

Mythical 64

Chapter 64: Turning of Fortunes

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Facing the aristocracy has been an inevitable task for every emperor in history, but truly subduing the aristocracy is something only a handful of emperors have accomplished. Chen Xi didn't believe that the still-growing Liu Bei could subdue these families, even with a time traveler's ability to avoid danger and a vision beyond his era. Directly confronting the aristocracy at this time went against the instincts of a prudent time traveler.

Adopting a dual strategy of carrot and stick, Chen Xi hoped that Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping could crush the Zhen family's businesses, making them understand the difference between nobles and warlords. Ideally, they would apologize obediently, allowing Liu Bei to let go of his simmering anger.

If the Zhen family proved to be formidable, Chen Xi would have to personally take action. Whether through commercial suppression or outright eradication of the Zhen family's upper echelon, he would ensure they received a dignified farewell. Chen Xi could guarantee that even if Zhen Mi truly had the appearance of a phoenix, she would end up as someone else's plaything. Meanwhile, Yuan Shao might feel humiliated but wouldn't start a war with Liu Bei over it.

"Zi Chuan, exactly how much money do you have? Since entering Fenggao, you've been continuously investing money and grain, yet we haven't seen any returns. How have you managed to sustain this? Do we really have that much money?" Jian Yong couldn't suppress his curiosity any longer, especially with the autumn harvest approaching. Even Zhao Yun, sitting nearby, looked up with interest at Jian Yong's question, as everyone in Fenggao City was eager to know.

"I have plenty of money, and it's continuously increasing. Why do you ask?" Chen Xi yawned. "Xuande, no need to stand outside. Come in if you want to listen. Everyone seems interested in this."

"Hahaha," Liu Bei laughed heartily, trying to mask his awkwardness. Seeing that Chen Xi's attention was elsewhere, he stopped laughing as much.

"Indeed, many people believe you, Chen Zi Chuan, to be a money god with boundless wealth," Liu Bei joked. He knew better than anyone that Chen Xi mostly spent his days drinking tea and reading

documents, far from the rumors of daily cartloads of money being brought in. Yet, he had indeed managed to make everyone live in peace and prosperity.

"I have only this much money," Chen Xi said, untying a silk pouch from his waist and tossing it onto the table with a clatter. The pouch was a recent gift from Chen Lan after he arrived in Fenggao. On his left hung a sachet, a delicate creation from his wife, Fan Jian.

"Zi Chuan, what do you mean by this?" Liu Bei, taking a seat, looked at the money pouch on the table, puzzled.

"I mean that I haven't invested a single copper coin into Fenggao. What seems like a lot of money doesn't actually exist," Chen Xi said seriously. "Of course, the refugees we've gathered continuously create value, so it seems like I'm pouring in money, but I have none to invest."

Liu Bei was confused, Jian Yong looked lost, and Zhao Yun scratched his head.

"Okay, to put it simply, you see me paying daily wages. Though not much individually, over time, it adds up to millions of coins leaving my hands. But have you considered that it's not just me spending money? The people earning money are also spending it. After all, if they're paid, I don't need to provide dinner," Chen Xi said lazily, looking utterly exhausted.

Still, they were confused, with blank expressions.

"I opened a few steamed bun shops," Chen Xi yawned.

He had been forced to do this after getting tired of hard bread and had failed numerous times before succeeding. Once he did, it was much better. Compared to hard bread, steamed buns were a profitable business. At least, steamed buns were tasty, filling, and easy to digest, plus nobody knew that each two-*tael* bun used less than 1.5 *taels* of flour. So, business boomed...

Moreover, Chen Xi made sure the free lunch provided for workers was just enough to fill them, not to satisfy them. Hard bread filled the belly, and thin millet porridge was just barely enough. When compared to the steamed buns, fewer people opted for the government-provided lunch. With the same price, why eat the hard bread that was like a rock when the steamed bun shop offered a small dish of pickles? The bun shops thrived even more.

Over time, fewer and fewer people stayed for the government-provided lunch. So, the government negotiated with the bun shops: workers would receive vouchers to eat at the bun shops, getting a small discount for bulk orders. The workers were grateful, the government saved money, and everyone was happy.

