

## **I. Dynasty 94**

### Chapter 94: The Qingzhou Army

In the dim light of the evening, the merchants who had come to visit Xiao Ming gradually departed.

Xiao Ming had instructed Luluo to hand over the recorded donations to Li Kaiyuan. These merchants had only made verbal promises, and whether they would fulfill them remained uncertain.

However, Xiao Ming wasn't worried about them breaking their promises. The introduction of the membership system had stripped these merchants of any excuse to use the names of feudal lords or princes to curry favor.

Through this system, Xiao Ming had not only standardized the status and code of conduct for merchants within the chamber but also secured substantial benefits for his fief.

The news of the membership system spread rapidly among the merchants.

Eager to secure early access to the distribution rights for glass, many merchants were willing to donate generously to the chamber in exchange for priority access to goods.

Those without sufficient funds could only watch enviously, hoping to accumulate enough resources to one day join the ranks of chamber members.

In a short time, the influx of merchants brought a flood of donations to the chamber, and various resources began pouring into Qingzhou.

“Your Highness, this move of yours is truly brilliant. Just by introducing the membership system, you’ve managed to extract a significant amount of silver from these merchants. I didn’t expect the Cao family from Jiangnan to also get restless and directly donate for a bronze membership,” Li Kaiyuan said excitedly to Xiao Ming as they stood at the Tuo River dock, watching the continuous stream of cargo ships.

Xiao Ming hadn’t anticipated that the glass would lure the Cao family, a major player, into the fold. For a long time, the Cao family had kept their distance from Xiao Ming, but now even they couldn’t remain indifferent.

“The Cao family used to look down on small profits, but with the emergence of glass and the promise of technology sales through the membership system, they naturally became interested,” Xiao Ming said.

A bronze membership required a substantial donation, and the Cao family’s contribution had significantly enriched Qingzhou’s treasury.

“However, the Cao family’s business spans the entire empire. If they gain early access to glass, they’ll undoubtedly reap substantial profits in the short term,” Li Kaiyuan remarked.

“That’s not our concern. No matter what, they’ll have to pay us for the goods they take. The more they sell, the more we earn,” Xiao Ming said, his mood buoyant. The combination of glass and the membership system had provided him with a fresh influx of funds and labor.

Qingzhou’s development could now continue to move forward at a steady pace, rather than crawling along.

Xiao Ming had come out today for two reasons: to inspect the donated resources and to check on the training of the Qingzhou Army.

After chatting with Li Kaiyuan at the dock and instructing him to organize merchant ships for the sale of glassware as soon as possible, Xiao Ming rode his horse to the Qingzhou military camp.

During this period, the steel workshop had not stopped production. On the contrary, as the craftsmen became more skilled, production speed had increased significantly. So far, the workshop had delivered three thousand sets of plate armor and weapons to the Qingzhou Army. In another month or two, every soldier in the Qingzhou Army would likely have a set of plate armor.

In addition to plate armor, the workshop had also delivered one thousand modao, five hundred sets of crossbows, and a number of shields and swords.

As Xiao Ming approached the Qingzhou military camp, he heard the shouts of Lu Fei and the soldiers from outside the gates.

Entering the camp, he saw Lu Fei leading the soldiers in drilling battle formations.

In ancient warfare, combat effectiveness was largely determined by battle formations. The role of individuals in such melee combat was minimal.

Thus, the difference in combat power between well-trained soldiers who could form battle formations and disorganized rabble was immense.

A disciplined formation of five thousand soldiers could easily defeat an enemy several times their size. Many instances of winning against overwhelming odds stemmed from this.

Lu Fei was currently drilling the soldiers in the square formation, one of the most basic battle formations. Other formations included the circular formation, the wedge formation, and the goose formation. On the battlefield, commanders would change formations according to the evolving situation.

This was where a commander's skill was truly tested.

However, while Lu Fei was drilling the square formation, Xiao Ming noticed that this particular square formation wasn't intended for ordinary combat.

Seeing Xiao Ming approach, Lu Fei shouted, "Halt!" and then walked over to him.

"Your Highness, you seem troubled. Is there something wrong with the formation?" Lu Fei asked, bowing.

As the feudal lord of the six prefectures, Xiao Ming held the title of Grand Marshal, overseeing all military affairs in the region. His status as a prince also allowed him to manage all administrative matters in his fief.

Lu Fei, as the captain of Qingzhou, was directly subordinate to Xiao Ming.

Thus, Xiao Ming had the authority to oversee military training.

“The front line has crossbowmen, the middle line has spearmen, and the rear line has modao wielders. This formation is designed to counter cavalry, isn’t it?” Xiao Ming said.

“Your Highness understands battle formations?” Lu Fei asked, surprised.

Xiao Ming smirked. “I am well-versed in all types of battle formations, Captain Lu. Don’t underestimate me.”

Lu Fei looked astonished. “Does that mean Your Highness also knows how to train troops?”

Xiao Ming hesitated. Knowing battle formations and actually training soldiers were two different things.

He dodged the question. “I’ll discuss that with you another time. Today, I’m here to inspect the soldiers’ equipment.”

At this, Lu Fei’s face lit up. “Your Highness, look at these soldiers in their plate armor. Just their presence is enough to strike fear into the enemy.”

On the training ground, five thousand soldiers stood in ten neat square formations, resembling a school assembly during morning exercises.

However, what set them apart was the plate armor they wore and the cold gleam of their weapons, which gave them an intimidating aura.

Seeing these heavily armed soldiers, Xiao Ming felt a surge of pride.

From now on, he would no longer need to fear the powerful families of Qingzhou or make concessions to appease them. The formidable Qingzhou Army was more than capable of crushing any family that dared to threaten him.

“Indeed, they look impressive. But this isn’t enough. Training must keep pace. We can’t waste such excellent equipment,” Xiao Ming said.

The plate armor was made from the highest quality steel in the steel workshop, forged through countless hammer strikes. Xiao Ming was confident that the quality of this plate armor was on par with, if not superior to, that of 17th-century plate armor.

“Your Highness, leave the training to me. If you’re not satisfied in three months, I’ll offer you my head. However, the second batch of recruits is about to join the camp. What about their equipment?” Lu Fei asked, rubbing his hands together with a grin.

Xiao Ming sighed. Lu Fei had become single-minded, always asking for equipment whenever they met. He said, “There will be no shortage of equipment. Every soldier will be fully outfitted. Moreover, in a few days, we’ll receive a thousand warhorses. Set aside some soldiers to form a cavalry unit.”

“A thousand warhorses?” Lu Fei’s face lit up with joy. “Your Highness, where did you manage to get so many warhorses? Horses are what I’ve been lacking the most. In past battles against the barbarians, we suffered greatly because of their cavalry. The barbarian cavalry was fast, and their archers were accurate. We couldn’t catch up to them, nor could we fight them effectively. The casualties were devastating.”