

Mythical 731

Chapter 731: The Once Mythical Troops

Qin Qi didn't recognize Han Xun, so after poking him with his spear and seeing no response, he frowned and asked, "What are you planning to do?"

"We're going to ensure Lord Xuande's safety," Li Tiao replied solemnly.

"You few, take them to their destination," Qin Qi instructed the soldiers who had recognized Li Tiao and his group earlier.

"Thank you. No need to worry about what's ahead—many villagers have already come out to fight. The private soldiers of the noble families don't stand a chance against them. The people here are nothing like the common folk of the past," Li Tiao called back to Qin Qi as he and his group sped past.

"Seventeen Qi Refinement warriors, and the leader seems to have reached the peak of Qi Refinement," Qin Qi murmured with a darkened expression after Li Tiao had passed. He could sense that Li Tiao's burst of internal energy just now had been even stronger than his own.

"Impressive indeed. Merely a minor leader, yet with such strength," Li Tiao muttered to himself as he gripped his spear tightly. These men were all Yellow Turban leaders who had fought through a decade of life-and-death battles, emerging victorious from situations where survival seemed impossible.

"Let's go check it out!" Xue Zhou and the others quickly followed, taking a few turns before they saw Liu Bei and his companions drumming on the altar.

"Lord Xuande is safe," Li Tiao muttered as he clasped his hands and bowed respectfully toward the altar.

"Those men look like Yellow Turbans," Xun Yue remarked, noticing Li Tiao and his group bowing. The disorganized weapons and yellow headbands made him think of the Yellow Turban Rebellion.

"Yes, it seems to be Li Tiao, Xue Zhou, and the others," Chen Xi replied, nodding as he recognized the group. After all, he had personally signed the discharge orders for these men when they retired from

military service. These individuals were dangerous, with their Qi Refinement level allowing them to easily secure a position as a military officer under any warlord.

"You know them?" Xun Yue asked in confusion.

"Yes, they are people under our governance," Chen Xi said with obvious satisfaction. "That man with the hoe, Old Zhang—he's quite good at farming."

"They ask for little and are easily content. They are citizens, not Yellow Turbans," Liu Bei added in a deep voice as he continued drumming, overhearing the conversation between Xun Yue and Chen Xi. "They are my last line of defense."

"We finally have elite troops who have pledged their loyalty through gratitude—Qingzhou soldiers, the strongest infantry in the land," Chen Xi said with a smile.

Chen Xi never looked down on these former Yellow Turban soldiers who had turned into farmers. After all, he understood the desperation that had driven the world into chaos ten years ago, as he had often heard from Li You and Jia Xu. When forced into a corner, who wouldn't fight back?

"Unlike cavalry, which is terrain-dependent, infantry has no such limitations," Xun Yue commented with a smile. "My brother, Zhongyu, will soon be escorted from Donglai to Fenggao. When the time comes, please convey a message to Borning on my behalf—discipline him harshly, so he understands that intelligence alone doesn't grant license to act recklessly."

Chen Xi only chuckled in response, aware of the recent events in Qingzhou. While many officials focused solely on their duties, trusting in the strength of Tai Shan, Xun Yu's laissez-faire approach was indeed a form of dereliction.

Chen Xi also understood that after this incident, Donglai wouldn't need a great figure stationed there as a precaution, but he still disapproved of Xun Yu's approach.

"Cavalry doesn't necessarily have to be terrain-dependent," Jia Xu said, his gaze fixed on a distant point as he suddenly spoke up. "The Flying Bear Army of old had no such limitations—they could fight in any terrain, be it on water, in swamps, or even over traps."

"Hmm?" Chen Xi was puzzled by Jia Xu's words.

"The first military unit with a soul to be destroyed was the Flying Bear Army, an elite force selected from the Xiliang Cavalry. But for some unknown reason, their army soul was incredibly strange. It didn't enhance their attack, defense, speed, or agility. Once mounted, the Flying Bear Army could disregard terrain entirely," Jia Xu explained with a nostalgic expression.

"Disregard terrain?" Chen Xi muttered, unsure what to make of this.

"It means that once the Flying Bear Army mounted their horses, they could perform some unconventional maneuvers..." Jia Xu struggled to explain further, as he had only seen the Flying Bear Army in action a few times.

"If you can't explain it clearly, don't say anything—it just makes me more confused," Chen Xi sighed, rolling his eyes.

"Zichuan, don't blame Wenhe. After all, back when Wenhe was in Luoyang, he only held a minor position and didn't have much access to such matters," Liu Bei interjected, trying to ease the tension.

"Thank you, Lord, for your understanding. It's just hard to describe what I saw—it was indeed quite strange," Jia Xu admitted, frowning as he recalled the scene.

"Try describing it, and I'll see if I can figure it out," Chen Xi said with a grin, intent on challenging Jia Xu.

"Very well, I'll tell you what I witnessed, and you can draw your own conclusions," Jia Xu said, half-annoyed.

"When I was in Luoyang, I once saw the Flying Bear Army during a military parade. After mounting their horses, they could leap great distances with ease. However, I couldn't shake the feeling that they descended very slowly, despite moving incredibly fast in a straight line. They're also the only cavalry unit I've ever seen that could leap and gain momentum on city walls," Jia Xu recounted what he had witnessed at the Western Garden in Luoyang, then turned to Chen Xi.

"...!" Chen Xi was taken aback. Jia Xu might have had difficulty describing it due to his limited understanding, but Chen Xi had been exposed to many concepts. From Jia Xu's description, Chen Xi deduced that what he was witnessing could involve a partial cancellation of gravity—at least, that was the best way he could rationalize it.

"A cavalry unit like that... perhaps such cavalry could indeed boast the strongest impact force in the world. By the way, Wenhe, could such cavalry cross a body of water without issue?" Chen Xi mused aloud, finally understanding why they were called the Flying Bear Army. It wasn't just because of their emblem—it was because, in one moment, they could be as light as a feather, and in the next, they could strike with the force of a bear.

"So, cavalry could potentially ignore terrain constraints. Although army soul units generally aren't factored into calculations, I wanted to make sure you're aware of the possibility," Jia Xu said, giving Chen Xi a meaningful look, hinting at the deeper implications.

"The Flying Bear Army left a deep impression on me, but what stood out even more was how they were annihilated by the army soul unit known as the Formation Breaker Army because they weren't on horseback while guarding Dong Zhuo in the imperial palace," Jia Xu added, looking pointedly at Chen Xi, his cold smile conveying volumes.

Chapter 732: The End of the Noble Families' Rebellion

This was truly a dark irony—an exceptionally powerful unit that met its end due to complacency. An army with a soul, as long as it retains even a spark, has the potential to rise again. But this time, the annihilation was so complete that not even a trace remained, and the once unassailable might of the Flying Bear Army was lost forever.

What a tragedy. Chen Xi didn't need to think hard to imagine the wails of the Xiliang elite soldiers when the Flying Bear Army was wiped out. They finally encountered an opponent worthy of their strength, yet due to their own carelessness, they had no chance to fight back and were utterly destroyed, losing even the qualification to compete for the title of the strongest in the land.

"Understood, I'll ensure that our forces remain at their peak at all times, not giving anyone an opportunity to exploit our weaknesses," Chen Xi nodded after a moment, resolving that such a tragedy would never befall their own forces.

