

I. Dynasty 601

Chapter 601

Qingzhou.

A sudden spring rain announced that the long winter was about to end.

Sitting at the bedchamber door, Xiao Ming chatted with Fei Yuer while eating melon seeds.

Since ordering the attack on Jinling City, his nerves had been tightly strung every day, fearing a disastrous defeat in the Battle of Jinling City.

“Your Highness has been frowning these past few days. Are you still worried about Jinling City?” Fei Yuer shelled melon seeds and put them in a plate. When enough accumulated, she would eat them with Xiao Ming.

Xiao Ming was the same; the couple had a tacit understanding.

“Yes, it’s been twelve days since Ye Qingyun set off. Regardless of success or failure, news should have returned by now,” Xiao Ming sighed slightly. The war with Wei had been intermittent for a year, and now it was time for him to fully occupy Wei.

According to the news returned by Wang Xuan, half a month ago, Prince Zhao, with the cooperation of barbarian fire and cannons, finally breached Sword Gate Pass, thus opening the gateway to Bashu.

Facing Prince Zhao's and the barbarians' iron cavalry, he believed that the King of Shu would not be able to hold out for long before losing this granary of the world.

From then on, Prince Zhao would occupy Chang'an City, using Bashu as a granary, moving freely. Wang Xuan also mentioned that Prince Zhao used a musketeer unit this time. Since the chaos in Chang'an, Prince Zhao had been producing matchlock guns, and this attack on Sword Gate Pass actually employed a musketeer unit of 15,000 men.

Although some of these muskets were sold to him by Xiao Ming earlier, this number was enough to show that Prince Zhao had manufactured many matchlock guns, and what worried him most was that Prince Zhao might hand over the matchlock gun technology to the barbarians.

After all, for royal power, a person would abandon all bottom lines, and Prince Zhao had already submitted to the barbarians. What else could he not do now?

As the two were speaking, a voice suddenly came, "Your Highness, Jinling City has been captured! Ye Qingyun sent someone to deliver Prince Wei's royal seal!"

The voice rang out in the distance, overpowering the patter of rain. Then Niu Ben walked towards the main hall, enduring the light rain.

Upon arriving, Niu Ben bowed and said, "Greetings, Princess. Greetings, Your Highness."

"Governor Niu, dispense with the formalities," Xiao Ming said. Fei Yuer nodded and walked into the hall, as she always chose not to interfere with government affairs.

Niu Ben, after performing the salute, said, “Your Highness, this subordinate has just received a triumphant report from Jinling City. Ye Qingyun has already taken Jinling City, and Prince Wei is also imprisoned in Jinling City’s dungeon.”

“Really?” Xiao Ming stood up from his chair. This time, he couldn’t help but be excited, because the capture of Jinling City basically meant the war in Wei was about to end.

“Absolutely true,” Niu Ben said with a smile, handing the royal seal in his hand to Xiao Ming.

Xiao Ming took the jade-carved royal seal, on the bottom of which was carved the character “Wei.” He immediately burst out laughing. This day was the happiest he had been in a year. Although his state had developed in the past three years, its overall prosperity still couldn’t compare to Wei.

Moreover, Wei had many cities and a large population, which itself was a huge asset.

As long as Wei was taken, not only would his goods expand their market, but the state’s financial problems would also be resolved. Wei might not be a granary for the entire world, but it could certainly be compared to half a granary.

“Since that is the case, immediately order Lu Fei to attack Chuzhou. With Prince Wei captured and Xiao Han trapped in Chuzhou City, once Xiao Han is taken, Wei will be completely leaderless. This time, we will take all the remaining cities of Wei in one fell swoop,” Xiao Ming said.

“Yes, Your Highness,” Niu Ben nodded heavily.

Turning to leave, Niu Ben had a scout brave the rain to send the message to the Chuzhou front line. Upon receiving Niu Ben's order, Lu Fei formally prepared to launch an attack on Chuzhou City.

"General, should we continue to starve the soldiers in the city for a few more days?" Luo Hong asked Lu Fei.

Lu Fei held the military order in his hand. He looked at the dispirited soldiers on the city wall of Chuzhou and said, "No need. The soldiers in the city are probably starving mad by now. Now, have logistics prepare porridge in front of the camp, and at the same time, send someone to tell the soldiers in the city that as long as they surrender, they will have porridge to eat."

"Yes," Luo Hong nodded.

"That boy Ye Qingyun really has some ability, but I won't lose to him," Lu Fei chuckled.

A few days ago, the reinforcements dispatched by Prince Wei had been heading towards Chuzhou City, but before they reached the city, they seemed to have received news of Jinling City's fall. This reinforcement army, which was originally unwilling to fight to rescue Xiao Han, had been dragging its feet all the way. Now, they scattered like birds and beasts without them even having to lift a finger.

At that time, he only suspected that something had happened in Jinling City. Now, Niu Ben's military order confirmed the news of Jinling City's fall, so he did not prepare for an immediate assault, but instead planned to first conduct a psychological warfare.

Soon, the Southern Expeditionary Army's cooks transported large iron pots to the front of Chuzhou City and began to boil rice porridge in front of the Chuzhou garrison. The Southern Expeditionary Army's soldiers formed squares to guard the surroundings.

Fires were lit, and porridge was boiled. Soon, the rich aroma of rice wafted with the north wind towards the city wall of Chuzhou. The already famished garrison immediately gazed eagerly at the iron pots outside the city.

At this moment, a soldier holding a megaphone walked a few steps forward. This megaphone was conical, made of rolled iron, and the soldier's voice carried far through it.

"Brothers inside the city, are you hungry? If you're hungry, come out and eat porridge! Our general said that as long as you lay down your weapons, we will absolutely not kill you. We just received news that Jinling City has been captured, your Prince Wei has also been captured, and Wei has fallen. Why sacrifice yourselves in vain?"

The loud voice reached Chuzhou City, and the soldiers immediately erupted in commotion.

"Jinling City has fallen? How is that possible?" The soldiers on the city wall were from Jinling City, belonging to the reinforcements who came from Jinling City. The Southern Expeditionary Army's words threw them into great disarray.

"How is it not possible? The Southern Expeditionary Army's firearms are so powerful. With the limited remaining forces in Jinling City, how could they possibly withstand Prince Qi's army's attack?" a soldier said.

“Then what do we do? Prince Wei is captured too. I don’t want to die here for nothing,” another soldier cried out.

With the crying, the other reinforcing soldiers also felt a pang of sympathy. The problem they faced now was not being besieged by the Southern Expeditionary Army, but that the food in the city had been almost entirely consumed over the past half month.

A small Chuzhou City was crammed with over a hundred thousand troops, and the city’s provisions were simply not enough. They were already eating only one meal a day, and soon they would probably have no food at all.

While the soldiers were discussing animatedly, a commotion suddenly arose at the gate of Chuzhou City, followed by the opening of the city gate. Chuzhou army soldiers rushed out towards the city.

These soldiers were all Chen Wei’s subordinates. When Chen Wei was imprisoned, they were already dissatisfied with Xiao Han in their hearts. In such a desperate situation, they had no intention of fighting anymore.

“Shoot arrows! Kill them!” the captain on the city wall commanded.

But after his order was given, none of the soldiers on the city wall moved, all looking at him with strange expressions.

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“What do you want? A rebellion?”

The captain's hand rested on the saber at his waist. From the soldiers' indifferent eyes, he felt a hint of danger.

"Captain, sir, we are just too hungry to even draw our bowstrings," an archer said, and the murderous atmosphere instantly lightened.

The captain snorted coldly. He said, "All of you listen to me, this is just a trick by the Southern Expeditionary Army. Our Jinling City is impregnable; they cannot possibly take Jinling City."

The soldiers remained silent. They were not fools. Reinforcements had not arrived, and the food in the city was almost depleted. This was enough to indicate that something was wrong with Jinling City. Even if Jinling City had not fallen, they were now an abandoned army.

Seeing that the soldiers said nothing, the captain's eyes looked outside. Smelling the wafting aroma of rice, he swallowed. He was also worried, but as a military captain, he had to obey military orders.

Descending from the city tower, he immediately relayed the the news of the Chuzhou army's rebellion to Xiao Han.

"Useless, idiot! What good are you to me!" Xiao Han roared with anger upon hearing this. "I knew Chen Wei and his Chuzhou army were useless. Now, I will personally guard the city gate. All surrendering soldiers will be executed without mercy."

The captain, having been scolded, merely hung his head. After Xiao Han had vented, he said, "The Southern Expeditionary Army outside the city also said, also said..."

“Also what!” Xiao Han was impatient, even agitated.

He had sent carrier pigeons for over ten days, but no reinforcements had arrived yet, and the provisions in the city were almost entirely consumed. If this continued, his army would completely collapse.

