

Mythical 44

Chapter 44: The Imperial Seal

Liu Bei led Chen Xi and the others back, looking satisfied, only to encounter a furious Cao Cao.

“Lord Cao, how are you?” Liu Bei dismounted and greeted Cao Cao. Liu Bei had a good impression of Cao Cao, who risked his life to pursue Dong Zhuo, as he still held loyalty to the Han Dynasty.

“Lord Xuande, sigh, I, Cao Mengde, have dedicated myself to the public good, only to end up in such a state.” Cao Cao lamented, “Inside the camp, there is revelry and merriment, with no one remembering the alliance’s oath!”

“Lord Cao, why not address me by my courtesy name? It would facilitate our discussions. As for the camp, to be honest, if Zichuan hadn’t insisted I come to watch the spectacle, I would have returned to Taishan County by now.” Liu Bei maintained a courteous demeanor.

“Very well, but this isn’t the place for such discussions. Let’s go to the rear camp and talk further.” Cao Cao, wearing a bitter smile, suggested. Earlier, due to his failed solo pursuit of Dong Zhuo, he suffered losses and was ridiculed upon his return, leading him to leave in a huff. Meeting Liu Bei calmed him, making him curious to see the “spectacle” Liu Bei mentioned.

Chen Xi sat silently behind Liu Bei, half-listening to the conversation between Cao Cao and Liu Bei. The two men seemed to find a kindred spirit in each other, talking as if they had known each other for years and were on the verge of becoming sworn brothers. Despite not yet being the warlords they would become, they shared many common ideals, which would persist even when they became rivals.

“I didn’t expect Lord Xuande to have such capable people under him, able to gather the Xiliang cavalry brought by Lu Bu.” Cao Cao expressed slight envy upon hearing Liu Bei had swiftly dealt with the Xiliang cavalry that had caused him so much trouble.

“Hahaha, Mengde, you give me too much credit. This wasn’t my doing but Zichuan’s planning.” Liu Bei laughed heartily, pleased to be seen as having a strong force. He then explained Chen Xi’s strategy to Cao Cao.

The more Cao Cao heard, the more impressed he became, clapping his hands in approval. The strategy was simple yet played perfectly on the suspicions between Lu Bu, Dong Zhuo, and Li Ru, pushing Lu Bu into a corner and exploiting his doubts.

"I indeed underestimated Zichuan." Cao Cao laughed but felt a twinge of bitterness. He recalled Chen Xi's actions at the start of the alliance and his interactions in the allied camp, realizing Chen Xi had been evaluating potential allies.

"I don't deserve such praise from Lord Cao." Chen Xi's face remained calm, curious about the strange scene. The next time they met, they might be enemies, but he still admired Cao Cao. If not for the risk of arousing Cao Cao's suspicion, joining him would have been the best choice.

"Big Brother!" At that moment, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei rushed in, shouting, "Big Brother, something big has happened!"

"Why are you two so panicked?" Liu Bei asked, annoyed.

Liu Bei had wanted to show off a bit, but now Guan Yu and Zhang Fei's hasty entrance made it seem like he couldn't control his subordinates. However, Liu Bei didn't really mind, as he considered Guan and Zhang more like brothers than mere subordinates. He was just a bit exasperated.

"Big Brother, there's trouble. It's spreading through the camp that Sun Jian has found the Imperial Seal and is hiding it. The alliance leader is sending someone to summon him to the main tent. You should go too!" Zhang Fei exclaimed.

"What?" Liu Bei was shocked and stood up. He then remembered Cao Cao beside him and glanced at him, seeing that Cao Cao was also standing up in anger. It seemed both were equally taken aback, making the situation more understandable.

"Mengde, I'm sure you're just as eager to know the truth. Let's head to the main tent and see what's happening!" Liu Bei took a deep breath to calm his anger and suggested.

"Alright, but please wait a moment, Xuande. I'll be right back!" Cao Cao said, bowing slightly before leaving quickly.

“Lord Xuande, don’t be upset.” Chen Xi smiled, “The Imperial Seal being found is likely true. You weren’t informed because, as the only member of the Han royal family, they wouldn’t dare to keep the Seal in your presence.”

“How can you still smile! What are they thinking! Hiding the Imperial Seal! Do they not respect the Han Dynasty or the Emperor?” Liu Bei fumed, “The Imperial Seal is a national treasure. It must be handed over to the state and returned to the Emperor!”

“Return it to the Emperor? The Emperor is still under Dong Zhuo’s control. Even if it were handed back, it wouldn’t reach the Emperor. Lord Xuande, calm down. The Seal is just Li Ru’s second bait. If Luoyang is to fulfill the previous alliance’s promise and stop the alliance from advancing, the Seal is meant to divide us, forcing us to fight each other and tear down the facade of the Han Dynasty!” Chen Xi explained, seeing Liu Bei struggling to accept the situation.

Liu Bei sat down stiffly, as if frozen. After a long time, he turned to Chen Xi and asked, “Zichuan, is there any chance I can obtain the Seal? I mean, can I keep it safe until we rescue the Emperor?”

“Impossible, at least not now.” Chen Xi shook his head, “Sun Jian will never hand it over, and he might lose his life because of it. The Seal is just bait, a seemingly sweet trap.”

“Li Ru sees further than anyone in the main camp because he knows the Seal is just a symbol. If he can sweep through the eastern lords like Qin Shi Huang did, the Seal will be like the jade bi in Duke Xian’s hand, destined to return eventually. If someone else sweeps through, they will take it. It’s better to discard it now and extract every bit of value. Even if the Seal is destroyed, someone will present a new jade bi, and the Seal will be remade!” Chen Xi explained, seeing Liu Bei still struggling. He couldn’t understand why a piece of stone was worth such a fight.

Is the Seal really that important? Chen Xi didn’t think so. At most, he felt it was a shame to carve such a beautiful jade into a seal. A fine jade should be preserved, not wasted on a seal.

Did Qin Shi Huang really need a seal to prove his achievements and status? What a joke. After conquering the six states and proclaiming himself the First Emperor, did he need a seal for validation? He could use a brick, and everyone would have to acknowledge it.

If holding the Seal meant ruling the world, Dong Zhuo wouldn't have needed to struggle so much. Similarly, the Qin Second Emperor held the Seal but was overthrown by Zhao Gao. The Seal doesn't represent the world; it's just a symbol. Once your status no longer needs any prefix, the Seal becomes irrelevant. You can always make a new one. Why chase after an illusion so desperately? Chen Xi was perplexed.