

## Great Ming 301

### Chapter 301: Hamster Adventure

#### The Great Ming in the Box

Driven onward by Li Daoxuan's giant hand, the eight of them ran for their lives. As they ran, a huge "wooden castle" appeared before them.

The wooden crate of "Hamster Adventure" was undoubtedly a massive wooden fortress in their eyes.

The sight of the enormous wooden castle startled them, but the colossal palm behind them offered no time for thought. It pressed relentlessly forward, forcing them to keep running. Ahead stood a huge gate.

A small door meant for a hamster was, to them, a "giant gate," as imposing as a city entrance.

Such a bizarre wooden castle stood before them, its equally bizarre large "city gate" wide open. What ordinary person would dare enter carelessly?

But a glance back at the approaching giant hand erased any hesitation—delaying even a second was disrespectful to their own lives. They charged straight for the massive gate...

Boom!

The giant hand slammed against the gate right behind them...

Looking back, they rejoiced: "Thank goodness! This gate is giant to us, but too small for the Dao Xuan Deity. His huge hand can't get through!"

Their relief lasted less than two seconds before realisation struck: "There's no ceiling above us!"

“Ah! Doesn’t that mean... the Dao Xuan deity’s giant hand could attack from the sky?!”

“Oh no! Quick, run forward!”

Old Nan Feng took the lead, sprinting ahead...

As he raced into a narrow passage, a terrifying sight greeted him: a colossal axe hung suspended in the air ahead. The enormous axe swung rhythmically back and forth.

“My god! Careful, watch for traps!” Old Nan Feng yelled, “Careful everyone! Trap!”

The other seven immediately stopped behind him. Their path forward was blocked by the massive swaying axe.

“What do we do?”

“Do we stay here?”

“No... we can’t stop... The dreadful Dao Xuan Deity could catch up any moment...”

“Then we have to dash through.”

“Watch the timing... Look at the axe’s gap.”

“There’s a two-breath interval. We can make it.”

Old Nan Feng took a deep breath. The axe whooshed from left to right. He leaped forward—shuu!—jumping just as it swung back from right to left, barely missing him as it passed behind.

He'd made it!

The other seven spirits soared: "Brother Nan Feng, wait for us!"

Timing their leaps to the gap, they slipped past the axe one by one.

Phew!

All eight passed unharmed. Running wildly again, they turned a corner to find a long, angled downward slope.

"What kind of trap is this?"

Before the words fully left their mouths, a thunderous noise erupted behind them. They whipped around: a massive black iron sphere was rolling straight towards them.

"Aaaaaaaa!"

"Run!"

The eight men charged down the slope in utter disarray, a massive black iron ball rolling menacingly at their heels. Summoning every last ounce of their strength, they somehow made it down the incline and swerved through a small door to the side...

With a resounding boom, the iron ball slammed into the wall directly behind them.

Having narrowly escaped death, they gasped for breath.

One subordinate cried out frantically, “Brother Nan Feng, what kind of bizarre place did we wander into?”

Old Nan Feng: “I don’t know. It’s terrifying, whatever it is. Everyone must tread carefully at every step to avoid triggering any more strange mechanisms...”

His words were barely out when one man stepped onto a loose tile. The panel flipped instantly, sending him tumbling downward. Below, a giant plastic cockroach, electric and buzzing, its eyes glowing red, advanced toward him.

The remaining seven men peered over the edge of the hole, their faces turning pale.

“What’s that?”

“A cockroach that big?”

“It must be a cockroach monster!”

“It’s over. Old Seven is going to get eaten.”

“Can we save him?”

“No way! It’s too high. We don’t even have a rope...”

Old Seven, who had fallen below, roared, “Don’t worry about me! Run! I’m done for! Just run! If you make it out... take care of my son for me...”

Before he could finish, the giant plastic cockroach reached him. Old Seven screamed “Ahhh!” and fainted on the spot.

Old Nan Feng gritted his teeth. "Old Seven's done for. Let's move!"

The seven men ran onward, tears in their eyes. They reached a fork in the path, unsure which way was safe. Forced to split up to test the routes, one man stepped onto the leftmost path only for it to flip downwards instantly. He fell into a huge net below where a giant plastic spider crawled relentlessly toward him.

He shrieked, "Ahhh! A spider monster... Run! Just get away!... Take care of my child...!"

The faces of the remaining six men paled further. They quickly tried the right path and finally found the correct route. But then, the ground gave way beneath one man, plunging him into a large pool. He was just congratulating himself on knowing how to swim when a super-sized plastic shark surfaced nearby...

"Ahhhhhh!"

Old Nan Feng wailed, "Heavens! What kind of godforsaken place is this? Such a hideous place! It took three of my good brothers in the blink of an eye!"

The other four men hauled Old Nan Feng up, urging him onward. "Brother Nan Feng, we can't stop. We have to run. Keep running! If we don't, the Dao Xuan Deity will just release more monsters to eat us."

As soon as the words were spoken, the path suddenly split open. The two men in front plummeted into a pitch-black, bottomless void. Their "Ahhhh!" screams echoed as they fell.

A sense of rush with pride surged through Old Nan Feng. Now was no time for despair. He grabbed his remaining two comrades, leaped across the gaping chasm in the path, and kept running.

Only three were left!

But finally, they reached the exit of the maze.

Seeing the landscape, mountains, and trees outside, the three men instantly heaved a sigh of relief. They had escaped the dreadful castle. Whew...

Old Nan Feng fell to his knees with a thud. "If I'd known I'd lose five brothers, I would never have run. Digging mud back at the labor camp would have been better than causing everyone to die!"

No sooner had he spoken than the golden hand reappeared. This time, it didn't strike or shoo them away. Instead, it opened its palm before them, revealing his five brothers lying there – alive, but unconscious.

Li Daoxuan had retrieved the five little men who had "failed the challenge."

Heh heh heh. The perilous Hamster Adventure wasn't meant for every little hamster to complete successfully. To see one victorious hamster reach the end, mountains of 'fallen comrades' were required.

It was truly tragic!

Seeing the golden hand, they knew they hadn't escaped at all.

Seeing his five brothers alive in the hand, Old Nan Feng understood. He kowtowed fervently. "Thank you for sparing us, great Deity! I will lead all my brothers back obediently for labor reform. We won't dare to run away ever again."

Chapter 302: He Was So Happy

An undercurrent of instability rippled through the labor reform worksite.

The atmosphere felt a bit off!

After Old Nan Feng and his seven companions had fled, the remaining labor offenders couldn't help but feel an itch in their hearts. Seeing that not a single guard had moved or given chase when Old Nan Feng escaped, they secretly wondered: Could it really be that easy to get away? If it's truly that simple, I want to escape too.

Zao Ying, a seasoned figure in the Jianghu, immediately sensed this shift. She lowered her voice and said, "Thirty-Two, if you don't come up with something soon, I'm afraid all six hundred-plus men are going to riot."

Thirty-Two smiled. "No need to worry. Hold your horses."

Zao Ying was both exasperated and amused: This wasn't a reason to worry? Then when would it be time to worry?

She was deeply concerned about the atmosphere growing increasingly tense.

Just then, the eight who had run away earlier actually returned. One was drenched, his clothes dripping wet. The other seven looked dreadful. Their faces were unnervingly pale, as if they'd just been chased five blocks by a zombie while crossing a graveyard ridge.

The other labor offenders gaped in shock. "Huh? They're back?"

"No one's escorting them back."

"Why do they look so utterly miserable?"

"Like they've been chased by monsters."

Old Nan Feng trudged dejectedly to Head Guard Zhong Gaoliang. "Head Guard, we were wrong. We won't try to escape again."

Zhong Gaoliang glanced up at the low cloud overhead, seemingly unsurprised by their wretched return. His lips twisted in a smirk. "Pick up your tools and get back to work. Since you skipped out on work for a while, you'll each work two extra hours today. Understood?"

Old Nan Feng replied: "Understood!"

His head hung low, he obediently picked up his tools and began working with vigorous effort.

The other labor offenders were inwardly stunned. That was Old Nan Feng! The fiercest warrior under Captain Wolf, notoriously rebellious and constantly defying even his own commander. Yet here he was, cowed into utter submission? What on earth had happened to him?

As they worked, the other offenders gravitated towards the eight men. Digging the earth, they asked questions: "What exactly did you run into out there?"

"A terrifying fortress machine! I urge you never to go inside that place."