“Said what!”

“They said Jinling City was captured by the Dengzhou army, and His Highness Prince Wei was imprisoned,” the captain said.

Xiao Han immediately sat up from his chair upon hearing this. He said, “Nonsense, utter nonsense!”

“I thought so too, but why haven’t Jinling City’s reinforcements arrived after so long?” The captain dared not say more.

These words completely shattered Xiao Han’s spirit, but he still clung to a sliver of hope. He said, “Wait a little longer, Jinling City will be fine, it will be fine.”

Outside the city, the Southern Expeditionary Army soldiers continued to shout, but after the Chuzhou army defected and fled the city, the content of their shouting changed.

“Brothers of Chuzhou, listen! Jinling City has fallen, and your Prince Wei is in our hands! Now, your royal seal is in our camp...”

Hearing this news, the soldiers on the city wall were even more shocked. Another general descended the city wall and went to the Chuzhou government office to tell Xiao Han this news.

“The royal seal!”

At this, Xiao Han could no longer remain calm. He immediately rushed out of the government office and ascended the city gate. Just as the reporting general had said, the Southern Expeditionary Army was now shouting the very words he had spoken.

“Shameless scoundrels! Don’t spread rumors! How could Jinling City be breached? How could my Imperial Father be in your hands?” Xiao Han roared.

The shouting soldier was unhurried. He seemed to have been waiting for Xiao Han to ascend the city wall. He said, “If you don’t believe it, just wait a moment.”

With that, he gestured towards the main camp, and then a cavalryman emerged from the camp and approached him.

This cavalryman was none other than Bai Mu. This time, Niu Ben had not only sent the military order but also the royal seal, all to demoralize Xiao Han.

“Xiao Han, do you recognize what this is?” Bai Mu held up a royal seal, wrapped in yellow brocade, and showed it to Xiao Han.

At this moment, Bai Mu was less than fifteen meters from the city wall, and the object in his hand was clearly visible. But as Xiao Han focused intently, his face finally changed drastically.

Others might not have seen Prince Wei's royal seal, but he certainly had. What was in Bai Mu's hand now was precisely the royal seal of Prince Wei, which he had dreamed of day and night. He had fantasized countless times about inheriting Prince Wei's throne with this seal.

"How about it? Do you believe it now? Not only is Jinling City gone, but your reinforcements also scattered on the way. Now, the remaining cities of Wei are all in peril; no one will come to save you, Xiao Han. Think carefully: who in this city will still fight for you! However, if you surrender, our general said he would guarantee your life before His Highness." Bai Mu said loudly.

At this moment, Xiao Han's mind was blank; he hadn't heard a single word Bai Mu said.

Trembling slightly, he left the city wall with the support of his generals.

Bai Mu sneered, rode his horse, and returned to the Southern Expeditionary Army's main camp.

"General, Xiao Han must be in chaos now. What should we do?" Bai Mu said.

Lu Fei said, "There's no need to waste any more time. If he doesn't surrender, we'll bombard Chuzhou City. His Highness ordered us to take Chuzhou City and then continue to conquer the other cities in Wei.

If it takes too long, these prefectures and counties might suffer the same fate as Yangzhou City. These powerful families are very cruel and won't care about the lives of the common people."

Bai Mu nodded upon hearing this.

The shouting continued. An hour passed, and no news came from inside Chuzhou City. Lu Fei said to Luo Xin, "No need to wait any longer. The people inside the city must already be in disarray. It's time for a siege."

Luo Xin nodded. In the past half year, the Southern Expeditionary Army's cannons had increased to a hundred. At this time, a hundred cannons were lined up in a straight line, facing Chuzhou City.

"Fire!" Luo Xin coldly gave the order.

"Boom, boom, boom..."

The artillerymen, already prepared, immediately began to bombard the city wall. At the same time, the mortar gunners launched explosive shells into the city.

Immediately, dust flew up from the Chuzhou city wall, and fire and smoke filled the air.

Lu Fei watched all this with indifference. He was putting pressure on Xiao Han. There were many soldiers in the city, and even if they were to be killed, it would take several days, and these soldiers were innocent.

Chuzhou City was in chaos at this time. Over a hundred thousand soldiers were already starving. Now, having learned that Jinling City had fallen, both generals and soldiers lost the will to fight.

And facing the powerful firepower of the Southern Expeditionary Army, they were even more terrified. The soldiers on the city wall could only cry out in despair. Despair soon turned into anger, and some soldiers suddenly found courage, choosing to rebel.

First one soldier, then a second, more and more soldiers joined the rebellion. They gathered and rushed towards the government office. As long as Xiao Han was captured, the battle would end.

Then, just at that moment, Xiao Han walked out of the government office. Facing a group of fierce rebels, he said desperately, "I surrender!"

"Surrendered!" The generals and soldiers immediately cheered. All they wanted now was a full meal.

Some soldiers directly opened the city gates. They threw their weapons and armor onto the ground and, as per the Southern Expeditionary Army's demand, walked out of the city with their hands raised.

When the Wei army surged out of the city gate, Lu Fei ordered Luo Xin to stop the bombardment. He laughed heartily, "This is winning without fighting."

Soldiers walked out of Chuzhou City one by one.

The surrendering soldiers were all required to throw down their weapons and remove their armor, leaving only their cloth clothing.

The Southern Expeditionary Army soldiers, holding their flintlock guns, supervised the soldiers coming out of the city to prevent them from taking the opportunity to cause trouble. Closely following the soldiers, Xiao Han also walked out of the city.

Lu Fei had been waiting for Xiao Han. Seeing him emerge, he said, "Your Royal Highness, you have made a wise decision. Otherwise, countless soldiers would have died in vain."

"General Lu is right. I made this decision out of pity for the soldiers. I hope General Lu can speak well of me before His Highness in the future."

"That's certainly not a problem. My word is my bond," Lu Fei said.

Xiao Han smiled bitterly. "Thank you, General."

Lu Fei nodded. At this moment, he had Luo Hong take Xiao Han to a camp tent to be guarded. Like Prince Wei, Xiao Han also belonged to the royal family. These individuals could only be dealt with by Xiao Ming's direct order; no one else dared to act arbitrarily.

After detaining Xiao Han, Lu Fei frowned, looking at the numerous captives. Bai Mu noticed Lu Fei's expression and said, "General, this is troublesome. There are too many of these soldiers. If they remain in the army, our military provisions won't be enough, and keeping them in the rear is also a hidden danger."

Lu Fei was also pondering this issue. He said, "These people are a burden to us now. So, after these soldiers have eaten, give each of them three days' dry rations and let them return home."

"Hmm, that's a good idea." Bai Mu nodded. These over a hundred thousand people would also exhaust their resources.

Lu Fei said, "Moreover, letting these soldiers go back can also spread word of our benevolence, and at the same time, undermine the morale of the garrisons in other cities."

Having decided on the plan for dealing with the captives, Lu Fei sent someone to deliver the battle report from Chuzhou City to Qingzhou City. The next day, he had his soldiers distribute three days' worth of dry rations to the captives. These soldiers, in military uniforms, were soldiers, but once they took off their military uniforms, they were ordinary common people. In the future, they would also be citizens of the state. It was precisely because he thought of this that he was so generous.

Receiving the dry rations, the surrendered soldiers successively left the Southern Expeditionary Army's camp. At the same time, Lu Fei began to reorganize the Southern Expeditionary Army and advance towards the southern cities. Now, Wei's Tongzhou, Yangzhou, Jinling City, Pengzhou City, Huaizhou City, and Chuzhou Army had all been conquered, leaving only seven cities.

The distances between these seven cities were all very close. Lu Fei believed he could take these seven cities within a month.

Qingzhou.

Three days after Lu Fei took Chuzhou City, Xiao Han arrived at the Qingzhou Grand Camp along with the battle report.

Upon receiving the news, Xiao Ming immediately arrived at the Qingzhou Grand Camp with Fei Ji.

When he saw Xiao Han in the cage, Fei Ji said, "Your Highness, that's right, this is Xiao Han, Prince Wei's eldest son."

"Your Highness, this is Lu Fei's battle report. This time, 120,000 surrendered soldiers were released. Lu Fei confiscated their weapons and armor, then gave them three days' dry rations and let them leave on their own," Niu Ben said.

Fei Ji nodded upon hearing this. He said, "Lu Fei handled this well this time. Keeping these surrendered soldiers in the army would also consume provisions. It's better to let them go back to farming."

Xiao Ming glanced at the battle report. It stated, as Niu Ben had said, that these surrendered soldiers no longer posed a threat to the Southern Expeditionary Army but were a burden to Qingzhou. If he were to turn these people into slaves, it would inevitably arouse resentment among the common people of Wei. Letting them leave on their own was the best choice.

