

# The Great Ming in the Box

## The Great Ming in the Box

On the eighth day of the eighth month, Year Seven of Tianqi, the temple to the Dao Xuan Deity was completed.

Actually, the temple had been finished two days earlier. But Thirty-Two, Third Lady, Gao Yiye, and the Village Chief had discussed it and decided the eighth day of the eighth month was an auspicious date. So even though it was ready, they pretended it wasn't, deliberately waiting until August eighth.

Thus, on the eighth day of the eighth month, over a hundred villagers, all dressed in clean clothes, lined up in orderly rows, much like pupils arranged in classes for a flag-raising ceremony.

Gao Yiye once again took the center position. Wearing an unbearably hot white outfit and heavy makeup, she knelt before the "Dao Xuan Deity Cave."

It was clearly a temple, yet they insisted on calling it a cave.

Without exaggeration, the “Dao Xuan Deity Cave” was currently the most grand, impressive, and high-end structure in Gaojia Village. It even had a proper foundation – the base built from fine stone, the upper portion crafted with meticulous woodwork.

Li Daoxuan had supplied the modern paint, vibrant and glossy, making the entire building eye-catching. If this were a battlefield, archers would surely target it.

The statue of the Dao Xuan Deity inside was carved with astonishing realism. Apart from being 32% more handsome and 320% more imposing than the actual person, it had no other flaws.

Li Daoxuan, watching his temple from outside the box, felt a strong urge to reach in, dig it out, take it to Cai Xinzi’s place to appraise its value, and sell it.

But seeing the little people gazing at it with such reverence, worshipping devoutly... well, better behave like a decent human.

Gao Yiye began reciting the prayer once more. Last time she had stumbled, but this time she was much smoother. These past days, she’d been learning reading and writing with Third Lady, reciting prayers daily. Now, though not perfectly fluent, she at least didn’t make major mistakes.

After finishing the script, Gao Yiye waved her hand: “Ring the bell!”

Beside her, Gao Chuwu swung a massive hammer: “GONG! GONG! GONG!”

Resonant bell tones rang out — proper bell sounds, deep, lingering, carrying a hint of sacredness.

Clearly, the blacksmiths Li Da and Gao Yiyi had finally forged an excellent bell.

Li Daoxuan couldn't help but find it darkly amusing: I ask you to craft iron armor, and after over half a month, I haven't seen a single set. Yet you manage to produce a fine bell first.

He now understood just how far apart the command plane was from the execution plane. Even if he watched the box every day, unless he specifically focused on those two blacksmiths, their work progress would never align with his thoughts.

Once the ceremony concluded, the Dao Xuan Deity Cave was officially open for business.

Villagers began lining up to enter the cave, kneeling before the “Deity Statue,” kowtowing with resounding bangs. After kowtowing, of course, they made wishes.

Li Daoxuan pressed his magnifying glass against the window to see inside.

A villager knelt before the Deity Statue, knocking his head five times audibly on the ground.

“May the Deity grant us favourable weather next year and abundant harvests.”

Li Daoxuan thought: That’s already something I intend to do for you. I supply water daily. Even if there’s a great drought across the land, Gaojia Village won’t suffer.

Feeling mischievous, he said to Gao Yiye: “Yiye, tell him this wish is granted.”

Standing beside the statue, Gao Yiye quickly adopted a solemn expression and told the villager: “Rise! The wish you just made has been granted by the Deity.”

The villager stared, stunned, then overjoyed: “Really? Truly granted?”

Gao Yiye: “The Deity personally granted it just now.”

Elated, the villager scrambled towards the exit. After only two steps, he suddenly remembered he hadn’t completed his reverence. Sweat broke out in panic. He rushed back, kowtowed several more times with heavy thuds before the statue, then finally ran out of the temple, shouting: “The Deity granted it! We can plant crops next year! Hahaha! The Deity granted it! Three years of drought... three

whole years... you don't know how I survived these three years! Hahaha! Finally, we can plant next year!"

Third Lady leaped out from the side, catching the villager to scold him: "If you truly plant and harvest next year, don't forget to fulfill your vow!"

The villager hurriedly promised: "Of course, of course!"

Seeing this, the villagers behind rejoiced greatly. They lined up, taking turns to kowtow and make their wishes.

"May the Deity bless my family's fields to yield several extra bushels of grain beyond a normal year."

Li Daoxuan thought: What's so hard about that? Just give you some fertilizer and it's done.

"Yiye, tell him, granted."

Gao Yiye relayed this in measured tones. The villager paused in disbelief, then burst into wild joy, kowtowed vigorously, ran out of the temple, and laughed hysterically in the village center: "Hahaha! Wonderful! Granted! My wish is granted too! Hahaha..."

The next one who stepped forward was unexpectedly Thirty-Two. The guy actually queued like the villagers, knelt before the Deity Statue, kowtowed, and made his wish: “May the Deity bestow blessings. I wish for... that little thing down below... to grow bigger. And for it to last longer... truly become ‘vigorous as a dragon and fierce as a tiger’.”

Li Daoxuan: “What the hell?! Tell him to get lost immediately!”

Gao Yiye froze, then awkwardly told Thirty-Two: “The Deity is angry. Tells you to get out. Immediately.”

Thirty-Two covered his head and scurried away like a frightened rat.

The entire village, over a hundred people, Li Daoxuan included, were thoroughly enjoying themselves...

Suddenly, the two sentinels guarding the wall beat rhythmically on two large bamboo tubes hung on the city gate — KONG! KONG! KONG! — then shouted: “Whoa! Someone’s coming! People outside coming! Lots of people coming!”

Their shouts sent everyone in the village sprinting towards the wall.

Li Daoxuan, previously engaged in the fun with the villagers, straightened up and looked towards the village outskirts.

But something interesting happened.

His line of sight covered only a 500m x 300m area, barely encompassing Gaojia Village and a surrounding strip of fields. Yet, from atop the wall, the villagers' gazes stretched for miles. So, while the villagers were already sounding the alarm, Li Daoxuan still couldn't see anyone entering the box.

“Damn! So inconvenient!”

Li Daoxuan cursed again: “This cursed field of vision! How the hell do I increase it?”

Chaos rippled through the village now.

Lacking any organization, the villagers were just scattered sand. Facing an emergency, no one had a clue what to do.

Ironically, Thirty-Two — the one who had just scurried away like a rat — now recovered his spirit. He scrambled onto the wall, peered into the distance, and immediately started barking orders:

“Everyone with weapons, grab them! Those without, grab pot lids, brooms, mops, sickles, hoes... take whatever you can find! Grab something! Everyone onto the wall! Now!”

The villagers, previously running around like headless flies, now blindly obeyed as soon as someone gave direction. Without caring who commanded, they snatched up all kinds of “chaotic equipment,” and climbed onto the wall.

## The Great Ming in the Box

After a while, Li Daoxuan finally understood why the sentinel was so panicked and why Thirty-Two had ordered all villagers to take weapons up the walls.

It turned out the sentinel witnessed a terrifying scene.

A large crowd was Dragging Children Along as they fled, wailing for their parents. Behind them, a massive bandit army chased them, wildly swinging blades and indiscriminately hacking at those in front.

Occasionally, someone would fall behind only to be struck down by pursuing bandits, their blood spraying far into the distance.

Those in front ran even more frantically upon seeing this, while those behind, after shedding blood, grew more vicious and deranged, chasing and slashing while emitting maniacal laughter.

Who wouldn't panic seeing this?

If Gaojia Village's villagers hadn't had protective walls and a Deity hovering overhead, witnessing this scene would likely have terrified them into wetting themselves, already thinking of escape.

"To the walls! Fast, fast, everyone up the walls!"

"Bows! I have a bow, picked it off bandits last time!"

"I have a rusty knife."

"Bring everything, even bamboo poles!"

The villagers scrambled up the walls clutching various pieces of chaotic equipment.

The blacksmithery's Li Da and Gao Yiyi actually unearthed two sets of two-panel armor from a corner, hastily donning them. Gripping their big hammers, they instantly became the best-equipped warriors in Gaojia Village.

Both men were robust, and standing armored atop the wall, giant hammers resting on their shoulders, they had an immediate stabilizing effect like pillars of a tranquil sea. Numerous weaker villagers clustered around them.

Two others, though unarmored, were imposing figures – Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu. Each held an axe, and dozens of villagers gathered near them too.

Just as they finished taking their defensive positions, the outsiders entered Li Daoxuan's "field of vision."

