

## Great Ming 911

### Chapter 911: Luckily, He Could Afford the Repairs

Li Daoxuan looked into the diorama box, a faint trace of irritation creeping onto his face.

Without activating the focus function and relying only on his naked eyes, the locust swarm inside the box looked no different from a rolling cloud of dust. A mass of drifting gray, swirling aimlessly.

Yet wherever that "dust" passed, annihilation followed.

Not a single blade of grass survived.

A small, delicate tree that had been standing there just moments ago, green and lively, was engulfed in an instant. Countless insects piled onto it, stripping every leaf clean in the blink of an eye. By the time the swarm moved on, only a skeleton of bare branches remained.

Li Daoxuan reached out and flicked the box lightly with his finger.

His enormous hand swept through the miniature swarm, momentarily carving out a clear gap in the cloud of "flying dust."

For an instant, there was empty space.

Then, just as quickly, more locusts surged in from all sides, filling the gap as if nothing had happened.

Completely useless.

"Annoying."

He shifted his angle again and again, scanning the interior of the box, checking every corner, making sure no one under his protection had slipped through the cracks.

Then his gaze paused.

His silicone avatar was standing right in front of the Prince of Fu's mansion, already buried beneath the endless tide of locusts.

The bugs crawled all over it, layering the figure in a thick, writhing coat.

Even though the silicone body was immune to bites, the sight alone was revolting.

Li Daoxuan reached in, pinched the silicone avatar between two fingers, and carefully lifted it out of the diorama box.

Inside the miniature world, everything continued as usual.

The Prince of Fu, torn between terror and a morbid sort of curiosity, kept staring at Master Swordsman Xiao Qiushui.

He wanted to see it with his own eyes. To witness what happened when a living man was eaten alive by locusts. Something straight out of a nightmare story.

Then, suddenly, Master Swordsman Xiao Qiushui began to rise.

Straight up.

There was no movement at all. No kicking, no struggle, not even the slightest twitch of his limbs. His body simply lifted into the air, as if an invisible hand had grabbed him and pulled him upward.

The Prince of Fu sucked in a sharp breath.

"Ahhh! What's happening to him?"

Eunuch Zheng's eyes nearly popped out of his head.

"He's flying?"

In the very next moment, Xiao Qiushui shot upward with terrifying speed. With a violent whoosh, he was flung dozens of meters into the sky, heading straight toward the clouds.

The clouds above parted, opening a gap that looked almost welcoming.

Xiao Qiushui vanished into it.

Then the clouds slowly closed again, smooth and seamless, as if nothing had ever passed through.

The Prince of Fu stood frozen, mouth agape.

Eunuch Zheng was just as stunned.

The guards of the princely manor, all witnesses to this impossible sight, stood there in a daze, unable to process what they had just seen.

Outside the box, Li Daoxuan held his silicone avatar in his hand.

The figure was still covered in locusts.

But the instant it fully left the diorama box, a strange, invisible force swept over the insects. The locusts stiffened, then died on the spot, their tiny bodies losing all life at once.

They dropped off the silicone figure.

And fell straight back into the diorama box.

Inside the miniature world, the Prince of Fu and his group were still staring at the clouds in shock when they suddenly noticed something else.

The locusts that had just ascended together with "Grand Immortal Xiao" were now falling back down.

Except now, they were dead.

Their bodies rained down lifelessly.

The Prince of Fu let out a shrill cry.

"Ahhh! What kind of divine power is this?"

Eunuch Zheng dropped to his knees.

"Immortal magic! This must be the work of immortals!"

Li Daoxuan blinked.

A thought struck him like a spark.

"That's right."

"Living things die the moment they cross the boundary of the box."

"So dealing with these locusts isn't impossible after all."

"All I have to do is get them out."

He rubbed his chin.

"What's the easiest way to pull them out in large numbers?"

He stared into space.

Thinking hard.

Click. Click. Click.

Ding.

A metaphorical lightbulb lit up above his head.

"I've got it."

His eyes shifted to the corner of his apartment.

The vacuum cleaner.

"Mine."

He pulled off the wide floor attachment and replaced it with a narrow nozzle. Plugged it in. Tested the grip.

Then he aimed the nozzle at the diorama box and slowly inserted it, just a tiny bit.

Inside the box, the Prince of Fu and his people were still staring blankly at the sky.

The Prince of Fu swallowed nervously.

"That... that Xiao fellow... cough... Master Swordsman Xiao... cough... Grand Immortal Xiao!"

Three titles in a single breath. His thoughts were a complete mess.

"After he flew up, why hasn't he come back down?"

Eunuch Zheng wiped the sweat off his forehead.

"Perhaps... perhaps he no longer wishes to interfere in mortal affairs?"

As the words left his mouth, the clouds above split apart once again.

From within them emerged something utterly unfamiliar.

A massive, milky white object.

A gigantic suction nozzle.

The Prince of Fu screamed.

"Ahhh! What in the heavens is that?"

Eunuch Zheng's pupils shrank.

"A divine artifact. It must be a divine artifact from the Celestial Realm! I understand now. Grand Immortal Xiao returned to the heavens just now to retrieve this artifact, and now he has brought it back!"

He gasped.

"My heavens. What kind of divine artifact is this?"

The Prince of Fu shook his head helplessly.

"I don't understand it at all. I've never heard of such a divine artifact."

At that exact moment, Li Daoxuan flipped the switch.

The vacuum cleaner roared to life.

It began to suck.

A deep, rumbling hum filled the air.

In Li Daoxuan's world, the sound was nothing more than a loud household appliance.

But inside the diorama box, it became something else entirely.

A vast, terrifying roar echoed across the sky.

The sound rolled through Luoyang like thunder, shaking the entire city.

Every person hiding indoors clutched their ears in panic. People peeked out through cracks in doors, through windows, through holes in their roofs, all staring up at the sky in terror.

Bai Yuan looked up once and burst into laughter.

"The Dao Xuan Tianzun has intervened! The Dao Xuan Tianzun is about to sweep away the locusts!"

Fan Shangzheng, Governor of Henan, stared in awe.

"Amazing. What is that strange contraption?"

The common people whispered among themselves.

"That tube is enormous."

"Is it roaring?"

The Prince of Fu frowned.

"What exactly is Grand Immortal Xiao's divine artifact for? Is it only meant to scare the locusts away with its sound?"

Before anyone could finish their speculation, it happened.

With a tremendous whoosh, the locust swarm hanging over Luoyang was sucked straight into the Celestial Artifact.

The entire sky cleared in an instant.

A citywide gasp followed.

"Wow!"

Li Daoxuan's spirits lifted immediately.

"Hey. This actually works pretty well."

"Let's keep going."

He tilted the nozzle slightly.

Inside the box, the massive Celestial Artifact shifted its aim.

Whoosh.