"He didn't waste his time at Bowen Academy," Xiao Ming said.

At this time, Xiao Ming looked at Xiao Han. In the battle report, Lu Fei said he had spared Xiao Han's life and requested Xiao Ming to do the same. He said to Xiao Han, "You and I are both of the imperial clan. Your leading troops to surrender also has some merit. I will not kill you, but though you are spared death, you cannot escape punishment. I have decided to demote you to commoner status on Ryukyu Island. Are you willing?"

Xiao Han's heart was filled with bitterness, though he had long been prepared for this outcome. He said, "Thank Your Highness for your great kindness. However, I have one more request: please allow me and my family to be reunited."

"If they are still in Jinling City, I will have them brought to Qingzhou to go to Ryukyu with you," Xiao Ming said. Although he didn't particularly like Prince Wei's family, since he had made a promise and Xiao Han had atoned for his sins with meritorious service, he could only give Xiao Han a way out.

However, keeping him in the state would inevitably lead to some remnants of Wei harboring ideas. So he sent Xiao Han to Ryukyu. In such a place surrounded by the sea on all sides, he would be unable to escape, unable to cause trouble again.

After discussing this, Xiao Ming signaled the bailiffs to temporarily detain Xiao Han. Then the three went to Niu Ben's camp.

In Niu Ben's tent, there was a huge sand table. This sand table was a map of Wei's cities and terrain. Niu Ben then pointed to the seven unconquered cities and said, "Your Highness, only these seven cities remain. Lu Fei will reorganize his army and continue to advance. With a pincer attack from north and south, Wei can be pacified in less than a month."

Xiao Ming nodded. With the Chuzhou army surrendered, Wei was essentially lost. Now it was just a matter of dealing with some scattered remnants, which wasn't a big problem. What bothered him most now was not the war but how to manage so many cities.

Fei Ji, however, was somewhat excited. Now that so many cities in Wei had been taken, these cities would undoubtedly require officials to manage them. In this way, the officials from Chang'an who were idle in Qingzhou would have a place to go.

So he said, "Your Highness, it's time to prepare officials for the government offices of these cities."

Xiao Ming nodded. He had brought Fei Ji out this time precisely for this reason. The thirteen prefectures of Wei had a large population, and managing this area would undoubtedly require a large number of officials.

These officials from Chang'an were all proficient in government affairs. Even without further education at Bowen Academy, they could manage Wei. Now that they had learned knowledge from Bowen Academy, there was even less of a problem.

"In that case, you will assess them in the next two days. If they are qualified, arrange corresponding positions for them," Xiao Ming said.

Fei Ji nodded. He was more skilled at this than Xiao Ming.

Niu Ben, however, said, "Your Highness, what about the garrisons of these cities? Wei has just been conquered, and for a period, it will inevitably be filled with rogue armies and bandits. We cannot be unprepared."

Xiao Ming had already thought about this problem. He couldn't establish an army in every prefecture, so he said, "This problem is not difficult. You will help the government offices establish local guard stations. These guard stations will be responsible for local security."

The "guard stations" Xiao Ming referred to were the security offices from the previous political reform, which basically equated to modern police organizations.

However, because Wei might be very chaotic for a while, he would increase the number of personnel in the guard stations.

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"Yes, Your Highness."

With the appointment of officials settled in the Qingzhou Grand Camp, Fei Ji's excitement was overflowing. He had been thoroughly annoyed by these idle officials lately.

However, remembering something, he asked, "Your Highness, I heard that even innocent powerful families in Wei will have their property confiscated this time. Is that true?"

"It is true. This is the policy used three years ago when dealing with the powerful families in the state," Xiao Ming nodded, awaiting Fei Ji's elaboration.

Fei Ji's expression showed some worry upon hearing this. He said, "Your Highness, I believe that the policy from three years ago is not suitable for Wei. The Southern Expeditionary Army was able to take

the cities of Wei so quickly, firstly, because of its strong combat power, and secondly, because Your Highness promised to spare the lives of those surrendering powerful family members. Now, if Your Highness confiscates their property, they might harbor resentment and rebel again. In that case, the difficulty of governing Wei will greatly increase. Your Highness must not forget that even now, there are powerful families within Your Highness's state who have turned bandit and are plundering."

"Elder Fei Ji, what you said is wrong. It's not that His Highness is not benevolent, but after His Highness spared these powerful families three years ago, they not only showed no gratitude but instead tried to assassinate His Highness. The powerful families in Wei are even more deeply entrenched than those in the original state. If evil is not eradicated completely, future troubles will surely arise."

"What Governor Niu said is precisely what I am worried about. Compared to the number and influence of Wei's powerful families, the powerful families of the original state were merely small fry. However, my confiscating their property is only taking back what they embezzled from the common people. What's wrong with that?" Xiao Ming said.

Fei Ji chuckled softly. He said, "During these days of being with Your Highness, I have found Your Highness's character to be very strong. This is a good thing for a monarch, but rigidity is easily broken. If Your Highness wishes to become a wise ruler for a generation, you must have both the might of a tiger and the cunning of a fox."

Xiao Ming paused. Pang Yukun had also said this about him, but he thought he had changed a lot. He didn't expect to still have this image in Fei Ji's eyes.

"Elder Fei Ji, please speak plainly."

Xiao Ming was still open to harsh but loyal advice, and Fei Ji was knowledgeable and understood the Great Yu Empire far more deeply than he did. He was happy to learn.

“Then I will be blunt,” Fei Ji pondered for a moment, then said, “Your Highness’s main task now is not to suppress the powerful families, but to end the internal strife and unify the Great Yu Empire. Although Wei’s powerful families are still powerful, they can no longer threaten Your Highness. After all, Prince Wei himself couldn’t contend with Your Highness, so who else could possess such ability?”

Xiao Ming nodded.

Fei Ji continued, “Since no one can threaten Your Highness’s rule over Wei, why should Your Highness create enemies in Wei, thereby allowing a prosperous Wei to continue to fall into war and internal strife? Now, Your Highness aims to conquer the world, and what you need is money, grain, and supporters. The powerful families of common people throughout history have all been opportunists. If Your Highness bestows favor upon them, they will certainly become Your Highness’s pawns, and when Your Highness conquers the world, the powerful families in various vassal states will certainly not resist to the death.”

Niu Ben glanced at Fei Ji, his expression somewhat complex.

“I naturally know that Your Highness was almost assassinated by a powerful family three years ago. However, circumstances have changed. Your Highness is no longer the weak Your Highness of that time, and I also approved of the handling of the powerful families in the state three years ago. After all, at that time, there were internal and external troubles, and no hidden dangers could be left within the state,” Fei Ji said.

“So, Elder Fei Ji means to win the support of the powerful families?” Xiao Ming said, now understanding Fei Ji’s thoughts. He had already understood that the most important thing for His Highness was to unify the Great Yu Empire.

“Precisely. The powerful families of Wei should be suppressed, but absolutely not driven to rebellion. In this way, Wei can quickly resume production and become Your Highness’s granary.”

Xiao Ming frowned. He looked at Wei on the sand table. This fiefdom, with its thirteen prefectures, was larger than his original state, and its population was three times that of the six prefectures.

As Fei Ji said, forcing the powerful families to rebel would be a very troublesome matter, because it would mean a significant increase in the cost of governing Wei, and he might even need to divert some soldiers to suppress the rebellion.

This could lead him into a quagmire of war, exhausting national strength, which would be extremely detrimental to him because his true enemies were the vassal princes.

It was not too late to deal with these powerful families after he had dealt with the vassal princes and there were no longer any separatist forces within the country.

However, temporarily shelving it did not mean he would not deal with it at all, but rather change to a method of slow boiling. Looking at Fei Ji, he wanted to continue to test Fei Ji’s abilities, so he said, “Then tell me, how should they be dealt with?”

“Firstly, confiscate the land of the major powerful families in each prefecture and distribute it to the local common people, and seize their family property, because these powerful families were all firm supporters of Prince Wei, and many of their children held official positions in the government offices. Secondly, suppress the medium powerful families and ally with the small powerful families. These powerful families are numerous, and they are dependent on the local major powerful families, but they resent the suppression of the major powerful families, so their land and property can be partially confiscated. Thirdly, for some enlightened and virtuous powerful families in each prefecture and county,

Your Highness should appease them and win their support. In this way, Wei can be pacified,” Fei Ji said with a smile.

Xiao Ming burst out laughing upon hearing this. He said to Fei Ji, “Elder Fei Ji, have you been reading some interesting books at Bowen Academy recently?”

“Did Your Highness guess?” Fei Ji was a bit embarrassed.

