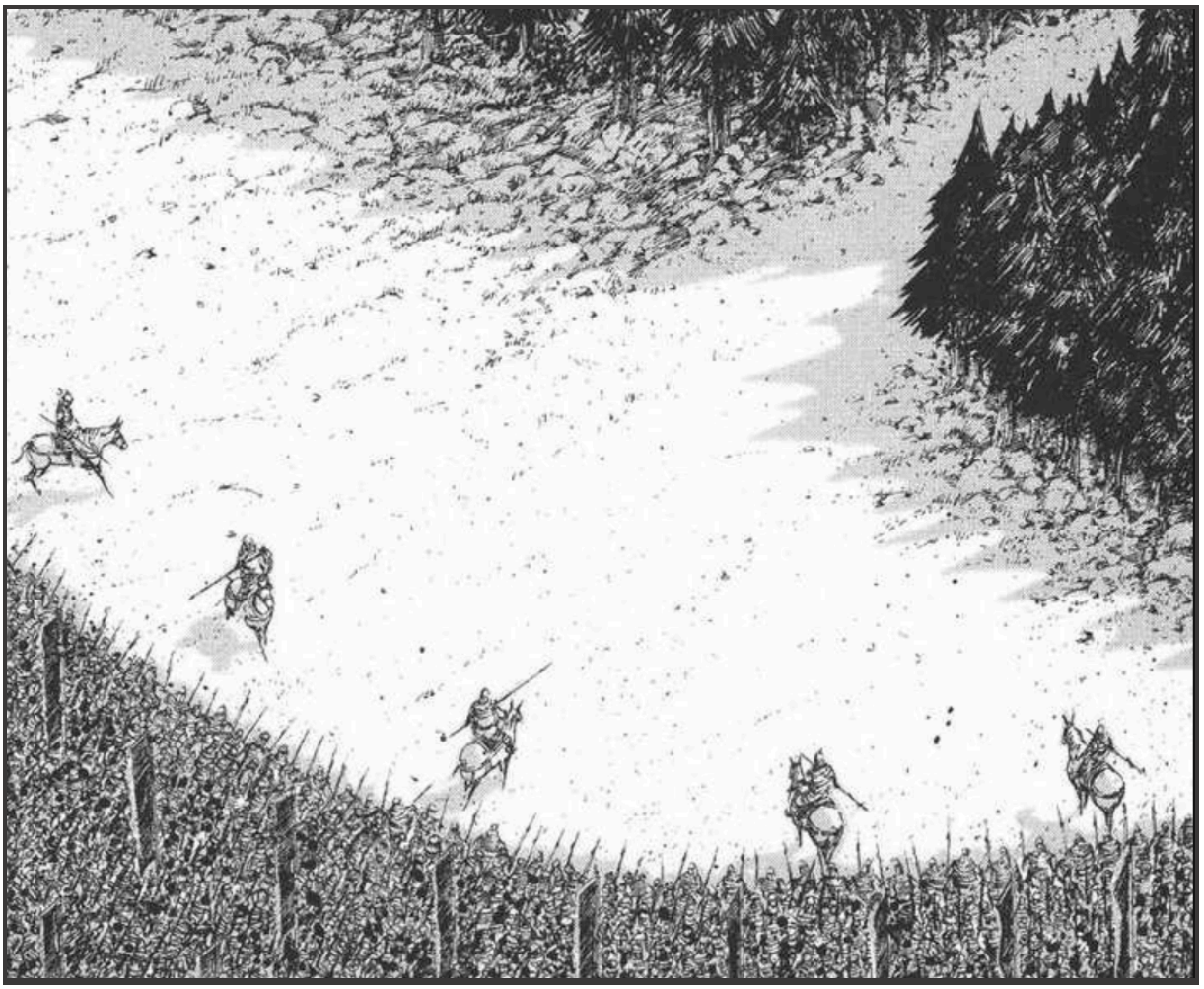

YE CITY
JIBEI
DANG
WEI
MOUNT TAI
DONG'E
DONGPING
CANGTING
LU
TAISHAN
YIN'AN
DANGYIN
JUAN CITY
DONG
SUANZAO
FAN
COUNTY
JUANCHENG
PUYANG
HUOJIA
LIYANG
BAIMA
YAN
PROVINCE
LANGYA
REN CITY
HENEI
PU RIVER
JUYE
YAN FORD
LINQIU
NAN RIVER
NAN SLOPE
XIAOPEI
YANGWU
CHENLIU
CHANGYI
DONGMIN
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YANGXIA
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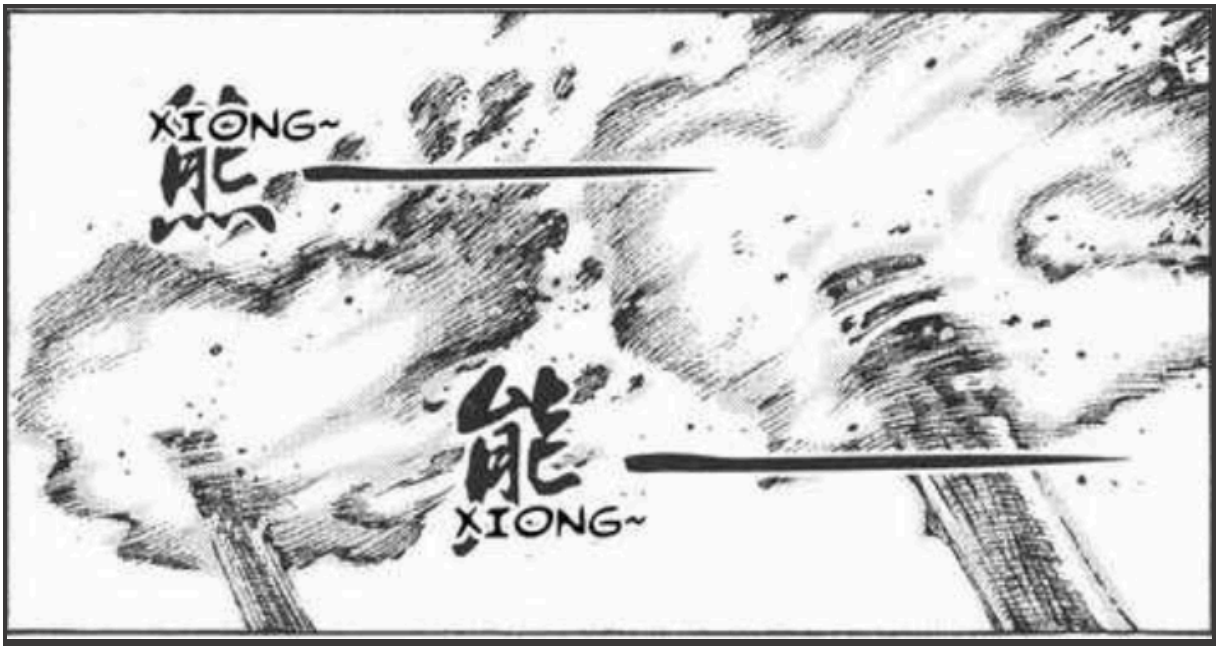


He reached Xun Yu before the city and, instead of engaging directly, raced ahead to the valley Xun Yu intended to cross and **surrounded it**. Xun Yu halted his forces in the valley's forests before Chen Gong could attack.

Chen Gong knew attacking a hidden army would expose his troops to massed archery, so he instead ordered the forests **burned**, forcing Xun Yu out and cutting off the road to Chenliu.


THE WIND IS RIGHT? ADVISOR, YOU MEAN...





Chen Gong believed he had decisively cornered Xun Yu.

He was wrong.

Just as Chen Gong seemed victorious, **Sima Yi** appeared.
He approached Chen Gong as Xun Yu's envoy and offered him a chance to surrender.

Chen Gong laughed. Why surrender when he held every advantage?

Sima Yi simply handed him a flag—saying it was a "gift"—and left.

Moments later, **arrows rained down** on Chen Gong's army *from behind*.

They were fired by the **Runan Yellow Turban Army**, supposedly Lu Bu's valuable allies.
But in truth, they had been loyal to **Cao Cao** all along, operating under the command of **Xun Yu**, the Second Genius.

The flag Sima Yi handed over carried the phrase **"Heaven is dead,"** a dark inversion of the Yellow Turbans' original slogan:

> "The Blue Sky is dead; the Yellow Sky shall rise."

It was a quiet announcement that the Yellow Turban remnants had switched sides.

Chen Gong's troops were slaughtered, and he suffered a devastating defeat.


THAT I HAVE CALCULATED UP TO ROUND SIX HUNDRED AND FIFTY.


PA~

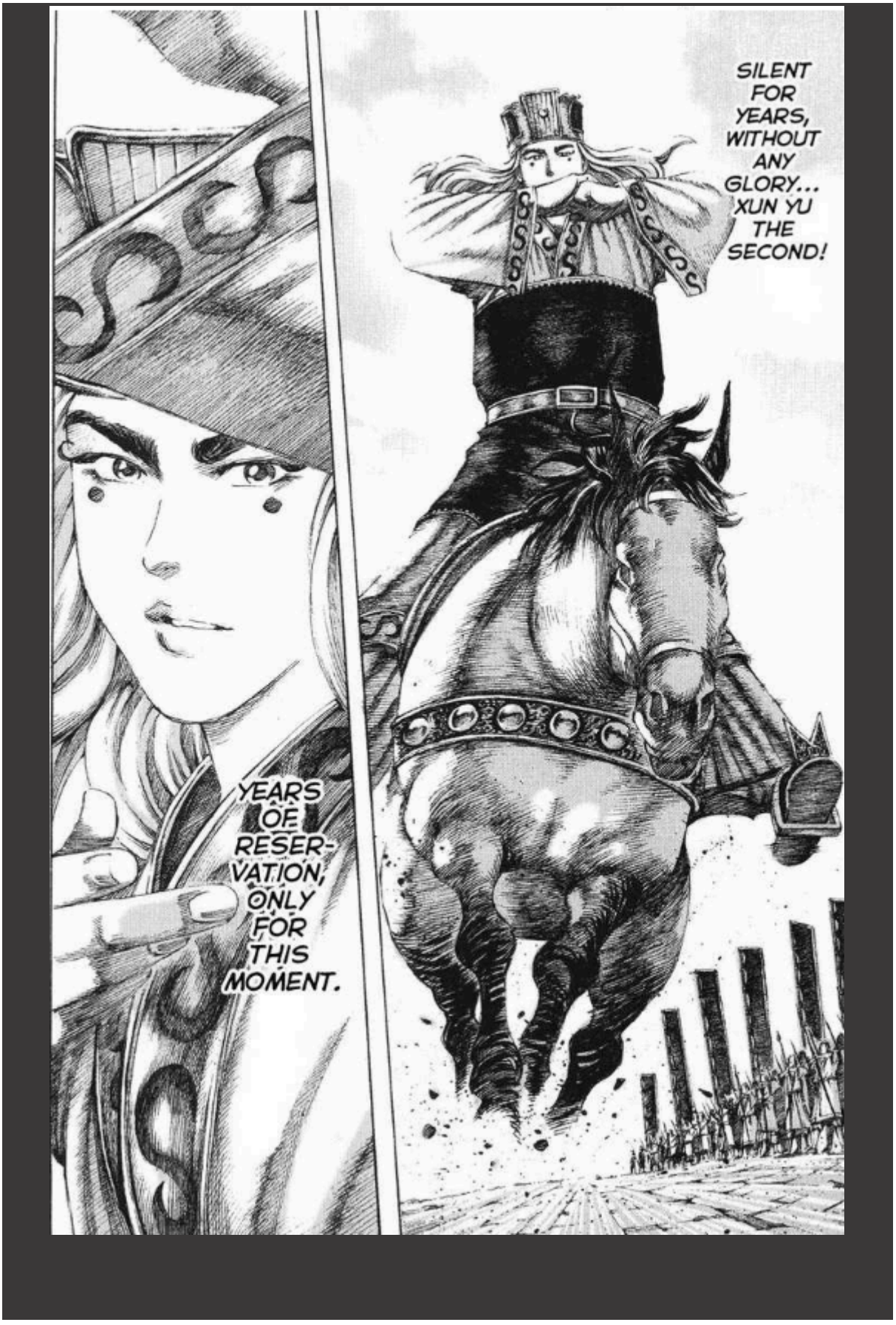

NOT A COMMANDER FLAG?
THAT IS... OUR ANSWER!
NO, MASTER CHEN GONG, THAT'S MY GIFT TO YOU.


XIU


HEAVEN
IS
DEAD.
PENG~



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SILENT FOR YEARS, WITHOUT ANY GLORY... XUN YU THE SECOND!
YEARS OF RESER-VATION, ONLY FOR THIS MOMENT.

Back in Puyang, Lu Bu personally confronted Cao Cao. The Sima clan's Handicapped Warriors intervened, not only protecting Cao Cao but even wounding Lu Bu. Using the secret underground passageways—constructed by the Sima clan themselves—Cao Cao escaped the burning city.



The cities in ancient China had a lot of secret passageways under their walls, and the clan that built those passageways was the Sima clan, and not just passageways, the

Sima clan was a very rich clan because they could build anything, even walls.



From the outside, it looked like Cao Cao was constantly being saved by his strategists.

But the truth is more twisted.

Everything—the Xuzhou massacres, the false deaths, the self-sabotage, and even Lu Bu's trap—was part of Cao Cao (and Guo Jia)'s long-term strategy.

He needed:

- **His weak-hearted elites purged through crisis,**

- **Disloyal noble families exposed,**
- **His remaining followers hardened through fire,**
- **And the perfect environment for Guo Jia's doctrine:**
  "A tyrant in war, a benevolent ruler in peace."

Cao Cao was not a reactive warlord—he was engineering an empire through controlled catastrophe.


LU BU IS POWERFUL, BECAUSE HE HAS BEEN IN MANY BATTLES.
OUR ARMY MIGHT THEN SUFFER A TOTAL DEFEAT.
WIN A LITTLE, LOSE A LITTLE, BETTER TO LEARN FROM MISTAKES NOW, THEN LATER WHEN...
OUR SIDE HAS MANY TALENTS, BUT NOT ENOUGH EXPERIENCE IN DEALING WITH ADVERSITY.
WE'VE ONLY FOUGHT SMALL BATTLES, BUT IF DISASTER STRIKES...
SON-OF-A-BITCH!
YOU MEAN YOU LOST AT XUZHOU'S ON PURPOSE?


I LOST TO THEM FAIR AND SQUARE, BUT THAT DOESN'T MATTER.
BECAUSE FOR YANZHOU'S CRISIS, OUR LORD'S GOAL WAS...
TO LOSE! TO CREATE CHAOS!
MORE CHAOS.
AN ABLE MINISTER IN PEACE TIMES, AN ANTI-HERO IN WAR TIMES.
MY MASTER ONCE SAID THIS ABOUT OUR LORD ...

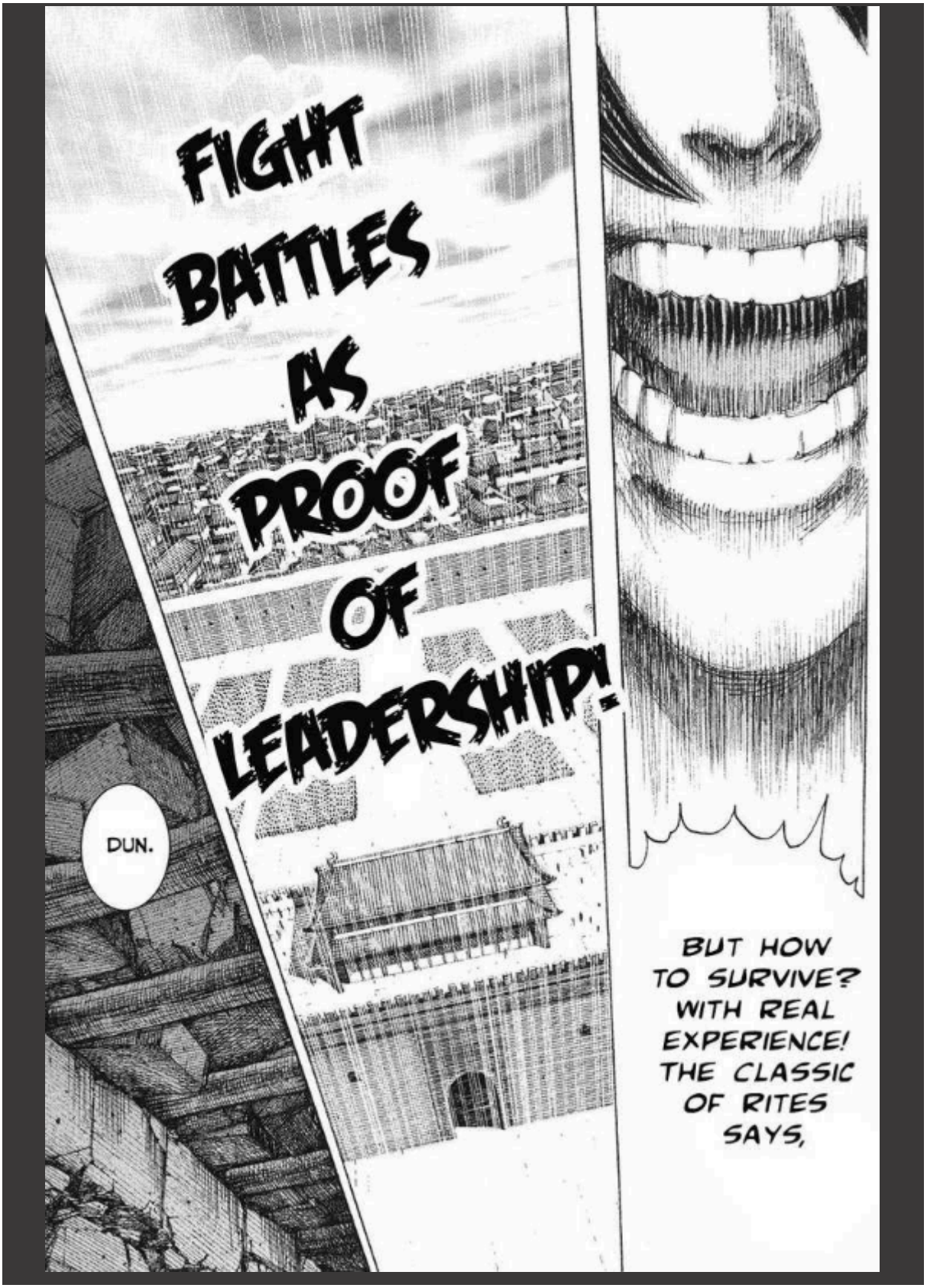

ONLY MEANS IT'S DESTINY'S CALLING!
THINK ABOUT IT, WHY WOULD OUR LORD CARELESSLY USE ALL OF HIS FORCES, JUST FOR A MEASLY XUZHOU?

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LIVES AND DIGNITY ARE BEING PUT TO THE GRINDSTONE THAT IS AN UNDEFEATABLE EVIL MAN!
IT'S FOR TRAINING!
THE XUZHOU EXCURSION WASN'T FOR THE TERRITORY, BUT FOR A TRAINING GROUND!
THERE IS A SHALLOW SAYING, "PUT ONESELF IN A DEADLY PERIL AND ONE WILL SURVIVE."
TO MAKE HIS MEN HAVE THEIR OWN WILL AND MINDS!


FIGHT BATTLES AS PROOF OF LEADERSHIP!
DUN.
BUT HOW TO SURVIVE? WITH REAL EXPERIENCE! THE CLASSIC OF RITES SAYS,



Guo Jia's influence during this arc serves *multiple long-term objectives*:

1. Reinstate Sima Yi into Cao Cao's circle

Guo Jia knew Sima Yi would one day be essential in countering **Zhuge Liang**, the greatest strategic threat in China. Even after Sima Yi inadvertently contributed to the defeat in the Xuzhou arc, Guo Jia ensured he regained Cao Cao's trust.

2. Secure Xun Yu's integration into Cao Cao's faction

Although their philosophies clashed—Guo Jia favored ruthless expediency, Xun Yu benevolent order—Guo Jia needed Xun Yu as Cao Cao's future "good face."

- **Guo Jia = Tyrant during war**
- **Xun Yu = Benevolent ruler during peace**

This duality was the foundation of Cao Cao's future legitimacy.

3. Deceive the powerful Yuan clan

Yuan Shao's clan was the most powerful in China. Had Cao Cao appeared too successful, Yuan Shao would have attacked early.
Guo Jia ensured Cao Cao looked weakened, preventing premature conflict.

4. Intentionally provoke Zhuge Liang

Guo Jia slaughtered civilians to bait Zhuge Liang into a contest of wits.
Two outcomes were possible:

- Zhuge Liang loses → no more threat.
- Zhuge Liang wins → Guo Jia learns his weaknesses and strengths.

Either result benefited Cao Cao's side.

5. Build internal cohesion before the inevitable war with Yuan Shao

The ordeal in Yan Province forged Cao Cao's army into a unified, hardened force capable of surviving the coming storm.

3- Wancheng Bloodbath arc

Guo Jia's role is small in this arc.
Xun Yu and Jia Xu carry most of the strategic weight. Cao Cao's reputation collapses,

and the Sima clan becomes suspected of orchestrating internal damage because of Pang Tong's schemes (one of the 8 geniuses) who managed to stay hidden.

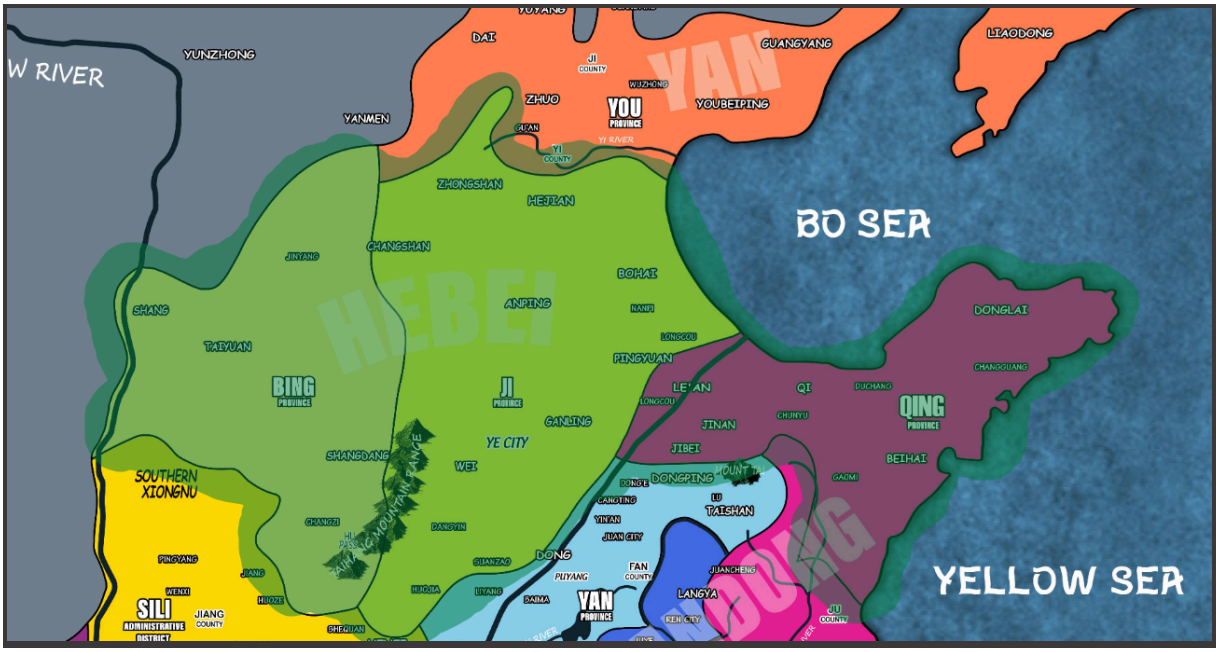
This presents a serious long-term threat. To prevent the Sima clan from ever destabilizing Cao Cao again, Guo Jia makes a drastic decision: he orchestrates the destruction of the Sima clan itself. By wiping out Sima Yi's family, he forces Sima Yi into a state of desperation and personal vendetta, ensuring that his only path forward is to seek Cao Cao's favor. Guo Jia then orders Sima Yi to assassinate Pang Tong's ally — the true culprit Guo Jia had already identified — using covert operatives. This gives Sima Yi the opportunity to "atone" and regain a place within Cao Cao's ranks.

Of course, Guo Jia is fully aware of Sima Yi's real intentions. But with Cao Cao's reputation in ruins, Guo Jia cannot allow Cao Cao to remain the ultimate power figure just yet. He needs someone else to eventually step into the role of internal pillar — someone ruthless, brilliant, and capable of contending with the era's most dangerous minds, especially Zhuge Liang. So Guo Jia deliberately allows Sima Yi to climb, shaping him into a pawn who will one day take control of Cao Cao's faction, stabilize it from within, and face the greatest strategic adversaries of the age. Through this, Guo Jia not only preserves a future weapon for Cao Cao's line, but also ensures that the clan's crumbling prestige can one day be rebuilt.

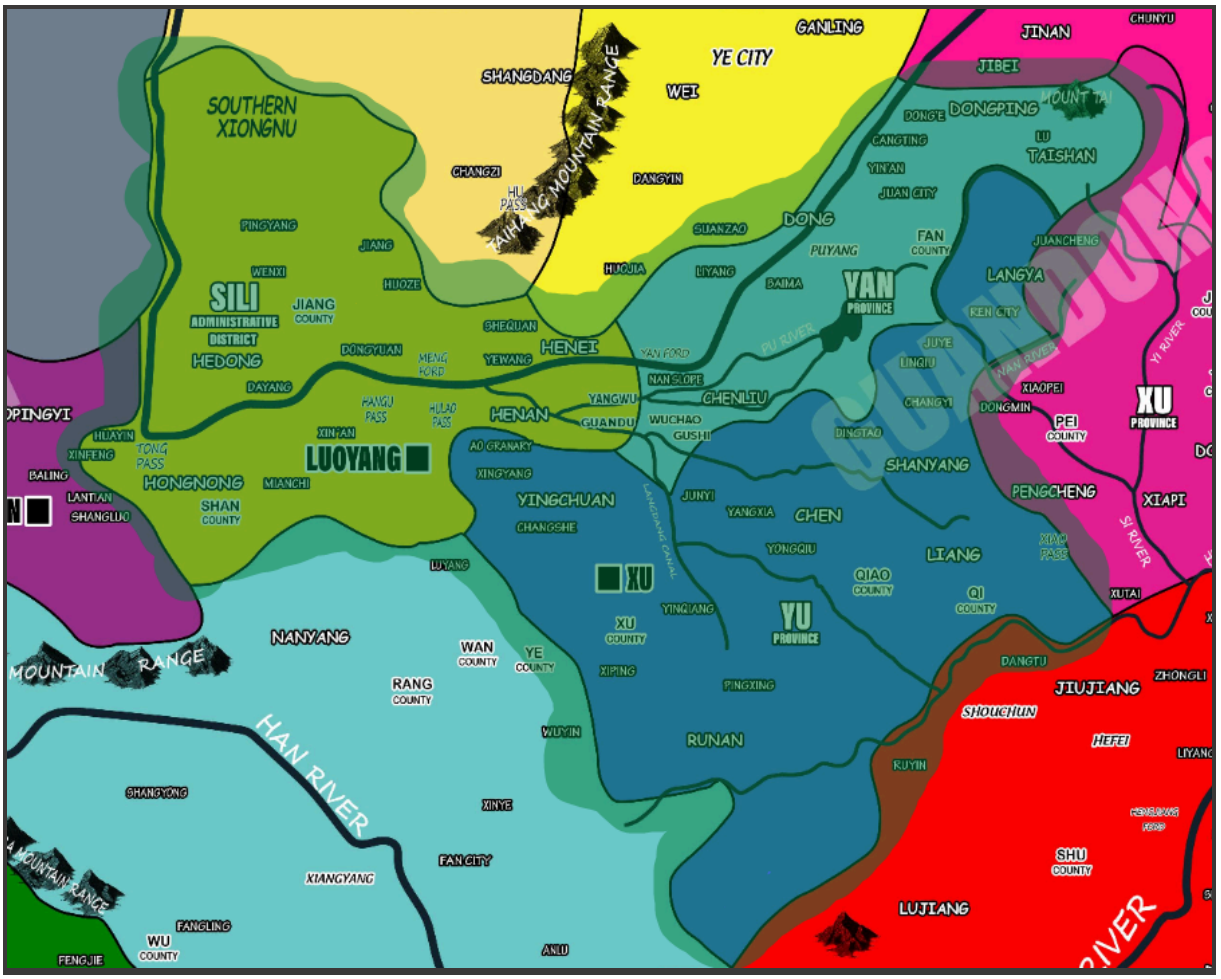
If you want more info about the arc itself and the adversities Cao Cao faces :
Pang Tong: Linked Stratagems

4- Battle of Xiapi

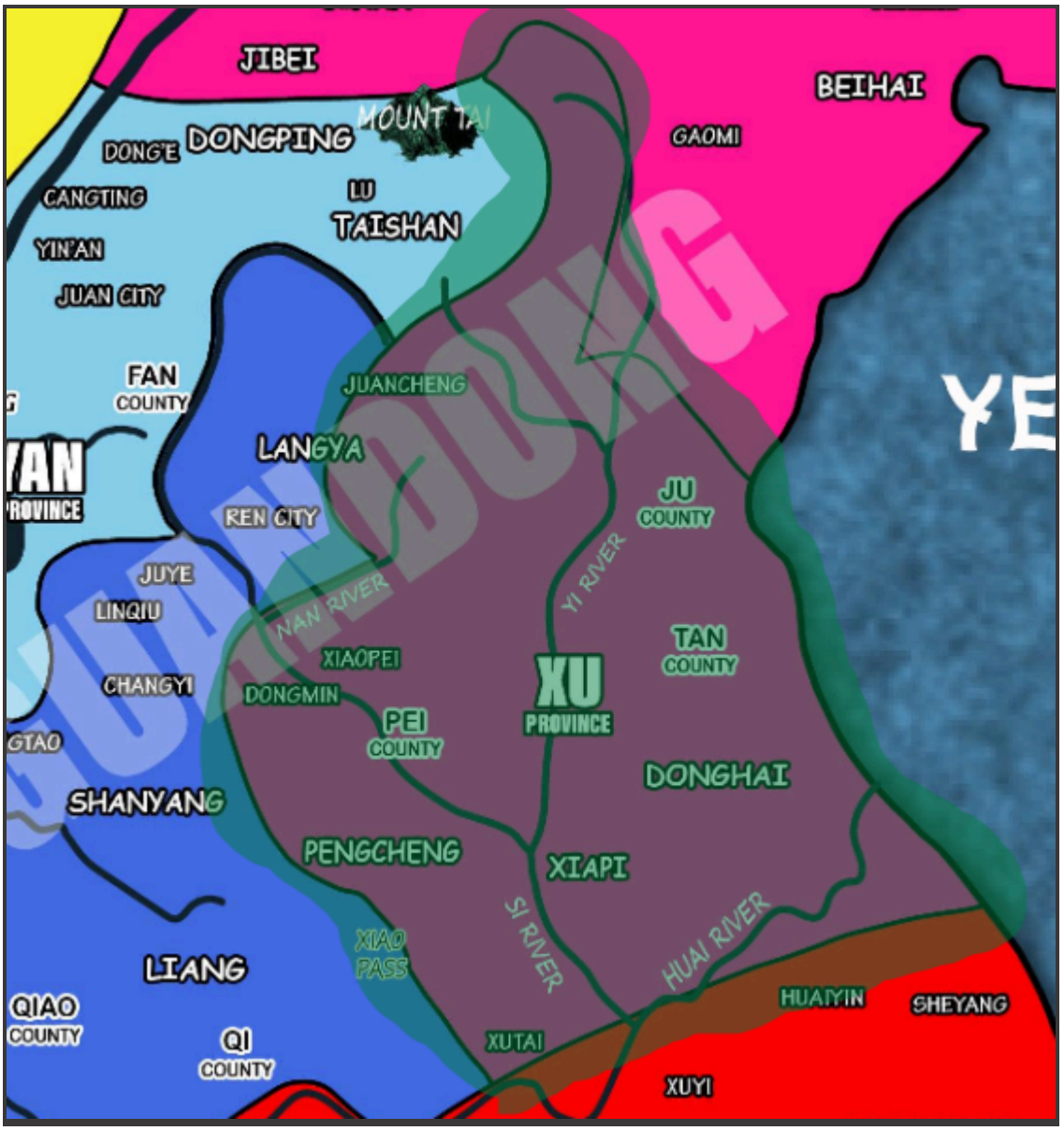
Yuan Shao, Cao Cao's greatest rival, rules from Yecheng in Ji Province and also controls Bing and Qing Provinces. His ambition pushes him further north toward You Province.



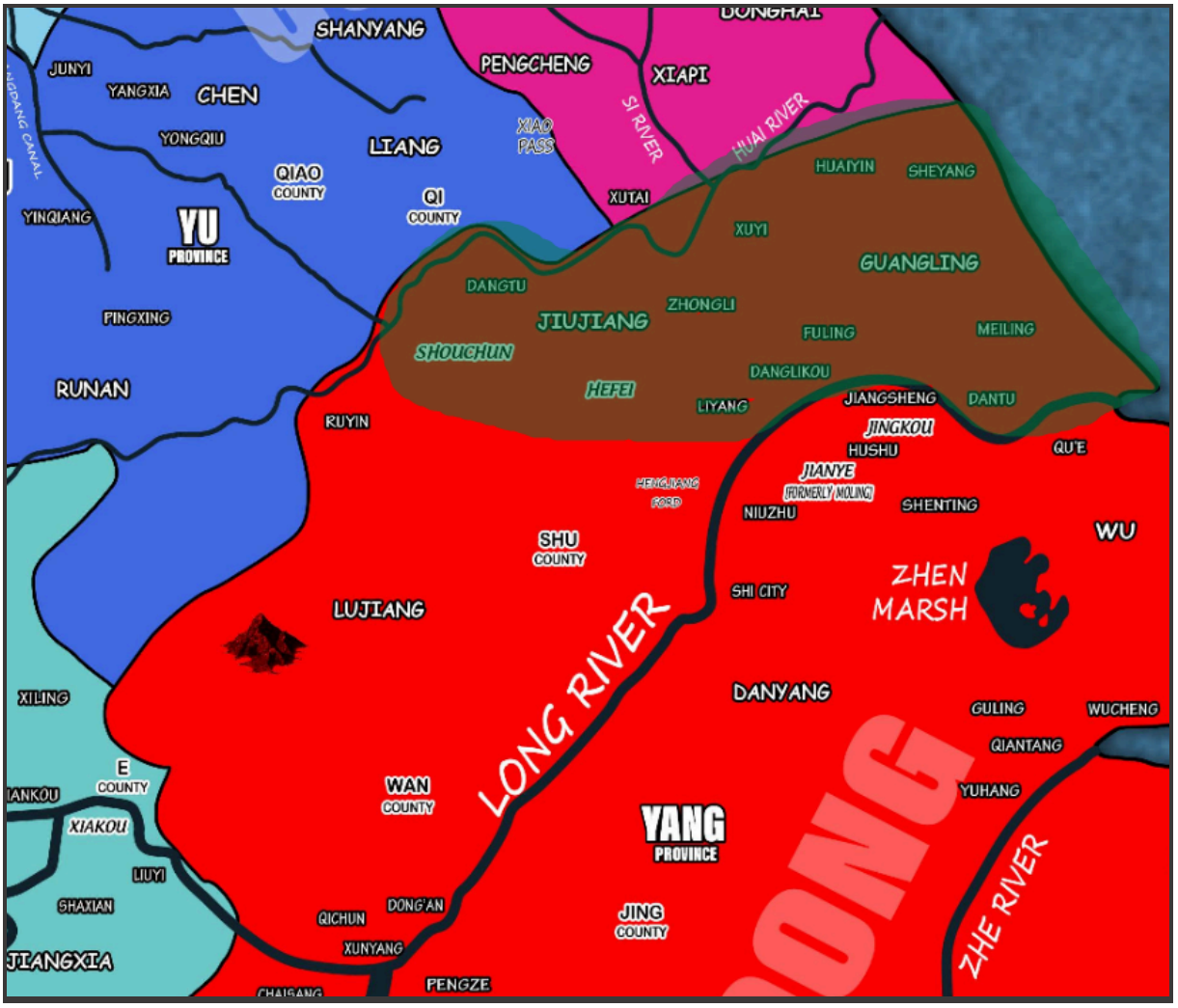
Cao Cao, by contrast, rules Yan and Yu Provinces and effectively controls the Sili District—the Emperor's territory. The Emperor is a powerless child and essentially a political instrument, so Sili is functionally part of Cao Cao's domain.



Meanwhile, Lü Bu has seized Xu Province from Liu Bei, making it his base of operations. This province is now Cao Cao's primary military target.



