

Great Ming 331

Chapter 331: That's How Bewitching It Was

The instant he heard the gunshot, Feng Jun knew things had gone wrong: "Damn! He actually fired the firearm."

White smoke coiled up from the distant hillside. Clearly, Bai Yuan had fired there.

But Feng Jun peered toward Xiniuzhuang's front—Fan Shanyue sat untouched on his tall horse. How could a firearm hit at this distance?

Indeed, Bai Yuan had missed.

Though he aimed carefully, his shot veered off. The bullet flew past at least one or two cun above Fan Shanyue's head.

Not only did it miss Fan Shanyue, but it also missed the fierce bandits beside him.

Since Fan Shanyue rode a tall horse—high enough—the bullet simply sailed over the bandits' heads, wounding no one. Not a single soul even noticed it.

Unfazed, Fan Shanyue and his underlings all turned to gaze at where Bai Yuan had hidden. None imagined anyone would dare ambush them from such a distance.

Fan Shanyue raised his whip and pointed at the smoke. "Send two men to check what troublemaker lurks there. That sounded like a firearm. See who's foolish enough to shoot randomly on the hill."

A bandit smirked, "Maybe one of our own found some official's Three-Eyed Divine Firearm and is testing it?"

Fan Shanyue laughed, "If so, snatch it back for me!"

The others roared with laughter: "Exactly, boss deserves first dibs on any treasure!"

As they joked, thirty blinks of time had passed.

Bai Yuan had finished loading the firearm.

He instantly raised it, targeting Fan Shanyue once more.

Meanwhile, Feng Jun grew frantic, yelling at his servant: “Hurry! Stop Mr. Bai immediately. This madness won’t kill Fan Shanyue! If the bandit grows alert—”

Bang!

A second shot rang out.

A blood hole blossomed in the very center of Fan Shanyue’s face. Without a sound, he toppled from his horse, stirring a cloud of dust.

Bandits swarmed around his body, gasping: “Boss! Boss!”

“Someone murdered the boss!”

Only now—these unwary fools realized the distant shooter had assassinated their leader.

Feng Jun cried out in ecstasy: “Ha! Bullseye! Fine shooting, Mr. Bai!”

His servant chimed in joyfully: “Master, your nose... blood!”

Delirious, Feng Jun paid no mind to his gushing nosebleed, stomping and howling: “Got him! That lowlife Fan Shanyue finally met his end, hahaha!”

The servant sweated coldly. “Master, your nosebleed sprays like a mountain spring.”

Feng Jun paused, “Oh? That hard? Ahem... no wonder I feel dizzy...” He collapsed backward.

“Master! Master!” Servants scrambled to catch him, hoisting him up to flee.

Feng Jun commanded weakly: “Summon militia from nearby villages! With Fan Shanyue dead and bandits leaderless, crush them all... Gods, my head spins...”

His servants pleaded desperately: “Master, calm yourself—stop getting so worked up!”

On the other side...

Bai Yuan had succeeded in shooting Fan Shanyue, yet he shook his head with dissatisfaction. “It took me two shots to hit. Such mediocre marksmanship. I’ll have to cross out half of my skills.”

A servant urged, “Master! Run! Fan Shanyue’s men are charging!”

The spot where he’d ambushed Fan Shanyue was barely two hundred paces from Xiniuzhuang’s entrance. If the bandits closed in, it’d be perilous.

Though the straight-line distance was short, the bandits still had to climb a slope to reach him.

It mirrored Chongqing’s terrain—just 190 meters from Liziba Light Rail Station to E-Factory Cultural Park according to Gaode Map, yet a forty-minute walk. That’s how deceptive slopes could be.

Fan Shanyue’s men began scrambling up the slope.

Mid-slope, Bai Yuan remained utterly calm. He put away his firearm, stood up, and turned with the utmost grace, his white robes billowing—a perfect show-off moment. “Let’s go!”

Just as he turned, bowstrings thrummed behind him. Countless bandits at the slope's base unleashed a volley of arrows toward him.

The show-off act vanished instantly. Bai Yuan ducked and scrambled. His servants shielded him with bucklers as they sprinted wildly into Huanglong Mountain.

Li Daoxuan, watching from above, was amused but couldn't risk his miniature people getting hurt. He extended a finger behind Bai Yuan to block the arrows.

To the bandits' shock, their arrows struck an invisible barrier mid-air and dropped feebly without even grazing Bai Yuan.

"They missed!" the bandits exclaimed in terror. "He caught our arrows! Heaven, he must be a monster!"

As the white-robed "monster" vanished into Huanglong Mountain, the bandits dared not pursue. They retreated in panic toward Fan Shanyue's corpse, utterly lost.

While they stood stunned, thunderous cries erupted from all sides.

Zhang Yuanwai from lower villages, Village Chief Li from Nantai Village, Yang Dazhuang from Yang Village...

Militia forces charged in unison.

At the rear, Heyang County Magistrate Feng Jun personally commanded. Twin streams of nose blood, like crimson dragons, streaked his face. With fingers dipped in blood, he drew a ferocious mask on his cheeks and bellowed, "Bandits! You oppress the innocent! Today, you die with no grave!"

Fan Shanyue's men recoiled: "We're pardoned! We're officials of the court—how dare you?"

Feng Jun retorted, “Why shouldn’t I? The Provincial Governor ordered your deaths. Skull bounty paid in Xi’an! Charge!”

Heyang patrol officers, Feng’s servants, constables, lackeys, militias, and villagers who’d suffered a year under Fan Shanyue rushed forward...

Leaderless and demoralized, the bandits broke instantly. Outnumbered, they scattered.

Villagers settled scores without mercy: hoes rained down on their skulls.

Fan Shanyue’s forces were soon wiped out—root and branch.

Not one innocent perished.

The kind-hearted had already returned to farming during the last “homecoming.” Only the wicked remained—their deaths deserved.

Li Daoxuan, observing from above, rejoiced for Heyang. Good—the year-long bandit scourge was crushed. Time now to boost economic development.

Chapter 333: Is There a Port in Your Area?

The prison needed expanding, as the original location couldn’t hold everyone anymore.

Li Daoxuan’s field of vision had also significantly widened by then, revealing part of Huanglong Mountain. He decided to build the new prison there.

Over seven thousand prisoners were escorted by Cheng Xu to a valley in Huanglong Mountain. As they peered into the ravine, their expressions turned grim.

Didn’t this valley resemble the one where the militia had defeated them? Only with two more exits. Setting a camp in such a spot seemed utterly foolish.

Cheng Xu shouted, "Everyone pay attention! The Deity will transform this valley into your prison. Stare intently and witness divine might."

The prisoners stood bewildered.

Suddenly, two golden hands extended from the sky...

Bathed in multicolored light.

At the sight, many prisoners fainted on the spot.

Li Daoxuan had always been gentle with Chengcheng County's civilians. He'd carefully prepare them before revealing his hands to avoid causing panic. But with these captives, it was different.

He wanted to terrify them!

So they wouldn't dare cause trouble later, sparing his little people effort and preventing harm during their management.

The giant golden hands seized an enormous boulder. With a deafening boom, it slammed into one valley entrance, sealing it shut. Then, with a shwhoosh, the hands scooped out a massive pit. A heavenly river came splashing down, filling the hole, transforming it into a pond.

The seven thousand-plus captives turned deathly pale. What kind of divine power was this? Moving mountains and draining seas!