"It must be a special punishment structure built by the Dao Xuan Deity. Horrifying."

"I'll never go in there again in this lifetime, that's for sure."

Thirty-Two beckoned to Zao Ying and grinned. "Seems the situation here is under control now. Once Old Nan Feng is dealt with, the rest of the labor offenders won't cause trouble anymore."

Zao Ying was intensely curious. "What exactly stopped him? Did you have a hidden cavalry unit stashed around the worksite? Did they intercept and beat Old Nan Feng somewhere out there before letting them come back?"

Thirty-Two spread his hands. "Maybe. Hahaha."

He continued the tour with Zao Ying. They visited the imposing Gaojia Fortress, then he took her to ride on the small train, showing her the vast fields of corn in Refugee Valley. "Look, these fields belong to Dian Deng Zi Zhao Sheng's group, numbering about three thousand people in total."

Zao Ying made a surprised sound. "So Dian Deng Zi Zhao Sheng settled here? Jianghu rumors said Zhao Sheng was pushed into rebellion by the authorities, joined Bu Zhan Ni's army as the leader of the Second Team, then mysteriously vanished. Never thought he ended up joining Gaojia Village."

Thirty-Two pointed and said, "See? That's Zhao Sheng over there!"

Zao Ying followed his finger and saw a scholarly man strolling along the ridges of the cornfield with a group of elderly farmers, animatedly explaining various “key points of knowledge” about planting corn.

Zao Ying’s expression turned peculiar. “A scholar teaching farmers how to plant? Is this... backwards?”

Thirty-Two laughed. “All the corn we grow in our village uses the celestial farming methods imparted by the Deity. Those methods are written in celestial books. Only literate scholars can understand them; the farmers can’t read.”

Zao Ying: “...”

Thirty-Two called out to Zhao Sheng: “Mr. Zhao! Come meet this distinguished visitor. This is Zao Ying of Yichuan, a very formidable leader of a horse bandit group.” (The term “horse bandit group” was a euphemism for mounted bandits.)

Zhao Sheng momentarily froze, then understood. Jogging up from the edge of the cornfield, he started towards them.

His attempt at jogging went poorly. He wheezed like pumping bellows. Arriving before them, he gasped for breath: “Boss... Zao... cough... Greetings... I am... Dian... Dian... Deng Zi... Zhao Sheng...”

Zao Ying eyed him: “You are the renowned Dian Deng Zi Zhao Sheng, Captain of Bu Zhan Ni’s Second Team?”

Zhao Sheng fought for breath: “Pant... cough... yes... mere... humble me... though... it’s... hardly... worth... mentioning... cough...”

Zao Ying covered her face with one hand. “In this state, why on earth would you go into rebellion?”

Zhao Sheng: “Cough... I didn’t... want to rebel! Don’t... know how... suddenly... cough... my fellow Villagers from Qingjian County... hailed me as their leader.”

Zao Ying was speechless. Qingjian County was a place producing fierce warriors and towering heroes. This Dian Deng Zi Zhao Sheng was clearly an anomaly among them.

Zhao Sheng panted for a while, finally catching his breath: "Has Boss Zao also come to join Gaojia Village? Ah! You've truly found the right place. Look at our people from Qingjian County here. Not only do we have good houses and vast fields to farm, many have also found jobs. Every day they ride the big train to work... Everyone's life here is incredibly joyous."

A smile spread across his face. "When we first rebelled, I often felt sorrow. But after coming here, I realized rebelling was the right choice. If we hadn't rebelled, we wouldn't have left our hometown. If we hadn't left our hometown, how could we have come here?"

He raised his hands emphatically. "Coming here is the best decision we three thousand Qingjian people ever made! Haha! Oh, here, try an ear of corn."

He actually pulled an ear of corn from his sleeve and thrust it into Zao Ying's hands.

Zao Ying: "..."

Zhao Sheng laughed heartily. "Corn grown by Qingjian County folks! Deliciously fragrant! Hahaha! Pardon me, I must return to the discussion with my Villagers about fertilizer application."

He dashed off in the direction of the cornfield again.

Thirty-Two yelled after him, "Try walking slowly for once, would you?"

Zhao Sheng was already back to wheezing: "The Villagers... huff... cough... shouldn't... keep them... waiting..."

Zao Ying: "..."

Zao Ying could see it clearly: Zhao Sheng was genuinely happy living here. This utter disregard for personal dignity – the sweat, the dishevelment, the undignified gasping – was itself a mark of profound relaxation. It meant he felt no need to cloak himself in a mask for protection.

Her thoughts drifted to Old Ghost from Guyuan, and to Xing Honglang of Yongji – legendary figures of both the martial and the common worlds. Yet here they all were, living quite contentedly under the shadows of Gaojia's fortress walls. Xing Honglang was even reportedly courting someone.

For the first time, a flicker of doubt – a wavering – stirred within Zao Ying.

Chapter 303: Establishing the Cavalry Camp

The Great Ming in the Box

Zao Ying felt somewhat shaken.

During this year of great disaster, being a horse bandit was truly difficult.

She couldn't bring herself to rob common folks, while looting government offices grew increasingly challenging. Yesterday, when Hong Chengchou's private soldiers chased after her, she genuinely felt a little panicked. For the first time, she worried about the future of her promising horse bandit career.

Since old ghost, Xing Honglang, and Dian Deng Zi Zhao Sheng could all live happily here... perhaps she could too?

After finishing the tour, Thirty-Two left her alone to consider it and returned to the main fortress.

Zao Ying continued wandering aimlessly through Gaojia Village. After circling widely, she ended up back in front of the military camp. There, she spotted the militia handling the five hundred warhorses captured just yesterday.

With steady rainfall around Gaojia Village, grass grew abundantly. The horses here had no worries about food or drink. Having eaten their fill, they now flicked their tails in satisfaction.

Gao Chuwu led a tall horse and grinned at Zheng Daniu: “Daniu, I even helped you mount up yesterday. Can you do it by yourself now?”

Zheng Daniu snorted, “Tsk, what’s so hard about mounting a horse? Watch me.”

He pressed his hands on the horse’s back and vaulted upward with a whoosh. His movement was quite agile.

However...

His momentum carried him too far. He flipped clean over the horse’s back, landing with a thump on the other side. His heavy frame raised a cloud of dust upon impact.

Gao Chuwu roared with laughter, “Hahaha! Daniu, you’re such a fool!”

Zheng Daniu retorted, “I’m no fool! Keep watching!”

He pushed off the horse’s back again, flipping with a whoosh.

This time, he managed to land seated. But the warhorse disliked his rough handling, tossing its hindquarters irritably. Before Zheng Daniu could find his stirrups, he toppled sideways and hit the ground again with another thump.

“HAHAHAHA!”

Gao Chuwu doubled over with laughter beside him.

Zao Ying shook her head and walked over. "Watch closely. This is how you mount up."

She slid one foot into a stirrup, then swung her body aboard with effortless grace. Her other foot traced a smooth arc through the air as she settled firmly into the saddle. The horse offered no resistance, merely giving an obedient snort as if ready to charge into battle.

Gao Chuwu exclaimed, "Wow, that lady is amazing!"

Zheng Daniu muttered, "Oh... I see now."

Cheng Xu stepped out from nearby. "Boss Zao's horsemanship is truly impressive."

Zao Ying sighed, shaking her head again, "It pales compared to the Mongolians or Jurchens."

Cheng Xu replied, "Why compare them? Let's start with how our own men stack up first. Surely you notice how far behind my boys are."

Zao Ying nodded quietly.

Cheng Xu continued, "That's precisely why Gaojia Village sincerely hopes Boss Zao will stay. Only then can our future cavalry unit begin to take shape. Otherwise... with just these clumsy lads here? Even with horses, we couldn't form a proper cavalry."

Zao Ying remarked, "Your village harbors significant ambitions."

Cheng Xu smiled faintly. "Big and not so big."

Zao Ying asked, "How so?"

Cheng Xu answered, "Not so big? Because Gaojia Village doesn't have plans for this world."

Zao Ying: "What about the scale?"

Cheng Xu: "Regarding scale, what we schemed was to save all the common people under heaven."

Zao Ying didn't know how to retort at that moment; it took several seconds before she rolled her eyes. "You act too much like an official, saying nice and nasty words with just your mouth. The previous statement sounded grandiose, but then the next one revealed your true intent."