Leading the flight wasn't common citizens, but a wealthy family using a carriage. However, struggling violently without a proper road, it bounced violently, barely outpacing those fleeing on foot.

The carriage reached the gate first. The driver wasn't a coachman but a middle-aged man in a cyan robe, evidently of some status. He craned his neck and yelled upwards, "What town is this? Please open the gates! Let us take refuge! Bandits kill behind us! Their vicious..."

Before he could finish, Thirty-Two exclaimed, “Huh? Isn’t this Mr. Bai?”

The man looked up, “Ah! Third Lady! Have I reached Chengcheng County? Impossible! The county seat should be distant yet?”

Thirty-Two shouted, “Open the gates quickly! Let Mr. Bai and his family in!”

Villagers frantically cranked the wooden wheel. Fishing lines pulled the wooden gates apart slowly. Mr. Bai urgently flicked the reins, driving the carriage to rush inside.

“Can we close the gates now?” yelled the villager operating the gates.

Thirty-Two glanced outside. Mr. Bai’s carriage had created significant distance from those still fleeing on foot behind him. Shutting the gates behind the carriage was easy and timely. But those escaping on foot remained perilously close to the pursuing bandits – practically on their heels.

Letting these people in would also risk the bandits charging through and slaughtering their way in... the consequences would be...

In that split second, sweat poured down him.

Should he prioritize self-preservation and order the immediate closure?

Or risk the entire village to save more lives?

Thirty-Two was not a war general. Facing such a crisis, he couldn't calm down to judge rationally, completely overwhelmed by panic.

Luckily, Li Daoxuan didn't give him the chance to decide!

Human nature cannot be withstood.

Li Daoxuan had no desire to push a man who wasn't bad into becoming a villain over such matters. Since he had the power to solve it, there was no need to test human nature.

He puffed his cheeks and blew forcefully toward the yellow sand outside the village.

A swirling tempest of sand surged through the air, enveloping those behind them and the bandits alike.

The bandits needed to see their targets to give chase with swords, but the fleeing people did not. They merely had to run straight ahead into the wind.

Within mere seconds, the escapees burst through the yellow sandstorm, putting distance between themselves and the bandits.

Once they had gained some separation, Li Daoxuan could easily swat the bandits like flies or flick their foreheads as if popping melon seeds...

He raised his hand, then paused thoughtfully before lowering it.

He could crush them anytime—there was no rush to act immediately. Besides, indulging incompetence wasn't wise. The villagers needed experience handling such threats themselves. Otherwise, if he weren't around someday, not a single person in the whole village would have combat experience. They'd be helpless amid tragedy, even with strong walls to guard them, easily overrun and slaughtered without mercy.

Activating his Deity's Cold Gaze upon the Mortal World mode, he decided to observe how Gaojia Village would handle the situation now.

Taking advantage of the sandstorm widening the gap, Thirty-Two no longer had to test anyone's limits and yelled, "Once everyone is inside, shut the gate!"

He hadn't even finished shouting when Mr. Bai appeared atop the wall. His carriage had barely entered the fort when he leapt off and scrambled up to join Thirty-Two, commanding without ceremony, "Anyone holding bows—shoot randomly toward the bandits! Scare them off!"

An outsider charging onto the wall to give orders was certainly audacious, yet strangely, no villager questioned it. Someone had taken charge, so they listened. They nocked arrows drawn from bandits during the last raid and fired a sprinkling of feeble shots outward.

Not a single arrow struck its mark, but their purpose was served—intimidation. The bandits collectively halted outside archery range and stared upward, whispering among themselves at the massive fortification before them.

Seizing the respite, those fleeing poured through the gate. Villagers swiftly wound the winch, with others pitching in to shove. With a thunderous groan, it slammed shut.

It was only then that Mr. Bai exhaled in relief. "Thankfully, I studied all Six Arts of Gentlemen thoroughly, particularly 'chariotearing.' Driving the carriage myself all the way here saved our necks. And to think you'd be here... had you not been, I'd have perished."

Thirty-Two looked bewildered. "Mr. Bai, what exactly happened?"

A sigh escaped the scholar. “Bai Family Fortress has fallen to the bandits.”

Thirty-Two’s jaw slackened.

Bai Family Fortress—that was their ancestral stronghold.

The Bai family weren’t among the most illustrious gentry, just a lesser lineage. Their ancestors had produced a magistrate and a county magistrate, yet no one in the current generation held any office.

Still, in Chengcheng County, they flourished through generations of accrued wealth. They possessed a sturdy fortress manned by dozens of guards, employed over a hundred tenant farmers, and funded local militia to defend nearby villagers against bandits—a force never to be dismissed.

Small roving gangs of bandits had always steered clear of Bai Family Fortress.

That they had breached its walls... Thirty-Two was stunned. What kind of unholy bandits could do that?

Mr. Bai pointed a despairing finger at the enemies now muttering beneath the walls. “Those dozen or so pursuers are but a fraction. Hundreds more gather behind them. My fortress resisted for barely two hours before crumbling. The militia shattered; guards slaughtered; only this pitiful company escaped...”

#### Chapter 43: Damn With Those Bandits

Thirty-Two was getting anxious. “Hundreds or even a thousand? What bandits could possibly have numbers like that?”

Mr. Bai shook his head with a sigh. “More than half a month ago, Bai Shui Wang Er rebelled, attacked and took over the county town. You know about that, right?”

Thirty-Two replied, “Of course I do. That’s why I’m holed up here in Gaojia Village right now.”

Mr. Bai continued, “After Wang Er rebelled, he immediately hid in the nearby mountains with several hundred rebels. Patrol Officer Cheng Xu took his soldiers to capture them, but even after several days searching the mountains, they couldn’t even find a trace of Wang Er.”

Thirty-Two: “...”

Mr. Bai let out a long sigh. “His rebellion set a bad example. Uprisings broke out everywhere one after another. Many farmers who couldn’t pay their taxes followed Wang Er’s lead and rebelled. Patrol Officer Cheng Xu only commands about a hundred soldiers. He can’t split himself into pieces, so how could he possibly manage farmers rebelling all over the place? He was constantly on the go all day, snuffing out rebels in the east only for them to flare up in the west, putting down troublemakers in the west only for them to rise again in the east... It’s said he’s been lamenting lately that he’s so exhausted he’s seeing his great-grandmother beckoning to him.”

Upon hearing this, Li Daoxuan nearly burst out laughing with a “Pfft.” So Cheng Xu is the military officer who ran away scared stiff by the ghost woman’s laugh I played last time? So lately he’s just been playing whack-a-mole these days.

Thirty-Two said, “Hiding away in this little village, news doesn’t reach me easily. I didn’t know about this. With rebels rising up and Patrol Officer Cheng lacking enough troops, he should have reported this to the imperial court and requested a large army for suppression, right?”

Mr. Bai looked both exasperated and amused. “They did report it! Many officials, local gentry, and scholarly families jointly sent petitions. Even I went and signed one! But Hu Tingyan, the Provincial Governor of Shaanxi, is old, sluggish, and muddle-headed. He’s terrified this matter getting reported upwards might lead to him being punished. So he desperately tried to hide it. Why would he be willing to report it? He ordered everyone who petitioned for aid given twenty strokes of the rod and chased out of the Provincial Governor’s office. He even said, ‘These are just hungry peasants looting. By next spring, it will naturally settle down.’ Does that sound like something a sane man would say?”

Beside them, Gao Chuwu asked curiously, “Looting through next spring and it settles down naturally?’ I didn’t understand that sentence.”

Mr. Bai cast a sideways glance at Gao Chuwu. Seeing he was just a young farmer with thick eyebrows and big eyes, he didn’t feel like explaining.

But Thirty-Two quietly murmured, “What he means is, let the rebels loot as much as they want. Once they rob till next spring, they’ll naturally stop and go home to plant their crops.”

Gao Chuwu: “!!!”

The villagers nearby: “!!!”

Everyone was instantly rendered speechless...

After several seconds, Gao Chuwu roared in anger, “So, if I grab a knife right now, go out, and rob anyone I see, no one would stop me? I could rob till next spring, come back to plant my fields, and be a decent citizen again?”

No one answered him, but the grim expressions on Thirty-Two and Mr. Bai’s faces gave him his confirmation.

Gao Chuwu declared, “Screw it, I might as well damn well rebel too.”

Gao Yiye gave him a resounding slap: “Snap!”

“Chuwu-ge! Wake up! Have you lost your mind in anger?”

Gao Chuwu: “...”

