

## I. Dynasty 329

### Chapter 329: A Mad Ambition

“Commoners can get a noble title?”

In Zhu Family Village, Zhu Wuliu looked up and asked the reporter who had come to read the daily news.

“Yes,” the man replied with excitement. “The newspaper clearly says that as long as someone makes a major contribution to Qingzhou, they can receive a noble title. And along with the title comes heritable land. Even the lowest-ranked baron gets 300 mu of land that can’t be reclaimed by the government. That land will be theirs, passed down through generations. It’s practically private territory.”

The one reading the news was Jiang the Reporter, who visited the village regularly. When he read this news today, his blood was boiling with excitement. He even had the urge to do something great.

This title system was just too tempting. Gaining a title didn’t only mean glory—it meant a wealthy life.

Zhu Wuliu was already drooling. The road construction he had contracted in Qingzhou was nearly finished, so he had free time to come and listen to the news today.

“Reporter Jiang, go on. How can regular people like us get a title?” Zhu Wuliu asked eagerly.

“Well, it’s not that easy,” Jiang the Reporter replied with a grin. “For example, take you, Zhu Wuliu—unless you can raise five thousand strong horses, then you might earn the title of county baron.”

“Five thousand?!” Zhu Wuliu stuck out his tongue. “Qingzhou’s policy says one horse per household is enough. How am I supposed to raise five thousand?”

“That’s why it has to be a major contribution,” Jiang laughed. “You think picking up a random cow pat on the side of the road is enough to get a noble title? Of course not! But I’m just using horses as an example. If raising horses is too hard, you can raise chickens or ducks instead.”

The villagers burst into laughter.

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Afterward, Jiang the Reporter read out the specific achievements that matched each title level. The villagers listened seriously, nodding along, each one thinking about how they might make a contribution.

And it wasn’t just Zhu Family Village.

Back in Qingzhou City, the discussion around noble titles was even more intense.

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At Bowen Academy, a group of students huddled together, visibly trembling with excitement.

They had been accepted into the academy, but truthfully, most of them weren't that interested in learning strange new knowledge. They had no motivation to do research or create inventions.

Most of them were just drifting along, hoping to graduate and land a job in some department of the Qingzhou government.

Like many scholars before them, their dream had always been to pass the imperial exam, join the government, and bring honor to their family.

Even when Xiao Ming offered monetary rewards, they hadn't been impressed. Many scholars still looked down on money and thought themselves too noble for it.

But now, things were different. They knew exactly what a noble title meant.

The common folk might not understand, but these students knew that such titles were reserved for royalty and high nobility in the Great Yu Empire.

For them, becoming an official wasn't just about wealth—it was about glory.

And now, this new path to glory had opened up. It wasn't the imperial exams, but in their eyes, it was just as good—maybe even better.

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“Brother Wentao, you said your hot air balloon needs someone to test-fly it, right?”

In the academy dining hall, one student lowered his newspaper and stared straight at Lin Wentao.

Lin Wentao, who had been thinking about how to maintain consistent heat in the balloon, looked up blankly and replied, “Yes, but... someone might die.”

“That’s fine. Let me do it. For Qingzhou and for the prince, I’m willing to give my life!” The student grabbed Lin Wentao’s hand with enthusiasm.

Lin Wentao hadn’t had time to read the news recently. He was completely focused on building the balloon, so he didn’t know what had happened.

Now, as he looked around the table, he noticed that all the physics students were staring at him with strange expressions.

Before he could say anything, another shouted, “Pick me! I’m fat and won’t fall easily!”

“I’ve got thick skin and strong bones. I fell out of a tree once and didn’t even bruise. Let me do it!” another chimed in.

“Let me try!”

“Me too!”

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Meanwhile, at the merchant guild...

The merchants who had come to buy goods had completely forgotten about their business. They gathered in small groups, newspapers in hand, talking excitedly.

“Our prince is wise and mighty, just like Emperor Yao or Emperor Shun! Who would’ve thought even merchants like us could one day earn noble titles?” someone shouted.

Outside the guild, Ding Wu laughed heartily.

“We merchants have always been treated like the lowest class in the social hierarchy. But now, the prince has not only raised our status—he’s given us a shot at true honor!”

Dai Zixing, standing beside him, was also thrilled. “Thank goodness we both got our Qingzhou citizenship early. Otherwise, we’d have missed out on this blessing.”

At that moment, Ding Wu felt his father had truly been farsighted.

He suddenly saw hope—hope that one day, he could earn a noble title and no longer be looked down upon.

Dai Zixing nodded repeatedly. The two of them had first met during a construction project in Qingzhou. Ding Wu had purchased a large number of cement pipes from him, which led to their friendship.

“Since the prince treats us so well, we can’t disappoint him. From now on, we must work even harder to grow Qingzhou’s economy,” Dai Zixing said casually.

Ding Wu’s smile stiffened for a moment.

Dai’s words might have sounded casual, but they struck a nerve.

Ding Wu’s father, Ding Wanquan, was associated with Prince Wei. That connection could become a liability.

Now, Ding Wu feared he might get dragged into unwanted trouble. His only goal was to build his business and earn a title. He wanted to live in Qingzhou with pride and honor.

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At the southeastern edge of Qingzhou, in Ping Family Lane, Cao Zhengyang was overseeing his servants as they moved furniture into his newly purchased house.

This was his new home in Qingzhou.

Just then, a steward rushed over and handed him a newspaper.

Cao Zhengyang glanced at the bold headline and raised his eyebrows. As he read further, his expression grew more serious.

“Coming to Qingzhou might be the smartest move our family ever made,” he muttered. “Prince Qi has clearly been influenced by that Western priest. If this continues, the Cao family will thrive here. Maybe we’ll see the kind of commercial prosperity the West enjoys—right here in Qingzhou.”

He clutched the newspaper tightly, eyes gleaming with ambition.

“If that’s the case, I must report back to Father immediately. We need to fully support the Prince of Qi and guide him toward learning from the West. Only then can the Cao family become a lasting commercial dynasty, one that endures through generations.”

With that decision made, Cao Zhengyang wrote a letter and ordered it to be sent to Lin'an by express courier.

He included a copy of the Qingzhou newspaper in the envelope. With proof like this, he was certain his father would support moving more of the family's assets into Qingzhou.