

I. Dynasty 13

Chapter 13: Aftermath

“This is merely an old servant’s speculation.”

Qian Dafu’s expression was hesitant, though he was far more informed about the news from Chang’an than Xiao Ming.

Lu Fei’s expression was stern. “Your Highness, while the Third Prince may be targeting you, this incident might also be a case of internal and external collusion.”

“What do you mean?” Xiao Ming was puzzled.

“Your Highness, I have always been strict in managing the military. It is impossible for ordinary citizens to carry bows, arrows, or swords into the city unless they are hidden in goods.”

Xiao Ming frowned deeply, glancing in the direction of the Wang family estate. The prominent families of Qingzhou were all there, drinking and making merry. Large shipments of goods came from them—so who among them was colluding with the Third Prince?

After a moment of contemplation, Xiao Ming said, “The assassin is dead, and with him, the evidence. These are all just our speculations, but the fact remains that someone tried to kill me.”

"Your Highness, such a heinous crime has never occurred in Qingzhou before. From now on, whenever you go out, you must bring guards for protection." Qian Dafu was always most concerned about Xiao Ming's safety.

Xiao Ming nodded. This incident had served as a wake-up call—the world was still a dangerous place.

Unable to reach a conclusion for the time being, Xiao Ming instructed Lu Fei to secretly monitor the movements of the prominent families in the city while also strengthening the security of the prince's residence.

News of the assassination attempt on the Prince of Qi spread throughout Qingzhou that night.

Xiao Ming had deliberately instructed Lu Fei to release the information, aiming to stir the pot and see if any unusual activity would surface in the city.

"Father, the Prince of Qi was assassinated. Who do you think did it?"

In the dim, flickering candlelight, Wang Shijie and his father sat facing each other in the garden pavilion of the Wang family estate. The banquet had ended, and the faint scent of alcohol still lingered in the courtyard. Wang Shijie was slightly tipsy.

Wang Chengchou stroked his long beard, his eyes closed as if deep in thought. He said, "From Commander Lu's actions, it seems he suspects that the prominent families in the city colluded with outsiders to harm the Prince of Qi."

"How can you tell?" Wang Shijie asked, confused.

Wang Chengchou snorted coldly. "I've always told you to study more, but you never listen. Now you're ignorant and unskilled. The assassination attempt on the Prince of Qi is a covert matter, yet Lu Fei is making a big show of publicizing it. Isn't that a way to flush out the snake?"

Wang Shijie shrank back, frightened. "No wonder. But who could it be? If the Prince of Qi were to die, it wouldn't be good for us."

"The Prince of Qi is foolish and doesn't know how to manage his fiefdom. That's good for us. I believe the other three families, like us, only want to use the Prince of Qi and wouldn't go so far as to harm him." Wang Chengchou pondered.

The assassination attempt on the Prince of Qi also left him puzzled. As soon as the news arrived, he had immediately ended the banquet and sent people out to gather information.

After a pause, Wang Chengchou said, "Tomorrow morning, take some gifts and go visit the Prince of Qi. Show that our Wang family is close to him."

Wang Shijie nodded, then remembered something. "By the way, Father, you sent me to the Engineering Department, and I went. At the time, the Prince of Qi seemed to be teaching the craftsmen how to make something. The coal briquettes and iron were for that purpose."

"Hmm, we both know the Prince of Qi's limited capabilities. He can't stir up much trouble. I sent you there because I was worried the barbarians might invade, and the Machinery Department would be making weapons. Since that's not the case, don't bother keeping an eye on it anymore. Just focus on maintaining good relations with him." Wang Chengchou spoke with an air of confidence.

Meanwhile, the Wei, Qin, and Sun families in Qingzhou were also discussing the matter.

The next day, all four families sent their sons to visit the Prince of Qi's residence.

"Brother Wang, Brother Wei, Brother Sun, Brother Qin, there's no need for such courtesy." Early in the morning, Xiao Ming was awakened by Qian Dafu.