Slapped by the Saint Lady, Gao Chuwu instantly calmed down. People in Gaojia Village didn’t need to go out and rob others. They were protected by the Deity. Moreover, the Deity disliked people burning, killing, plundering, and looting. The

way His Holiness dealt with bandits was one slap each, smashing them all into meat patties.

If he became a bandit, maybe he'd be the next meat patty.

Mr. Bai's face darkened. "The Provincial Governor ignores the problem, doesn't report it, doesn't send troops. This quickly became common knowledge. Knowing this, the rebels became even more brazen, and their numbers grew ever larger. In just half a month, several bands of rebels roamed the countryside, hundreds or even a thousand strong at a time, pillaging villages within a radius of dozens of li. Anyone willing to join them was forced in, those unwilling were killed outright, and their property stolen."

The crowd: "..."

Just as everyone reached this point in the conversation, the bandits outside the city walls suddenly began clamoring loudly.

Soon, one man emerged from the bandit throng. Tipping his head back, he bellowed towards Gaojia Village, "What rich man built this city? Tell him to come out and talk!"

The villagers all turned their gazes towards Gao Yiye.

Seeing this, Gao Yiye made to step forward, but Thirty-Two blocked her. "Miss Gao, you are the Saint Lady. Speaking directly with such men would demean your status, and demeaning you would be demeaning the Deity. We absolutely cannot do that. Let me speak. You just relay His Holiness's commands."

Gao Yiye fell silent, standing quietly.

Thirty-Two stepped to the very front and shouted loudly, "What scum dares trespass on our Gaojia Village? Get lost this instant!"

Thirty-Two had been an advisor for many years, and when facing common citizens, he naturally exuded an aura of authority.

That group of bandits didn't recognize Thirty-Two either. They thought he was the wealthy gentry who built this city, so they loudly shouted, "You're the spokesman here, right? Good! We give you half an hour to hand over ten stones of food, and we'll spare your life. Otherwise, all the valiant men from our stronghold will swarm here and utterly crush this small city, just like Bai Family Fortress."

Li Daoxuan was amused: This group didn't charge over directly but resorted to threats and negotiation. It indicated they were scared of this city wall. They knew that breaching such a two-zhang-tall wall would be difficult and could lead to heavy casualties or even failure. So they avoided confrontation and aimed to seize food through intimidation.

This was the so-called "With a big fist, others reason with you."

The large city wall of Gaojia Village transformed unreasonable bandits into reasonable ones.

Thirty-Two turned to Mr. Bai and inquired, "Are there really many of them?"

Mr. Bai replied, "Many—hundreds or even thousands. Honestly, I'm unsure of the exact number. When they attacked, they were overwhelming, and my Bai Family Fortress couldn't withstand them at all."

Thirty-Two then asked, "Mr. Bai, what do you think? Should we hand over the food or defend?"

Mr. Bai was stunned for a moment.

He looked outside.

Then he turned and surveyed Gaojia Village.

The tall city wall gave him a tiny boost of confidence.

But the villagers defending on the wall didn't seem capable.

At a glance, it was clear they had no combat experience.

They were even less effective than his own family soldiers.

After pondering for a few seconds, he said in a low voice, "If you aren't short on food, give them ten stones to end this disaster safely. That's the best plan. After this storm passes, I'll present you with twenty stones of food as my Bai family's gift of gratitude. You know, in the Six Arts of Gentlemen, I value the art of 'courtesy' very highly."

Thirty-Two didn't reply to him.

Instead, he turned toward Gao Yiye, his gaze clearly seeking her opinion.

Mr. Bai was slightly stunned: Huh? Third Lady isn't the decision-maker here? This young lady is? Who on earth is she?

Gao Yiye tilted her head and listened intently.

Then she called out loudly, "The Deity says, don't be afraid of them!"

Everyone...

Third Lady wiped her sweat beside them.

She whispered, "Saint Lady, when you speak for the Deity, your phrasing needs more elegance."

Gao Yiye replied, "Those are the Deity's exact words: Don't be afraid of them!"

Third Lady...

An awkward silence hung for several seconds.

Then Gao Chuwu suddenly burst into loud laughter, "Hahaha, hahaha, the Deity has spoken, so don't be afraid of them!"

Zheng Daniu also laughed heartily, "Yes, yes, don't be afraid of them!"

The two blacksmiths raised their hammers and yelled, "Don't be afraid of them!"

The villagers all thumped down onto their knees.

They bowed toward the sky.

Then they shouted in unison, "Don't be afraid of them!"

With over a hundred voices booming the same phrase, the noise was deafening.

It sent tremors that stunned the bandits outside.

What was happening in this village? Were they ungrateful? Did they deserve punishment instead?

Mr. Bai was completely dumbfounded, "What... is going on? Your village... how is it so bizarre?"

...

Everyone was talking about water spraying, but I wasn't doing it, so I must explain.

In the story's timeline, it was currently August, the hottest part of summer. Spraying water wouldn't work, as crops couldn't be planted anyway.

We had to wait until autumn came and crops could grow before spraying water. In this situation, providing a big pond was better than spraying water, so the villagers could draw water whenever they needed it.

Additionally, using items like water sprayers was unworkable. Water mist of 0.3 millimeters in diameter, sent into that late Ming-era space, would turn into water spheres six centimeters across. Falling from two hundred meters high, that would be a natural disaster.

## The Great Ming in the Box

Seeing the villagers' wild excitement, Mr. Bai felt uneasy. Combined with what he'd observed about Third Lady, he immediately understood—it was a cult.

This was unmistakably a cult's way of doing things.

The young girl was likely the cult's Saint Lady, akin to the White Lotus Saint Girl. And this "Deity" they chanted about was no different in essence from the "Eternal Venerable Mother."

For centuries, the Ming Dynasty had relentlessly suppressed the White Lotus Sect without pause.

As a gentleman deeply versed in the Six Arts of Gentlemen, Mr. Bai naturally despised cults.

He grabbed Thirty-Two's arm and whispered, "This village follows a cult? You actually mingle with these people?"

Thirty-Two replied, "Only those worshipping evil gods breed cults. If the god is benevolent, it's not a cult."

Mr. Bai snapped, "Listen to those chants! 'Fear no hammer'? Slogans like that—what else could it be but a cult?"

Thirty-Two coughed, "Well... that's because the Deity is unconventional."

Mr. Bai muttered, "Madness... utter madness..."

Thirty-Two chuckled. "Mr. Bai, I get you. When I first arrived, I thought the same. Until I witnessed the Deity's miracles myself."

Mr. Bai shot him a sideways glance. "Cults always pull that trick—only their saints or witches 'see' the miracles. Utter nonsense."

Thirty-Two countered, "But you just witnessed the Deity's miracle earlier."

A massive question mark slowly formed over Mr. Bai's head. "When did I see anything?"

Thirty-Two pointed outside the wall. "Sand swirled outside the walls just now, helping your guards and tenants flee to Gaojia Village. But did you feel wind stinging your face?"

Mr. Bai froze. Caught in the frantic escape, he hadn't noticed. Now it struck him as eerie—fierce winds roared beyond, yet not a breeze brushed him hundreds of paces away. Truly unnatural.

Thirty-Two declared, "That wind was the Deity at work."

Mr. Bai was torn between disbelief and doubt.

Outside, the bandits had halted their advance. Hearing Gaojia Village's unified shout, they knew resistance was decided. The mask had dropped. Two men sprinted off to fetch their leader while the rest sat and glared up at the towering walls.

Inside the village, tension tightened. The inexperienced villagers hadn't a clue. They turned to Thirty-Two, who shook his head helplessly. Everyone then looked to Gao Yiye.

But Gao Yiye simply spread her hands. “The Deity says prepare yourselves—he needs to handle something else first.”

The crowd fell silent.

Thirty-Two seized Mr. Bai’s arm. “Mr. Bai, we need your command! As a militia instructor at Bai Family Fortress, you know warfare.”

Mr. Bai grimaced. “I’m here because I got defeated!”

Thirty-Two insisted, “Failures teach. You’re still better than us.”

Mr. Bai reconsidered. “Fine. I’ll do it.”

The bandits’ main force was busy looting Bai Family Fortress. Even with scouts racing back, it’d take four hours at least—their fastest attack would come by dusk. Time remained.

First, a headcount: 150 Gaojia villagers. Minus the elderly and weak, 70 remained. Mr. Bai's own fleeing guards added over a dozen; after culling the unfit, his tenants offered 24 more fighters. Total: over 100.

Against these high walls? They stood a chance!