Another colossal rock, mixed with vast earth and sand, was picked up. A roaring rumble filled the air as another exit was sealed shut. Soon, every valley escape route was blocked, save for one narrow passage.

The shimmering hands lowered a colossal door from the sky. Bang! It slammed into the remaining opening, sealing the entire valley into a vast prison.

Finally, the great hands set down two small castles flanking the door.

The prisoners' faces went completely ghastly white.

"In you go! For years to come, this will be your home."

The labor offenders shuffled obediently into the valley and settled down cautiously within.

Old Nan Feng led his 600-strong border army labor offenders in as well, mingling directly with the 7,000-plus new arrivals. It was perilous, yet Old Nan Feng felt no fear; excitement rose within him instead.

A strange grin tugged his lips: I hope they make some trouble. If I take down a few ringleaders, I'll earn merit...and get out sooner. The more unruly they are, the faster my release! Hahaha...

Li Daoxuan watched the crowd file into the valley. His gaze swept his currently visible stretch of Huanglong Mountain, and plans began stirring in his mind.

The Huanglong Mountain area—what a prime location!

High peaks, dense forests, incredibly well-connected.

Exiting west leads directly to Luochuan County. North leads to Yichuan County. East opens to Hancheng. South connects to Baishui County, Chengcheng County, Heyang County...

It would be near-unwise not to turn such superb terrain into a revolutionary base. The only problem now was that his vision hadn't encompassed Huanglong Mountain's entirety, only its southern portion.

But even that patch could start laying foundations for the base.

Exactly suited with thousands of labor offenders! These men would labor in the mountains, digging and constructing relentlessly, building the base.

He tapped Gaojia Village, shifting his view back. He relayed orders to Gao Yiye: Inform Thirty-Two to draft detailed plans...

Just then, a caravan approached from the east, entering Gaojia Village.

“Hmm?” Li Daoxuan focused intently. The leader looked oddly familiar—dressed in official garments, a county magistrate.

After a moment’s thought, he remembered: Feng Jun, Magistrate of Heyang County!

Feng Jun traveled with a large entourage, bearing Fan Shanyue’s head. They’d entered Chengcheng County via Zhengjia Village, intending to cross through to report to the Provincial Governor in Xi’an.

But stepping into Chengcheng County, lush fields and blooming wildflowers greeted him everywhere. Utterly untouched by drought’s devastation!

Reaching Gaojia Village, he was met with bustling prosperity. Dumbstruck, words escaped him; only a trickle of nosebleed ran unnoticed.

Amid his bewildered stare, he spotted a familiar figure. “Mr. Bai!” he burst out, speeding towards the man. “Thank the heavens! Who would have thought we’d meet again here!”

Feng Jun beamed as he ran to Bai Yuan. “A few days ago, sir, you aided us in wiping out the Fan Shanyue bandits.” He brandished the box holding the head. “Heyang County is finally rid of this scourge! I travel to Xi’an now to personally deliver his head to the Provincial Governor.”

Bai Yuan smiled pleasantly. “Assisting you, Lord Feng, was my honor.”

Magistrate Feng scanned the surroundings in amazement. “This village...”

Bai Yuan gestured broadly. “This is Gaojia Village. Under Dao Xuan Deity’s eternal protection, the people live in joyful comfort. Fear not, Lord Feng, Heyang County will soon receive similar blessing.”

Feng Jun looked utterly perplexed, unable to grasp Bai Yuan's meaning.

At that moment, Gao Yiye approached, clad in ritual white robes fresh from a ceremony. Seeing the "Saint Lady" arrive, Bai Yuan swiftly bowed and tactfully withdrew, placing Gao Yiye center stage before Feng Jun.

Feng Jun frowned. Standing aside for a woman to speak? What was this?

Gao Yiye smiled politely. "Greetings, Lord Feng. I am Gao Yiye, little girl and master's wife of the Li Family here."

Feng Jun's eyes flickered toward the distant fortress—a noble family's stronghold. He understood the status. "And what counsel does the lady offer?"

"Master Li has a question," Gao Yiye continued. "Heyang County borders the Yellow River. Does a significant dock, perhaps named Qiachuan Port, exist there?"

Feng Jun nodded eagerly. "Indeed there is! One of Heyang County's vital trade docks! In prosperous years, merchant ships gather there, unloading goods beyond count."

Listening intently, Li Daoxuan thrilled inwardly: Confirmed! Heyang County possesses Qiachuan Port! Excellent! My vision only covers half the county now, and the port lies further east, out of sight. But a few more Rescue Index points...and my reach extends into the Yellow River! Then...hehehe...

His mind surged with images: countless plastic boats floating freely upon the great river's currents.

Chapter 334: Build the Ships First

Li Daoxuan was happily musing about the little man sailing the boat when Feng Jun shook his head and sighed. "Although we have the Qiachuan Port in our region, it has been practically abandoned over the past year."

Li Daoxuan found it strange. “Abandoned? With such a port, merchants should seize the opportunity to transport grain from the prosperous Jiangnan region here to sell. Wouldn’t they make a huge profit with just one shipload of grain? Why would it be abandoned?”

Gao Yiye was also curious and quickly conveyed the question.

Feng Jun sighed. “Madam, you may not know. Last year, when Hu Tingyan was the Provincial Governor of Shaanxi and Wu Zhiwang was the Provincial Governor of Yansui, they both reported the bandit uprising. Later, Wu Zhiwang died of illness, Hu Tingyan was dismissed, His Majesty appointed Yang He as the Three Boundary Governor, and at the same time... the imperial court ordered a ban on transporting grain into Shaanxi. Therefore, grain merchants stopped coming. Apart from grain, no one wants any other goods now. As a result, no merchant ships have entered the Qiachuan Port for a very, very long time.”

Li Daoxuan cursed, “Fuck!”

Gao Yiye was also shocked. Before Li Daoxuan could speak, she urgently asked, “Why? There’s a severe drought. Why would the court ban grain shipments into Shaanxi?”

Feng Jun sighed. “To prevent banditry!”

Gao Yiye asked, “What does preventing banditry have to do with banning grain shipments into Shaanxi?”

Feng Jun explained, “The grain entering Shaanxi would be distributed to the common people, but the common people would immediately be robbed by bandits. In the end, that grain would fall into the bandits’ hands, nourishing them and giving them the strength to rebel.”

Seeing Gao Yiye and Bai Yuan’s grim expressions, he hastily clarified, “That... that’s what the people above said, not me, alright? I, an official in Shaanxi, understand perfectly that this must be the kind of idea conceived only if your head gets crushed by the palace door...”

Li Daoxuan: “...”

Gao Yiye: “...”

Both were speechless for a moment.

Bai Yuan, however, accustomed to such bewildering moves by the court, seemed less shocked. He spread his hands and said, "Oh, if the bandits get no food, they all starve, thus no rebellion. Impeccable logic. Much admired."

Feng Jun gave a bitter smile. "This is beyond the ability of a mere Seventh-Rank magistrate like me. Please excuse my incompetence."

Li Daoxuan spoke up: "Heyang County must be helped."

He spoke, so Gao Yiye understood. "Lord Feng, our Gaojia Village actually has a considerable amount of grain. We are willing to share a portion to help the people of Heyang County."

Feng Jun was overjoyed upon hearing this. "Really?" he blurted. "Ah? Lord Feng! Your nose is bleeding! Suddenly gushing!" exclaimed Gao Yiye.