Cheng Xu laughed heartily: "I wouldn't say this to ordinary people. Only to someone like a boss of your stature. You'd have seen it anyway, whether I said it or not."

Zao Ying understood: This group was plotting rebellion! But their method seemed ingenious; they hid in the small mountain village at the border between Chengcheng County and Heyang County, built up the town, improved farming, accumulated power... Yet in the martial world, only names like Wang Er, King of Disruption, Wang Jiayin, Bu Zhan Ni, and Wang Zuogua were heard; Gaojia Village was unknown.

If she hadn't come here herself, she wouldn't have known such a powerful force was hidden here.

A great figure in the early Ming Dynasty had done this kind of thing.

He built high walls, stored grain widely, and delayed declaring kingship.

His name was Zhu Yuanzhang!

Zao Ying: "To be honest, I'm quite interested in joining. But I'm used to freedom and dislike being controlled. If I join, what rank would I be? How many people would give me orders?"

Cheng Xu considered the question seriously before spreading his hands. "Unfortunately, we don't have such ranks."

Zao Ying: “?”

Cheng Xu smiled: “Gaojia Village started from scratch with everything needing rebuilding, so each department is being set up step by step. I can’t manage Xing Honglang, nor Dian Deng Zi Zhao Sheng, nor Thirty-Two... Of course, they can’t manage me either; we each handle our own tasks and manage our own areas. If Boss Zao Ying joins, you’d definitely manage the cavalry camp; it’s an independent department, and probably no one would oversee you.”

Zao Ying made a surprised sound. “Then who is the ultimate authority?”

Cheng Xu pointed to the sky. “The Deity is, naturally!”

Zao Ying: “Where is the Deity?”

Cheng Xu: “The Deity is a god. If He wished to appear, He would. If He didn’t, no one could see Him. If you, Boss Zao Ying, insist on someone managing you, then from now on, it must be the Deity overseeing you.”

Zao Ying raised her head and looked at the sky.

The sky was cloudless, clear and blue.

Li Daoxuan had covered the lid of the box, so the people inside couldn’t see him at all, and even the low cloud representing him disappeared.

Zao Ying thought to herself: Since arriving in this village, she’d heard about the Deity several times but hadn’t seen Him. That meant this village had no real manager.

What a lovely, free place it was!

Zao Ying: “Then I’ll stay here.”

Cheng Xu smiled. "We welcome you very warmly."

Zao Ying: "Next, what should I do?"

Cheng Xu: "I think first we must establish the cavalry camp. Find a suitable spot nearby for building a stable, fence in the land, then find Thirty-Two and get him to send laborers to build barracks for the cavalry. If the Deity feels inclined, He might bestow a barracks directly from heaven. If the Deity isn't inclined, building slowly is fine."

"Before the cavalry camp is constructed, your people can stay with me. After all, we're all responsible for fighting; we are one family."

Zao Ying: "So next is recruiting soldiers and buying horses?"

Cheng Xu nodded. "Recruit cavalymen, breed warhorses, train cavalry... You surely know more about these than I do, so I won't elaborate. All necessary supplies can be handled through Thirty-Two."

Zao Ying cupped her fist. "Thank you for the guidance."

Chapter 304: Assassination Plan

At the same time Gaojia Village absorbed Zao Ying and began forming a cavalry camp.

Huanglong Mountain.

Wang Zuogua, who had just clashed with Yansui General Wu Zimian, resulting in mutual heavy losses, led the four leaders under his command to sit around a large rock.

"Damn it all," Wang Zuogua scowled, displeasure etched on his dark face. "I almost had it. Wu Zimian's five hundred warhorses were practically mine, then some band popped out of nowhere and snatched the goose right out of my mouth!"

Second Leader Miao Mei whispered, "That group came from the south. The strongest among them was called Old Ghost from Guyuan, flanked by Yongji Xing Honglang and Yichuan Zao Ying. Seems like a formidable rebel force."

Wang Zuogua's expression remained grim. Even though they were all technically "rebels," he didn't bother wasting breath cursing them as "turncoats" or "backstabbers".

Though numerous rebel forces existed under heaven, they were far from united. Inter-faction fighting was unsurprising.

When it came down to it, they were all thieves licking blood from blades; "black eating black" was perfectly normal.

Wang Zuogua brooded silently for a long moment. "If that group headed south, they must've gone to Chengcheng County, right?"

"Yes!" Feishan Hu confirmed. "South would lead into Chengcheng County territory."

Wang Zuogua: "That reminds me of something. Last year, Bu Zhan Ni and I combined forces and attacked Chengcheng County once. We were beaten back at the Bai Family Fortress by strange weapons... still fresh in my memory."

He had been floored by a "block missile," an unforgettable experience due to its sheer absurdity.

"This time, those strange bombs they used exploded and killed a bunch of our men the moment they landed. Could they also be from the Bai Family Fortress?"

Wang Zuogua seemed to recall something, turning to Big Honglang: "Did you figure it out? How did those suddenly killed men die?"

Big Honglang opened her palm, revealing a small round iron ball: "This thing! When the bombs they threw exploded, these little iron balls flew out everywhere. If you got hit, you either died or were badly injured. Extremely vicious."

Wang Zuogua, Miao Mei, and Feishan Hu leaned in to look. After examining it, they shook their heads helplessly. "How can you guard against something like this? Such an outrageous weapon must come from Bai Yuan."

Big Honglang nodded emphatically: "Definitely!"

Wang Zuogua's expression turned serious: "So this means every time we attack the Bai Family Fortress from now on, as long as Bai Yuan is there, we'll face these things?"

Big Honglang nodded: "We can't overpower it."

Wang Zuogua: "Then are we just going to let that ambush stealing our horses slide?"

Big Honglang: "Of course not! Big brother, we must avenge this, or else the heroes of the rivers and lakes will look down on us."

Wang Zuogua: "We can't fight them head-on; how do we get revenge?"

Big Honglang: "We disguise ourselves, get close to Bai Family Fortress's commander, Bai Yuan, then suddenly strike. We can assassinate him."

Wang Zuogua: "The plan sounds good, but the defenses at Bai Family Fortress are tight. How can we easily sneak in?"

Just then, a scout rushed up to report: "Leaders! We've received news that Chengcheng County is assembling a 'large militia,' supposedly gathering several thousand men to guard against roaming bandits."

Wang Zuogua flared up: "Isn't that clearly aimed at me?"

Scout: "It's said the organizer is Bai Yuan, commander of the Bai Family Fortress. He's in Chengcheng County right now, gathering militia instructors from every village and town to discuss major plans."

An idea seemed to light up over Wang Zuogua's head: "That guy left the Bai Family Fortress and went to the county capital? Heh heh heh. The county is chaotic, full of refugees and snakes mixed with dragons. Disguising our men to sneak in there will be much easier than infiltrating the fortress!"

He turned to Big Honglang: "Fourth Sister! Immediately arrange a team. I need top-skilled men from the rivers and lakes, disguised as refugees, to infiltrate Chengcheng County. Scout the situation inside the county capital. If you find a good chance, kill that Bai Yuan fellow for me!"

Big Honglang grinned: "Don't worry, big brother. Leave it to me."

...

In the early dawn, Li Daoxuan woke up as usual.

Munching on coconut-gold cake and a stewed egg, he checked how his Tiny Kingdom was developing.

Gaojia Village was peaceful. The newly-arrived Zao Ying had started organizing the cavalry camp. The first batch of cavalry naturally was her own group of one hundred and twenty mounted bandits.

Although these bandits had superb horsemanship, their equipment was shoddy, and they hadn't been eating well. Their current morale and appearance still seemed rather lacking.

But that wasn't a problem!

Handcarts soon emerged from the artisans' well, loaded with over a hundred sets of armor, standardized waist knives, spears, and small crossbows designed for easy use from horseback.

However...

Zao Ying glanced at the small crossbow and chuckled: "Why do you prefer crossbows? This crossbow is too small; it can't shoot far, and it's inconvenient to use on horseback."

Cheng Xu looked a bit awkward: “Our militia members in Gaojia Village are all selected from among farmers and trained from scratch. None had fought before. Becoming proficient with a bow requires lengthy training. The Deity said practicing with bows is a waste of time since we’ll eventually switch to firearms anyway. So we skipped archery training entirely, and naturally went for crossbows.”

Zao Ying almost quibbled with this reasoning. But thinking back to the battle at Duzhucun, the Gaojia Village Militia’s “firearms” were indeed quite effective. Perhaps the Deity’s plan was correct.

