

Mythical 26

Chapter 26: The Road Ahead

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“Yes, apart from the glory inherited from our ancestors, I still had nothing until recently. Now, I have five thousand elite soldiers, a reputation among the lords, and the foundation to restore the Han Dynasty!” Liu Bei’s expression darkened slightly but gradually became more invigorated as he spoke, his eyes shining brightly as he looked at Chen Xi.

“Yes, you have gained so much, but it is still not enough. Far from enough. You are too far behind. Not to mention comparing yourself with the Yuan family, which has had four generations of high-ranking officials, even compared to some local powers, you fall short in everything except for reputation!” Chen Xi’s face carried a smirk that couldn’t be dissipated. Liu Bei was still too naive!

“Please, sir, enlighten me,” Liu Bei straightened up and said solemnly. Since the time Chen Xi had helped him become one of the lords, this was the first time Liu Bei had spoken to him so formally.

“No need for that,” Chen Xi waved his hand dismissively. “Reputation seems important and appears to offer many things, but reputation is hollow. Only strength is crucial!”

“When Duke Xiao of Qin ruled, the Qin State was so weak that the feudal lords did not invite him to their meetings, and wise men of the world did not go to Xiqin. But then, Shang Yang entered Qin, defeated the Wei’s elite troops in Hexi, and established Qin’s formidable army, making the world call them tyrannical! After that, wise men from all over flocked to Xianyang! The feudal lords of Guandong feared Qin like a tiger!” Chen Xi’s face showed a trace of fervor.

“Lords vie for power, seeking practicality rather than reputation. The Spring and Autumn period lasted three hundred years without righteousness, only benefits!” Chen Xi’s sneer deepened. In chaotic times, the struggle was for nothing other than profit; history had long written this.

Liu Bei remained silent, slowly closing his eyes. When he reopened them, there was no trace of hesitation left. “Zichuan, honestly, I never thought someone could see everything so clearly and distinctly!”

“It’s nothing. These things are simple. As a ruler, you may not need to master the art of governance, but you must know how to gain power. When your strength grows to a certain extent, all the rules will change with your words and actions,” Chen Xi’s expression carried a hint of allure. “Rulers who rely on the art of governance to control their subordinates are unqualified. True rulers disdain such trivialities!”

“Zi...Zichuan,” Liu Bei seemed startled, staring rigidly at Chen Xi. The art of governance! This was a profound subject, yet Chen Xi dismissed it with such disdain.

“Xuande, what are you afraid of?” Chen Xi asked calmly. “If the jade seal’s inscription ‘Mandate from Heaven, Eternal Prosperity’ were true, why did the chaos of Dong Zhuo occur? It can only be said that the mandate was initially from the people, but it strayed from them and was ultimately destroyed by them. The people are like water, and the ruler is like a boat. Water can carry a boat, but it can also overturn it. This is an eternal cycle.”

Chen Xi’s words echoed like a bell in Liu Bei’s mind, clarifying many things he had previously been unable to comprehend. He had witnessed famine-stricken people cannibalizing each other, the decadent luxury of Luoyang’s noble families, soldiers risking their lives for a full meal, and generals indulging in wine and music in their camps. These scenes unfolded before his eyes.

“Zichuan, never speak of this again!” Liu Bei, snapping back to reality, glanced deeply at Chen Xi and solemnly warned him.

“Did I say anything?” Chen Xi hiccuped, “Xuande, if you have any questions, you can ask them now.”

“How to take Taishan County, how to become stronger, how to...” Liu Bei gritted his teeth, “how to quell the chaos in this world!”

Chen Xi smiled faintly, “Quelling the chaos is not something that can be achieved now. Before that, you must become stronger, strong enough. Taishan County is a good place, and Qingzhou is a good place. With three million bandits, thirty to forty percent are strong young men. Once you take these people and train them a bit, even if you can’t achieve the power of Western Qin, you can still stand firm like Tian Qi, watching the flames of war across the land!”

"That does sound like a good place, but pacifying it will be very difficult," Liu Bei sighed.

"On the contrary, pacifying them is not very difficult. As long as Xuande can convince Tao Qian to lend grain, taking Taishan County and then swallowing Qingzhou is not too challenging. Those people would not have become bandits if they had a way out. The most important point is that, apart from Bingzhou and Qingzhou, which have been shattered by the Yellow Turbans and bandits, the local powers and aristocratic families in other places are beyond Xuande's current capabilities," Chen Xi said with narrowed eyes. He was very clear about how to handle Qingzhou and even had a rough idea of how to handle the thirteen provinces of the Han Dynasty!

"If Zichuan is so confident, I am willing to give it a try!" Liu Bei made up his mind almost without hesitation after hearing Chen Xi's words. His thirty-plus years of experience had taught him one thing: in this era, the power of aristocratic families and local magnates was formidable enough to influence imperial authority. It was not something a fledgling lord like him could touch. To provoke them would invite endless troubles.

"Alright, give it a try. One must always try to know. If you don't try, who knows it won't work? Who knew Xiang Yu could defeat Zhang Han before that battle? You must try to find out."

"Aristocratic families, local magnates, sigh..." Liu Bei sighed, lost in thought.

"Those people are also a foundation. Although some of them are indeed scum, it is undeniable that nine-tenths of the Han's elite come from this class. Until we have an absolute advantage, we should not think about dealing with this class," Chen Xi shook his head. He didn't have much animosity toward the aristocratic families and local magnates. Despite their land annexation, this class was beneficial to the country.

The most basic level of governance relied on these local magnates. Although there were some rotten apples, it would be a mistake to generalize. Uprooting these families and establishing a new system was a headache-inducing thought for Chen Xi.

For this reason, Chen Xi could only think of limiting, pulling some in, and striking others when dealing with aristocratic families. To eliminate them entirely would mean first dealing with his own family. If he couldn't lead by example, how could he fight against the aristocrats?

Thus, Chen Xi dismissed the idea of confronting the aristocrats. However, to prevent them from controlling Liu Bei while he was still weak and forcing him to retaliate later, Chen Xi initially chose Qingzhou, where the aristocrats and local magnates had been largely cleared out!

This was why Chen Xi's answers came almost without hesitation. Even if Kong Rong and Tao Qian did not recommend Liu Bei, after aiding the king, Chen Xi would have Liu Bei propose himself as the governor of Qingzhou! Naturally, all issues had been considered well in advance!