Another potential target is Yuan Shu's territory in Yang Province. Yuan Shu's situation is dire: Lü Bu crushed him when he attempted to seize Xu Province, and Sun Ce stripped him of several key cities. Desperate, Yuan Shu turned to his brother Yuan Shao for help.

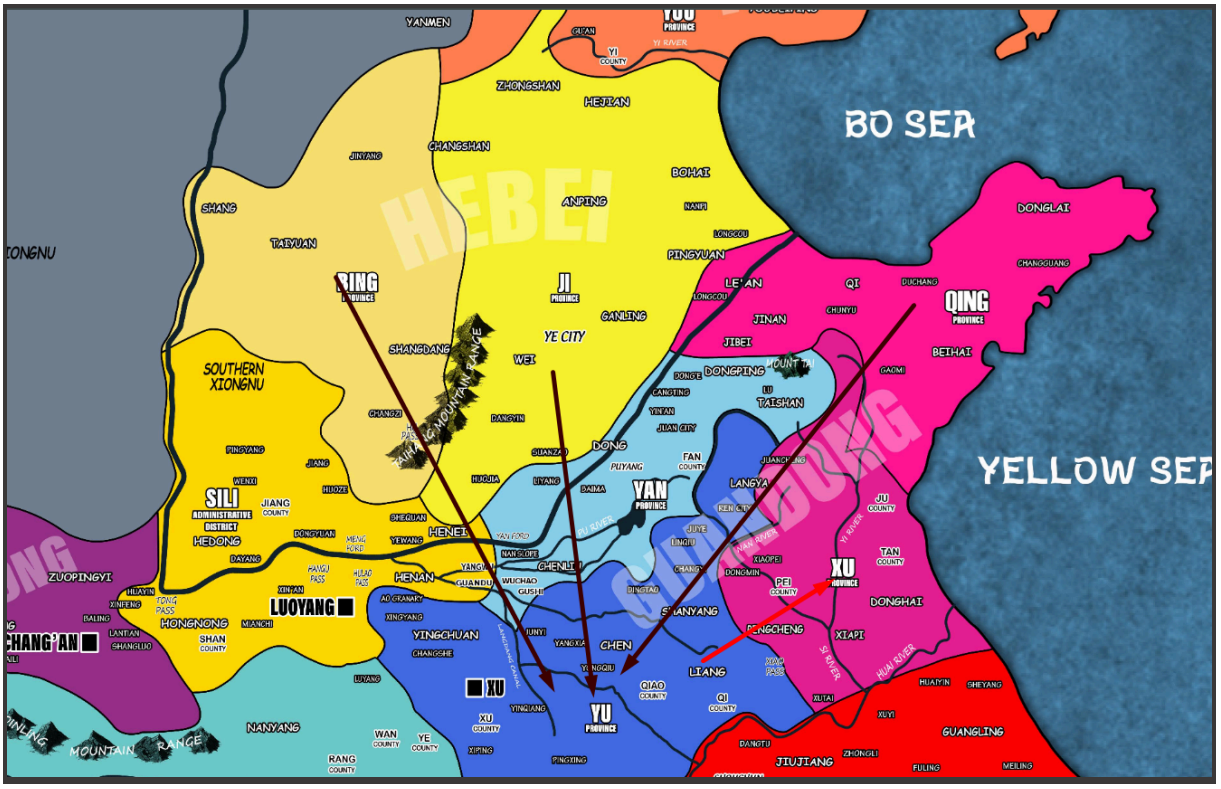


There are two problems for Cao Cao:

Cao Cao faces two major strategic dilemmas:

1. **He cannot allow Yuan Shao to aid Yuan Shu**, as that would undermine his plan to annex Yuan Shu's territory and expand Yuan Shao's influence southward.

2. **He cannot attack Xu Province without leaving his main city in Yu Province exposed**—a perfect opportunity for Yuan Shao to invade from the north.



To resolve both issues simultaneously, Cao Cao sends his top political adviser, **Xun Yu**, to negotiate with Yuan Shao.

Through the Emperor's authority, Xun Yu offers Yuan Shao the one prize he has long coveted: **You Province**. If Yuan Shao moves his army north to occupy it, he will be too busy to interfere in the south.

This would grant Cao Cao:

- Freedom to invade Xu Province and eliminate Lü Bu.
- Assurance that Yuan Shao cannot supply Yuan Shu.

The plan works—almost too well. But then everything spirals out of control.


YUAN SHU HAS TARNISHED THE REPUTATION OF MY CLAN; WOULD I BE ABLE TO FACE THE ELDERS IF I HELP HIM NOW?
GOVERNOR OF JIZHOU,
YUAN SHAO
IMPARTIAL, REFUSE TO HELP EVIL, AND TAKING THE WHOLE SITUATION INTO ACCOUNT. YOUR ACTION IS EXEMPLARY TO THE PEOPLE.
THEREFORE I AM HERE TO DELIVER HIS MAJESTY'S PRAISE.

Lü Bu abducts Xun Yu to prevent Cao Cao and Yuan Shao from forming an alliance. If the two warlords united, Lü Bu would be crushed between them. So he kidnaps Cao Cao's chief adviser to force suspicion and hostility between the two sides.

Cao Cao believes Yuan Shao murdered Xun Yu, and war between the two factions becomes imminent.

If war breaks out, Cao Cao must pull his troops from Nanyang (in Jing Province) back to defend the Yan–Ji border. This leaves Nanyang vulnerable—allowing **Zhang Xiu** to reclaim it and potentially strike at Cao Cao's main city while he's busy fighting Lü Bu.



Back in Cao Cao's camp, Sima Yi offered Liu Chong's head to Cao Cao, asking for Cao Cao's forgiveness for the clan's betrayal.



Cao Cao accepted, as Sima Yi's talents would be of use to him, and ordered him to help Guo Jia in the invasion of Xu Province.



In Nanyang, Jia Xu—now serving Cao Cao—manages to persuade Zhang Xiu to surrender. This eliminates the threat to Cao Cao's rear and even allows the recovery of rations stuck in Nanyang, thanks to Sima Yi.

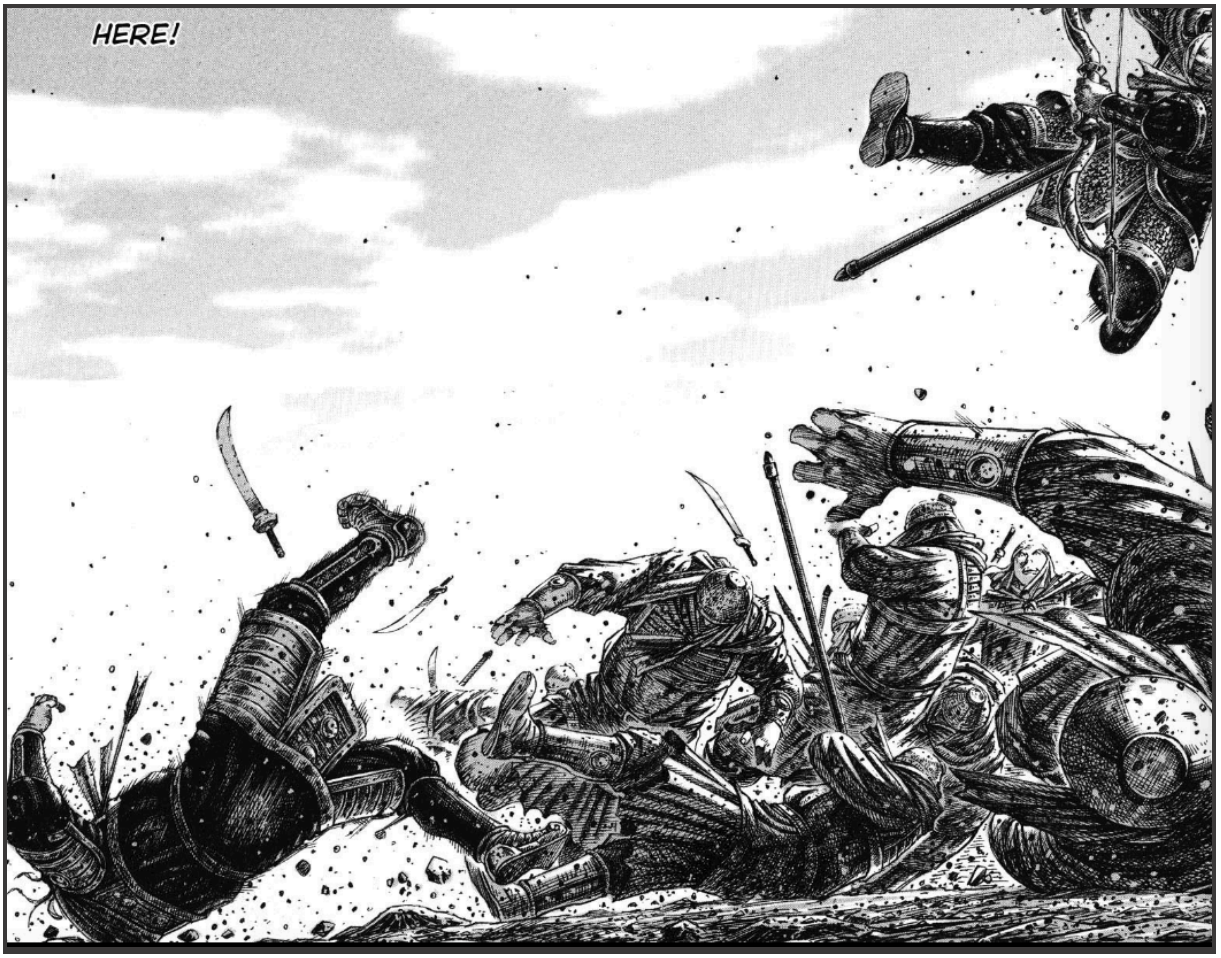


Cao Cao's southern front moves toward Xiapi.

Xiahou Dun's army is ambushed by Gao Shun, one of Lü Bu's elite generals. Xiahou deploys archers on his left flank, but Lü Bu's cavalry tears through them.



Xiahou moves the archers to the front of the left flank to arrow down Gao Shun's cavalry. Xiahou Dun's entire left flank is wiped out, but he still manages to survive, and even kills the leader of the horse archers, as they have no arrows left.
With their leader killed and no arrows left, they retreat to Xiapi, and Xiahou Dun is saved by the remnants of his army.



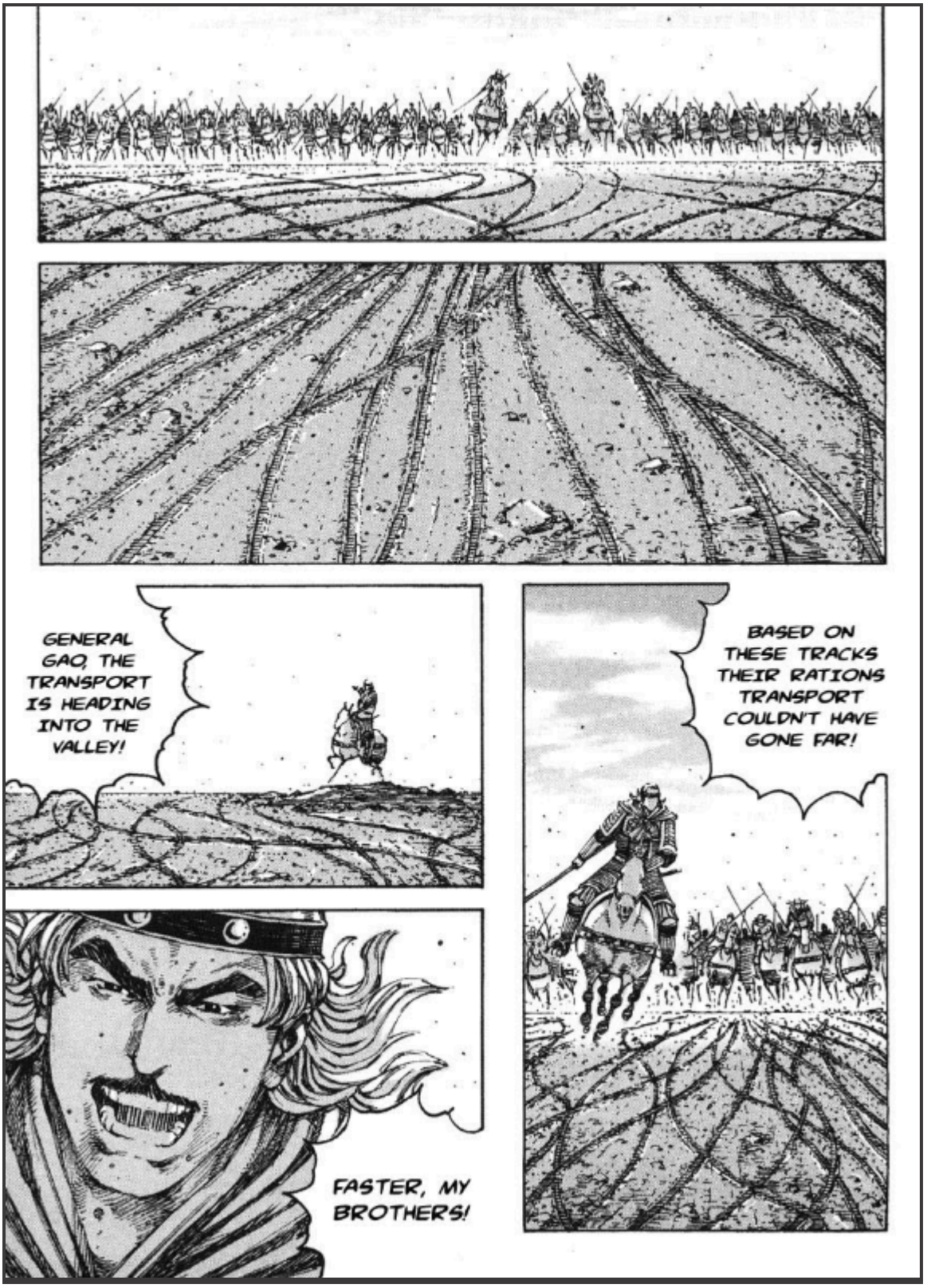
Xiahou Yuan, not expecting that Xiahou Dun would lose to the Lu Bu's cavalry, also gets his army ambushed by Gao Shun.



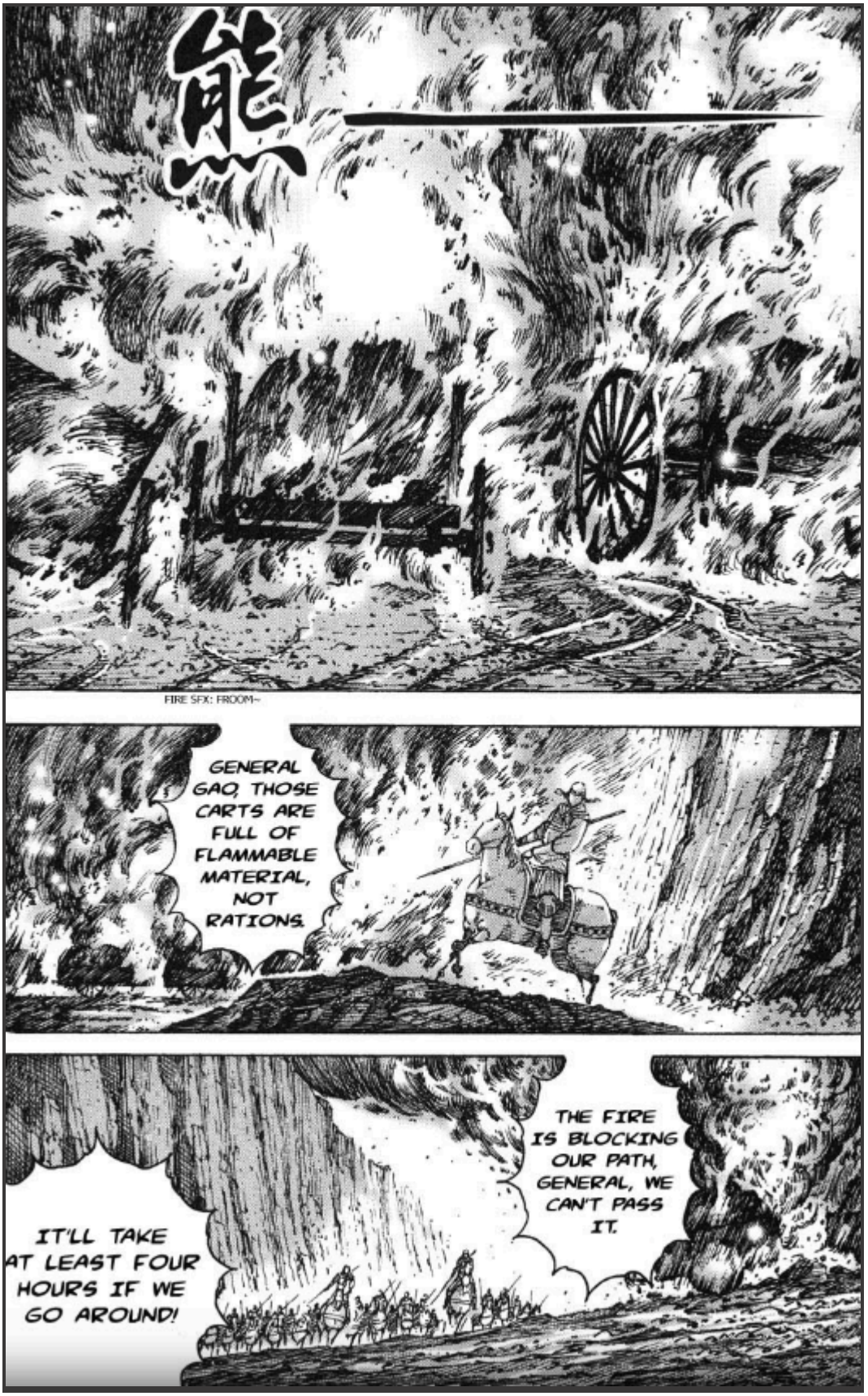
Xiahou Yuan is forced to retreat.

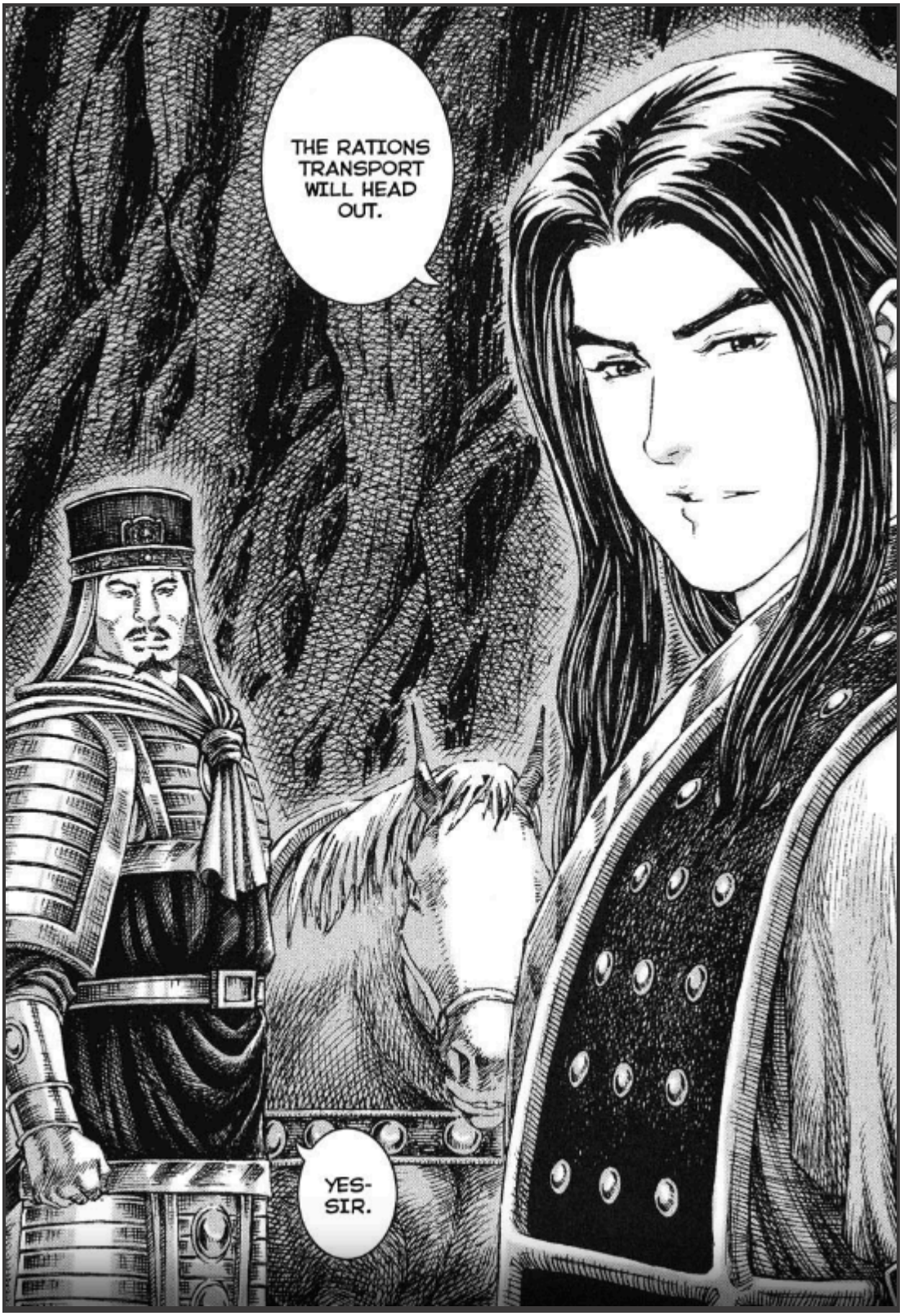


Instead of pursuing Xiahou Yuan's army, Gao Shun chooses to attack Cao Cao's rear camp where the rations are stored, and it is also revealed that the forces of Mount Tai, previously allies of Cao Cao, have switched to the Lu Bu side and are blocking the main route for the rations,



The carts, instead of carrying rations, are full of flammable materials that block the entire valley road, making it impossible for Gao Shun to continue.This was Sima Yi's trap. Anticipating Gao Shun's moves, he had already moved the real rations to Yu Jin's southern camp and prepared a fire barrier to halt any pursuit. Scouts divert Mount Tai's forces, completing the deception.


燃
FIRE SFX: FROOM~
GENERAL GAO, THOSE CARTS ARE FULL OF FLAMMABLE MATERIAL, NOT RATIONS.
THE FIRE IS BLOCKING OUR PATH, GENERAL, WE CAN'T PASS IT.
IT'LL TAKE AT LEAST FOUR HOURS IF WE GO AROUND!



In the Outer City, Sima Lang is revealed as a secret investor in Xu, and three former Dong Zhuo generals—now serving Lü Bu—have secretly been spying on him to avenge their fallen master.

They reveal that Xun Yu is alive and offer to help rescue him. They succeed, but burn the location afterward to frame Gao Shun's failure to guard it.


HONESTLY, OVER THE YEARS I HAVE REALIZED HOW RIGHT THEY WERE. I JUST GOT A LITTLE WORKED UP KNOWING THAT I CAN RETURN TO LU BU'S CAMP TODAY. SORRY, BROTHER SIMA.
THEN I'LL GO STRAIGHT TO THE POINT AS WELL. WE HELP YOU IN SECRET, AND BY ELIMINATING LU BU WE HOPE TO GET ON CAO CAO'S GOOD SIDE.
LET ME BE FRANK HERE. OUR GOAL IS TO EXACT REVENGE FOR OUR LORD. WE'RE NOT INTERESTED IN A LONG TERM ALLIANCE WITH THE SIMA CLAN.
ALWAYS HAVING A BACKUP PLAN. NO WONDER WHEN THE WORLD THOUGHT YOU WERE DESTROYED BY CAO YOU BECAME HIS GUIDE TO XU INSTEAD.


XUN YU IS STILL ALIVE.
I HEARD THAT HE HAS BEEN PLACED IN GAO SHUN'S CAMP SO HE CAN BE SHOWN OUR ARMY'S MIGHT.
DON'T WORRY, BROTHER SIMA. I WILL ARRANGE THE DETAILS SO YOU CAN TAKE HIM BACK.



Xun Yu, who Lü Bu had occasionally consulted for military advice, now provides Cao Cao with detailed intelligence.

Sima Yi, Xun Yu and Guo Jia find the rescue suspiciously convenient and orders surveillance of a certain man—possibly **Wei Xu**, not Chen Gong. Wei Xu is later revealed to be secretly working for Chen Gong.


THEY LACK ENDURANCE. IT'S NOT DIFFICULT TO BEAT THEM.


HOW COULD THAT BE? I DON'T SEE ANY FLAW IN THIS PLAN...
GET IN TOUCH WITH THE CHEN FAMILY IN XUZHOU.
TELL THEM TO MONITOR ONE MAN CLOSELY.
I'M SURE XUN AND GUO FEEL THE SAME WAY.



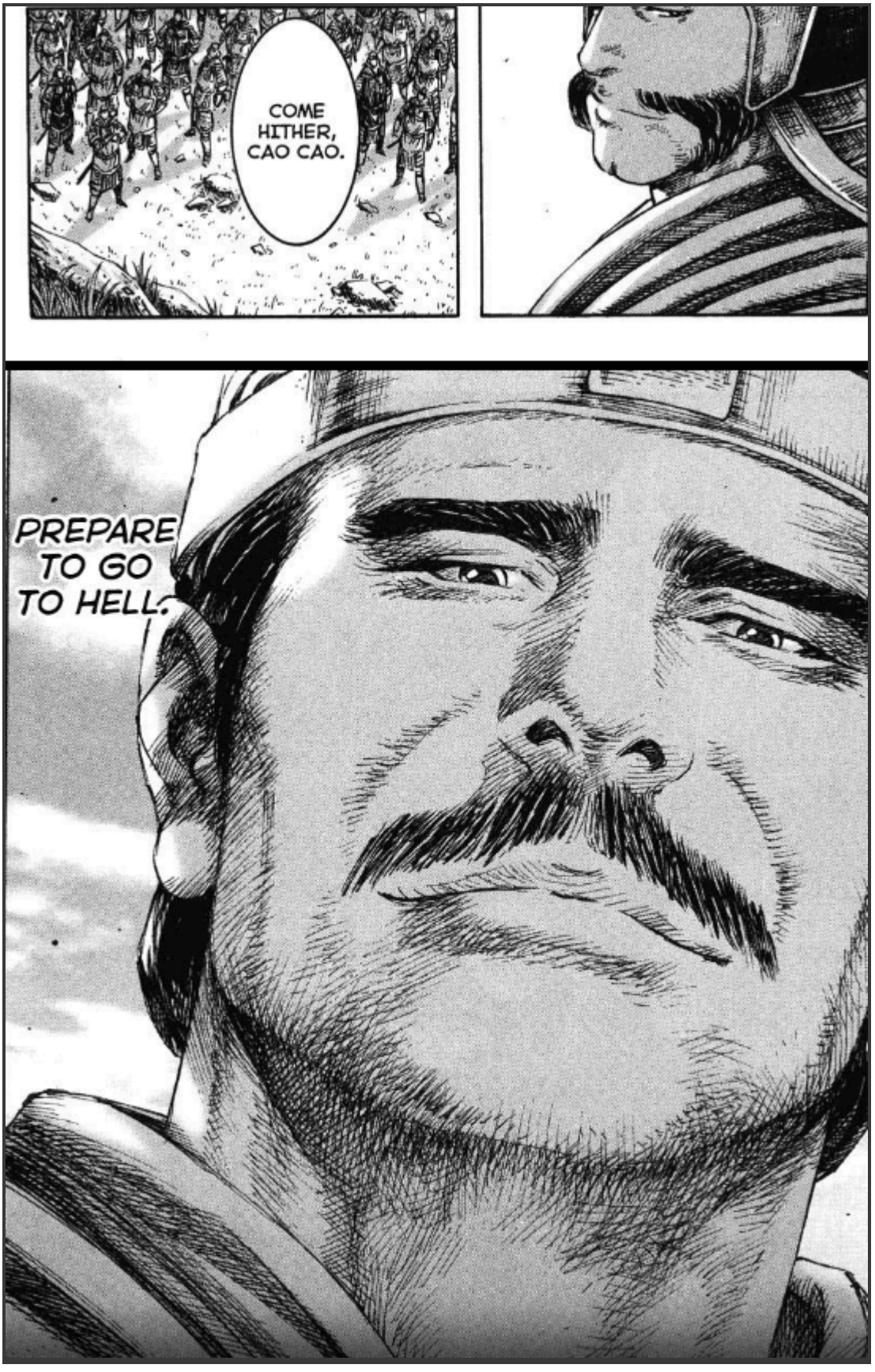
Chen Gong orchestrated everything:

- Planting false intelligence about Lü Bu’s archer numbers
- Manipulating the rescue of Xun Yu
- Setting up Gao Shun’s temporary “demotion”
- Preparing a timed counterstrike

The trap works perfectly.

Yu Jin charges forward expecting few archers and is crushed by a wall of arrows. Retreating, he runs straight into Gao Shun’s ambush.

Han Hao and Xu Huang are defeated by Mount Tai’s forces. Cao Cao’s army suffers devastating losses in a single day.


COME HITHER, CAO CAO.
PREPARE TO GO TO HELL.

Unable to match Lü Bu’s cavalry head-on, Cao Cao’s army digs pitfalls across the battlefield. Even then, supplies are lost, morale is low, and both Mount Tai and Zhang Liao march toward Xiao Pass—Cao Cao’s critical supply corridor.

Zhang Liao, blocked by Guo Jia’s pitfalls, heads south to join Mount Tai.

Xu Chu challenges and defeats all four Mount Tai generals, disorganizing their forces. Zhang Liao orders a withdrawal.



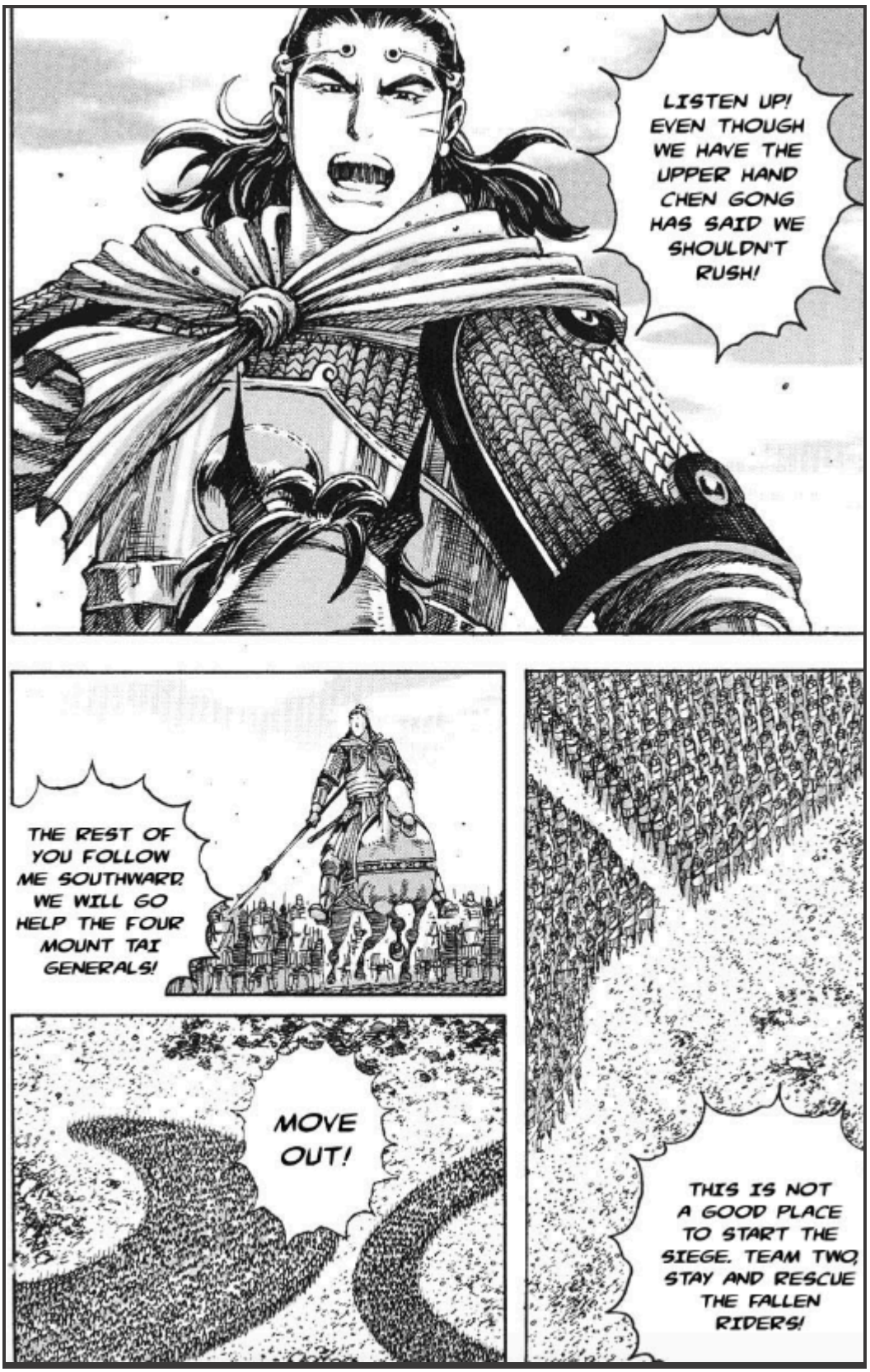
Only 1 day after Cao Cao began to attack the Xu Province with all his forces, many of his generals lost to the insanely strong cavalry of Gao Shun, and he even lost a camp of rations. After these brutal losses, both the Mount Tai and Zhang Liao armies march towards the Xiao Pass, which is Cao Cao's buffer zone and where he is now.

The Xiao Pass is probably the most important place for Cao Cao, as it's the place where he can transport his rations from the Yu Province, if Lu Bu takes it, we can say it's pretty much over for Cao Cao, as he is taking a lot of Ls, and losing his buffer zone would be RIP.

The Zhang Liao's army coming from the east is trapped by the Guo Jia's pitfalls



Zhang Liao realises that it's impossible to move his cavalry across such terrible terrain, so he moves most of his army to south to help the Mount Tai forces take the Xiao Pass, leaving the rest to help the victims of thepitfall.



Sima Yi meets Lü Bu in Xiapi, claiming to seek revenge on Cao Cao for destroying the Sima clan. Zhang Liao questions his loyalty, but Sima Yi speaks in metaphors about "raising a tiger only to invite disaster"—a reference to Lü Bu's betrayal of Dong Zhuo.

Sima Yi explains Cao Cao's dire situation: losses everywhere and the rainy season approaching. He predicts Cao Cao will soon retreat south.

Gao Shun appears with a map showing all of Guo Jia's traps—given to him by Sima Yi and verified on the field. With this proof, Lü Bu trusts Sima Yi.

Sima Yi then outlines his plan:

- He will return to Yan Province and make Cao Cao's retreat difficult.
- As Cao Cao pulls back, Xiao Pass will weaken.
- Lü Bu can then seize it, cutting Cao Cao's supply line and winning the war.

