

Mythical 74

Chapter 74: Peace of Mind with Grain in Hand

"Before you came, the people of Taishan were starving and dressed in rags. Now, fifty thousand people under your governance have surplus grain at home. Naturally, you can eat with a clear conscience," Liu Bei said as he walked in from outside the main gate, laughing as he heard Chen Xi's words. "Zilong, you have executed your duties flawlessly, tirelessly running between the villages to ensure the people's food supply. The people are grateful to you, offering seasonal fruits and vegetables. Why wouldn't you eat them?"

"My lord, running between the villages has made me aware of the people's suffering and the military adviser's capabilities. My efforts are trivial, yet I receive the people's gifts. I cannot eat with a clear conscience," Zhao Yun said, his face showing hesitation. He couldn't feel as confident as Liu Bei and Chen Xi that he had done better.

"Eat your share. They give it to you, so just accept it. If you don't feel comfortable, then next year, do even better so you can feel at ease. Don't waste their goodwill by letting the food spoil. Their gifts are also to encourage you to do better. So eat, and think about how to do even better next year instead of blaming yourself for not doing enough now," Chen Xi said, tossing the bag of dates to Zhao Yun. "And don't forget to take those other things home. While you eat, think about how to improve next year!"

Zhao Yun stopped arguing and seemed determined to do even better. Liu Bei didn't mind that Zhao Yun, an exceptional warrior, was spending so much time on agriculture. After all, Zhao Yun was doing an excellent job, and with Liu Bei not lacking in generals, it made sense to let Zhao Yun strengthen the foundation of Taishan, especially since he was willing.

Liu Bei grabbed a date and began eating it without hesitation, feeling just as justified as Chen Xi. After all, Chen Xi had come to Taishan with him, and now that Taishan was prosperous, Liu Bei shared in that success.

Zhao Yun ate the dates stiffly, still feeling uneasy, but he didn't argue further. If he had argued as fiercely as last time, with his spear in hand, Chen Xi would have sent him back without a second thought.

"Zichuan, did you summon me for something important?" Liu Bei asked as he sat at the head of the table, kicking Chen Xi to the left-hand seat and taking a sip of tea.

"There are some things we can start implementing. Although I could issue the orders, it's better to have you confirm them. Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, and the others will be back soon, and we can finally start the second phase of our plan," Chen Xi said, nodding and moving past the topic of the gifts.

Seeing Chen Xi so serious, everyone became more focused. Even Zhao Yun put aside his guilt to wait for Guan Yu and the others to arrive.

It wasn't long before Guan Yu and the others arrived. Seeing Liu Bei at the head of the table and everyone else looking solemn, they too took their seats seriously.

"Zhongkang, you personally guard the main gate, and have your tiger guards secure the entrance. While we review this year's affairs and decide on next year's direction, no one is to enter," Chen Xi said to Xu Chu, who stood behind Liu Bei.

"Understood!" Xu Chu responded, saluting with his large sword before stepping out.

"Let's talk about our current situation. In May, we took over Taishan and used public works projects to gather many refugees. Then Zang Ba and Zhou Cang subdued the Taishan bandits, giving us a large labor force, which was the foundation for rebuilding Taishan. Over the past four months, we've built enough housing for the winter, and roads between villages..." Chen Xi began detailing the achievements of the past four months. With fifty thousand people under his direction, the entire Taishan had been turned into a construction site, barely meeting his goals.

"Once again, I thank you for your assistance, Zichuan," Liu Bei said, now having a clear understanding of his domain's wealth for the first time.

"It sounds like a lot, but spread over fifty thousand people, it's just enough," Chen Xi said with a sigh.

"We still have a shortage of land, but a million dan of grain should be enough to implement our plans slowly."

"Zichuan, I think you've forgotten that a million shi is just the harvest. Tax revenue will only be around four hundred to four hundred fifty thousand shi," Lu Su pointed out, nodding towards Zhao Yun.

"Yes, I know. Zilong's Tuntian Decree takes half in the first three years and then reverts to one-third. Is that correct?" Chen Xi glanced at Zhao Yun. "This method isn't bad; it makes it easier to gather refugees. After all, people are the most valuable resource in these times."

Chen Xi had anticipated a million dan harvest, remembering that the Han Dynasty at its peak produced about twelve billion shi. Spread over a population of around fifty million, that amounted to about six hundred jin per person, which wasn't much.

These twelve billion shi were mainly produced by the provinces of Qing, Xu, Yan, Yu, and Ji, which hadn't been ravaged by war. This was why Tao Qian could easily allocate a million shi of grain to Liu Bei, and why during the Battle of Guandu, Yuan Shao's vast army never ran out of grain while Cao Cao's forces often went hungry.

The advantage of the Central Plains was this: these five provinces were the main grain producers. As long as they had good harvests, even if the rest of the country didn't produce grain, they could still manage. But the tragedy of the Three Kingdoms period was that these five provinces were eventually devastated.

Later, places like Jingzhou, Yangzhou, and Yizhou became major grain producers, but this was because they were developed later, primarily during the Tang Dynasty. Before that, these regions were mostly wild, uninhabited lands used to exile criminals.

However, the Chengdu area in Yizhou was indeed a good place, transformed by the incredible efforts of Li Bing and his son. But that was just one area.

Everyone valued grain highly. With grain in hand, there was peace of mind. In wartime, grain was crucial for political stability. With over four hundred thousand shi of grain in hand, many plans could be implemented. Even if they couldn't take Qing Province all at once, they could lure it in with grain and slowly nibble away at it. Who could refuse such generosity? They would be seen as benevolent for taking in refugees and providing them with land to survive. How noble they were!