Another patch of sky was cleared.

It moved again.

Whoosh.

Yet another section was wiped clean.

The crowd exploded with cheers.

"Incredible!"

"Oh my goodness!"

"Such divine might!"

"May the Dao Xuan Tianzun protect us!"

The militia soldiers shouted themselves hoarse.

"The Dao Xuan Tianzun's power is boundless!"

Li Daoxuan was having fun now.

Left. Right. Forward. Back.

The locust swarms blanketing Luoyang were rapidly reduced. Nearly three quarters of them were gone, reduced to lifeless dust inside the vacuum bag.

But the ground was still crawling with insects.

He hesitated, then lowered the nozzle a little closer.

Inside the box, the Prince of Fu stiffened.

"Huh? That divine artifact... it's coming down!"

Eunuch Zheng muttered nervously.

"It's getting closer."

A powerful wind howled through the city.

The closer the nozzle came to the ground, the stronger the suction became.

Locusts clinging to the eaves of the Prince of Fu's mansion were ripped away in waves.

Then something felt very wrong.

The gate tower of the manor began to creak.

The entire structure groaned, as if it were about to lift off the ground.

Panic erupted.

"Quick! Grab onto something!"

Everyone inside clutched the nearest pillar with all their strength.

Then came a deafening crash.

The roof of the gate tower was torn clean off and disappeared straight into the enormous nozzle.

The people below were lifted off their feet, bodies spinning wildly in the violent wind. If they had not been clinging to the pillars with everything they had, they would have been sucked away as well.

The Prince of Fu screamed until his voice broke.

Outside the box, Li Daoxuan winced.

"Oops."

He pulled the nozzle back up.

Inside the diorama, the suction vanished. The figures who had been half lifted into the air dropped back down with dull thuds.

Li Daoxuan scratched his head.

"Too close to the ground."

"It's damaging buildings."

He glanced at the ruined manor and shrugged.

"Good thing it was the Prince of Fu's place. He's rich enough to rebuild. No big deal."

"If that had been ordinary people's homes, that would've been a real disaster."

Chapter 912 What Now?

After using the Prince of Fu's Residence as a very expensive test subject, Li Daoxuan gradually got the hang of controlling the vacuum cleaner's hovering height.

Once the altitude was adjusted precisely, the suction no longer affected buildings. It was only strong enough to pull in locusts, nothing more.

A sweep across East Street.

Whoosh.

The entire street was instantly spotless.

Then West Street.

Then he shifted the nozzle toward the Governor's Yamen.

"Oh right, the militia barracks too."

Li Daoxuan was normally extremely lazy. The kind of person who could let his kitchen go uncleaned for days without feeling a shred of guilt. Yet now, cleaning Luoyang City inside the diorama box, he was painstakingly careful and thorough.

A textbook case of being lazy with real life responsibilities, but turning into a perfectionist the moment it involved something like a game.

After a flurry of these so called divine operations, Luoyang City was left absurdly clean. So clean that it practically gleamed. If he had gone one step further and polished it, the whole place would probably have sparkled.

Li Daoxuan looked down at the city.

"Perfect. Job done."

He pulled back the air conditioner nozzle.

"Oh right."

"And I still have to retract those glass cups, glass bowls, and acrylic boxes."

The people of Luoyang City had truly had their horizons expanded today.

Celestial artifacts had descended right before their eyes and swept away the locust plague completely. Fast, clean, decisive. It was just like the legendary Great Immortal Zhenyuan casually sweeping Sun Wukong into his sleeve.

Along with the locusts, all the dust and debris in Luoyang City had been cleared away as well.

The air was terrifyingly clean.

Some of the braver residents slowly pushed open their doors and crept outside. They stared blankly at the sky.

Then they saw giant transparent cups and bowls rise one after another and fly away into the heavens.

The refugees who had been trapped beneath them were freed, yet none of them stood up right away. Instead, they dropped to their knees with loud thuds, bowing deeply toward the sky.

"Thank you, Immortal Lord, for saving our lives!"

Someone hesitated.

"Wait, doesn't adding 'Lord' after 'Immortal' sound a bit strange?"

"Then how should we address him?"

"Great Heavenly Deity?"

"Great Immortal Deity?"

"Dao Xuan Tianzun?"

The people of the city poured into the streets, performing all sorts of elaborate bows and prostrations toward the sky, completely sincere and utterly chaotic.

Li Daoxuan picked up his silicone avatar and examined it carefully with a magnifying glass.

"Good."

"Not a single bite."

After all, it was a chemical product. By instinct alone, the locusts probably knew that eating it would cause explosive diarrhea, so they did not dare to touch it.

He gave it a quick blow to clean it off.

Then he placed it back into the diorama box, positioning it right outside the Prince of Fu's Residence.

Inside the box, the Prince of Fu and his entourage were still stuck in the roofless gatehouse. They clung tightly to the pillars, none of them daring to let go, all afraid that the celestial artifact would suddenly return and vacuum them straight into the heavens.

Then they saw it.

Immortal Xiao descended from the sky once more, landing steadily on the ground in the exact same posture he had held when he flew upward.

He stood there, hands behind his back, gazing up at the sky with a distant, inscrutable expression.

After a moment, his eyes shifted. He lowered his head and turned around.

He walked up to the gate and knocked.

"Alright. The locust plague is over. Prince of Fu, come out. Let's continue discussing the dine and dash incident."

The Prince of Fu fell silent.

Eunuch Zheng fell silent.

The guards and jianghu toughs fell silent.

An eerie, suffocating silence filled the gatehouse.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

The knocking continued.

The Prince of Fu was terrified out of his mind.

"What should I do? This Prince was so disrespectful just now. I do not dare go out and speak to him."

Eunuch Zheng swallowed hard.

"Your Highness, this... you must go, whether you want to or not. If you do not, and Immortal Xiao becomes angry that we are making him wait, and he summons that celestial artifact again..."

He shuddered.

"The entire princely residence will be swept straight into the heavens."

The Prince of Fu trembled from head to toe.

"What do I do? What do I do?"

Suddenly, he turned and glared at the group of troublesome jianghu toughs.

"This is all your fault!"

"What free meal was that?"

"Could you not even spare ten coins?"

"For the sake of ten coins, you dared provoke a Heavenly Immortal on my behalf?"

The toughs were shaking just as badly. The problem had long since stopped being about ten coins. It was now about how to survive after offending a deity.

Eunuch Zheng, as a eunuch, was highly skilled at reading intent and finding a way out.

A flash of inspiration struck him.

"Immortal Xiao clearly could have swept all of us into the sky earlier with that celestial artifact."

"But he did not."

"That means our offense is not unforgivable."

"It can still be remedied."

The Prince of Fu's eyes lit up.

"How do we remedy it?"

Eunuch Zheng lowered his voice.