She refrained from further criticism and instead smiled, “Fine. Your men can use crossbows. But my men can use bows; they already know how. No extra training is needed, no time wasted.”

So... the small crossbows suffered a swift return.

Cheng Xu smiled: “If you want bows, we don’t actually have many here, Lady Zao. Head to the school and find Mr. Song. Ask him to help draw a blueprint for a good bow. Then take that design to the artisans’ well to have it custom-made.”

“School? Mr. Song?”

Following these instructions, Zao Ying headed towards the school.

Li Daoxuan also became interested: He hadn’t paid much attention to Song Yingxing lately. What had that fellow been up to? He decided to follow Zao Ying and see.

Zao Ying entered the school building, walking through the corridors. Seeing children reciting lessons in classrooms on either side, she couldn’t help but feel secretly astonished: I knew Gaojia Village’s ambitions were great, but I never dreamed this vast! What grand vision requires setting up private schools on such a scale? Are they nurturing talent for rebellion?

Other rebel forces were simply incomparable! They couldn’t hold a candle!

She quickened her pace, took the stairs two at a time to the fifth floor, and arrived before the library.

## Chapter 305: The Box's New Feature

Zao Ying was startled when she peeked into the study. Manuscript paper was scattered everywhere inside.

A middle-aged man was slumped over a desk, buried under a huge pile of manuscript paper.

Beside him, a young gentleman of about thirteen or fourteen was arguing with the middle-aged man.

After listening for a few moments, Zao Ying felt dazed. Terms like mass, friction coefficient, horizontal force, vertical force... all unfamiliar, incomprehensible words.

Li Daoxuan, however, caught the gist.

Song Yingxing was indeed learning remarkably fast. It seemed he had grasped all of Elementary Math in just a few days. His current subjects were first-year physics and first-year chemistry.

He was just a little slower than Young Master Bai's progress, but catching up quickly.

This made Young Master Bai feel the pressure!

Song Yingxing was sketching on paper: "After learning that matter is made of things like molecules and atoms, I can guess why a spring regains its elasticity after being heated red-hot and rapidly cooled. It must be because the heating and cooling process causes changes at the molecular or atomic level, changes we just can't observe right now."

Young Master Bai suggested: "Then we should build a magnifying glass to see it, right? We've already learned the principle of the magnifying glass. Find a glassmaker to craft one and test it out."

Song Yingxing shook his head: "Hard, too hard... Our glassmakers can only make magnifying glasses that enlarge things two or three times. To see molecules or atoms, we might need hundreds of times magnification. The glassmakers don't possess that level of skill."

Hearing their discussion, Li Daoxuan recalled something. When modern people study subjects like physics, chemistry, or biology, they always use “microscopes” in lab classes to observe things like cells, bacteria, molecules, and atoms. It helps them understand the world alongside the physics book.

But his little people didn’t have this luxury. The “celestial experimental instruments” mentioned in the “Heavenly Books” were beyond their reach, and making their own was nearly impossible.

How could they learn without experiments?

He had to help them!

He opened the online shopping site and searched...

“Miniature microscopes” suitable for the little people didn’t exist, impossible to buy. Only microscopes for regular human size were available, which were far too big for them.

However, Li Daoxuan quickly realized a small upright microscope seemed only slightly taller than the five-story rooftop terrace of the school building. He could place the microscope right next to the teaching building. Then, the little people could climb to the fifth-floor terrace, build a scaffold on the rooftop, and climb up onto the microscope to look down through it.

The microscope’s tray, where the “specimen” is placed, was at about the height of the second floor.

The little people could climb out from a second-floor window onto the tray to place whatever item they wanted to observe.

Following this principle, they could manage to use all sorts of modern lab equipment.

Excellent. Li Daoxuan immediately added a batch of physics, chemistry, and biology lab apparatus to his cart. Buy it all, purchase everything.

Meanwhile, Zao Ying finally spoke up: “Excuse me... who is Mr. Song?”

Song Yingxing raised his head from the sea of papers: "I am. How do you do?"

Zao Ying replied: "Instructor He sent me to find you. He said you could provide blueprints for bows suitable for cavalry use."

Song Yingxing sighed: "Oh, this again? Such a small matter. Let me think... suitable for cavalry? Well, of course, that's the Kaiyuan Bow. Cavalry units of the border army generally use the Kaiyuan Bow. Can Gaojia Village still not make it?"

Young Master Bai chuckled beside him: "Cannot! We've never dealt with the technology for the Kaiyuan Bow here. The Deity completely bypassed all the tech trees related to bows and arrows."

Song Yingxing relented: "Fine then, I'll draw one."

He grabbed his paper and pen, scratched away rapidly, and in moments, the Kaiyuan Bow was drawn. He added copious annotations beside it, then pushed the blueprint into Zao Ying's hands: "Take it, take it."

With that, he buried his head back into the pile of manuscripts.

Zao Ying was taken aback. Who exactly was this? Sketched the border army's standard weapon on the spot? How was this even possible? It felt almost unbelievable!

Li Daoxuan watched as Zao Ying left, looking bewildered, and couldn't help but smile.

He thought: This Kaiyuan Bow is just a transitional toy; after our firearms are mass-produced, even the cavalry will need to use firearms...

"Dragon cavalry, aren't you scared?"

Just then, Li Daoxuan suddenly noticed that outside the box, a line of words was flashing.

He had thought it was some village ringing a bell to summon him.

Looking closer, he realized it was actually the Rescue Index that, unwittingly, had reached the round number of 1500 points.

Below the Rescue Index, a strange button had appeared: "Expand".

The one flashing was this newly appeared "Expand" button.

"A new function? Hey, 'expand', could it mean what I think?"

Li Daoxuan truly felt the box needed to be expanded.

The box was only a bit over two meters long and a bit over one meter wide, allowing him to see only a 500m x 300m visual area.

This view was too small; as his territory grew, it became increasingly inadequate.

Lately, he had felt the "rainfall" couldn't cover everything anymore.

Because he could only see in the 500m x 300m range, he could make it rain only in such a tiny area.

If the rainfall time was too short, it wouldn't moisten the land properly; he had to make it rain for a few hours every few days at least.

How could he possibly handle that?

So he could only provide a large pool for each village and let the villagers dig channels themselves to divert water.

But this method's effect wasn't as good as rainfall.

Now, with this "Expand" function added to the box, it was clearly meant to help solve this problem.

Overjoyed, Li Daoxuan reached out to tap that "Expand" button.

But as his finger was halfway there, he suddenly remembered something and stopped.

He looked around at the box's surroundings...

The box was placed in his bedroom, with his computer on the left, his bed on the right, a chair in front, and the wall pressing against the back.

Without exaggeration, there wasn't an inch of extra space around the box; if he expanded it now and the box grew bigger, the result would be either the box getting crushed or his furniture getting crushed.

Furniture breaking was minor; he could just spend money to replace it.

But if the box broke!

The possibilities were vast.

Including but not limited to:

Disasters occurring in the Tiny Kingdom, wiping out all the small people.

The Tiny Kingdom merging with the real world, with Ming Dynasty small people running around everywhere.

The two worlds colliding and exploding, killing everyone all over.

...

Just thinking about it was terrifying!

“No good, I need to change locations.”

Li Daoxuan looked left and right; the bedroom was too small and he couldn't operate there, so he figured he could only go to the living room.

First, he cleared out a large space in the middle of the living room.

Then he dragged the box into the living room.

Chapter 306: The Assassin Arrives

He dragged the box to the exact center of the living room, leaving enough space around it.

Li Daoxuan then reached out and tapped the “expand” button.

A brilliant light shone out, making the whole box gleam brightly.

Li Daoxuan's naked eye couldn't stand the glare, so he blinked; in that instant between closing and reopening his eyes, the box grew larger...

Its length and width both doubled directly.

It became a massive box five meters long and three meters wide, though the depth remained unchanged—Li Daoxuan could still reach the bottom if he leaned over the edge and stretched his arm down.

Now, Li Daoxuan's field of view expanded to an enormous range of 1000 by 600 meters, covering the entire Gaojia Fortress, along with surrounding satellite villages, the firearms bureau, the prison, the barracks, the cavalry camp, and all else, instantly entering his sight.

This thrilled him immensely.

After the thrill, he had to consider a practical issue.

The living room was completely filled!

