

Mythical 97

Chapter 97: Chen Xi's Schemes

Since the autumn harvest and the beginning of Chen Xi's plan to annex Qingzhou, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei have been constantly busy along the border between Qingzhou and Taishan. Whether it's gathering refugees, suppressing the Yellow Turbans, or helping Zhao Yun cultivate the land in Qingzhou, they have been fully occupied.

Guan Yu and Zhang Fei have been using their small cavalry units to harass the Yellow Turbans on the edges of Qingzhou. Thanks to the speed advantage of cavalry over infantry, they repeatedly escaped the Yellow Turbans' encirclement. When Guo Jia and Fa Zheng arrived in Qingzhou, they not only continued to weaken the Yellow Turbans by luring them into attacks but also turned the stronger Yellow Turban rebels into robust refugees to further increase the cultivation efforts.

Naturally, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei were not entirely comfortable with this. They worried that integrating these rebellious Yellow Turbans into the farming teams might corrupt the entire group. However, after Guo Jia explained his considerations, and comparing the potential losses with future benefits, they decided to follow his plan, with increased supervision. Once the Yellow Turbans were completely subdued, the troublesome elements could be dealt with later.

By November, as winter arrived, Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, and Zhao Yun packed up and returned to Fenggao. Unlike Guan Yu and Zhang Fei, who only needed to manage their troops, Zhao Yun began his second mission upon his return.

Previously, Chen Xi and Lu Su had discussed taking care of widows and orphans, a task that naturally fell to Zhao Yun due to his familiarity with the entire Taishan region. Zhao Yun was to scout the area, and then, when Liu Bei visited before New Year's Eve, the process would be smoother.

These were the official duties. In reality, Zhao Yun's task included investigating Taishan's population to prepare for potential infiltration by other warlords next year and to calculate Taishan's military potential. This was crucial for silently swallowing Qingzhou without exhausting their resources.

Less than a month later, Zhao Yun returned to Taishan. Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, Taishi Ci, and others had gathered at Liu Bei's residence to welcome him. They planned a banquet, but seeing the ready food, they began eating immediately, as brothers often do.

"Greetings, Lord!" As soon as Liu Bei entered, everyone put down what they were holding and stood up to salute.

"At ease, at ease. I didn't expect Zilong to return to Fenggao so soon," Liu Bei said, returning the gesture as a recognition of their hard work over the past six months. "Tonight, let's not talk about official matters. Let's drink and celebrate!"

"With the Night Illumination Jade Lion, how could he not be quick? I want a horse like that too," Zhang Fei muttered, though his loud voice carried clearly to everyone.

"There will be good horses, fine wine, and more in time. Jizhou, Bingzhou, and Liangzhou all have excellent horses. Wild horses roam the northern plains. Even Red Hare has its weak moments, so we shouldn't worry about finding good horses in the north. You're too impatient, Third Brother," Chen Xi said with a smile.

"When we have good horses, I want a black one! And I definitely want to duel with that Lu Bu several more times!" Zhang Fei said, tearing into a lamb leg and waving his fist excitedly, imagining the scene.

"Second Brother, do you have any aspirations?" Chen Xi asked, knowing Zhang Fei's straightforward nature. Even if Lu Bu died, Zhang Fei would likely feel regret for not having fought him more.

"To restore the Han Dynasty!" Guan Yu replied solemnly, ending the conversation with Chen Xi, his habit of formal speech unchanged.

The banquet, which had been a mess thanks to Zhang Fei and others, was re-arranged. Fortunately, Liu Bei had enough servants and cooks. By the time Liu Bei sent someone to fetch Zang Ba, who was freezing outside, the feast was ready again.

The hall was warm with fire pits around. Lu Su had four of them behind him, sweating and looking very pleased. Chen Xi found the scene odd, wondering if Lu Su had started to enjoy the heat. He quietly moved a bit farther away.

As they drank and exchanged toasts, talk turned to Hua Xiong, still in Yongzhou, and Gan Ning, training the navy at sea. Both were likely having a hard time, considering Yongzhou's harsher cold and the stronger winds at sea.

Chen Xi knew a bit about their situations. Hua Xiong had become the leader of the largest band of robbers in Yongzhou. He didn't rob commoners, only other bandits. The first time he did this, other bandits tried to deal with him, saying he broke the rules, but they ended up being robbed.

Hua Xiong's actions led to a coalition of two or three thousand bandits aiming to eliminate his band. However, they were easily defeated by Hua Xiong. Now, he had a reputation throughout Yongzhou and even attracted the attention of Li Jue, who tried to recruit him but was refused.

After this, Hua Xiong declared that bandits in Yongzhou had to pay him protection fees. This idea came from Chen Xi. Bandits who paid would receive protection from his forces; those who didn't were on their own.

There were always troublemakers, giving Hua Xiong targets to establish his authority. After dealing with a few groups, he turned most of Yongzhou's bandits into obedient followers. With three to five thousand men, Hua Xiong believed he could meet Chen Xi's goal of bringing the Emperor back to Taishan.

Of course, this was just talk. Chen Xi's real goal for Hua Xiong was to gather the bandits in Yongzhou. Hua Xiong needed a base. Before Dong Zhuo's death, he would extract Jia Xu and Li Ru. After Lu Bu killed Dong Zhuo and the Emperor took control, Hua Xiong would present gifts and invite the Emperor to move to Taishan.

No one would agree at this stage. Confident officials like Wang Yun and Lu Bu wouldn't believe it. Hua Xiong would leave after delivering supplies. When Li Jue and Guo Si threatened Chang'an, Hua Xiong would pretend to fight for the Han, then retreat in defeat, explaining that even Lu Bu couldn't win.

This setup meant that when the Emperor fled in a few years and Liu Bei and Cao Cao came to greet him, the loyalists wouldn't want to move to Taishan. They would argue it was too remote or unsuitable, allowing Liu Bei to retain his status and return with honors.

In this scenario, the Emperor and his court would eventually move to Cao Cao's territory, proving they were shortsighted. Liu Bei, as a Han relative, would gain prestige and support, making his path forward even smoother.