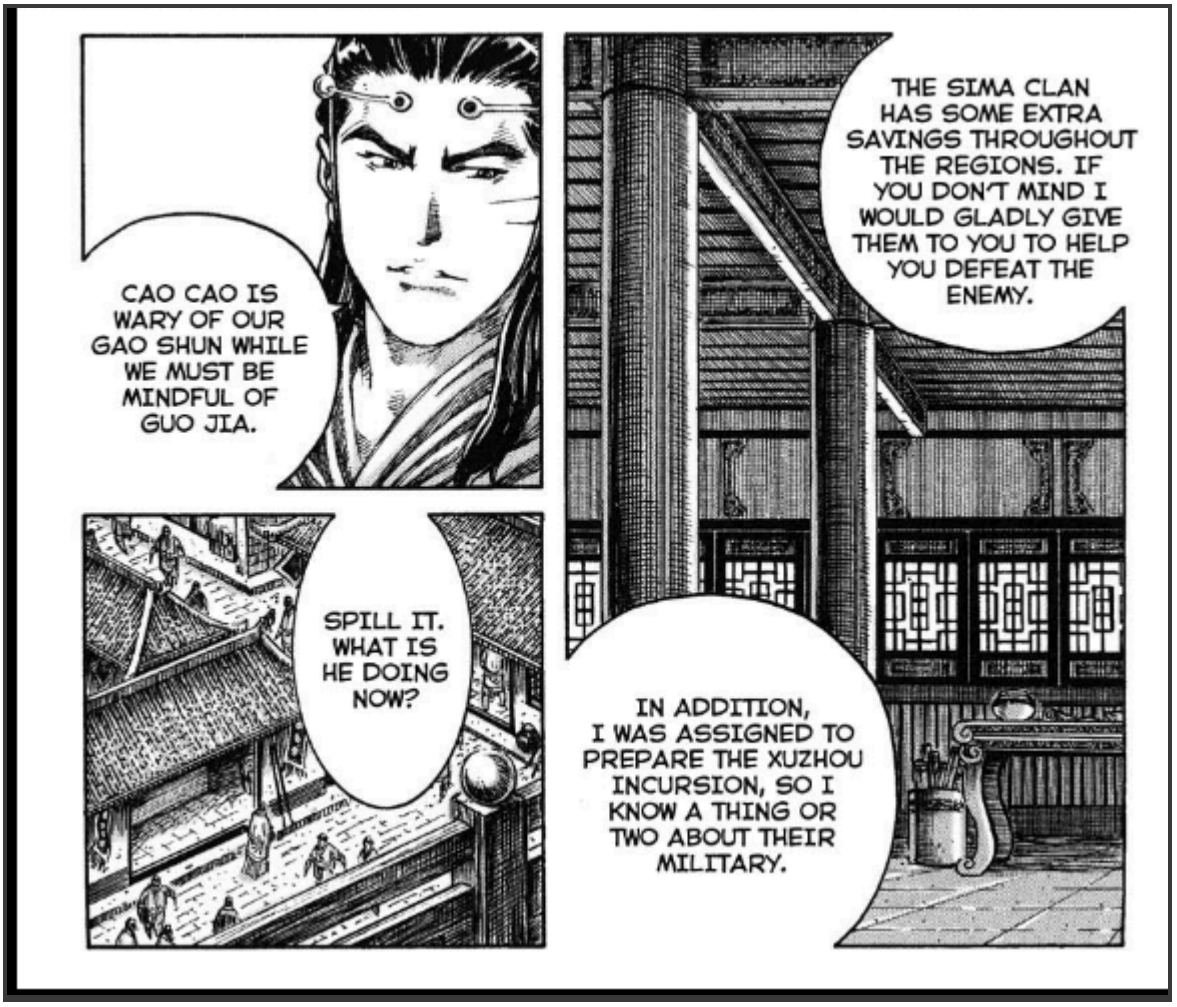
Lü Bu agrees and sends Yuan Shu's troops to hold the southern front.



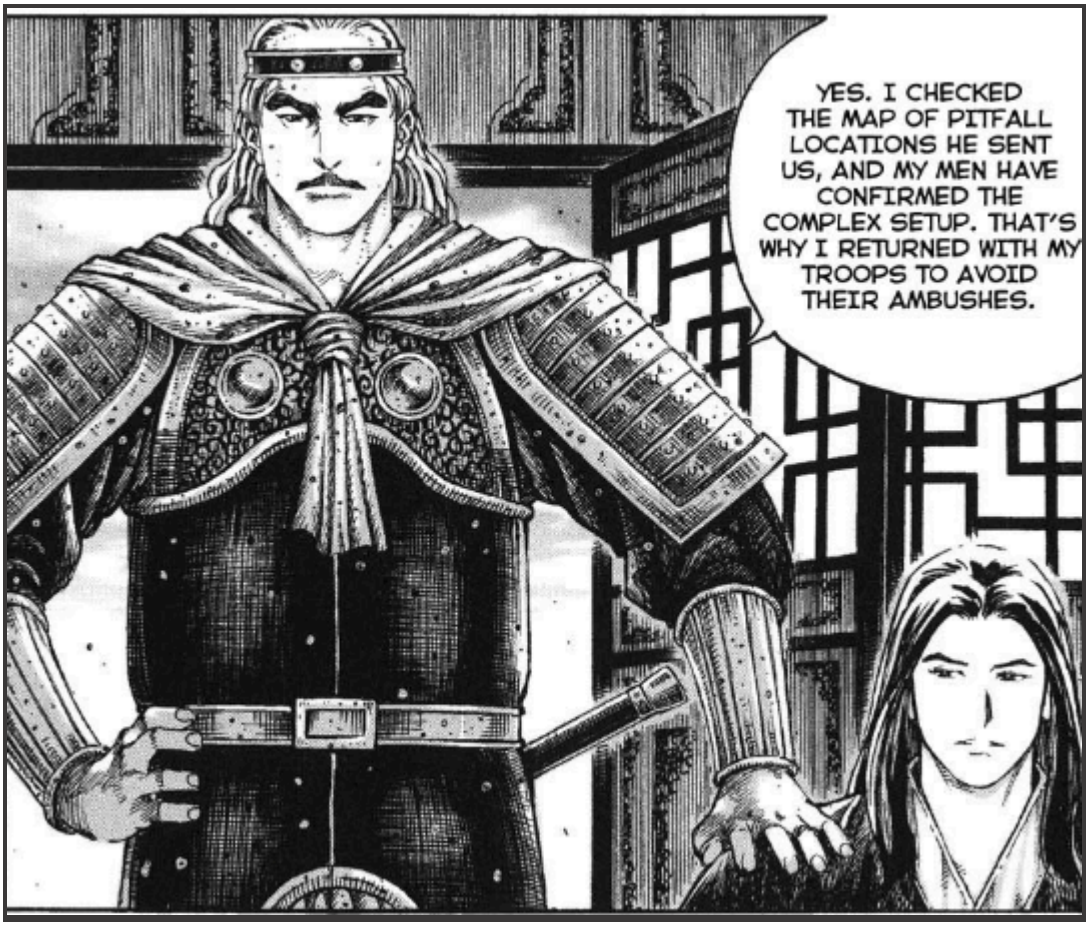
CHAPTER 234 ZHONG DA ADVISES

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I'LL BE BRIEF. DON'T FORGET YOUR OWN HISTORY.
RAISING A TIGER TO COURT DISASTER, AS WELL AS DONG ZHUO'S DEATH. YOU KNOW THAT BETTER THAN ANYONE.
FORGIVE MY BLUNTNESS, BUT WHY WOULD YOU HELP EVIL CAO CAO WHEN HE HAS HURT YOU SO?

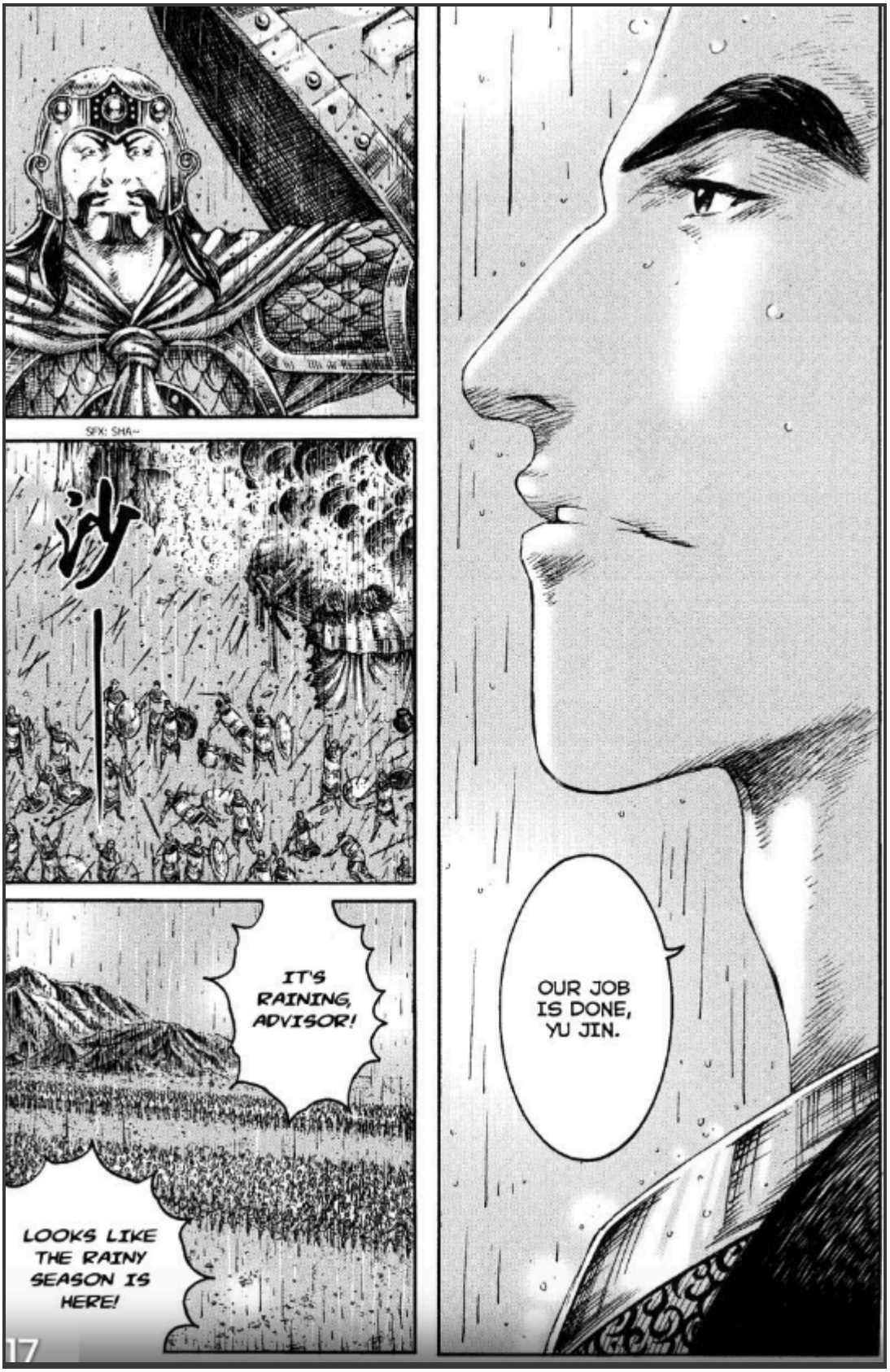

CAO CAO IS WARY OF OUR GAO SHUN WHILE WE MUST BE MINDFUL OF GUO JIA.
SPILL IT. WHAT IS HE DOING NOW?
IN ADDITION, I WAS ASSIGNED TO PREPARE THE XUZHOU INCURSION, SO I KNOW A THING OR TWO ABOUT THEIR MILITARY.
THE SIMA CLAN HAS SOME EXTRA SAVINGS THROUGHOUT THE REGIONS. IF YOU DON'T MIND I WOULD GLADLY GIVE THEM TO YOU TO HELP YOU DEFEAT THE ENEMY.


THEN WE FALL INTO HIS TRAP AND LOSE, RIGHT?
SO HE NEEDS YOU TO LEAD US TO THE RIGHT EXECUTION SPOT.
GUO JIA SURE IS AMAZING. HIS PITFALLS ARE HARD TO DETECT, AND HE IS ONLY MISSING THE BAIT.


YES. I CHECKED THE MAP OF PITFALL LOCATIONS HE SENT US, AND MY MEN HAVE CONFIRMED THE COMPLEX SETUP. THAT'S WHY I RETURNED WITH MY TROOPS TO AVOID THEIR AMBUSHES.



During the rainy season, Jia Xu abruptly announces that Cao Cao's work in Xu Province is "done," using deliberately misleading language to disguise their true intentions.



The pitfalls Guo Jia had ordered earlier were never meant to trap cavalry. They were arranged in a specific pattern near Xiapi. When the rains came, the pits would channel the swelling waters of the Si River directly into the city. But Chen Gong had placed Gao

Shun near the river. So after Cao Cao's numerous L, he immediately adapted and sent Sima Yi to "negotiate" with Lu Bu with the pretense of vengeance for the Sima clan's slaughter. Lu Bu had no way to realize that Sima Yi was actually helping Guo Jia despite the atrocities, this is why the following trap will work.
Lü Bu ended up committing **all** his forces to Xiao Pass—clearing the riverbank so the engineers could dig and connect the Si River to the pitfalls.

When the floods hit, **Xiapi becomes a water-locked prison**, trapping all of Lü Bu's supplies inside.


HOO. SO MUCH RAIN WATER THIS YEAR.
SFX: PONG~
碰
THE EMBANKMENTS ARE BROKEN, LOOK OUT!
IT REACHED THE UPPER FIFTEENTH!
WATER HAS BROKEN THE THIRTIETH DAM!



Chen Gong realizes the trap and urges Lü Bu to retreat. But when Chen Gong seeks support from Yuan Shu's troops, he finds them pulling back to Shouchun—because **Xun Yu convinced Yuan Shu to break the alliance**.

Cao Cao and Yuan Shu even form a non-aggression pact. All escape routes close. Lü Bu becomes a **Trapped Beast**—isolated and doomed.


TELL OUR NEARBY DIVISIONS TO RETREAT TO THE CITY AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!
HURRY! INFORM THE THREE DIVISIONS THAT LEFT EARLIER TODAY!
WE'VE BEEN HAD! LISTEN UP! RETREAT TO XIAPI BEFORE THE WATER LEVEL RISES HIGHER!
YUAN SHU HAS DISPATCHED SOME TROOPS, MY LORD. I WILL GO AND DISCUSS FURTHER STRATEGIES WITH THEM!
SFX: LOON~



Back in Xiaopei, Sima Yi cleverly held Lu Bu's Wei Xu, which is now Lu Bu's brother-in-law, and a very trusted ally of Cheng Gong, as a hostage for Sima Yi's future plans.



Chen Gong's final trump card is to attack Cao Cao's main camp while all of Cao Cao's forces are focused on killing Lu Bu, but with the water level too high, they couldn't bring their horses, making them considerably weaker.



Although Sima Yi is the hidden architect of Cao Cao's victory, Guo Jia remains wary of him. He orders two bodyguards to shadow Sima Yi and relocates the Sima clan under the supervision of the Xu clan, effectively neutralizing him.

Cao Cao absorbs Lü Bu's Red Hare cavalry—an elite high-speed unit that will prove decisive in the Battle of Guandu.



It is likely that Guo Jia purposefully “humiliated” Lu Bu publicly so that Lu Bu’s own troops who initially valued honor would eventually turn up against Lu Bu and eventually sides with Cao Cao who would value empathy towards not only Lu Bu but also honor.

FartherMoney converged all of Guo Jia’s past actions from Xuzhou up to the Rain trap of Lu Bu for his pre-Guandu preparations :
Guo Jia's Pre-Guandu Planning Summary

5 — The Battle of Guandu

The Battle of Guandu marks the moment when the Yuan clan finally confronts Cao Cao’s faction head-on. At the center of the Yuan camp stands **Yuan Fang**, its chief strategist and one of the era’s Eight Geniuses. His objectives are vast and interconnected:

Yuan Fang’s Strategic Objectives

1. **Justify war against Cao Cao** by appearing righteous and pro-Han, especially since Cao Cao controls the Emperor.

2. **Unify the entire Yuan clan**, which—despite being the most powerful family in China—suffers from deep internal rivalries.

3. **Win over the people and the Imperial Court.**

4. **Eliminate Yuan Shu**, whose actions tarnish the clan’s legitimacy.

5. **Frame Cao Cao as a traitor to the Han**, granting the Yuan moral supremacy.

How Yuan Fang Sets the Stage

To accomplish these goals, Yuan Fang weaves together brilliant political maneuvering and psychological manipulation:

- He **returns the Imperial Seal**, demonstrating loyalty to Han.

- He **pushes Yuan Shu into provoking Cao Cao**, worsening Cao Cao’s reputation.

- He **collaborates with Imperial loyalists** (Dong Cheng, etc.) to engineer crises inside the capital.

- He **lures Liu Bei into political traps**, weaponizing Liu Bei's popularity.

- He **triggers coordinated revolts**, using chain reactions of fear and rumor to destabilize regions loyal to Cao Cao.

- Most importantly, he **shapes public perception** so that when war begins, the Yuan clan seems to be *defending* the Han dynasty rather than attacking Cao Cao.

Before the battle even begins, Yuan Fang strikes at Cao Cao's greatest assets: his strategists.

- **Jia Xu** is forced to deal with the rebellion at Wancheng—another of Yuan Fang's machinations. This removes Jia Xu from the battlefield entirely.

- **Xun Yu** is gravely wounded and nearly killed.

- **Guo Jia** is weakened by a **deliberately spread plague**, drastically limiting his mobility. This is catastrophic: Guo Jia's strength lies in personally conducting field operations, and Yuan Fang specifically uses this to gain the upper hand in future confrontations.

Thus, the Battle of Guandu begins with Cao Cao's strategic brain trust heavily compromised.Even inside Cao Cao's camp, many individuals who should have been alert are unknowingly helping the Yuan forces.



As a result, **Guo Jia—not Wen Chou—is ambushed** during the early clash.

Wen Chou’s deployment is elegant and deadly:

- **Cavalry on both wings**, infantry at the center.
- The two cavalry wings converge to envelope Guo Jia’s vanguard (led by Yue Jin), sowing chaos.
- Wen Chou hides his true position in the confusion, aiming to suddenly break through and kill Guo Jia personally.



Liu Ye is concerned for the fate of his kin, and Guo Jia exploits this:

- He tells Liu Ye to leave the most valuable treasure at a place where several mountain paths converge.

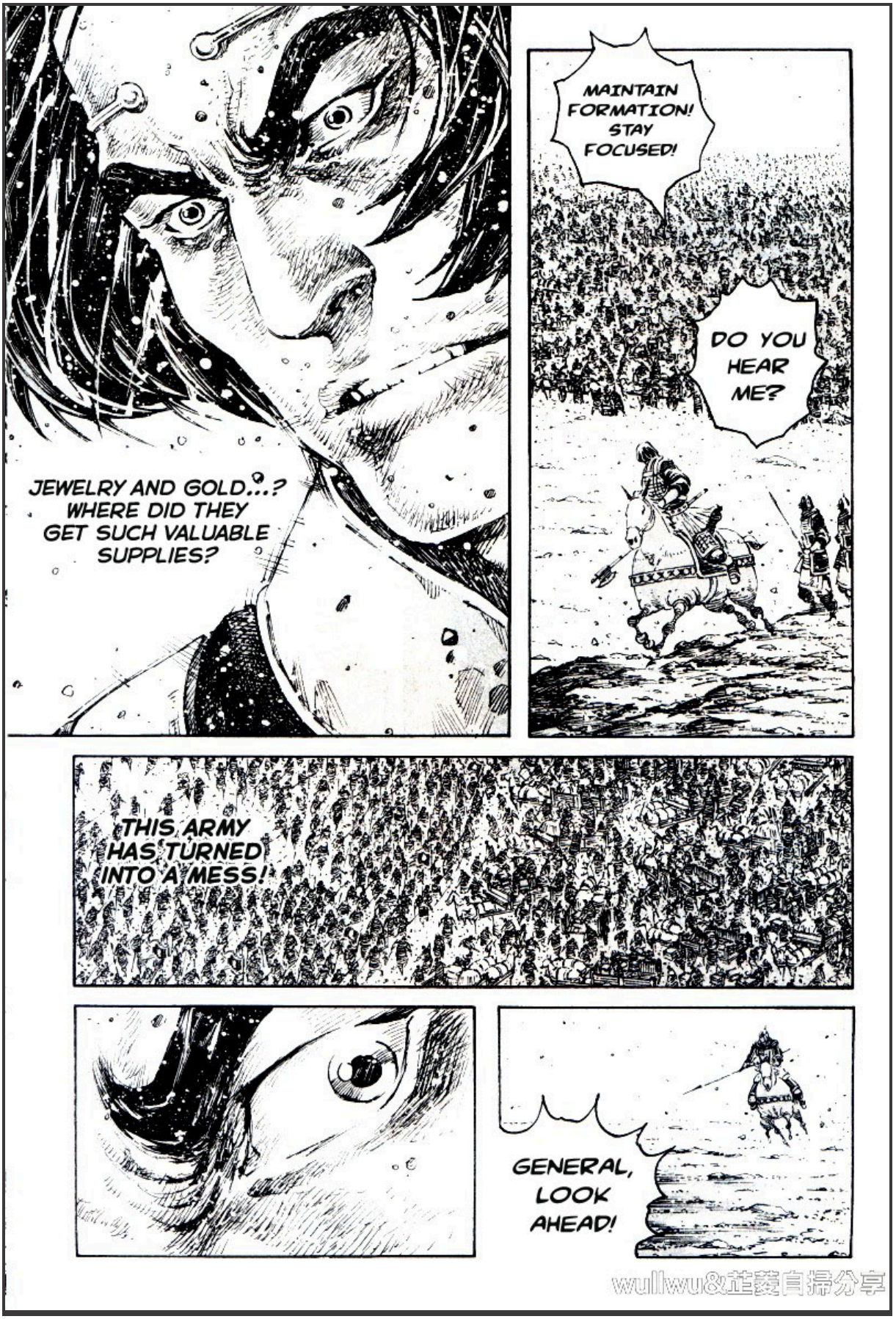
- Guo Jia then uses soldiers' greed and anxiety to **break Wen Chou's formation indirectly**: the rear ranks panic and block each other while scrambling for valuables.

- Meanwhile, Guo Jia's forces attack Wen Chou from multiple mountain paths.

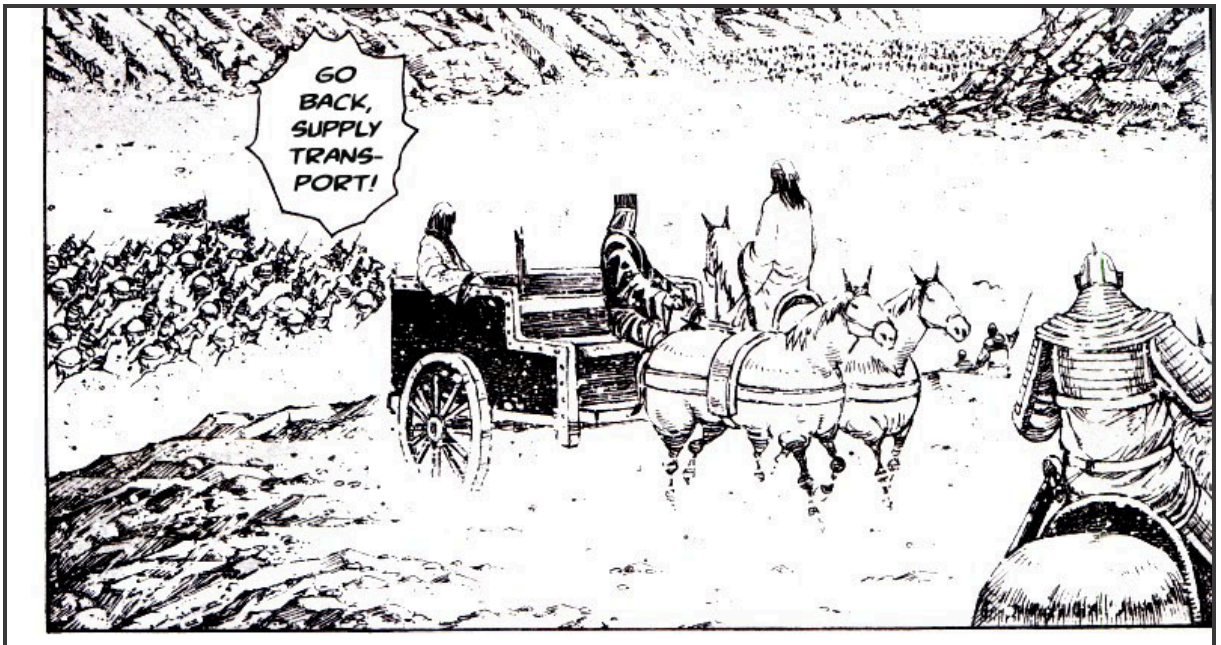
This produces a **win-win** for Liu Ye:

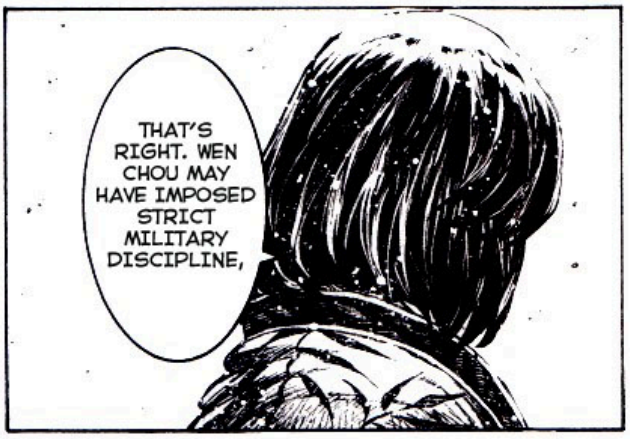
- If the Yuan win, Liu Ye can claim he left the valuables as tribute.

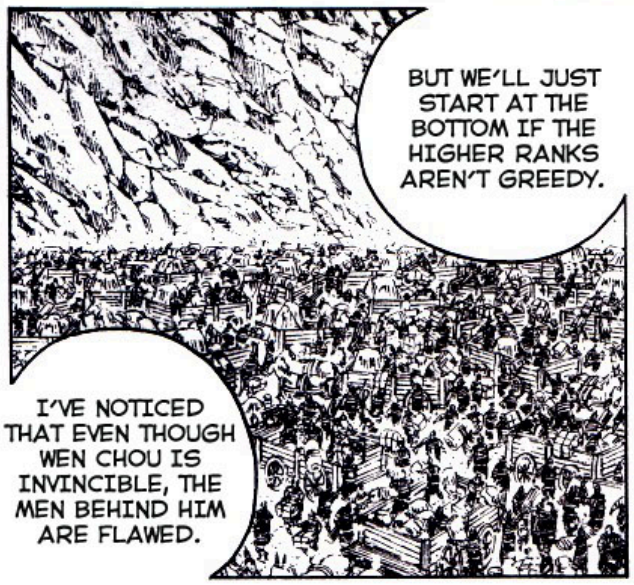
- If Cao Cao wins, Liu Ye is praised for indirectly aiding the rout of Yuan isShao.



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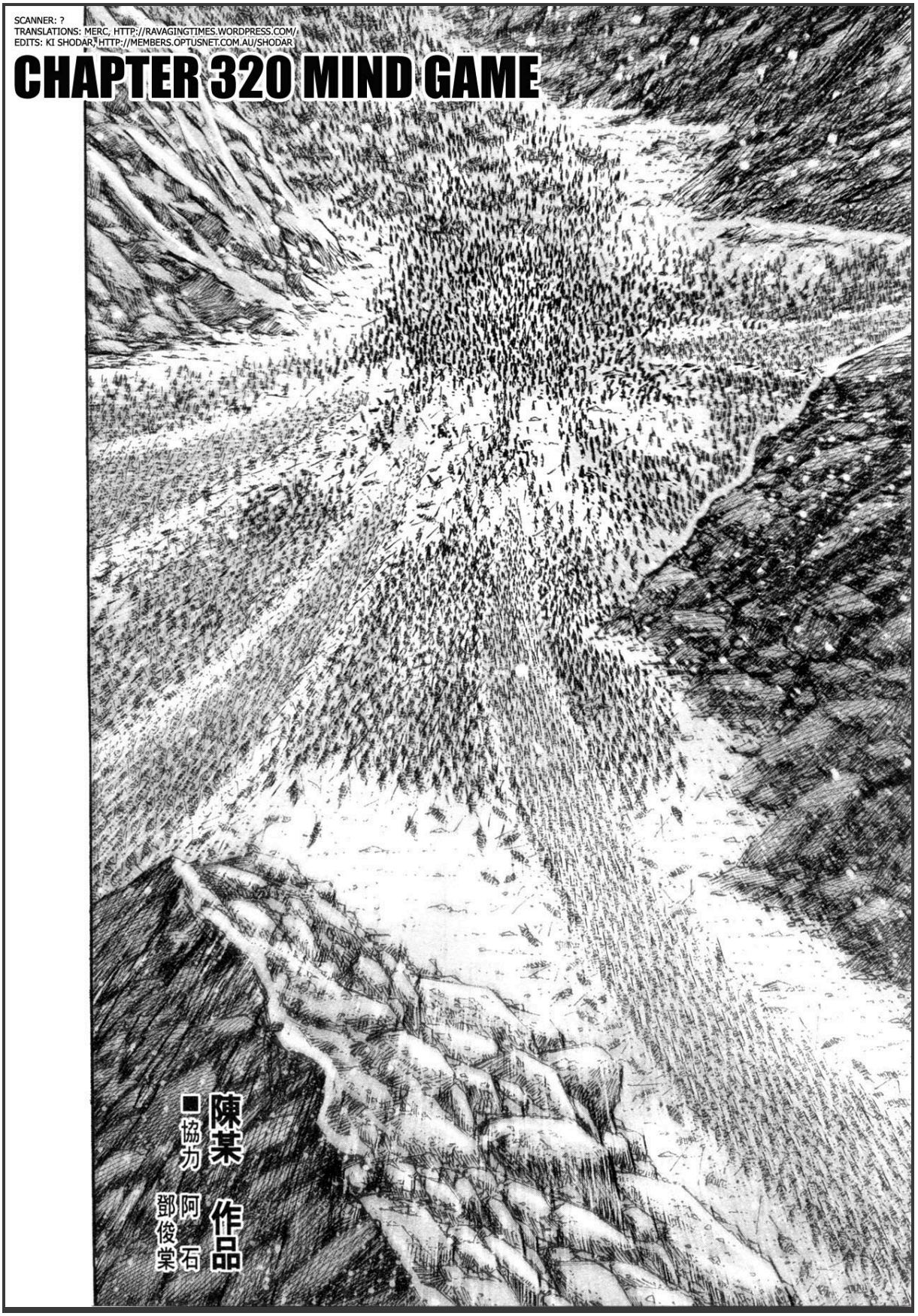








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Since the vanguard leads the march and the rations follow behind, a defeated vanguard exposes supplies. Guo Jia correctly predicts this and seizes Yuan rations, knowing that:

- **Yuan forces have far more troops**, thus require much more food.
- If their supplies remain intact, Guo Jia has no hope in a prolonged campaign.

Despite extreme adversity, the morale of Guo Jia's troops remains notably high.


MIAO CAI, ISN'T THIS EXHILA-RATING?
HA, NOW THAT'S THE ART OF WAR!
XIAHOU YUAN'S COURTESY NAME IS MIAO CAI
IN JUNE OF 200 A.D., THE CAO ARMY ROUTED THE YUAN ARMY IN YAN FORD; KILLING WEN CHOU AND SEIZING SEVERAL ENCAMPMENTS.

But everything collapses when **Yuan Fang personally enters the battlefield**:

- With only one-third of Guo Jia's numbers, Yuan Fang **overwhelms him completely**.
- Guo Jia's hard-earned morale gains evaporate.
- From that point on, Guo Jia is forced into **pure defense**, stuck at base, unable to evaluate or maneuver without risking instant defeat.

To worsen matters:

- Rations are cut off because rebellions erupt near the capital under Cao Cao's control.
- Reinforcements and supply chains are blocked.
- Xun Yu, Jia Xu, and Guo Jia cannot cooperate.
- The Yuan army assaults Cao Cao's base with **ten times** the manpower.

Guo Jia's contingencies are not designed to withstand a long-term siege of this magnitude.

One contingency Guo Jia *did* plan for was the isolation of Xun Yu and Jia Xu:
Sima Yi remains by his side.

Even though Sima Yi should logically hold grudges from earlier arcs (e.g., the Wansheng Bloodbath, Xuzhou), Guo Jia uses this to his advantage. Outsiders expect Sima Yi to defect, which Guo Jia deliberately allows to be assumed.

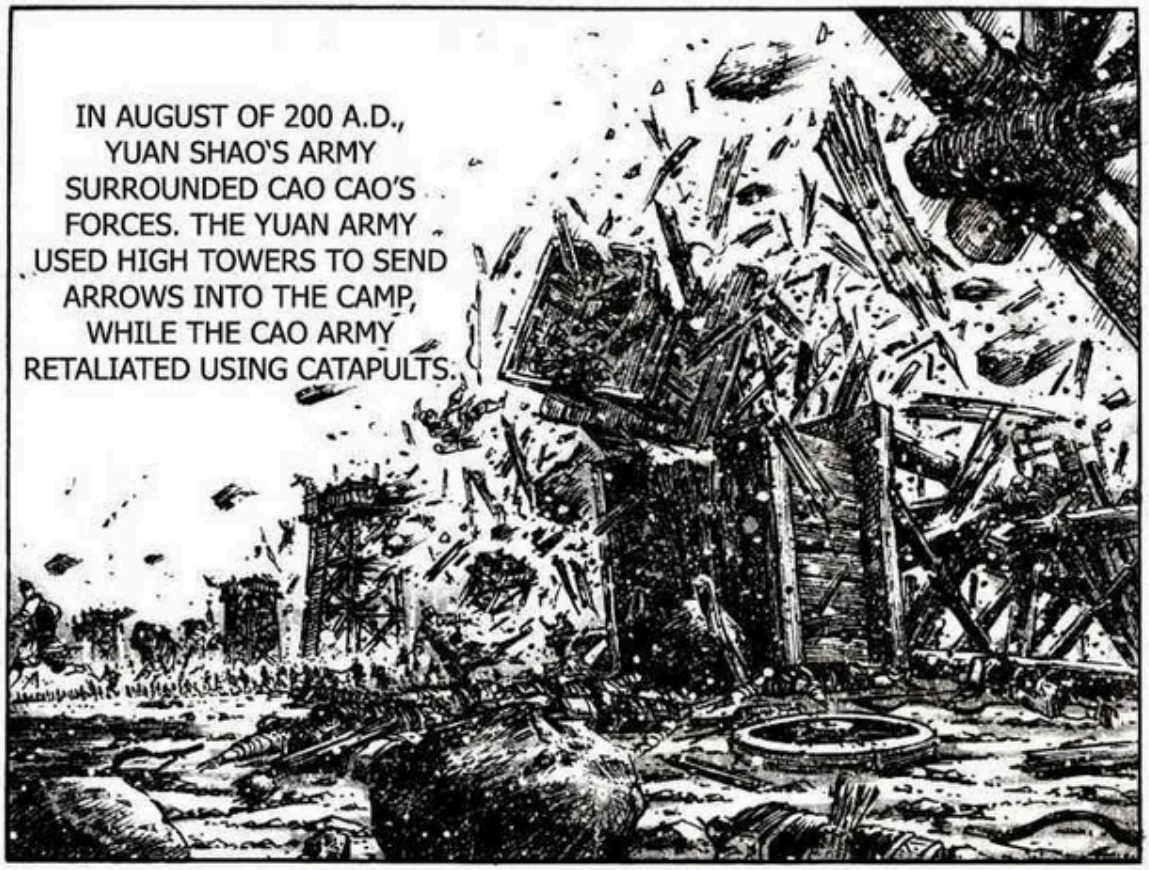
The three strategists at the base are:

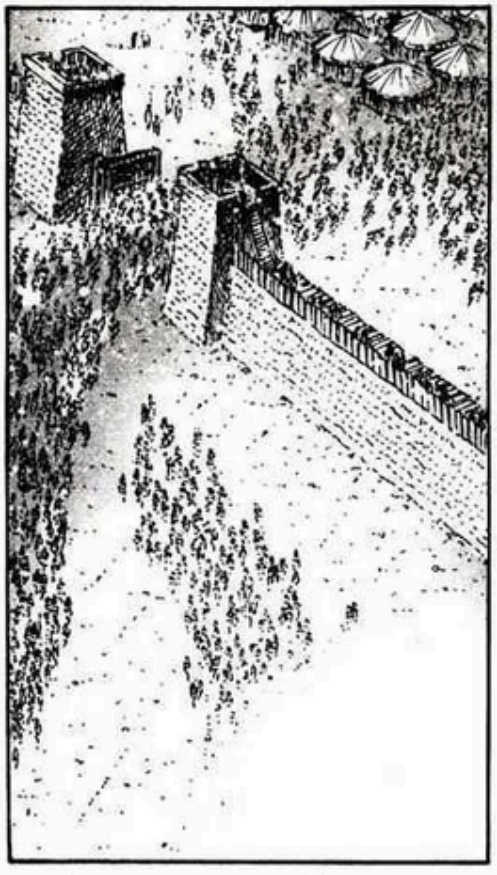
- **Guo Jia**
- **Sima Yi**
- **Xun You** (Xun Yu's relative)

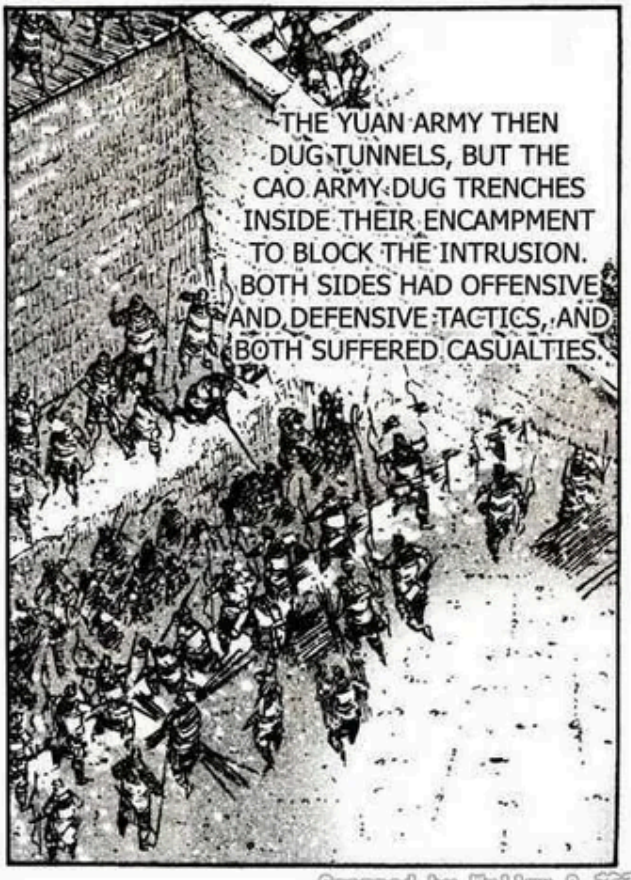
The Yuan army launches wave after wave of advanced tactics:

- **Siege towers** are countered by secretly built catapults.
- **Infiltration tunnels** are neutralized by trenches.
- Cao Cao launches small counteroffensives: e.g., Kong Kui acts as a decoy, letting Xu Huang and Shi Huan seize rations from Han Meng.