"The story of begging for forgiveness with humility..."

The Prince of Fu instantly understood.

"Yes. Yes. Begging for forgiveness with humility."

He turned to the guards.

"Beat them."

The guards immediately understood. They rushed forward and began beating the troublemaking toughs mercilessly.

The toughs knew they had caused a catastrophe and did not dare resist. They accepted the blows obediently. In the blink of an eye, they were beaten into pitiful, battered shapes.

Eunuch Zheng spoke quietly.

"These men were recruited by me. I must also bear responsibility."

He extended his left arm toward a nearby guard.

"Do me a favor. Break it."

The guard's face went pale.

"Really break it?"

Eunuch Zheng gritted his teeth.

"Break it. Offering an arm in atonement is far better than being swept into the heavens like locusts."

The guard clenched his teeth and swung his club.

Crack.

Eunuch Zheng's left arm snapped.

He groaned, clutching his broken arm, his face twisted in pain.

"Good. Now I can atone."

He turned to look at the Prince of Fu.

The Prince of Fu sucked in a sharp breath.

He was the Prince of Fu, the third son of Emperor Shenzong of Ming, the most favored among his children. Though he had not ascended the throne, he had always been treated with the highest ceremonial respect, even exceeding that of other princes.

To suffer such humiliation was unthinkable.

But angering a deity was worse.

Even Emperor Shenzong himself could not protect him from that.

After a long struggle, the Prince of Fu made his decision.

He chose a particularly solid looking pillar.

Then, thwack.

He slammed his head into it.

He controlled the force carefully. Not enough to kill himself. Just enough to draw blood.

Blood immediately streamed down his face, staining half of it red.

The Prince of Fu asked shakily.

"This... this should be enough to atone, right?"

Eunuch Zheng, his arm broken, lips twitching in pain, nodded.

"It should... be... enough..."

Thus, a bizarre procession formed.

A group of people in various states of injury, groaning and limping, slowly made their way out.

Creak.

The palace gates opened.

The Prince of Fu, his head bleeding, accompanied by a group of severely battered men, appeared before Li Daoxuan.

Li Daoxuan had already seen everything through observation, but he pretended ignorance.

He raised an eyebrow.

"Oh? Your Highness, what happened to you?"

The Prince of Fu forced a mournful expression.

"Grand Immortal... Grand Immortal Xiao..."

Li Daoxuan frowned.

"Immortal? What Immortal? I know no Immortal."

The Prince of Fu panicked.

"Ah. Hero Xiao!"

He quickly corrected himself.

"Earlier, when the locust plague struck, this Prince... cough... this humble one thought carefully inside the residence."

"The solutions you proposed earlier were all extremely reasonable."

"There must be compensation. Absolutely compensation."

"I will personally interrogate these jianghu toughs."

"Anyone who extorted money or caused losses to the common people will compensate them twice over."

He paused, then hurriedly added.

"No. A hundredfold compensation!"

Chapter 913 Only Character Matters

Li Daoxuan said simply, "Oh."

Seeing that Li Daoxuan's expression seemed to soften, the Prince of Fu immediately pressed on.

"Besides compensation, these fellows must naturally be handed over to Xiao Qixia. If they deserve Labor Reform, then Labor Reform. If they deserve to be beaten to death, then beaten to death..."

"Beaten to death?" Li Daoxuan interrupted. "Eating without paying and getting into fights does not warrant the death penalty. Punishment must be appropriate and standardized. One cannot arbitrarily lighten or increase sentences based on personal mood or emotion."

The Prince of Fu nodded so fast his head nearly came loose. "Yes, yes, yes, yes. You are absolutely right. Sentencing must have standards and cannot depend on personal preference. Labor Reform. It must be Labor Reform."

Li Daoxuan nodded in satisfaction. "Finally, there is the issue of your lax discipline over subordinates."

Eunuch Zheng immediately stepped forward. "These men were hired by me. I have already broken one of my own arms as self punishment."

The Prince of Fu also hurriedly pointed to the blood streaking down his face. "Eunuch Zheng acted under my orders, and I have punished myself as well."

Li Daoxuan curled his lips into a mocking smile, the kind that made him look like a powerful figure secretly enjoying himself. "Oh? How ruthless. Broken arms and bleeding heads. Must it really be this cruel?"

The Prince of Fu and Eunuch Zheng quickly replied in unison, "It is what we deserve. It is what we deserve."

Li Daoxuan's expression suddenly turned solemn. "Have you already forgotten what I just said? Punishment must be moderate. There must be standards. Lax discipline is indeed a serious issue, but it has not led to irreparable consequences. As long as you actively correct it and carry out proper criticism and education, that will be sufficient. There is no need to take things to this extreme. You have gone too far."

While he said "you have gone too far," inside his heart he was laughing so hard he was nearly choking.

Serves you right.

Modern people actually carry two sets of standards in their hearts.

One is the standard he had just voiced aloud. Punishment must be fair, regulated, neither too light nor too heavy.

The other is much more honest. They want to see bad people suffer a far heavier price. Hence the saying, "Online sentencing starts with the death penalty."

These two standards coexist perfectly without contradiction.

The first maintains fairness and order.

The second releases emotional pressure.

Li Daoxuan had now achieved both fairness and emotional satisfaction. A perfect outcome.

He put on an innocent expression. "Earlier, I was worried the Prince of Fu might be an unreasonable big shot. I did not expect Your Highness to be so reasonable. Not bad at all. The matter is settled, so I will take my leave."

The Prince of Fu hurriedly said, "I have always been a very reasonable person, Xiao Qixia. Please take care. I will have these lawless martial artists delivered to you later for Labor Reform. Please take care. I will not see you out. If you have time, do come again next time."

Li Daoxuan strolled leisurely toward the street corner, turned, and vanished from sight.

Only then did the Prince of Fu finally relax.

His legs gave out completely.

With his massive body weight, once his legs softened, he had no chance of holding himself up. He collapsed to the ground with a heavy thud.

"Someone. A doctor. Quickly summon a physician."

The Prince of Fu's residence instantly descended into chaos.

While the Prince of Fu's residence was in turmoil, Luoyang City itself was finally at peace.

The common people gathered in small clusters, chatting excitedly.

"Just who was the immortal that saved us?"

"No idea. They never even showed their face."

"That venerable elder did not even leave a name. Who am I supposed to burn incense to?"

"Look. The Governor's carriage is coming."

Henan Governor Fan Shangzheng emerged onto the streets with a large group of officials, his expression full of disbelief as he surveyed Luoyang City.

When the locust plague had struck earlier, they had all believed Luoyang would be ruined. They had expected chaos, looting, arson, and riots, a complete free for all.

Yet now, everything was calm.

Forget looting. After witnessing an immortal display divine power, not even the smallest thief dared to act.

"The heavens are watching" was no longer just a saying. It was a reality hanging above everyone's heads.