Feng Jun wiped his nose. Blood instantly smeared across his face as if cutting it in half. Ignoring it completely, he rapidly calmed down and countered, "You give me grain. What must I give you in return?" After the initial ecstasy, he instantly grasped that mutual benefit was the key tune. Clearly, the nosebleed hadn't addled his brains.

Gao Yiye smiled. "We don't require goods. We merely ask Lord Feng to issue an administrative decree to build several roads. The rules would be the same as those in our Chengcheng County."

Feng Jun was momentarily surprised, then understood immediately. He had heard rumors about Bai Yuan's Chengcheng County Magistrate, Liang Shixian, engaging in large-scale construction there, though he didn't know the exact scale. Hearing Gao Yiye mention "road construction" made him realize instantly.

He thought to himself: So that's how it is! No wonder the Chengcheng County Magistrate could undertake road construction during this great disaster. He's getting support and grain supplies from

Gaojia Village. If Liang Shixian dared to do it, Feng Jun certainly dared too. Building bridges and roads was inherently sound governance. If he hesitated over even this, what kind of magistrate was he?

“Of course I have no problem with that!” Feng Jun stated firmly.

“Then it’s settled,” said Gao Yiye. “Lord Feng, why not first go to Xi’an to deliver your report? After you return from Xi’an to Heyang County, come back to our Gaojia Village. We can then discuss the specifics of the road construction.”

Feng Jun replied, “Good!”

His mood instantly brightened considerably. Over the past year or so, not only had Fan Shanyue harassed him relentlessly, but he also received no aid from the court. Worse still, the officials above had outright severed his trade route, banning grain shipments. Heyang County’s future had seemed utterly hopeless. Now, suddenly, people are actively seeking to help him? He couldn’t contain his joy.

“By the way!” Bai Yuan interjected with a smile. “Lord Feng, if you’re traveling to Xi’an, you can take our little train for part of the journey. It will save you quite some time.”

Feng Jun was puzzled. “Oh? What’s a little train? A fire-burning cart?”

Bai Yuan chuckled, “You’ll understand once you ride it.”

Minutes later...

Feng Jun boarded the small train heading from Gaojia Village to Chengcheng County. With a loud “Wooooo!” from the whistle, the train, carrying him, shot off towards the county seat at a roaring 60 kilometers per hour.

It was Feng Jun’s first time riding such a bizarre mode of transport: excitement, screaming... accompanying a sudden, torrential nosebleed. The blood loss mounted. He felt dizzy. He fell unconscious...

Upon reaching Chengcheng County, his attendants had a tough time reviving him.

Meanwhile, Li Daoxuan had already turned his attention to researching ships.

Although the Yellow River hadn't yet entered their zone of control, it inevitably would. The matter of ships likely needed to be ordered well in advance. He dialed his old friend Cai Xinzi.

"Hello, Old Cai? Haven't asked you to customize anything for a while. Want a few cute, kawaii, ship models this time. Riverboats, not oceangoing ships, alright?"

Cai Xinzi laughed, "Ship models? I've got models aplenty. Why bother making more? Just come pick a couple!"

Li Daoxuan clarified, "I don't want regular remote-controlled ship models. I want the kind that you can 'operate' from inside the model boat. Riverboat, riverboat, riverboat. Important things thrice said."

Cai Xinzi got it. "Shrooms again? Remember your weirdo sun chariot? That teeny-tiny cart the size of a knuckle? Still adding braking and steering systems? Tsk, man, I'm out of patience. Now you're onto boats? Fine. What systems this time?"

Li Daoxuan listed, "Steering system's a must. Propulsion system's definitely required. Transforming..."

He barely got "Trans" out of his mouth when Cai Xinzi roared down the line, "First two? Fine! 'Transforming'? Absolutely not! Not ONE. Enough mushrooms! Throw them away! You will DIE if you keep this up. Die!"

Li Daoxuan whined, "Don't reject so fast! Boats are big. Making a Transformer should be easy! Toy shops are stuffed with Transformers!"

Cai Xinzi retorted, "Sure, transformation itself is easy. But you'll demand full remote operation after transformation! Listen, operation? NO-HOW! Impossible! All that 'Gundam' jazz about psychic links and joysticks controlling bots? Utter fantasy! Impossible! Unless Musk finishes that brain-chip interface, forget it! Without operation? Pure transformation? Utterly. Useless."

“

Chapter 335: You Can Do Some Technical Work

Li Daoxuan thought carefully: “Alright, forget the transformation. But you need to upgrade the power system and steering system for me.”

Hearing him abandon the transformation, Cai Xinzi breathed a sigh of relief. The mushrooms he ate this time couldn’t have been too potent. There was still hope for him.

Li Daoxuan pondered further. For previous projects like the sun chariot and small train, their limited usability and small toy size meant he hadn’t considered arming them. But a ship was entirely different.

Ships could be made large!

Equipping large weapons on a massive vessel became an obvious idea.

“Old Cai, I also want to install some weapons on the ship model.”

“Of course we’ll install them,” Cai Xinzi replied. “We’ll arrange all kinds of hundreds-of-millimeter caliber naval guns for you. Torpedoes, missile launchers—whatever you want, you’ll get.”

Li Daoxuan: “I’m not talking about display weapons. I mean weapons that can actually fire.”

Cai Xinzi: “Pfft! I just thought the mushrooms weren’t that bad, but clearly, I was wrong. Go lie down properly. I’ll call an ambulance for you. Hang in there!”

Hearing this, Li Daoxuan laughed himself. Indeed, he hadn’t been clear, inviting Cai Xinzi’s sarcasm.

“I meant toy-like weapons,” Li Daoxuan explained. “Like mounting a small toy cannon on the bow that can shoot out plastic pellets. That should be possible, right?”

Cai Xinzi: "Oh, that's easy. I can buy a small plastic-pellet cannon online and fit it onto the ship. Won't take much time. But... won't your ship end up looking rather perverted?"

Li Daoxuan: "I like perverted toys."

Cai Xinzi: "Fine, you said it. Then I could also install a lighter on the bow. Flip a switch, and it becomes a flamethrower ship."

Li Daoxuan: "That sounds good too. Add it."

Cai Xinzi sighed deeply: "I'm clearly a maker of high-end toys. Why does everything I build for you tend towards juvenilization?"

The call ended. Cai Xinzi went to work on the riverboat.

Li Daoxuan, however, was thinking that relying solely on toy weapons he provided wouldn't do. The little people needed to make weapons for their ships themselves. And in the late Ming era, the weapon for ships was, of course, the "Red Flag Cannons."

Li Daoxuan shifted his focus back to the main fortress of Gaojia Fortress to find Gao Yiye to relay his message.

Yet, at a glance, Gao Yiye wasn't in the watchtower.

Where had the young lady run off to?

Li Daoxuan began searching everywhere.

Only upon looking did he realize the challenge. The box now had a 1000×600 meter field of vision encompassing the busiest and most prosperous part of Gaojia Village. It teemed with energetic little people, men and women scurrying about freely. Finding one specific person among the crowd proved surprisingly difficult.

Finding a little person clearly required some skill.

He needed to think this through!

If Gao Yiye wasn't in the watchtower, where would she usually be?

The fabric shop in the Gaojia Business Circle?

Li Daoxuan thought of this possibility and locked his "Focus" function on the fabric shop. Hey! He found her.