Despite Yuan's overwhelming resources, Cao Cao's defenders perform admirably.







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On the operational level, Cao Cao's forces are stretched thin. They must guard multiple fronts at once—Runan's rebels, Liu Biao, and the Sun clan—all while holding the northern line against the Yuan army's relentless assault. Because of this, the northern bases are forced to fight under severe disadvantage. Cao Cao has to compensate through sheer tactical endurance and deft diplomacy: for example, he grants Sun Quan a noble title to secure temporary stability in the southeast while quietly waiting for the perfect moment to launch a decisive, unexpected maneuver to reverse the situation.

Strategically, Cao Cao's plan is to lure the Yuan army deeper into dangerous territory, then cut off their supply lines and force a catastrophic retreat. As long as Yuan Shao's forces keep attacking without delivering a killing blow—continuing the stalemate rather than ending it—the opportunity for Cao Cao to strike back remains alive.

Yet beneath the surface, the Yuan army's strategy is far more intricate than simple brute force. Yuan Fang aims to engineer internal collapse. His goal is to spark defections and betrayals inside Cao Cao's coalition—including from members of the imperial clan—isolating the frontline so thoroughly that the rest of Cao Cao's allies surrender on their own.

This brings us to the core of the conflict. Cao Cao *must* sabotage Yuan Shao's supplies to win. But Yuan Fang anticipates this perfectly and sets a trap: he uses his massive supply depot as bait. If Cao Cao takes the risk, he walks straight into Yuan Fang's hands—providing the Yuan clan the perfect opportunity to demonstrate their supremacy

to the entire realm.

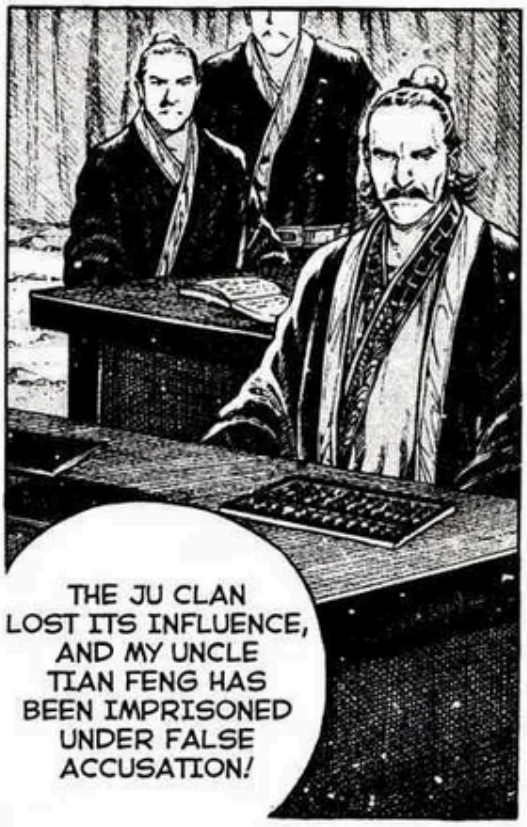


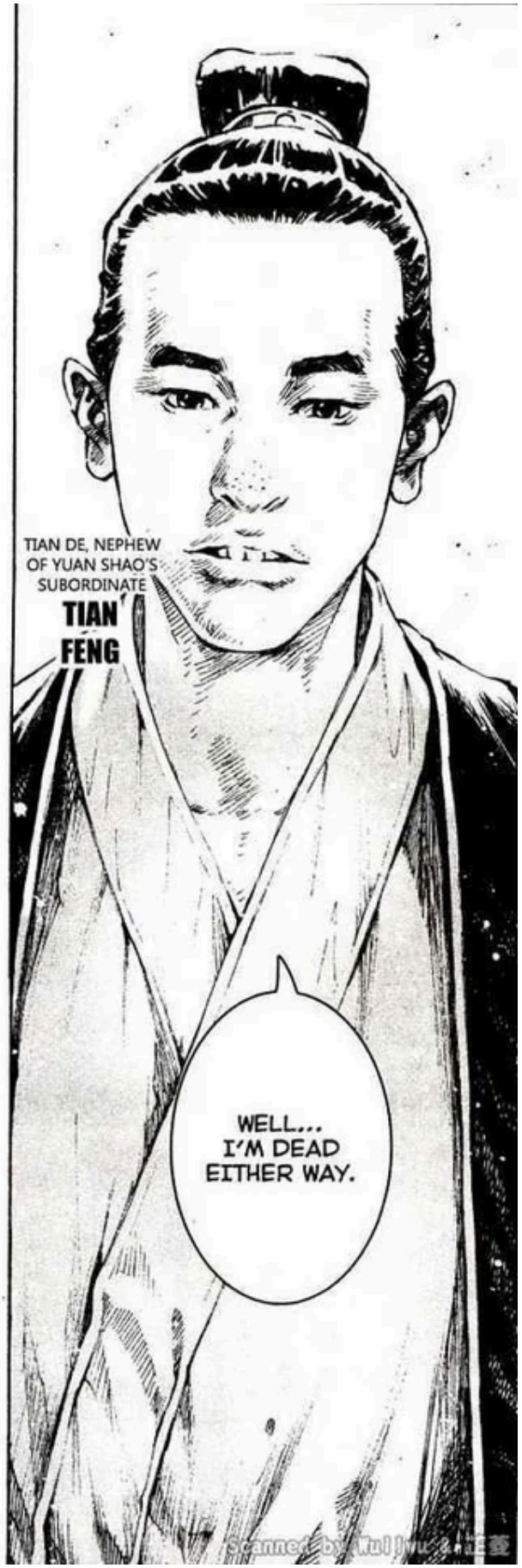
Scanned by Wuliwu & 正能

And as always in wartime, it's not just soldiers who must pay the price. Wealthy merchant families—who exploit laborers yet finance armies—also get drawn into the conflict. Unlike in the modern world where creditors hold most of the power, warlords in this era can easily seize the fortunes of the elite unless those elites have bought influence everywhere. Families who oppose the war, such as the Tian clan, become

convenient scapegoats for keeping the conflict alive.


EVER SINCE THE BATTLE OF GUANDU STARTED THE ANTI-WAR FACTION HAS BEEN SYSTEMATICALLY TARGETED BY YUAN FANG.


THE JU CLAN LOST ITS INFLUENCE, AND MY UNCLE TIAN FENG HAS BEEN IMPRISONED UNDER FALSE ACCUSATION!


TIAN DE, NEPHEW OF YUAN SHAO'S SUBORDINATE
TIAN FENG
WELL... I'M DEAD EITHER WAY.

Now let's s

Now before going on, we need to know the situation. In the 3 Kingdoms period, if a faction progressed in a time of war, investors who supported them would gain resources and expand their business. On the contrary, if the faction ended up falling, those investments would amount to nothing. For example, Sima Yi, businessman and chief of the Sima clan who supported Cao Cao faction, hoped for the faction to rise up in China.However, because Cao Cao was FAR FAR disadvantaged, it became obvious to the public that Cao Cao faction was doomed to be erased and so investors quickly turned to the most secure placement aka Yuan clan which was the most powerful and was on the brink of growing expandably once Cao Cao would fall. Do you see where I'm going ? In the public eyes, it's obvious that since Sima Yi is the biggest investor of Cao Cao's faction, he's the most threatened and because of his growing disdain, he would obviously go to the Yuan faction to negotiate with them. Especially knowing that Yuan Fang targeted him so he must have a lot of value for the Yuan Clan for Guo Jia to use.


EXCEPT WHEN IT'S CLEAR WHICH SIDE HAS THE ADVANTAGE, ANY WRONG INVESTMENT WILL BE DISASTROUS.
THIS WAR BETWEEN TWO POWERFUL FIGURES HAS CERTAINLY PAINED THE WEALTHY ELITES IN THESE PROVINCES.
XU YUAN
SIMA CLAN IS ONE OF CAO CAO'S SUPPLIERS. IN THESE TRYING TIMES...
I SUSPECT... YOUR CLAN IS NEAR THE BREAKING POINT.

This was a deceptive mist created by Guo Jia 7 years prior during the Xuzhou Incursion. He knew most of the events they would face and prepared for it as you will later see. So he used Sima Yi to counter his lack of social awareness and to gather information in the Yuan clan during that travel in order to find a weak point to attack Yuan Fang. This is the following information Sima Yi gathers :



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Scanned by Kuiwu &

Through Sima Yi's investigation, the following picture of the Yuan family crisis emerges:

- **Yuan Tan**, the eldest, traditionally the heir, has lost prestige after a humiliating defeat recently.

- **Yuan Shang**, the third son, is favored by powerful clans and hasn't blundered militarily like Yuan Tan.

- **Yuan Xi**, the second son, has withdrawn entirely from the power struggle after marrying Zhen Fu.

- **Yuan Shao**, nominally the clan head, quietly allows this chaos to unfold so that **Yuan Fang**—his beloved bastard son (publicly presented as a nephew)—can rise as hegemon of the north.

- Political alliances are split: the Xin and Guo clans back Yuan Tan; the Shen and Feng/Pang clans support Yuan Shang; the Xu clan sides with Yuan Fang; and the Tian clan reluctantly aligns with Yuan Tan but mainly opposes the war itself.

Because all three brothers command different segments of the army, their lack of cooperation forms a massive vulnerability waiting to be exploited. Eventually, Sima Yi meets Yuan Fang directly. They engage in layers of under-the-table dealings:

- Sima Yi bribes Xu Yuan, who is eager to embezzle funds under Yuan Fang's protection by giving half from the contribution.

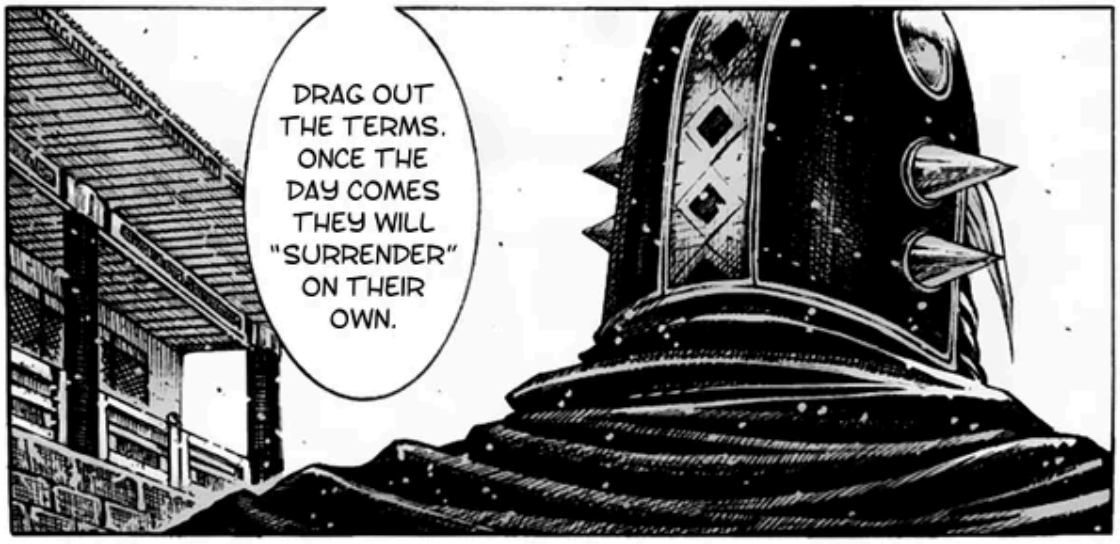
- He would then spread rumors of the deal publicly to gain leverage over Xu Yuan. This way, Sima Yi doesn't give a single cent to Xu Yuan and in exchange, since the Xu clan has been assigned to manage the rations of the enemy's army, Xu Yuan will give the locations later. Those rumors immediately alerts Yuan Fang and make him come in Hebei (his home-base) to deal with Xu Yuan.

- To counter this situation, since Sima Yi hasn't yet blackmailed Xu Yuan after he created the rumors, Yuan Fang proposes a staged prosecution using Xu Yuan as a scapegoat, then uses it as a pretext so that the uncle of Xu Yuan, Xu You, ends up siding to Cao Cao—bringing misinformation with him. Since Cao Cao is short on rations which pressures him, has no information, absolutely needs to destroy the rations of the enemy and always maintains a peaceful and respectful relationship with Xu You, this is the perfect trap to put him into. The sophistry is even better since the family incident Yuan Fang fabricated appeals to Sima Yi'since it parallels the slaughter within Sima's clan.

On a broader level, Sima Yi and Yuan Fang mutually agree to minimize the involvement of imperial loyalists in the campaign, since empowering them strengthens the Han court and indirectly Liu Bei. Opportunistic loyalists, they assume, will flock to the Yuan side once Cao Cao falls.


RIGHT NOW THE BALANCE OF POWER BETWEEN THE YUAN AND CAO FACTIONS IS EXTREMELY ONE-SIDED. THE YUAN CLAN CAN STILL WIN WITHOUT THE IMPERIAL CLAN.


I BELIEVE THERE'S NO NEED TO RAISE THE IMPERIAL MIGHT.


DRAG OUT THE TERMS. ONCE THE DAY COMES THEY WILL "SURRENDER" ON THEIR OWN.

On the military front, Shen Pei (advisor to Yuan Shang) correctly deduces that Yuan Fang's planning enabled Jia Xu's night raid. Yuan Fang, however, anticipates Shen

Pei’scautiousnessandnullifies Jia Xu’s attempt to draw out reinfocements.



Yuan Fang thus places all his suspicions towards Sima Yi as the man who could threaten his scheme and immediately focuses his attention on him. What he doesn't realize is that it was exactly part of Guo Jia's plan to push the attention towards him and escape the suspicions of the true traitor who would act unseen. You will see how later on.

At the same time, Yuan Fang orchestrates a staged scandal to make the Yuan clan appear fair and benevolent, allowing corrupt allies to switch sides cleanly and then spread disinformation in his favor. This sets the stage for even larger schemes to come.


HE WANTS TO CUT OFF OUR SUPPLY OF RATIONS, SO WE'LL LET THAT TORTOISE EXTEND IT'S HEAD TOO FAR IN TO PULL BACK.
GUO JIA'S DEFENSIVE STRATEGY WILL MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR US TO WIN.
THERE'LL BE LESS ISSUES IF WE STRIKE FIRST.
SIMA YI WANTS A PAWN LIKE XU YUAN, BUT I'LL GIVE HIM A GENERAL INSTEAD.
XU YOU.
HERE.

More emphasis on how difficult Cao Cao's situation is. Even if they win Battle Of Guandu, Yuan Fang's base is simply impossible to be taken :



Scanned by Wulwu & 正義

Now, let’s go to the Cao Cao clan. We have this interesting discussion with Guo Jia:



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They examine Sima Yi's cryptic message about "two brothers" fighting — a warning which may conceal something more dangerous: that Sima Yi is positioning himself by getting close to Cao Pi. Beyond Guo Jia's reminder that one must pay attention to both large and small matters (a guiding principle when reading *Ravages*), the discussion draws a fascinating line between *ruling the world* and merely *governing* it.

Ironically, according to Guo Jia's logic, Cao Cao can't simply seize the throne just because he's more capable; doing so would agitate loyalists and ambitious rivals who also believe themselves worthy.

This raises old but relevant questions. In any "meritocratic" or "aristocratic" system, who decides what counts as talent or excellence? Is there an absolute measure? Or is everything contingent on people agreeing on the criteria — criteria that someone must set, interpret, and enforce? Even if we ignore these theoretical matters and accept that "merit" includes prevailing in real power struggles — the idea behind "an antihero in chaos, a loyal minister in peace" — then rulership becomes an endless competition. Whoever is on top is simply the latest winner, echoing Xunzi's rebuttal of Mencius's claim that anyone could become a Yao or Shun.

Perhaps the very concept of "sagely rulership" is part of the problem: it dresses up domination in moral legitimacy. If ruling is just hegemony with extra steps, why fight for the throne at all? Why insist on unifying the realm under one banner, only to burden one's children with the fallout?

What Guo Jia ultimately implies is that raw technical superiority is not enough to rule. Power sustained solely by ability teaches only that "the ruler is who happened to win," and someone else can always replace him. What's required is ideological sophistication — justified lineage, loyalty narratives, moral claims — tools that make authority feel legitimate rather than merely dominant.

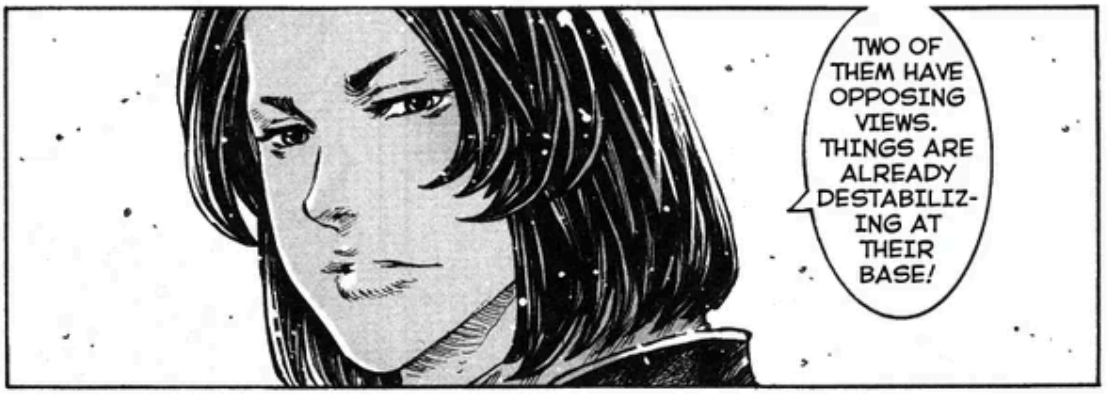
From here, the conversation circles back to virtue. True virtue isn't dependent on who sits on the throne. As Xunzi famously said, Heaven is constant and does not care who rules; individuals remain responsible for their own moral conduct whether they serve a sage king or a tyrant. The real issue isn't virtue or ability per se, but the attempt to use them to justify domination — turning them into political alibis.

Legalist thinkers like Han Feizi would scoff at the moral debate entirely: people must be controlled to produce value, and control is best achieved through a central authority enforcing strict law.

After the philosophical interlude, Li Dian reports potential defectors. This leads to Guo Jia's remark about the fundamental weakness of the Yuan clan: their deep-seated internal strife,

suppressed only temporarily by Yuan Fang.







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Here's the situation at Guandu so far:

- **The Yuan army** massively outnumbers Cao Cao and assaults him on all fronts.
- **Cao Cao**, in response, intends to stall, lure the Yuan forces deeper, then destroy key supply depots to force a disastrous retreat.
- **The Yuan army** aims to besiege Cao Cao, pressure his allies, sever his supply lines, and force mass defections.
- **Sima Yi** offers cooperation on Cao supplies to bait Cao Cao while quietly fishing for intel on Yuan supplies.
- **Yuan Fang**, in turn, offers intel on the Yuan supplies to bait Cao Cao into a trap, ensuring that once Cao Cao bites, the invasion proceeds flawlessly.

and it must be highlighted, the reason the Cao and Yuan camps can play this game is because both make use of backchannels and shadowy networks (that is to say, even as the soldiers and commanders are fighting hard, agents and operatives are keeping in touch and deceiving one another)

Both sides rely heavily on backchannels, spies, and covert operatives. Even as armies clash openly, hidden networks maintain communication, spread disinformation, and prepare traps.

At Wenchao, Sima Yi — using the Handicapped Warriors and layers of disguises — constructs a web of intelligence to monitor the evolving situation. Unsurprisingly, things get messy.



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Yuan Fang has the Xu clan indicted for embezzlement, promising them leniency later.

This gives Xu You cover to defect to Cao Cao, providing believable misinformation while shifting blame onto Sima Yi. Xu You doesn't realize Sima Yi and Guo Jia anticipated this, arranging the death of Xu Yuan and the kidnapping of Xu You's sons through the handicapped warriors.



Meanwhile, the strategic situation — Cao Cao's outnumbered forces rotating against fresh Yuan units — creates a deliberate two-way corridor. Xu You can now pose as a useful defector, and Cao Cao can be enticed toward Wuchao.



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Yuan Tan and Yuan Shang separately believe Cao Cao will be trapped thanks to Xu You trap and prepare ambushes of their own, unaware that they themselves are also being baited. Eventually, when Xu You comes to deliver to Cao Cao the disinformation, let's just say that it didn't go very

well and that GJ and SY quite frankly cooked him:





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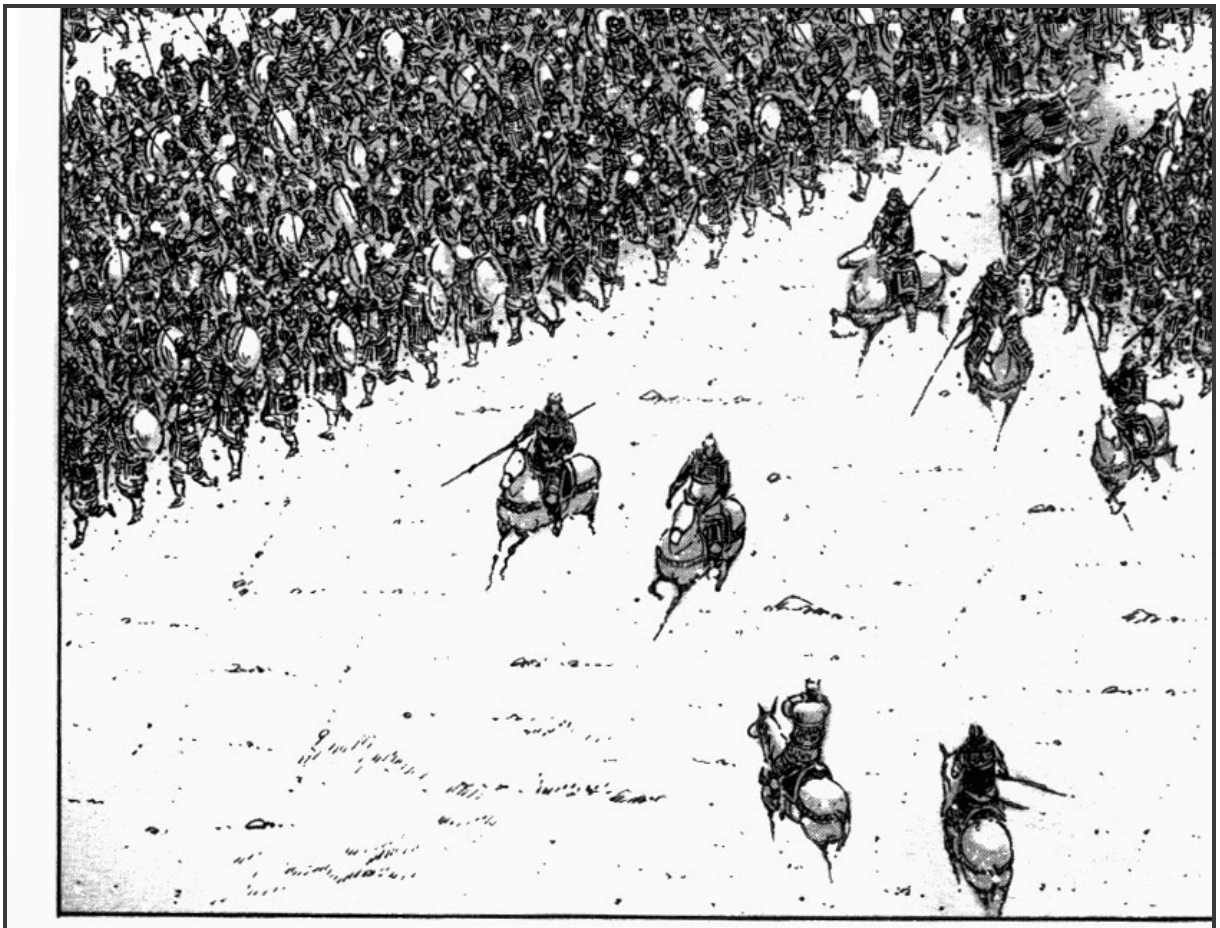


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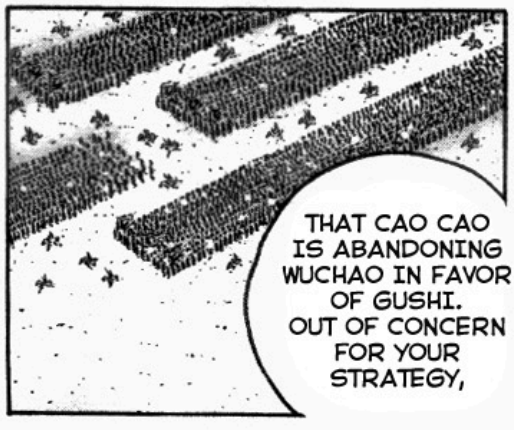
Basically, GJ and SY immediately saw through YF's entire embezzlement fabrication (and far beyond as we will later see) and Xu You's entire emotional state perfectly with little information (Reasoning needed to be developed) before proceeding to make him say where the rations truly were via blackmailing him through his sons. Thus, Xu You is forced to give up the false location he knows (Wuchao since it's a trap) and tell the truth he knows (Gushi being the true ration locationà.

However, as we know it, this was exactly what Yuan Tang, Yuan Shang and Yuan Fang wanted as they willingly let Xu You's sons to be captured by the Handicapped Warriors

instead of protecting them. YF predicted GJ's second layer of counter-strategy.




OH YOU MISUNDER-STOOD, CHIEF CONTROLLER. OUR TROOP HAS RECEIVED NEWS


THAT CAO CAO IS ABANDONING WUCHAO IN FAVOR OF GUSHI. OUT OF CONCERN FOR YOUR STRATEGY,


CAO CAO IS GOING TO ATTACK WUCHAO, ADVISOR SHEN. WHY ARE YOU HERE...


THIRD MASTER HAS COME TO STRENGTHEN YOUR REAR FLANK.
NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO BEAT AROUND THE BUSH.
ZHANG HE
YOU DIDN'T FOOL ME. WHEN XU YOU WENT TO CAO CAO,
HE COULD HAVE TAKEN HIS FIVE SONS.
FINE. WITH STRATEGIES AS VICIOUS AS YOURS, CHIEF CONTROLLER, YOU SHOULD SPARE YOUR ALLIES FROM COLLATERAL DAMAGE.


BUT SOMEONE KEPT THEM HERE AND LET THEM BE CAPTURED.
POOR XU YOU DOESN'T EVEN REALIZE HOW CRUEL THE STRATEGIST IS.

Officially, people thought the Xu family (and the members themselves) was the one who took care of the ration for the enemies and believed they knew the location. The truth is that it was wrong, the Xu family was gaslighted into thinking Gushi was the true place of the ration when in fact it was false, it was a two-layered trap initiated by YF that would kill Cao Cao. Since there was tons of spies in Cao Cao camp who witnessed the public humiliation of Xu You, Yuan Fang and others were informed that Cao Cao fell into the trap perfectly. Unbeknownst to them, Guo Jia and Sima Yi actually made the humiliation public to bait the spies into informing it to YF so that he could proceed normally, unaware of the deeper situation and tragedy that awaits him. Cao Cao is left unaware of what's happening for 2 reasons:

1- Cao Cao is the heart of the faction, him and the others being unaware, conceals the scheme Guo Jia will pull from the spies and thus from Yuan Fang.

2- Yuan Fang has to set his eyes for Cao Cao during their confrontation, so that the spy Guo Jia planted could act freely and burn the rations (we will see how later on).

Cao Cao's main camp is the only one who isn't under siege so he's the only one who can send a dispatch. Cao Cao cannot let this opportunity go as planned unaware he's being baited by the Gushi trap :


I REALLY APPRECIATE YOUR PAINSTAKING EFFORTS.
YOU SHOULD BE CAREFUL AS WELL, MY LORD.
BESIDES, NO ONE BUT ME COULD COMMAND THIS TROOP.
EVERY GENERAL IS UNDER SIEGE, SO THE ONLY CAMP THAT CAN SEND A DISPATCH IS MINE.


IT'S A TRANSIENT OPPORTUNITY, JIA XU.
GUSHI
AND I BET YOU'RE INTERESTED IN WITNESSING "MENG DE'S METHOD OF WAR."
CHIEF CONTROLLER, YUAN TAN HAS ARRIVED TOO.

Cao Cao, unaware of the deeper scheme, predicts that Yuan Tan and Yuan Shang will argue over who gets the honor of killing him. He devises the following counter-strategy:

1. **Strip uniforms from fallen Yuan soldiers.**

2. **Seeing Yuan Tan being the first to come, wait for Yuan Shang to arrive at Gushi,** then merge disguised troops into his ranks under the cover of darkness.

3. **Since Yuan Tan and Yuan Sheng will verbally clash about who gets to kill Cao Cao in Gushi,** Cao Cao's infiltrators kill one of Yuan Tan's men, triggering fratricidal chaos since both sides wear identical uniforms and night obscures visibility.

4. **Slip past the collapsing defense**, using Lu Bu's elite-speed troops (wearing Yuan uniforms) to torch Gushi's rations.

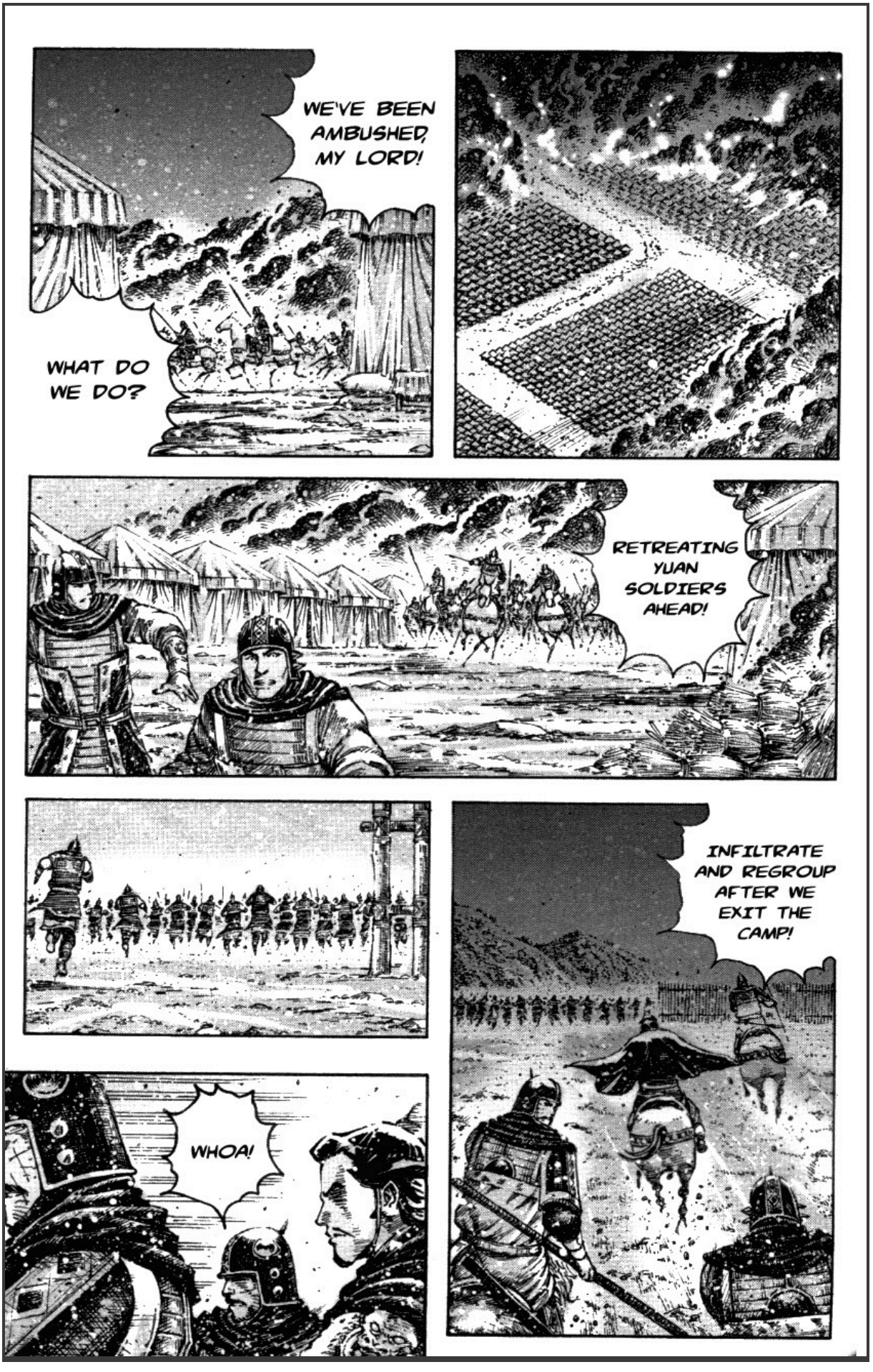
Unfortunately, this was entirely manipulated by Yuan Fang and once Cao Cao realized there were no rations in Gushi, Yuan Fang already closed in.

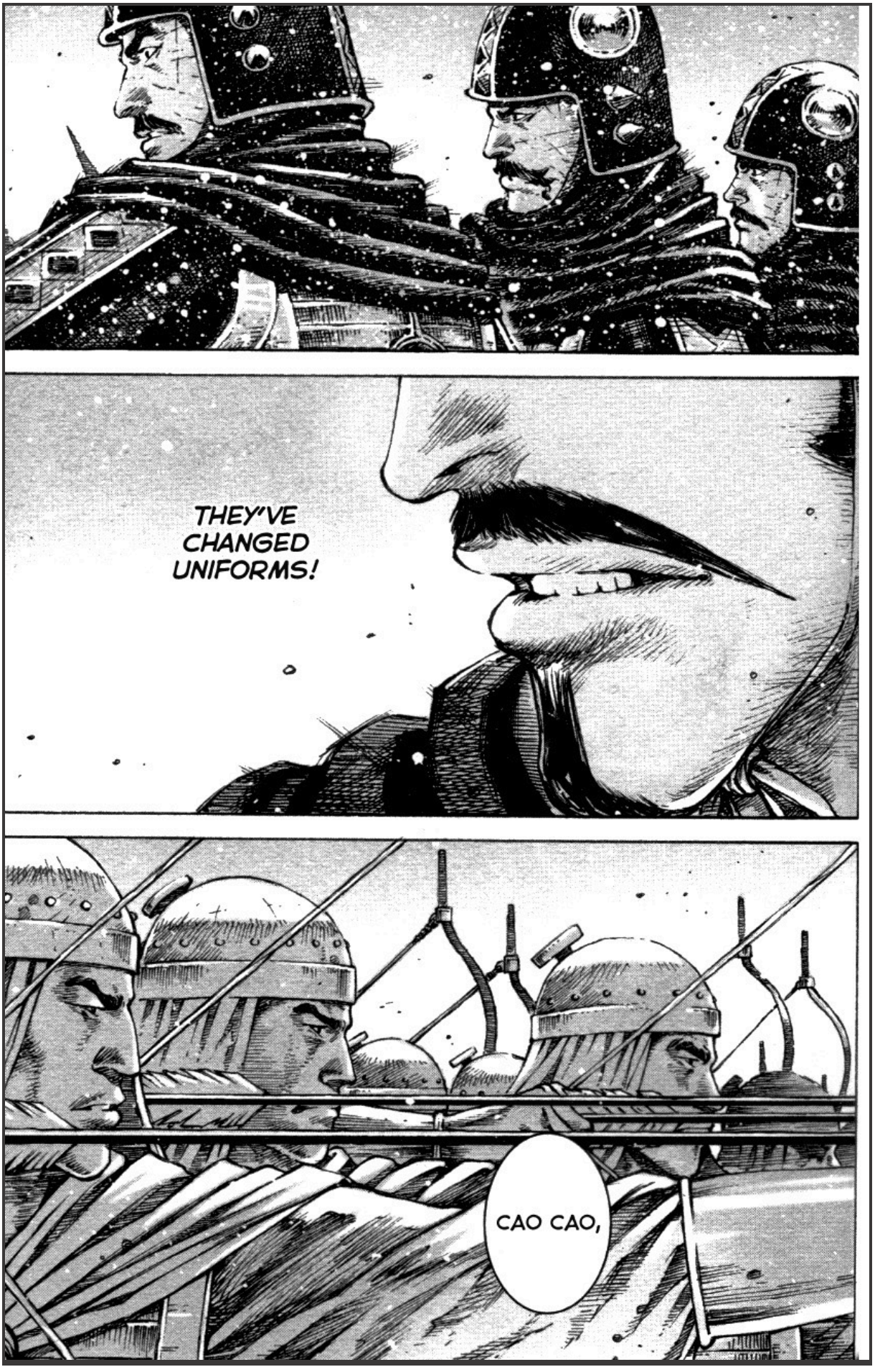

MAKE WAY!
MAKE WAY!
BY YOUNG MASTER'S ORDER, PLEASE TURN BACK!
THE HELL? BABY'S THROWING A FIT 'CAUSE HE AIN'T THE OLDEST?
SFX: PA~


喋
SFX: CHA


SIR, YUAN TAN'S TROOP HAS ARRIVED!
OUR LORD SUCCEEDED IN TRICKING THE ENEMY.
YEARS OF TRAINING HAVE MADE OUR NIGHT RIDERS A MIGHTY FORCE TO CONTEND WITH.
HAHA, BY SIGHT OR NOT OUR MEN WORKED TOGETHER FLAWLESSLY.
OKAY! THE FIRST FIGHT IS A SUCCESS. NEXT WE TARGET THE CAMP!
DO IT! TAKE NO PRISONER!