Xiao Ming said, “These books were written by me, how could I not know? You are right, this time I was a bit careless and did not formulate policies for Wei in a timely manner that suited the local conditions. However, it seems it’s not too late. This matter of dealing with Wei’s powerful families will be left to Elder Fei Ji. As you said, I need a stable and prosperous Wei, not a Wei embroiled in war.”

Fei Ji breathed a heavy sigh of relief. Ever since he was reprimanded by Xiao Ming last time, he had diligently studied the books in Bowen Academy and gradually learned about some marvelous policies.

His bold proposal this time was made at the risk of being scolded, but this time he was right.

“Yes, Your Highness, I will certainly not disappoint Your Highness’s expectations,” Fei Ji said solemnly.

Niu Ben, gradually understanding after Fei Ji’s explanation, said, “Elder Fei Ji lives up to his name. If Wei can achieve smooth governance and harmony, then the Southern Expeditionary Army won’t need to be bogged down in Wei suppressing bandits.”

After a pause, he confidently said to Xiao Ming, “Your Highness, this battle in Wei is enough to prove the strength of the state army’s combat power. In my opinion, none of the other vassal princes are Your Highness’s match. After taking Wei, Your Highness should take the initiative to attack, quickly pacify the six directions, and ascend the throne.”

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The shouts of the soldiers in training echoed over Qingzhou.

Xiao Ming said to Niu Ben, “General Niu is absolutely right. In this battle for Wei, the Southern Expeditionary Army and the Dengzhou Army conquered cities as easily as taking something from a pocket. Now that Prince Wei is captured, Youzhou, Qingzhou, and Jinling City are connected. We just need to continue strengthening our military readiness and diligently manage internal affairs to find an opportunity to break the deadlock and seize control of the northern territories.”

War, perhaps at first, is a contest of the training and bravery of both armies, but as the war progresses, it becomes a contest of money, provisions, and equipment.

Now Xiao Ming held the advantage in military strength, and he was not lacking in money and provisions. After all, by taking Wei, he essentially gained another granary.

“With generals responsible for fighting, officials responsible for assisting Your Highness in governing the state, and the advantage of the state’s firearms, it will be easy for Your Highness to gain control of the northern territories.”

Fei Ji was equally confident now. Prince Wei, who was powerful among many vassal princes, was now so easily defeated by Xiao Ming. He had to look at firearms with new eyes.

Xiao Ming smiled upon hearing this. Fei Ji had left out a sentence: he only needed to focus on advancing technology.

Now that Wei had been taken, he could also confidently dedicate himself to climbing the technology tree. In recent years, Qingzhou had accumulated a group of technical talents, laying the foundation for a technological explosion. Now was his time to participate, as the students who had already mastered scientific knowledge had a better understanding than before. He only needed to give a little guidance.

The three conversed in the tent for a while longer, then Xiao Ming and Fei Ji returned to Qingzhou City.

The farming season was fast approaching, and he had something to deliver to Qingzhou's slave farms, and he also planned to have the government office promote it.

Upon arriving in the city, Xiao Ming and Fei Ji did not go to the government office but instead went to the farm where Kui Wu was located. There, he saw an excited Pang Yukun.

Originally, Pang Yukun was supposed to go with them to the Qingzhou Grand Camp, but after Lin Wentao sent something over, he couldn't move. He insisted on taking this machine to the fields for a live trial.

"Your Highness, this animal-powered twelve-row seeder is amazing! In just one morning, three people sowed seeds on twenty mu of land."

Seeing Xiao Ming and Fei Ji approach, Pang Yukun jogged over from the field.

Xiao Ming looked not far away. At this time, three slaves were sowing seeds in the field. One of them was leading three oxen, and the other two slaves were holding a long, rectangular object. This was the animal-powered twelve-row seeder that Lin Wentao had sent over.

In modern Europe, the first seeder was made in Greece in 1636. In 1830, Russians added a seeding device to an animal-powered multi-share plow to make a plow-seeder. Countries like Britain and America began mass producing animal-powered grain seed drills after 1860.

The structure of this seeder was not very complicated, but even so, it required a certain industrial foundation to be mass-produced. Now, Lin Wenyang was able to produce it because Qingzhou could produce its components, and also because of the blueprints provided by Xiao Ming.

Otherwise, it's unlikely they would have thought of producing a seed drill on their own.

Actually, the principle of a seed drill is very simple: a moving wheel drives a seed-dispensing wheel to rotate. Seeds are dispensed from a seed box above into a seed tube and fall into a furrow opened by a furrow opener. Then, a soil-covering and pressing device covers and compacts the seeds.

Simply put, it's a long, plow-shaped tool at the bottom, with a cylindrical seed box on top. At the same time, the moving wheels have a connecting rod-like structure. Each rotation opens the bottom of the seed box, allowing seeds to fall into the plowed furrow. At the very back of the seed drill is a curved iron plate that levels the soil after the seeds are sown.

"What! Three people sowed twenty mu of land in one morning!" Fei Ji's jaw almost dropped.

"Absolutely true. If you don't believe it, count it yourself," Pang Yukun said, pointing to the field ridges. Now, to distinguish the size of each mu of land, a branch was inserted at the head of each mu.

Fei Ji counted them, and it really was twenty mu.

Fei Ji was truly shocked. He said, “Your Highness, if this seed drill is popularized, the common people will be able to cultivate even more land. Now, Youzhou has few people but much land, and Ryukyu is also waiting to be developed. This thing has come at just the right time!”

With that, Fei Ji, regardless of his image, ran towards the slaves who were sowing.

Xiao Ming and Pang Yukun exchanged glances, both smiling helplessly. People living in Qingzhou were now used to new things appearing every now and then.

But for people from other places, it was still quite shocking.

Seeing Fei Ji walking with his long gown, taking uneven steps through the fields, the two also followed.

When they arrived in front of the grain seeder, the three stopped. At this moment, a pungent smell suddenly hit them. Xiao Ming immediately realized something. “This Lin Wentao, he also added a manure tank to it!”

“Indeed. This subordinate was also surprised when I first arrived. This grain seeder can plow, sow, and fertilize all at once. And according to the person Lin Wentao sent, everything on this seeder can be disassembled,” Pang Yukun said.

Fei Ji, meanwhile, circled the grain seeder. After a thorough look, he seemed to have grasped the idea. He said, "Isn't this a louche (an ancient Chinese seeder)?"

"That's right, it's a louche, but an improved one," Xiao Ming laughed.

Fei Ji nodded. "In the past, the common people used wooden louches, which were very slow at sowing seeds. This one is made of steel, so it's much faster. And this thing looks like twelve louches stuck together, so it's no wonder it can sow twenty mu of land in one morning."

"That is natural. How can a louche compare to this large seed drill? Your Highness, let Lin Wentao mass-produce it now. We can have every production team buy one," Pang Yukun said, excited.

Xiao Ming shook his head, "Yes, not only should production teams be equipped, but also slave farms and large merchant farms. That way, the money from selling to merchants can be used to subsidize the production teams."

Fei Ji and Pang Yukun exchanged smiles upon hearing this. This idea was excellent, allowing the common people to use seed drills at a low cost.

Xiao Ming was also in a great mood today. He said, "You'll have more to be happy about in a few days. This grain seed drill is just the beginning. I and Lin Wentao will work together to produce an animal-powered harvester before the harvest."

"Harvester!" The two were once again surprised.

Xiao Ming nodded. In modern times, the earliest horse-drawn disc reaper appeared in England in 1799. Like the seed drill, these machines currently presented no difficulty in manufacturing, requiring only the mechanical structure, as his lathes, steam engines, and steelmaking technology had all reached this level.

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The fragrance of the soil drifted freely in the spring breeze. Sparrows chirped loudly on the treetops in the fields, and the beautiful pastoral scenery was fully visible.

The three carefully observed the process of using the grain seed drill, then smiled and returned to the field.

Fei Ji then asked, "Your Highness, what can this grain seed drill plant?"

"Wheat, barley, sorghum, millet, beans, early rice, rapeseed, and flax can all be planted with it," Xiao Ming said, looking around at the beautiful scenery.

Since coming to this world, he had never so seriously appreciated the original beauty of this world. Now that he had resolved the southern threat, he could finally enjoy his life in this world with peace of mind.

As for Prince Yan, Prince Zhao, and Prince Liang, they were merely meat on his chopping block. It was only a matter of time before they were carved up.

"So many," Fei Ji stroked his beard, his eyes narrowing in a smile.

First, there were potatoes, then sweet potatoes, and now the emergence of the seed drill reduced the labor needed for cultivation. The state's agriculture was now flourishing, and he believed that in a few years, the state would likely have more food than it could consume.