Gao Yiye was chatting with a group of women inside the fabric shop.

Most were ordinary village women, the kind who rarely stepped outside their homes, hence limited in perspective and experience.

When Li Daoxuan's "Focus" shifted over, he caught a village woman saying with a laugh: "Saint Lady, Chunhong, all thanks to this fabric shop you opened. I've earned a fair bit taking clothing commissions. That stubborn husband of mine isn't making as much now. He used to look down on me during arguments, claiming I lived off him. Hah! Now he doesn't dare say that!"

Another woman chimed in: "Mine too! At first, he forbade me from joining the fun, saying a woman should just stay home and serve her husband. When I pulled out pieces of silver I earned from tailoring... his expression! Hahaha!"

Other women joined in the laughter:

"Same here!"

"Me too!"

“Hahaha!”

“After earning money, the way he treats me is noticeably different.”

They laughed triumphantly, but three brothel girls present didn't join the chorus. Though more capable than these village women, they lacked the ordinary woman's courage to hold their heads high. A deep-seated sense of inferiority kept them unexpectedly shy in this “conference on women's rights.”

Gao Yiye laughed: “I'm glad everyone feels this way. Just the other day, chatting with the Deity, He said: ‘Women hold up half the sky.’ We women shouldn't entirely hide at home. We should bravely step out and contribute our strength. What was it called again... huh? What was it... I forgot.”

Li Dauxan laughed: “It's called ‘liberating female productive forces.’”

“Ah, yes, yes! Liberating female productive forces,” Gao Yiye finished, then realized the Deity had joined them. Her cheeks flushed slightly. “Ah? Deity! When did you start listening?”

Li Daoxuan replied smiling: “Just the last few sentences.”

Gao Yiye felt a little awkward: “Us women hiding here gossiping, saying unkind things about our men... is that really okay?”

Li Daoxuan: “It's fine. I didn't hear anything unkind. You were just talking about perfectly ordinary things. The economic base determines the superstructure. Status between men and women is essentially decided by ‘who earns.’ If you earn more than your husbands, support the family, or even lord it over them the way they did when they were the sole earners, that's perfectly justified.”

The women were hearing “the economic base determines the superstructure” for the first time. It felt novel, yet upon reflection, wasn't that exactly how the world worked?

Li Daoxuan continued: “Years of continuous warfare, rebel uprisings, militias fighting... all this means fewer men and more women in villages and towns. Under these conditions, social productivity suffers.

You women should bravely step forward now. Do some less physically demanding, technical work. This wouldn't only raise your social standing but also boost Gaojia Village's productivity."

The women were astonished: "Ah? Besides weaving cloth and making clothes, what other technical work can we do?"

Li Daoxuan gently guided them: "Like papermaking, lamp making, preparing pre-measured gunpowder cartridges wrapped in paper, engraving, printing books... indeed, there's much you can do, just as well as men. Have confidence in yourselves. Be brave. Step outside home. Go sign up as apprentices at the artisans' well. Who knows? Maybe one day, each of you will earn as much as any man."

Chapter 336: Want to Invent Something

Liberating women's productive forces was definitely necessary!

Due to the war causing a sharp decline in the male population, if women did not enter the workforce, it would be hard for social productive forces to recover swiftly—this was true not only at the end of the Great Ming but also in modern times.

After liberation, didn't our country also shout the slogan "Women hold up half the sky" to boost productivity?

Li Daoxuan knew that in the Great Ming now, relying on his golden hand for providing food and materials, the productivity issue was manageable. If one day, due to some accident, he stopped helping, the miniature post-war world would need both men and women to work together to restore productivity.

Relying solely on men was surely not enough! After the great chaos of war, how many men could remain?

So it was necessary for him to deliver some motivational advice early, planting a seed of "liberation of thought" in the women's hearts, giving them time to grow slowly.

"Yiye, come here."

Gao Yiye knew she was needed for relaying messages, and quickly ran out from the fabric shop. Following Li Daoxuan's directions, she came to the school, went straight to the fifth floor, and arrived at the library.

The atmosphere in the library was as chaotic as ever, with draft papers flying everywhere.

But that day, Young Master Bai was not present; only Song Yingxing was there alone.

Young Master Bai had now started teaching the children "Physics class"; some children with quicker learning progress had finished "Elementary Math" and were advancing to the "junior high" level, so they could start learning "Physics." Naturally, Young Master Bai could no longer spend every day in the library with Song Yingxing doing strange things.

When Gao Yiye walked into the library, Song Yingxing was crouching, lying on the ground, busy drawing on a huge piece of paper.

Li Daoxuan looked closely—Song Yingxing was drawing an "electric small train."

"This isn't scientific!" Song Yingxing shook his head while drawing. "This thing is absolutely unscientific; it fundamentally can't run. Its mass would cause it to fall apart; how could it possibly move?"

Li Daoxuan laughed. "Tell Mr. Song that it was created with my immortal methods and doesn't obey physics."

Gao Yiye began to relay the message.

Song Yingxing let out an "ah," jumped up from the floor, and said, "Saint Lady, when did you arrive?"

Gao Yiye replied, "I've been here for a while, and the Deity has also been here for some time. Seeing you drawing things, we didn't disturb you."

Song Yingxing showed an awkward expression. "Ahem... I'm very interested in this electric small train, but sadly... it can't be made just by studying physics."

Gao Yiye smiled. “The Deity is a deity; deities follow ‘divine principles,’ not ‘physics.’” That explanation was perfect!

Song Yingxing stopped dwelling on it. “What did the Deity want with me?”

Li Daoxuan asked, “Do you know the production method of the Red Flag Cannons?”

Song Yingxing paused. “Actually, I do know that. But... why should our village build this? It’s a firearm used only in large-scale combat or siege battles. If we’re just repelling bandits, firearms and grenades are already enough.”

Li Daoxuan said, “Just for fun. Whether it’s useful or not, playing around with it and studying the technology is still worthwhile.”

Such words would be unbelievable even to a dog, but Song Yingxing had no doubts, since he himself enjoyed fiddling with chaotic equipment for fun.

He pulled out a paper, picked up a pen, scribbled quickly, and in little time drew the production method of the Red Flag Cannons on the paper.

Li Daoxuan didn’t speak, but Gao Yiye couldn’t help but marvel. “Mr. Song, how many bizarre things do you actually know? Why, every time we seek you out, you can always draw blueprints?”

Song Yingxing said, “Knowing how to draw these blueprints isn’t remarkable. These are inventions by others; I just copied them. It’s not impressive at all. If I could invent something interesting myself, that would be genuinely exciting. Alas...”

At this, he felt a bit sorrowful. “Right now, what I most want to invent is a small train. How amazing it would be if we could build the small train the Deity made with immortal methods using our mortal power. Sadly, I can’t figure out any way to propel such a huge vehicle.”

Hearing that, Li Daoxuan inwardly stirred—was he thinking of that?

For the late Ming Dynasty, this was indeed too early.

With the technology and productivity of that time, not only could they not create a train, but even with one, the materials for laying rails could not be secured. Given the Ming Dynasty's mining capabilities, where would they get enough iron to build lengthy railways?

Luckily, he was there! Simply tossing in a few lumps of iron would be enough for them to pave railways from Australia to the Maldives.

A steam train, though, could be made now with sufficient technology, but if he just handed over blueprints, Song Yingxing would merely "copy" it, not truly "invent," which would harm scientific enlightenment.