熊一
SFX: FOOM
SENIOR OFFICER, THE RATION STACKS ARE EMPTY!
OH NO!
SENIOR OFFICER, OUR LORD'S GROUP HAS GONE TOO FAR AHEAD!
THERE'S FIRE BEHIND US AND TO BOTH OF OUR SIDES AS WELL!


WE'VE BEEN AMBUSHED, MY LORD!
WHAT DO WE DO?
RETREATING YUAN SOLDIERS AHEAD!
INFILTRATE AND REGROUP AFTER WE EXIT THE CAMP!
WHOA!


THEY'VE CHANGED UNIFORMS!
CAO CAO,


HAS ALREADY ENDED.
PA

Before moving forward, we must address Yuan Shao's catastrophic family dynamics.

He berates his sons for being unworthy — Tan is spoiled, Xi complacent, Shang overly trusting — yet he created the conditions that shaped them. He groomed them to facilitate Yuan Fang's rise, and in the process, shattered Yuan Fang himself, turning him into a hybrid of Darth Vader and Uchiha Itachi.

A decade ago, they were all still children.
We saw only Yuan Fang and Yuan Shang then, but even that was enough to hint at where things were headed.

Compared to this, Yuan Shu's delusional dream of becoming emperor seems almost adorable.

And this collapses into the broader theme of *ambition*. Dong Zhuo condemned the elites for corrupting the realm, Liu Bei warned of ambition's dangers, Cao Cao justified loyalists seizing power to restore order, Sun Ce mocked the hypocrisy of political struggles — yet Yuan Shao embodies all these structural failings at once. He does not control the crisis, but he thrives in it. And Yuan Fang is his ultimate creation, the poisonous fruit of a rotten tree.

Readers were led to believe Yuan Fang's plan focused on eliminating Cao Cao, with the internal Yuan clan struggle being a long-term concern. But Guandu flips this assumption. The external battles are theatrical distractions. The real aim is to erase Yuan Shao, Yuan Tan, and Yuan Shang in one clean sweep — the culmination of a private vendetta and a quest for absolute control.

Yuan Fang likely believed that after he consolidated power, Cao Cao would be incapable of conquering the north, even if Cao "won" the staged spectacle.

At the same moment as Cao Cao is ambushed, on Wuchao, Yuan Shao is waiting when Yuan Tan and Yuan Sheng eventually come to meet him to yap about how the other ruined their chances of cooking Cao Cao. However, the worst happens. Soldiers in Yuan's uniform come and burn Wuchao once Yuan Tan and Yuan Sheng are present with Yuan Shao. They initially believe that those soldiers are Cao Cao's disguised soldiers who outsmarted them back in Gushi and discreetly followed them once YuanTan and Yuan Sheng came to see Yuan Shao after their defeat.

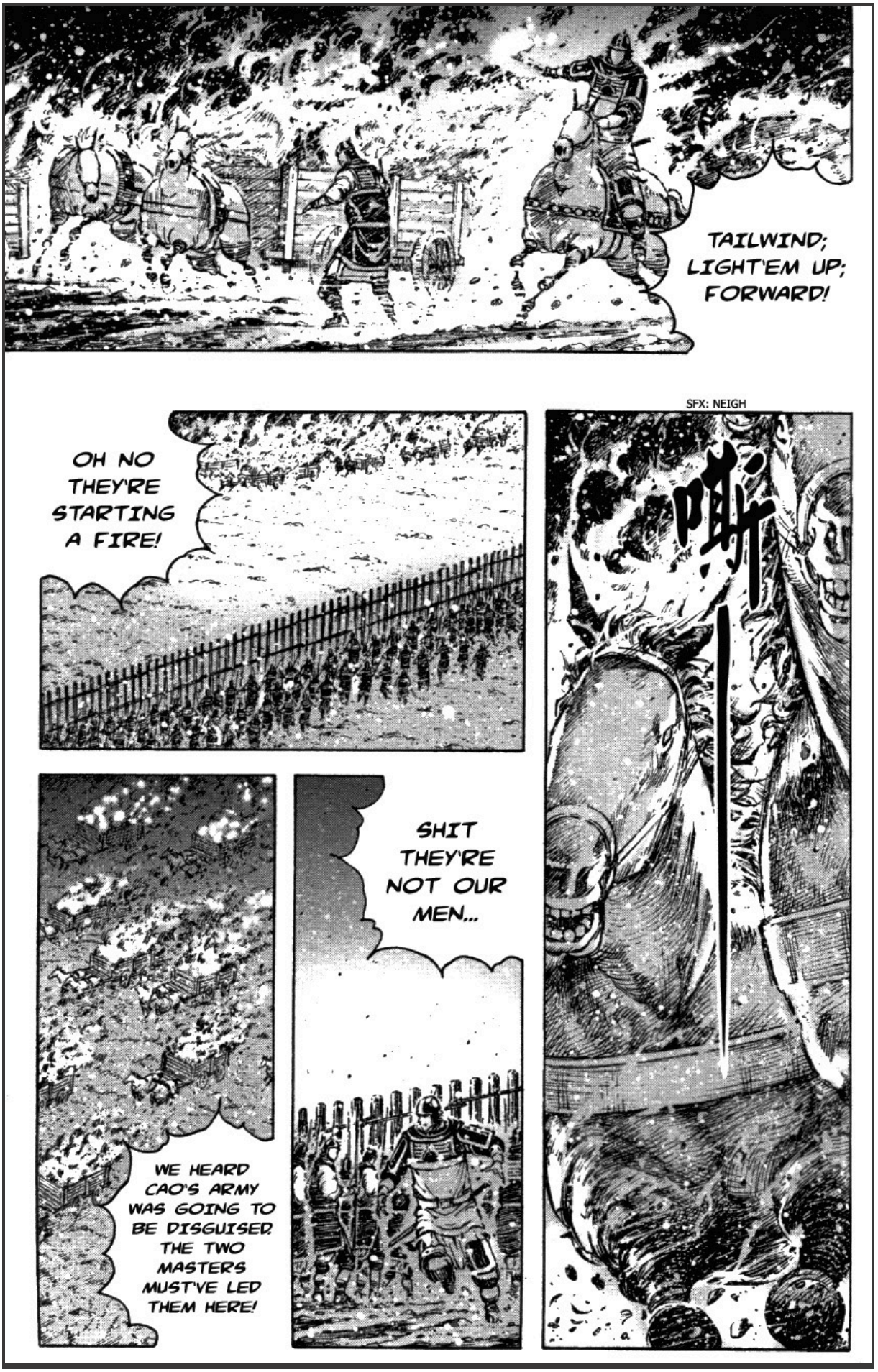
But this couldn't be further from the truth.

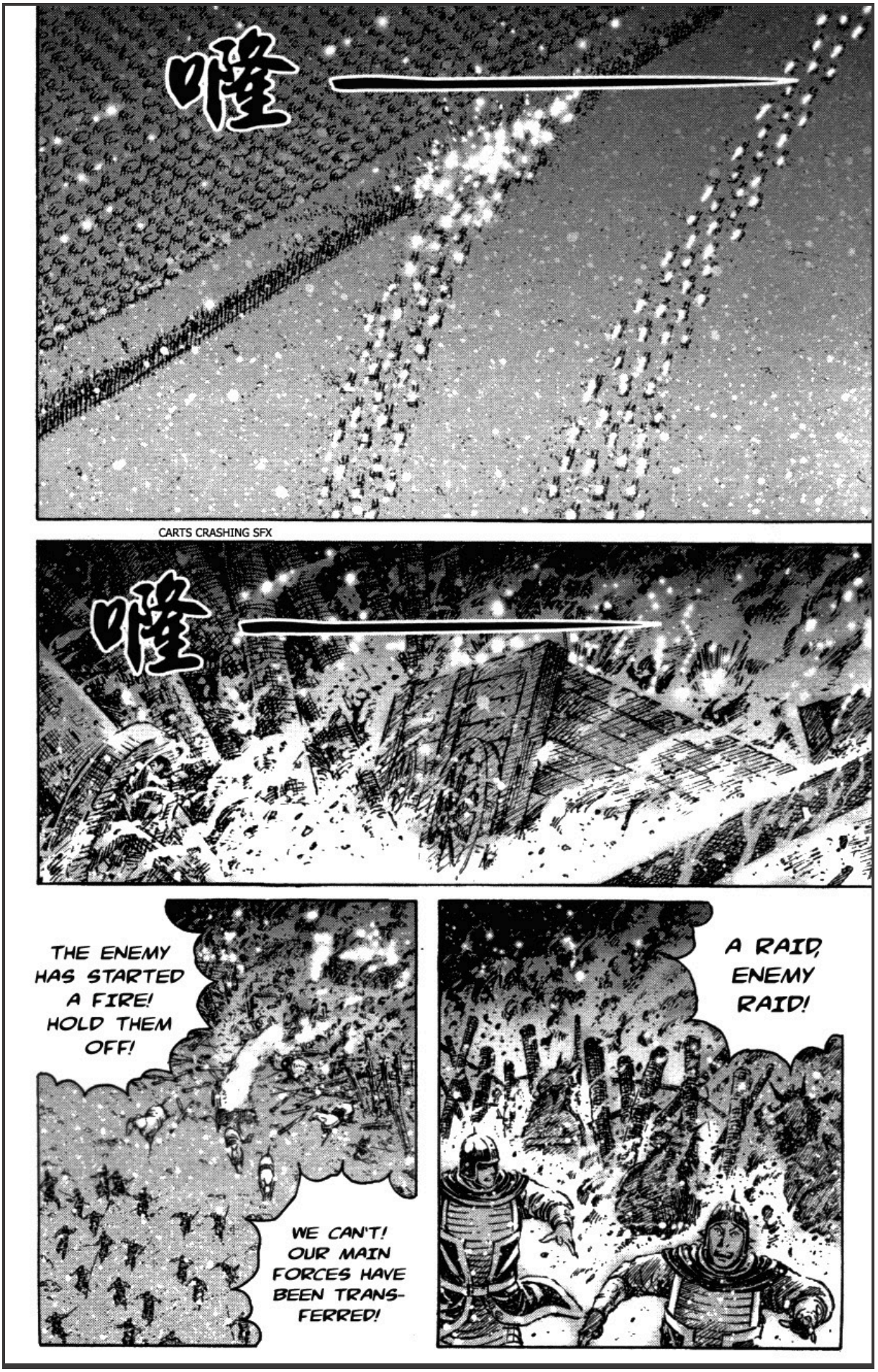
They were actually Yuan Fang's soldiers with the chief manipulating events to gaslight the entire Yuan clan to believe they were Cao Cao's soldiers (when they were actually

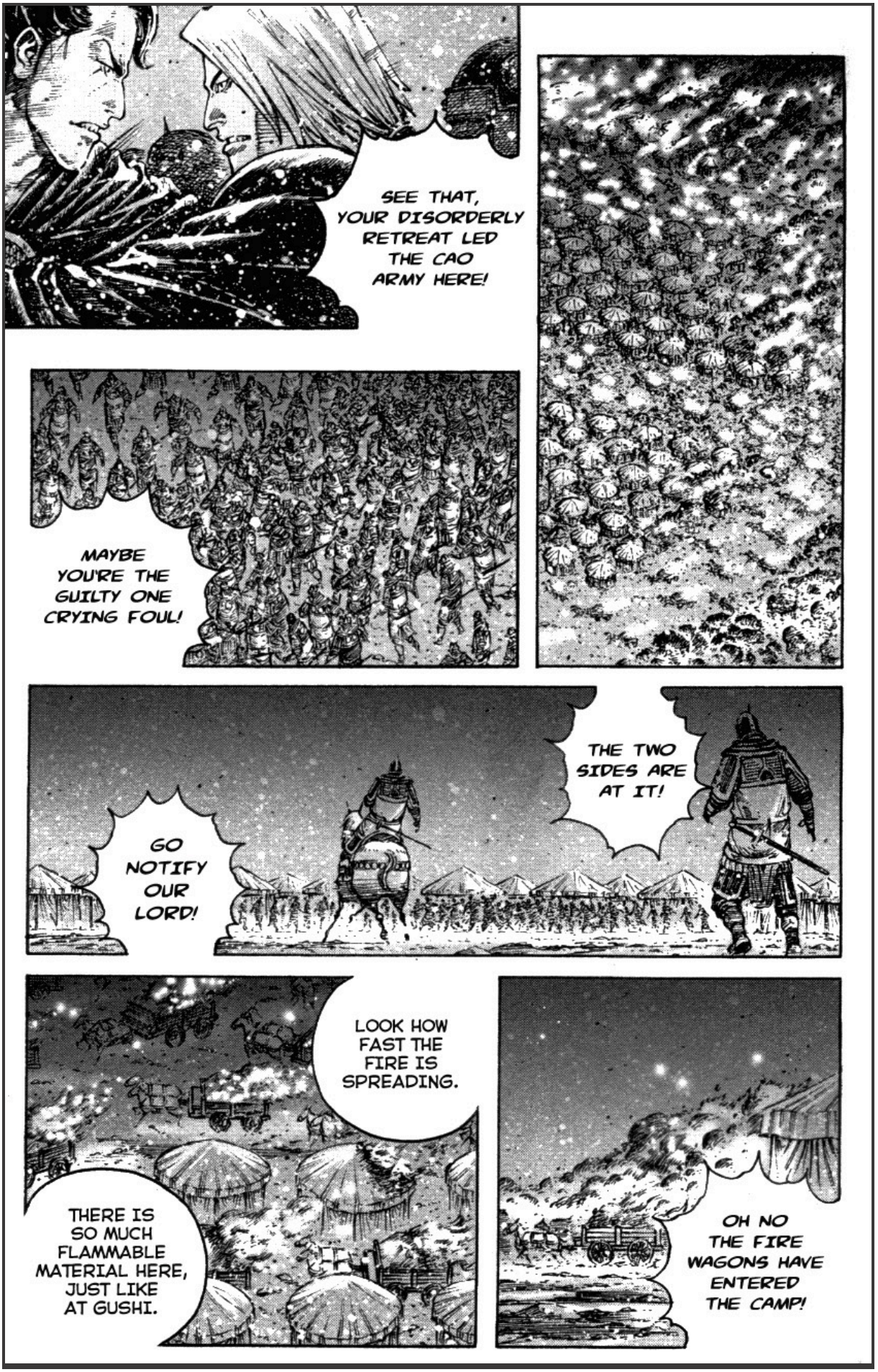
trapped by Yuan Fang) and actually burn the entire Wuchao clan.

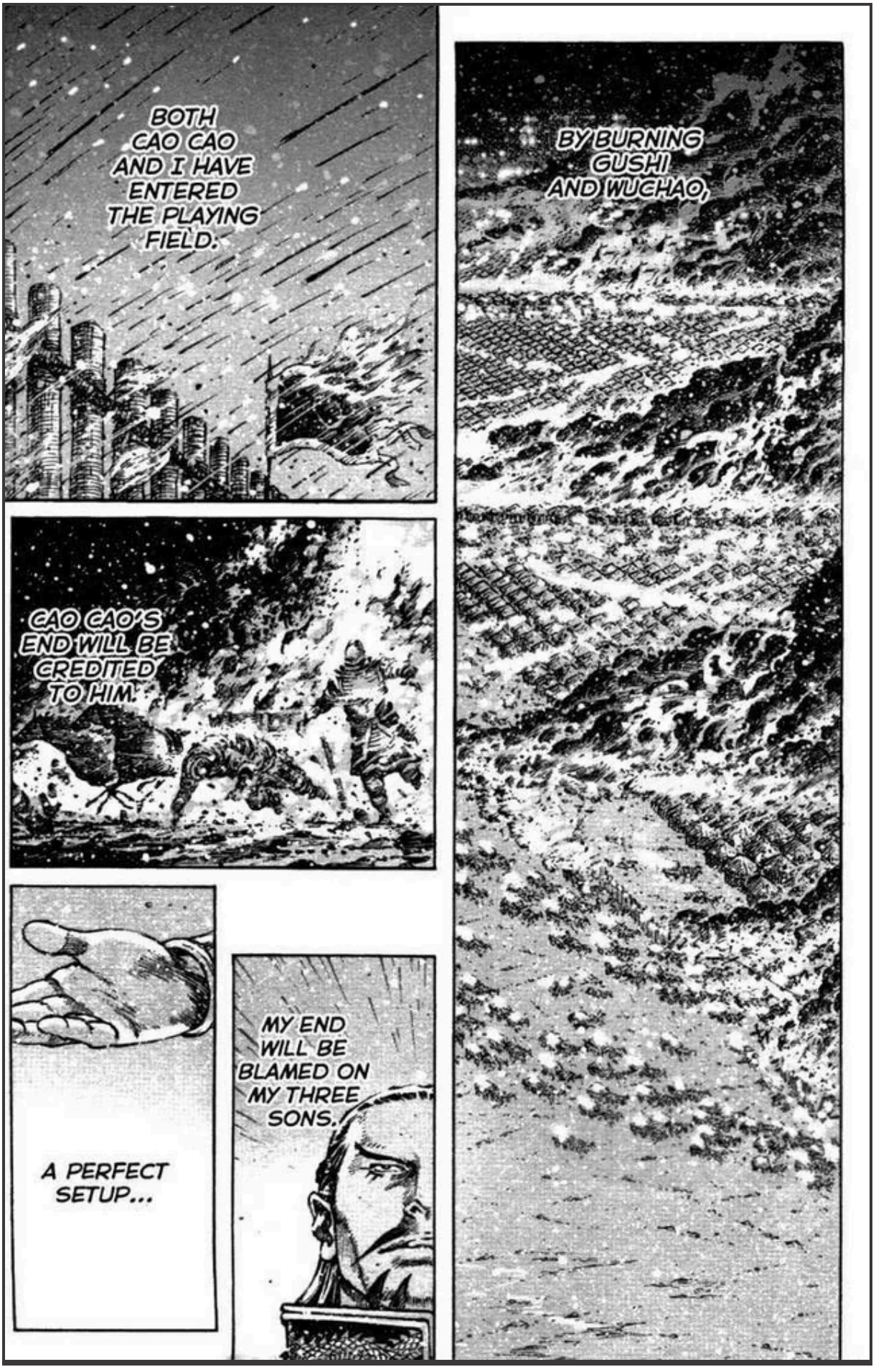

MY LORD!
SEE, MASTER FANG ONLY MEANT TO TEACH THEM A LESSON, NOT KILL THEM OUTRIGHT.
THE FIRST AND THIRD MASTERS HAVE RETURNED WITH THEIR TROOPS!


THIS TROOP WAS DEPLOYED FIRST...
THEY STILL DON'T KNOW THAT WE INTEND TO BURN GUSHI.
GOOD. KEEP APPROA-CHING.


TAILWIND; LIGHT'EM UP; FORWARD!
SFX: NEIGH
OH NO THEY'RE STARTING A FIRE!
SHIT THEY'RE NOT OUR MEN...
WE HEARD CAO'S ARMY WAS GOING TO BE DISGUISED. THE TWO MASTERS MUST'VE LED THEM HERE!


噌
CARTS CRASHING SFX
噌
THE ENEMY HAS STARTED A FIRE! HOLD THEM OFF!
WE CAN'T! OUR MAIN FORCES HAVE BEEN TRANS-FERRED!
A RAID, ENEMY RAID!


SEE THAT, YOUR DISORDERLY RETREAT LED THE CAO ARMY HERE!
MAYBE YOU'RE THE GUILTY ONE CRYING FOUL!
GO NOTIFY OUR LORD!
THE TWO SIDES ARE AT IT!
LOOK HOW FAST THE FIRE IS SPREADING.
THERE IS SO MUCH FLAMMABLE MATERIAL HERE, JUST LIKE AT GUSHI.
OH NO THE FIRE WAGONS HAVE ENTERED THE CAMP!


BOTH CAO CAO AND I HAVE ENTERED THE PLAYING FIELD.
BY BURNING GUSHI AND WUCHAO,
CAO CAO'S END WILL BE CREDITED TO HIM.
A PERFECT SETUP...
MY END WILL BE BLAMED ON MY THREE SONS.

Mindblowing trap. One might still wonder how Yuan Fang's elaborate plan seemed to unfold so smoothly. To understand that, we need to look closely at how the fires at **Gushi** and **Wuchao** were orchestrated.

Zhang He and Gao Lan had been positioned in locations that allowed them to set Gushi ablaze without Cao Cao noticing until it was far too late. At the same time, Yuan Shao was deliberately kept in **Wuchao**, which had been repurposed into a support base once Cao Cao walked into the trap at Gushi. Meanwhile, Yuan Tan and Yuan Shang—having already failed to ambush Cao Cao thanks to one of Cao Cao's signature tricks—hurried back to Wuchao to publicly blame each other in front of their father.

The key piece of the puzzle, however, was **Yuan Xi**. Misled by Duan Jian and Yang, he commanded a unit that had been mobilized early, and therefore never received the updated orders about the trap at Gushi. Operating under outdated instructions, he moved to burn Wuchao in an attempt to "trap Cao Cao"—completely unaware that he was walking straight into Yuan Fang's layered scheme.

The resulting confusion only amplified the chaos. Many guards, not realizing that Yuan Xi was the one leading the operation, assumed that the attack was another strike by Cao Cao's forces—especially after hearing about the fiasco involving Yuan Tan and Yuan Shang. With both Wuchao and Gushi in flames, Yuan Fang simultaneously advanced his objective of eliminating

Yuan Shao while tightening the noose around Cao Cao.


IT IS BRILLIANT BEYOND COMPARE!


THE CAO ARMY ATTACKS THE CAMP DISGUISED AS OUR MEN!


HAHA, YUAN XI STILL DOESN'T KNOW THE REALITY OF THIS SCHEME.


SEND SOMEONE TO NOTIFY YOUNG MASTER, THAT WITH CAO CAO AS BAIT, THE TARGETS HAVE ENTERED THE GAME.


DON'T HESITATE! DIDN'T WE PLAN TO BURN WUCHAO ALL ALONG?

Meanwhile, the broader Yuan army launched a full-scale offensive. Their strategy relied heavily on defectors and infiltrators: moles hidden within Cao Cao’s headquarters coordinated with Taiping Sect operatives to sabotage defenses from within, ensuring that Yuan troops could breach the defensive lines more easily.


THE MAIN FORCE OF THE CAO ARMY IS GUARDING THE CAMP. I'M IN CHARGE OF THE BARRACKS.
BET THEY NEVER EXPECTED A MOLE TO LAST THIS LONG.
RESENTMENT LEADS TO REVOLT. SUCH IS THE FORESIGHT OF THE CHIEF CONTROLLER.
NOW THAT THE CAMP IS FULL OF PROTEST, YOUR ARRIVAL WILL STRIKE A CHORD WITH THOSE MEN.



On top of that, resentful mutineers openly switched allegiances and attacked key positions. With

supply stations under threat, even if Cao Cao escaped Yuan Fang's trap, there would be little left to sustain his army. The frontline bases were already buckling under pressure, and the Yuan army still had enough manpower to open entirely new fronts, sever Cao Cao's supply lines, isolate his forces, and pressure the imperial capital into collapse.

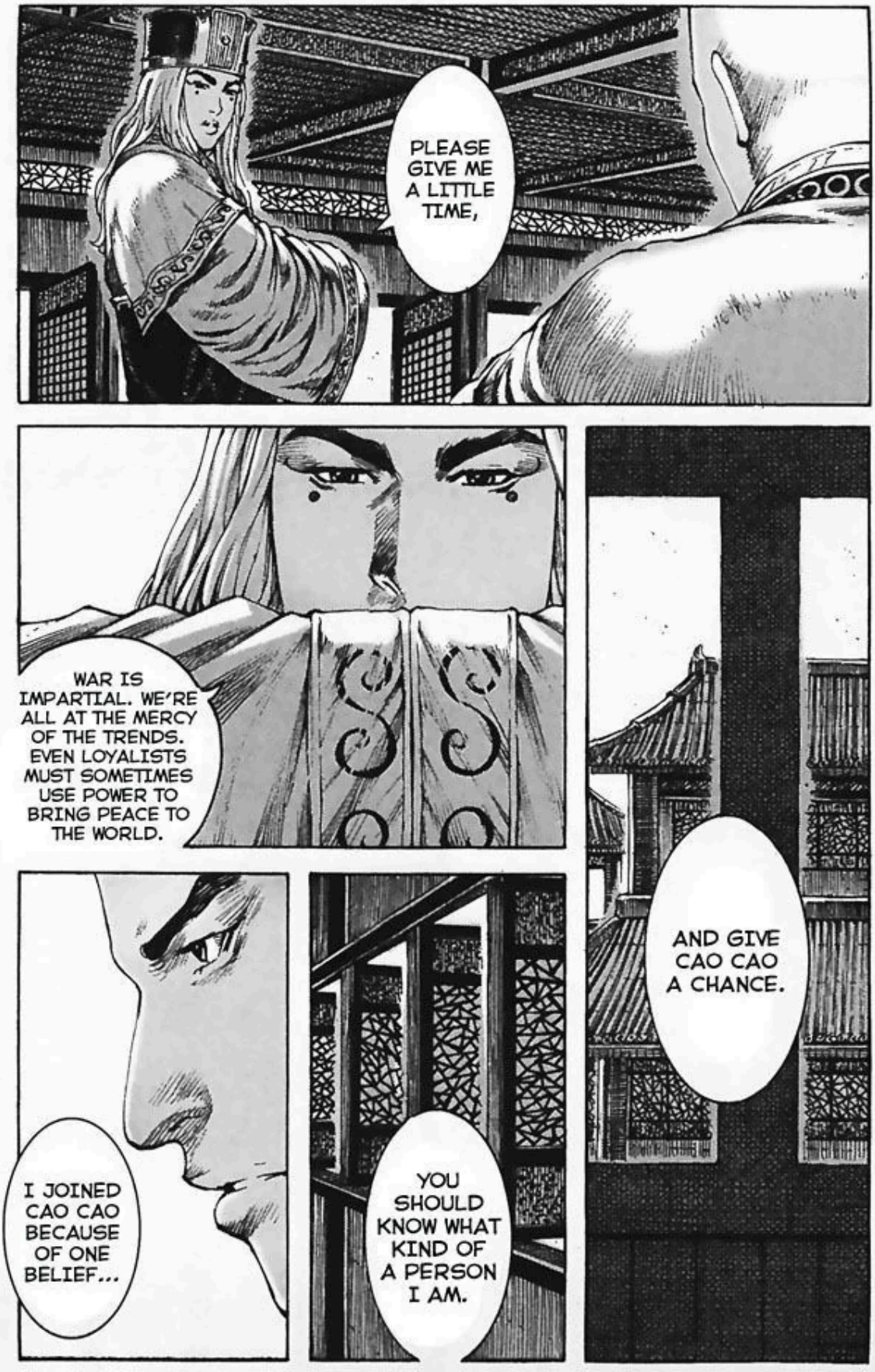
This is where the **opportunistic court officials** come into play—the "survivors" of earlier purges who remained only because they kept their heads down. Liu Xie receives these men not in formal court sessions, but in a series of informal, almost casual meetings—an ongoing reminder of how diminished the imperial authority has become in *Ravages*. During one such exchange, Cao De tries to distance himself from the Cao clan's less prestigious branches, only to be reminded that the clan's current status was built solely on Cao Cao's achievements.


HOW PREPARED ARE WE?
EMPEROR OF HÀN
LIÚ XIÉ
ARMIES HAVE BEEN SENT SOUTHWARD FROM GUANDU, YOUR MAJESTY, TO COLLABORATE IN THE COUNTER-ATTACK.
EACH PROVINCE WILL FOLLOW SUIT AFTER THE COUP.
WE'VE GATHERED COUNTLESS COLLABORATORS OVER THESE MONTHS.
MINISTER
DONG WAN
MINISTER
JIN YU
DON'T WORRY YOUR MAJESTY. CAO CAO BEING TRAPPED IN GUANDU IS ACTUALLY GREAT NEWS.
THIS TIME FOR SURE, RIGHT...

Then Cao Ren storms in with armed guards, trapping the opportunists before they can flee. It looks like the final blow—no escape, no hope.

The incident with Cao Ren was entirely engineered by **Xun Yu, and Liu Xie**, who had coordinated beforehand to expose the opportunists publicly. After the ruse, Xun Yu scolds the ministers for their lack of principle: they claim to be loyalists, yet always side with whoever seems most powerful at the moment. The irony, Xun Yu suggests, is that even genuine loyalists are forced by circumstances to make pragmatic choices—but unlike the opportunists, he has stayed true to his principles while assisting Cao Cao.

Knowing that the Yuan strategy depends heavily on insider networks, Xun Yu devises a countermeasure: he instructs Cao De to forge a poisoned letter that will mislead the invading Yuan forces into a trap. The misinformation alone might only have delayed them and triggered a few ambushes, but the intervention is crucial—it prevents an internal collapse in Xu and keeps Cao Cao's political base intact.


PLEASE GIVE ME A LITTLE TIME,
WAR IS IMPARTIAL. WE'RE ALL AT THE MERCY OF THE TRENDS. EVEN LOYALISTS MUST SOMETIMES USE POWER TO BRING PEACE TO THE WORLD.
AND GIVE CAO CAO A CHANCE.
I JOINED CAO CAO BECAUSE OF ONE BELIEF...
YOU SHOULD KNOW WHAT KIND OF A PERSON I AM.


BUT, THERE IS A LETTER TO WRITE.


MAKE THE YUAN ARMY FALL FOR A TRAP THAT I'VE SET UP LONG AGO?


HAVE YOU CONSIDERED REDEEMING YOURSELF USING A LETTER?


CHENG YU ISN'T HEADING FOR GUANDU, CAO DE. HE'S GOING TO DEFEND RUNAN.


I'LL DO IT FOR MY CLAN, BUT CHENG YU'S WHEREABOUTS HAVE BEEN EXPOSED, WHAT IF...

Cao Cao and his riders breaks free from the fire trap, and accepts Yuan Fang's challenge to engage in another round which defeated Guo Jia himself. This then brings us to the deliberate mention of Puyang (the campaign where Cao Cao 'trained' his troops for the eventual showdown against the Yuan clan), and thus in a way the match against the first of the eight geniuses can be seen as a graduation exam for Cao Cao and the geniuses under him, the last hurdle after years of painstaking efforts (in another note, just as the win in Puyang involved some sneaky schemes, we're clued in especially those of us familiar with the source texts that team Cao is about to unveil a surprising move to turn the tide). Puyang definitely shows Guo Jia and Cao Cao’s insane EF, soldiers are literally performing self-immolation to create a path for Cao Cao.





SFX: FOOM~

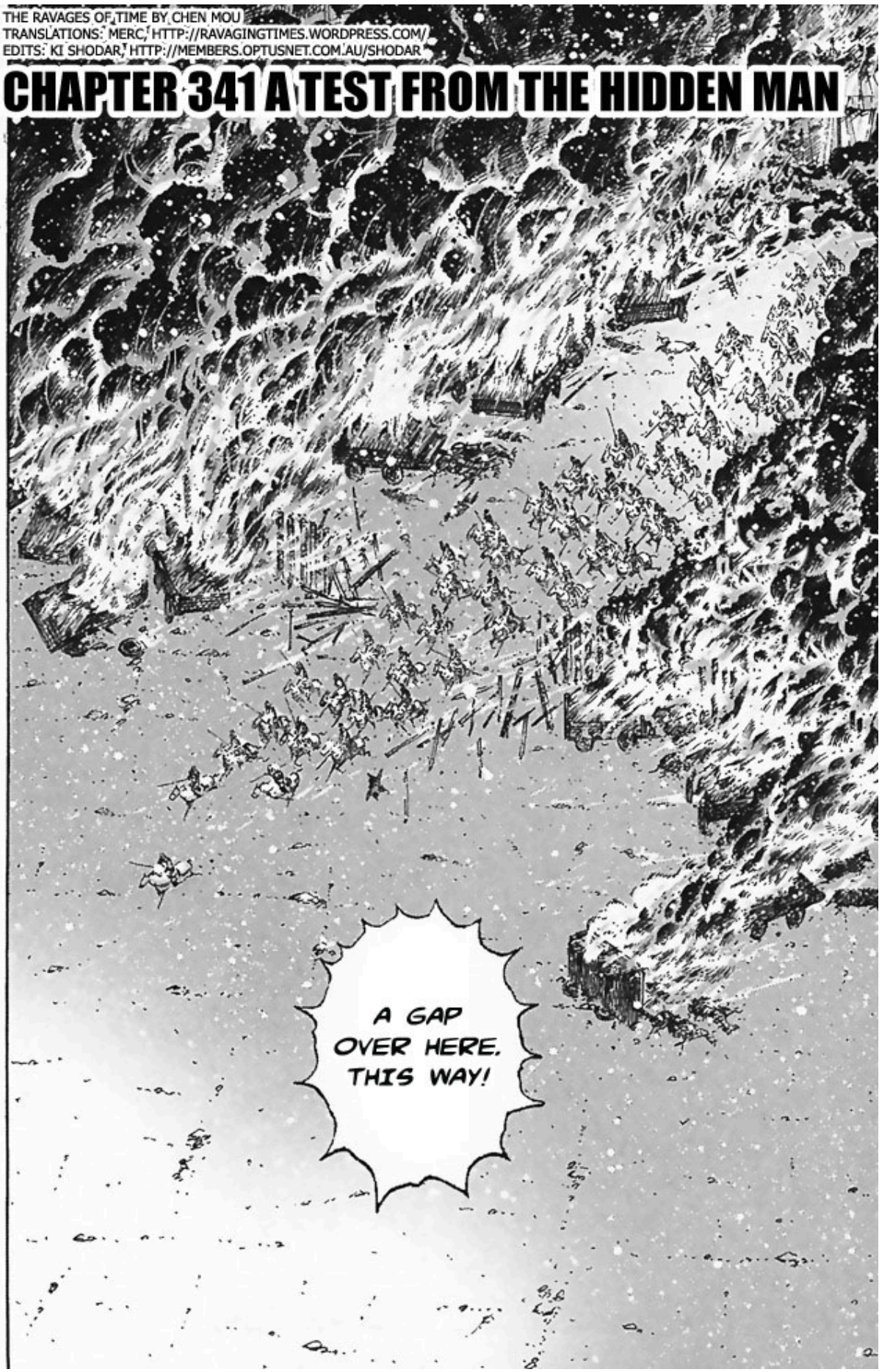


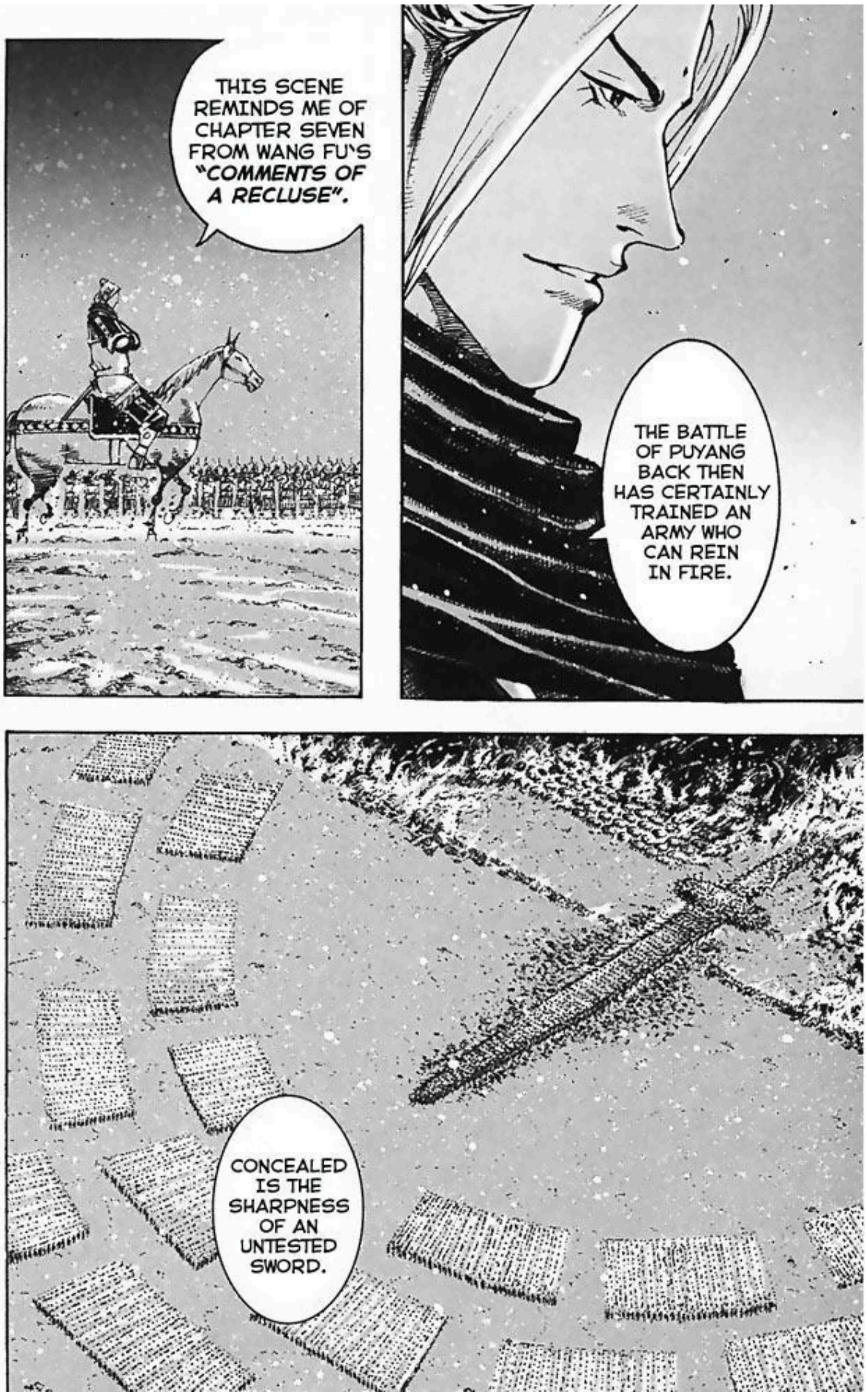




THE RAVAGES OF TIME BY CHEN MOU
TRANSLATIONS: MERC, HTTP://RAVAGINGTIMES.WORDPRESS.COM/
EDITS: KI SHODAR, HTTP://MEMBERS.OPTUSNET.COM.AU/SHODAR

CHAPTER 341 A TEST FROM THE HIDDEN MAN




THIS SCENE REMINDS ME OF CHAPTER SEVEN FROM WANG FU'S "COMMENTS OF A RECLUSE".
THE BATTLE OF PUYANG BACK THEN HAS CERTAINLY TRAINED AN ARMY WHO CAN REIN IN FIRE.
CONCEALED IS THE SHARPNESS OF AN UNTESTED SWORD.

