

Mythical 63

Chapter 63: A String of Unfortunate Events

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The work-for-relief approach completely eased the worries of the refugees. In Taishan, wages were paid daily and never delayed. Chen Xi had already mastered this strategy. As long as the money kept circulating within Taishan, he could continue indefinitely.

For now, Chen Xi was not short of money or food. The spoils from defeating the bandits were sold to Xuzhou and converted into grain, which was then transported back. Xuzhou had an abundance of grain, and Tao Qian was willing to support Liu Bei, making him more than happy to lend food to Chen Xi. Combined with the spoils and grain purchases, Chen Xi had over a million dan of grain at his disposal.

Thanks to the reputation of Kong Rong and the wealth of Tao Qian, Liu Bei was faring much better than Cao Cao at this point. Taishan County was bustling with activity, giving the illusion of prosperity, with bustling streets and a vibrant scene, while Cao Cao was still wandering...

The reason it was an illusion was that if Chen Xi were to withdraw the grain, the entire Taishan would quickly fall into a state of depression and collapse. However, if he could hold on for a few more months until September when the grain ripened, even withdrawing his grain wouldn't pose any issues.

Chen Xi needed to survive these three months. The summer grain was being cultivated everywhere that could be farmed in Taishan, thanks to Chen Xi's investment in seeds and a small number of oxen. Since summer millet took about a hundred days to mature, once they passed this period, the foundation for future plans would be set. During this time, Chen Xi was prepared to deal harshly with anyone who dared to cause trouble.

In July of 191, Yuan Shao had just seated himself in the throne of Jizhou. Cao Cao was about to establish himself in Dongjun. Gongsun Zan had yet to fully conquer Youzhou. Liu Yan had just begun to seal off Yizhou, preparing for his own dominion. Everyone was busy solidifying their foundations, and no one would dare to provoke. This was the final opportunity for development.

The years 192 and 193 would be the last chance for development. Starting in 194, natural disasters would continuously plague the land—droughts, locusts, plagues—causing widespread devastation. But

in 192 and 193, it was only Chang'an's Emperor Xian who suffered from yearly earthquakes, causing the Three Ducal Ministers to change annually...

Taking advantage of this final opportunity, Chen Xi was ready to buy up all the grain he could. He didn't want to end up like Ying Shao, the historical Taishan Prefect who, despite defeating the Yellow Turbans in Qingzhou, gained nothing due to a lack of food. In this era, grain was king!

By hoarding grain during these last two bountiful years, Chen Xi aimed to weather the subsequent disasters and absorb the Yellow Turbans in Qingzhou. This was the most realistic and feasible plan: build high walls and hoard grain.

Zang Ba had already surrendered. Seeing the shortage of capable generals, Zhang Fei found Zang Ba acceptable and didn't object. Hua Xiong, acknowledging that while he could defeat Zang Ba in battle, Zang Ba's command skills might surpass his own, accepted him as a deputy general.

Despite his severe injuries, Zang Ba was pleased to be accepted as a deputy general under Hua Xiong. He expressed his willingness to persuade Sun Guan, Wu Dun, and Yi Li to surrender, relying on his influence in Taishan.

Hua Xiong, though not the brightest, decided to give it a try. Grateful for Hua Xiong's honor and trust, Zang Ba endured his injuries and rode to Sun Guan's stronghold.

True to his word, Zang Ba managed to persuade Taishan's three largest bandit leaders to surrender. Sun Guan soon bound himself and presented himself before Chen Xi.

Thus, the matter of the grain robbery was settled. Chen Xi wasn't concerned about the deaths of the Zhen family members, as they were no longer of use to him.

By September, Taishan was pacified, giving Chen Xi ample time and some useful people at his disposal. However, the strategists he initially sought had not been recruited, as they did not view Liu Bei favorably. Figures like Zhang Zhao, Zhang Hong, and Gu Yong, all from prestigious families, sneered at Liu Bei's emissaries.

In the end, Chen Xi gave up on recruiting more strategists. After all, accumulating grain was something he could handle himself. Having strategists might make his days a bit more leisurely, but their absence wouldn't significantly impact his plans.

The Zhen family, which initially intended to invest in Liu Bei, began to scale back their support for Taishan after Yuan Shao took control of Jizhou. It was evident that in the eyes of the Zhen family, Liu Xuande, though recognized by the Imperial Clan, didn't hold as much potential as Yuan Shao, who had three generations of high-ranking officials in his lineage.

Chen Xi had anticipated this and wasn't surprised. He never expected the Zhen family to support Liu Bei wholeheartedly just because of his presence. This was simply unrealistic.

The Zhen family, based in Jizhou, naturally had extensive ties with Yuan Shao, who was on the verge of dominating the world. Their family management wouldn't allow them to gamble everything based on personal feelings. Though the Zhen family appeared to be wealthy merchants, Chen Xi knew they were more than that. With a hereditary salary of 2,000 dan, the Zhen family wasn't merely a rich merchant family.

The Yuan family had held high office for four generations. In the three kingdoms era, where social standing was paramount, would they let their most favored son marry Zhen Mi just because of her beauty? It was a joke. No matter how wealthy, they were nothing compared to the Yuan family's influence, which now aimed to control the whole country. Merchants were insignificant in comparison.

Chen Xi didn't comment on the Zhen family's decision. It wasn't the right time to concern himself with such matters. Even if Yuan Shao were to be defeated, it wouldn't be wise to eliminate the Zhen family. At most, they could change the family head. Provoking the aristocracy without absolute power was unwise, but if Liu Bei insisted, there was no other choice.

Liu Bei was furious about the Zhen family's withdrawal, especially after being mocked by prestigious scholars during recruitment. Now, even wealthy merchants dared to snub him. Chen Xi's explanation of the circumstances helped calm Liu Bei, preventing a complete fallout with the Zhen family. Still, Liu Bei's simmering anger suggested that if the Zhen family fell into his hands, they would suffer. If not managed, the entire Hebei aristocracy could suffer due to the Zhen family's involvement.

As a precaution, Chen Xi contacted Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping, asking them to undermine the Zhen family's salt and horse trading businesses in Jizhou. The goal was to pressure the Zhen family into apologizing to Liu Bei. If this anger brewed for a few more years and Chen Xi managed to conquer Qingzhou and defeat Yuan Shao, the Hebei aristocracy might be dragged down with the Zhen family.