Rushing with pride, Mr. Bai shouted orders: "Strong men—haul every large stone to the gates! Seal the gate tunnel so bandits can't charge through even if they break the wood! Mid-sized stones go atop the walls—especially by the gates—to crush climbers! If stones run short, dismantle stone houses—"

His eye swept the village: ragged huts everywhere, just one solid structure. Freshly built too—the glaring "Dao Xuan Deity Cave."

He opened his mouth to say "dismantle this," but Thirty-Two cut in: "Undestructible. Dismantle this, and not even death will grant you peace."

Mr. Bai paused. So the cultists would defend their shrine. He'd bow to reality.

Next, he bellowed, "Got any oil? Boil it! Pour boiling oil when they scale the walls—"

He instantly regretted it. Look at these crumbling broken houses! Ragged villagers! People slept under lean-tos or on dry grass. What oil? Hot water it is—but water can't match oil.

Then Thirty-Two commanded: "You, you, and you—ten of you! Fetch that basin from storage! Pans and ladles too! Women, boil the oil!"

Named villagers darted into a broken house. Soon they lugged out a basin—actually, a mineral water bottle lid enlarged in the chest to near ten feet wide. The canola oil within weighed so much only half-full could be moved.

The basin crashed before Mr. Bai. So much oil! So fragrant! Top-grade canola oil, amidst this drought? Stunned, he stammered, "But... how is Gaojia Village..."

Thirty-Two grinned. "A Deity's gift. Stay sharp—give us more tactics!"

Mr. Bai jolted alert. Time mattered. He led 100 defenders atop the wall, assigning sectors: how to fight bandits attacking here, over there, scaling over here...

A chaotic array of equipment plans took shape.

Meanwhile, Li Daoxuan had descended, scanning shelves in a toy store, sorting through trinkets...

# The Great Ming in the Box

The toy store was filled with colorful toy weapons.

However, as Li Daoxuan scanned row by row, he found almost none that were usable.

The toy guns meant for children were no good; if you put this thing into the scenic box, it grew hundreds of meters long.

Finally, he found a rubber band gun that was ten centimeters long, but when placed in the scenic box, it became twenty meters, also impossible for the tiny people to use.

If he couldn't find any usable "modern weapons," he could only split toothpicks into fine pieces, break them into short sections around one centimeter long, put them into the scenic box for the tiny people to use as spears.

But, the villagers hadn't practiced martial arts or trained in formations, so even with spears in hand, they were of little practical use.

They definitely needed “projectile-type” weapons to help them fight the enemies safely.

Projectile-type, projectile-type...

Suddenly, Li Daoxuan’s eyes lit up!

On a low-profile shelf in the farthest corner of the toy store, there was surprisingly a box of miniature plastic catapults.

It was only three centimeters per side, very crudely made, fully plastic in structure, and the mechanism was extremely basic, relying solely on plastic elasticity to function as a catapult; a child could press the “throwing arm” down with a finger, and upon releasing it, the plastic’s rebound force would make the throwing arm spring up.

Li Daoxuan chuckled happily—such fun! Why hadn’t he seen such an amusing little toy as a child? He simply picked up the entire box and walked to the checkout counter: “Boss, how much for this catapult?”

The boss glanced over: “One yuan each.”

Li Daoxuan couldn’t help but complain: “With so little plastic and such shoddy workmanship, you’re really charging one yuan for this?”

The boss said: “Then why not take the whole box? There are fifty in there; I’ll only charge you twenty-five yuan for it.”

Li Daoxuan took out his phone, scanned the code, and completed the payment.

Returning home and sitting before the scenic box, he immediately saw a bustling scene in Gaojia Village: all the tiny people were hard at working.

The female tiny people were split into two groups: one was cooking to give the men a big meal before heading to battle, and the other was heating oil in a small pot just two millimeters wide, with canola oil bubbling inside.

The male tiny people were busy doing heavy labor: they were moving leftover stones and beams from building the “Dao Xuan Deity Cave” toward the town wall to serve as rolling logs and stones.

On the town wall, another group of tiny people listened attentively as Mr. Bai lectured.

Li Daoxuan perked his ears to catch it: “Hold the spear like this—keep your palm steady... if any bandits climb up below... just thrust down like this...”

How funny!

There was also a group of elderly people and children inside the newly built “Dao Xuan Deity Cave,” kneeling devoutly before the sacred statue, earnestly praying, begging the Deity to protect everyone safely from harm.

This lively commotion within the box was exactly what Li Daoxuan loved to watch.

He secretly felt grateful he hadn’t swatted all the bandits to death with his hand; otherwise, there’d be nothing so entertaining to see.

Alright!

Time to provide a small bit of help to them.

Li Daoxuan spoke aloud: “Gao Yiye, tell everyone to get ready; I’m going to send weapons down.”

At this, Gao Yiye gave a startled shudder, her face lighting with joy, and she quickly announced loudly: “Everyone pay attention—the Deity is bestowing weapons upon us now.”

With those words, the original hundred-odd people of Gaojia Village grew solemn at once; the young people who had been listening to Mr. Bai's advice on defending the defenses stopped immediately, looked upward, and wore expressions of deep reverence.

Mr. Bai, boiling with frustration, thought bitterly: I'm teaching you all how to fight—you should be respectful toward me. But here you are, listening one moment, then suddenly turning to stare at the sky—absolutely absurd.

That cult witch said something about the Deity bestowing weapons, a scam, right? After playing supernatural tricks and performing a spirit-summoning dance, she hauled out a pile of rusty broken swords and daggers from the warehouse, handed them out to everyone, yet declared they were bestowed by the evil deity.

Tricks like these, Mr. Bai had heard so many times that his ears were calloused.

Just as he was thinking this, he heard Gao Chuwu beside him shout loudly, "It's here, it's here, look quickly..."

"It's coming down!"

"Pay respects to the Deity!"

The original residents of Gaojia Village knelt down to the ground one after another with a thud. Yet the group brought by Mr. Bai stood there foolishly, unaware of what was happening.

Mr. Bai fixed his gaze on the sky and finally saw.

Unbeknownst to them, a low cloud had appeared overhead, only about seventy zhang above the ground. Within the cloud layer, a colossal object was slowly descending.

Green!

Rectangular!

Carrying a giant spoon!

At that moment, Mr. Bai couldn't recognize what it was.

No, what it was didn't matter anymore. The key question was, how did it slowly descend from the cloud layer? How was that achieved?

Could it be... that it was truly bestowed by the Deity from the heavens?

He was utterly stunned.

After the colossal object slowly landed and steadied, Mr. Bai saw clearly: its main body was two zhang long and two zhang wide, perfectly rectangular, and that spoon on top was attached to a long arm, fixed by a mechanism.

“Cat... catapult!” Mr. Bai exclaimed in surprise. “This is a strangely shaped catapult.”

He could recognize it as a catapult at a glance, but others couldn't. The villagers of Gaojia Village and the tenants of Bai Family Fortress were still foolishly dazed, completely baffled about what the Deity had bestowed upon them.

Gao Yiye shouted at the top of her voice, “Everyone, listen well. This thing bestowed upon us by the Deity is called a catapult. First, place a stone in the spoon on the throwing arm, then pull that mechanism beside it, and it will launch the stone out.”

Everyone: “???”

Gao Yiye shouted loudly, “Li Da, the Deity orders you to bring the big hammer over, stand next to that mechanism. When I say hit, you swing the hammer and strike that mechanism with all your might.”

Li Da quickly responded, gripping the big hammer, and stood by the catapult.

Li Daoxuan gently picked up a stone and placed it into the spoon.

That stone was adorably small to him, like a bead, but what the villagers saw was a large stone floating up out of thin air and flying into the spoon.

Everyone: “Wow!”

Mr. Bai: “!!!”

He, who was full of contempt for the cult just moments ago, now felt his mind couldn't cope.

Gao Yiye shouted loudly, “Hit!”

Li Da used all his strength, swung the big hammer in his hand, and with a thud, struck the mechanism.

The mechanism of the catapult released. The massive throwing arm whooshed up, sending the large stone in the spoon soaring. It streaked across the sky with a terrifying roar, flying from one end of the village to the other, crashing down with a boom. Sand and stones flew everywhere, an awe-inspiring spectacle.

After a pause, the villagers cheered in unison, “So powerful! Celestial artifacts! Celestial artifacts!”

Mr. Bai sighed in exasperation. “A bunch of sightless fools—catapults on the battlefield are just this strong.”