Cao Cao ultimately wins this “second round,” flipping the momentum back in his favor.

Then comes the revelation that reframes the entire campaign.

First, we learn that Guandu itself was a long con by Yuan Fang—its true purpose was not defeating Cao Cao, but eliminating Yuan Shao, Yuan Tan, and Yuan Shang in one sweep so that Yuan Fang could seize total control of the northern clan.

But now we discover that the battle was also a **charade staged by Cao Cao**, designed to buy enough time for his own insider to burn the *real* rations depot: **Yangwu**.

Let’s take stock:

- **Cao Cao** intended to lure the Yuan forces deeper by offering his supply routes as bait, then strike the rations depot.

- **Yuan Fang** countered with disinformation to lure Cao Cao into a fire trap at Wuchao and let the Yuan army roll deeper into Cao territory.

- But **Cao Cao** used *himself* as bait to hold Yuan Fang's attention long enough for his agent—Yang—to burn the true depot at Yangwu.


THEY'VE BURNED THE RATIONS DEPOT AT YANGWU!
YANG QING


IS...
IS ONE
OF US!
AND THE
ARSONIST...


SUPPOSE WE COULDN'T GO ON, IT'S STILL OVER FOR YOU LOT!
MY TROOP MAY BE DEFEATED, BUT IT'S NOT A TOTAL LOSS FOR US.
LORD CAO SAYS: STALL?
MY LORD SAID, IF YOU GUYS ARE NOT THERE...
CORRECT. WE'VE STALLED LONG ENOUGH TO ACHIEVE OUR GOAL.

This ruined Yuan Fang’s plan to assassinate Yuan Shao and take full control. Guo Jia and Sima Yi had foreseen the possibility and had already developed contingencies. Sima Yi acted partly as a red herring to divert attention away from Yang, while Guo Jia quietly manipulated Liang Jiyang Yu into rescuing the surviving Yuan leadership—an act that inadvertently derailed Yuan Fang’s internal purge.


I'M TELLING YOU, I'VE ALWAYS BEEN ON THE OUTSIDE OF THE GAME.
I'M MERELY A FOOT SOLDIER IN THE CAO CAMP, WITH ONLY SMALL TRICKS TO PLAY, NEVER THE POWER TO MAKE STRATEGIC DECISIONS.
PERHAPS MY FAME GIVES A GOOD COVER FOR THE REAL STAR OF THE SHOW.
WHILE THE REAL LEADS WORK UNDISTURBED IN THE YUAN CAMP.
AND JUST AS GUO JIA HAD PLANNED, OUR ENEMIES HAVE FOCUSED THEIR GAZE ON ME;


ta

SFX: PA~


IT'S AN AREA THAT HAS THE HIGHEST BUSINESS TRAFFIC WITH THE SIMA CLAN!


LIYANG'S JIANG YI QU GREW UP IN HENAN...


I FINALLY GOT IT.




CAREFUL, MY LORD!
IF THEY RETURN TO HEBEI...
TA
THEY'LL START A SERIES OF RETALIATION AGAINST YUAN FANG.
AND THE YUAN CLAN WON'T BE ABLE TO SURVIVE THIS ROUND OF INFIGHTING!
UNLESS...
WHO TOLD JIANG YI QU TO COME HERE...

To deepen the chaos, Guo Jia and Sima Yi framed **Zhang He and Gao Lan** as the supposed insiders who allowed Yangwu to burn, forcing Duan Jian to flee and spread the rumor. This planted seeds of doubt within the Yuan clan and ensured that even if Yuan Fang retreated north, he would lose two invaluable commanders.

Despite his meticulous preparations, Yuan Fang's master plan had one fatal flaw: once the dust settled, there would be no one left capable of carrying it forward.

Zooming out, here's where things stand:

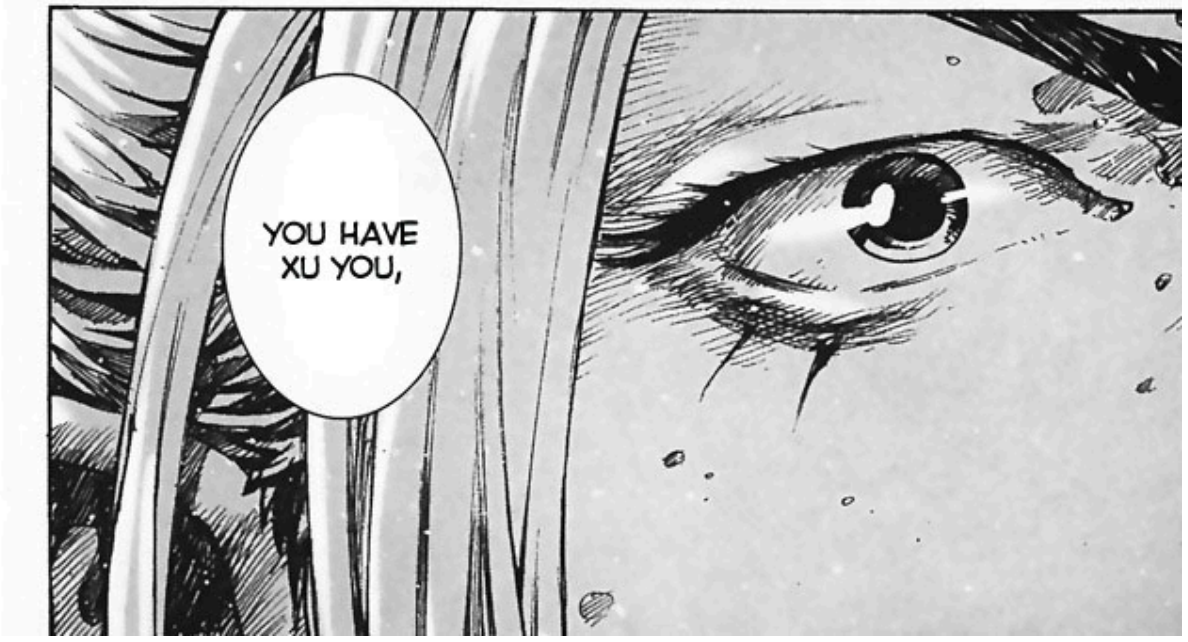
- The clash at **Gushi** was a staged response to Yuan Fang's trap at **Wuchao**.
- Cao Cao's true objective succeeds: Yang burns the Yuan rations at **Yangwu**.
- Xun Yu prevents a political implosion in the capital and secures Liu Xie's support.
- The Yuan army continues its offensive, but with their supplies gone, retreat becomes perilous and morale collapses.


YES-SIR!
TEAM TWO, RETURN WITH THE ARMY TO TRANSPORT ALL REMAINING RATIONS HERE FOR OUR IMMEDIATE NEEDS!
YANG QING.
HERE!
THE MAIN TROOP SHALL RETREAT AHEAD OF ME!
AND TELL OUR INSIDERS IN THE CAO CAMP TO STAY PUT.
TAKE YOUR MEN AND PATROL THE ROADWAYS TOWARD CAO CAO'S CAMP. CAPTURE ANYONE AND EVERYONE. DON'T LET THE INSIDER GET AWAY.
YESSIR. PLEASE TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, CHIEF CONTROLLER!
WE'LL TRY AGAIN AFTER I UNITE THE NORTHERN TERRITORIES!
YES-SIR!

Realizing the situation is untenable, Yuan Fang orders a retreat. But even this fallback is compromised: Yuan Fang is betrayed by **Yang—the very insider he never suspected**, whose long-term infiltration by Guo Jia now pays off. Yuan Fang's army, deep in enemy territory, faces starvation, ambushes, and mass desertion.


NO NEED.


ADVISOR GUO JIA WANTS YOU TO KNOW:

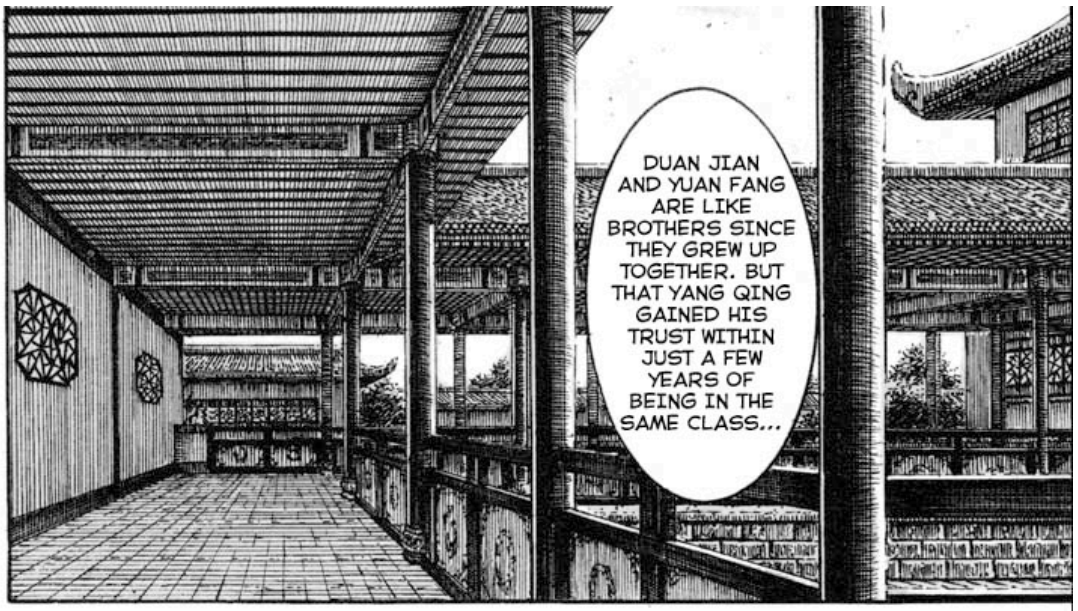

YOU HAVE XU YOU,



This shows how Guo Jia and Sima Yi saw through Yuan Fang's entire strategy in this battle and

countered it. As for how Yang Qing was integrated as a spy by Guo Jia and managed to deceive Yuan Fang for so long :




DUAN JIAN AND YUAN FANG ARE LIKE BROTHERS SINCE THEY GREW UP TOGETHER. BUT THAT YANG QING GAINED HIS TRUST WITHIN JUST A FEW YEARS OF BEING IN THE SAME CLASS...


HAHA, THE WISEST MAN OF HEBEI INDEED.


IT'S AMAZING, AS FASCINATING AS YUAN FANG'S ORIGIN...


YOU WANT TO FIND OUT YUAN FANG'S BACKGROUND THROUGH YANG QING, RIGHT?
NOW THAT THE YANG FAMILY HAS FLED, THE TRUTH PROBABLY WOULDN'T HURT.
YANG QING... IS ACTUALLY YANG BIAO'S SON YANG XIU.


CORRECT. YANG BIAO'S WIFE IS AN OLDER CLAN SISTER OF YUAN SHAO. BACK THEN YANG BIAO WAS AFRAID THE POLITICAL WAR WOULD JEOPARDIZE HIS FAMILY, THUS HE SECRETLY SENT HIS SON TO HEBEI AND INDIRECTLY ENROLLED HIM AT MY SCHOOL.
YANG BIAO'S SON, THAT MEANS...
LATER WHEN DONG ZHUO DOMINATED THE COURT, YANG BIAO HAD TO SUPPORT HIM IN ORDER TO PROTECT HIS MAJESTY. THAT STANCE MADE HIM AN ARCHENEMY TO YUAN SHAO, WHO WAS THE CHIEF OF THE EIGHTEEN-WARLORD-ALLIANCE.
OH.
FOR FEAR OF ENDANGERING THE STUDENT, THAT IDENTITY STAYED HIDDEN.


OUR SIMILARLY TORTUROUS BACKGROUNDS MADE YUAN FANG EASY TO HIT IT OFF WITH.


YOU'RE GOOD AT DELIBERATING. YUAN FANG'S IDENTITY HAS BEEN WITHIN YOUR GRASP LONG AGO.
AH, I GOT LUCKY.

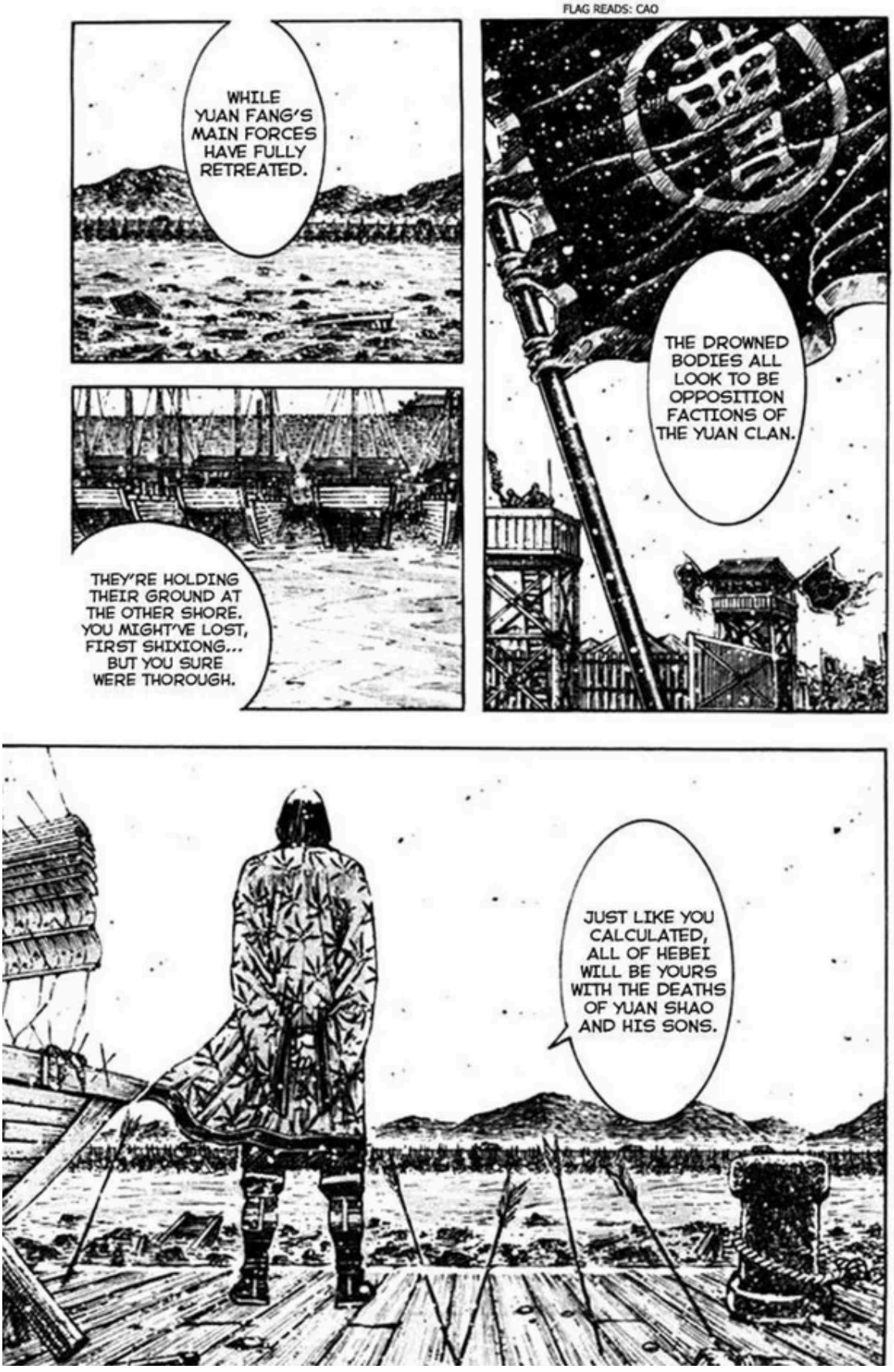

HAHA, YUAN FANG STILL HAS NO IDEA THAT WE'RE COUSINS.
HAVING KNOWN THE REAL STORY, A TALENT LIKE YOU COULD'VE RISEN TO THE TOP AS LONG AS YOU PANDERED TO YUAN FANG.
LIKE WHAT?
HIS COMPLETE TRUST IN ME ALLOWED ME TO DO ANYTHING I WANT IN HIS ABSENCE.
ONE TASK DONE.
SFX: CRASH

When was the time GJ could have planted Yang Xiu as an insider ? Xuzhou Incursion which is from the start of this document and Guo Jia's plan. He understood Yuan Fang's psychological state (his family burdens, his goals, his internal conflicts…) and planted Yang Xiu who is appropriate for mole insertion as he is compatible with Yuan Fang's characteristics and background, furthermore he is pretty good at warfare deception and acting skills, so has a great chance of being an insider while minimising traces as demonstrated in the panels above. Yang Xiu was the son of Lady Yuan, who was the sister of Yuan Shu. So his background was probably the most compatible to interact with Yuan clan; Yang Xiu also develops a camaraderie with Yuan Fang which becomes extra untraceable alongside his great acting skills.

From the beginning, all of this battle Guo Jia orchestrated was a distraction. Yuan Fang was entirely on the belief that Guo Jia never knew the locations of the rations but he never needed it in the 1st place as Yang Xiu was gonna do it by himself. Everything was a misdirection made by Guo Jia but to deceive Yuan Fang even better, he had to genuinely attempt to find the rations hidden by YF. It was one of his goals but Yuan Fang mistook it as his utmost urgency.

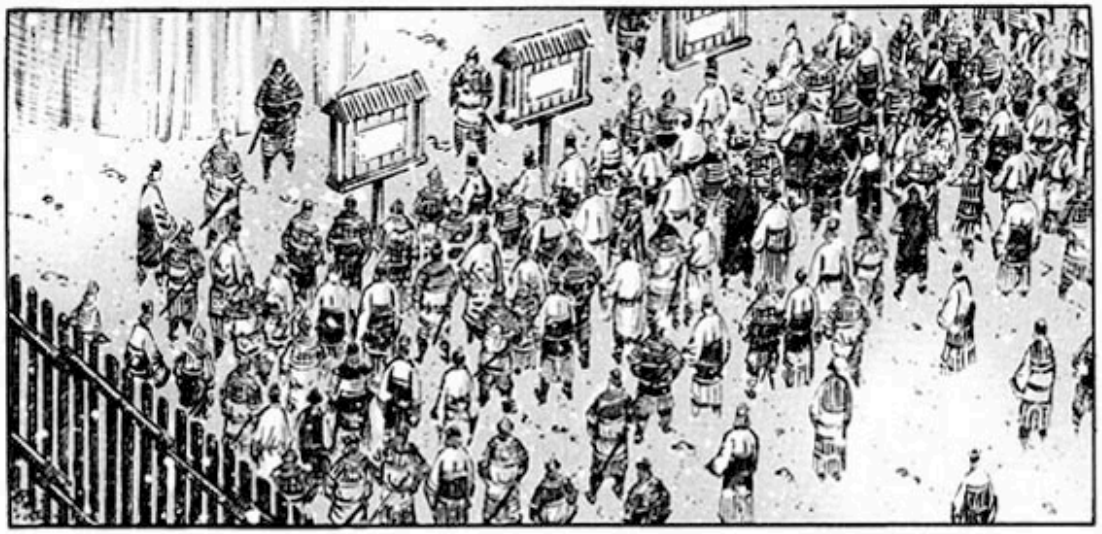
Yuan Fang has a contingency however, if ever the Yuan army loses in the Guandu campaign (and somehow the main targets manage to survive), opposition factions will not only be framed for the blunder, but their retreat will be sabotaged


THE BLAME OF LOSING OUR RATIONS FOR GUANDU WILL BE ALL ON HIM.
AS FOR THE ESSENCE OF THE SECOND PLAN...
CHIEF CONTROLLER THOUGHT OF A BACKUP FOR EVERYTHING, EXCEPT...
LET THOSE PARTIES WHO OPPOSED CHIEF CONTROLLER BE THE LAST TO BOARD.
YES-SIR.



It is important to note that **Guo Jia never intended to kill Yuan Fang**—that move comes from

Yang Xiu's separate agenda. Nevertheless, Yuan Fang had prepared yet another contingency: during the retreat, he planned to spread forged letters implicating members of Cao Cao's camp, hoping to ignite internal conflict. Guo Jia counters brilliantly: he convinces Cao Cao to issue a fake letter of surrender supposedly signed by **Xiahou Dun**, whose reputation would make such a letter absurd on its face. When the frightened defectors see it burned publicly, they realize Cao Cao is giving them a chance at redemption, and many reaffirm their loyalty. Half the base was practically made of forced traitors—but Guo Jia turns them back into allies.



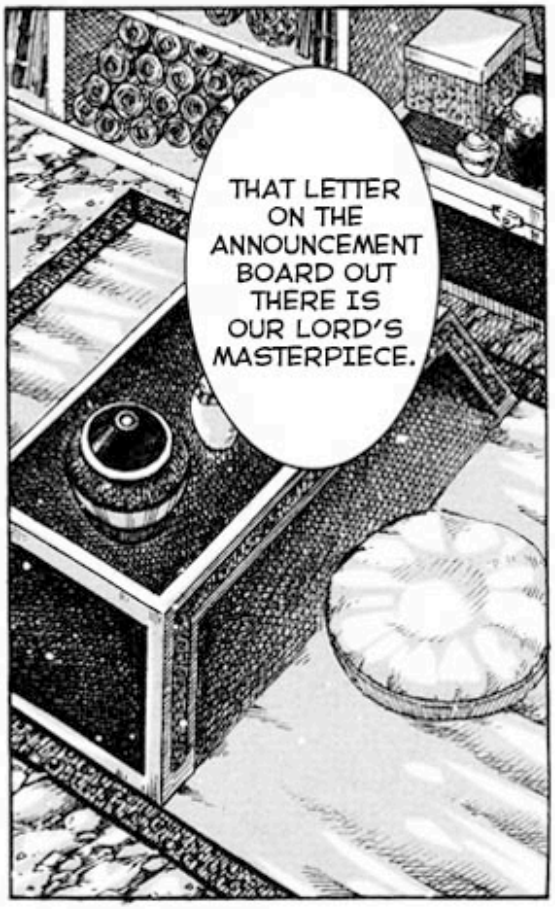



THESE ARE... PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE WITH YUAN SHAO, SIGNED IN YOUR NAME.


THESE LETTERS YOU FOUND, YUE JIN, MUST ALSO CONTAIN FORGERIES TO PLANT DISTRUST AMONG OUR PEOPLE.
THAT YUAN FANG KNOWS HOW TO HANDLE A DEFEAT AS WELL AS WINNING A BATTLE.
THEN HEBEI WILL HAVE TIME TO RECOUP, AND WAIT FOR THEIR NEXT CHANCE TO ATTACK...
WITH THIS TACTIC WE'LL SUFFER HUGE CASUALTIES IN THE ENSUING HOUSE-CLEANING, DESPITE OUR VICTORY AT GUANDU.
SHREWD AND CALCULATING AS HE IS, YUAN FANG IS UNFORTUNATELY DEALING WITH A DIFFERENT KIND OF OPPONENT.

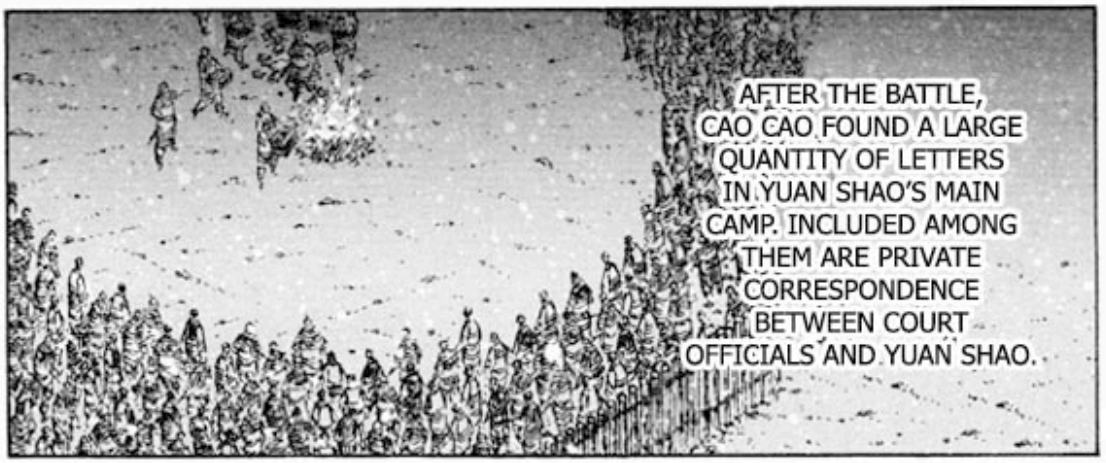

OUR LORD IMITATED XIAHOU DUN'S HANDWRITING AND WROTE A LETTER OF SURRENDER TO YUAN SHAO.


WH... WHAT?

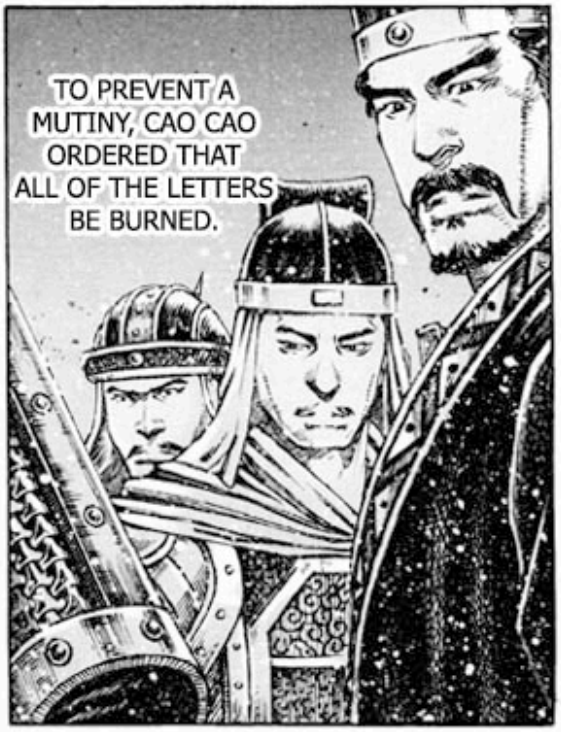

THAT LETTER ON THE ANNOUNCEMENT BOARD OUT THERE IS OUR LORD'S MASTERPIECE.


TO THOSE WORRYING MEN, LET THAT BOULDER BE LIFTED FROM THEIR HEARTS.
WOULDN'T THIS FEEL LIKE ONE BIG JOKE TO EVERYONE IF EVEN XIAHOU DUN WOULD DO THE SAME.
PREPARE A FEW MORE FOR ME, XUN YOU. GIVE THEM THE PEACE OF MIND.
IN ADDITION ...
HAHA, CAO DE'S BETRAYAL MEANS CAO REN WON'T BE FAR BEHIND!




AFTER THE BATTLE, CAO CAO FOUND A LARGE QUANTITY OF LETTERS IN YUAN SHAO'S MAIN CAMP. INCLUDED AMONG THEM ARE PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN COURT OFFICIALS AND YUAN SHAO.


MANY OF THE MEN WHO FELT FORCED TO COMMUNICATE WITH YUAN SHAO INSTANTLY REPLACED THE WORRY IN THEIR HEARTS WITH GRATITUDE FOR CAO CAO.


TO PREVENT A MUTINY, CAO CAO ORDERED THAT ALL OF THE LETTERS BE BURNED.

Finally, Guo Jia, Jia Xu, and Xun Yu recover Yuan Fang's body and burn it, erasing him from history and ensuring that the Yuan clan's future implosion will have no mastermind to avert it.

S


YUAN FANG'S DEAD.


HOW DID YOU KNOW...?


I KNOW ONE OF THE EIGHT GENIUSES.


CAO CAO OBTAINED YUAN FANG'S CORPSE, BUT INSTEAD OF FLAUNTING IT PUBLICLY, HE ELIMINATED ALL TRACES OF IT...
THIS WAY... YUAN FANG'S SUPPORTERS WILL REMAIN IGNORANT AND CONTINUE TO FIGHT AGAINST THE YUAN CLAN.

Afterwards, Yuan Shao kills himself after learning Yang Xiu's identity, setting up the conflict between Yuan Tan (who would use the clan's power) and Yuan Sheng (who would use the power of the people), in which Guo Jia would manipulate events to make brothers destruct themselves. Not an important plot (1 volume merely), so let's go to the most important part.

From the beginning, Guo Jia suffered tuberculosis which threatened his life. While Dr Hua (the greatest doctor in the country) managed to constantly save his life, he's however not present anymore as he was separated by Zhuge Liang scheme to indirectly make Guo Jia die by his tuberculosis. Guo Jia eventually know ZL is scheming in the shadows and even deduce his 3 Visitations strategy :

P1: ZL is very arrogant person.

P2: Without stopping Cao Cao's attack to the South, he would be unstoppable anynore.

P3: Giving up to Cao Cao's mercy or doing absolutely nothing would be pretty humiliating.

-->

C1: Zhuge Liang intends to stop Cao Cao.

P4: Currently he lacks resources to do so.

-->

C2: Now is a time when Zhuge Liang will join one of the camps.

P5: The only currently/potentially strong warlords to whom no one has joined are Liu Biao and Liu Bei.

P6: Liu Bei is basically a legend, righteous person helping innocent people and blah blah blah.

P1+P5+P6+C2

-->

C3: Zhuge Liang is going to join Liu Bei's camp.

P7: But when Liu Bei asked ZL to join him, ZL refused.

-->

C4: It's a contradiction between Zhuge Liang's plan and his motivation.

-->

C5: It makes it look like for everyone that ZL gave up, which is not true.

-->

C6: ZL intentionally build up a false image around oneself.

P8: My spies told that ZL fr acted so passive for last few years.

-->

C7: Meaning, ZL was intentionally trying to build such an image on himself years.

P9: All the previous victories and such ZL'a image lead to Cao Cao commiting the same mistake Yuan Shao did -- underestimating the enemy.

-->

C8: Zhuge Liang's aim was to make Cao Cao and others to underestimate him.

-->

C9: Not just that, but based on C7 that was Zhuge Liang's plan FOR YEARS.

-->

C10: Meaning, if Zhuge Liang planned for YEARS to join the weakest faction and was preparing tactics, it means that he most likely he had already very well calculated all the schemes and his own actions very very well.

-->

C11: Except that it means, that ZL was aware of the existence of my spies (if he wasn't, then he wouldn't act so passive in his average life).

.

P10: Me and JX formulated a strategy, using weather conditions and starting rains to crush Liu Biao's fortified positions on water.

P11: Zhuge Liang is better than us in reading weather.

-->

C12: He should've figured that out and started preparing against that somehow.

P12: According to spies whose are constantly around him, Zhuge Liang does nothing (no preparations for that) but refused from Liu Bei's request.

P13: Moreover, ZL refusing from Liu Bei's request somehow lead to conflict between Liu Biao's sons.

P14: That conflict in fact makes it even easier for us to crush Liu Biao.

-->

C13: ZL has some sort of the scheme here, possibly intending to use Cao Cao crushing Liu Biao to make his "underestimate the enemy" strategy even more deadly.

P15: If so, then ZL needs to also somehow save Liu Bei AND save his (and some of Liu Biao's) troops.

.

-->

C14: Because of C11 the only way for Zhuge Liang to communicate Liu Bei and give him instructions without getting attention of my spies (whose would tell that to Cao Cao which would lead to his "underestimating the enemy strategy" to failing) is by refusing Liu Bei's proposals (having some sort of the indirect control of the situation by that).

P16: Currently, Liu Bei and Liu Biao's troops are not in the safe zone.

-->

C15: Zhuge Liang needs at very least also refuse on a 2nd visitation from Liu Bei's request to indirectly get them into a safe zone.

-->

C16: Meaning, Zhuge Liang would probably agree on Liu Bei's 3rd request, when Liu Bei and Liu Biao's troops are safe.

The most important part to note is that even while being completely overridden by his sickness and close to death, he keeps working for the country, making Xun Yu… well, it’s better to show through panels:

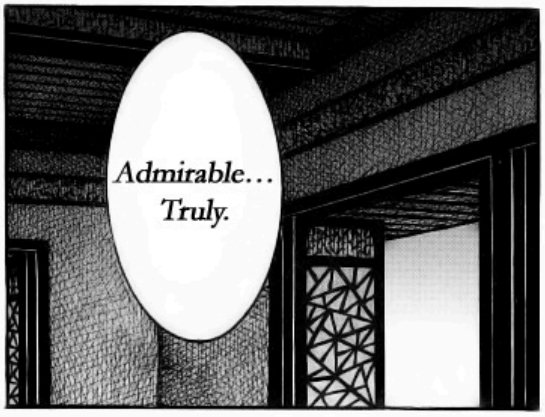

You're all dismissed.
Let him rest.
Have… have you been promoted?


On what grounds do I deserve to be placed among the Three Dukes…


If anyone deserves to take the position, it's you.