Fan Shangzheng walked along the street, sighing deeply. "Truly astonishing. With the arrival of this immortal being, Luoyang has gained an entirely new aura."

"Governor, I caught an escaped locust," a constable shouted excitedly as he ran over.

Fan Shangzheng ordered calmly, "Break its wings and throw it down."

The constable obeyed at once.

Fan Shangzheng watched the wingless locust struggle on the ground. He snorted, raised his foot, stomped on it, then ground it into the earth twice for good measure.

The act was filled with undisguised arrogance.

At that moment, a figure appeared from a side street. Bai Yuan arrived, leading a large unit of Gao Family Village Militia soldiers.

Fan Shangzheng's eyes lit up. "Instructor Bai."

Bai Yuan clasped his hands respectfully. "Governor."

Fan Shangzheng asked, "Did you see it earlier? An immortal descended upon Luoyang and swept the locust swarm into the heavens."

Bai Yuan smiled faintly. "Of course I saw it."

Fan Shangzheng frowned slightly. "Hm? You do not seem particularly excited."

Bai Yuan laughed. "What are you saying? I am quite excited. This divine ability of Dao Xuan Tianzun is also something I have witnessed for the first time."

Fan Shangzheng sensed something off. Bai Yuan sounded far too familiar with this immortal being, as if he had seen such miracles before.

His gaze grew suspicious.

Bai Yuan laughed openly. "Governor, you probably do not know yet. The immortal who cleared the locust plague is named Dao Xuan Tianzun."

Fan Shangzheng thought for a moment. "Dao Xuan Tianzun... I have heard that name before. Merchants from Shaanxi and Shanxi have mentioned a Daoist sect there that worships this very immortal."

Bai Yuan pointed at the golden embroidered emblem on his chest. "That is him."

Fan Shangzheng gasped. "Then you..."

Bai Yuan laughed loudly. "Yes. I have always been under the protection of Dao Xuan Tianzun."

The Gao Family Village Militia soldiers burst into laughter as well. "We have always been protected by Dao Xuan Tianzun too. This time the locust plague came, so Dao Xuan Tianzun must have acted to protect us."

Bai Yuan turned and scolded them with a smile. "Do not flatter yourselves. Dao Xuan Tianzun acts for the common people of Luoyang City, not just for you lot."

The soldiers laughed even harder. "We are soldiers of the common people. Are we not common people too? So Dao Xuan Tianzun protecting us is perfectly reasonable."

The entire Gao Family Village Militia was filled with joy.

Fan Shangzheng looked up at the sky, then down at the crushed locust beneath his foot. After staring at the golden emblem on Bai Yuan's chest for a long time, he finally spoke hesitantly.

"If I may ask... if I were to embroider the image of Dao Xuan Tianzun on my chest as well, would that venerable elder also protect me?"

Bai Yuan snapped open his folding fan, revealing the word "Gentleman," and laughed. "Dao Xuan Tianzun protects all people, but only character matters. Those of good character receive his protection. As for those of poor character, even if they embroider Dao Xuan Tianzun's image all over their bodies, that venerable elder will never favor them."

Chapter 914 I Am Unhappy

Fan Shangzheng engraved Bai Yuan's words deeply into his heart and nodded with conviction.

"That is exactly how it should be."

He considered himself a decent man as well, so he felt no particular anxiety. With a slightly shameless grin, he leaned closer and asked, "Mr. Bai, could you also help make one for my official robes later?"

The officials following behind him immediately lit up.

"We want one too!"

"Us as well!"

Bai Yuan laughed. "Naturally, that is no problem. But does His Excellency the Governor not wish to gain a deeper understanding of Dao Xuan Tianzun?"

Fan Shangzheng answered without hesitation, eyes bright. "Of course I do. I am extremely eager to learn more."

The Prefect of Luoyang and several other senior officials quickly echoed him.

"We wish to learn as well!"

"Please enlighten us!"

Bai Yuan nodded. "Very well. I will have a full set of The Divine Saga of Dao Xuan, Heavenly Lord of Exorcism delivered to each of you. Once you have read it, you will naturally understand everything."

That very night.

The twelfth volume of The Divine Saga of Dao Xuan, Heavenly Lord of Exorcism, along with a thick stack of earlier volumes, was delivered straight to Fan Shangzheng's residence.

Fan Shangzheng lit the lamp, sat down, and began reading.

He read from dusk until dawn.

From the first volume all the way to the end, he devoured everything in one breath.

By the time he finished, he was completely shaken.

If he had not personally experienced the locust plague in Luoyang, he would have dismissed this book as nothing more than entertaining folklore, a collection of exaggerated legends meant to amuse the masses.

But now?

Now every single word felt real.

To him, every plot point in the book was truth itself.

Dao Xuan Tianzun striking down bandits with a wave of his hand.

Calling down rain to save the suffering common people.

Bestowing weapons to suppress rebellions.

Dropping food from the heavens to feed the starving masses.

All the seemingly disconnected stories suddenly clicked together.

Everything made sense.

Why Bai Yuan commanded so many flintlock rifle soldiers. He understood now.

Why Chen Yuanbo managed the tiny Wenshui County with such astonishing competence. He understood now.

And why Young Hero, Great Hero, Grand Hero, Extraordinary Hero Xiao Qiushui could charge through rebel ranks alone, impervious to blades and spears, unharmed by fire and water. He finally understood that too.

Just a few days earlier, the magistrate of Xin'an County had submitted a report stating that the hardened mud deposits along the Yellow River floodplain, a problem that had plagued the county for years, had been excavated with divine assistance. Xin'an County had even constructed a bridge leading directly into Shanxi.

Fan Shangzheng had originally scoffed, believing the magistrate was fabricating achievements to curry favor.

Now he knew.

That, too, was the work of Dao Xuan Tianzun.

Joining the Dao Xuan Tianzun Sect carried enormous benefits.

If he joined as well, would Henan, the province under his governance, also fall under the protection of Dao Xuan Tianzun?

The mere thought filled him with uncontrollable excitement.

That night, Fan Shangzheng did not sleep at all.

The next morning, when he left his residence to attend to official duties, he noticed something peculiar.

The Prefect of Luoyang.

Several circuit officials.

A whole group of senior bureaucrats.

Every single one of them had dark circles under their eyes.

Clearly, he had not been the only one awake all night.

From that day onward, the grand development of Luoyang City officially began.

With Dao Xuan Tianzun's divine manifestation laying the foundation, the common people of Luoyang City were brimming with energy.

The fear and uncertainty that had once clung to them vanished almost overnight.

In its place was hope.

They were people protected by a deity.

They were no longer refugees drifting without shelter.

Just like how a kitten with a mother is no longer a stray.

Standing before the Governor's Yamen, Fan Shangzheng addressed the gathered refugees in a loud, clear voice.