Better to give him just the core idea and let him imagine the rest himself.

Li Daoxuan rummaged through his pile of toys and soon found a fun little thing—a "mini steam engine." It had been bought from an online shopping site for only a few dozen yuan, standing just a few centimeters tall.

He directly placed this item on the terrace of the teaching building. "Yiye, take Mr. Song to the terrace to show him a little thing."

Song Yingxing climbed to the terrace as instructed and immediately saw a massive machine in front of him, with water pipes and strange large wheels...

In front of him, Li Daoxuan poured some clean water into the water pipes, then lit an alcohol lamp beneath them.

A flame flickered up, heating the water in the pipes. Soon, the water boiled, steam rushed along the pipes, driving the large wheel. The big wheel started spinning wildly.

Li Daoxuan smiled gently. "Did you understand?"

Song Yingxing watched in a daze. “I think I get it, I get it... This matches what’s taught in Physics class: water heated turns to gas, and the gas, compressed in a tiny space, generates immense force, pushing that large wheel to turn.”

“Exactly!” Li Daoxuan said. “This is a steam engine. Its principle is simple—you got it instantly. With a steam engine, you can drive wheels. For wheels, you’ve studied gear principles: gears driving gears can amplify power several times.”

Song Yingxing seemed enlightened. “I understand now, I do, haha! As long as there’s enough steam and enough wheels, I can move incredibly heavy things.”

Li Daoxuan said, “That’s right. Keep researching. With your smarts, try to invent something using this principle.”

Chapter 337: Du Wenhuan’s Fury

Yan’an Prefecture!

Three Boundary Governor Yang He arrived beneath Yan’an Prefecture’s walls at the head of a large army.

The troops behind him were no ordinary force. Their commander was a man named Du Wenhuan, who excelled in both archery and horsemanship, mastered military strategy, and was well-versed in “The Commentary of Zuo”, various schools of ancient philosophy, and the poetic styles of the Six Dynasties and Early Tang periods. He authored works including “Essays from Mount Taixia,” “Survey of the Five Sacred Mountains,” “Morning Mist Musings,” “Comprehensive Interpretation of the Six Secret Teachings,” “Selected Works of Taixia,” “Eight Streams Collection,” and “The Complete Works of Dao Wu.”

He was a man of exemplary military and literary talents.

During the Wanli era, Du Wenhuan repeatedly defeated Mongolian tribes and later earned great merit suppressing the rebellion of She Chongming in Chongqing.

He was a formidable warrior, possessing both capability and numerous battlefield achievements.

This time, when Yang He came to the northwest to oversee the operation against the roving bandits, Du Wenhuan happened to be claiming illness and resting at home. Yang He personally sought him out, inviting him to join specifically for bandit suppression.

They had pursued the largest bandit force, led by Wang Jiayin, from the northern borders, chasing relentlessly until they reached Yan'an Prefecture.

Arriving before Yan'an Prefecture, the desolate landscape along the way made Yang He sigh involuntarily. "Four years of severe drought, not a single grain harvested, supply lines failing... Starving soldiers and starving commoners, over half have turned to banditry..."

Du Wenhuan, however, focused on something different. He lowered his voice. "Your Excellency Yang, on this journey, we passed several county seats overrun by Wang Jiayin. Have you noticed these counties have no city walls anymore?"

Yang He: "Hmm? You're right. Why no walls?"

Du Wenhuan: "The counties originally had walls. After Wang Jiayin broke in and pillaged, the bandits demolished the walls before leaving."

A question mark slowly formed above Yang He's head: "?"

Du Wenhuan: "Walls aid defense. The bandits destroyed them during their withdrawal to facilitate their next raid."

Yang He: "Utterly outrageous! We must catch up to Wang Jiayin swiftly and apprehend this lawless reprobate."

Just as he spoke, a fast rider galloped up. The messenger dismounted urgently and reported: "After capturing Huangfu, Qingshui, and Mugua, Wang Jiayin seized Fugu. Bandit leader Shen Yiyuan occupied Xin'an, Ningsai, Liushujian Forts, and other strongholds. Shen Yiyuan's brother Shen Yikui besieged Qingyang and took He Shui..."

Hearing “Ningsai,” Du Wenhuan’s face darkened, his entire body trembling. “Ningsai... Ningsai is my ancestral home!”

The messenger lowered his voice: “General Du... your clansmen... were almost... all killed by Shen Yiyuan.”

Du Wenhuan was furious!

Hearing this, Yang He couldn’t help but deeply furrow his brows. “Here we are pursuing Wang Jiayin, yet Shen Yiyuan rises elsewhere, Bu Zhan Ni rampages fiercely near Luochuan... With all Five Troop Divisions having Entered the Capital to Serve Wang, our forces are utterly insufficient to suppress all these roving bandits.”

Du Wenhuan was furious!

Yang He: “Given the situation, it seems we must resort solely to appeasement.”

Du Wenhuan was furious!

Yang He: “Issue my command: all local commanders, prefectural magistrates, and county magistrates are to appease the roving bandits with the promise of high offices and riches, enticing them to surrender. I will personally issue pardons to them and formulate settlement policies.”

Du Wenhuan, still furious, shouted: “Deputy Minister Yang! Did you not just hear? These bandits slaughtered my family! Yet you plan to appease them? Issue them pardon documents? Did my Du family members die for nothing?”

Yang He: “But the Five Troop Divisions are absent. We lack sufficient troops. Appeasement is the only way to quell the bandits right now.”

Du Wenhuan was furious: “Fine, fine! Deputy Minister, appease to your heart’s content! This humble officer will go fight the bandits himself to the death, to revenge the blood of my family!”

With that, Du Wenhuan swung around and strode away.

His personal retainers and house guard instantly followed. In a blink, a large group of elite soldiers and capable officers trailed Du Wenhuan, deaf to Yang He's calls. They simply refused him the courtesy of turning back.

Yang He was left surrounded only by a group of incompetent soldiers shivering in the cold wind.

...

County Magistrate Feng Jun of Heyang, after making a circuit in Xi'an, drifted back to Gaojia Village.

Though the shortest route from Chengcheng County back to Heyang County should pass through Quangou Village, sometimes the fastest path between two points wasn't a straight line, but "wherever the train arrives." Thus, taking the long detour through Gaojia Village was actually the shortcut to Heyang County.

Thirty-Two, Bai Yuan, and Gao Yiye came out together to welcome Feng Jun into the village, seating him within Gaojia Fortress's conference hall.

"This official presented the severed head of Fan Shanyue to the Provincial Governor. The Provincial Governor was most pleased." Though Feng Jun spoke of good news, his expression was heavy, showing not a trace of joy.

Thirty-Two and Bai Yuan sensed trouble immediately. They lowered their voices and asked, "What's wrong? You look so grim?"

Feng Jun sighed. "After finally dealing with Fan Shanyue, and with your promise of grain aid for Heyang County, I should be relieved. Yet during this Xi'an trip, I received very ill tidings."

Everyone: "?"

Feng Jun: "Wang Jiayin's rampage from Fugu worsens. Days ago, he began pushing south along the Yellow River. The fiend even commands a fleet now! He dispatched boats to attack Hequ County across the river in Shanxi!"

Everyone: "!!!"

Li Daoxuan, outside the box upon hearing this, frowned slightly. He's going to start infesting Shanxi? Well, the timing fits. The peasant uprising erupted in Shaanxi, but moved into Shanxi territory within a few years. After devastating Shanxi, they turn towards Huguang and Sichuan, eventually paralyzing half the Great Ming.

