CHAPTER TWO

TO GUARD THE EMPEROR
190–196

To govern Yan province 190–192
Fight for survival 193–195
Welcome to Xu city 196
Captive Emperor

Chronology

190 spring: Cao Cao at Suanzao with the “loyal rebels” as General Who Displays Firmness
Dong Zhuo moves the imperial court west to Chang’an
Cao Cao defeated at Rongyang in Henan
Cao Cao gathers reinforcements in the southeast
191 spring: Yuan Shu’s general Sun Jian captures then abandons Luoyang; Dong Zhuo retreats to Chang’an
summer: the alliance east of the passes begins to break up
autumn: Yuan Shao takes over Ji province; war between Yuan Shao and Liu Biao against Yuan Shu and Gongsun Zan
Cao Cao attacks Black Mountain bandits in Yan province, then becomes Administrator of Dong commandery
192 spring: Yuan Shao defeats Gongsun Zan in Ganling
Cao Cao defeats bandit raiders in Dong commandery
summer: Cao Cao takes charge of Yan province to oppose the Yellow Turbans from Qing province
Dong Zhuo killed at Chang’an; his officers Li Jue and Guo Si seize power
winter: Cao Cao persuades the Yellow Turbans to surrender; they are reformed as the Qingzhou Troops; Cao Cao endorsed by the government at Chang’an
193 spring: Cao Cao drives Yuan Shu away to Yang province
Cao Cao’s father Cao Song is killed in Xu province
autumn: Cao Cao attacks Tao Qian, Governor of Xu province, and slaughters the people
194 spring: Cao Cao withdraws from Xu province
summer: Cao Cao embarks on a second campaign into Xu province; Chen Gong and Zhang Miao invite Lü Bu to take over Yan province; Cao Cao comes back to oppose the invader at Puyang
autumn: Cao Cao and Lü Bu both withdraw from Puyang

195 spring: Cao Cao recaptures Shanyang
summer: Cao Cao holds Jiyin; death of Tao Qian in Xu province, succeeded by Liu Bei
autumn: Cao Cao gains decisive victory in Shanyang; Lü Bu flees to Xu province

Emperor Xian escapes from Chang’an
winter: Cao Cao acknowledged by Emperor Xian as Governor of Yan province

Emperor Xian establishes his temporary court at Anyi in Hedong

196 spring: Cao Cao takes control of Chen, Yingchuan and Runan; he receives title as a general from Emperor Xian and is granted enfeoffment
summer: Cao Cao sets his capital at Xu city in Yingchuan, where he develops agricultural colonies
autumn: Emperor Xian returns to Luoyang
Cao Cao brings the emperor to Xu city; he quarrels with Yuan Shao and takes title as Excellency of Works

To govern Yan province 190–192

By the beginning of 190, the “loyal rebels” against Dong Zhuo’s usurping regime at Luoyang were arrayed in four main divisions. Command north of the Yellow River in Henei was held by Yuan Shao, aided by Wang Kuang the self-styled Administrator of that commandery, while a number of lesser leaders gathered their forces at Suanzao in Chenliu, just south of the River. Further still to the south Kong Zhou, who had been appointed Inspector of Yu province by Dong Zhuo, had occupied Yingchuan but then turned against his former master, while Yuan Shu had his own camp in Nanyang. Not long afterwards, Kong Zhou died and Yuan Shu took over his position.1

1 Major sources for the war against Dong Zhuo are his biographies at HHS 72/62:2327–30 and SGZ 6:172–79, that of Yuan Shao in HHS 74/64A:2375–78, and that of Cao Cao in SGZ 1:5–8, supplemented by his Apologia: Chapter Eight at 358.