I'm… almost dead… I can't…
Listen to me. Forget about everything. Rest and recoup. And then, together…
You set down a great foundation for Han. The world is nearly at peace.
You… concede…

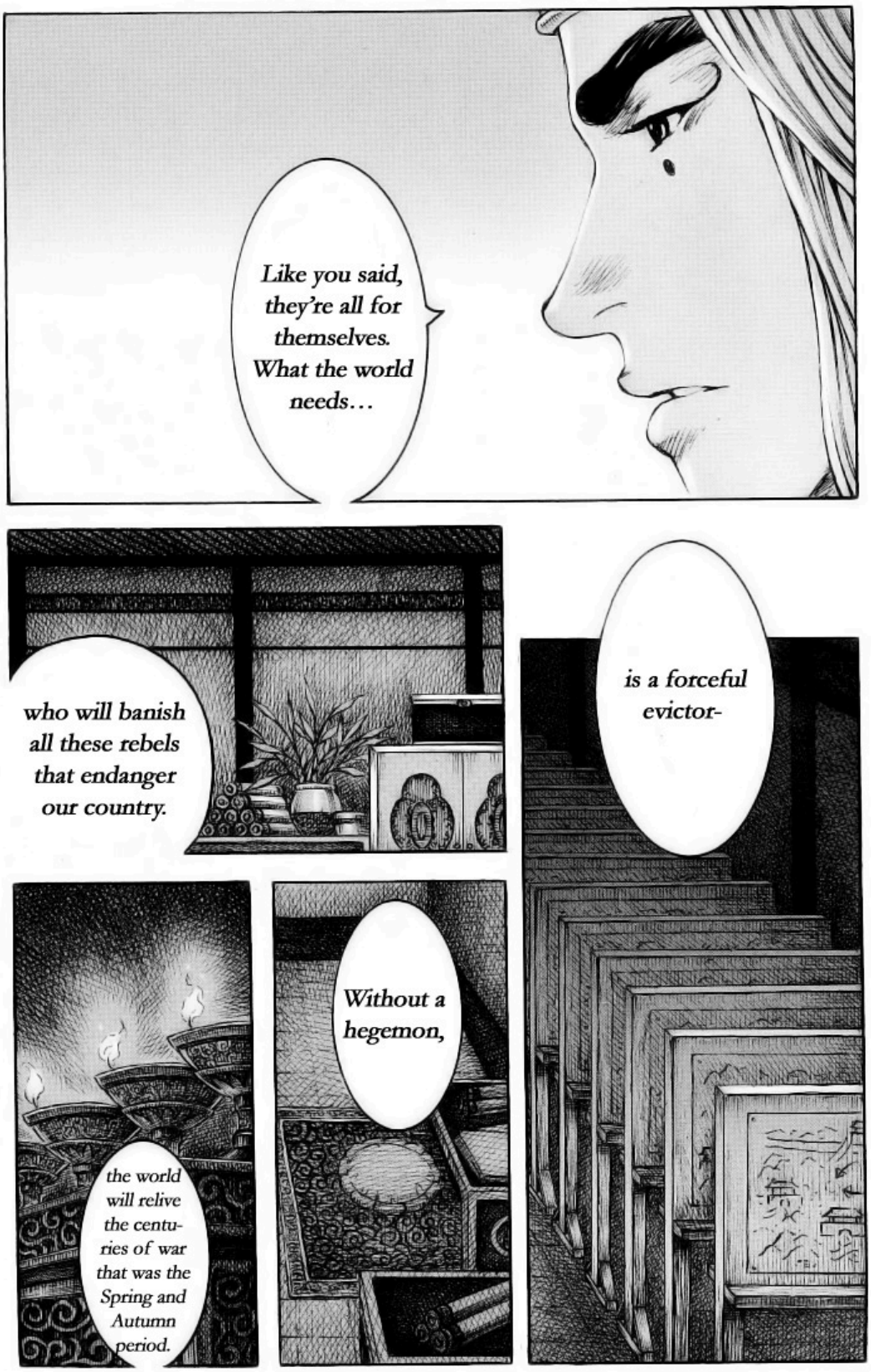

Yes, I concede to your actions.

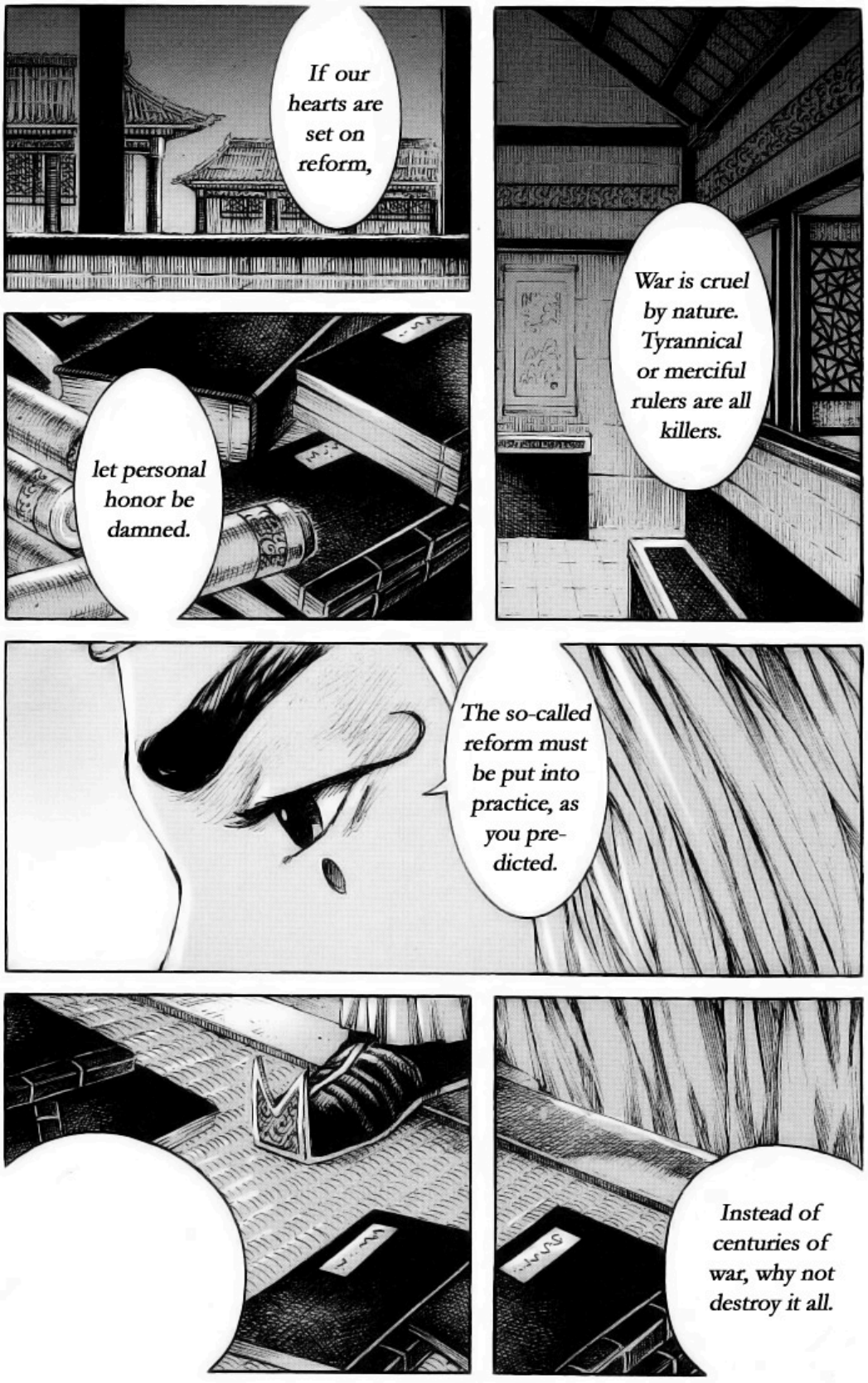

Admirable... Truly.

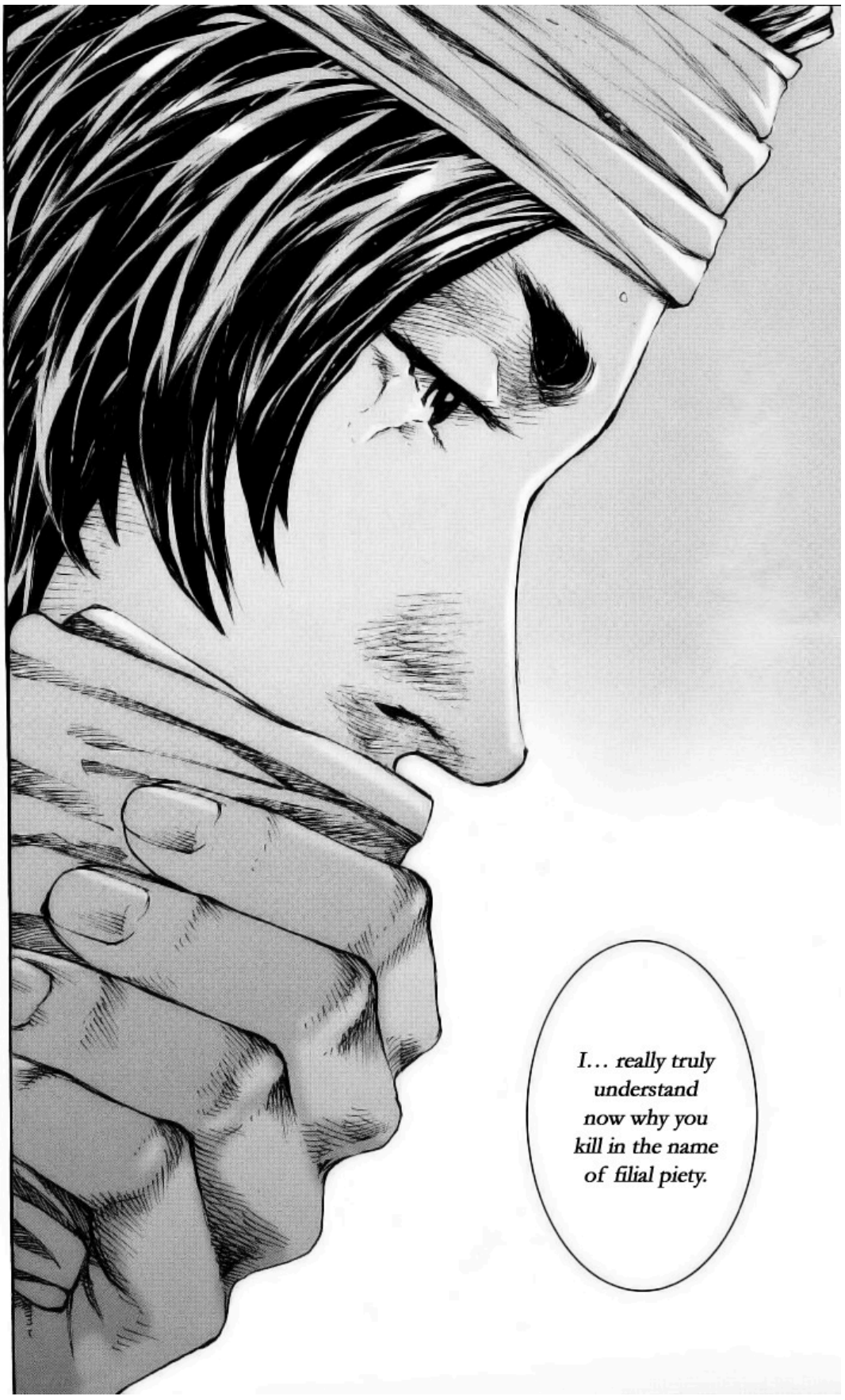


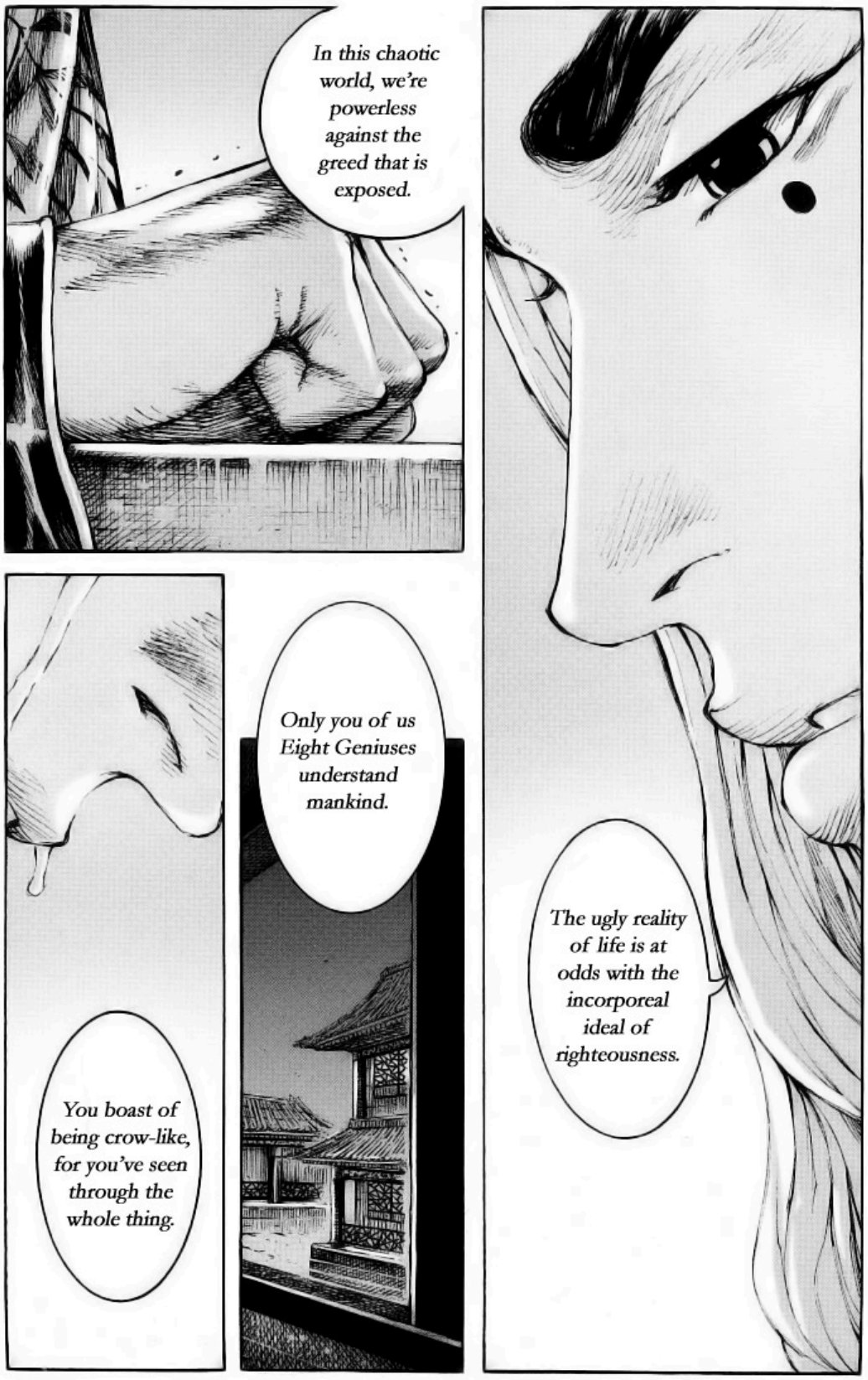

Your insistence was absolutely correct.


The northern areas have submitted without a fight.
Gongsun Kang has sent the heads of the Yuan brothers.
Back in the beginning I believed there was still hope for the world if we could just stand by His Majesty.
Except ten years later, the warlords still dominate their territories with armies of their own.
Cough.


Like you said, they're all for themselves. What the world needs…
who will banish all these rebels that endanger our country.
is a forceful evictor-
Without a hegemon,
the world will relive the centuries of war that was the Spring and Autumn period.


If our hearts are set on reform,
War is cruel by nature. Tyrannical or merciful rulers are all killers.
let personal honor be damned.
The so-called reform must be put into practice, as you predicted.
Instead of centuries of war, why not destroy it all.


I... really truly understand now why you kill in the name of filial piety.


In this chaotic world, we're powerless against the greed that is exposed.
The ugly reality of life is at odds with the incorporeal ideal of righteousness.
Only you of us Eight Geniuses understand mankind.
You boast of being crow-like, for you've seen through the whole thing.


{sfx: pong}

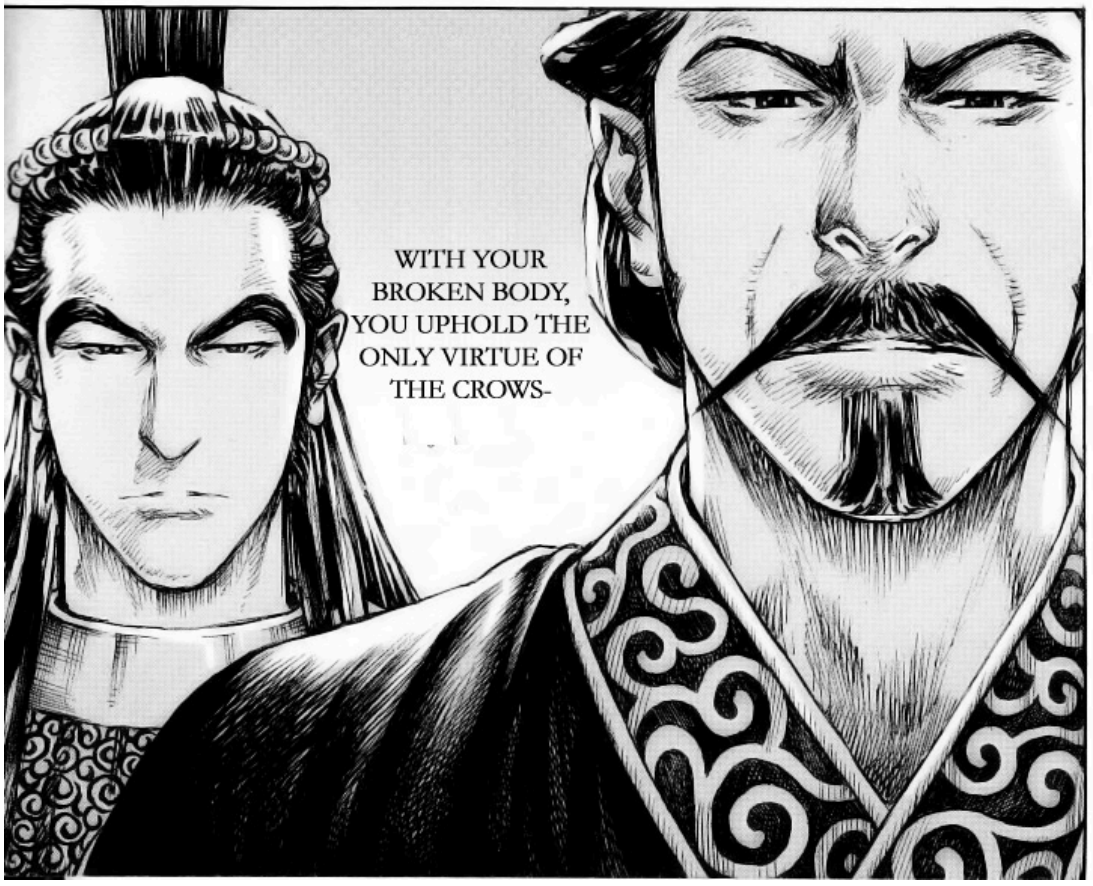

Yet, crows have a loving nature…

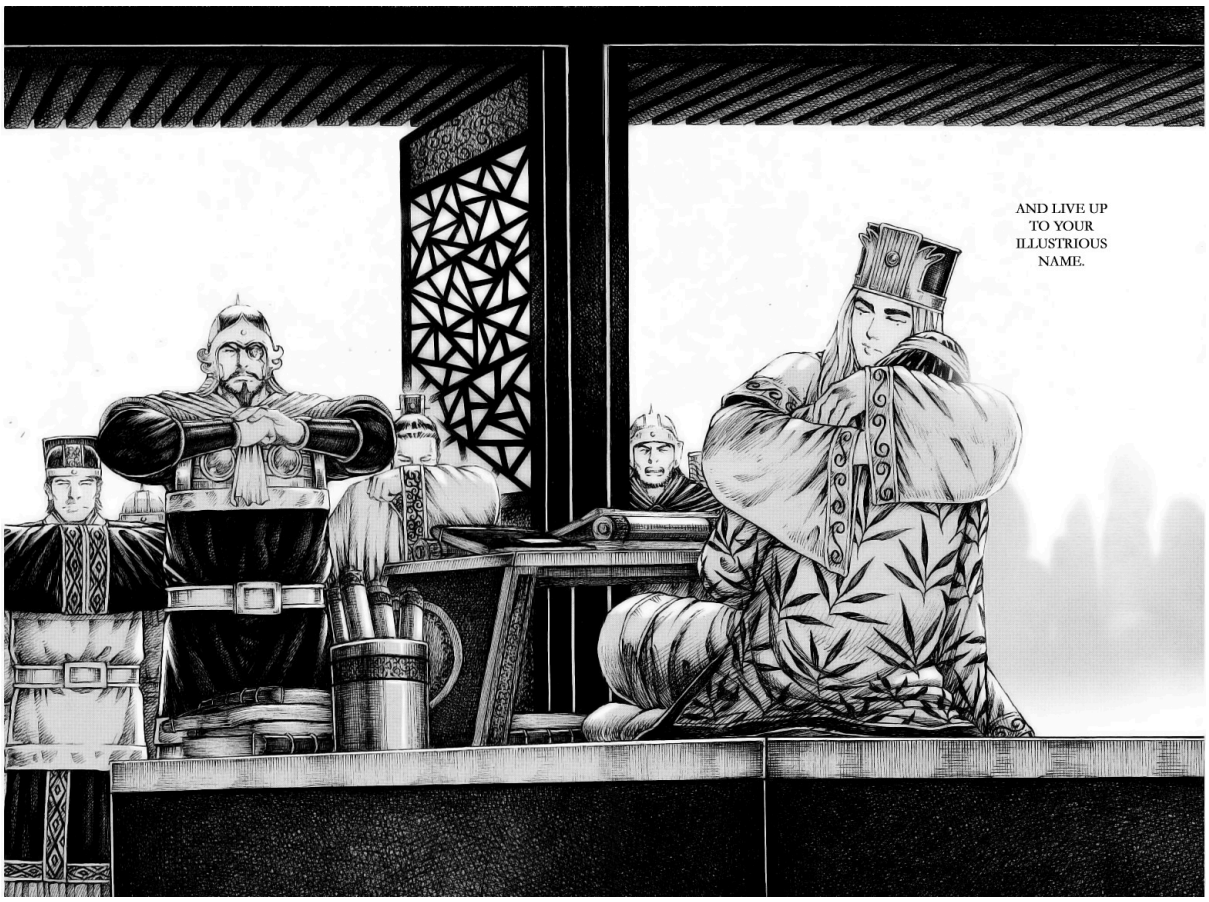

They nurture,
and they're filial.
Oh, Guo Jia…
They love where they came from, unashamed of the ugliness.



Oh, our country…
(wordplay, "guo jia" is homonym to "guo jia", but different tone and different hanzi)


ONLY YOU ARE SUPPORTING
YOUR KIND IN SECRET.


WITH YOUR
BROKEN BODY,
YOU UPHOLD THE
ONLY VIRTUE OF
THE CROWS-



Guo Jia ultimately dies of tuberculosis — but not before unifying the entire North under Cao Cao's rule and leaving behind a complex set of posthumous contingencies to guide the conquest of the South.

To summarize the obstacles Guo Jia faced:

overlapping contingencies, massive numerical disadvantages, Yuan Fang's brilliance, internal betrayals, and the long-term fragility of Cao Cao's faction.

Even after his death, he planned for everything.

Some more analysis on Yuan Fang's STP/reasoning + orchestration, which was manipulated by Guo Jia: (jackthezodiac + Catguy)

At first, SY's deception: Sima Yi's Deception:

> → He used a merchant friend of his (childhood friend) who was involved in the Yuan family's supply chain and wanted to convey to Yuan Fan through him that he wanted to defect to his side. The reason for the betrayal was that Cao Cao had previously exterminated most of the Sima family (which was true),

and at the moment, Cao Cao was obviously losing the battle, and therefore, Sima Yi allegedly decided to defect to Yuan Shao and help Yuan Fan win the Battle of Guandu. Sima Yi also revealed all of Cao Cao's supply lines and the traps set by Guo Jia (this information was also true. That is, it matched the facts that the Yuan intelligence transmitted). Sima Yi also tried to transfer a large sum of money from the Sima family to Yuan Fan through his childhood friend, with whom he had contacted. + He proposed to conspire with the Han Dynasty supporters in Cao Cao's capital, promising through his influence and his people at court to convince them and the Emperor to openly oppose Cao Cao (thus creating huge problems for Cao Cao in the rear + if the Han Emperor openly opposes Cao Cao, then Cao Cao's reputation will finally end and other princes will oppose him. + the Yuan family will be able to finally unite). He also promised that the allied trading families who are allied with the Sima family will also oppose Cao Cao (the Shan and Tan families are also losing their investments and their money due to Cao Cao's war) and deprive him of supplies. + It seems that Yanzhou has ALREADY stopped supplying Cao Cao (which proves Sima Yi's sincerity). However, Sima Yi does not want to do this for free and also set some conditions for his betrayal of Cao Cao: Namely, he first wanted his family and the Sima family's allies to retain their economic influence.
And also... As far as I understand, he wanted to personally head the Imperial court (i.e. so that the Yuan family would not remove him from this) so that the Sima family could greatly expand its political influence (but still inferior to the Yuan family).
Sima Yi's plan/strategy: His goal was to use allat to deceive his childhood friend and YF for some time. Sima predicted that cuz his friend is greedy he will def steal part of money sent by SY to YF. + He started to spreading rumours on Yuan territory about that fact, that his childhood friend stole part of money whose should've went to YF (which is true). Then he planned to use that fact that his friend would be checked for corruption in some time to blackmail his friend (cuz Sima has actual proofs of that guy actually stealing stuff from Yuan army cuz he sent the money. So corruption) And to get from his friend the locations of Yuan clan food supplies (that was the only way to defeat Yuan army on Guandu cuz there were no other possibilities for doing that). Cuz if Sima reveals proofs of corruption his friend will be executed (and his family will suffer from that as well). But if he betrays Yuan clan and gives info about their army supplies location then Yuan clan will be defeated in Guandu (cuz they are so deep in the Cao Cao's territories) and thus, cuz Yuan clan would be defeated and destroyed by Cap Cao, Sima Yi's friend wouldn't suffer from betraying Yuan clan.
. . Now to how YF saw though that (occam’s razor):

P1: Despite all Guo Jia's efforts, Cao Cao is losing the battle in Guandu and clan Yuan is dominating the battlefield in every way (Yuan army have more

troops, more food and Cao Cao's political situation is more complex than Yuan's).

P2: Yuan army is deeply inside Cao Cao's territories and lose of the food supplies would be a catastrophe for Yuan army.
→ **C1**: The only way from Cao Cao to win Guandu is somehow destroying all Yuan clan food what we have with us rn.
→ **C2**: Cao Cao will try to do it.

P3: To do it Cao Cao needs to get information about location where is our food supplies.
→ **C3:** Cao Cao (and Guo Jia who is commanding the battle) will try to find the location of our food supplies to destroy them and change the outcome of the battle (cuz without doing so he will end up losing in the end).

P4: Sima Yi despite Cao Cao mass murdered his family still is in Cao Cao's camp and hasn't betrayed Cao Cao in previous battles with other people despite probably having possibilities to do so.

P5: For a person whose family was mass murdered by Cao Cao it would be logical to betray and try to kill Cao Cao without waiting for a situation where Cao Cao is losing with 100% chance anyways.

C4: Sima Yi has some special reasons to be on Cao Cao's camp.

P6: Sima Yi stated and is acting like he is ready to betray Cao Cao.

P7: He is doing that only in situation when Cao Cao is 100% losing.
→**C5:** Sima Yi is trying to deceive us and his actions have some profitable part for Cao Cao.

P8: His childhood friend via who he sent me info and send me money also knows stuff about Yuan clan supplies related stuff.

—> C6: Sima Yi is planning to deceive and somehow gather the information about our supplies from his childhood friend to give Cao Cao and Guo Jia a possibility to defeat Yuan army in Guandu.

P9: Rumors are spreading in Hebei that this childhood friend is engaged in corruption by stealing from the Yuan army whose started after Sima Yi decided to betray Cao Cao and to give me money (whose he decided to send me via his childhood friend).

P10: It's possible that that childhood friend guy stole a part of money sent by Sima Yi what was supposed to go to Yuan army.

→ **C7:** Most likely Sima Yi expected his childhood friend to steal a part of money and used rumours to get my my attention to the possibility of childhood friend doing corruption.

→ **C8:** If childhood friend really stole part of money sent by Sima Yi to me then it would be easy for Sima Yi to prove the fact of corruption to me.

→ **C9:** It's easy for Sima Yi to blackmail his childhood friend via that.

→ **C10:** Sima Yi's/GJ's/CC's plan is to after deceiving me to blackmail his childhood friend into revealing to him (Sima Yi) the information about my (Yuan army) food supplies.

→ **C11:** Destroying our food supplies is only chance for Cao Cao to win Guandu. Thus he will bet everything on that chance, sending his best soldiers and going there himself to destroy our supplies to the place where he thinks they are.

He proceeded to foresee Sima Yi's scheme here.

. . . . Now to YF main Strategy in Guandu:
After seeing though Sima Yi, Yuan Fang decided not just take the money and execute Sima, but something else... He decided to cook Cao Cao. Literally. He acted like he believed to Sima's deception and arrived to investigate the truth behind the corruption rumors (so acting like he fall into Sima's plan). Next he warned that childhood friend and his uncle about Sima's plan and about his counterplan. He told them the counterplan that with his orders Yuan clan woll start and immediately arrest childhood friend and take their money and stuff they own. The childhood friend will also be arrested. They will also try to arrest Sima Yi but he would be capable to escape. The only one who would be capable to "escape" would be childhood friend's uncle (he was also Cao Cao's friend long time ago). YF planned to make the situation look like that childhood friend's is nigh destroyed by Yuan clan and thus via that make the betrayal from the Uncle believable (so like. Uncle was friends with Cao Cao sometimes and now his family is nigh destroyed by Yuan clan for corruption which actually happened. Logically speaking uncle doesn't have any others options except working with Cao Cao cuz he ain't getting anything good if Yuan Fang wins Guandu over Cao Cao. Cao Cai winning is his only

chance. + The Uncle while "escaping to the Cao camp" takes Sima Yi as a prisoner to use him in negotiations with Cao (to again, make his betrayal of Yuan family more believable). And then the Uncle is supposed to tell that all food supplies are in Vuchao. Where ACTUALLY Yuan Fang set a trap with fire. What is supposed in the end... LITERALLY burn Cao Cao and all his best troops alive in Vuchao when they arrive. (So, Yuan Fang decided to literally COOK Cao Cao).
Then there are rumours that Yuan Shao is planning to Yuan Hua adopts Yuan Tan. Then Yuan Tan will lose the right to inherit Yuan Shao. That's not proven but probably Yuan Fang's bait to bait Yuan Tan to his next actions. Also all Cao Cao's troops are rn kinda "paralyzed" by Yuan armies so they have like only 1 army what isn't paralysed by Yuan armies attacks (and only Cao Cao can led it) and they can move it only via 1 route to the Vuchao.. But in the same time, cuz Sima Yi's people were capable to kidnap that Uncle's (his name is Mendo btw) family amd they executed that "childhood friend"... That Mendo (Uncle guy) told to the Cao Cao truth - that Vuchao is a trap and that food supplies are actually in the Gushi. So actually, YF intentionally allowed siblings of the Xu Yu (Mendo/Uncle guy) to be captured by Sima Yi's people so Cao would use them against Xu Yu! Cuz YF also gave to the Xu Yu fake info about supplies being actually in Gushi. So now Cao Cao is thinking that he successfully saw though YF's strategy with a trap in Vuchao but actually YF set a trap in Gushi for Cao Cao. (So double deception ahh). Then Yuan Shan (third son of the Yuan Shao) decided to go away from his positions to the. So why he did that? He did that cuz Yuan Shan understood YF's deadly trap being actually in Gushi, not in Vuchao (he figured out that YF intentionally allowed to that Mendo guy family being captured and via that understood everything) and decided to intentionally leave his position to allow Cao Cao to get a position on the hills. So now to execute his strategy with destroying Cao Cao's army YF will be forced to share the glory of defeating Cao Cao with Yuan Shan (since Yuan Shan will be able to participate in the battle). In this way, Yuan Shang plans to prevent Yuan Fang from gaining even more prestige, and will also be able to gain prestige for himself (but his whole LR process and his scheme was predicted by YF).
The information about trap being actually in Gushi was also given to Yuan Tan somehow (I haven't figured that out but probably same process). So now Yuan Tan (first Yuan Shao's son), Yuan Shan (third Yuan Shao's son) and Cao Cao all are moving to the Gushi. Meanwhile Yuan Shao is the only one waiting in Vuchao. YF set him here under the pretext of "if Cao Cao will fall to the first trap and go here" (despite YF made sure it wouldn't happen with the family member stuff) . Also cuz Yuan Shan and Yuan Tang like HATE each others, in a situation when they both need authority and glory and Yuan Shao who is capable to control them is in the other place, it allowed to Cao Cao to mini sheme: To sent his troops with changed clothes to start a conflict between brothers. Yuan Shan's and Yuan Tang's people cuz of some Cao

Cao's attacks are killing each others (and at first they both are sure that the other brother decided to kill them here to get inheritance). That Cao Cao's plan (to make 2 armies of 2 brothers whose hate each others to kill each others) was predicted by YF (proven by the fact that he ordered his people to have different clothes in advance). So now Yuan Fang's people are gonna send information about that happening to Hebei (the capital of Yuan clan) so both, Yuan Tang and Yuan Shan's reputation would be 100% fucked (and most likely the elders will send them away from inheritance or even get rid completely) EVEN if they successfully survive the battle (which is unlikely cuz...). So now half of Cao Cao's army used that possibility of army of 2 brothers fighting and successfully broke into the camp at Gushi with the intention of burning the food supplies. However, now Yuan Fang's men themselves set fire to the camp in order to burn Cao Cao's cavalry trapped in the camp (which they also started burning themselves).

..and yeah. There is no any food in Gushi. So yeah, Yuan Fang told that Xu Yu (Mendo/Uncle) guy false info so Cao Cao. Food supplies are in somewhere else. Also Cao Cao's soldiers whose are in Yuan clan army clothes tried to to blend in with the Yuan Clan soldiers fleeing from the camp, but since Yuan Fang had anticipated this tactic with changing clothes, he also ordered only HIS men to change clothes. Thus being able to successfully distinguish Cao Cao's men who were in normal Yuan Clan clothes via that eliminating also that escaping route for Cao Cao's cavalry. Also cuz the battle started in Gushi Yuan Fang send order to Yuan Shao to sent part of Yuan Shao's army from Vuchao to the Gushi to help them here (and ordered to the rest of the Yuan Shao's army stay in Vuchao as auxiliary camp. ... So after both Yuan Tang and Yuan Shan understood what happened they stopped fighting and both of them lost most of their troops... So they both decided to go back to the Vuchao (cuz it's auxiliary camp???? Or maybe cuz their dad - Yuan Shao is here so they can justify themselves??? Or cuz Yuan Fang ordered them??? That's not explained but all of those explanantions makes sense) ...so now while Cao Cao and his best troops are in a fire in Gushi, Yuan Shao himself, Yuan Shan and Yuan Tang (all of them don't have many troops cuz brothers has lost most of their soldiers in a fighting between each others and Yuan Shao has sent most of his troops to Gushi cuz Yuan Fang ordered him that). So now soldiers who were supposed to set fire to Wuchao if Cao Cao fell into the trap in Wuchao commanded by Yuan Xi (Yuan Shao's second son with no political influence)... So Yuan Shao's 3 sons and he are all in one place.
And now.... The soldiers who were supposed to set fire to Wuchao if Cao Cao fell into this trap... STILL set fire to Wuchao (using the preparations they had made in advance)... So Yuan Fang is literally BURNING his own father and 2 his brothers in a fire in Vuchao (So Yuan Shao will die, his 2 sons too and

> Yuan Xi will be basically be blamed for that. + Use that fact that Cao Cao made his soldiers to change clothes in Yuan Tan and Yuan Shan's armies to claim that those 2 brothers brought Cao Cao's people to the camp and those set the fire therefore they are guilty in their fathers death). . So in the end YF would eliminate Cao Cao and his best troops (winning the battle of Guandu by himself and becoming a hero in Yuan clan. Raising his reputation and allat) + most likely eliminating Yuan Shao, Yuan Tan and Yuan Shan + completely eliminating most of their loyal forces (even if they by themselves somehow manage to survive) + completely ruining Yuan Shan's, Yuan Tan's and Yuan Xi's reputation (even if they manage to survive the fire trap somehow).

All of this was actually part of Guo Jia's strategy, based on the planning with the spy planting from ages ago, Guo Jia needed to set as many meaningful baits to manipulate Yuan Fang as effectively as possible. The funny thing is that this is just one part of Guo Jia's strategy, it's absurdly complex.