Pang Yukun was pleased, but he also thought of an important question: "Your Highness, Wei has many people but little land, while Youzhou has few people but much land. As a result, the amount of land each common person receives will inevitably be different. This subordinate is wondering if we should transfer some common people from densely populated prefectures and counties to Youzhou?"

Xiao Ming nodded, "What Chief Grand Secretary Pang said is also what I am thinking. However, not everyone is willing to leave their homeland. Wei has just been recaptured, and the people's hearts are still unstable. If we act rashly, it might cause civil unrest. Therefore, I believe it would be better to introduce some policies that benefit the common people in densely populated prefectures and counties, for example, offering compensation for relocating to Youzhou, or even more land."

"Your Highness's deep consideration, that is indeed a method," Pang Yukun said.

Xiao Ming said, "Youzhou is secondary; what I am primarily concerned about is the land outside Shanhai Pass."

"The land outside Shanhai Pass?" Fei Ji looked confused.

"I've read many historical records these days and found that the continuous troubles in the north for thousands of years have all been because, even when the barbarian tribes of the grasslands were driven away, no dynasty ever sent people to settle on that land," Xiao Ming said.

As the saying goes, if you don't occupy a place, others will. The scourge of the northern grasslands has never ceased for this very reason.

One barbarian tribe of the grasslands left, and the north would soon be occupied by another tribe. This cycle continued, and the people of Great Yu Empire never constituted the majority on this land.

So, in Xiao Ming's view, the most important thing after defeating the barbarians was to relocate Han people to this land to settle and multiply. Otherwise, in a few decades, another grassland tribe might rise.

After all, land not dominated by Great Yu Empire people would inevitably be occupied by foreign tribes.

"Your Highness, the north is harsh and cold. Who would be willing to go and live in those barren lands?" Pang Yukun stated a current fact.

Xiao Ming sighed. He said, "Never mind, I just brought it up. It will probably take some more years to defeat the barbarians, but you should keep this issue in mind now."

Not having a solution now doesn't mean there won't be one in the future. Next, he would encourage the people of Great Yu Empire to have more children. When a water jar is full, it overflows. When the population increases, people will naturally be willing to settle in the north.

No longer mentioning this matter, Xiao Ming said, "Now that we have the grain seed drill, you should also find a way to promote it to merchants. Manufacturing this thing requires a lot of steel and manpower. If it can sell for a good price, it's worth establishing a separate workshop for its production."

Pang Yukun voluntarily took on this task. He said, “Your Highness, leave this matter to me. Elder Fei Ji will surely be very busy dealing with the affairs of Wei.”

Fei Ji smiled. Although the two often argued due to differing ideas, they had always cooperated well in government affairs.

The three talked as they walked towards the government office, now they just needed to wait for good news from the Southern Expeditionary Army.

March 6th, Haizhou City.

The Battle of Chuzhou ended, and Lu Fei led his army straight to Haizhou City in Wei. During this period, intelligence from the Secret Guard continuously arrived, confirming his suspicion: in the Battle of Jinling City and the Battle of Chuzhou, Wei’s main forces had all been annihilated. The remaining cities only held scattered remnants of troops.

After receiving intelligence from the Secret Guard in the city that there were only 8,000 defenders in the city, he launched an attack. In just one day, Haizhou City fell.

On March 9th, after three days of rest, the Southern Expeditionary Army left 2,000 men in the city to maintain order and set off for Suzhou. On March 13th, Suzhou City was captured.

At the same time, Ye Qingyun, after leaving 10,000 men to guard Jinling City, led 20,000 men to march rapidly towards Binzhou, which was only a day's journey away.

On March 14th, Binzhou City fell. Then, on March 20th, Shouzhou City was captured by Ye Qingyun.

On March 25th, Sizhou City fell. On April 2nd, Taizhou City fell. On April 10th, Yaozhou City fell.

On April 20th, Ye Qingyun led the Dengzhou army and converged with Lu Fei outside Shouzhou City. Shouzhou City was the last city in Wei. Capturing this city would mean the entire territory of Wei would be incorporated into the state.

"Ye Qingyun, why do you have so few men left?"

Lu Fei roughly estimated Ye Qingyun's forces, finding only about 10,000 men remaining.

Ye Qingyun rolled his eyes, "You're overthinking it. These soldiers weren't killed in battle; I left them in the captured prefectures and counties to maintain order. Aren't you doing the same?"

"I thought you were unskilled and had lost all your men in battle," Lu Fei chuckled, scratching the back of his head.

Ye Qingyun and Lu Fei had known each other for a long time, being veteran officials of the state. Because of this, they spoke casually to each other and often bickered.

Glancing at Shouzhou City, Ye Qingyun said, "Are you attacking or me?"

Lu Fei thought for a moment, "Neither of us will attack. Let Luo Hong attack. After all, the Luo family is a famous military family in the Great Yu Empire. Now that the tiger has fallen into the plains, he should be given some opportunities, shouldn't he?"

Ye Qingyun was startled for a moment. He said, "Indeed. I heard that the firearms division fought very fiercely in these recent battles."

"Yes, exactly. Because of that, we can't bully them," Lu Fei said.

Ye Qingyun nodded, "Alright, I won't compete with Luo Hong. The brothers of the firearms division also need some settlement fees in Qingzhou, so this juicy piece of meat is for them."

"Bah, feigning generosity! Who doesn't know you took Jinling City? When it's time to distribute rewards, you, Ye Qingyun, will be rolling in wealth!" Lu Fei complained.

Ye Qingyun's face was full of smiles, completely unconcerned by what Lu Fei said. Just as Lu Fei said, he and his soldiers were now excited.

He had already counted the treasury of Jinling City. This time, the state had truly struck it rich.

Amidst the rumbling cannon fire, Shouzhou City was covered in flames and smoke.

Just as he had told Ye Qingyun, Lu Fei had assigned Luo Hong the task of attacking Shouzhou City this time.

Throughout this campaign, the Luo family brothers had worked tirelessly and without complaint. Lu Fei had seen all of this, so for the final Battle of Shouzhou, he intended to give some of the credit to Luo Hong.

He did this partly out of respect for the Luo family's performance in the Battle of Jizhou, and also to avoid being too greedy for credit. He knew that after returning, merits would certainly be rewarded, and it would not be good if he monopolized all the credit.

Moreover, he understood Xiao Ming well and believed that Xiao Ming would also want him to do so.

Shouzhou City was the last remaining city in Wei and also the closest to Yan. Its strategic position was important; taking Shouzhou City would allow for a direct assault on Yan.

It was precisely for this reason that the two armies, after converging, launched an attack on Shouzhou City. The reason was none other than their concern that Prince Yan might take the opportunity to seize Shouzhou City.

However, to their relief, Prince Yan did not launch an attack on Shouzhou City.

Under the combined assault of the two armies, Shouzhou City's defenders quickly chose to surrender. On April 21st, Shouzhou City fell, and all thirteen prefectures of Wei were conquered.

In the blood-red sunset, Ye Qingyun and Lu Fei led their soldiers into Shouzhou City. Blood and glory accompanied them, shining brightly.

Subsequently, this news was sent to Qingzhou City.

After waiting for over a month, Xiao Ming revealed a heartfelt smile upon receiving the news. Now that Wei was also incorporated into his state, the war for Wei had finally ended.

Upon receiving the news, he immediately called Fei Ji over. After a discussion, the two traveled on the third day to Jinling City, a city reputed to be as prosperous as Great Yu Empire's capital and Chang'an. Accompanying them was a group of officials who were about to take office in Jinling City.

Because Wei was completely occupied, Xiao Ming did not take the sea route but went directly to Jinling City via the canal. At the same time, Ye Qingyun also received orders to rush to Jinling City.

Six days later, the ship carrying Xiao Ming and a group of officials docked at Jinling City's pier.

Stepping ashore, Xiao Ming looked at the city wall of the South Gate, which was being repaired, and smiled bitterly. It was clear that this was the wall that Ye Qingyun had directly breached with cannon fire.

Fei Ji and the officials followed closely behind Xiao Ming. They too pointed at the city wall, looking pained.

After observing from a distance for a while, Xiao Ming and the others entered Jinling City.

Xiao Ming had always yearned for Jinling City. After all, in contemporary times, Jinling City was also an ancient capital of six dynasties, and the charm of the Qinhuai River banks was famous in poetry and prose, making people long for it.

Now, the land beneath his feet belonged to Jinling City, and he was somewhat excited.

“Your Highness.”

Ye Qingyun was already waiting for them halfway. Seeing Xiao Ming and the others approach, he immediately became their guide, leading Xiao Ming towards Jinling City.

“I heard Jinling City’s treasury is quite remarkable,” Xiao Ming asked with a smile.