As he pondered, Chen Xi began to discern a pattern in how elite troops were formed. It seemed that as long as soldiers had a high level of cohesion—whether this came from loyalty, ideology, or any other source—and underwent rigorous training, they could become elite troops. This meant that the Qingzhou army had the fundamental conditions to become an elite force. However, how to elevate them to an army with a soul remained unclear to Chen Xi. Although he had explained the existence of such armies with the concept of willpower, there was still something about it that felt off—they were strong to the point of being monstrous.

[At that time, Li Ru must have been truly formidable,] Chen Xi thought as he glanced at Jia Xu. Compared to Li Ru, Jia Xu was even more adept in strategy, but he preferred to keep a low profile.

While Chen Xi was contemplating whether to give Jia Xu a bit of trouble, Li You was leading his forces to deal with the rebellious noble families.

As he and his troops methodically subdued one household after another, by the time dawn approached, Li You and the remaining 300 members of the city management force had gathered at the gates of the Wang family estate.

"Knock on the door," Li You ordered, glancing at the grand entrance of the Wang family residence before signaling Zhang Wang with his eyes.

"Bang, bang, bang!" Zhang Wang pounded on the main door with his large shield.

"Who's causing trouble at this hour?" An elderly voice called out from inside, and with a "click," an old man poked his head out to see what was going on.

"Seize everyone!" Li You barked after a quick assessment of the Wang family estate.

"Who are you, daring to raid the Wang family in the night?" Wang Yu emerged from the inner courtyard, recognizing the shining armor and realizing the situation was dire, but still attempting to put on a brave front for the sake of his family.

"By the order of the lord, the Wang family is guilty of rebellion. Arrest everyone and await trial," Li You coldly commanded, waving his hand for the city management troops to storm in.

Wang Yu, seeing that his family's private soldiers were quickly overwhelmed, felt a wave of despair. His confidence shattered, he sank to the ground, muttering, "It's over... It's all over... The Wang family is finished..."

When Li You finally opened the main hall doors, the expressions of the gathered noble family heads were a mix of shock, panic, and unease. These once dignified figures now wore faces that betrayed their inner turmoil.

"Thank you, Chief Li, for coming to our rescue," Chen Shang was the first to step forward and bow in gratitude. "There are still a few family heads locked in the secret room."

"Shen family, Deng family, and the others?" Li You's expression darkened slightly.

Originally, Li You had expected families like the Shen and Deng to be the ones to rebel. To his surprise, those who had stayed loyal until the end were the very families that had always tested the limits of the rules, often giving Lu Su, who managed the laws of Fenggao, a headache with their antics.

"Yes, they were taken there after being tied up," Chen Shang confirmed with a nod.

Despite his annoyance, Li You was pleased with the actions of the Deng family and the others this time. He quickly ordered his men to search for the secret room.

"Seems the commotion outside has died down—it's over already," Deng Lun remarked as they waited in the secret room.

"We underestimated the strength of Fenggao," Zheng Tai responded with a wry smile. "But we certainly played our cards well. They're here."

"Yes, I can hear them too," the Shen family head added with a laugh before shouting out, "We're in here!"

With this call, Li You immediately pinpointed the location of the secret room and soon found the mechanism to open it. As the family heads were released, Li You scanned the group, his expression darkening further. Aside from the Zheng family head, the others were notorious for their opportunistic behavior.

"Thank you, Chief Li, for rescuing us," Deng Lun said with a bow, looking relieved as if he had narrowly escaped death.

"Hmph," Li You snorted, turning on his heel and ordering the arrest of the majority of the noble family heads. He had visited each of these households specifically to gather evidence, and now, his reasons for arrest were more than sufficient.

"But, Chief Li, we were merely coerced by that traitor Wang Yu—why are we being arrested?" One of the remaining noble family heads stepped forward, questioning Li You.

"Hanyi, don't interfere. You're different from them—you may be careless in small matters, but you understand the importance of the bigger picture. These others, however, are cunning in small matters but foolish in the important ones. I suspect their private soldiers joined the rebellion last night," Deng Lun said, patting the man on the shoulder.

"Ah, how could that be? Weren't we all supposed to follow the rules and focus on our families' development?" Han Yu wiped the cold sweat from his brow and quickly distanced himself from Bai Ying.

Li You narrowed his eyes, glancing at Deng Lun and Han Yu. For a moment, they felt as if every thought they had was laid bare before him. But then Li You turned away, his expression unreadable, as he led the problematic family heads out.

Chapter 733: One Thing Overcomes Another

"If nothing major happens tomorrow, please do not leave your residences. Marquis Chen and Inspector Mi have some matters that require a visit. Please prepare yourselves accordingly," Li You advised the remaining family heads as he left with the detained noble family leaders.

After Li You departed, those who remained finally understood the meaning of his last words. The fact that Chen Xi and Mi Zhu would visit meant only one thing: the authorities did not intend to pursue last night's events too harshly. They were planning to swiftly resolve and bury the matter.

With this understanding, the remaining family heads no longer felt the initial despair. Instead, they began to feel that the recent events had brought them closer together.

Li You placed the captured individuals into different prisons, with one prison per family. Although a few families had reacted too violently and lost many of their members, most families had not suffered much. Li You was no longer the ruthlessly brutal Li Ru he once was, and he did not intend to execute these thousands of people wholesale.

"You've captured quite a few people, Wenruo," Chen Xi said as he tiptoed to peek into the prison.

"I still think we haven't captured enough. These are just the members of each family within Fenggao. If it were up to me, I'd have rounded up all the members of these families from the entire Qing and Xu regions," Man Chong remarked coldly, supporting Li You.

"There's no need for that. It's enough to discipline them and make them understand. Some families do indeed need to be cleaned up, but it's not necessary to be overly harsh. We should balance punishment with kindness; that's the best approach," Li You replied calmly. "As for tracking them down in the Qing and Xu regions, it's unnecessary. Punish the leaders and set a stern example to maintain order. Being overly strict can be counterproductive."

"What are they doing?" Jia Xu asked, noticing soldiers spreading white powder on the streets and others cleaning by sprinkling water.

"Preventing an epidemic," Qu Qi said as he suddenly appeared. "By the way, could you please move Hua Yuanhua to a different location? Since Fenggao is being replanned, this would be a good time to give him a new place. He keeps picking herbs in my garden. I've told him that I'm growing them, but he just scoffs at me."

"Will this method prevent an epidemic?" Jia Xu asked, looking at Qu Qi.

"Even though I'm not fond of that old man, I have to admit he's unmatched in medicine. If he says this method will work, then it will. But seriously, that old man keeps picking herbs from my yard!" Qu Qi, who was the kind of person who wouldn't criticize someone's ability just because he disliked them, explained honestly.

"Why don't you plant them somewhere else? Why insist on growing them in your garden?" Chen Xi said, feeling helpless. Hua Tuo picking herbs in Qu Qi's yard was partly Qu Qi's own fault.

Qu Qi was a bit of an obsessive; once he decided to plant something somewhere, no amount of persuasion could change his mind. Meanwhile, Hua Tuo kept picking herbs, and the more he picked, the more Qu Qi planted. Now Qu Qi's entire yard was filled with herbs.

There was also the fact that Hua Tuo only picked mature herbs, never depleting Qu Qi's supply entirely. This was the main reason why Qu Qi's garden became more abundant with herbs, and also why Hua Tuo increasingly enjoyed gathering herbs there.

"Why should I be the one to move? Why should I avoid him!" Qu Qi complained, though without much conviction.

"Then plant the herbs in his yard. You have so many students; take them and plant Hua Yishi's yard full of herbs. He'll be shocked!" Chen Xi suggested after staring at Qu Qi for a while.