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6 — Post-Death Contingencies: Red Cliff

After the victory at Guandu, Guo Jia already understood he would not live to see the inevitable confrontation between Cao Cao's northern armies and the southern coalition led by Zhou Yu — one of the Eight Geniuses and a master of naval warfare. He also predicted an abnormally large flood on the Han River that year.

Why the Flood Matters

The Han River's banks were heavily fortified by Liu Biao. Normally, the river is far too shallow for large fleets, making a northern invasion by water practically suicidal. Even with Cao Cao's superior manpower and resources, attacking through a shallow river guarded by Liu Biao's ships would guarantee defeat.

However, the geniuses — Zhuge Liang, Jia Xu, Guo Jia, Zhou Yu, and others — all knew the Han River experiences an annual flood. Usually this rise in water level is still insufficient for warships. But in the specific year of the Battle of Red Cliff, the flood was predicted to be extraordinarily high, temporarily making the river navigable.

This foretold flood becomes the **centerpiece of Guo Jia's contingency planning**.

The Problem After Guo Jia's Death

Once Guo Jia was gone, Cao Cao's faction would lack anyone capable of predicting weather patterns, tides, and climate shifts. Their enemies, however — **Zhou Yu and Zhuge Liang** — would still possess that advantage.

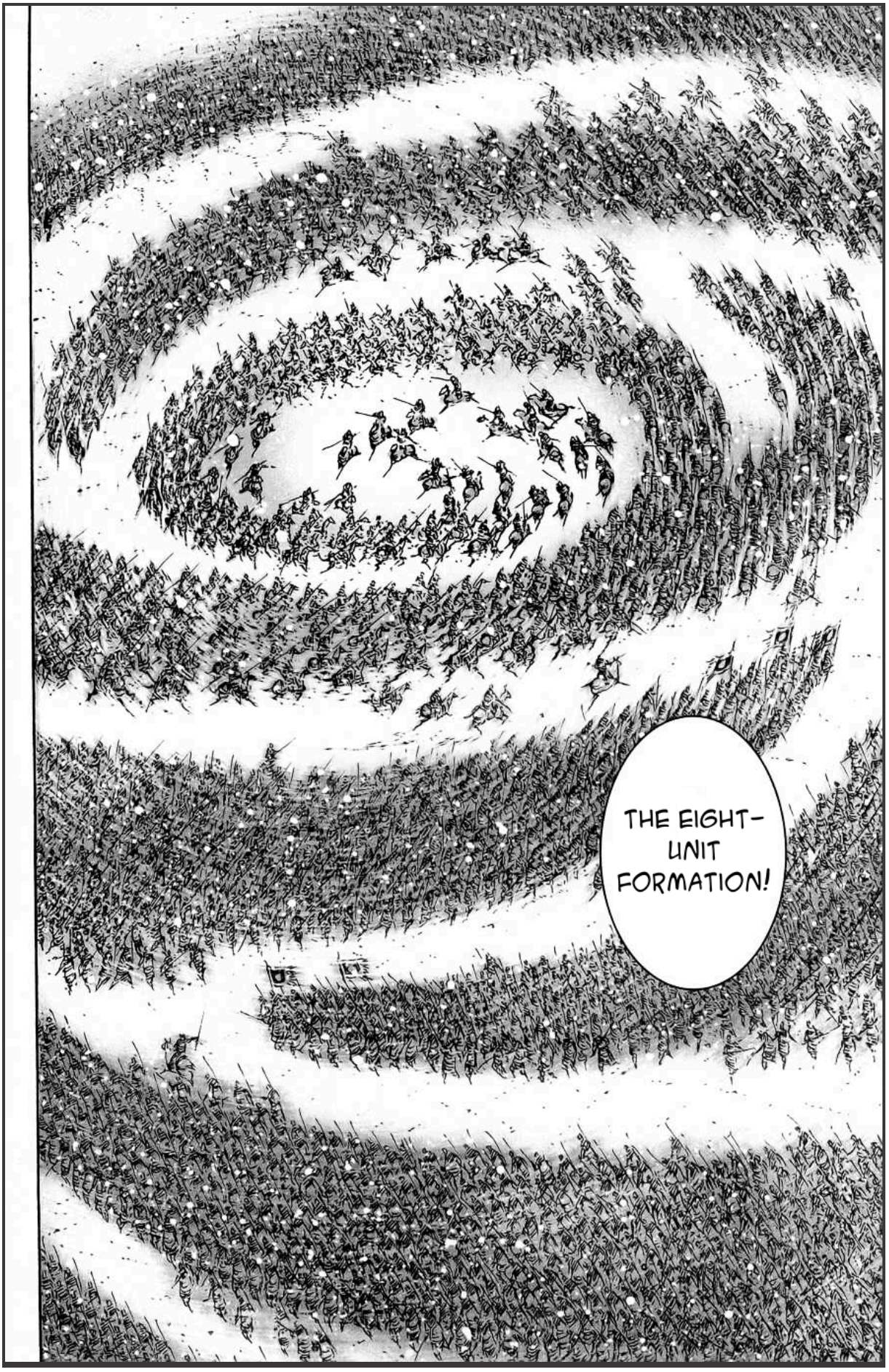
To compensate, Guo Jia secretly seized the talents of **Zuo Ci**, the only remaining weather-reader from the defeated Yuan clan. He hid Zuo Ci's existence completely. Zhou Yu and Zhuge Liang would therefore falsely assume that Cao Cao's side had *no* weather specialists, making them overconfident in using meteorological traps. Meanwhile, Jia Xu — whom Guo Jia intended as the leading strategist after his death — would be able to counter these traps using Zuo Ci's concealed predictions.

Anticipating Zhao Yun's Possible Defection

Guo Jia also anticipated that Zhao Yun, the strongest warrior in Cao Cao's faction, might one day turn against them due to manipulation by enemy strategists. To neutralize this risk, he adapted Yuan Fang's famous counter-formation — the one that once defeated him — into a deadly anti-elite strategy capable of killing Zhao Yun or any other top-tier soldier.

This level of foresight was so extreme that even Zhuge Liang would have been neutralized had fate not intervened.


YES, MY LORD. WE'LL BE DELAYED IF WE DON'T FINISH HIM.
THIS IS GUO JIA'S IMPROVED VERSION OF ...
SO THEY ARE TESTING THE FORMATION ON HIM?


THE EIGHT-
UNIT
FORMATION!

Accepting the Worst-Case Scenario: Cao Cao's Loss

Guo Jia calculated that **Cao Cao might lose at Red Cliff**, for several reasons:

- Zhuge Liang would only enter a battle if he were absolutely certain of victory.
- Zhou Yu's mastery of naval warfare, especially in home territory.
- The risk of Zhao Yun's defection undermining Sima Yi's position.
- Zuo Ci possibly seeking revenge for Yuan Fang's death by sabotaging Cao Cao.

With these variables, Guo Jia built a multilayered posthumous scheme.

Framing Xun Yu to Remove Him From Power

Guo Jia believed Xun Yu and Jia Xu together still could not defeat the combined might of Zhou Yu and Zhuge Liang. In contrast, Sima Yi — treacherous, brilliant, and ideologically aligned with Zhuge Liang — *could*. Therefore, Guo Jia needed Sima Yi to eventually rise to the top of Cao Cao's faction.

The problem?
As long as Xun Yu held influence at court, he would block Sima Yi's ascent.

So Guo Jia arranged for **Yang Xiu** to frame Xun Yu if Cao Cao lost the battle.

How Xun Yu Was Discredited

Cao Zhi, influenced by Yang Xiu, handed Xun Yu a list of "suspicious individuals" to investigate:

- The first half was legitimate.
- The second half consisted of Cao Pi's supporters.

Xun Yu could not refuse this investigation:

- The faction demanded internal purges.

- Refusal would imply loyalty to Cao Pi.
- Denying Cao Zhi's order would destroy him politically.

Thus Xun Yu proceeded — and Yang Xiu immediately declared that Xun Yu had *blocked* the personnel intended to reinforce the suffering troops at Red Cliff, framing him as a saboteur.

His political influence collapsed instantly. One should mention that this contingency was immediately made between Guandu and Guo Jia's death and not before as it required Yang Xiu's sudden ascension to power through the death of Yuan Fang, a move Guo Jia hadn't anticipated but used to its advantage.

Why Jia Xu Was Not Removed

Guo Jia foresaw that if Cao Cao lost Red Cliff, Jia Xu — as chief strategist — would naturally be blamed for the disastrous defeat. His influence would evaporate on its own.

Thus both strategists restraining Sima Yi would be neutralized automatically.

Zhu Ling's Assignments

Guo Jia left two instructions for Zhu Ling if Cao Cao's army were defeated:

1. **Deploy hidden upstream fleets** to reinforce Xun You after his heavy losses.
2. **Sail to the rear of Huarong Road** to rescue Cao Cao's trapped forces by encircling their pursuers.

These actions would preserve Cao Cao's core army even in defeat.

Choosing the Successor: Sima Yi

Guo Jia feared Zhuge Liang more than any other strategist. Red Cliff proved that only someone of equal brilliance — and similar moral flexibility — could counter him in the long term.

This is why, during the Xuzhou arc, Guo Jia deliberately tested both Zhuge Liang and Sima Yi. Once he saw their parity, he resolved that **Sima Yi must inherit control of Cao Cao's faction**.

Thus, after removing Xun Yu and neutralizing Jia Xu, Guo Jia's final instruction was simple:

Transfer all deployment and command authority to Sima Yi.

Would Sima Yi assassinate Cao Cao?
No. Sima Yi's ambition was to *usurp the dynasty*, not to kill Cao Cao prematurely. Guo Jia trusted Sima Yi to use this opportunity to climb — not to destroy the faction.

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b) The Battle of Tong Pass

(credits, Fathermoney from YouTube, from the Shattered Strategy doc, already linked in this doc)

Guo Jia also anticipated Xun Yu's eventual attempt to strike against Cao Cao after deducing that the Han dynasty was doomed.

Xun Yu's "shattered strategy" relied on smoke-screen tactics and deep infiltration. Guo Jia, even from beyond the grave, built a counter-strategy.

Key Components of Guo Jia's Contingency

- The Hedong salt bureau had infiltrated the Sima clan for years, ready to weaponize the internal tensions between them and Cao Cao.
- Foreign tribes west of Tong Pass and the Shanyue brigands of the south could be mobilized to complicate enemy maneuvers.
- The Shanyue, masters of ambush and mountain warfare, were especially potent assets.
- Zhang Chunhua — Sima Yi's wife — had once been a Shanyue agent whose identity had been forgotten. Guo Jia exploited this oversight.
- He used Shanyue ships to rescue Cao Cao when Ma Chao lured him deep into Liang Province.

- He assigned Xu Chu as Cao Cao's personal guard, knowing Ma Chao would lead the enemy's elite forces.

Xun Yu's Last Move

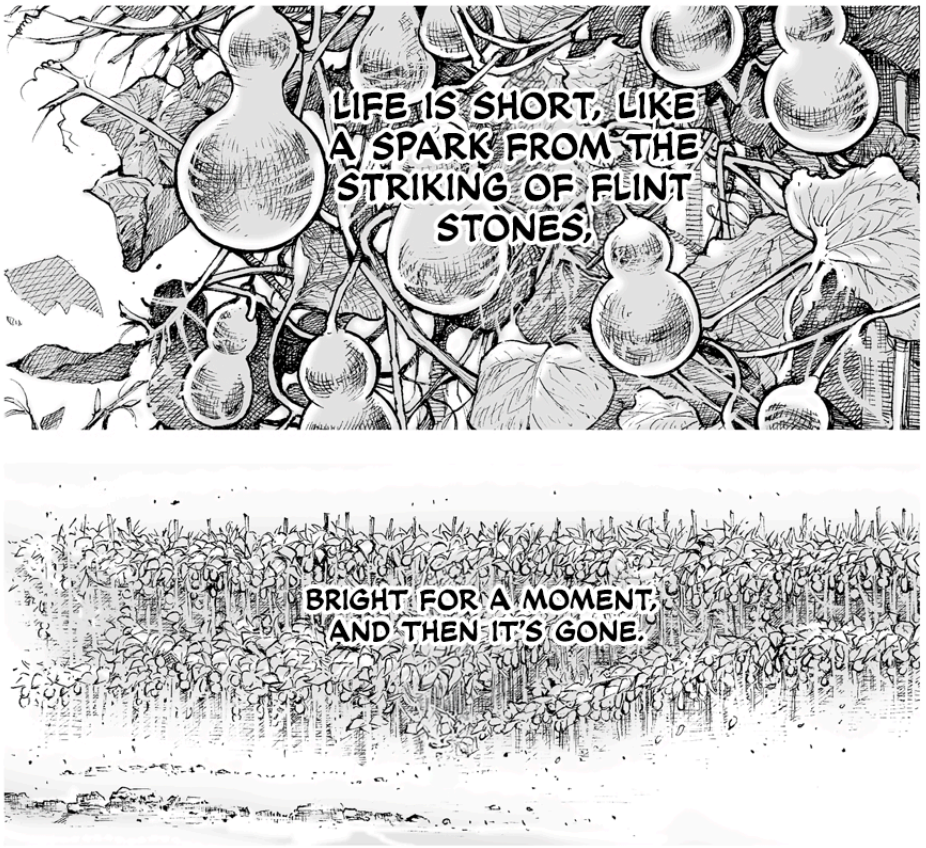
Xun Yu foresaw this contingency and counterattacked with his final tactic during a public festival:
an impassioned speech proving Cao Cao's loyalty to the Emperor, undermining the legitimacy of the Wei establishment.

But Xun Yu paused too long, watching Cao Cao's reaction — and Liaoyuan Guang struck him down.
He could not bring himself to order a full loyalist uprising.

His hesitation doomed him:
his life ended, and the sacrifices of loyalists like Ma Teng were undone.

Meanwhile, Yang Xiu staged a comedic performance at the same time, diluting the impact of Xun Yu's speech so the public would forget it.

Thus, even after death, **Guo Jia successfully predicted and countered Xun Yu's final gambit** in which he manipulated him to stop his schemes due to his numerous manipulations, especially during Guo Jia's death if you remember.


LIFE IS SHORT, LIKE A SPARK FROM THE STRIKING OF FLINT STONES,
BRIGHT FOR A MOMENT, AND THEN IT'S GONE.
YOU MISUNDER-STOOD, TEACHER, I TRIPPED AND FELL.
I HEARD THEY GANGED UP ON YOU IN THE FIELD...
IT MUST'VE BEEN ABOUT THEIR STEALING THE GOURD MELONS.

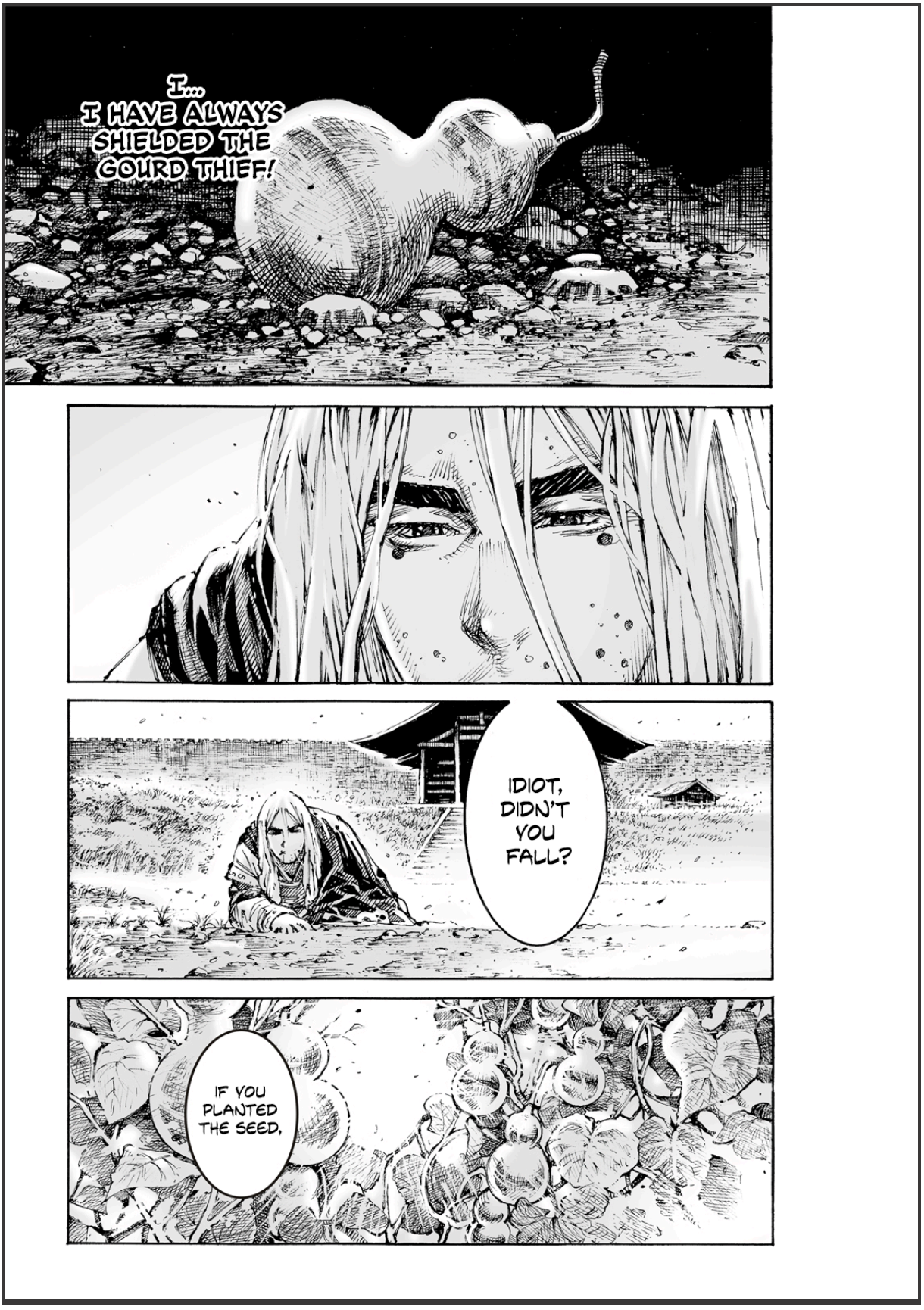

Chan Mou
THE RAVAGES OF TIME
CHAPTER 618
GONE IN A FLASH
YOU TOLD ON THEM AND RECEIVED A BEATING, YET YOU WOULD SHIELD THEM FROM PUNISHMENT DESPITE THEIR REPRISALS. WAS IT WORTH IT?

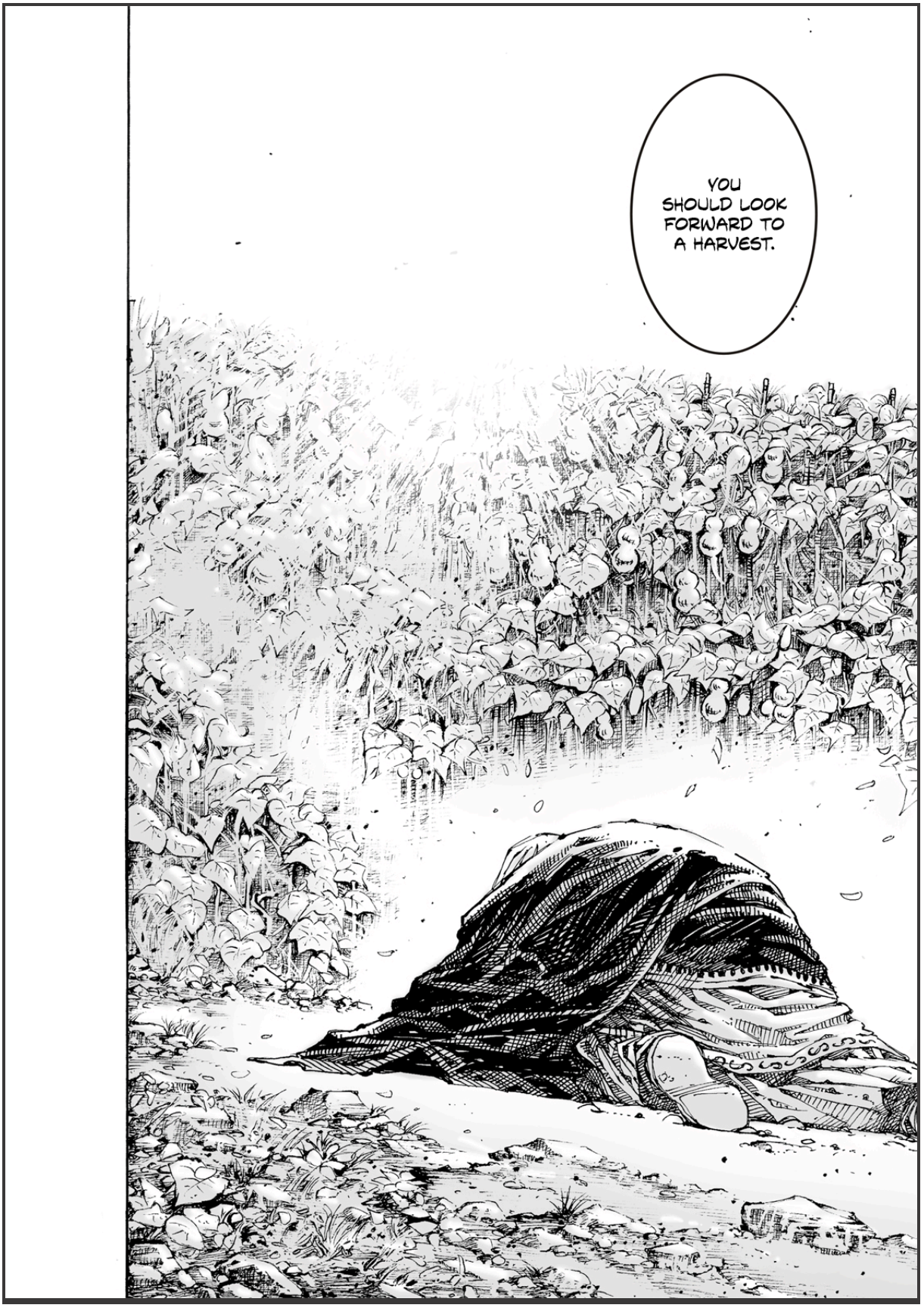
Guo Jia's manipulation effects during Xun Yu's death :

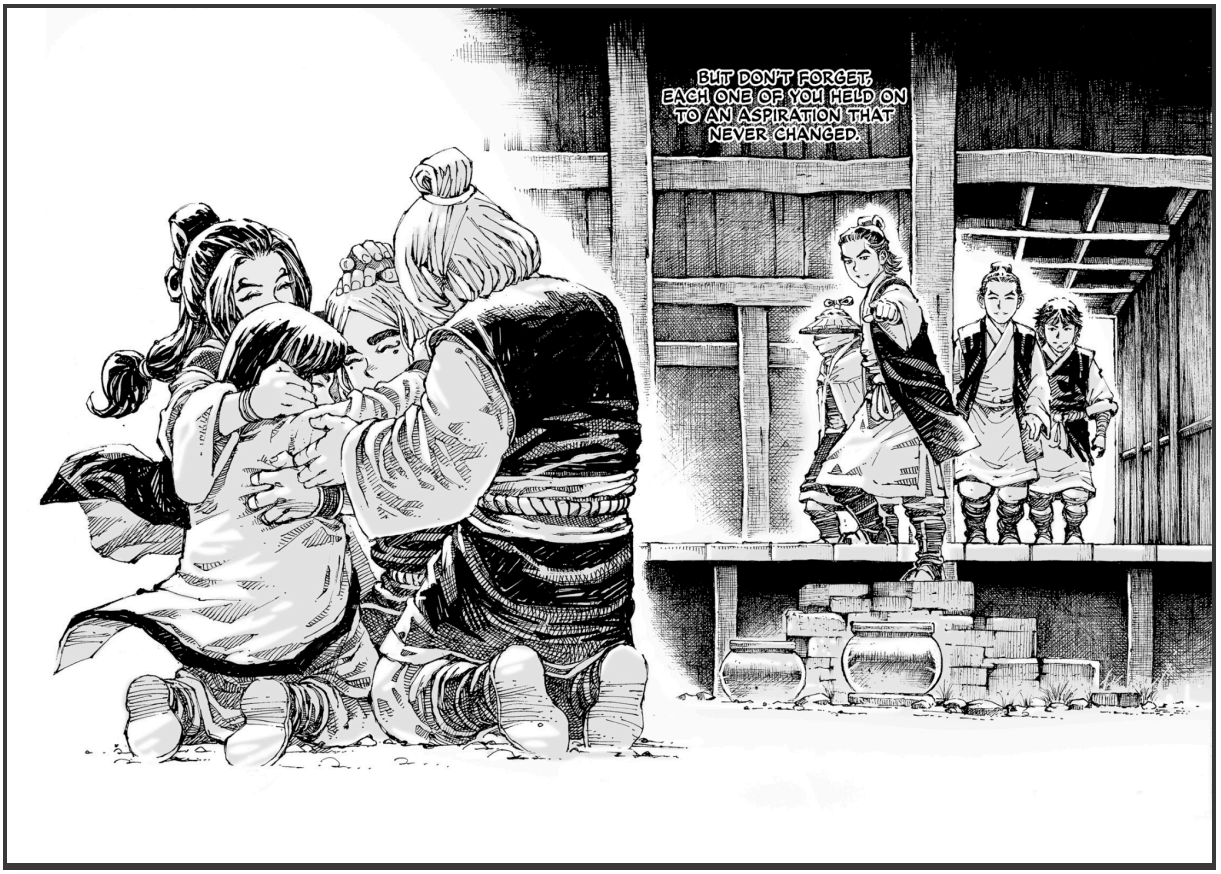



NO! WARS, ALAS, SINS!
IT WILL ONLY TAKE A FEW YEARS TO...
THIS IS THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY TO SAVE HAN.
THE MOST POWERFUL PLAY IS ABOUT TO BE MADE.
GUO JIA, DON'T STAND IN MY WAY!


YET I...
AM STUMBLING IN
THIS MOMENT
TO INDECISION!
YET I
WOULD BE
THE ONE TO
DESTROY
IT ALL...
WHERE WOULD
HAN BE WITHOUT
CAO CAO...?
THE MAN I HAVE
ADMIRED THE MOST!
WHERE WOULD
I BE WITHOUT
CAO CAO!


I...
I HAVE ALWAYS SHIELDED THE GOURD THIEF!
IDIOT, DIDN'T YOU FALL?
IF YOU PLANTED THE SEED,


YOU SHOULD LOOK FORWARD TO A HARVEST.


BUT DON'T FORGET,
EACH ONE OF YOU HELD ON
TO AN ASPIRATION THAT
NEVER CHANGED.

Brief Interpretation for Guo Jia anticipating Xun Yu's very final move (regarding the Cao Clan division)

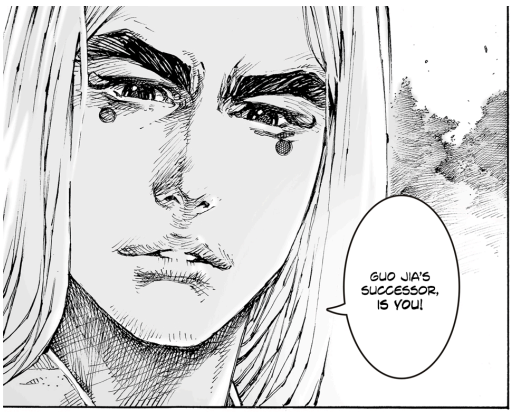


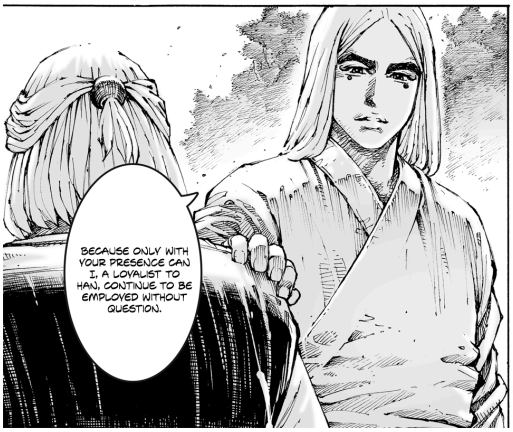
Xun Yu states that he used Sima Yi as his very final contingency against Cao Cao to save Han Dynasty.

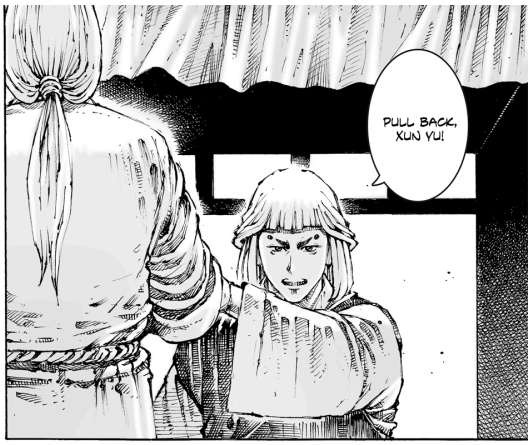

I WOULD SUPPORT YOUR USURPATION.
LET THE HORSE EAT FROM THE TROUGH.

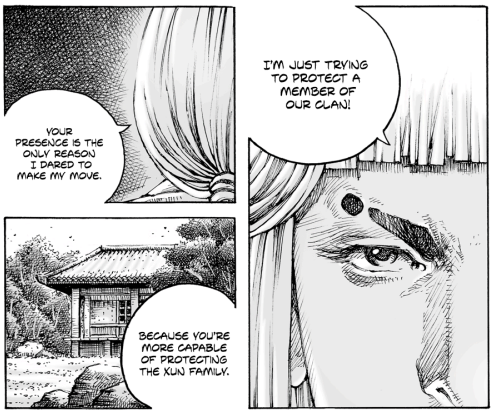


Just a reminder that Guo Jia's post-death plan is heavily emphatic on Sima Yi being able to match up against Zhuge Liang, as he is the only extremely smart guy in the verse who isn't one of the eight geniuses.


GUO JIA'S SUCCESSOR, IS YOU!


BECAUSE ONLY WITH YOUR PRESENCE CAN I, A LOYALIST TO HAN, CONTINUE TO BE EMPLOYED WITHOUT QUESTION.


PULL BACK, XUN YU!


YOUR PRESENCE IS THE ONLY REASON I DARED TO MAKE MY MOVE.

BECAUSE YOU'RE MORE CAPABLE OF PROTECTING THE XUN FAMILY.

I'M JUST TRYING TO PROTECT A MEMBER OF OUR CLAN!

Above are the scans where Xun Yu states that if it hadn’t been for Guo Jia setting Xun You as his contingency against Xun Yu, then Xun Yu wouldn’t be able to execute his stratagems at a fast paced rate as he would’ve wanted to.

→ So on the first sight we see a situation, where XY understood the GJ's contingencies and used it against him.

→ But in fact it’s likely that the true point of leaving Xun You is to make XY to create Shattered so XY would be capable of leaving SY as his contingency. . Cuz XY's last move was to strengthen conflict between Cao's sons ...and as I hope you can remember from Red Cliff, Sima Yi is on the side of one of the sons (Cao Pi).
Some scans to act as basis for this interpretation:



So based on all that this would be Guo Jia's concurrent POV:

If Cao Cao wins in the Red Cliff then he successfully unites China and executes SY who doesn't have enough influence yet.
Everything is fine.

→ If Cao Cao loses, then SY will do everything to save Cao's life, and considering ZL's Tripartite wish he (ZL) would help SY here.

JX's and XY's positions are now weakened.

→ Now ZL needs to target ZY as the highest threat for Tripartite he needs.

If ZY dies without setting Tripartite, then Cao's camp would successfully dominate and unite China (cuz Liu Bei is not established yet). SY is executed and everything is fine.

→ If ZY dies while setting Tripartite, then XY will go wild.

If XY will go wild there are 2 possibilities:

→ JX and SY aren't capable of stopping XY and XY successfully eliminates Cao Cao, JX and SY.

→ Now, when the Emperor ACTUALLY got his power back, Liu Bei (despite ZL not wanting that) as a true Han loyalist (Pang Tong as well) will join the Emperor. Considering that ZY is dead, two fractions (previous Cao's and Liu Bei's) under XY's and PT's rule it's more than enough to dominate the Sun fraction and unite China under restored Han dynasty (even though ZL would probably try to stop that). Everything is fine.

(What actually happened) If XY fails and is stopped by SY/JX, then he pulls his last contingencies relying on SY and creating conflict in Cao family.

→ SY relies on the support of one of Cao's sons and helps him get control of Cao's faction. SY's influence grows which is important for the long term fight with ZL. Everything is not as fine as in previous options but still good enough for GJ's aim.

8 – Overall: (Guo Jia's scaling)

Counterability: Guo Jia is just in his own tier in counterability, each and every action he takes has extremely high counterability, against such strong opponents; unlike Zhou Yu and Jia Xu who just have very adaptable tactics (they are still smart as hell), but what distinguishes Guo Jia with these characters is his ability to thinking holistically. He always thinks of the bigger picture, looking out for dangerous variables in all possible manner, preparing troop training programs for an incoming battle he foresees, Guan Du aftermath countering alone shows this. Being able to pull off multiple contingencies and get Zhuge Liang (who has the best foresight+risk calculation in the verse) to be cautious AFTER his own death alone tells us his great danger. Zhuge Liang states himself that he was only able to comfortably come out of hiding because Guo Jia had died from the plague, every time Zhuge Liang even makes a small action behind the scenes, there's an increasingly greater risk of being seen through and foreseen by Guo Jia, resulting in having to confront very tanky counters. Meanwhile the rest of the geniuses were easy for Zhuge Liang to manipulate and orchestrate. Guo Jia was the real deal and heck of a threat.

Best Categories: Aside from FSIQ (which is a useless category except FRI), I believe it's safe to say Guo Jia is complete in everything, from knowledge application, fluid intelligence+EQ+SQ to even adaptability and field skills+tactical prowess.
Guo Jia's Top 9 Categories I believe goes like this:

1) Strategy
2) Foresight
3) Planning
4) Deception
5) Reasoning
6) Tactical Prowess
7) Manipulation
8) Adaptability
9) EQ

Feat Framework + Opponent Adversity:

→ RoT feat framework/situations are extremely convoluted, battles can span across a large geographical area and also a long time, not just large but a ton of variables. E.g. weather prediction info control (one of the problems after Guo Jia dies), or dryness of soil, usage of flooding areas, hills, forests. Ration surprise attacks can be conducted anywhere and a lot of unpredictable variables occur, especially with opponents of such complex thinking processes like Xun Yu, Zhou Yu, Zhuge Liang, Lu Bu, Chen Gong. Lol, an example of this framework is Red Cliff arc, which has 4+ simultaneous proxy locations to work on (could be a bit more).

Anywhere there could be betrayal, a fake insider, a real concealing insider, plague distributions, fake ration display, fake weather alignment, planned defeats, spreading rumours across city populations, all sorts of different misdirections or new types of misdirections can occur. Or even more painful to counter: chained stratagems, which is what Guo Jia countered regarding Yuan Fang's long term plan in Guan Du. We even see Pang Tong (the 2nd weakest out of the 8 geniuses by feats) casually pulling off a chained scheme, only failing because he followed the wrong leader.

Mindgames → Complex, different geniuses concealing their aims and intentions, planting high quality traps, controlling info.

The amount of foresight all RoT characters have and spam is pretty scary, even RoT NPCs like Cai Mao, Ma Chao, Wen Ping, Yang Xiu have good enough foresight to contribute to the threat.

After Guo Jia's death, one of the allies (I forgot exactly who) mentioned that Guo Jia was very reluctant to die and that guy understood Guo Jia wanted to see the future prospects of his utopia development. Guo Jia, knowing he is dying, contributes an intricate plan to his lord Cao Cao while having a plague (implied to be a worse version of tuberculosis), in this degrading physical state he produces some of the scariest foresight and planning feats in semi-realistic SCD.

My takes :

Guo Jia > Light (no diff)

Guo Jia > William James Moriarty (no-low diff)

Guo Jia > Enyo/Dionysus (low diff)

Guo Jia > Baku (low-mid diff)

Guo Jia > Souichi (low-mid diff)

Guo Jia > Manga + Light Novel Dazai Osamu (mid-high diff)

Guo Jia > Fyodor Doestoevsky (high-extreme diff)
Zhuge Liang = Guo Jia
Sora > Guo Jia (very high-extreme diff)
Kang Jinhyeok > Guo Jia (high-very high diff)
Chen Ran > Guo Jia (mid-high diff)
First Saint > Guo Jia (mid diff)
Niu Youdao > Guo Jia (low-mid diff)

Bibliography (without those analysis made by passionate fans, we would have never thought of making a document):

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Xun Yu's shattered strategy - Google Docs
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