Ye Qingyun’s face lit up. He said, “Yes, Your Highness. When I opened the treasury this time, I was truly shocked. I never imagined Prince Wei was so wealthy. The prosperity of Wei is no mere legend.”

Xiao Ming smiled slightly. It was precisely because he heard about this huge treasury that he decided to come to Jinling City personally. Moreover, Prince Wei was also imprisoned here, and he needed to deal with this imperial uncle.

Upon entering Jinling City, Xiao Ming looked around. Jinling City seemed to have resumed its daily life now. Common people came and went on the streets. If it weren't for the ruined city wall behind him, he would have truly doubted if a war had occurred here.

Fei Ji was even more surprised than Xiao Ming. He said, "After a war, a city is bound to be desolate. Why is Jinling City still so prosperous?"

"Elder Fei Ji, that's not surprising. This attack on Jinling City was a surprise attack. The common people in Jinling City didn't have time to flee. Secondly, our siege was very fast; the Wei army didn't have time to destroy the city's treasury or houses. Thirdly, after we entered the city, we didn't harass the common people. These days, the common people no longer fear us and have gradually returned to their former state," Ye Qingyun explained to Fei Ji.

Fei Ji and the officials were once again impressed by the Dengzhou army's discipline. If it were the Great Yu Empire's army, they would surely have plundered the city upon entering. How could they have not harmed a single hair?

"With such a mighty and strong army, why worry about not being able to stabilize the country and expel the barbarians?" an official exclaimed in admiration.

Other officials echoed, having initially thought that the war in Wei would last at least three years, they never expected everything to end in less than a year.

As they talked along the way, Ye Qingyun led Xiao Ming to Prince Wei's mansion.

“Your Highness, the plaque of this princely mansion has been removed and replaced with the four characters ‘Imperial Traveling Palace’. The rooms inside have also been cleaned. Your Highness can rest here tonight,” Ye Qingyun said to Xiao Ming, pointing at Prince Wei’s mansion.

Xiao Ming looked at Prince Wei’s mansion. In front of the mansion were two two-meter-tall auspicious qilin beasts. The vermilion lacquered main gate, with its two golden beast-head knockers, exuded a hint of ferocity and solemnity.

Looking inward from the main gate, a white jade road also led to the opulent main hall of the princely mansion. The white jade road forked beside the main hall, suggesting a large complex of buildings behind the main hall.

“This Prince Wei’s mansion is truly magnificent!” Xiao Ming smiled.

Fei Ji said, “Indeed. Compared to here, Your Highness’s princely estate is much smaller. Your Highness, now that Wei is settled, shouldn’t you also consider the capital and the imperial palace?”

Xiao Ming frowned upon hearing this. Several months ago, an official had submitted a memorial, requesting Xiao Ming to build a new capital and an imperial palace.

Xiao Ming had outright refused this and had severely criticized that official. He knew the official was trying to flatter him, but he didn’t want to bring disaster upon himself by wasting money and resources.

Now that Fei Ji brought it up again, he couldn’t help but feel a little annoyed. He said, “Elder Fei Ji, why are you also joining in the commotion?”

Fei Ji smiled and said to Xiao Ming, “Your Highness, look at the prosperity of Jinling City, and then look at the magnificence of Prince Wei’s mansion. In my opinion, Jinling City is suitable to be the new capital.”

“Is that so?” Xiao Ming’s eyes shifted. He looked at Fei Ji and said, “I think it’s inappropriate.”

“Why?” Fei Ji was puzzled.

Xiao Ming said, “Jinling City is indeed prosperous, but it is a place of wealth and indulgence. I fear it would bury great ambitions. In my opinion, choosing Jinling City is not as good as choosing Youzhou.”

“Youzhou!” Fei Ji was startled. “Your Highness is joking. Youzhou is currently barren land; how can it be suitable as a new capital?”

“The Son of Heaven guards the nation’s gate, and the monarch dies for the country. Outside Youzhou City lies the land of barbarians. There, you will constantly remember that the barbarian threat is right before you, lest you become intoxicated in this pleasure district of the Qinhuai River,” Xiao Ming sneered.

He said this merely to scare Fei Ji and the others. Now was not the time to relocate the capital. At the very least, it would only be considered after Youzhou had recovered its prosperity.

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“The Son of Heaven guards the nation’s gate, and the monarch dies for the country!”

Fei Ji murmured this phrase, his expression growing increasingly solemn.

After a long silence, Fei Ji bowed deeply to Xiao Ming. “Your Highness’s noble principles will surely make you a wise ruler for a generation. This is a blessing for our Great Yu Empire, and a blessing for the common people.”

Xiao Ming smiled and didn’t explain. In his opinion, establishing the capital in Youzhou was advantageous, firstly, because it was close to the sea, and secondly, only by establishing the capital in Youzhou could the northern border troubles be thoroughly resolved.

Rejecting Fei Ji’s suggestion, Xiao Ming followed Ye Qingyun to Prince Wei’s mansion.

Unlike his own princely estate’s minimalist style, Prince Wei’s mansion was extremely luxurious. The main hall alone was as grand as the Chengqing Hall in the imperial palace. Behind the main hall was a winding pebble path, at the end of which was a river that cut through the mansion, with a stone bridge spanning across the river.

On the other side of the river was another cluster of buildings, which were the bedchambers of Prince Wei and his consorts.

“When I was in Chang’an, I heard that Prince Wei’s mansion was extremely luxurious. Now it seems that’s true,” Fei Ji said.

Ye Qingyun said, "Prince Wei's mansion is not the most luxurious place in Jinling City. Your Highness and Elder Fei Ji will understand what luxury is when you see Jinling City's treasury."

Xiao Ming and Fei Ji exchanged glances. This was the focus of their trip to Jinling City. Xiao Ming said, "Then what are you waiting for? Lead the way."

"Yes, Your Highness," Ye Qingyun smiled.

Then the two left Prince Wei's mansion and headed west. By the Xuanwu Lake in Jinling City, Ye Qingyun stopped and pointed to the civilian residences on one side of the river, saying, "Your Highness, this is where Jinling City's treasury is located."

Xiao Ming looked in the direction Ye Qingyun was pointing. In the residential area not far away, pavilions stood in abundance, clearly resembling a palace complex.

"This is Jinling City's treasury?" Xiao Ming asked.

Ye Qingyun said, "Yes, Your Highness. All the tax revenue of Wei these past years is in this treasury."

Fei Ji was also somewhat stunned. The buildings in this residential area were connected one after another, like a long dragon.

With some anticipation, Xiao Ming walked towards the residential area. After twenty minutes of walking, they arrived at Jinling City's treasury.

Upon closer inspection, Xiao Ming realized the immense size of the treasury. Before him were vast halls, each connected front to back. At this time, Dengzhou army soldiers were guarding these halls.

“Your Highness, please see. This hall stores silver. I have already had it counted; there are a total of eight million taels of silver,” Ye Qingyun said.

Fei Ji’s and the officials’ eyes immediately widened. Fei Ji said, “Prince Wei is indeed extremely wealthy.”

At this moment, Xiao Ming’s heart also skipped a beat. What the Qingzhou Bank lacked right now was silver. If he had sufficient silver, he could issue banknotes based on silver.

Having so much silver stored in Prince Wei’s treasury was simply a timely boon for him.

Led by Ye Qingyun, he and Fei Ji entered the treasury together. Instantly, a flash of silver light slightly stung his eyes. He saw neatly stacked silver ingots in the treasury, each in a long, rectangular shape.

He picked up an ingot and weighed it. One ingot weighed at least a catty (about 0.5 kg).

Eight million taels of silver would be 800 tons. Prince Wei’s savings over the past decade or so were probably all here.

“Your Highness, we’ve struck it rich!” Fei Ji, too, couldn’t help but gesticulate excitedly at this moment.

Ye Qingyun smiled and continued, “This hall stores silver, and next door, copper and copper coins are stored. Compared to silver, there is even more copper.”

“Let’s go take a look.” Xiao Ming was overjoyed. This time, he had truly become rich overnight. This campaign to conquer Wei was a huge profit.

Then the group went to the copper hall. There was a thousand two hundred tons of copper stored here. Afterwards, they went to the halls storing cloth, raw silk, tea, and porcelain.

At the end of their tour, they went to Jinling City’s granary. However, Ye Qingyun did not yet know the exact amount of grain in the granary, as the quantity was too vast to measure. They could only rely on the granary’s ledger, which stated a total of five million shi.

After understanding the Jinling City treasury, Xiao Ming seemed to relax entirely. He said, “Now the food problem is finally solved. With the grain collected from Wei, the state army will not have to worry about provisions.”