Even as he said this, he glanced at the sky, and reverence swelled in his heart. Truly, there was a deity in that cloud. This catapult looked peculiar; perhaps it really was a celestial artifact.

## **The Great Ming in the Box**

Mr. Bai was genuinely stunned.

Just like Thirty-Two during his first visit to the village, he hadn't believed in the "Dao Xuan Deity" originally, thinking it was just the same as other figures like "Eternal Ancient Mother." But now he was beginning to believe.

After all, no one in ancient times was truly an atheist.

Showing just a little bit of divine miracle was enough to shake the faith of a person.

At this moment, people like Gao Chuwu, Zheng Daniu and others, gathered around the catapult, discussing the one with its arm raised high.

Gao Chuwu said foolishly, "This thing flung once, and its big spoon stood up. Seems it's useless now?"

Li Da, as the official craftsman and having seen the most machines, immediately spotted the key: "We gotta pull that big spoon down, latch it into this mechanism, then it can be used again."

"Okay. How do we get it down?"

“Isn’t that obvious? Gao Chuwu, you’re good at climbing trees. You climb up first, tie the divine rope around the neck of that spoon. Then a few of us pull together to haul it down, so it latches onto the mechanism.”

“Good idea!”

Gao Chuwu, like a monkey, scaled the arm of the catapult.

The arm stood almost two zhang tall; to him it was just like climbing a big tree. He scrambled up to the spoon like a squirrel and tied the leftover divine rope (from building the gate) onto it, then slid back down.

Several villagers grabbed the rope like it was a tug-of-war. “Heave-ho! Heave-ho! One, two, three!” They sang out the rhythm, pulling together on the rope, and actually managed to drag the arm down. Li Da and Gao Yiyi, the two blacksmiths, worked in unison. With a mighty swing of their hammers, clang! The arm snapped back into place on the mechanism.

“Success!”

The villagers cheered: “We learned how to use the magical weapons!”

Mr. Bai snapped out of his astonishment. Now, neither out loud nor in his heart, did he mutter anything about it being a cult or no cult. Waving at the villagers, he said: “Get more people! Let’s push this catapult together to the open ground behind the main gate, aim it outside the walls. When the bandits charge, we fling rocks and kill by hitting them.”

The villagers cheered: “Aye!”

A large group ran over to push. Li Daoxuan was worried they couldn’t budge it. Then he saw the villagers fetch tree branches as thick as a child’s arm. Laying these on the ground in rows, they made rollers. They eased the catapult onto these wooden rollers, allowing them to push it away with surprising ease.

Okay. These villagers might be uneducated and inexperienced, but they were absolute experts when it came to brute-force labor. They didn’t need Li Daoxuan’s help; they were even more professional than he was.

Watching the villagers push the catapult, Mr. Bai thought: The immortal’s catapult is useful, but with just one... it doesn’t feel like enough.

As soon as the thought surfaced...

Gao Yiye called out loudly: “The Deity says, now that everyone has learned how to use it, he will bestow a few more upon us. Those people behind the wall, step aside!”

Mr. Bai jolted, whipping his head around to look.

The villagers behind the wall scattered in all directions.

Another catapult descended from the sky, landing directly in a prepared spot, kicking up a cloud of dust. Then another followed... and another... and yet another...

In the blink of an eye, twenty catapults stood in a neat row behind the wall, each a different color.

Green ones, blue ones, gray ones, even red ones...

A riot of colors, as gaudy and strangely out of place as the garish city wall itself.

Mr. Bai: “!!!”

The spectacle before him truly broadened his horizons.

Seeing these vividly colored catapults, he immediately understood: the bizarrely huge wall of Gaojia Village was undoubtedly also a gift from the deity. Hence the matching, inexplicable materials and multi-colored oddity.

The villagers instinctively knelt again. A whole swathe of Gaojia Village's inhabitants dropped to their knees, kowtowing towards the sky: "We thank the Deity!"

Mr. Bai looked around and saw that his own tenant farmers had also dropped to their knees en masse. Following the Gaojia villagers, they shouted towards the heavens: "We thank the Deity!"

Even his dozen or so retainers were trembling at the knees, on the verge of kneeling themselves.

As Mr. Bai stood dumbfounded, Thirty-Two tugged his sleeve: "Mr. Bai, with 20 extra catapults now, we need people to operate them. You need to re-organize."

"Huh?" Mr. Bai snapped out of his daze, stuffing the exclamation marks spinning in his head back into his thoughts. Pulling himself together, he commanded loudly: "You two blacksmiths! When the fighting first begins, don't go up onto the wall yet. Stay back here by these catapults. When I give the order to shoot, take your hammers and strike the mechanisms hard!"

Li Da and Gao Yiyi quickly acknowledged the order.

Mr. Bai frowned in thought for a moment. He pointed towards a group of elderly villagers and women: “You folks, join this blacksmith group. You’re in charge of reloading rocks into the spoons of the catapults.”

The elderly and women looked bewildered. They were old, frail, women, and children; where would they find the strength for such work?

Mr. Bai pointed at the divine rope still tied to the catapult that had been lowered: “You might not be strong individually, but if enough of you pull this rope together, you should be able to pull it down. Then just put a smaller rock into the spoon.” Li Daoxuan had made them a little trapezoid pit earlier for stones?

The group of elderly and women tried it. With enough hands on the rope, it actually worked.

Li Da and Gao Yiyi glanced at their new positions, then looked up at Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu—both now standing on the front line atop the wall. The two blacksmiths promptly stripped off their two-panel armor. “Chuwu! Daniu! Come here! Take these suits of armor!” they shouted.

The two young men didn’t hesitate. Happily, they draped on the two-panel armor.

They were young, strong, and tall to begin with. Now clad in armor, they looked genuinely imposing.

Mr. Bai watched them out of the corner of his eye, muttering internally. Privately possessing metal armor was a capital crime. However... he reconsidered the bandit army assaulting the Bai Family Fortress. What crime was that?! It was completely ignored! The Provincial Governor said in person: "Let them plunder until next spring settles things." Even if the Governor knew about the two suits of armor in Gaojia Village, he'd probably just say: "The villagers forged armor to fight the bandits. Wait till spring, when the bandits are naturally dealt with, then we'll deal with the armor matter too."

Time ticked inexorably away...

Evening arrived. The setting sun dipped westward, wobbling across the sky like a drunkard with faltering steps, threatening to tumble below the horizon at any moment.

Li Daoxuan's takeout arrived: rice topped with shredded pork (Common Trade). Best of all, it came with a bonus 300ml bottle of cola. He took a sip of cola, then a bite of rice, thoroughly enjoying himself.

Suddenly, a clamor rose from the little people inside the model village. A noisy commotion drifted out of the box.

Li Daoxuan peered inside. Whoa. The main force of the bandit army had arrived!

# The Great Ming in the Box

“The main force of the bandit army is here. So many, so many,” the sentinel of Gaojia Village screamed first.

For villagers who grew up in a small village and never saw the outside world, the sight of a thousand people marching together was overwhelmingly terrifying.

But Li Daoxuan gave only a glance—nothing special. It resembled high school sports day, back when thirty classes lined up neatly for the opening ceremony.

And these mountain bandits’ discipline paled against high schoolers. They marched without formation or unified command, just a chaotic mass scurrying about. Passing the reviewing stand, they shouted no slogans like “Study hard, improve daily.”

Their physical strength clearly couldn’t match modern students either. Amid drought, they’d rarely eaten full meals—gaunt faces showed malnutrition.

Compared to Gaojia villagers, who for half a month enjoyed daily rice, flour, oil, meat, and vegetables, their vitality existed on another plane.

But...

They possessed one thing Gaojia villagers lacked: presence.

They were bandits, raiders. They'd plundered villages, slaughtered innocents, even breached the famed Bai Family Fortress. They had combat experience, confidence, and savagery to cleave a living foe—unflinching when blood sprayed them, remorseless when violating women or boiling infants alive.

These traits amplified battle strength.

Gaojia villagers had none.

Tremors seized the untested villagers as a thousand enemies advanced. Though Thirty-Two and Gao Yiye repeatedly urged, "Fear not! The Deity protects us!" still they shook.

The bandit army halted seventy meters from the walls. A man wielding a guillotine-blade, whose face screamed villain, stepped forward. "I am Supreme Bright King!" he roared. "Cowards of Gaojia! Heard you rely on tall walls? Think you're safe? I'd have spared your wretched village for ten stones of food. Now you're doomed! When we breach these walls, not a dog or chicken survives! Screw your ancestors!"