"The last time I fainted, he used such a long needle to wake me up. How can I not be afraid of him?" Qu Qi shuddered at the memory. "That wasn't acupuncture; that was just stabbing me awake to give me medicine."

"But it worked, didn't it?" Chen Xi retorted. Hua Tuo's approach to medicine was all about being quick and effective. "And who told you to wander off and get heatstroke, needing to be carried back?"

"The problem is, when I woke up, I was still weak, and I watched him cut open a man's belly, stitch it back up, and then I saw that guy alive and kicking a few weeks later!" Qu Qi exclaimed, visibly disturbed. "I can't handle it. Every time I see him, I start trembling. He cuts people open and sews them back up, and they live!"

"I can't deal with it... I just have to avoid him..." Qu Qi was clearly distressed, and understandably so. In this era, anyone witnessing Hua Tuo's procedures would be hard-pressed to accept them.

"That's why he's considered a divine physician, capable of things other doctors can't do," Chen Xi said, patting Qu Qi on the shoulder. "I'll find you some burly students, each over nine feet tall and eight feet wide, to give you some courage. Then you can start planting herbs in Hua Yishi's yard. He'll be quite surprised."

After dealing with Qu Qi, Hua Tuo suddenly appeared, which made sense. Qu Qi had retreated so quickly because Hua Tuo was nearby.

"Hua Yishi, what brings you here?" Chen Xi asked gently. He knew that the medical compendium still needed Hua Tuo's expertise, and he himself was only familiar with basic epidemic prevention. Everything else would depend on Hua Tuo's research since Chen Xi had run out of ideas.

Hua Tuo seemed hesitant, but finally spoke up. "I need some corpses to conduct research. Some of the methods I intend to use may be hard to understand, but I can't pass up this opportunity."

"That's fine. I've already arranged for several intact bodies to be stored in the underground icehouse for preservation. If you need them, you can retrieve them yourself. Just return them to the guards afterward, and they'll handle the rest," Chen Xi replied, keeping his expression neutral. He had anticipated that Hua Tuo's research would eventually require corpses.

"Thank you for understanding, Marquis Chen," Hua Tuo said, bowing deeply. He was used to people not understanding his work, and Chen Xi's calm acceptance meant a lot to him.

"No need to thank me. Living people are more important than the dead, and good people are more important than bad ones. Just follow your conscience," Chen Xi said with a sigh.

Most people of this era couldn't comprehend such matters. Even someone as cold as Man Chong, who dealt death to living people, held a certain reverence for the dead. Hua Tuo's willingness to use the dead for research was a completely different mindset.

"Thank you, Marquis Chen, for your understanding," Hua Tuo repeated, bowing again before retreating. However, before Chen Xi could head off to inquire about the progress of a certain project, Hua Tuo returned.

Chapter 734: An Inevitable Passion

"Doctor Hua, is there something else?" Chen Xi asked, seeing Hua Tuo turn back, knowing he had more to say.

"I want to swap my courtyard with the one next door," Hua Tuo made a rather peculiar request.

"Why?" Chen Xi asked, puzzled.

"The courtyard next door has good feng shui; it's more suitable for me to live in. It's always full of various medicinal herbs, and although there are dried herbs stored in Fenggao, I need fresh ones to determine their properties," Hua Tuo explained with a serious expression.

"...Those were planted by Han Mou, not something that grew naturally," Chen Xi said with a blank expression, knowing that Qu Qi would probably be on the verge of breaking down if his research garden were to be taken over.

"Herbs are naturally occurring; how could they be planted by human hands?" Hua Tuo dismissed the idea with a wave, clearly not believing Chen Xi.

"How can I put this... You know, food grains are also grown by people. What about in the beginning?" Chen Xi said helplessly, knowing how difficult it was to explain these things to someone from ancient times.

"According to the ancient texts, the divine ancestor Emperor Yan, Shennong, was the one who cultivated the Five Grains. He was a deity, beyond what mere mortals could achieve," Hua Tuo responded indignantly, refusing to allow such a comparison.

"I'm at my wit's end. Okay, look, have you ever heard of someone performing surgery on a person before?" Chen Xi asked, noticing Jia Xu gazing at the sky and Li You counting ants on the ground, realizing he'd have to handle the explanation himself.

Jia Xu and Li You didn't have much to say about whether herbs could be planted since they had seen Qu Qi grow mushrooms and wood ear fungus before. They had come to the conclusion that Qu Qi could grow just about anything, so they didn't bother questioning it.

"Surgery?" Hua Tuo frowned at the word but replied, "No, that's something I discovered by chance. Unlike what others say, it's not some immortal technique."

"Your medical skills, Hua Laoge, are even more miraculous than immortal techniques," Jia Xu interjected.

Zuo Ci's healing abilities couldn't compare to Hua Tuo's, and the skills Hua Tuo had honed to perfection were beyond ordinary comprehension. Not only could Hua Tuo instinctively identify medicinal properties, but he could also suppress illnesses for a period of time, a talent that made him practically supernatural.

"So, you see, just because it didn't exist before doesn't mean it can't exist now. The person living next to you, Han Mou, is responsible for the high crop yields in Qing, Xu, and Taishan. He's very skilled at growing things. If not for this, I wouldn't have placed him next to you. He's just as much a rare talent as you are," Chen Xi explained with a smile.

Hua Tuo paused in thought, clearly taken aback. "So, it really can be grown?"

"If you need, you can ask him to plant some in your courtyard too. Then you'll see the results for yourself," Chen Xi reassured him, not caring about whether Qu Qi might get annoyed by Hua Tuo's requests.

"In that case, I'll go back and keep a close eye on things," Hua Tuo said, nodding before he left, swaying slightly as he walked.

"Clang." Huang Yueying suddenly appeared in front of Chen Xi, and a small hammer fell from her sleeve, nearly hitting Chen Xi's foot.

"Miss Huang, haha, do you have something you'd like to ask as well?" Chen Xi asked, seeing that Huang Yueying was a bit embarrassed by the hammer falling out of her sleeve.

"I'm here with Master Zheng. I need some support, and Master Zheng has something to report," Huang Yueying replied gracefully, bowing slightly before she spoke.

"I'm not worthy of being called 'Master' by Miss Huang," Zheng Hun quickly declined the title, not wanting to accept even the slightest courtesy from her.

When Huang Yueying first appeared at Zheng Hun's workshop, he didn't think much of it, as most of the women who came to commission something were usually noble ladies ordering custom items. He assumed Huang Yueying was no different.

However, after observing Huang Yueying's talent and skills, Zheng Hun was utterly shocked. She was a true genius, able to propose solutions to problems he couldn't solve. After only a few days, Zheng Hun realized that she was far more than just a skilled worker—she was an exceptional intellect who had chosen to live and work humbly.

"Alright, what do you need?" Chen Xi asked, half-expecting the request, but still cautious due to Huang Yueying's unpredictable demands.

"I'd like to visit different parts of the city and have a city map, if possible. I'll need protection during these visits. I also need full access to the archives for any texts related to craftsmanship. Moreover, I need master-level craftsmen to produce some of my designs..." Huang Yueying listed over ten different requests.

"I can understand most of these, but what do you need glass ornaments, glassware, and mirrors for?" Chen Xi asked, puzzled.

Huang Yueying didn't answer, but her eyes sparkled as she looked at Chen Xi, reminding him of the look Mi Zhen had when she first saw a set of gleaming glassware and a large glass mirror. It also brought back memories of the disappointment on Fan Jian and Chen Lan's faces when the only set of finished products was gifted to Cai Yan instead of them. Chen Xi couldn't help but sigh.

