

## I. Dynasty 242

### Chapter 242: Overcorrection

The metallic scent of blood quickly filled the room. In his final moments, Zhao Kuan looked to Zhao Yuanliang with a pleading gaze.

But his vision grew blurrier by the second, and soon lost focus altogether.

“Xiao Ming, what are you doing?! Aren’t you afraid of the three hundred thousand Black Armored Cavalry in Zhao territory?” Zhao Yuanliang staggered backward, his face pale as a sheet.

Xiao Ming glanced coldly at the panicked strategist. “My only goal is the barbarians. I never wanted to waste energy on internal struggles. But since you made the first move, I had no choice but to respond. Zhao Kuan’s death is a warning—I’m not the same Prince Qi you once toyed with. If you provoke me, you’d better be ready to pay the price.”

Zhao Yuanliang was so shaken by Xiao Ming’s fierce words that he subconsciously nodded.

Xiao Ming continued, “You keep quiet, I keep quiet. But if you take this to court, I won’t fear you either. Your carriage is ready. It’s time to go. Oh—and if you’re still interested in buying cannons, I’m still willing to sell. Twenty thousand taels per cannon. Not a single coin less.”

Zhao Yuanliang’s body trembled. He gave Xiao Ming one last deep look, then turned and went downstairs.

Xiao Ming turned to Li San and said, “Have your men follow him—make sure he leaves my territory.”

Li San nodded, then cast a cold glance at Zhao Kuan’s lifeless body lying in a pool of blood, sneering inwardly.

This incident had been a serious lesson for Xiao Ming. As Qingzhou continued to develop, the spy problem would only grow more severe.

And the most dangerous spies... might never be discovered at all.

Even with modern surveillance technology, espionage remained a headache for governments. And there was another problem—spies could turn locals into assets through persuasion or bribery.

This time, the three local street thugs who had been turned were a perfect example. If one of them hadn’t already defected to the Secret Guard, Zhang Liu might never have returned.

So after much thought, Xiao Ming decided it was time to raise public awareness about espionage among his people—and introduce a new law.

It would be called the Anti-Spy Decree.

Upon returning to the Prince’s Manor, Xiao Ming personally wrote out the full legal text of the new law.

Then, he wrote a second document: the Anti-Spy Handbook.

When both were finished, he summoned Fan Zeng to the manor.

“Publish these two documents in tomorrow’s newspaper. Two full pages,” Xiao Ming ordered.

Fan Zeng picked up the manuscripts and began reading.

The Anti-Spy Decree began with:

Article 1: To prevent, suppress, and punish espionage, and to safeguard the security of the fiefdom, this law is hereby enacted.

Article 2: All citizens of the fiefdom have the duty to uphold its security, honor, and interests. No individual may engage in actions that endanger these. All institutions within the fiefdom share the responsibility of preventing espionage, and the Bureau of Justice must rely on the people’s support to organize and mobilize anti-espionage efforts.

Article 3: Any act of espionage carried out by external institutions, organizations, or individuals—or through collusion with individuals or groups inside the fiefdom—must be severely punished. Those who assist in anti-espionage efforts will be protected, and major contributors shall be handsomely rewarded.

The law then continued with a series of detailed rules and penalties.

“Spies?” Fan Zeng had never encountered the term before. A chill ran down his spine. “Your Highness, even the newspaper office has to worry about spies?”

“Of course. Spies are everywhere. When you return, talk to the staff—make them aware of the risks,” Xiao Ming said.

“What exactly counts as ‘spy behavior’?” Fan Zeng asked, still puzzled.

Xiao Ming pointed at the Anti-Spy Handbook.

Fan Zeng opened it and read.

The handbook opened with five guiding topics:

What do spies do?

Who can become a spy?

Common behaviors of spies who recruit or spread rumors.

Fake missionaries who spy under the guise of religion.

Early signs when low-level spies try to recruit others.

Under the first section, Xiao Ming had written: “Spies primarily gather intelligence, analyze it, bribe key individuals, spread rumors, and pass on information.”

The remaining sections were just as thorough.

After reading everything, Fan Zeng finally understood what spies were, what they did, and how dangerous they were to the safety of the fiefdom.

“I’ve lived this long, and it’s the first time I realized spies could be lurking everywhere,” Fan Zeng muttered.

Xiao Ming chuckled. “There’s still much you don’t know. Don’t waste time—start printing immediately. Distribute this edition for free.”

“Yes, Your Highness,” Fan Zeng replied.

The next day, peaceful Qingzhou was once again stirred by explosive newspaper headlines. The Bureau of Justice issued a directive ordering village militias across the territory to assist in anti-espionage operations.

Meanwhile, the Machinery Department and other workshops launched internal anti-spy crackdowns. Using the newspaper's guidelines, workers began scrutinizing anyone acting oddly.

Within a short time, several people suspected of being spies were brought into custody. The term "spy" quickly became one of public disgrace.

"Kill him! Beat the bastard! Damn spy, how dare you betray our land—you shameless rat!" In the streets of Qingzhou, two street thugs were paraded through the city in prison carts. The crowd hurled rotten vegetables, mud, and stones at them.

Curses filled the air, each word seething with fury.

The newspaper had made it clear—their actions had seriously endangered the security of the fiefdom and the Great Yu Empire itself.

The people were outraged. Life had just started getting better, and now these traitors had tried to sabotage it. They would've beaten the men to death if they could.

One father pointed and said to his son, "See that? That's what happens to spies. Don't ever become one. If you do, I won't acknowledge you as my son."

“If you become a spy, I won’t acknowledge you as my father,” the boy replied seriously.

“ ... ”

In the crowd, some merchants, servants, and commoners wore uneasy expressions. In a shadowed corner, one merchant whispered to another, “Don’t make any moves for now. That Prince Qi is ruthless. How did he even come up with this idea? I only asked a passerby a few questions about Qingzhou, and he looked at me and asked if I was a spy!”

“You’re lucky you just got here. Most of the ones who came earlier have already been reported by the locals and handed over to the authorities,” the other merchant said.

Both sighed in unison and quietly walked away.

The newspaper’s publication had sparked a full-scale anti-espionage fervor across all six prefecture. For Xiao Ming, this wave of vigilance would help cleanse the environment of his territory. And sometimes, to correct an imbalance...

An overcorrection was necessary.