"We are now recruiting a large number of laborers to construct a super long road starting from Luoyang City, passing through Xin'an County, and extending north into Shanxi, all the way to the Hedong Circuit."

"Those willing to work will receive three catties of flour per person per day."

After speaking, he hurriedly added, voice rising.

"This is not corvée labor. Not corvée labor. Not corvée labor. I will repeat it three times for emphasis."

"This project is personally backed by the venerable Dao Xuan Tianzun. All wages will be paid in full."

The moment these words fell, the crowd erupted internally.

With Dao Xuan Tianzun overseeing it, what was there to fear?

Even if officials could not be trusted, there was no need to worry.

Would the government dare go against Dao Xuan Tianzun?

He could sweep the entire officialdom into the heavens just like he did with the locust swarm.

In the blink of an eye, an overwhelming number of refugees signed up.

Especially those who had once taken shelter beneath the glass dome.

Their lives had been saved by Dao Xuan Tianzun himself.

They had no reason not to believe.

Fan Shangzheng recruited tens of thousands of laborers in an instant.

The sheer scale of it left him stunned.

In the past, building a road meant forcibly conscripting strong young men, a process that almost always sparked resistance, riots, and bloodshed.

Now?

One shout.

Tens of thousands responded.

Blue Hats from Gao Family Village arrived by boat from Shanxi shortly after.

Under the guidance of these skilled technicians, a railway and highway double line began extending steadily from Luoyang toward Shanxi.

At the same time, construction teams from Shanxi were advancing toward Luoyang.

The Luoyang extension of the Xihe Railway officially broke ground.

Xi'an. Caisikou Plaza.

Gaojia News aired as scheduled.

Gao Yiye appeared on the screen, smiling calmly.

"The railway connecting Hedong Circuit and Luoyang City has officially commenced construction. This segment is named the Xihe Railway Extension."

"Once completed, it will connect seamlessly with the Xi'an to Hedong Circuit railway. The entire route will then be renamed the West Luo Railway."

"From that day onward, everyone will be able to travel directly from Xi'an to Luoyang by train."

The crowd burst into cheers.

"That's amazing!"

"Now we can visit Luoyang easily."

"I've always wanted to see the Central Capital."

"I have poetry friends in Luoyang. Now we can finally travel together."

Merchants were equally thrilled.

"Our goods can finally reach Luoyang quickly," one sighed. "Before, transporting goods meant crossing Mount Hua, passing Tongguan, navigating dangerous terrain, and dealing with bandits everywhere. It was exhausting."

The atmosphere was jubilant.

Everyone was happy.

Everyone except one person.

The Heir Apparent of the Prince of Qin.

Zhu Cunji.

Zhu Cunji was very unhappy.

His lips were tightly pursed.

His Princess Consort gently poked him. "What's wrong?"

Zhu Cunji muttered, "I want to go to Luoyang."

She sighed softly and held his hand. "You cannot go. Do not even think about it."

Zhu Cunji protested, "Am I not even allowed to think?"

She lowered her voice. "If you think about it too much, it will become an obsession. One day, your mind will fail to control your legs, and you will jump onto a train."

"After that comes the reduction of your fief, the stripping of your title, and finally, your head."

Zhu Cunji snorted. "Hmph. Always threatening me with losing my head. If they are so capable, let them exterminate my entire clan."

His wife fell silent.

There was nothing she could say to that.

No emperor, not even a mad one, would exterminate an entire princely clan over something like that.

Suddenly, Zhu Cunji stood up and declared loudly, "I have decided!"

His wife jumped. "Why are you shouting?"

Zhu Cunji announced passionately, "I will continue building railways."

"I cannot stop at the West Yan Railway."

"I will build a Xi'an to Chengdu Railway."

"Then a Xi'an to Hangzhou Railway."

"A Southwest Railway connecting to Nanjing."

"A Xi'an to Yanjing Railway."

"And a Xi'an to Qiongzhou Railway connecting to Qiongzhou."

He paused.

"...Wait. That one might not be feasible."

His wife stared at him. "What exactly are you planning to do?"

Zhu Cunji answered earnestly. "I am preparing in advance."

"Just in case."

"One day, if I am finally allowed to leave Xi'an..."

"I will board a grand train and travel across the entire realm."

His wife let out a long sigh.

"I told you not to think about it."

"It really has become an obsession."

Zhu Cunji nodded firmly. "It already is."

"Too late to stop now."

Chapter 915 The Remedy for the Locust Plague

The summer of the eighth year of the Chongzhen Emperor's reign ushered in a great locust plague.

The locust swarm that Li Daoxuan had eliminated in Luoyang was merely a small offshoot of a far larger disaster. Almost the entirety of Henan Province had been ravaged. Hubei, northeastern Sichuan, and southeastern Shanxi also suffered heavy damage.

Wherever the locusts passed, they left devastation behind.

They descended like a natural calamity, stripping the land bare, gnawing every stalk and leaf until not a trace of green remained.

At this time, Li Daoxuan's field of vision was limited to Luoyang City.

He could protect Luoyang and the regions northwest of it, but the southeastern areas lay beyond his sight. He was powerless to help those places for the moment.

Moreover, Li Daoxuan was still human.

He was not a true god after all.

When the locusts split into smaller groups and scattered into southeastern Shanxi, Mengjin County, and Xin'an County northwest of Luoyang, he often failed to detect them.

Especially when observing the diorama box from outside, the locusts appeared no larger than specks of dust. When massive swarms flew together, they were visible at a glance. But when only a handful fluttered about, they were impossible to notice unless he deliberately activated the focus function.

As a result, the people of Mengjin County, Xin'an County, and southeastern Shanxi were forced into a grueling, endless struggle against countless small groups of locusts.

"Dao Xuan Tianzun!"

From Taiyuan Prefecture and Luoyang City, two prayers rose at the same time.

Henan Governor Fan Shangzheng and Shanxi Governor Wu Shen both bowed deeply toward the heavens, their voices filled with desperation.

"The locust plague is rampant. Your humble officials are powerless to stop it. We beg Dao Xuan Tianzun to display divine might and save the common people."

Two prayers from two distant locations, spoken simultaneously.

It was, frankly, an unreasonable demand.

Li Daoxuan had no choice but to respond with the speed and multitasking ability of a battlefield commander.

First, he switched to the portrait of Dao Xuan Tianzun before Wu Shen and said calmly, "Let me think."

Then, in the next instant, he switched to the newly embroidered golden image of Dao Xuan Tianzun on Fan Shangzheng's chest and spoke sharply.

"Henan is vast. Do you expect me to chase locusts everywhere? Are you trying to drive me mad?"

Fan Shangzheng jumped in fright.

He had never imagined that his prayer would actually summon a response.

Excitement and terror surged through him at the same time.