Eventually, all the cooks who were originally employed by the government to prepare lunch were reassigned to open more bun shops. It was truly a win-win situation. The government's expenses were cut significantly, and newcomers received coins, discovering they were spending more than those with vouchers. They demanded to convert their wages into vouchers. Thus, the issue of insufficient funds was avoided...

After a while, Chen Xi noticed the number of refugees was increasing, and funds were running low. A clever refugee discovered the vouchers could be used at the bun shops in the evening, too, avoiding the need to spend more money at home on hard bread...

This secret quietly spread, and soon wages were paid mostly in vouchers. Chen Xi spent his days stamping documents with his seal and having Zhao Yun slice them into neat strips. Zhao Yun was impressively efficient at this task, slicing a thousand sheets in one go without damaging the table.

These transformative paper notes started as a general equivalent for everyday needs, and it was practically reasonable. Chen Xi could produce as many as needed without fear of counterfeiting since making the paper required his seal. In the Han dynasty, counterfeiting seals was a capital offense, possibly even punishable by extermination of three generations. Compared to that, counterfeiting paper notes was nothing.

With this system in place, Chen Xi didn't need to pay much in actual money. The massive influx of refugees—bandits-turned-refugees, Yellow Turbans from Qingzhou turning into refugees—continued to grow, transforming them into taxpayers. Taishan appeared increasingly prosperous.

Chen Xi opened more shops for daily necessities. With the entire Taishan County under his control, even bandits had to follow his rules. Most of the coins spent returned to his hands, recycled and spent again. His shops accepted the vouchers...

This wiped out over ninety-nine percent of private merchants. Outside Taishan, the vouchers were useless. Who would accept them? Keep them to exchange for buns? How many could you eat?

If a merchant dared to accept the vouchers, Chen Xi would assess their integrity. For a compliant merchant like the Mi family, Chen Xi would happily exchange the vouchers for grain. For a troublemaker like the Zhen family, who angered Liu Bei, Chen Xi wouldn't mind filling their warehouse with vouchers. Being a human printing press was no pressure at all. So, it was wise for the Zhen family to flee quickly...

Chen Xi meticulously explained his every move, but Liu Bei and the others still looked confused. Watching the weary Chen Xi, Liu Bei couldn't help but interrupt.

"Stop, Zi Chuan. Though we don't fully understand your explanations, from the results, you've done a great job," Liu Bei said, cutting off Chen Xi with a bewildered look.

"Indeed, no one understands. Looks like I need to find an internal affairs expert with an IQ over ninety. It's too lonely now," Chen Xi said, leaning his head on his hand, looking bored.

"Zi Chuan, why do you always look so tired, as if you're always sleepy?" Liu Bei changed the topic, feeling that continuing the previous conversation was too taxing. As long as the construction continued, the details didn't seem as important.

"Spring lethargy, autumn fatigue, summer drowsiness, and winter huddling in bed. Now it's autumn fatigue," Chen Xi said with a sleepy expression. "But don't worry, Xuande. The administrative affairs are under control." He adjusted his position to make himself more comfortable, looking ready to fall asleep again.

Liu Bei, Jian Yong, and Zhao Yun all looked at Chen Xi helplessly. Was that a valid reason? Sleeping through the entire year like a pig, how did he learn all his skills? Was he some divine being who learned through dreams?

"Report!" The silence was broken by a messenger rushing in, shouting loudly. Chen Xi instantly snapped awake, a thin layer of sweat forming from the shock. Liu Bei and Zhao Yun, both sharp-eyed warriors, noticed Chen Xi's reaction, guessing he was startled.

Chen Xi looked seriously at the messenger, his sleepiness thoroughly scared away. Internally, he sighed, resolving not to sleep in the administrative hall again—it was too terrifying.

"What's the report?" Chen Xi asked calmly.

"From Xuzhou, Mi Zhu and Lu Su have come to visit," the messenger announced loudly.

"Hmm?" Chen Xi was taken aback, then his expression brightened with joy. "Xuande, great wealth and great wisdom are arriving."