A thousand bandits echoed his oath, shaking the fields.

Villagers: "..."

Thirty-Two began trembling slightly himself. "I... I admit I'm spooked," he whispered.

Mr. Bai sneered. "Fools. Such threats only steel defenders' resolve. Bandits remain bandits—can't grasp psychological warfare. To take this fortress, offer incentives, coax surrender."

"But terrifying us works!" countered Thirty-Two. "I feel... unnerved."

"Don't tremble over trifles," snapped Mr. Bai.

Thirty-Two protested, "I'm a scholar!"

"I am too!" shouted Mr. Bai. "Useless arguing." He turned abruptly. "Blacksiths! Strike when I say!"

Li Da and Gao Yiyi boomed, "Understood!"

Mr. Bai barked toward the ramparts, “Bai family men! You fight first!”

A dozen Bai retainers shouted, “Yes!”

Mr. Bai ordered, “Gao Chuwu, Zheng Daniu! Second wave holds!”

Two sturdy youths chorused, “Yes!”

Mr. Bai roared, “All know your roles?”

Some answered “Know!”

Others stuttered “Kno... w...”

A few murmured, “Think... so...”

A chorus of loud replies rang out; some voices were resolute, while others wavered with hesitation. These hundred able-bodied men tasked with defending the city were unevenly trained and varied in courage. Their disarray wasn't much better than the chaos of the bandit army outside.

Li Daoxuan, by now, had already placed his small stool, taken his bowl of covered rice in hand, and held a magnifying glass ready. Sitting outside the scenic box, he prepared to watch a grand spectacle of ancient warfare.

The bandit chief outside the walls, the Supreme Bright King, swung his arm wide and bellowed, “Charge!”

His Second Leader, standing beside him, inquired somewhat awkwardly, “Such tall walls! Charge where? There’s no way to scale them!”

The Supreme Bright King roared in anger, “Where are the ladders I told you to prepare?! Once they’re leaned against the wall, we climb up and we win!”

“Oh... right!”

“And the pointed logs?!” The Supreme Bright King snapped, “Smash through that flimsy wooden gate! Break it down, charge in, and we win.”

“Oh... right!”

The Supreme Bright King declared, “Over a thousand against barely a hundred! How can we lose? What are you waiting for? Charge! Just like taking the Bai Family Fortress—one charge and victory is ours.”

He swung his demon-head sword, and with a mighty shout, the horde of bandits waved their chaotic equipment, shouldering improvised battering rams and siege ladders as they surged towards Gaojia Village, yelling fiercely.

This charge terrified the Gaojia villagers even more, sending them huddling together in sharp fear.

Gao Yiye was also frightened. Standing on the wall, her legs trembled, but she remembered the words the Third Lady had once told her: “The more poised and graceful your demeanor, the more others will respect the Deity.” Though afraid, she gritted her teeth, remaining utterly still, forcing herself to appear calm.

Just then, Mr. Bai’s hoarse yell echoed above Gaojia Village: “Two blacksmiths, STRIKE!”

Standing behind the wall and thus shielded from the sight of the yelling, charging bandits, Li Da and Gao Yiyi felt no fear. Their hands, gripping the hammers, didn’t tremble—strength still coursed through them. At Mr. Bai’s command, both swung their massive hammers down with all their might onto the mechanism of the catapult before them.

A heavy thud sounded as hammer met mechanism. The two plastic catapults jerked violently, flinging two large stones into the air.

The stones soared overhead, slicing through the air with a sharp whooshing sound. Gao Chuwu and the others on the wall instinctively looked up, tracking the massive rocks passing above.

Then, a multitude of eyes followed the two stones as they arced beyond the city wall.

Seeing you off, I felt boundless emotion...

BOOM!

The large stones plummeted into the thick of the charging bandits. Bandits directly hit were instantly flattened by the crushing impact. Momentum unforgiving, the stones continued their terrible roll forward, crushing anyone—soldier or devil—in their path, carving two bloody furrows through the massed ranks.

A panicked cry rose from the bandit army:

“Oh my god!”

“Zhang San... Zhang San was pulped right before my eyes! Waaaah!”

“My face... it’s covered in blood!”

“God damn it!”

“What the hell was that?”

“How do flying rocks appear?!”

Instantly, the bandit army erupted into chaos!

Yet, eighteen more catapults remained ready. The two blacksmiths moved to the next pair, swung their heavy hammers with grim determination, and smashed down once more...

## **Chapter 48: The Battle of the Rookies**

Again, two large stones rose and once more flew over the city wall.

This time, even more people tilted their heads back to watch the large stones streak through the sky.

“Boom!”

“Boom!”

The two large stones again fell into the bandit army formation, causing cries of woe as they hit directly and killed by hitting.

The bandit army’s charging momentum slowed, and many among them felt like retreating.

Seeing this, the villagers instantly grew braver. Many who had just been trembling in fear now had steady hands and calm hearts. They burst out laughing loudly: “Hahaha, so satisfying, kill by hitting those cowards.”

“Keep it up!”

“Li Da, Gao Yiyi, keep going!”

Without needing their shouts, Li Da and Gao Yiyi had already run to the two catapults below and were swinging the large hammers again.

The villagers stationed on the city wall, along with Mr. Bai’s servants, couldn’t help but turn back to look at the two blacksmiths...

Mr. Bai became furious: “What are you looking at? Keep your eyes outside the city! Archers, prepare to shoot arrows!”

His roar snapped the villagers’ attention back. As they turned to look outside the city wall, they were shocked to see that a group of the fiercest bandits had charged within just ten steps of the wall.

“Release arrows, release arrows!”

Mr. Bai screamed desperately.

Mr. Bai’s servants reacted the fastest. In an instant, they drew their bows, and four or five arrows flew out, thudding as they hit several bandits directly.

Li Daoxuan said: “Clap! Excellent archery.”

However, he immediately noticed that the bandits hit by arrows did not fall but continued charging forward. On TV, someone shot by an arrow dies instantly, but that's all nonsense. The reality is "three arrows are no match for one knife, three knives are no match for one spear," and the power of arrows is practically laughable.

The villagers' light bows could only add a small bloody hole to the bandit troops' bodies.

Several mountain bandits also drew their bows and retorted against the city wall. Swish, swish, swish, dozens of weak arrows flew up...

Li Daoxuan had originally decided to be just an onlooker, but seeing the mountain bandits shoot arrows, he couldn't hold back. His little villagers didn't have much armor; getting shot and having a bloody hole would be very painful.

His protective instinct flared up. He couldn't help but reach out his hand to block in front of the villagers. The bandit troops' arrows shot at his palm and bounced off him, his skin thickened 200 times...

Only Gao Yiye could see the scene of the giant hand helping the villagers block the arrows. The mountain bandits thought their arrows had been stopped by the city wall, completely unaware that the villagers had activated the golden hand, grabbed the thick thigh, and were wildly cheating.

Above their heads, another two large stones flew past...

The bandit troops in the rear were hit again and fled helter-skelter, but the bravest bandits at the front had already reached the base of the city wall. Several bandits joined forces to set up a long ladder against the wall.

Mr. Bai roared: "Throw stones! Pour boiling oil!"

Mr. Bai's servants immediately picked up the stones prepared beforehand and threw them haphazardly down the wall.

These stones were far more powerful than arrows. If one hit directly on a head, it would burst it open. The brave bandits below the city wall were miserably struck.

Behind them, the village women who had been organized earlier, hunched over and carrying pots filled with boiling oil, climbed the city wall and passed the pots to the servants.

The servants took the oil pots and poured them messily downward. After pouring, they tossed the empty pots behind them. The village women quickly grabbed the pots and retreated down the wall... Behind the wall, large and small pots were set up, boiling oil frantically.

The village women returned to the pots, filled one full again, and carried it back up to the city wall. This was high-quality canola oil, and using it to pour on people made the women feel heartache greatly. Every time they sent a pot up, it felt like a knife was gouging their hearts.

After several rounds of fighting, the timid ordinary villagers finally regained their composure. Battle cries echoed around them as huge stones flew overhead, and their trembling limbs somehow inexplicably gained strength.

Gao Chuwu darted forward to the edge of the battlements. He hoisted a large stone and hurled it downward: "I'm here!"

Zheng Daniu: "Me too!"

Dozens of villagers surged forward: "We'll help too!"

The hired guards' earlier haphazard attacks had clearly lacked force, but with the villagers now joining, the situation instantly changed. Large stones and small stones, big pots and small pots of boiling oil were recklessly hurled down the walls.