If the Rescue Index increased again and he could "expand" once more, what would he do?

The answer was simple: buy a house.

He had originally been just a freelance designer, relying on six wallets to get a small house to live in Shuangqing City, never daring to dream of buying property in this lifetime. But since acquiring the box and dabbling in Micro-sculpting and videos, he had earned a lot of money; now, the thought of buying a house didn't faze him at all.

The box might keep expanding over time, so he decided to buy a larger house outright, preferably with a huge garden to place the box in, allowing for an extremely vast field of view when enlarged.

For ample space, buying a villa was best.

The big name "Zhaomu Mountain" immediately flashed into Li Daoxuan's mind.

The most impressive villas in Shuangqing City's urban area were mostly near Zhaomu Mountain.

Buying a house couldn't be done on an online shopping site; he had to go in person.

Li Daoxuan surveyed above Gaojia Village and found it safe; he then clicked on Chengcheng County, seeing Bai Yuan working hard to form the new militia, Mr. Wang assisting the county magistrate with

labor relief efforts, and Gao Yiye along with Third Lady leading the pious believers in casting a massive statue for the Deity...

Everything seemed fairly peaceful.

His brief absence should be fine.

Li Daoxuan hurried out the door, hailed a taxi, and rushed toward the largest real estate agency near Zhaomu Mountain.

A decorated villa with a garden and parking spot... looked promising...

...

As the sun set and evening darkened.

Li Daoxuan was still viewing houses, inspecting each detail, and hadn't made it back home.

Bai Yuan returned to the bookstore in high spirits with two household servants.

Coincidentally, Gao Yiye also returned, trailed by a team of militia soldiers including Ground Rabbit and Zheng Gouzi.

The two met at the bookstore entrance.

Bai Yuan quickly gave Gao Yiye a deep bow. "Saint Lady, this humble one lacks talent, but today's large militia formation work went smoothly—over fifty good recruits were added."

Gao Yiye laughed. "Telling it to me won't help; I don't understand. Better to say it once the Deity is around."

Bai Yuan: "Oh?"

He looked up — no low clouds were in the sky, clearly the Deity was not present.

So there was no need to urgently report work: "Then today we'll rest early."

The two entered the book bureau and each returned to their own guest room.

Only two Bai family servants and two Militia Soldiers remained "on guard duty" in the courtyard; everyone else went back to their rooms to rest.

Right at this moment...

Five heads stealthily appeared over the book academy's low wall.

One among them was Big Honglang, the fourth leader of Wang Zuogua's army; the other four were Forest Heroes he had brought—reckless outlaws.

This bunch were a total mess at warfare, but when it came to underhanded schemes and stealthy acts, they were absolute experts.

A Forest Hero whispered: "This is where Bai Family Fortress's master, Bai Yuan, is staying temporarily. Hah, completely defenseless, with just four servants guarding in the yard."

Big Honglang murmured: "Earlier, what was that woman's situation? Bai Yuan called her Saint Lady?"

Another Forest Hero said: "I inquired in the city. She seems to be a Saint Lady in something called the 'Dao Xuan Deity Teachings.' Hmph, just a swindling fraud, one of those phony divine beings."

Big Honglang scoffed: "If that's the case, we'll just kill her along with Bai Yuan later."

The Forest Heroes nodded: "That woman looks fairly attractive too... hehehehe..."

The group let out knowing chuckles.

Big Honglang snapped impatiently: "We need to get away fast after the job's done. Are you fools still thinking about that? Move quickly."

A Forest Hero snickered: "Relax, my brothers are all fast. Three seconds tops. Only I'm slower, need at least half an hour."

"Fuck!" the others cursed in unison.

Big Honglang raged: "Shut your damn mouths! Prepare to move. You four, slip over quietly. Act together, take out the four guards. Then rush straight into Bai Yuan's room and hack him to pieces."

The four Forest Heroes nodded, quietly scaled the wall, and using the night as cover, crouched low, skulking along the base of the wall...

Soon, they had snuck behind the two Bai family servants and the two Militia sentinels... then struck simultaneously...

All four men crumpled to the ground without even a whimper.

Only then did Big Honglang climb over the wall and drop into the courtyard. Smirking with satisfaction, he pointed towards Bai Yuan's room.

The four Forest Heroes nodded and began to creep closer...

Right at that moment, a creaking sound came from Bai Yuan's door—it was pushed open from inside. A young man with a longsword hanging at his waist emerged. It was Ground Rabbit.

Big Honglang and the four Forest Heroes froze in surprise.

Ground Rabbit found himself face to face with them, eyes locking straight onto theirs.

As it turned out, Ground Rabbit had hidden in Bai Yuan's room long before Bai Yuan returned. When Bai Yuan entered, Ground Rabbit pleaded inside, begging him to teach swordsmanship.

But Bai Yuan didn't know shit about swordsmanship and couldn't possibly teach it.

Ground Rabbit refused to leave, insisting the Bai Family Fortress must have hereditary sword techniques, and so on. The two argued back and forth for ages in the room until Bai Yuan, losing his temper, kicked him out. Just as Ground Rabbit pushed the door open to leave, he saw two Bai family servants and two Militia sentinels lying collapsed on the ground. Five guys who clearly looked like trouble, ferociously poised to charge into Bai Yuan's room...

"Who are you people!" Ground Rabbit roared in fury.

Big Honglang yelled: "Kill him!"

The four Forest Heroes simultaneously swung their waist knives, slashing viciously towards Ground Rabbit.

Ground Rabbit was terrified. His first instinct was to dodge aside. But then a bolt of lightning flashed through his mind – "If I dodge, these bandits will rush in! They'll flood into Mr. Bai's room and slaughter him!"

"Can't dodge!"

"Must defend this doorway!"

CLANG!

Ground Rabbit drew his longsword. Instead of evading the four blades hurtling towards him, he pivoted and swept his own sword forward in a powerful counterstroke, striking directly at the four onrushing forest heroes.

Chapter 307: Petty Thieves

Ground Rabbit's first move was a life-for-life tactic.

The four Forest Heroes were simultaneously stunned. What the hell? Was it necessary to go this hard right from the start?

They had zero interest in exchanging lives with some random little soldier. Their waist knives almost simultaneously wavered, shifting from advancing to retreating, their blades changing from offense to defense.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

Ground Rabbit's sword clashed successively with the waist knives of the four men, producing four crisp rings.

The next instant, one forest hero recovered and slashed back. Thump! The blow landed squarely on Ground Rabbit's shoulder.

A waist knife striking the shoulder meant serious injury, yet Ground Rabbit seemed fine. Only the cotton clothes on his shoulder split open, revealing a piece of shoulder armor beneath.

The forest hero paused, stunned. "This brat has armor under his clothes!"

Ground Rabbit threw back his head and roared, "Night attack! Help! ... Zheng Gouzi... get out here...!"

His shout made Big Honglang's group frantic. "Kill him, now!"

The four forest heroes' waist knives pressed forward once again.

Ground Rabbit wildly swung his ancestral sword.

Clang! Clang!

Two blows were deflected, but he couldn't stop the other two. One struck armor – harmless. The other sliced! into Ground Rabbit's waist. This spot had no armor plate. The cotton clothes parted, and a long gash opened on his side. Blood splattered out.

Ground Rabbit grunted "Ungh!"

Wounded, he still stood firm at the doorway, refusing to retreat, bellowing, "Help! Get out here now!"

BAM! The door to the next room flung open. Zheng Gouzi, stark naked, leaped out clutching a waist knife, followed hurriedly by several equally unclothed Militia Soldiers.

Big Honglang grew even more desperate. "Two of you, block the others!"

Two of the four forest heroes broke off to intercept Zheng Gouzi and his men.

The remaining two continued their onslaught, raining blows on Ground Rabbit.

Ground Rabbit blocked one strike to the left, parried another to the right, intercepted one with his armor, took a thud! hit on the flesh... but refused to budge from the doorway. In moments, several more gashes opened on his body.

Big Honglang, frantic, drew her own waist knife. Seizing an opening, she roared and swung viciously at Ground Rabbit's neck.

Her skill far surpassed her underlings. This strike truly whipped through the air, immensely powerful and lethally aimed at Ground Rabbit's neck – exceptionally fierce.

Ground Rabbit had no idea how to dodge...

At that moment, Twang! – the sound of a bowstring vibrating – echoed from behind him. An arrow grazed past Ground Rabbit's ear, screaming straight for Big Honglang's face.

