

## Mythical 99

### Chapter 99: Situational Overview

Marrying a wife is complicated, but taking a concubine is much simpler. Just consult the almanac for a good date. After all, wives and concubines are entirely different concepts in this era.

The date chosen was May 8th. The reason for this choice is straightforward: given Chen Xi's status, any marriage has to follow the proper protocols, unless he chooses to ignore customs, which is unlikely. Chen Xi wouldn't break societal norms unless absolutely necessary.

With administrative tasks being handled increasingly efficiently, training for Taishan's soldiers continues unabated. Next year is critical, despite plans initially set for the year after. The presence of the unpredictable Guo Jia means Chen Xi must be prepared for anything, especially considering the numerous conflicts expected next year.

"Zi Long, are you sure we have a population of 860,000?" Chen Xi asked, shocked by Zhao Yun's census data. Unbeknownst to him, Taishan had become one of the top ten most populous counties in the Han Empire. Though it still lagged behind Nanyang, Runan, and Chen counties, it had become a significant county.

"I visited each town myself," Zhao Yun replied with a smile, backing his claim with personal experience.

"Hmm, this means supporting 50,000 soldiers short-term won't be an issue," Chen Xi sighed in relief. With swift action, he was confident that the well-trained troops could handle any incoming Yellow Turban threats.

Chen Xi envied Yuan Shu's vast resources. If Liu Bei had Yuan Shu's power base, they wouldn't need to be so calculating. Yuan Shu's territories, including Nanyang's 2.4 million people, Runan's 2.1 million, and Chen's 1.5 million, provided a massive manpower reservoir. Swallowing a million Yellow Turbans wouldn't even strain Yuan Shu's resources. This disparity made Chen Xi both envious and resentful.

"We're really making a move on Qingzhou next year?" Zhao Yun questioned.

"Yes. Based on reports from the north, both Gongsun Zan and Yuan Shao are preparing for war. When spring arrives, they'll likely clash. Once Yuan Shao is free, his primary target will be Qingzhou," Chen Xi explained, fingers interlocked, a cold determination in his eyes. "If we don't want Yuan Shao to interfere, we must solidify our hold on Qingzhou quickly."

"And what about Dong Zhuo? I can't believe he would do nothing after all the effort he's put in," Zhao Yun pointed out, addressing the concern that had been on Lu Su's mind.

"Dong Zhuo's days are numbered," Chen Xi replied, pulling out a report from Chang'an. "Look at this; you'll understand."

After reviewing the document, Zhao Yun and Lu Su exchanged glances and said in unison, "The Beauty Trap!"

"Exactly. If 'The Thirty-Six Stratagems' were for sale, it would be worth a fortune. I wouldn't have noticed these details before, but now, it's simple—just apply the strategies. Although the flexibility isn't great, it's more than enough to deal with ordinary commanders," Zhao Yun remarked with a smile.

"Zi Long, stop dreaming. Such books are heirlooms in any family. Zi Chuan was generous to lend it to us, but selling it is impossible. Military texts have never been for sale," Lu Su quickly quashed Zhao Yun's idea.

Lu Su understood the book's value. Unlike Sun Tzu's "The Art of War," which trained top-tier commanders, "The Thirty-Six Stratagems" was perfect for mass-producing competent military officers. It didn't create exceptional commanders but ensured a steady supply of near-first-rate leaders.

Teaching with "The Art of War" would yield nine mediocre soldiers for every one elite. In contrast, "The Thirty-Six Stratagems" ensured most officers could handle common strategies, leaving complex tactics to specialists.

"Indeed, we're not selling this book. It's mainly for fishing. I'm curious how the Lu family is doing with it. Though it can't train top talent, a wise person can glean much from it," Chen Xi smiled, shifting the conversation back to Dong Zhuo. "I predict Wang Situ will soon outmaneuver Dong Zhuo."

"It's a shame for Li Wenyou's brilliant plans to end like this. He must be disheartened, seeing this coming but unable to act," Lu Su lamented.

Literati both admire and compete with each other. Lu Su, admiring Li Ru's intellect, found his downfall regrettable.

"Hmph, traitors and rebels deserve no pity!" Zhao Yun scoffed.

"That's about the situation," Chen Xi said, organizing the documents. "Our focus now is on acquiring grain. With this year's summer and autumn harvests in Jiangnan being bountiful, we must buy as much grain as possible before April."

In Yanzhou's Chenliu, Cao Mengde was struggling through a harsh winter. Despite support from noble families, the lack of resources made his situation worse than Liu Bei's. Even with Xun Yu's efforts, Cao Cao couldn't alleviate the pressure. Without a stable Chenliu, the Cao family hesitated to invest heavily.

As a result, despite capturing Chenliu in 191, Cao Cao missed his first chance to thrive. However, if he survived the winter, Zao Zhi's land reforms would bear fruit. Missing the summer harvest by two months had already planted the seeds of hardship.

Meanwhile, in Yuzhou, Yuan Shu lived comfortably, controlling fertile lands. After learning of Sun Jian's defeat by Liu Biao, he took in Sun Jian's family. With troubles in Nanyang, Yuan Shu decided to punish Liu Biao for interfering, planning to avenge Sun Jian.

Regarding the Imperial Seal, Yuan Shu knew Sun Ce had it but refrained from asking. His aristocratic pride wouldn't allow him to stoop to such levels. Conflict with Sun Jian was one thing, but stealing from widows and orphans was beneath him.

Instead, Yuan Shu hoped to earn the Sun family's loyalty, expecting them to eventually offer the seal. For now, his main concern was consolidating power and preparing for future conflicts.

Chen Xi, monitoring Yuan Shu, noted a significant development: Zhou Yu had joined Yuan Shu, likely to rally Sun Ce's ambition.