The first wave of fierce bandits approaching the base was swiftly driven back. The team hauling the battering ram intending to force the gates was pelted until they

abandoned the ram altogether, dropping the wood and fleeing with their hands over their heads.

Yet the bandit troops carrying ladders remained. They didn't advance directly under the walls but stopped several yards away. There, beyond the reach of catapults, stone drops, or cascading boiling oil, they began hoisting their scaling ladders.

They indeed managed to assemble one ladder. It swung forward with a loud thud, the thick bamboo frame striking the battlements. Several villagers immediately ran over, trying to shove the ladder away.

Mr. Bai roared: "Don't push it! That thing won't budge by pushing! Spearmen! Get close, ready to stab down anyone climbing up!"

He had drilled these villagers endlessly before the battle, explaining how to handle various situations. But once the actual fighting started, they seemed to have forgotten everything he said, with hardly anyone following his instructions, leaving him jumping around angry, cursing continuously.

Fortunately, the terrain greatly favored them! The bandit army also lacked discipline, fighting just as recklessly and chaotically.

Amidst the confusion, a fierce bandit clambered up the ladder. Holding onto the rungs with one hand, he wildly swung an axe with the other.

But how long was that axe handle?

A villager raised a sharpened bamboo spear and thrust straight at the bandit. The man screamed, plummeting from twenty feet high and landing on his back with a heavy, muffled thump.

Between the spear wound and the fall, his survival looked bleak.

However, the next bandit soldier climbing up was trickier. This man was huge and impressively strong, his body wrapped in thick cowhide. When a villager thrust a bamboo spear toward his chest, the man didn't even bother to dodge.

The sharpened bamboo struck the thick hide but couldn't pierce it. The villager's thrust lacked the strength to knock the man off the ladder. Gripping the ladder with one hand, the bandit swung his sword with the other hand and chopped the bamboo spear in half with a sharp crack!

The villager jumped in fright and scrambled back.

The bandit leapt onto the wall, roaring with laughter: "They call me 'One Blade'! Remember that name! Today I'll wipe you all out!"

Figures lunged as several villagers charged him.

One Blade felt no fear. Encased in cowhide, ordinary weapons couldn't harm him. Facing a group of villagers was nothing alarming. Just yesterday, while attacking Bai Family Fortress, he personally chopped down five hired guards. He was that ferocious.

He swung his sword straight at the first villager charging toward him.

“Clang!”

The blade landed squarely on the villager's chest – yet made the sound of metal striking metal.

One Blade froze in shock: “Iron armor!”

## **Chapter 49: Don't Let the Bandit Chief Escape**

The one who arrived was Zheng Daniu. He knew nothing of martial arts and utterly failed to dodge when his opponent swung a blade at him. The strike landed squarely on his chest. Yet, he wore the two-panel armor given to him by Gao Yiyi—a hefty iron plate covering his entire torso.

The result when a blade slams into a solid iron plate is naturally...

Whoa, scared the hell out of him!

Zheng Daniu was terrified by the strike, but when he realized he remained unscathed, his lips peeled back into a vacant, foolish grin.

One Blade drew his sword once more and aimed at Zheng Daniu's neck—after all, how could iron armor cover that?

But as he brought down the blade, a strange sensation struck him. Something seemed to seize his weapon mid-air, freezing it in place.

Huh?

What?

Why? There was nothing in the air at all! What was grasping his blade?

It was, of course, Li Daoxuan.

The Deity favored his own followers above all others by a thousandfold. What's more, Zheng Daniu had sweated blood in the service of his micro-sculpting earnings. Such a follower could never be harmed.

Seeing the sword strike toward Zheng Daniu's throat, Li Daoxuan extended two fingers into the sky and caught the blade like tongs seizing hot steel.

One Blade strained to reclaim his weapon, but it was of no use.

A voice called from a distance, Gao Yiye shouting, "Zheng Daniu! The Deity has pinned down the enemy's blade! What are you still grinning about?"

Zheng Daniu paused, baffled. "Huh? Ah?!"

Jolted to awareness, he swung his own axe...

His skill with the axe was hard-honed. For days now, he'd been felling trees on the hillside, hauling timber back for the two sculptors to carve figures. Each effort

earned him a great basin of happy fat water from the Deity—and after guzzling it these past weeks, he'd noticeably plumped up.

The force he swept through with his axe was enough to terrify century-old trees into ripping their roots from the earth and fleeing.

The thick bovine leather armor wrapped around One Blade's body offered no defense against that axe swing.

Thunk!

One Blade gasped as agony tore through his chest and belly. Looking down, he saw the axe blade splitting through his thick leather armor. Blood gushed instantly from the gaping wound.

Unable to believe it, he lifted his head toward the heavens once before collapsing backward.

Zheng Daniu hoisted his axe and roared, "Deity protect us!"

Villagers nearby echoed the chant in unison. "Deity protect us!"

...

The bandit army's chief, the Supreme Bright King, began to feel uneasy.

As the leader, he naturally pushed forward boldly, his toughest brigands charging beside him. So when the large stone flew, it had landed far behind them.

It hadn't struck him, so why fear?

Once at the foot of the wall, he didn't climb up himself but kept urging his fiercest men to scale it.

Thus, stones and cascades of boiling oil never fell upon his head.

Again—it hadn't touched him, so why fear?

He continued waving his demon-head broadsword, shouting and urging the people around him to climb the scaling ladders and kill their way up the city wall.

But as he commanded, he noticed the people around him becoming fewer and fewer.

“Huh? Where is my twelve hundred strong army?”

The Supreme Bright King turned his head to look, and behind him, there was no great army at all, only a scattered few dozen people.

It turned out that the large stones hurled by the catapults continuously smashed into the bandit army formation behind him; the first wave launched a total of twenty large stones, and with these stones falling one after another, they directly shattered the bandits' morale.

The bandits at the rear were unwilling to charge forward any longer; instead, they retreated farther and farther from the city wall, and finally scattered and fled, vanishing without a trace.

Thus, the first wave of bandits that charged to the base of the city wall became a lone force.

One fewer whenever one was crushed by a stone, one fewer whenever scalded by boiling oil, one fewer whenever climbing a scaling ladder and stabbed down...

The Supreme Bright King's men were constantly decreasing, but since he stood at the front of the formation, not the rear, and amid the noise, chaos, and confusion around him, he had no idea.

Only at this moment, when he suddenly spun around, did he realize something was terribly wrong.

In that instant, the Supreme Bright King finally understood what was meant by "the defenders have a huge advantage." After all, this was his first time attacking a city; he had picked up a little knowledge from storyteller tales that erecting a scaling ladder would allow him to climb up, but in real combat, he found it was not like that at all.

The morale of his subordinates wasn't something he, a mere bandit, could control.

The Supreme Bright King roared, "Retreat, retreat! Withdraw!"

After saying that, he turned and sprinted away.

The last few dozen fierce bandits around him also turned and ran after him.

Mr. Bai extended his hand and shouted loudly, “Bring me a bow!”

A nearby servant promptly handed him a hunting bow and got ready to shout “Good shot!” to flatter his master.

Then, Mr. Bai drew an arrow, nocked it, aimed at a vital point on the Supreme Bright King’s back, let go with his right hand, and with a twang of the bowstring, the arrow shot forth like a startled swan...

Swish!

It flew past a half-zhang away from the Supreme Bright King.

The servant who was poised to yell “good shot” froze in awkward silence.

The people beside him: “...”

Mr. Bai gave a light cough, his aged face flushing slightly red; he hastily shoved the bow into the hands of a nearby servant, clapped his hands, pretended nothing had happened, and thought, “I’d better focus on commanding.”

Cross out, cross out this 'archery' skill in the Six Arts of Gentlemen.

Of course, this minor embarrassment of his did not affect the larger situation.

The bandit army began to retreat; the pressure on the city wall eased instantly, and the villagers started cheering, "We won!"

"We repelled the bandits."

"Gaojia Village is secured!"

"We're safe!"

"Deity bless us!"

"Deity bless us!"

Mr. Bai looked around left, right, front, and back, and bellowed, "What are you so happy about? The bandit chief escaped; that Supreme Bright King will surely hate us, and who knows when he might suddenly turn back to ambush us?"

The villagers collectively froze.

After some thought, “Huh? Yeah!”

“It’s not about fearing thieves who steal, but fearing thieves who bear grudges.”