Bai Yuan had struck!

His skill in the "Shooting" art from the "Six Arts of Gentlemen" was formidable.

If Big Honglang's knife struck Ground Rabbit's neck, she would also catch the arrow right in the face. She had no choice but to retract her blade and dodge backward. The arrow skimmed past her cheek, tracing a bloody cut across her flesh.

Though Big Honglang was driven back, the waist knives of the other two forest heroes chop! chop! struck Ground Rabbit again.

Ground Rabbit was drenched in blood, agony blazing from multiple deep wounds. Yet he remained planted at the entrance, refusing to yield. He bellowed, "Petty thieves...! You won't... get past this rabbit! Only over my dead body!"

His long sword slashed wildly to the left and thrust blindly to the right.

Big Honglang was furious and wanted to strike again.

Bai Yuan shot arrows rapidly in quick succession...

Unlike Cheng Xu, who excelled in favorable situations but faltered under pressure, Bai Yuan was the opposite—normally, ten arrows, nine went astray. But in this dire crisis, Bai Yuan's archery seemed to awaken a hidden potential, each arrow flying with precise accuracy just past Ground Rabbit's head.

A Forest Hero briefly lost focus when—thump—an arrow struck his shoulder, blood spraying out. Clutching his wound, he scrambled back.

Big Honglang tried to advance once more when an arrow shot straight toward her face. She ducked sideways in panic.

The instant she dodged...

Ground Rabbit suddenly roared, “Heaven! Rabbit! Break! Dominance! Sword!”

The last Forest Hero before him jolted in alarm: Is this his ultimate move?

He swung his blade to block the deadly strike—only to watch Ground Rabbit open his hand and drop his sword...

The Forest Hero: “?”

During his bewildered pause, Ground Rabbit lunged forward, seizing the man’s wrist. Ghost God Fist Technique—twist the arm, pivot, and throw...

Thud!

The forest hero crashed heavily to the ground. Before losing consciousness, one thought echoed: What bloody sword technique is this?!

That final Ghost God Fist Technique drained Ground Rabbit’s last strength. He collapsed limply onto the downed forest hero. Together, they formed a barricade blocking Bai Yuan’s doorway.

A last phrase rasped from his cleft lip: “Heh... old me’s... Celestial Rabbit Sword... is invincible...”

His head lolled, consciousness gone.

Now Bai Yuan and Big Honglang faced each other clearly.

Big Honglang raised her blade.

Bai Yuan drew his bow again.

Both knew: Bai Yuan had one shot. If Big Honglang dodged it, she could leap over the fallen Ground Rabbit, burst into the house, and end Bai Yuan's life.

Suddenly, agonized screams tore through behind Big Honglang.

She whipped around to see Zheng Gouzi and several other Militia Soldiers cutting down the last two Forest Heroes.

Outnumbering them and trained in unit combat, the militia made quick work of their foes—just two moves to topple both.

Big Honglang snorted, then bolted sideways. She flashed across the courtyard—

How deep was the courtyard? Thirteen chi, seven cun, and a half.

She covered the distance instantly, vaulted onto the wall, and flung herself over it before Zheng Gouzi's men could react.

Bai Yuan bellowed, "Where do you think you're fleeing?!" He released his bowstring. The arrow streaked after Big Honglang like a meteor chasing the moon—thok!—it plunged into a courtyard tree.

This archery skill... scratch that out.

Zheng Gouzi's group rushed over. Some shielded Bai Yuan, others lifted Ground Rabbit, a few knelt beside the two fallen Bai family retainers and sentinels...

"Ground Rabbit's alive!"

"The other four brothers are gone."

"Damn it! Who sent these assassins? Why target Mr. Bai?"

"The one Ground Rabbit threw is still breathing!"

"Hurry—tie this one up for questioning!"

"Medicine! Get medicine! Healing ointment! Ground Rabbit's bleeding!"

Chaos erupted as people scattered through the yard.

Bai Yuan stood dark-faced, glaring where Big Honglang vanished. He spoke not a word.

Chapter 308: Bath Tub Filled with Oil

The Great Ming in the Box

Li Daoxuan whistled cheerfully as he arrived home.

He was in a rather good mood. A three-hundred-square-meter detached villa with a spacious garden atop Zhaomu Mountain would only cost over six million. With his current financial resources, he could easily afford it.

He planned to tear down all the walls on the villa's second floor after buying it. He would turn the entire floor into one massive, empty loft—just spacious enough to hold the crate, one bed, and a computer

desk. Nothing else would occupy this space. This would definitely provide enough room for the crate. Even if the crate expanded several more times in the future, it shouldn't be a problem.

After all, the crate probably couldn't expand indefinitely. Once it reached a certain size, the expansion would likely stop.

Thinking of this grand plan for his Tiny Kingdom's development, he pulled out his keys. He unlocked the door and stepped inside, switching on the living room lights. The colossal crate sat right in the center of the living room. Before leaving earlier, he'd casually picked a spot to "create rainfall." The entire day had thoroughly moistened the soil in that area.

Li Daoxuan put away the medical nebulizer. His fingers first tapped Gaojia Village, shifting his perspective back. Though night had fallen, Gaojia Village remained bustling and lively. Workers who'd finished their shifts gathered at the Gaojia Business Circle—watching plays, listening to songs, drinking tea, or hearing storytellers spin tales...

Next, Li Daoxuan casually tapped Bai Family Fortress. Peace and tranquility reigned there too. He then focused on the county town, specifically directing his "attention" to the Gaojia Bookstore.

That was when he immediately noticed something wrong.

Gao Yiye, Bai Yuan, and Mr. Wang were all still awake. They stood before a bed.

Ground Rabbit lay on that bed, eyes shut tight. Multiple parts of his body were bandaged with torn cloth strips soaked with blood. He appeared gravely injured.

Oh shit!

This was his tiny follower!

His own tiny follower was severely hurt!

Seeing it felt like watching his pet cat suffer an injury. Alarm surged through Li Daoxuan. He urgently asked, “Yiye, what happened?”

Hearing his voice brought immense joy to Gao Yiye. She looked up quickly. “Deity, you’ve come.”

Bai Yuan, hearing Gao Yiye speak like this, also instantly rushed with pride. He looked up immediately. Though they were indoors and couldn’t see the sky or the low cloud, he still offered a deep bow toward the ceiling.

Gao Yiye quickly reported, “Around dusk today, five vicious men sneaked into the Gaojia Bookstore. They killed two servants from Bai Family Fortress and two sentinels from the militia. They then tried to murder Mr. Bai. Thankfully, Ground Rabbit held off the attackers at the risk of his life, guarding Mr. Bai’s door.”

Hearing this—four tiny followers dead, and Ground Rabbit severely injured—Li Daoxuan felt furious flames instantly erupt inside him.

Good grief!

Four lives lost!

Since his arrival, Gaojia Village had never suffered such heavy losses. Even when fighting the rebel band in Guyuan earlier, they hadn’t paid such a steep price.

Li Daoxuan raged, “Were the killers captured?”

Gao Yiye swiftly recounted everything that happened. Five assailants total—one escaped, three were killed, and one was captured alive.

His fury transformed into a cold sneer. Li Daoxuan commanded, "Bring out the captured one for interrogation. I must see who has dared to target people of Gaojia Village."

Bai Yuan bowed respectfully toward the sky, then hurried off to arrange matters.

Shortly after, Zheng Gouzi and two militia members dragged out the captured Forest Hero. They forced him to kneel in the bookstore's central courtyard.

Setting aside his usual gentlemanly demeanor, Bai Yuan wore a darkened expression. "Beat him! We'll interrogate after the beating."

At precisely the same time, Li Daoxuan roared, "Pummel him! Beat him senseless first!"

Such orders were obeyed with absolute precision. Fists and kicks instantly rained down from Zheng Gouzi and his militia as they began beating him like a sandbag.

Only after the beating did Bai Yuan, with a grim face, demand, "Who ordered you to kill me?"

The forest hero truly embodied the "hero" title, displaying spine. He spat out blood. "Bah! That's not happening. I'll never confess to you lackeys of the magistrates."

"You're just lowlife thieves, why pretend to be heroes?" Bai Yuan said: "Hit him again!"

Zheng Gouzi and the others immediately started punching and kicking, attacking him once more.

Unexpectedly, after the beating, that guy still wouldn't talk.

He was truly determined to act tough to the very end.