Chapter 735: The Two Youths

"Approve everything. If there are any special requests, report them all at once. Making just one set at a time is a waste. Hurry up and tell me; in a few days, I'll inquire with others and get everything done in one go. By the way, why did you go to Cai Zhaoji's place?" Chen Xi decisively chose to bend the rules, knowing that making a large mirror was no easy task. To this day, he still didn't know how those craftsmen managed to create one.

"How did you know I went to Cai Zhaoji's place?" Huang Yueying asked, puzzled.

"Because Cai Zhaoji's place is the only one with a glass round mirror. If you hadn't seen it there, you wouldn't have asked for such a thing." Chen Xi waved his hand, indicating for Huang Yueying to step aside and not bother him.

"Many thanks to Lord Chen for your understanding," Huang Yueying said, covering her mouth with a smile. She hadn't known that the item was unique, but after hearing Chen Xi's words, she realized there was something else behind his offer and accepted it graciously.

"Master Zheng, what brings you here?" Chen Xi asked, noticing the somewhat dazed expression on Zheng Hun's face.

"It's like this: Inspector Lu ordered me to create water wheels, wheelbarrows, curved plows, and other tools, and they've all met the requirements," Zheng Hun replied, taking a deep breath to steady himself.

"Oh, that's great!" Chen Xi responded, puzzled by Zheng Hun's lack of enthusiasm.

"The thing is, after Inspector Lu left, he handed the task over to Secretary Wang," Zheng Hun explained with a bitter smile. "Without Inspector Lu's oversight, Secretary Wang's demands have become much more burdensome. The problem isn't the manufacturing; it's that many things need to be redesigned according to her specifications."

"Secretary Wang? Wang Shuzhi? That's impossible; isn't he in Yanzhou?" Chen Xi asked, turning to Li You for clarification.

"He's referring to Fa Zheng's cousin, Wang Yi," Li You explained, gesturing for Chen Xi to step aside so he could discuss matters with Zheng Hun.

"Oh, I see." Chen Xi nodded, realizing he had met Wang Yi before but hadn't known she was holding an official position.

"Surprised?" Jia Xu asked with a smile, noticing Chen Xi's thoughtful expression.

"Not really. Balancing yin and yang is a core principle of governance, and there's no need to differentiate based on gender when selecting the capable. Besides, with people like you overseeing things, if she lacked ability, she wouldn't be entrusted with such important duties," Chen Xi replied, shaking his head. He wasn't particularly shocked, given his past experiences.

"She's indeed a remarkable young woman. When she first started, she made mistakes, but now she's adapted to her role. When Zijong left, he entrusted her with full responsibility for setting up the water management network. She's truly exceptional and makes our work much easier," Jia Xu said with a tone of admiration.

"Let's see how far she can go. Perhaps she'll surprise us," Chen Xi said casually, showing little concern. "She might even benefit from this and gain more recognition if she handles it well."

"She's currently a secretary, but if she performs well this time, she might be promoted to an assistant. She's doing exceptionally well," Jia Xu added, sounding like a proud elder.

"I think so too. If Fa Zheng is promoted to marquis, she might ride on his coattails. As long as she can perform at an average level, it'll be enough," Chen Xi nodded in agreement, aligning with Jia Xu's assessment.

"You're underestimating her. While she may not possess the innate talent that you and Fa Zheng have, her dedication and diligence are truly admirable. Other than Kongming, I've never seen anyone as eager to learn as she is," Jia Xu said, shifting from his earlier teasing tone to one of solemn respect, making it clear that he held Wang Yi in high regard.

"It seems you hold her in even higher esteem than you do Boyan and Ziji," Chen Xi said, somewhat displeased. Although Wang Yi was smart and eager to learn, he didn't think she warranted such high praise.

"Not exactly. I'm simply impressed by her. Her intelligence is indeed above average, but compared to us, it's ordinary. However, her determination to learn has piqued my interest. She might achieve great things," Jia Xu said, looking toward Li You with a hint of nostalgia.

Twenty years ago, Li You had only slightly better potential, but now even Jia Xu couldn't claim an easy victory over him. Li You had maximized his potential, a feat that even Jia Xu admired.

"Let's hope so. The opportunities and effort that Wenru put in back then are nearly impossible to replicate," Chen Xi said, shaking his head slightly. "By the way, keep an eye on that chubby son of yours. He's been dragging my disciple into money-making schemes under my name."

"Haha, Lu Boyan saw through that easily. If he hadn't been thinking along those lines already, he wouldn't have gone along with it so readily," Jia Xu said with a chuckle, not concerned at all about Lu Yu leading Lu Xun astray. As long as they didn't stray too far from the right path, it was fine.

"Isn't it too early to teach him politics as a compromise? It feels like you're rushing things; if you keep this up, Lu Ziji might go off the rails," Chen Xi said, frowning at what he saw as Jia Xu's overly aggressive educational approach.

"It's something he picked up on his own. Besides, even though your disciple talks about competing with Ziji, they actually get along the best among their peers," Jia Xu replied with a neutral expression.

Jia Xu didn't interfere much with Lu Yu's development; he offered guidance but also let Lu Yu rely on his own understanding. So far, Jia Xu was satisfied with Lu Yu's progress, feeling that the disciple Chen Xi had recommended lived up to expectations.

"That's because they've matured earlier than their peers. Friendships are often about shared interests or common goals, or at least having something in common. Do you think any of the other kids in Taishan can really keep up with them?" Chen Xi said, rolling his eyes. "It's not surprising that they've bonded over shared experiences."

"True," Jia Xu sighed, letting the matter drop. Their positions ensured that their successors would be closely watched, and their exceptional talents naturally set them apart from others.

"It's probably for the best that they mature early. I think I'll cut off their allowances and let them fend for themselves," Chen Xi said with a mischievous grin. "Maybe I should assign them some tasks. It's not good for them to be cooped up studying all the time."

"You say that as if you've actually taught them anything. I've spent more time teaching Boyan than you have," Jia Xu retorted, giving Chen Xi a disapproving look. "But your idea isn't bad. Send them out, give them some assignments to handle. It'll save us some trouble."

"I still haven't scolded you for turning my disciple into such a gloomy character. You should be glad I haven't complained," Chen Xi muttered.

"What did you say?" Jia Xu shot him a sharp glance, annoyed by the implication. Since Lu Xun often accompanied Lu Yu, Jia Xu would occasionally offer them advice, and he didn't appreciate Chen Xi's critique.

"Let them handle the local officials in Qing and Xu. They're young, and their presence won't draw much attention. If someone manages to outwit those two, then they must have some real skill," Chen Xi quickly changed the subject, not wanting to escalate the argument

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"Alright, bring that kid Ma Zhong along as well. He's the only one who occasionally manages to contribute to the conversation," Jia Xu considered for a moment before agreeing to the suggestion. It made sense—if someone could manage to fool both Lu Xun and Lu Yu despite their vigilance, they were indeed no ordinary figure.

"I just heard Zhongkang praising him for shooting down more than ten enemy officers last night," Chen Xi remarked with a smile. "In terms of archery alone, he's already quite formidable, no weaker than top generals."

"Speaking of which, you have a good eye for talent. When you first brought those kids back and used them as the pilot group for orphan education, it turned out to be an excellent decision," Jia Xu commented, looking at Chen Xi with some curiosity. Chen Xi's eye for potential remained as sharp as ever.