Excitement, because he had just joined the Dao Xuan Tianzun Sect and already received a direct response from the deity. This proved that his decision had been absolutely correct.

Terror, because he suddenly realized that his request might have been excessive.

Dao Xuan Tianzun was a divine being who acted at his own discretion. To make demands so soon after joining the faith might provoke divine displeasure.

Fan Shangzheng immediately lowered his head, posture respectful and humble.

"Your humble official did not mean that. I would never presume to trouble Dao Xuan Tianzun personally. I only beg that Dao Xuan Tianzun bestow upon us a method to control the locust plague, so that this humble official may protect the people of Henan."

"Hm. That sounds more reasonable," Li Daoxuan replied.

"Very well. Let me think."

Switching back to his true body, Li Daoxuan sat down at his computer and typed in a search query.

"How to control locusts."

Instantly, a flood of information appeared.

He skimmed through it quickly.

For small groups of locusts, manual capture and poultry control were effective methods.

For large scale infestations, however, only one solution was truly reliable.

Pesticides.

Li Daoxuan knew that the people of this era already understood how to deal with small numbers of locusts. There was no need for him to teach them something they already knew. Fan Shangzheng and Wu Shen had their own ways of handling minor outbreaks.

What they lacked was a decisive remedy.

His first thought was the insecticide he kept at home.

But after a moment's consideration, he rejected the idea.

That kind of chemical insecticide was far too potent. If mishandled, it could easily harm people. That would be unacceptable.

Was there an insecticide that was effective but not dangerous to humans?

He continued searching.

To his surprise, he found one.

Biological agents.

But almost immediately, Li Daoxuan remembered that biological agents relied on bacteria infecting the locusts.

Bacteria could not be introduced into the diorama box.

That path was closed.

Left with no choice, he abandoned biological agents and turned to natural plant extracts.

After another round of intense searching, he finally found something suitable.

Neem extract.

More precisely, Azadirachtin.

Azadirachtin was a natural compound extracted from neem tree fruits. It was globally recognized as a broad spectrum insecticide that was highly effective, low in toxicity, easily degradable, residue free, and resistant to resistance development. It caused no harm to humans, livestock, or the environment.

Li Daoxuan was delighted.

He immediately opened his usual online shopping app and searched for it.

The product was available.

A small bottle of 100 milliliters cost only around thirty yuan.

Cheap beyond belief.

Without hesitation, he placed the order.

The next day, the Azadirachtin arrived.

The instruction manual was thick and detailed, listing all kinds of precautions.

Do not touch with bare hands.

Avoid contact with eyes.

Do not eat while applying.

Wear protective clothing.

And many more warnings.

Li Daoxuan stared at the instructions and muttered, "Damn it. This stuff is still dangerous."

In the real world, one drop was nothing.

But inside the miniature world, a single drop would turn into a massive barrel.

If the villagers were exposed to the concentrated solution, it would be disastrous.

He had to be extremely careful.

He could not give them the original concentrate. That would be suicidal.

He needed to dilute it strictly according to the instructions. On top of that, he had to issue divine orders as Dao Xuan Tianzun and force them to follow the usage rules without deviation.

Putting on rubber gloves, Li Daoxuan carefully diluted the 100 milliliters of Azadirachtin with several hundred times its volume in clean water, shaking it thoroughly until fully mixed.

Then, he translated the usage instructions into traditional Chinese characters and printed them out.

Only after everything was prepared did he proceed.

His vision shifted to Hedong City.

Xing Honglang and Gao Chuwu were playing with their son, Gao Zhengjing.

Gao Zhengjing was only two years old, but he had grown into a sturdy child, larger than most three or four year olds. He had learned to walk early, and now he could even hop twice in a row, his chubby arms swinging energetically.

Li Daoxuan switched to the puppet image of Dao Xuan Tianzun resting on Gao Chuwu's shoulder and spoke.

"Chuwu. Honglang. I have a divine remedy for controlling locusts."

Both of them were overjoyed.

"Greetings, Dao Xuan Tianzun."

Gao Zhengjing babbled excitedly. "Ah. Ah. Puppet. Talking. Talking."

His fat little hands immediately reached out to grab the puppet.

Xing Honglang and Gao Chuwu were terrified.

The last time their son had grabbed the puppet, he had snapped its neck with a loud crack. That incident had nearly scared them out of their souls. They could not let it happen again.

Xing Honglang instantly grabbed Gao Zhengjing by the collar, lifted him up, and gave his bottom a sharp smack.

"How many times have I told you? Do not touch Dao Xuan Tianzun."

"Wah. Wah. Woo."

Gao Zhengjing burst into tears.

The puppet Dao Xuan Tianzun chuckled. "Alright, alright. Do not cry. I will sing you a puppet song. The sun shines brightly, the flowers smile at me."

Gao Zhengjing blinked. "Oh?"

He stopped crying immediately.

"Hahaha. What a charming child," the puppet laughed.

Then his tone abruptly turned serious.

"Chuwu. Honglang. What I am about to give you is extremely dangerous."

"Immediately have a servant take the child far away."

"The two of you must wear thick, non breathable clothing."

"It would be best to cover your faces completely as well."

Chapter 916 You Guys Figure It Out

The Dao Xuan Tianzun's grave tone immediately alerted Gao Chuwu and Xing Honglang.

Precautions this strict could only mean one thing.

This stuff was terrifyingly powerful.

Neither of them dared to delay. They quickly ordered the attendant to escort Gao Zhengjing away, then hurriedly changed into thick layers of clothing. On top of that, they somehow dug out two large glass covers and placed them over their heads.

This was already the absolute limit of protection their era could offer.

The Puppet Dao Xuan Tianzun personally checked them over, then instructed them to use strips of cloth to tightly seal the gaps between the glass covers and their necks. The cloth was crude, but it could at least block and filter things a little. For now, that would have to do.

Only after all that did he slowly place a Nongfu Spring bottle cap in front of them.

Inside the cap was diluted neem extract.

Gao Chuwu blinked.

"Oh? Is the Dao Xuan Tianzun rewarding us with more Happy Fat Water?"

Xing Honglang stared at him.

"The Dao Xuan Tianzun made us dress up like this before giving it to us. That clearly means it's poison. And your first thought is Happy Fat Water? Are you an idiot?"

Gao Chuwu nodded without hesitation.

"That's right. I am an idiot."

Xing Honglang fell silent.

Alright. Teasing was useless. At that moment, she truly understood what it meant for formlessness to triumph over technique. Against someone like Gao Chuwu, there was simply no winning. Xing Honglang could only concede defeat.

The Puppet Dao Xuan Tianzun spoke calmly.

"This entire pool of liquid is a potent poison. Locusts will die upon contact. Humans, if exposed in excess, will also suffer severe consequences."