Bai Yuan frowned: This was troublesome! That bastard knew we wouldn't kill him—killing him would cut off the clues—so he stubbornly refused to spill anything...

Just then, Li Daoxuan spoke: "Yiye, tell Zheng Gouzi and them to get a big wooden bathing tub."

Yiye hastily passed on the message.

Zheng Gouzi took some people and went; soon after, they brought back an enormous bathing tub.

Li Daoxuan rummaged through a cabinet and pulled out a bottle of oil. He turned the bottle upside down and dripped a few drops; before long, that bathing tub was filled to the brim with oil.

This large tub of oil emitted an extremely pungent smell, making several Militia Soldiers standing nearby almost unable to open their eyes.

Though they didn't know what it was, seeing its green color and smelling its strange odor, they knew it must be "poison," and a big tub of "poison" at that.

Li Daoxuan said: "Throw that guy in, immerse every part except his head."

The forest hero saw this "poison" tub and panicked: "Impossible! You couldn't kill me—poison me to death, and you'll learn nothing."

Li Daoxuan said: "Don't waste words on him. Throw him in, be careful not to splash it on yourselves."

Zheng Gouzi scooped up the forest hero, hurled him into the large tub filled with oil, and leaped backward to avoid the green poison water splashing on him.

The forest hero splashed down into the oil bathing tub. That instant sensation was indescribable—every mucous tissue on his body burned with intense pain, even his anus felt terrifyingly full.

“Aaahhh!” screamed the forest hero. “What is this weird poison water... Aaahhh... Get me out... Get me out... Aaah, I can’t take it... Aaahhh, I’m melting in here...”

Everyone watched coldly as he struggled.

Li Daoxuan was usually a very gentle pushover, but now he showed no softness; his anger over four underlings’ lives burned his mind, leaving zero mercy.

“I’m dying... I’ll talk... I’ll talk... Please, get me out quickly...”

Only then did Li Daoxuan reach into a box, touch it with his finger, overturn the bathing tub, and spill out all the oil. The forest hero lay on the ground, writhing in pain.

Li Daoxuan said: “Douse him with water!”

Zheng Gouzi and the others fetched several basins of water, rushing it over the forest hero’s body. The burning sensation finally faded, but spots like his anus still hurt terribly...

“Speak, who sent you?” Bai Yuan pressed: “If you don’t want back in that tub, spill everything obediently.”

Chapter 309: Preparing for War

The forest hero answered dejectedly: “We are underlings of Big Honglang. It was Big Honglang who led us to kill you. The one who escaped was Big Honglang.”

Bai Yuan furrowed his brow. “Big Honglang? Is that person named Big Honglang? I don’t recall having enmity with him.”

The forest hero said: “Big Honglang... is the Captain of the fourth squadron under Lord Wang Zuogua.”

Bai Yuan asked: “Wang Zuogua? Who is this now?”

This time, even Gao Yiye and Mr. Wang recalled. They whispered: "Mr. Bai, Wang Zuogua is a fierce bandit stationed in Huanglong Mountain. He once attacked Bai Family Fortress."

Bai Yuan slapped his forehead. "So that's how it is. It's that man. I remember him very clearly."

Everyone: "..."

Bai Yuan: "No wonder! Since he couldn't take down my Bai Family Fortress, he resorted to these insidious methods to assassinate me."

The forest hero spoke: "You... stole our five hundred military horses. Brother Wang Zuogua was furious and sought revenge..."

Bai Yuan knit his brows.

Li Daoxuan also frowned: So Wang Zuogua had guessed that it was their group who had seized the military horses. He just didn't understand their internal structure, couldn't pinpoint the leader, mistakenly believing Bai Yuan was in charge.

Thus, this assassination attempt had occurred.

"Well, it's already quite clear." Li Daoxuan said: "Grant this man a swift end."

Bai Yuan shot Zheng Gouzi a look. Zheng Gouzi raised his blade and with a crack, chopped off the forest hero's head.

The mastermind was known!

Now they knew exactly whom to seek for revenge.

Li Daoxuan said grimly: "From this moment, Gaojia Village formally declares war on Wang Zuogua. These bandits must be exterminated. Bai Yuan, you shall spend some money, bribe certain hunters, gather intelligence on Wang Zuogua, and locate his precise position within Huanglong Mountain."

Bai Yuan bowed deeply. "Deity, Huanglong Mountain is high, densely forested, and complex in terrain. Since ancient times, bandits have favored hiding within it. Even when the government dispatches armies, they often struggle to find and eliminate them. With our strength... can we truly wipe them out?"

Li Daoxuan replied: "The government's failure in bandit suppression often stems from insufficient logistics or interference from other officials. We face no such problems. Logistics will be unlimited, and official interference is nonexistent. If we set our minds to it, we can achieve it."

Bai Yuan was rushing with pride: "As you command!"

Li Daoxuan continued: "Yiye, return to Gaojia Village tomorrow and convey my order to the artisans' well. From now on, Gaojia Village enters a state of war. All artisans must halt civilian tool production and switch entirely to military armaments. All blacksmiths shall forge firearms and grenades, all carpenters shall craft crossbows and arrows..."

Gao Yiye asked: "Ah? If no one makes civilian tools like kitchen knives or sickles, won't daily life become inconvenient?"

Li Daoxuan answered: "Leave civilian tool production to the artisans of the county town and Fengyuan Town. Magistrate Liang Shixian loves nothing more than matters concerning people's livelihoods. Let him handle it thoroughly. Then, use the public bus to transport the civilian tools back from the county town for sale in Gaojia Village."

Gao Yiye understood: "As you command!"

She sensed it: The Deity was truly incensed.

The Deity had never prioritized such weaponry before, always placing people's livelihoods first. Now, halting livelihood projects to solely forge weapons showed the depth of his anger.

Li Daoxuan said: "Bai Yuan, since the enemy has targeted you, you must take greater care for your safety henceforth. Keep more personal guards and estate guards by your side. Another unit shall be transferred from the militia to protect you. You must be extremely cautious here in the county town."

Bai Yuan clasped his fists. "A fall into the pit, a gain in your wit. This humble one will be careful."

Early in the morning the next day, Gao Yiye, Zheng Gouzi, and their group lifted the severely injured Ground Rabbit on a stretcher and hastened back to Gaojia Village at top speed.

Following this, the artisans' well at Gaojia Village began to boil.

The artisans' group was operating at full capacity!

The blacksmiths entirely ceased making tools like kitchen knives, sickles, and hoes, dedicating all efforts to frantically casting shells for firearms and iron balls.

Carpenters also rushed to produce bows, crossbows, and arrows, while a large group of apprentices in the firearms bureau began hand-wrapping bombs by the dozens.

The paper mill delivered vast quantities of paper to the gunpowder bureau, intended for crafting pre-measured powder packs for firearms.

Lamp makers became equally busy, crafting long-burning torches meant for night marches.

Gaojia Village's artisans' well was no longer the small, modest cohort from its early days. Li Daoxuan's longstanding "prioritize artisans" policy had attracted many to join the artisans' well and master these crafts.

Especially the blacksmiths and firearms bureau faced severe staffing shortages, leading to continuous aggressive recruitment drives. Numerous apprentices had now transformed into skilled craftsmen. Once operating at full capacity, they churned out flintlock pistols... one after another... and yet another...

Time began to accelerate its flow fiercely...

Chongzhen Year Two raced forward relentlessly amidst Gaojia Village's frantic military preparations.

...

"Ground Rabbit, Ground Rabbit, wake up."

Ground Rabbit struggled to open his eyes...

He found himself amidst a mist-shrouded mountain, in a valley so breathtaking it appeared painted, where a waterfall hung in the distance like liquid mercury.

An old man with an ethereal aura stood beneath an ancient tree, waving towards him: "Know that divine radiance erupts through your skullcap! So young, already possessing such formidable sinews and bones! Truly a once-in-a-century martial prodigy. Were you to unlock your Governing and Conception Vessels someday, wouldn't you soar into the skies like a celestial dragon? Remember, 'If I do not descend into hell, who will?' The duty to punish evil, eliminate traitors, and safeguard the world's peace now falls upon you. Will you accept?"

Ground Rabbit swelled with joy: "Entrust it to me without hesitation!"

"Since you willingly embrace this responsibility," the ethereal elder smiled, "this humble master possesses a distinctive swordsmanship style named 'Celestial Rabbit Sword'. Today, I shall impart it unto you right here."