"Just luck," Chen Xi replied with a modest smile, then shifted the topic back, "Ma Zhong is fourteen now, isn't he? It's about time he received a courtesy name. His martial skills have really improved lately. I heard he was even tricked by your disciple into ambushing Zhongkang with a bow and arrow, and he actually hit him, right?"

"It's time for his coming-of-age ceremony, and we should arrange his marriage soon too. Zhongkang has been training him recently, and he's grown a lot stronger—he's like a young bull now. As for that ambush, yes, he did hit Zhongkang, but that was more of a fluke," Jia Xu said, stroking his beard with a proud expression. His disciple convincing Ma Zhong to ambush Xu Chu was a skill in itself.

"Haha," Chen Xi chuckled, understanding Jia Xu's pride and deciding to let the matter drop. Jia Xu also forgot to ask Chen Xi about his keen eye for talent.

"Let's go report to the lord," Li You suggested after sending Zheng Hun away. Noticing that Chen Xi and Jia Xu had finished their conversation, he spoke up.

As they traveled north along the main street, the faint scent of blood still lingered in the air. The buildings along the street bore the marks of blades, spears, and smoke from the previous night's battle.

"Let's resolve these matters within three months. Once the summer harvest is over, neither we nor Yuan Shao will be able to hold back any longer," Chen Xi said, looking at the scars on the main street before closing the window and turning to Jia Xu, Li You, and Xun Yue.

"We haven't stopped fighting. It's been nonstop, just like this last battle, which might be the biggest we've fought—engaging Yuan Shao's flank while simultaneously waging war against Yuan Shu," Li You said, his calm expression tinged with concern. "Right now, Fa Xiaozhi has probably already marched out of Shanyang, and Kongming might have also moved out of Jiyin."

"Both of them have a keen sense of the battlefield situation, and we told them before they set out that they have full authority to make independent decisions. Only with that freedom can they fully utilize their abilities," Chen Xi nodded, understanding Li You's concerns.

"We'll see if they rise or fall," Jia Xu remarked more calmly than Li You, having complete confidence in Fa Zheng's abilities.

"They will undoubtedly create their own legacies. My only worry is that Xiaozhi might parade in front of Shouchun's gates, and I'm also concerned that Kongming might threaten Wancheng," Chen Xi expressed his absolute confidence, trying to reassure Jia Xu and Li You.

"Kongming is prudent and has Taishi Ziyi and Chen Shu to command. He'll advance steadily and shouldn't encounter any major problems. It's Xiaozhi and Xingba who worry me..." Li You said, his calm facade barely hiding his concern. Though usually clear-minded, his worries sometimes clouded his judgment.

"Xiaozhi and Xingba are of the same ilk—extremely confident and daring enough to take risks. But that might not be a bad strategy," Jia Xu said, glancing meaningfully at Chen Xi. The distance between Runan and Jingxiang had already been proven during Lu Bu's raid on Xiangyang.

"It's too risky," Xun Yue said, stroking his beard as he weighed the situation. "This is gambling on the loyalty of Jingxiang's generals to Sun Bofu!"

"Whether it succeeds or not is up for debate, but this move will certainly drive a wedge between Yuan Shu and Sun Ce, and it might even create distrust among Yuan Shu's officials who are leaning towards Sun Ce," Chen Xi said, waving his hand dismissively. Although there was an element of gambling involved, whether or not to proceed would be up to Fa Zheng and Gan Ning. However, Chen Xi was inclined to believe that they would indeed take the risk.

"It's a shame this opportunity came when it did. With Sun Bofu and Zhou Gongjin ascending to power, we had to initiate our plans early to prevent them from discovering the hidden moves we left behind. Otherwise, after securing the north, we could have used our momentum to wipe out Yuan Shu in a month," Jia Xu lamented. Long-term strategies sometimes had to be adjusted in response to changing circumstances.

"If we had done that, it would have been too hasty and wouldn't align with our current strategy of securing and developing each territory as we go," Xun Yue interjected.

"I think our current method of gradually nibbling away at our enemies is more reliable. By the time we unify the land, it'll be at its peak, and with the momentum of unification, we might even be able to fulfill our lord's oath," Xun Yue calculated, though he seemed to lack confidence in achieving that final goal.

"That was just a suggestion back then. But if we secure the north, use our victory to crush Yuan Shu in a month, and continue to advance without interruption, we might even be able to achieve a seamless surrender across the land," Li You said, waving his hand dismissively. He favored grand strategies like this one, but it was a pity the situation hadn't allowed for it.

"Let's take it one step at a time. The current situation isn't unfavorable for us. Our strategy of fighting while building is part of our plan. Besides, if we abandon the plan to develop the north that Zijing has worked so hard on, he might actually kill someone," Chen Xi said with a playful smile.

At this, the others thought of the diligent Lu Su and burst into laughter, even the usually stern Man Chong showing a stiff smile. If they were to abandon Lu Su's carefully laid plans for the north, Lu Su would indeed be furious.

The group of five soon arrived at the entrance to Liu Bei's residence in the city center. As for dealing with the aristocratic families, they weren't in the mood to handle that yet. Letting them stew for a while would temper their arrogance and give them a clearer understanding of the consequences of rebellion.

"So Lord Xuande really did name his hall this," Chen Xi remarked with a smile as he looked at the characters for "Keji Hall" on the main gate before stepping inside. Standing by the door like a statue was Xu Chu, who didn't move an inch despite holding a large sword.

"Keji, Keji," Li You muttered, shaking his head as he followed inside.

"Still the same as before," Jia Xu said as he entered, offering no further comment. He was more satisfied with Liu Bei than Li You was.

"Maintaining one's true self is more important than anything else," Man Chong said, his expression as impassive as ever, as he and Xun Yue followed the others in. The Northern Campaign was about to begin, and Liu Bei would inevitably be drawn into it!

Liu Bei's role was about to become even more prominent. Despite being the ruler, he would have to join the others in the Northern Campaign.

Chapter 737: Dealing with the Aftermath

Liu Bei's matters were ultimately his to handle. When the time came, he would lead the army into battle as needed. Having personally fought in battles before and with a large group of civil and military officials by his side, Chen Xi truly wasn't worried about Liu Bei.

"Greetings to Lord Xuande." "Greetings, my lord." Two different voices greeted in a disorganized manner.

Liu Bei gestured towards the table, and after the group sat down, he ordered the maids to serve tea and refreshments before dismissing them. "How are things? Did all the aristocratic families rebel?"

"About thirty percent of the aristocratic families did not participate in the rebellion. Some were caught off guard by the unexpected actions of the Wang family of Mount Tai and were forced to join the rebellion due to poor response. Others were simply opportunistic," Li You calmly recounted the events of the previous night.

"At least some of them retained a bit of conscience," Liu Bei said with a strained smile, looking somewhat relieved.

Though Liu Bei was often displeased with certain behaviors of the aristocratic families, he understood that they constituted the backbone of the middle management in this era. While it was feasible to harshly suppress them, completely eradicating these families would create significant short-term issues.

"It's not so much about conscience as it is about interest. The benefits we offer them outweigh those they might gain by siding with Yuan Benchu. So, it's about half and half," Chen Xi said as he took a sip of tea. He hadn't slept all night, and now that the tension had eased, he was feeling drowsy, relying on tea to keep him awake.

"Morality can constrain an individual, but it's far from enough to restrain a family. Even the Wang family of Mount Tai, which has been apprehended, didn't have any major moral issues, did they?" Chen Xi placed his teacup down, shook off his drowsiness, and continued.