Feng Jun's expression remained grim: "General Wang Guoliang of Shanxi deployed Western cannons on Hequ County's battlements to bombard the bandit ships. He managed to repel Wang Jiayin's attack."

Thirty-Two, unfamiliar with military matters, couldn't help but ask, "The bandits attacked Hequ, still far from Heyang County. Lord Feng, you truly need not worry. What's this, if not pointless anxiety?" [Lit. "Worry of the man from Qi"]

Bai Yuan: "Steward Thirty-Two, that's where you're mistaken. Overland travel and river travel are entirely different matters. Bandits attacking Hequ today could strike our Qiachuan Port in Heyang County tomorrow."

Thirty-Two: "Ah?"

Bai Yuan produced a fan, flicking it open with a whoosh, striking an eccentric pose. "This," he declared, "is what they call 'covering a thousand li of riverbank in a single day, returning.'" [Lit. "A thousand li of Jiangling in one day"]

Thirty-Two covered his face: "Master Bai, when you talk like that, it makes me want to punch you."

Bai Yuan: "Oh? So even you recognize that's an annoying way to speak? I was simply imitating your earlier example."

Thirty-Two: "..."

Feng Jun added with a deeply troubled face: "Master Bai speaks truly. Now that Wang Jiayin possesses a fleet, he could assault Qiachuan Port at any moment. My Heyang County, barely recovered from Fan Shanyue's ravages, has had no time to recuperate. If Wang Jiayin strikes immediately... I possess neither General Wang's Western cannons nor any formidable militia to defend us. I truly do not know what to do. Aiyah..."

Chapter 338: The Fleet is Coming

Lord Feng's concerns were certainly well-founded.

Li Daoxuan privately thought: Unlike officials, bandits didn't fight city by city. Instead, they hopped around, weaving and striking unpredictably. When land routes were blocked, they took to waterways, making surprise attacks everywhere—no surprise there.

If his vision had reached Qiachuan Port, he could have deployed his ship model to deal with the bandit fleet immediately. But his vision hadn't quite reached there yet, which was quite awkward.

He still had to urgently save the citizens of Heyang County!

As long as most of Heyang County's citizens felt happiness and joy, surrendering their "Rescue Index," wouldn't his vision reach Qiachuan Port then?

"Yiye, tell Thirty-Two. Our village must fully support Heyang County's disaster relief—full support! Have Heyang County initiate work-for-relief immediately. At the same time, I will go at once to bring rain to Heyang County."

Gao Yiye quietly relayed Li Daoxuan's divine decree into Thirty-Two's ear.

Thirty-Two rushed with pride: "Lord Feng, we already discussed aiding Heyang County last time. Without delay, let us begin at once. But as you surely know—give a man a full bowl of rice and he feels gratitude, but give him a dou of rice and he grows resentful. Simply handing out grain to Heyang's citizens does them no good. Therefore... we must provide aid through wages."

Feng Jun nodded. "That would be excellent. Mr. Bai and I discussed this last time. Let's simply construct two roads: one from Quangou Village straight to Heyang County, and another from Gaojia Village to Yang Village... I will organize numerous laborers. The aid and food from you will be distributed to them as wages. After careful thought, I believe keeping workers at half-satiety daily would make them work quite happily."

Thirty-Two shook his head with a smile. "Who has strength to work at half-satiety? They must eat their fill! Moreover, additional wages must be paid—three jin of flour per day, delivered without fail."

Feng Jun: "Ah?"

His first impression of the "work-for-relief" scheme had been like distributing congee to help citizens—laborers working to barely eat. Little had he expected Gaojia Village to insist on full meals plus three jin of flour daily as wages—this was...

This far exceeded his expectations!

Feng Jun's nose bled instantly. He wiped at it; the blood on his face formed two curved lines, like a smile.

Feng Jun: "Is this real?"

Thirty-Two: "Perfectly true."

Feng Jun rejoiced: "Then this is truly excellent!"

Bai Yuan also stepped forward. "Once work-for-relief is announced, every young adult man will want labor. The militia in your county will disband. Yet Wang Jiayin's fleet could strike at any moment. If bandits arrive while your militia is digging roads, Heyang County will stand in grave danger."

Hearing this, Feng Jun's expression darkened again. "You're right! What then? I can't order the militia not to build roads. Cutting off a man's livelihood is like killing his parents—long before bandits attack, the militia would have rebelled."

Bai Yuan smiled. "Therefore, we must rethink how your militia is organized."

Feng Jun: "?"

Bai Yuan continued, "Pay the militia wages. Let them focus wholeheartedly on this promising career without wandering off to other jobs. Gaojia Village will provide their wages, ensuring their income exceeds road construction labor. Thus, they can guard against bandits with peace of mind."

At first glance, Feng Jun thought the plan excellent.

But on deeper reflection, something felt amiss. Fresh blood gushed from his nose. Wiping his face smeared the blood downward, warping his expression strangely. He muttered lowly, "Laborers pose no issue... but if Gaojia Village pays and supports the militia... something just feels wrong."

Bai Yuan spread his hands. "Lord Feng overthink things. Militias have always been sustained by local gentry. Since when has the government funded them? Even without Gaojia Village covering the cost, some Zhang Yuanwai, Mr. Li, Wang Yuanwai, or Zheng Yuanwai would fund them. How could any trouble arise?"

Feng Jun found this reasoning somewhat persuasive.

Left this way, it felt off. Right that way, it made sense.

Back and forth, his mind jammed.

In truth, militias differed little from private retainers. They were "civilian forces" maintained by local gentry through wealth—much like mercenaries, loyal to their paymaster.

In ordinary gentry's hands, they became vital protectors.

In the hands of rebels? They'd barely differ from bandits.

Feng Jun pondered deeply: Heyang County already hosted local gentry maintaining several militias. Recently, they eradicated Fan Shanyue's remnants. Even harboring vile motives, Gaojia Village couldn't simply seize militias from local gentry, could they?

Let Gaojia Village support militias if they wished—at worst competing in wealth with Heyang's gentry. No serious threat.

Perhaps he needn't worry much here.

Ultimately, Shaanxi drowned in chaos. With the imperial court indifferent, Feng Jun had to save himself through any means necessary—even extreme measures.

Once clear-minded, he dismissed the conflict.

“Good! Let us proceed!”

Now that County Magistrate Feng Jun approved, matters proceeded smoothly.

Gao Yiye smiled. “Since road construction is settled, only one task remains: Gaojia Village will now perform a ritual, inviting the Dragon King to rain upon Heyang County, granting its farmers tangible benefit.”

Her words baffled Feng Jun. “Perform a ritual? Invite the Dragon King for rain? What sorcery is this? If this involves cult practice, I refuse.”

Li Daoxuan had instructed Gao Yiye to say precisely this intentionally.

Previously for Chengcheng County, he'd gradually influenced locals through comic books, then dispatched priests like Third Lady and believers for elaborate groundwork before manifesting divinity.

But that was too slow!

Wang Jiayin's fleet threatened imminently. Li Daoxuan urgently needed vision over Qiachuan Port and reach into the Yellow River. Lacking leisure now, he resorted to brash "divine being" theatrics.

