

I. Dynasty 338

Chapter 338: Broadly Announced

After the hot air balloon floated across Qingzhou City, the entire city was soon abuzz with speculation about what exactly it was.

But by the next day, the newspapers cleared things up. The populace finally understood what the mysterious floating thing was, and the term “hot air balloon” quickly became trendy and fashionable in Qingzhou.

“What’s this hot air balloon?” asked a visiting merchant who had just entered the city.

“That’s the thing that flies in the sky—basically like a giant ball,” replied a proud local.

“A flying ball?” The outsider looked puzzled.

“Of course! In Qingzhou, even pigs might fly. Anything is possible here. That’s what the newspaper said!” said the local with unwavering confidence.

The visiting merchant gave an awkward laugh. To him, it seemed like the entire population of Qingzhou was... not quite right in the head.

He had heard people talking about the balloon all along the way into the city—but no two explanations matched, which only left him more confused.

Just as he was still puzzling over it, a chorus of gasps suddenly rose from the crowd. Everyone tilted their heads upward.

He followed their gaze—and his jaw nearly dropped.

Floating slowly across the sky was a massive sphere, suspended not very high overhead. Attached to the hot air balloon was a huge horizontal banner, and from the gondola beneath hung three more vertical banners.

Each banner read:

“Qingzhou Chamber of Commerce: Mirrors, Perfume, Drunken Qingzhou White Wine—Buy Now!
Address: ...”

The balloon wasn’t flying high, and its visibility was excellent. Anyone who saw it could also clearly read the banners—the GG.

The visiting merchant was dumbfounded. He had come here on the word of others, and now he finally understood—this really was a place unlike any other.

The local citizens were shocked as well. They hadn’t expected the balloon to be used like that.

The local merchants—ever astute—immediately caught on.

In the days that followed, the people of Qingzhou grew more and more accustomed to seeing hot air balloons in the sky.

Every time one floated overhead, even children would chase after it, laughing and cheering.

At the same time, spies and informants within Qingzhou reported news of the balloon far and wide, collecting details about it from all angles.

That was a task left to Li San, while Xiao Ming busied himself meeting with merchants—after all, he still wore the title of President of the Qingzhou Chamber of Commerce.

“Your Highness, this hot air balloon is truly marvelous. Would you permit me to have the name and business details of the Cao Family Bank displayed on it?” asked Cao Zhengyang, making his first visit to the Prince’s residence.

He had gone to the Chamber first, only to learn that the Chamber had no say in the matter. He had immediately rushed to see Prince Qi.

GG placements—Xiao Ming did not leave those in the hands of Li Kaiyuan, who didn’t understand them. The recent promotional banner campaign was Xiao Ming’s own order, executed by Lin Wentao.

In this information-starved era, promoting one’s shop was no easy feat—especially since many merchants had their workshops outside the city.

After Xiao Ming transferred the soap-making technology, there were now no fewer than fifty soap factories around Qingzhou.

Each one wanted to sell more of their soap. This made GG placements immensely valuable. Whoever acted first would gain the advantage—and the profits.

“Well...” Xiao Ming said, feigning hesitation. “Balloon flights are costly...”

Cao Zhengyang was ready.

“Your Highness, say no more. I wouldn’t let you foot the bill.”

“In that case, I’ll be frank,” Xiao Ming said. “These promotional banners on the balloon are called GG, short for ‘Broadly Announced.’ Since you want one, naturally, they come at a price.”

“Please name it,” said Cao Zhengyang.

“As you’ve seen, there are multiple banners in different positions and sizes on the balloon. Each one has a different visibility level—and therefore a different price. So, which position and size are you looking for?”

Cao Zhengyang recalled the balloon's banners—they did indeed vary in placement and size.

"No need to be so complicated, Your Highness. I'll just take the whole thing."

Xiao Ming smirked to himself. Walking into the trap willingly, are you?

With a 10-meter diameter balloon and a hanging gondola, a single balloon could host 30 GG slots.

"Actually, it's not that much," Xiao Ming said smoothly. "The balloon makes three rounds per month, once every ten days. Every time it appears, it draws huge crowds."

Cao Zhengyang nodded.

"So if you want full exclusivity for a month—that'll be fifty thousand taels of silver."

Cao almost blurted out: Are you robbing me?! But he caught himself and fell silent.

Xiao Ming was expecting that. He broke down the numbers:

“Thirty slots, three times a month—that’s about 600 taels per slot per flight. The cheapest spots cost only 300 taels monthly. That’s quite reasonable.”

Cao Zhengyang did the math. It really wasn’t that expensive after all.

He had already boasted about the campaign, and the Cao Family Bank was about to launch. He clenched his jaw.

“Very well—fifty thousand it is. Here’s a banknote issued by the Cao Family Bank. You can redeem it for silver at any time.”

As Xiao Ming accepted the note, he felt both pleased and impressed. It was essentially paper money, widely accepted in Great Yu, thanks to the strength of the Cao Bank.

But Xiao Ming wasn’t worried. It wouldn’t be long before he issued his own currency—but before that, he needed massive reserves of gold and silver.

And those reserves would come only from foreign trade and conquest.

In his mind, he clearly remembered the locations of every major gold and silver mine—but to obtain them, he would have to defeat the Western colonial powers that currently controlled them.

After bidding farewell to Cao Zhengyang, Xiao Ming met with several more merchants to introduce the GG concept.

Most quickly understood its value.

But thanks to Cao Zhengyang's deep pockets, he had already booked all GG slots for the next three months.

By the afternoon, the stream of merchants finally thinned out.

Xiao Ming took the money and made his way to Bowen Academy.

He was fulfilling his promise: all GG revenue would go to education—whether to buy lab materials, improve students' living conditions, or fund custom school uniforms.