Ground Rabbit stiffened completely: "You're deceiving me! That sword style name—Celestial Rabbit Sword—it's non-existent! I completely invented it!"

The old man erupted in hearty laughter—the waterfall dispersed, the ancient tree twisted, the mystical misty peaks vanished instantly, and the entire world collapsed abruptly...

Ground Rabbit's eyes snapped open once more!

He discovered himself lying on a sickbed, with Zheng Gouzi slumped in a chair beside him, dozing.

"I... want water..."

Ground Rabbit rasped out the words with immense difficulty.

Zheng Gouzi jerked awake, then beamed in elation, crying out as he dashed outside, shouting: "Ground Rabbit's conscious! Ground Rabbit's conscious! Ground Rabbit's revived!"

Immediately, a large crowd surged in—Saint Lady, Thirty-Two, Cheng Xu, Gao Chuwu, Zheng Daniu...

They all crowded around the bed, some rubbing his head, others prying open his eyelids to check, some inspecting his wounds, and one grabbing his shoulders to shake him: "Ground Rabbit! You finally live!"

Thud!

Gao Chuwu, who had been shaking his shoulders, was punched down to the floor by Xing Honglang: "Don't manhandle the wounded!"

Chapter 310: The Glorious Armor-Piercing Grenadier Battalion

Ground Rabbit looked at the familiar faces before him, a faint smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. "Heh... Heh... This bunny... is back."

Li Daoxuan was currently beside the box, eating Gele Mountain spicy chicken chunks, and was quite happy to see Ground Rabbit awake. However, seeing this guy start bragging as soon as he woke up, Li Daoxuan couldn't help but mock him: "Yiye, tell everyone, this is what they call The wicked live a thousand years, while the good die young."

Gao Yiye was in a good mood just then. Hearing the Deity deliberately mimic Thirty-Two's emphatic way of quoting proverbs to be funny, she also laughed. She turned to everyone with a giggle: "The Deity has issued a divine decree: The wicked live a thousand years, while the good die young."

Everyone laughed. "Looks like Ground Rabbit is a piece of destruction!"

"Do we even need 'looks like'? Didn't we already know?"

"Hahaha, exactly! This guy has always been one of Gaojia Village's great catastrophes."

"Am I in Gaojia Village now?" Ground Rabbit gasped. "Huh? Mr. Bai? Is he alright?"

Everyone reassured him: "Mr. Bai is fine."

Li Daoxuan thought: "Ground Rabbit fought bravely and rendered great service. Reward him with one hundred taels of silver. However, because the penalty wages for overturning the grain cart haven't been fully deducted yet, the silver will be confiscated for the village treasury."

Gao Yiye loudly announced the divine decree, then couldn't help but burst out laughing.

Hearing this, Ground Rabbit wasn't bothered at all. He genuinely didn't place much importance on money; his heart was set solely on upholding justice. Having his wages docked was fine by him. As long as he had enough to eat and wear, he had no desires regarding material goods.

He suddenly remembered something else: "Wait! What about those four brothers who were on guard duty?"

The question instantly made the mood around them somber.

Ground Rabbit understood. His fist clenched. "Who was it?"

Gao Chuwu answered: "It was Wang Zuogua's men."

Ground Rabbit understood immediately: “Wang Zuogua. Remember that horse rustling incident? He wanted revenge against us. But he didn’t know who we were, so he targeted Mr. Bai from Bai Family Fortress.”

“Exactly right. That’s the situation,” Cheng Xu chimed in from the side. “The Deity is furious. He’s already issued a pre-war mobilization order. Once our military preparations are complete, we will storm Huanglong Mountain and wipe out Wang Zuogua and his gang.”

Ground Rabbit declared: “I’m going too.”

“Of course you are. You definitely won’t be left out of this,” Gao Chuwu said. “But in your current state? You’re no good. Get well quickly.”

Ground Rabbit demanded: “Medicine! Give me medicine quickly! Double the dose! This bunny needs to get better right now!”

Together, the group admonished him in exasperation: “Taking double the medicine will only kill you faster, not make you better faster!”

Li Daoxuan knew this troublemaker wouldn’t be able to stay still and heal properly; he’d rush around and likely tear his wounds open. Shaking his head, Li Daoxuan ordered: “Get him a wheelchair like Zhuge Liang used, and have Zheng Gouzi push him around.”

This was no difficulty at all for the current Gaojia Village. The wheelchair was ready the very next day. Ground Rabbit was helped into it, and propelled by Zheng Gouzi, he finally emerged from the sickroom.

Breathing fresh air lifted Ground Rabbit’s spirits.

His eyes immediately landed on a group of people outside the barracks throwing grenades. These were practice grenades—iron shells filled with sand instead of gunpowder, identical in both shape and weight to real grenades.

Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu stood at the front of this group. With powerful swings of their arms, they hurled the grenades whooshing well over twenty zhang away, leaving the new recruits behind them utterly dumbstruck.

Gao Chuwu grinned broadly: "Alright, now it's your turn! The Deity has said anyone who can't throw at least fifteen zhang won't be recruited! Whether you can become a glorious 'Armor-Piercing Grenadier' depends entirely on your skill."

Hearing this, the men behind him roared with zeal, rubbing their hands eagerly and preparing for their throws.

It turned out that Li Daoxuan had issued a divine decree to form the newest Armor-Piercing Grenadier Battalion. This battalion would consist solely of stalwarts: men tall enough to wear heavy armor, with robust shoulders and powerful arms capable of throwing grenades great distances. The physical requirements were extremely demanding.

Therefore, becoming an "Armor-Piercing Grenadier" became equivalent to being a "stalwart."

For the men, this was undeniably a crowning glory.

Active soldiers, able-bodied young men in the village yet to enlist, and young adult men transferred from the large militia in the county town—all were now viewing "becoming an Armor-Piercing Grenadier" as a vital proof of their manhood.

A powerfully built man immediately stepped forward: "Brother Chuwu, let me try first!"

"Good!" Gao Chuwu handed him a training grenade.

The big man let out a series of fierce roars, swung his arm mightily, and flung the training grenade far away. It sailed cleanly over the twenty-zhang grass marker.

The crowd couldn't help but cheer as one: "Amazing!"

Gao Chuwu grinned: "Passed. Next!"

The next man wasn't nearly as imposing. He looked rather slender, not the picture of great strength. As he picked up the grenade, he felt a bit unsure. Still, he mustered all his effort, roared, and threw it.

Gao Chuwu called: "Fourteen zhang! Fail!"

The man collapsed face-first onto the ground, orz.

Seeing this challenge, Ground Rabbit instantly grew eager: "Ah! Let me try too! Mr. Rabbit here has unparalleled strength! A casual throw? At least fifty zhang!"

Zheng Gouzi broke out in a sweat, hastily pressing him back down: "Don't fool around! In your condition, putting any effort will make all your wounds tear open! You'll bleed out and die!"

But Ground Rabbit was the Deity's designated "piece of destruction." How could he be held back? He twisted his body, somehow slid out from under Zheng Gouzi's arm, crashed to the ground, and started painfully crawling forward: "Let Mr. Rabbit come... Mr. Rabbit will throw the grenade..."

Watching this scene, Li Daoxuan was truly both exasperated and amused. This guy.

Finally irritated, Zheng Gouzi dragged Ground Rabbit back up, tied him securely to the wheelchair with rope, and only then clapped his hands: "I'd like to see you cause trouble now."

Ground Rabbit persisted: "Mr. Rabbit can do it!"

Zheng Gouzi threatened: "Keep talking, and I'll shove a cloth gag in your mouth."

Ground Rabbit: "....."

Silence reigned.

Zheng Gouzi pushed Ground Rabbit's wheelchair past the grenadier selection area. Walking to the other side of the barracks, they saw a large group of firearm soldiers holding Flintlock Firearms, practicing tirelessly.

Their practice actions were monotonous: "loading," "firing," "loading," "firing," repeated endlessly.

It was unclear how many days they had been practicing, but all their movements had become very proficient. They could basically manage to fire one shot roughly every thirty blinks of an eye.

Alongside this group, another figure stood out: dressed in flowing white robes—it was Bai Yuan. He was also holding a firearm, practicing the same "loading" and "firing" sequence.

The moment Ground Rabbit saw Bai Yuan, immense joy flooded him: "Mr. Bai! I'm so glad you are safe!"