Gao Yiye continued smiling. "Rest assured, Lord Feng, we practice no cult. Ma Tianzheng—Daoist Ma of the Quanzhen Dragon Gate sect—resides here at Gaojia Village. Simply invite him to Heyang County to perform the ritual, and he shall summon the Dragon King. See how our village escapes drought? The Dragon King brought that rain."

Chapter 339: Daoist Ma Who Could Pray for Rain

Feng Jun didn't believe a single word about "invoking rain."

However, upon learning it wasn't a cult, but rather a Taoist from the Quanzhen Dragon Gate sect, he felt less resistant.

The Quanzhen Dragon Gate sect was founded by the renowned Taoist Qiu Chuji during the late Song and early Yuan dynasties. Everyone knew Qiu Chuji, so there was no need to elaborate. The current leader of the Quanzhen Dragon Gate sect, Master Wang Changyue, was also a very famous Taoist.

At that time, Taoism was in decline, and many Taoists disregarded the precepts, only interested in swindling money.

But Wang Changyue said, "If you yourself cannot follow the teachings and practice them, yet try to persuade others to do so, who would believe and submit?"

Thus, he raised the slogan "self-attainable first," urging disciples of the Quanzhen Dragon Gate sect to shun unorthodox practices, uphold proper Taoist traditions, and revitalize their sect.

This matter was well-known, and Feng Jun was aware of it too.

He couldn't help asking, "Is there a Taoist master from the Quanzhen Dragon Gate sect here?"

Gao Yiye smiled and said to an attendant beside her, "Go invite Daoist Ma."

Soon, Ma Tianzheng arrived.

Feng Jun looked at the Taoist with doubtful eyes.

But Ma Tianzheng wasn't fazed at all. Having wandered the world for years, seeking immortals and visiting masters, he had met as many people as there were hairs on an ox and experienced more things than most people encounter in a lifetime.

He had once been lost, too. But since witnessing the divine manifestation of the Dao Xuan Deity, he had never wavered in his faith toward the Tao he practiced.

He radiated a kind of confident brilliance!

Just like the song goes: "The lovers on Bride's Street/ wore faces filled with pride." Proud people give others a completely different first impression.

Ma Tianzheng smiled slightly and performed a Taoist salute to Feng Jun. "Long life and great blessings! This humble Taoist, Ma Tianzheng, am a disciple of Master Wang Changyue of the Quanzhen Dragon Gate sect. Greetings, my Lord."

Hearing the name Wang Changyue, Feng Jun couldn't help but feel deep respect. He thought: Master Wang always strictly governed his disciples, keeping them away from crooked paths, preaching "self-attainable first." Master Wang's disciple must be quite reliable.

He gained some preconceived goodwill toward Ma Tianzheng. "Daoist Ma, this official heard earlier that you possess the skill to set up an altar and perform rites to invoke rain. Is this true?"

Ma Tianzheng chuckled inwardly: With the Deity here, this was an easy task!

But outwardly, he couldn't say so!

When it came to such matters, the more emphatic you sounded, the less people believed you. The more vague and ambiguous you were, the more likely people might actually believe you. It was a strange psychology, but having been a Taoist for so long, he had seen much of it.

A peculiar expression appeared on his face as he sighed deeply. "Lord Feng, you greatly overestimate this humble Taoist. I do know the methods for setting an altar and performing rites to pray for rain. But whether it brings rain... that is not for me to decide."

Feng Jun: "What decides it then?"

Ma Tianzheng: "Why, Heaven, of course!"

He raised his hand, pointing skyward, deliberately aiming it at Li Daoxuan's low cloud, and pretended earnestly to Feng Jun: "This humble Taoist is merely a petty mortal, 'begging' the Heaven for the gift of rain. Whether Heaven heeds such a humble plea and grants it... that is uncertain. If the Heaven takes pity on the sincerity of my heart and bestows a few drops of rain, that would be this Taoist's good fortune. Should Heaven choose to ignore this poor Taoist, well, such is my insufficient merit and fortune. One can only resign to fate."

True enough, his explanation was deliberately incomplete and elusive.

This actually made Feng Jun feel more settled. He thought privately: That makes sense! If you said you could definitely bring rain, this official would never believe it. But saying it might come, it might not... that is the hallmark of a charlatan.

Feng Jun didn't like charlatans.

However, as an official of the court, the most essential skill was dealing with various forces. One must understand how to flatter and compromise with superiors, and how to wield both kindness and authority over the people, resorting to deception or coercion when necessary.

Feng Jun thought to himself: After four years of severe drought, many commoners could barely survive, thinking of nothing but rebellion day and night. If I dispatch a Taoist to perform rain-invoking rituals or such rites, it might coax the populace into watching the heavens daily, hoping for rain in the short term, diverting their thoughts away from rebellion. Wouldn't that be immensely beneficial?

Having thought this through, Feng Jun made up his mind. “Daoist Ma, since you know the methods to pray for rain, whether it succeeds or not, it cannot hurt to try. Please depart immediately for Heyang County to assist our people there.”

Ma Tianzheng: “Since Lord Feng puts it this way, I shall naturally spare no effort.”

With the discussion settled, there was no time for idle talk. Feng Jun felt pressed for time—whether arranging rainfall, organizing work relief programs, or ensuring the militia’s wages, each task demanded immediate action. If Wang Jiayin attacked now, Heyang County would be doomed.

He dared not linger in Gaojia Village any longer. Claspng his hands briefly in farewell, he departed swiftly.

Ma Tianzheng raised his head and bowed deeply toward the low cloud in the sky. “This disciple guarantees the mission’s completion.”

Having spoken, he floated away after Feng Jun.

...

Grain carts from Gaojia Village streamed out in great numbers.

They funneled into Heyang County via two routes.

One passed through Quangou Village, utilizing an official government road that offered a relatively smooth journey.

The other route wound eastward through Zhengjia Village, descended a treacherous slope, then turned west. Within a short time, they reached Yang Village in Heyang County.

Though daunting to others, the slope posed no threat to the villagers of Gaojia.

Li Daoxuan, who hadn't personally intervened in a long while, acted this time. Producing a metal scraper, he vigorously smoothed the very incline where Fan Shanyue had once been pummeled by rolling logs and stones.

Within moments, he carved an elegant S-type mountain path into the hillside—a serpentine trail of eighteen bends...

Laborers from Gaojia Village pushed grain-laden handcarts along this freshly scraped S-curved road, breezing into Heyang County and arriving straight at Yang Village.

The influx of grain naturally sparked ecstatic joy among Heyang County's desperate populace.

They lined the streets to welcome the Gaojia convoy.

Ground Rabbit and Zheng Gouzi served as the escort commanders for this shipment.

Leading their hundred-man team through the jubilant crowds of Heyang, Ground Rabbit scanned the pitiful locals—each gaunt, clad in rags, eyes vacant—a stark contrast to the vigor of Gaojia villagers.

His heart clenched faintly with sorrow.

Beside him, Zheng Gouzi adopted the starting posture of the Ghost God Fist Technique's grappling maneuver, coiled like a spring ready to strike.

Ground Rabbit shot him a sidelong glance. "Gouzi, what's that stance? Who exactly are you planning to seize?"

Zheng Gouzi returned the glare sideways. "You! If you even think about overturning another grain cart, I'll drop you the instant you move."

Ground Rabbit spread his hands placatingly. "Alright, Gouzi, relax! That last blunder taught me my lesson. Saving people can't be done recklessly. It demands strategy, a broader view. Reckless acts might

save a few in front of you, but they spark chaos. Grasping the bigger picture? That saves countless more—quietly, steadily, like dew soaking the earth.”