Chen Xi's words led to a moment of silence among the group. Morality had long been a traditional value, but Chen Xi's blunt dismissal of it as insufficient in the context of family dynamics made everyone uncomfortable.

"Zichuan makes a valid point. Moral character can indeed constrain an individual, but not everyone possesses such a high level of moral integrity. Within a family, those who can truly be restrained by their moral compass are few; most are just ordinary people," Liu Bei was the first to respond, surprisingly agreeing with Chen Xi.

Liu Bei had long grown accustomed to Chen Xi's straightforward manner and didn't mind if his own statements were occasionally contradicted. In fact, Liu Bei welcomed it, as it often meant there were better solutions to consider.

"That's the situation. Ordinary people will always be the majority in this world. The sage's teachings aim to guide them, but there was never an expectation that everyone would become a sage. Just as Wenruo said, it's about balancing kindness with authority. It would be a shame to wipe them all out. For the Wang family of Mount Tai and other such families, we'll execute the ringleaders, confiscate most of their assets, and exile them," Chen Xi said with a sigh.

Improving moral standards is indeed crucial, but to achieve universal altruism, the level of moral development required is almost unattainable, even by Chen Xi's standards.

"Then let's proceed accordingly," Liu Bei said after some thought. "As for Fenggao, any citizens who suffered losses last night should be fully compensated. Those who were injured or killed in the battle should receive the same benefits and compensation as regular soldiers."

"There's no issue with the finances," Li You nodded.

Although much of Tai Shan's fiscal reserves had been converted into materials, the treasury still held substantial funds. Moreover, they would undoubtedly confiscate the wealth of several aristocratic families today. Additionally, those families who sought to take advantage of the situation would likely end up paying for their miscalculations. Thus, Tai Shan's treasury was in good shape.

"The central street buildings and the city of Fenggao will soon need to move to the second phase you mentioned, Zichuan. When you initially proposed the fortification-level planning for the central street, I thought you were exaggerating. But it seems you were right after all," Liu Bei remarked with a sigh.

"We might as well make some profit out of it," Chen Xi smiled. When they built it initially, the walls were a full ten feet thick, with even the thinner sections being several feet deep. Now, by tearing it down and rebuilding, the internal space would naturally expand considerably.

"It's also time to reclaim the land deeds and reassign them," Li You calculated, estimating the timing.

"I'm planning to open up paper-making technology," Chen Xi suddenly brought up the topic.

"It's about time. We now have the strength to safeguard this knowledge," Liu Bei nodded. In the past, they had to be cautious of both the aristocratic families and other warlords. But now, their power had matured to the point where they no longer feared any challengers.

"When the time comes, let's have Xianhe return and compile the 'Great Dictionary' and 'Character Source' first," Chen Xi said. "We should first establish our dominance in culture and morality."

"I've heard a bit about these from Xianhe over the years. He seems to have been working on them for quite some time. But what exactly are they?" Liu Bei nodded but then asked. He genuinely didn't know much about Jian Yong's work. Among the original group, Jian Yong had always been the least noticeable.

"You'll understand once you see them, my lord," Xun Yue said with a smile. He was also aware of Jian Yong's ambitions. If the work succeeded, Jian Yong's name would be remembered throughout history.

"We'll discuss it when the time comes. As for those aristocratic families who were opportunistic, give them two choices: either let us copy a set of their family's academic knowledge before sentencing, or send eighty percent of their offspring to become teachers. We still have a significant shortage of teachers in Tai Shan. If eighty percent of their offspring become teachers and there are no major issues, we can let them go," Liu Bei said firmly. He was quite interested in the family teachings of the aristocracy.

"This method... is quite clever," Xun Yue weighed the idea.

Allowing the copying of family teachings would be a severe blow to the aristocratic families. Even if they carefully selected what to share, the process would likely expose much of their core knowledge, revealing their essential teachings.

On the other hand, sending eighty percent of their offspring to become teachers might seem like a good offer. But with most of their children teaching, how many would be left to take government positions? Without officials in the family, how could they maintain their status?

"Let's proceed with that," Chen Xi nodded in agreement with Liu Bei's proposal. There wasn't much to criticize. Although the aristocracy would likely sacrifice some family teachings for copying and send many of their children into basic education, this was already sufficient for Chen Xi's goals. They couldn't push too hard.

Moreover, if they demanded the full surrender of all family teachings, it might cause further unrest. Similarly, if they forced all the aristocratic offspring into teaching positions, the families might resort to sneaking in their own agendas, potentially leading to subversive influences on young students.

"But what about Zizhong? Originally, he and I were supposed to go placate the aristocracy tomorrow. Now that Zichuan is taking over, I hope Zizhong isn't too spooked," Jia Xu asked, glancing around and noticing that Mi Zhu was absent, which struck him as odd.

Chapter 738: The Four Classes: Scholars, Farmers, Artisans, and Merchants

"Zizhong is busy revising the commercial regulations, and Madam Zhang is about to return north to Jizhou, so she needs to coordinate with Zizhong on updating the management rules. Meanwhile, Lady Gan has recently become more delicate due to her pregnancy, so all these matters have been fully entrusted to Zizhong," Liu Bei sighed as he explained.

As he spoke, Liu Bei glanced at Chen Xi, noticing that Chen Xi was also deep in thought. Liu Bei smiled and asked, "How is Lady Chen? I'm still waiting for her to become my daughter-in-law."

"She's doing well, just sleeping more these days, but no other issues," Chen Xi replied, his lips curving slightly as he thought of Chen Lan, which lifted his spirits.

"Did the chaos in the city last night disturb her?" Liu Bei asked with a sigh, recalling how the sounds of slaughter had visibly agitated Lady Gan.

"Fortunately not. My inner courtyard is well-insulated against noise, and any intruders were swiftly dealt with by my household guards," Chen Xi replied with a smile. His residence was well-protected, especially with Hua Xiong's family living next door and the presence of a seemingly harmless yet formidable small white dog.

"That's good to hear. As for Zizhong, please be understanding of his situation. The merchant guilds are quite chaotic. Although they generate wealth quickly, from what Zizhong, Madam Zhang, and Lady Gan

have reported to me, there's a lot of infighting and frequent revisions of the rules," Liu Bei advised, looking at Chen Xi.

"They're still revising?" Chen Xi raised an eyebrow. "That's rather inefficient."

"With you putting it that way, I'm at a loss for words," a hearty voice chimed in as a man of medium height with a robust build and an air of prosperity entered the main hall. After bowing to Liu Bei, he greeted him first, "Greetings, my lord."

"Zizhong, please sit," Liu Bei smiled, motioning him to take a seat. "You'll need to bear more responsibilities in the coming days. If you encounter any issues, consult with Zichuan."

"Rest assured, my lord, I will not fail you," Mi Zhu said with a smile before turning to Chen Xi. "Zichuan, I will also need your guidance."

"I'll point out any problems I see, but it's best not to rely too heavily on me. I can only offer advice; whether it's suitable or not is up to you to determine. You should make the decisions regarding the merchant guilds, and as for any vacant positions, just fill them with those families that didn't cause trouble this time," Chen Xi replied with a nod.

"Zichuan, tomorrow you and Zizhong will visit each family to hold them accountable," Liu Bei said, sipping his tea and glancing at Chen Xi for confirmation.

"I'll gather them all at the Manxiang Tower on North Street. I'll send them invitations, stating that visiting each family individually is too time-consuming, so they should all come there," Chen Xi suggested after thinking for a moment.