Xing Honglang had once dealt with all kinds of illicit goods during her time as a salt smuggler. Poisons were nothing new to her. She instantly grasped the situation.

"I understand, Dao Xuan Tianzun!" she said seriously. "We will operate under strict protective measures, decant the poison into containers, and send it to the locust-stricken regions."

"To use it most effectively, it would be best to spray it from the sky."

Li Daoxuan let out a sigh.

"Unfortunately, you do not possess the means for aerial spraying. Hot air balloons are also unreliable for this purpose. Therefore, you will have to rely on manual spraying instead. As for how to do it, I trust you will find your own solutions."

Xing Honglang's spirits immediately rose. She clasped her fists.

"How can we keep relying on the Dao Xuan Tianzun for everything? Please watch our performance this time."

The Puppet Dao Xuan Tianzun nodded slightly.

With a few dull thuds, he placed several more large bottle caps filled with pesticide in front of Gao Chuwu and Xing Honglang. He also laid out pre-printed instructions for use.

Then his perspective shifted.

Wu Shen, Fan Shangzheng, and Bai Yuan were each given a portion of the pesticide, along with the same instruction manuals.

Henan. Luoyang. Governor's Yamen.

"My lord, we have caught the locusts you requested."

Several household servants rushed in, carrying a cloth sack. Something inside writhed violently, constantly distorting the shape of the bag.

Fan Shangzheng stared at it, his face full of disgust.

"This official asked you to catch a few locusts. Not an entire sack. Isn't that revolting?"

The servant grinned and tilted his head.

"It's not that bad. When they're not swarming, they're basically just big grasshoppers. I used to catch grasshoppers all the time when I was a kid."

Fan Shangzheng waved his hand impatiently.

"Enough. Bring one over. This official will test it."

The servant opened a small slit in the sack, reached inside, and pulled out a massive locust, presenting it in front of Fan Shangzheng.

The insect struggled fiercely. Fan Shangzheng frowned even harder.

He turned to another servant.

"Bring the divine medicine bestowed by the Dao Xuan Tianzun."

That servant immediately adopted an expression of deep reverence and carefully held out a small porcelain bottle.

This was the insecticide that Fan Shangzheng's men had decanted.

While repackaging it, they treated it like a celestial elixir. Not a single drop was allowed to spill. No one dared let it touch their skin.

Everyone wore protective gear and used wooden ladles, the kind oil vendors used, to carefully transfer the "divine medicine" into bottles and jars.

Fan Shangzheng personally uncorked the porcelain bottle, tilted it slightly, and allowed a single drop of the liquid to fall onto the locust.

This substance could instantly kill locusts when atomized. What would happen if an entire drop landed directly on one?

The locust thrashed violently for a brief moment, then stiffened.

Within seconds, it was completely motionless.

Fan Shangzheng felt both ecstatic and alarmed.

Ecstatic at the terrifying effectiveness. Alarmed for the exact same reason.

"The celestial elixir truly lives up to its name. Locusts die on contact," he declared. "You have all seen how potent this divine medicine is. If anyone were to ingest it by accident..."

The servants were instantly drenched in sweat.

"We wouldn't dare."

"Under no circumstances is it to touch your skin," Fan Shangzheng said sternly. "Memorize the Dao Xuan Tianzun's instructions one hundred times. After that, each of you will take ten buckets and head to the counties to poison the locusts."

One servant hesitated.

"My lord, how are we supposed to spray this medicine onto locusts in the sky?"

Fan Shangzheng glared at him.

"Do you expect this official to think of everything? What good are you otherwise?"

And so the higher officials passed the problem downward.

Those receiving it, naturally well-versed in the same art, passed it even further down.

At the very bottom were the common laborers. With no one left to pass the burden to, they had no choice but to rely on their own ingenuity.

What followed was a true spectacle.

All sorts of bizarre contraptions began to appear.

Some people drilled countless tiny holes into one end of thick bamboo poles, poured poison into the tube, and used plungers to force it out. Thin streams of poisoned water sprayed forth, essentially bamboo water guns using capillary action.

Others climbed to hilltops and waited for strong winds. From there, they scattered the poisoned water and let it drift downwind. Naturally, they had to make sure no one was standing downwind.

A few true geniuses decided to heat the poison in massive woks, hoping to evaporate it into a mist that would float into the sky.

The result was disastrous. The mist lost its toxicity entirely and failed to kill a single locust. A complete failure.

Even the militia's hot air balloons were borrowed by villagers. They climbed aboard and sprayed downward with bamboo water guns.

However, when the locust swarms arrived, they blotted out the sky. The balloons had to ascend extremely high just to avoid being overwhelmed. From that height, the poisoned water drifted off course as it fell, rendering the effort useless. Another failed attempt.

None of these crude methods could compare to modern aerial spraying.

Yet through sheer determination and numbers, they still achieved results.

In southeastern Shanxi and northwestern Henan, the locust plague was gradually brought under control.

As for southeastern Henan...

The star reporter of Gao Family Village, Miss Zhou Daya, the Flower Queen herself, once again arrived at Gubai Ferry.

She had brought back the most valuable footage before, and today was another day to deliver food supplies to Lao Huihui.

Once again, the Flower Queen volunteered to head straight to the front lines to record precious video.

By now, the people of Gao Family Village had interacted with Lao Huihui's forces many times. A certain level of trust had formed. The old tension was gone, replaced by relaxed conversation.

Lao Huihui clasped his fists.

"Instructor Jiang, Miss Zhou, Henan has been plagued by locusts recently. My troops have been harassed by swarms several times. It's been quite a mess. How are things at Xiaolangdi?"

Jiang Cheng smiled.

"Thank you for your concern. We're doing well. We've largely avoided the disaster."

Chapter 917 My Brother's Lost It

Lao Huihui was completely baffled.

"Hardly any disaster?" he asked in disbelief. "Just a few days ago, I personally saw a massive swarm of locusts heading straight toward Luoyang. I was extremely worried about you."

Jiang Cheng burst into hearty laughter.

"That swarm?" he said. "Its main force was taken straight up to the heavens."

Lao Huihui's face instantly filled with confusion, as if several question marks had been pasted onto it.

Jiang Cheng did not elaborate.

Those who had not witnessed it with their own eyes would never believe the terrifying divine power the Dao Xuan Tianzun used to sweep away the locust swarm. That level of strength was simply beyond comprehension. Jiang Cheng knew that no amount of explanation would convince Lao Huihui, so he chose to leave it unsaid.

Instead, Jiang Cheng continued calmly, "After the main swarm was dealt with, we brought in a large number of chickens and ducks from the Hedong Circuit farms in Shanxi. We released them to handle the smaller swarms. The results were extremely good."

Lao Huihui was once again struck dumb.

In the midst of a devastating drought, people were still raising chickens and ducks?

And not just a few scattered birds, but entire farms?