“Precisely,” Fei Ji said with a smile, “With Wei, this granary, to support us, Your Highness will be like a tiger with wings.”

“Hahahaha...” Everyone burst into laughter simultaneously.

Coming out of the Jinling treasury, Xiao Ming said to Ye Qingyun, "By the way, where is Prince Wei?"

"Reporting to Your Highness, Prince Wei is currently imprisoned in Jinling City's dungeon, and his relatives have also been detained."

Xiao Ming nodded. He said, "Take me to see him."

"Yes, Your Highness."

Ye Qingyun led Xiao Ming towards the Jinling City dungeon.

After another twenty minutes of walking, Xiao Ming and his group arrived at the Jinling City dungeon. At this point, Ye Qingyun sent someone to bring Prince Wei out from his cell.

Soon, a disheveled Prince Wei walked out of the dungeon.

Seeing Prince Wei, whose hair had turned white and whose demeanor was utterly disheartened, Xiao Ming sighed softly. Compared to the once vibrant Prince Wei, he was now merely a decrepit old man.

At this moment, Prince Wei squinted, seemingly unaccustomed to the outside brightness. When he adjusted to the light, he clearly saw Xiao Ming standing before him.

“Xiao Ming, you’ve come after all,” Prince Wei chuckled. “How is it? My Jinling City is quite prosperous, isn’t it?”

“Jinling City is indeed very prosperous.”

Xiao Ming said blandly, seeing a hint of hysterical madness in Prince Wei’s eyes.

“Hahahaha, I, who possessed such a prosperous Jinling City, was defeated by your hand! Why! Why is this!” Prince Wei’s eyes stared intently at Xiao Ming.

Ye Qingyun stood closer to Xiao Ming at this moment, fearing that Prince Wei might suddenly attack.

“Because the Mandate of Heaven does not reside with you,” Xiao Ming gave Prince Wei a despairing answer.

“Mandate of Heaven, Mandate of Heaven.” The madness in Prince Wei’s eyes gradually turned into sorrow. “Yes, the Mandate of Heaven is not with me, the Mandate of Heaven is not with me. This is not my fault; it is the will of Heaven!”

Fei Ji sighed, “Your Highness, Prince Wei is probably mad.”

“No, he’s not mad. He’s just too unwilling to accept defeat,” Xiao Ming said. “Elder Fei Ji, what do you think should be done with Prince Wei?”

“Prince Wei rebelled, a heinous crime. Only a silken cord and poisoned wine are fitting for him,” Fei Ji said firmly.

Xiao Ming’s eyes narrowed. Feudal dynasties were indeed this cruel. Eradicating the roots was what every emperor would do.

Now, Xiao Ming had gradually adapted to this world, a world where civilization was just budding, but barbarism still reigned. To survive in this world, one had to learn to be ruthless.

He nodded, “Grant him a cup of poisoned wine. Wei has fallen; a Prince Wei is no longer needed.”

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“Hahahaha...”

Prince Wei laughed uproariously, then suddenly pointed at Xiao Ming and said, “You scoundrel, you are ruthless enough! I misjudged you before. It’s also my fault for having a moment of mercy and not killing you four years ago.”

“Imperial Uncle, there’s no medicine for regret in this world. There’s only one throne, and only one can win it in the end.” Xiao Ming’s eyes were cold.

Prince Wei's expression gradually calmed down, all the madness in his eyes faded. He looked at Xiao Ming with a hint of an inexplicable gleam, "Worthy nephew, you are the only one among the many princes whom I truly misjudged. I'm afraid even your Imperial Father would not have imagined you achieving such success today. Heh heh, Imperial Uncle has lost, but Imperial Uncle is also very relieved. At least this world still belongs to our Xiao family."

After saying this, Prince Wei turned and slowly walked towards the dungeon. At this moment, he seemed like an old man at dusk.

Xiao Ming frowned. This ancestral motto of the Xiao family not only influenced Xiao Wenxuan, but also Prince Wei.

"Your Highness, should we bring Prince Wei back?" Ye Qingyun said. In his opinion, Prince Wei was too rude.

"No need. He is Prince Wei after all. Let him keep his last bit of dignity," Xiao Ming said.

Ye Qingyun nodded.

Seemingly noticing that Xiao Ming's mood was somewhat displeased by Prince Wei, Fei Ji suddenly said, "Your Highness, Jinling City is not only prosperous but also a place of outstanding people. The Great Yu Empire's famous physician, Huang Tingzhi, lives in Jinling City."

"Huang Tingzhi?" Xiao Ming's mind flashed with some fragmented memories upon hearing this. "Are you talking about Huang Tingzhi, the itinerant physician who traveled all over the Great Yu Empire?"

“Yes, Your Highness. This Huang Tingzhi traveled extensively since his youth and provided medical care throughout the world. It is said that Huang Tingzhi held nothing back in his medical skills, teaching anyone who wished to learn from him, and even taught some women.”

“Is that so?” Xiao Ming was pleasantly surprised. Ever since Physician Sun died, the development of the medical academy suffered a major blow; there was no one in the academy capable of taking charge.

He had been looking for a suitable person to lead the medical academy during this time, and Huang Tingzhi, whom Fei Ji mentioned, was undoubtedly a very suitable candidate.

“Huang Tingzhi?” Ye Qingyun scratched his head at this moment. He suddenly realized and said, “Oh no, Your Highness, I arrested Huang Tingzhi as one of Prince Wei’s men.”

“What!” Fei Ji was greatly alarmed upon hearing this. “You, you! This Huang Tingzhi is a reclusive master, never serving anyone. How could he be Prince Wei’s man?”

“I did not know who Huang Tingzhi was. When I searched Prince Wei’s mansion, I found a physician treating a patient and thought he was Prince Wei’s medical officer, so I arrested him along with the others,” Ye Qingyun said, feeling somewhat wronged.

Xiao Ming showed a helpless expression. He couldn’t blame Ye Qingyun; he himself didn’t know much about this Huang Tingzhi.

He said, “Where did you imprison Huang Tingzhi? I will go see him myself.”

“Reporting to Your Highness, I did not imprison him in a cell. Because many soldiers were wounded during the siege, I confined him alone in a courtyard and had him treat the soldiers’ wounds daily.”

Xiao Ming breathed a sigh of relief. At least Ye Qingyun hadn’t completely offended the man. He immediately had Ye Qingyun take him to see Huang Tingzhi.

Following Ye Qingyun, Xiao Ming arrived at a sealed powerful family’s residence. Fei Ji and the officials did not follow. Xiao Ming instructed Fei Ji to take the officials to the Jinling government office to establish the governing body for Jinling City.

When the two arrived, Huang Tingzhi was sitting in the courtyard reading a medical book. Seeing Xiao Ming, Huang Tingzhi merely glanced at him casually and then returned to his book. Xiao Ming had learned from Fei Ji that Huang Tingzhi had a very stubborn personality and never feared powerful figures. Because of this, he had offended many powerful families.

However, in Xiao Ming’s opinion, it was abnormal for a reclusive master not to have a temper. After all, with great skill comes the capital for self-confidence.

Huang Tingzhi had naturally never seen Xiao Ming, and seeing Xiao Ming follow Ye Qingyun, he was even less inclined to pay attention.

Ye Qingyun, seeing Huang Tingzhi’s rudeness, stepped forward to reprimand him, but Xiao Ming stopped him. Xiao Ming instructed Ye Qingyun to prepare brush, ink, paper, and inkstone for him, while he himself sat directly in front of Huang Tingzhi.

According to Fei Ji, Huang Tingzhi was already fifty-three years old, but the Huang Tingzhi before him had dark hair and a robust physique, looking even more energetic than an ordinary Qingzhou resident, showing no signs of his advanced age. Perhaps this was due to his mastery of traditional Chinese medicine's health preservation techniques.

Xiao Ming did not announce his name when he sat down. After Ye Qingyun had prepared the brush, ink, paper, and inkstone, he began to write in front of Huang Tingzhi with the brush. What he wrote was none other than "Qianjin Yaofang" (Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold), by the famous Tang Dynasty physician Sun Simiao.

Huang Tingzhi at first paid no attention to what Xiao Ming was doing, but as more and more characters appeared on the paper, he couldn't help but glance over.

After that glance, he couldn't stop. Wherever Xiao Ming's brush moved, his eyes followed, even showing a look of eagerness.

After writing one chapter from "Qianjin Yaofang," Xiao Ming stopped writing and pushed the paper towards Huang Tingzhi.

Huang Tingzhi was startled. He put down the medical book in his hand and at this point examined Xiao Ming, then glanced at the paper on the stone table.

Ignoring Xiao Ming, he picked up the complete scroll and began to read it. Once he started, he couldn't put it down, as if he had found a treasure in the world, praising it constantly as he read.