Upon waking, he realized that the local prominent families had come to visit him.

Naturally, there was no shortage of gifts. The so-called "Four Scourges of Qingzhou"—Wang Shijie, Wei Qing, Sun Dong, and Qin Mu—were all present.

The four were dressed as scholars, wearing long robes in blue, red, black, and green respectively.

Wang Shijie was pale and sickly-looking, Wei Qing was robust and dark-skinned, Sun Dong was plump and round, and Qin Mu was tall and thin.

Standing together, the four of them were a sight to behold—each unique in their own way.

"Your Highness!" What they had in common was the cheeky smiles they wore upon seeing Xiao Ming.

In the Da Yu Empire, ordinary citizens couldn't afford education, but the sons of prominent families all held scholarly titles. The four had all studied and could be considered scholars.

Since there weren't many scholars in Qingzhou, the four called themselves the "Four Great Talents of Qingzhou," though in the eyes of the common people, they were nothing but pests.

"Qian Dafu, prepare seats."

Qian Dafu, who had been happily busy collecting gifts, finally remembered that the four young masters were still standing. He immediately had chairs brought over.

"Your Highness, I heard about the assassination attempt on you yesterday and was so worried that I couldn't sleep all night. I came first thing this morning to see you." Wang Shijie wore an expression of concern, as if his own father were gravely ill.

"Brother Wang, that's too fake. I'm the one who's most worried. Not only did I not sleep all night, but I also had my servants prepare a wooden stake and hacked at it a thousand times, imagining it was the assassin, to vent my anger." Wei Qing, who always claimed to be both scholarly and martial, had developed a muscular physique.

"Brother Wei, that's too superficial. Your Highness, my father specifically sent me with a century-old ginseng to help you recover." Sun Dong's chubby face quivered with sincerity.

At this, Qin Mu showed a hint of disdain. He gently waved his paper fan and said, “Your Highness, they’re all too vulgar. Last night, I thought long and hard and came up with an excellent place to take your mind off your troubles.”

“You mean a trip to the Mi River?” the other three said in unison, their tone dripping with sarcasm.

It had to be said that the previous Xiao Ming had been on good terms with these four scoundrels, which was why they felt comfortable joking and bantering in front of him without restraint.

Although Xiao Ming now prioritized eradicating the harm caused by the prominent families, he had to pretend to be the same as before.

Whether in modern times or ancient times, dealings between interests were simple—brothers at the dinner table, knives drawn beneath it.

On the surface, everyone still had to maintain a harmonious facade.

However, Qin Mu’s mention of the Mi River stirred something in Xiao Ming.

The Qingzhou he was in now was located in what would later become Qingzhou City, and the geographical position was roughly the same.

Qingzhou was a place of half-mountain, half-plain terrain, situated at the northern foot of the Yimeng and Yi Mountains. Its mineral resources were primarily limestone and iron ore.

To the south of Qingzhou City, a river encircled the city—the Mi River that Qin Mu had mentioned.

Before the advent of steam engines, water power was the most important natural force for the common people. In addition to the Mi River, Qingzhou also had the Yang River and the Xiaoqing River to the north. All three rivers eventually flowed into the Bohai Bay.

Now, Xiao Ming had taught the craftsmen how to make lathes, but that didn't mean steam engines could be produced immediately.

These lathes were only meant to facilitate the production of various components. The craftsmen still needed time to hone their skills before they could manufacture steam engines.

After all, the development of steam engines was also built on the foundation of skilled craftsmen.

However, before that, he could give these craftsmen some practical experience by having them create traditional tools. At the technological level of this late Tang and early Song period, these tools would be comparable to the practical devices of the Ming Dynasty.

Many of these devices were related to water.

Xiao Ming had always wanted to visit these three rivers. Now, he said, “Brother Qin’s suggestion is a good one. Let’s go to the Mi River.”

TN: Change the translation

Armory to Engineering Department

Da Yu Empire to Great Yu Empire