"You can handle these minor details as you see fit. The aristocratic families are used to your unpredictable ways. If you were to visit them personally, they might not be able to handle it. But if they're gathered together, how will you decide who gets what?" Liu Bei asked, not too concerned about the matter but curious about how Chen Xi would distribute the rewards.

"Whether it's blessings or punishment, it's all the ruler's grace. How much they receive is our decision; whether it's fair or not is up to them to feel. Whether they fight for it or not is their choice," Chen Xi shrugged, indicating that there was no need to overthink it.

As Chen Xi had stated earlier, after the first year, Liu Bei should have made the world take notice, and by the third year, he should be a dominant force. Now that the internal troubles had been dealt with, it was time for them to set the rules. They could throw out the rewards and let the families fight for them. It didn't matter much who got more or less.

"Wouldn't that dishearten those families? After all, some of them did stand by us during this turmoil in Qing and Xu provinces," Mi Zhu frowned, dissatisfied with Chen Xi's approach to distribution.

"We're giving them benefits; how they're distributed isn't our concern. To be honest, I'm not interested in the specifics of how each family is doing. We just need to know that this group supported us, and we'll reward them as a group. That's enough," Chen Xi replied with a nonchalant expression.

"Zizhong, we are the rule-makers, not caretakers. We don't need to focus on individual families. Our attention should be on the collective. My concern is with broad fairness, not absolute fairness. There can be some variation," Chen Xi added, noticing Mi Zhu's hesitation.

"I've learned much," Mi Zhu said after a pause, standing to bow in thanks, while the others also fell into thoughtful silence.

"This principle seems to apply to all of us here. Don't focus too much on individual gains and losses or personal fairness. We need to consider the bigger picture to avoid mistakes. Many things that seemed significant in the past are now trivial matters for us," Liu Bei said as he stood up.

Chen Xi's words helped Liu Bei understand why he had felt that some issues were mishandled. While he had become a dominant force, his perspective sometimes remained stuck in the past.

For example, after witnessing the private soldiers of the aristocratic families converging on Fenggao's center last night, Liu Bei's anger flared, and he had wanted to eradicate all the rebellious families. He even harbored resentment towards those who hadn't rebelled.

This was why Liu Bei's smile had seemed forced when Chen Xi had proposed how to deal with the families. Although Liu Bei knew Chen Xi's approach was correct and agreed with it, he couldn't help but feel a sense of frustration.

Why should I have to restrain myself? I'm already a dominant force, so why should I hold back? My goal is to serve the people, not to forgive the aristocracy. Why should I only punish the ringleaders and let the rest go?

These thoughts had been simmering in Liu Bei's heart, accumulating over time. Coming from a humble background, Liu Bei had always harbored resentment towards the aristocracy. However, as the name of this hall suggests—Self-Restraint (克己)—Liu Bei had always restrained his desires, striving to balance the current situation.

This restraint was why Liu Bei had never lost his principles. He maintained his original ideals by continually checking his desires and avoiding venting his anger towards the aristocracy, instead trying to view their issues objectively with Chen Xi's guidance.

But this didn't change the core issue: Liu Bei's deep-seated bias against the aristocracy. Now that Liu Bei had the strength to oppose them, even if all the middle and lower-tier officials from the aristocracy were to leave, he still had the scholars from Qing and Xu provinces and the students he had trained to rely on.

At this moment, Liu Bei finally realized where he had gone wrong. While it would take time to change his bias against the aristocracy, with continued adjustment, Liu Bei would eventually come to view the aristocracy as part of the common people he served.

Chapter 739: Relocation

After realizing the issue within himself, Liu Bei frowned slightly before calming down. He looked toward Chen Xi with a sense of gratitude, interpreting Chen Xi's words as being directed at him.

Chen Xi, puzzled by Liu Bei's expression, instinctively nodded in response, though he was left baffled as he glanced at Mi Zhu, not understanding why Liu Bei was nodding at him.

"The height from which one stands determines the perspective one needs. Although height influences perspective, the rapid elevation we've experienced might leave many under our rule struggling to

adapt," Liu Bei said earnestly. "We, as leaders, must set an example for those below us, ensuring that no momentary negligence leads to future calamities."

Chen Xi felt speechless, wondering why Liu Bei suddenly escalated the conversation to such a serious tone. Resigned, he simply echoed, "What you say is indeed true, Your Excellency."

In truth, Chen Xi had no idea what Liu Bei was driving at. He didn't believe he had any issues with perspective; at most, there might be gaps in his understanding. Viewing this era through the lens of someone two thousand years in the future, Chen Xi found it riddled with flaws and far from perfect. How could any system or ideology blind him to reality?

The others chimed in agreement, though Chen Xi doubted anyone but Liu Bei needed such advice.

Mi Zhu had long adjusted his mindset since the first time he ascended to the top of the Five Great Merchants. As he took control over the entire Qing and Xu province's commercial regulations and began to influence commerce throughout the land, Mi Zhu had reached the pinnacle, his heart rising along with it.

While he might still show some softness in dealing with the aristocracy due to his background, once they entered the commercial sphere, Mi Zhu had no fear. He dealt with them as he saw fit, not hesitating to crush anyone who disrupted the merchant guilds. In this realm of capital operations, Mi Zhu had no shortage of resolve.

As for Jia Xu, Li You, and Xun Yue, they were on another level entirely. Their education and past influence were not to be trifled with. There was a time when Li You had nearly held sway over the entire nation, and had Dong Zhuo been more cooperative, who knows how the great conflict might have turned out?

"Zizhong, incorporate paper production into the commercial sector. As for how to manage it and set prices, that will be your responsibility. Just make sure it doesn't operate at a loss," Chen Xi instructed Mi Zhu.

"Rest assured, there won't be any issues with me handling it," Mi Zhu nodded. "Regarding the renovation plans for Fenggao, some residential areas need to be relocated. I've already reclaimed most

of the land under Taishan's name and moved the residents to the outer city, but there are still some who are hesitant."

"Talk to them first. For those willing to move, offer them alternative housing and compensation. As for those unwilling to relocate," Chen Xi paused in thought, "note down their reasons. If it's pure obstinacy, leave it to Boren to handle. How does that sound, Your Excellency?"

"As long as Boren doesn't use overly harsh methods, that should be fine," Liu Bei nodded, agreeing with Chen Xi's proposal, but reminding Man Chong to use restraint. Liu Bei understood that people are diverse, and no one group of commoners could be described in one simple term.

Taishan's populace was indeed hardy, honest, and grateful, but even so, there would inevitably be troublemakers and idlers. Despite the city management forces' efforts to maintain order, some of these rogues would surely become difficult when they saw an opportunity to exploit the situation.

"I'll handle it," Man Chong replied coldly, his expression practically declaring that he would "take them all down." Back when Fenggao was first being established and had just begun to thrive, it was Man Chong who had filled the jails, executing those deserving of it and heavily punishing the rest, which had greatly improved the city's public order.

In fact, if not for Chen Xi's suggestion to employ these troublemakers in labor camps, Man Chong would have likely decorated the marketplace with their heads. Once Man Chong started enforcing the law, he showed no mercy, and the number of executions quickly piled up.

"How did you handle it, Zizhong?" Man Chong asked icily, clearly already in enforcement mode and likely eager to demonstrate his severe methods again.

Jia Xu quietly distanced himself from Man Chong. He had no desire to interact with the man when he was in such a mood. Man Chong in enforcement mode was not someone to be trifled with.