The villagers of Gaojia are all good-natured, timid folks; they really disliked being resented by bandits—the feeling was unbearable. Seeking refuge within Gaojia Village’s walls was fine for now, but what if in the future, while harvesting herbs in the mountains, shopping in the county town, or visiting a neighboring village, they were ambushed mid-journey by this Supreme Bright King? Wouldn’t they die without a burial place?

Just then, they suddenly heard Gao Yiye’s voice.

She pointed at the retreating figure of the Supreme Bright King and shouted, “Watch closely, everyone! The Deity will soon cast divine magic to eliminate this problem for good.”

The villagers beamed with joy immediately.

Mr. Bai: “?”

Suddenly, the sounds of wind and thunder rumbled in the sky, as though something massive split the clouds and plummeted down rapidly; an unseen pressure whipped up a violent whirlwind on the open ground outside the city, dust spreading outward in rings.

Then...

“Boom!”

With a deafening blast, the earth trembled violently.

The Supreme Bright King, who was fleeing into the distance, and all his underlings within three zhang of him, turned into flattened masses of meat.

The ground where they had been standing caved in, forming a huge indent shaped like a palm.

The Supreme Bright King’s pulp of flesh lay right in the center of that palm print...

# The Great Ming in the Box

Dust was swirling.

The corpse of the Supreme Bright King and the enormous handprint became increasingly clear amidst the dust. Especially when viewed from atop the city walls, the sight was truly far too shocking.

The original forty-two settlers of Gaojia Village had already witnessed such a scene before, yet seeing it again still left them utterly awestruck. Thump, thump—in the blink of an eye, they had plopped down kneeling across the ground.

Following them were the new villagers, the Bai family's tenants, and the Bai family's servants. One after another, they knelt down, knocking their heads against the ground.

Mr. Bai was also stunned by this scene. Having always maintained his pride, he felt an impact at this moment that far exceeded that felt by the ordinary villagers.

He glanced around. Even Thirty-Two and his wife were kneeling properly, just like the ordinary villagers.

Everyone was murmuring in unison, “Praise the might of the Deity!”

Just then, the curtain of the large carriage carrying the Bai family’s dependents was pushed open. A middle-aged woman leapt out, followed by a young man—Mrs. Bai and her son. As soon as they jumped down from the carriage, they decisively knelt down, prostrating themselves flat against the ground, seemingly oblivious to the mud and dust clinging to their clothes.

Mr. Bai scanned his surroundings. Throughout the entire Gaojia Village, he alone remained standing, stood out incongruously.

Mr. Bai tried hard to convince himself: He is not an evil spirit, nor a false god. He is a genuine deity who just manifested his power. Besides, his name sounds like it belongs to Daoism. Kneeling to a Daoist deity can’t be wrong, can it? This doesn’t count as joining a cult.

In reality, Ming Dynasty scholars often wore Daoist robes as a fashion statement; Daoism was universally considered an orthodox faith. Kneeling to a Daoist deity was perfectly acceptable.

Persuading himself like this made his knees feel less stiff.

Mr. Bai also knelt down: “Praise the might of the Deity!”

Li Daoxuan watched the little figures in the “sky” below prostrate themselves throughout the village. A faint smile touched the corners of his lips as he prepared to tell them to rise.

Suddenly, he felt there was something amiss.

A faint point of light, like that of a firefly, rose from every single person and drifted up into the sky. Then, these tiny, firefly-like lights scattered, flying towards the four walls of the scenic box.

With over a hundred and fifty village residents, plus the hundred or so people brought by Mr. Bai, the total approached nearly three hundred. Each person emitted one point of light, amounting to nearly three hundred lights. One after another, they flew upwards and seeped into the four walls of the scenic box.

Then, the entire scenic box erupted in a dazzling golden light!

It was as if an enormous golden lantern had been lit inside the scenic box.

The little figures below seemed completely unaware of this golden radiance; they didn't even blink. Li Daoxuan, however, was momentarily blinded by the glare, forcing him to shut his eyes.

When he reopened his eyes, he was astonished to discover that five new buttons had appeared on the corners of the box. They were labeled "East," "South," "West," "North," and "Center." Beside the box, a row of strange text appeared: Rescue Index: 325.

A strange sensation welled up within Li Daoxuan, akin to suddenly grasping a key game mechanic while playing.

He eagerly pressed the “East” button.

The village inside the box seemed to instantly shift ever so slightly towards its left side. The visible area to the left of the village clearly shrank a notch, while the visible space to the right distinctly increased by a similar amount.

He pressed the “East” button again. The houses and little figures instantly seemed to shift a tiny bit further left, and another sliver of space appeared on the right horizon.

He tapped the “North” button several times in quick succession.

The entire village seemed to edge slightly southward, while the visible range expanded northwards, revealing a small slope covered in a grove of trees. All the trees were dead, their bark entirely stripped away.

This must be the slope where Zheng Daniu had chopped trees previously. Li Daoxuan hadn’t been able to see it then, but now he could. (Readers who forgot may refer to the final paragraphs of Chapter 39.)

“The sight range can move in all four directions: east, south, west, and north!”

Li Daoxuan was overjoyed: “Haha! The sight range has finally gotten larger!”

“So that’s it! I get it! I understand!” This was what he realized: the unseen entity that sent him this box clearly intended him to use it to save the late Ming Dynasty. Therefore, the scope of what he could see, the radius, was determined by his Rescue Index.

Initially, he had only rescued over a hundred villagers, and the “Rescue Index” hadn’t met the minimum threshold needed to expand the sight range. But now, by repelling the bandit army and effectively rescuing Mr. Bai’s group of over a hundred people, the “Rescue Index” had risen sufficiently. This met the condition for expanding the sight range, hence the new buttons “East, South, West, North, Center” materialized, allowing him to click the buttons to see these newly accessible peripheral areas.

Exhilarated, Li Daoxuan frantically mashed the “North” button. Very quickly, however, he realized... it stopped working.

That is to say, pressing it elicited no response. The sight range no longer moved northward.

“Has the sight range reached its northern limit?”

He pressed the “Center” button. The sight range instantly snapped back, centering itself directly above Gaojia Village.

He then tested the East, South, West, and North buttons again. Pulling out a ruler and calculating the 1:200 scale, he quickly determined the expansion: about 500 meters more visibility in each direction around the village—east, south, west, and north.

The increase wasn’t massive!

This was simply because the “Rescue Index” hadn’t increased enough.

But that didn’t matter. Knowing the method to expand the sight range was a significant gain in itself. Going forward, as long as he found ways to raise the “Rescue Index,” the sight range could continue to grow.

Li Daoxuan opened a Notepad file on his computer and recorded today’s findings inside.

1. The center of the scenic box’s sight range is Gaojia Village, and the radius is determined by the “Rescue Index.”

2. The sight range can be moved using the “North,” “South,” “East,” “West,” and “Center” buttons. However, the scale ratio of items and people inside the box to the real world remains 200:1.

Having recorded these, he stretched long, feeling a surge of joy mingled with exhaustion. Originally, he was just keeping a box of pet miniature people with a mindset to help whoever he incidentally could. Now, the addition of the “Rescue Index” seemed a bit like pushing him to “grind.” Systems with measurable metrics tend to pressure people into compulsive behavior. He didn’t want to force himself, though. Let nature take its course. He would rescue those he wished to rescue. How much of the sight range unlocked was secondary; whatever happened would be fine by him.

Lowering his head again to look into the box and Gaojia Village, he saw the villagers busily getting to work. Just like after the bandits had invaded last time, they were preparing to clean up the aftermath.

A group of villagers was clearing the bandits’ corpses. Naturally, clothes had to be stripped—not a scrap of cloth could be wasted. Weapons were all confiscated and distributed. Any loose copper coins found on some bandits belonged to whoever discovered them, a matter of pure luck.

The completely stripped bandit corpses were carried outside the city walls. A large pit was dug on a slope, and the bodies were thrown inside and buried.

Thanks to Li Daoxuan's biased assistance, none of the villagers had suffered serious harm. The most severe injury occurred to one of the Bai family's servants: while pouring burning oil over the parapet onto the besiegers below, he had accidentally spilled some onto his own leg.

Now, a large blister had formed on his scalded leg, causing him to groan in constant pain.

Several villagers were dousing it with cold water, trying to cool the burn. But the villagers had no medication specifically for burns. Beyond applying cold water, they had no other recourse.

Li Daoxuan opened his drawer, pulled out a tube of "Strong Relief Brand Scald Ointment," squeezed out a minuscule dab—smaller than a grain of sesame—and delivered it downwards...