He drew himself up solemnly, concluding, “I, Ground Rabbit, have matured. Henceforth, address me as...”

Zheng Gouzi cut in drolly, “The heroic Ground Rabbit?”

Ground Rabbit thumped his chest. “The expansive Ground Rabbit!”

“Pfft!” Zheng Gouzi snorted. “Did only your damn weight expand?”

Chapter 340: Praying to the Dao Xuan Deity for Rain

Just as Ground Rabbit and Zheng Gouzi were escorting grain into Heyang County at the same time...

Ma Tianzheng put on a clean Taoist robe, strapped a gleaming green peak sword on his back, and stood in the middle of Yang Village.

To the west of Yang Village, rolling hills stretched all the way to Zhengjia Village in Chengcheng County, while to the east, it was all flat.

A rare large stretch of mountain flatland, suitable for farming, was the main grain-producing area of the whole Heyang County.

However, after four years of drought, this plain was now...

County Magistrate Feng Jun, accompanied by county clerk and principal, stood beside Ma Tianzheng, introducing to him: “The most important grain-producing land in our Heyang County is this mountain flatland right before our eyes. It extends from Heyang County Town in the south to Xiniuzhuang in the north, west to Yang Village, east to Mengzhuang Fortress Village, roughly over thirty li north-south, fifteen li east-west... As long as this flat area gets rain, all the common people of Heyang County can fill their stomachs.”

While he was saying this, Li Daoxuan was also calculating.

After his scenic box underwent an “expansion,” it could now see a range of 1000 by 600 meters. To cover the entire core grain-producing land of Heyang County with rain, it seemed it would need at least thirty attempts.

It was a bit troublesome!

But it could save the lives of tens of thousands of common people, so the trouble was worth it.

When the box was expanded, he had already anticipated today’s development, so he had long prepared more medical nebulizers. This time, he directly brought out four.

He installed a blue dragon head on the first one, a red dragon head on the second, a yellow dragon head on the third, and a green dragon head on the ninth...

When Ma Tianzheng saw a low cloud floating overhead, he knew the Deity was watching. He felt extremely steady in his heart, not panicking at all. In the past, when he wasn’t sure if deities existed, he could swindle people—needless to say now, since it was confirmed that deities did exist.

He flicked the whisk in his hand, looked up, closed his eyes, and adopted an appearance like “sensing something.” After a good while, he lowered his head, opened his eyes, and said leisurely: “This poor Taoist has just sensed the spiritual energy of this place. I feel it’s full of sacred spirits and outstanding people, an excellent location. Moreover, with the great traitor gone, the world is clear and bright. Now is the perfect time to pray for rain.”

None of the officials believed a word, but their subordinates, yamen runners, and the common people watching the excitement heard Ma Tianzheng’s words and rejoiced: “Really?”

Ma Tianzheng: “Really! What benefit would this poor Taoist have in deceiving you?”

He pretended to make finger calculations: “Previously, it must have been an evildoer like Fan Shanyue in Heyang County, who provoked the anger of heaven and people. Since ‘heaven was angry’, of course, it wouldn’t rain. Now that Fan Shanyue has died, there are no more evildoers stirring mischief here. I will

set up an altar and perform rites, informing the Deity that the evil spirits have been expelled here. Then the Deity will invite the Dragon King to send down rain.”

The officials still didn't believe a word, but those below expressed great joy again: “Then, please, Reverend Taoist, quickly set up the altar and perform the rites.”

Feng Jun, watching the common people being completely deceived, thought: This Taoist might not be able to summon rain, but he's quite good at calming these people down. With these words spoken, who would dare to imitate Fan Shanyue and rebel in the future? Hehe! Not bad, not bad! Inviting this Taoist was the right move.

Ma Tianzheng selected the village's drying ground for grains. In the middle, he set up a table, opened a bag he carried with him, took out a small statue about a few tens of centimeters tall, and placed it on the center of the table.

That statue was Li Daoxuan's statue, of course, unchanged in being 32% more handsome and 3200% more majestic than he himself.

When that statue was placed, the onlooking common people were confused: “Who is this?”

“Not the Supreme Lao Jun or the Primordial Deity.”

“And not the Compassionate Traveling Real Person!”

“Never seen such a deity before.”

Ma Tianzheng shouted loudly: “Duō! This is the Dao Xuan Deity! You lot don't recognize a true deity, there's no need to be rude.”

The crowd, shouted at like that, dared not discuss anymore. They thought: The reverend Taoist says this is the Dao Xuan Deity; we definitely don't know as many deities as he does, so we'll just listen obediently.

Ma Tianzheng placed the statue carefully, bowed respectfully a few times. People arranged by Feng Jun immediately brought up the offerings. In these great disaster years, finding decent offerings wasn't easy; it was still thanks to Zhang Yuanwai from Xia Village who provided a big rooster.

Zhang Yuanwai was the militia instructor of Xia Village; he now squeezed into the crowd, watching coldly. He also didn't quite believe the Taoist could pray for rain, but his principle was: "One may not believe in deities, but one must not disrespect them."

Anyway, he didn't believe what divine beings said, but he could still give offerings; a chicken wasn't beyond him.

Right under the public eye, Ma Tianzheng took out yellow talisman paper, drew on it, and in an instant, drew a talisman that neither the onlookers recognized, nor Ma Tianzheng himself, nor even the Dao Xuan Deity...

Using the tip of his sword to pick it up, he burned it.

The talisman paper burned away instantly with a "boom," so fast that it startled everyone.

Li Daoxuan could see at once that he had coated the talisman paper with special chemicals so it could burn so fast. But the common people didn't know that, and immediately someone shouted: "Good!"

"The Reverend Taoist has divine powers."

Ma Tianzheng began to dance with the sword; a three-chi green peak sword was wielded like a flower. Muttering incantations, he suddenly lunged with the sword, piercing another talisman paper. Loudly, he said: "In this talisman is the sin of Fan Shanyue."

He took out a gourd, took a sip of "wine," and sprayed it at the talisman.

Suddenly, a "small red figure" appeared on the talisman paper.

The onlooking common people were astonished: “Ai yo! Really, there’s a small red figure on the paper!”

“Is that Fan Shanyue’s ghost?”

“He was captured in the talisman.”

Ma Tianzheng swung his sword and cut; the talisman was split in half, and the small red figure on it was also split in half.

The crowd shouted loudly: “Well done!”

“Chopped the ghost of Fan Shanyue!”

“Make this scoundrel never be reborn for all eternity!”

“Hey, brother, rebirth sounds like a Buddhist thing; this one is a Taoist.”

“Fool, Taoism also has the ‘Rebirth Mantra’; it can also grant rebirth.”

After cutting “Fan Shanyue’s ghost,” Ma Tianzheng looked up and recited a prayer loudly at the sky. The prayer was long and tedious; everyone listened for a long time before understanding its meaning: roughly, “I, the poor Taoist, killed the scoundrel Fan Shanyue; there are no more bad persons in Heyang County, everyone left is good citizens. Please, Dao Xuan Deity, bestow heavenly gifts to protect these good citizens.”

Ma Tianzheng knelt down with a thump, holding a stick of incense in both hands, pressed his forehead to the ground: “I beg the Dao Xuan Deity to grant rain.”