"How else? When we demolish and rebuild, we simply move them to another place. We cover the costs incurred during their temporary relocation. If the new location is too far from their original farmland, we provide them with land closer to their new homes. As for the trees in their yards, we convert them to cash equivalents," Mi Zhu explained the entire relocation policy.

"There are also various other small compensations. We ensure that apart from changing locations, the people suffer no real losses," Mi Zhu sighed, though some residents were still dissatisfied.

"In that case, it's within my jurisdiction. Just a bunch of troublemakers," Man Chong scoffed at Mi Zhu, clearly unbothered. For him, it was a simple matter of enforcing the law.

"In the future, when resettling refugees, we should offer them housing on a rental basis. That way, if we ever need to relocate them again, it won't be such a hassle. Of course, we should maintain Zizhong's current relocation policies," Chen Xi hesitated before deciding to leave the matter to Man Chong.

As for land ownership, the truth was that all the land in Taishan belonged to the Taishan government. However, Chen Xi had no intention of enforcing that right. The houses built during the early days of the settlement had been constructed through relief work, and once the economy stabilized, those houses were given to the people who had helped build them.

"Rent the houses?" Liu Bei was the first to react to Chen Xi's suggestion, quickly realizing the implications. "That sounds reasonable. However, make sure to publicize this policy. Also, ensure that they cannot privately sell these properties."

"That works," Mi Zhu nodded. He didn't see any issue with the change. After all, Taishan's previous approach to refugee resettlement was not much different, except for the new rental agreement.

"Will the lease be indefinite?" Li You pondered for a moment before asking.

"And what happens when the current generation passes away? Should the lease be inheritable? If the parents both held leases, and they leave behind only one child, would that child inherit both properties, or would one be reclaimed? If the property is reclaimed, will the people accept it? What if there are three children? What about cases with no children but a designated heir?" Without waiting for Chen Xi to respond, Li You fired off a series of questions.

Chapter 740: Postpone, Focus on Medical Development

Chen Xi nearly spat out his tea. Li You was thinking too deeply and too meticulously, directly pointing out the biggest issues with the proposed measures. It was clear that Li You had already figured out that all the land in Taishan, and most of the land in Qing and Xu provinces, was under government control.

"Are you also going to ask if adopted children should inherit the land? Or if a citizen without children designates an heir, should that heir inherit the property? And by the way, if the house is damaged, should the government repair it or should the citizens?" Chen Xi looked at Li You, exasperated.

"It seems Zichuan had already planned these things years ago. The title of 'planning ahead' is no joke," Li You said, nodding at Chen Xi. "In that case, there's no need for me to ask further."

"I did have such thoughts back then, but I didn't have enough time to delve into these matters, and more importantly, I haven't implemented them yet. You've brought up these issues too early." Chen Xi sighed, resting his hand on his forehead before picking up his teacup.

"So, it's not finished?" Li You asked, slightly taken aback.

"Do you think I'm some kind of divine being? It's not that exaggerated. I haven't even started on this yet. If it hadn't been brought up today, I probably wouldn't have mentioned it until after we secured the North. By then, with Zijing back, we could have slowly worked it out." Chen Xi lowered his hand, picking up his tea.

Li You nodded, acknowledging that he understood. At the same time, Chen Xi admitting he hadn't completed this plan made Li You feel a surprising sense of relief—it reminded him that Chen Xi was human, not a god.

"Let Boren handle this matter for now. As for the issues Wenyou raised, we'll take our time. While the world is in chaos, let's quickly bring as much land under state control as possible. Of course, private ownership should be allowed; making everything uniform generally doesn't lead to good outcomes." Chen Xi set the general tone for the discussion.

"Ensuring social security will require significant effort and will be quite costly," Li You nodded, accepting the basic direction Chen Xi had set. "But it's a necessary course."

Li You, despite his occasional obsession with certain administrative details, was certainly capable of functioning as a capable chancellor, so he quickly came to terms with the situation.

The others in the room also began to grasp what Chen Xi was suggesting, although the issues seemed distant.

"I never expected you to have foreseen so far ahead," Jia Xu said, stroking his beard with a touch of sentimentality. When he had first arrived in Taishan, Chen Xi's youthful face contrasted with the far-sighted wisdom he displayed, which earned Jia Xu's admiration.

"This is what I excel at. When it comes to development, as long as the people handling the details are competent, governing the nation is not as difficult as it seems," Chen Xi said with a hint of pride.

There was no need for Chen Xi to be modest when it came to internal affairs. Everyone knew how incredibly skilled he was in this area, and the results spoke for themselves.

"Let's set this matter aside for now. Zichuan, you and Wenru should discuss it further. When Zijong returns to Taishan, the three of you can research it more thoroughly. If others feel it's necessary, they can also contribute suggestions." Seeing that Chen Xi had made up his mind, Liu Bei made the final decision.

Liu Bei, though not as clever as the others, had been through the early days of Taishan's development and could guess what Chen Xi intended. He understood that now wasn't the right time to fully implement such plans.

"Yes, Wenru, I'll need your assistance when the time comes," Chen Xi said, turning to Li You.

"I can't say whether this will be beneficial in the long run, but based on the current situation, while it may increase the state's burden, it will also greatly enhance stability. Besides..." Li You muttered, half to himself.

"We don't know what the future holds, so let's focus on the present. Our goal is to lay down a solid path for those who come after us. If they stray, it's not our fault. At least, I don't see this as a burden." Chen Xi shook his head slightly, looking at Li You with confidence.

"That's true. As long as you're alive, money will never be an issue for the state. The treasury will always be full whenever you want to do something," Li You said, his tone a mix of admiration and reflection.

"Hahaha, you two can stop flattering each other now. Let's get things wrapped up—Wenhe is about to fall asleep." Seeing that Chen Xi and Li You were about to continue their conversation, Liu Bei cut them off with a laugh.

"Let's finish up quickly and head home. I'm planning to reopen the earliest government and private kilns in Taishan, aside from those being used to rebuild Fenggao," Chen Xi said, glancing at Jia Xu, who was pretending to sleep.

"Are you planning to start producing glassware again?" Jia Xu asked, raising his head to look at Chen Xi. After a moment of consideration, he continued, "Are you preparing to stockpile these items for post-war recovery? Normally, these wouldn't be considered essential."

"It's not about stockpiling; it's just about reopening the kilns," Chen Xi replied, hiding his expression behind a fan. "Both medical and astronomical research have reached a certain level, and they'll soon require this material. Unfortunately, we don't have much large, colorless crystal available."

"Medicine requires this?" Li You asked, puzzled, unable to see the connection between medicine and glass.

"Yes, it's needed. Initially, it wasn't necessary, but now it is. Hua Tuo's research has advanced to a frightening depth, and he'll soon need to delve even deeper," Chen Xi said with a wry smile. It was a pity that the technology wasn't yet advanced enough to produce optical glass; they would have to rely on colorless crystals for now.

"At this point, no one will consider excellent physicians as mere craftsmen. In our state, the best physicians are treated on par with scholars. This proposal can be approved," Jia Xu said after some thought. If it benefited medical research, it was worthwhile.

"The issue is that training a doctor is more difficult than training a scholar. Fortunately, Hua Tuo has been standardizing medical prescriptions," Chen Xi said, helplessly. "In any case, reopen the kilns and start producing some glassware. It will greatly aid both medical and astronomical research."

"This proposal is approved. Additionally, let each department report what they need, and we'll fire up the kilns to produce everything in one go," Liu Bei said, nodding. Then, thinking of Gan Shi and the soon-to-depart Zhang Shi, he couldn't help but hatch some plans.