Huang Tingzhi read with intense concentration, oblivious to his surroundings, while Xiao Ming waited quietly. For such reclusive masters, it was necessary to be humble and courteous.

Although he could simply place medical books in the medical academy, it wouldn't work without someone proficient in medicine to study and teach them.

Soon, Huang Tingzhi put down the paper, stroked his beard, and nodded slightly. "Your Highness Prince Qi has gone to great lengths."

Ye Qingyun and Xiao Ming were both startled. Xiao Ming said, "How do you know I am Prince Qi?"

"When I was in Chang'an, I met Your Royal Highness Prince Qi's Imperial Concubine Zhen, and even took her pulse. In fact, it was I who detected Imperial Concubine Zhen's pregnancy. Your Highness's appearance resembles hers by about forty percent. Now that Jinling City has fallen to the Qi army, and this General Ye is the commanding general, who else could he be so respectful to? Precisely for this reason, I recognized you as Prince Qi at first glance," Huang Tingzhi said.

Xiao Ming nodded slightly, thinking, 'He truly is an old fox.' He stood up, cupped his hands, and said, "It was truly disrespectful to detain Elder Huang here. Governor Ye did not know who Elder Huang was, and I hope Elder Huang will forgive him."

"This Governor Ye is indeed a bit reckless. At that time, I was treating patients and saving lives. In my view, whether it's the Qi army or the Wei army, these are all common people of the Great Yu Empire. A physician's heart is benevolent, so how could I just stand by and watch them die?" Huang Tingzhi still felt angry when he thought about it, but Xiao Ming was, after all, a prince, so he couldn't speak too harshly.

“Elder Huang, please don’t take offense. It was an urgent time of war, and Ye Qingyun simply made a mistake in identifying you. However, what you said about a physician’s benevolent heart truly resonated with me. Elder Huang, would you be willing to come with me to Qingzhou to establish a medical system?”

Xiao Ming smiled bitterly.

“Establish a medical system? How would you establish it?” Huang Tingzhi paused, then asked.

Xiao Ming smiled frankly, extending his right index finger to point at Qianjin Yaofang. “Today, whether it’s physicians or artisans with extraordinary skills, all of them selfishly hoard their knowledge. Father passes it to son, master to apprentice. Those without sons would rather let their skills be lost than pass them on to others. How lamentable! Now, establishing a medical system means breaking this bondage, allowing all who wish to learn medicine to do so. What does Elder Huang think of this?”

Huang Tingzhi’s expression shifted slightly upon hearing this. “Then how can Your Highness ensure that all who wish to learn medicine can do so?”

“To tell you the truth, Elder Huang, I have already established a medical academy in Qingzhou. However, something happened a while ago, and now I urgently need someone like Elder Huang to take on this important responsibility!” Xiao Ming said solemnly.

“Medical Academy?”

“Yes! Like a school, but specialized in the study of medical principles.”

Huang Tingzhi gently nodded, then pondered for a moment. “Then Your Highness means for me to go to this medical academy to teach and dispel doubts?”

“Yes, that is precisely my intention. Elder Huang’s medical skills are superb and renowned throughout the world. If Elder Huang presides over the medical academy, he will surely be able to cultivate a large number of truly skilled physicians. This would also benefit the world, would it not?” Xiao Ming said slowly.

Huang Tingzhi did not speak, but fell into hesitation. He was a free spirit, and could not stand being confined.

Xiao Ming smiled and stood up. He continued, “Elder Huang, what you just saw was merely a fragment of a Qianjin Yaofang. I have even more here.”

Ye Qingyun then picked up the brush again and began to write. This Qianjin Yaofang was just one of them; he also wrote other medical books, all of which were masterpieces that had been passed down through modern times, and even included anatomical diagrams.

Huang Tingzhi then began to read again, and he was even more shocked than before, especially by masterpieces such as Bencao Gangmu (Compendium of Materia Medica) and Wenyi Lun (Treatise on Pestilence).

The more Huang Tingzhi read, the more surprised he became, as if his mind had gone blank. At this moment, Xiao Ming suddenly stopped writing.

“Alas, this...” Huang Tingzhi was looking intently, still not satisfied, and seemed quite distressed.

Xiao Ming said, "Elder Huang, I am not an unreasonable person. Inviting Elder Huang to Qingzhou is also for promoting medicine and saving lives. But if Elder Huang insists on staying in Jinling City, I will not force him. Later, I will have Ye Qingyun send Elder Huang back."

"Your Highness, you..." Huang Tingzhi's face changed rapidly.

Xiao Ming feigned a look of regret and said, "Then Elder Huang, please think slowly. I will not accompany you." With that, Xiao Ming left with Ye Qingyun, and as they left, he also withdrew the guarding soldiers.

On the way back, Ye Qingyun said, "Your Highness, you went through so much trouble just to keep him, so why are you letting him decide whether to stay or leave?"

"One cannot use force with such reclusive masters. Using force will have the opposite effect. And what good would it do to force him to stay? It's easy to gain a person, but the hardest is to gain a person's heart. If his heart is not with me, what's the use of keeping him? I've let him see these medical texts. Whether he stays or not is up to him. You don't need to make things difficult for him," Xiao Ming instructed.

"Yes, Your Highness, I understand!" Ye Qingyun said.

Under the escort of soldiers, Xiao Ming arrived at Prince Wei's mansion. For the next two days, he had officials further compile various data from Jinling City.

After gaining a detailed understanding of the Jinling City treasury, Xiao Ming prepared to return to Qingzhou City on the third day, leaving the remaining matters for Fei Ji to handle.

As before, Xiao Ming planned to return by ship this time. All the officials gathered at the dock to see him off.

Looking at Fei Ji and the many officials, Xiao Ming said, "Jinling City is entrusted to you. Remember what you told me, and give me a prosperous thirteen prefectures."

"Yes, Your Highness," Fei Ji bowed.

Xiao Ming nodded. At this moment, the warship was preparing to set sail. Just as the warship was leaving the dock, a figure suddenly appeared in Xiao Ming's sight. Seeing this person, Xiao Ming immediately said, "Wait."

The newcomer was jogging quickly; it was none other than Huang Tingzhi.

Upon arrival, Xiao Ming immediately had someone help Huang Tingzhi board the ship and bring his luggage aboard as well.

"Your Highness, I have thought it through. As Your Highness said, to practice medicine for the benefit of the world and to bless all living beings is the heart of a physician. This medical academy is indeed suitable for me!" Huang Tingzhi bowed and stood before Xiao Ming.

"It's good that Elder Huang has come around. I am greatly pleased." Xiao Ming's face beamed with joy. Huang Tingzhi's return was self-evident; the medical academy was finally going to get on the right track.

"Then from now on, I will trouble Your Highness to take good care of me," Huang Tingzhi said.

Smiling and nodding, he asked Yue Yun to arrange a cabin for Huang Tingzhi to rest. Although Xiao Ming was still returning by ship this time, the route was no longer the previous one.

He planned to return by sea with Yue Yun's warships, and on the way, make a detour to the Sanmyo Kingdom. According to Yue Yun, the King of Sanmyo had been constantly talking about him, hoping to meet him personally, and had even expressed a desire to visit Qingzhou.

Xiao Ming thought that a trip to the Sanmyo Kingdom would only add three or four days to their journey, so he decided to make a detour. After all, a stable Sanmyo Kingdom was also something he needed, as he also wanted to establish a naval base there to deter the Japanese navy's southward expansion.

The warships set off, with Yue Yun leading twenty warships.

After leaving Jinling City dock and sailing for four more days at sea, Xiao Ming was woken up by the soldiers' clamor at noon this day.

Life on the ship was boring. He mostly slept, and when he was awake, Huang Tingzhi would drag him along to write medical books for him to read.

He then rose from the cabin and came to the deck, looking forward. His gaze immediately narrowed. Not far away was a large dock, where many ships were berthed, almost all connected together. Among these ships, three were very tall. Xiao Ming immediately recognized them as Qingzhou warships. This was the dock of the Sanmyo Kingdom.

The warship formation sailed for a while longer before docking. Xiao Ming and his entourage disembarked. At this point, the soldiers guarding the dock immediately gave Xiao Ming a military salute.

Then one person left the ranks and ran towards a star fort being constructed behind the dock. Xiao Ming looked up. That was precisely the defensive star fort he had asked Yue Yun and the others to build.

This fortress, resembling a European castle in its entirety, could effectively provide collective defense to protect the soldiers on the land. It was perfectly suited for a place rampant with pirates, because once a pirate invasion was detected, soldiers could immediately retreat into the fortress and use its supplies and cannons for defense, thus allowing a small military force to maintain the island's defense and security.