

I. Dynasty 114

Chapter 114: Blood and Steel

“Sun Yuanzhi has conspired to assassinate the Prince of Qi! Anyone involved will be executed without mercy!”

Li San shouted at the top of his lungs. The servants who had suddenly turned violent were actually secret guards disguised as assassins.

In an instant, most of the powerful families who had conspired with Sun Yuanzhi were either dead or injured. Sun Yuanzhi himself was forced to retreat under the relentless assault of the secret guards.

However, the private soldiers from the Sun family, charging out of the grove, quickly closed the distance, forcing the secret guards to temporarily withdraw to protect Xiao Ming.

Sun Yuanzhi laughed maniacally. “Xiao Ming, you’re truly a fool. Even though you knew this was a trap, you still came. Since you delivered yourself to me, don’t blame me for what happens next.”

“If I hadn’t come, how would you traitors have revealed yourselves? Everyone knows the principle of ‘capture the leader to defeat the rebels.’ Now, let’s see whose side fate is on,” Xiao Ming said coldly.

The previous night, Sun Yuanzhi and his allies had chosen to stay in a fortress outside the city rather than within Qingzhou, making it difficult to capture them.

If Xiao Ming had rashly led the Qingzhou army to attack Sun Yuanzhi's ambush, Sun Yuanzhi would have fled in advance.

In that case, Xiao Ming's plan to eliminate these powerful families in one fell swoop would have failed. If these families escaped, they would inevitably conspire to harm Qingzhou's interests, no matter whose banner they rallied under.

This was especially true for Sun Yuanzhi's faction. If they fled to the grasslands, they would become a future threat to Qingzhou.

It was for this reason that Xiao Ming had taken the risk. After all, in an era of vast territories, sparse populations, and backward communication, capturing fugitives would be extremely difficult.

As the two spoke, the private soldiers from the Sun family charging from the south were now less than a hundred meters away from Xiao Ming.

These soldiers wore a variety of armor—cloth, leather, and chainmail—and wielded an assortment of weapons, from swords and spears to clubs and more.

"Kill!" Roars erupted from the charging soldiers.

Xiao Ming noticed that among these soldiers, some wearing finely crafted scale armor were directing the troops to split into three groups. The central group charged straight at him, while the two flanking groups aimed to encircle him.

Lu Fei also noticed this. He shouted to Xiao Ming, “Your Highness, retreat! If they complete the encirclement, we won’t be able to escape!”

Without a word, Xiao Ming and Pang Yukun sprinted northward, heading toward the approaching Qingzhou army.

Seeing this, Sun Yuanzhi was determined not to let Xiao Ming escape.

This was a high-stakes gamble. The loser would not only lose their life but also their entire family and wealth. Sun Yuanzhi had already staked everything. It was do or die.

“Charge!” Sun Yuanzhi brandished a sharp longsword and shouted to the other powerful families.

The other powerful families drew their swords and, along with their servants, charged at Lu Fei and his men. Their faces were twisted with rage, like vengeful spirits.

“Your Highness, don’t worry about us! You and Minister Pang, go!” Lu Fei shouted as he was immediately surrounded by Sun Yuanzhi and his men.

Pang Yukun grabbed Xiao Ming. “Your Highness, we can’t afford to be soft-hearted now. Otherwise, we’ll only hold Captain Lu back.”

Facing a thousand armed men charging at him was a scene Xiao Ming had only seen in movies before.

Now he understood the immense courage it took for those movie heroes to stand against thousands of soldiers.

The sheer momentum of the charge was terrifying, even if these were just poorly trained private soldiers from powerful families.

Nodding, Xiao Ming quickly ran toward the Qingzhou army. Lu Fei and his men formed a line, blocking Sun Yuanzhi and his forces.

Seeing Xiao Ming fleeing toward the Qingzhou army, Sun Yuanzhi's expression changed drastically. "Archers, fire!" he roared.

As soon as he spoke, over twenty archers drew their bows and fired at Xiao Ming.

Lu Fei, seeing this, let out a fierce roar. His sword moved with deadly precision. As a veteran of real battles, his strikes were efficient and lethal, with no wasted motion.

The Sun family servants blocking his path were no match for him. Several fell in quick succession.

Sun Yuanzhi hid behind his servants, looking for an opening. As Lu Fei drove his sword into a servant's chest, Sun Yuanzhi seized the moment to slash at Lu Fei's chest.

“Clang!” A dull metallic sound rang out, and a deep scratch appeared on Lu Fei’s armor.

Lu Fei pulled his sword free, and a spray of blood erupted from the servant’s chest, staining his armor. The thick smell of blood filled the air.

Lu Fei grinned savagely. “Master Sun, this armor was specially forged for me by His Highness. Pretty tough, huh?”

Sun Yuanzhi cursed under his breath. Although Lu Fei and his men numbered only thirty, they stood like an iron wall, firmly blocking the path.

These men were the elite of the Qingzhou army, each worth ten ordinary soldiers. Their full-body armor made them nearly impervious to ordinary sword strikes.

In close combat, Sun Yuanzhi’s men had repeatedly struck at vital points, but to no avail.

Meanwhile, Sun Yuanzhi’s servants were nearly all dead or wounded.

Sun Yuanzhi glanced at the private soldiers now only ten meters away and sneered. “Let’s see how long you can hold out.”

With that, he quickly retreated. The thousand private soldiers were now upon them, led by a burly man wielding twin hammers.

Lu Fei's heart sank. Xiao Ming had warned him that plate armor was vulnerable to blunt force.

The twin hammers in the man's hands would be far more dangerous than swords or spears.

Glancing at Xiao Ming, who was now halfway to safety, Lu Fei let out a battle cry and charged forward. He couldn't retreat yet!

"Whoosh, whoosh..."

Arrows whistled past Xiao Ming's ears. He felt a strong impact on his back, nearly knocking him off his feet.

Without looking, he knew he had been hit by an arrow.

Before coming, he had specifically worn a breastplate, with metal plates protecting his front and back. For extra safety, he had chosen a thicker set.

Since it wasn't full-body armor, the weight was manageable.

After a frantic sprint, Xiao Ming had used up almost all his energy. These past few days, he had been so busy with construction that he had neglected his archery and horsemanship. It seemed he would have to pick those up again.

As the Qingzhou army came into view, he finally breathed a sigh of relief. Looking back, he saw Lu Fei surrounded by Sun Yuanzhi's private soldiers.

"Lu Fei is truly a fierce warrior. When Your Highness first came to Qingzhou, you replaced many of the local generals but kept Lu Fei. Looking back now, it seems Your Highness recognized his abilities," Pang Yukun said, panting heavily.

When Xiao Ming first arrived in Qingzhou, aside from bringing his own generals, he could also select some local officers to serve as his personal guards.

At the time, Xiao Ming had been foolish, allowing powerful families to replace many of his guards. Only Lu Fei had been kept.

In truth, Xiao Ming had initially kept Lu Fei out of spite, wanting to slowly deal with this troublemaker. But Lu Fei's performance three years ago had impressed him, and despite his dislike, Xiao Ming had decided to keep him.