Enough to send them out against locust swarms?

Jiang Cheng reached into his pocket, pulled out a large duck egg, and placed it into Lao Huihui's hand.

"Here, brother," Jiang Cheng said with a grin. "A little extra snack, just for you."

Lao Huihui was speechless.

The hand holding the duck egg trembled slightly.

The more he interacted with the people of Xiaolangdi, the more Lao Huihui felt their strength was unfathomable. When others were starving, these people not only transported grain to him by the boatload, they also sent luncheon meat. And now, they casually handed him a duck egg.

It was simply too much.

He truly did not know what to say.

At that moment, the sound of galloping hooves came from the distance. A fast horse rushed toward them, the rider leaping down the moment he arrived.

"Report!" the scout shouted. "The Rebel King has arrived!"

Lao Huihui blinked. "Eh? What's he doing here?"

The scout replied quickly, "It seems he is merely passing through with his army. He does not appear to be targeting us. There are no signs of hostility."

Lao Huihui finally breathed out in relief. "So he just ran into us? That's good. Quick, hide the provisions."

His subordinates immediately sprang into action. They dragged the grain Jiang Cheng had just delivered behind rocks, shielding it with horses and men to keep it out of sight.

Jiang Cheng also hurried back toward his boat. He intended to steer it away from the shore at Gubai Ferry. A vessel of that size was impossible to conceal.

After running a few steps, he suddenly remembered something.

He turned his head and realized that the courtesan had not moved at all.

"Hey!" Jiang Cheng called out. "Miss Zhou, get on the boat!"

The courtesan shook her head. She leaned close to Jiang Cheng's ear and whispered, "No. I can't leave. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I might be able to film the Rebel King with my camera. The people of Gao Family Village would definitely want to see what he looks like. News needs interesting material. Who wants to keep watching the same old things?"

Jiang Cheng was shocked. "Hey! That's far too dangerous!"

The courtesan turned toward Lao Huihui instead. "General, dear brother, I'm feeling a bit seasick and don't want to go back on the boat. I'd like to hide with your army for a while. Once the Rebel King leaves, Instructor Jiang can come get me. Would that be alright?"

Lao Huihui answered without hesitation, "Of course! If I can't even protect a young lady, I might as well jump into the Yellow River."

The courtesan made a playful face at Jiang Cheng.

Jiang Cheng had no choice but to give in. He hurried back to the boat and steered it away toward the opposite bank of Gubai Ferry.

The courtesan and her special operations team hid inside an abandoned house at Gubai Ferry. From a window, they aimed the camera lens outward.

From the south came the sound of shouting men and neighing horses. A massive banner bearing the character "Chuang" advanced toward Gubai Ferry.

At the head of the formation rode a man on a white horse. He wore white robes and a white hat.

This had to be the Rebel King.

The courtesan immediately aimed her camera at him.

For some reason, his face felt strangely familiar. It was as if she had seen him somewhere before. A powerful sense of déjà vu washed over her, even though she was certain this was her first time seeing the Rebel King.

The feeling was unsettling.

The Rebel King rode up to Lao Huihui and clasped his fists while still on horseback.

"Brother Lao Huihui," he said, "I just fought a battle with He Renlong and Gao Jie. I'm passing through on my way back. What are you doing stationed at Gubai Ferry?"

Lao Huihui replied calmly, "Nothing special. Just letting the troops rest."

The Rebel King raised his horsewhip and pointed toward the north bank of the Yellow River.

"Could it be that you're still thinking about going back north?"

At the Xingyang Conference, Lao Huihui had proposed returning north, and Zhang Xianzhong had made a few sarcastic remarks about it at the time. The Rebel King still remembered the incident clearly.

As he passed through and heard that Lao Huihui was camped by the river, he had genuinely worried that Lao Huihui might abandon everyone and flee. That was why he came personally to ask.

Lao Huihui shook his head. "Yes, I'm still thinking about it. But thinking is one thing, acting is another. Look at the river. I don't even have a single boat. How could I go back?"

The Rebel King nodded. He indeed saw no boats, and his concerns eased.

"Brother Lao Huihui," he said, "it's not that I, as your elder brother, don't want to return home. The problem is that Shanxi is currently under Wu Shen's control. You know how wealthy that fellow is. Back then, he arrived in Shaanxi with a hundred thousand taels of silver and bought over many of our brothers in an instant. Now he's stationed in Shanxi, carrying out massive construction projects and gathering a large army along the Yellow River. Crossing over would be extremely difficult. If you went back now, you'd likely be walking straight into death."

Lao Huihui replied simply, "I know."

The Rebel King nodded again. "Alright. Since you understand, I'm relieved. I'll be taking my leave now. You shouldn't stay here either. He Renlong and Gao Jie's troops will be arriving soon."

Before his words had even faded, two swift horses galloped in from the distance.

The first rider was Lao Huihui's scout.

The second was a middle-aged man. He was not particularly handsome, but his expression was steady and he carried a sharp, ruthless air.

The scout shouted loudly, "Report! The Dashing General has arrived!"

The man behind him shouted angrily, "Report what? I'm already here, right behind you! No need to announce it!"

As he spoke, the Dashing General rode straight up to the Rebel King. Still on horseback, he clasped his fists and asked urgently, "Brother Rebel King, I heard you just fought with He Renlong and Gao Jie?"

The Rebel King nodded. "Yes. Their forces are just west of here."

The Dashing General roared, "Good! Thank you, elder brother! I'm off!"

With that, he kicked his horse hard and charged westward.

The Rebel King cried out in alarm, "Hey! Brother Dashing General! Why are you riding straight toward the enemy?"

The Dashing General shouted back, "That bastard Gao Jie is Fan Shan Yao! I have a blood debt to settle with him for seducing my wife!"

The Rebel King froze on the spot.

Lao Huihui also froze.

In the blink of an eye, the Dashing General had already ridden far ahead. Immediately after, his Old Eighth Squad burst out from the east, charging west after him.

"Brother Dashing General, wait for us!" they shouted. "Don't run off by yourself!"

The Dashing General roared as he rode, "Brothers, hurry and catch up! Whoever captures Gao Jie alive gets a reward of one hundred catties of gold! Fifty catties if he's dead!"

The Old Eighth Squad went wild upon hearing this. Howls of excitement echoed as they charged westward at full speed.

The Rebel King let out a long sigh.

"Ah," he said helplessly. "My brother's lost it."

He turned to Lao Huihui. "Brother Lao Huihui, I'm going to help the Dashing General. Will you come with me?"

Lao Huihui shook his head. "I won't be going. We just fought government troops yesterday. My men need rest."

The Rebel King nodded. "Very well."

He turned his horse around and rode west as well, followed closely by a large portion of his army.

Chapter 918 I'm Going to Thrash That Brat

Chuǎng Wang and Li Zicheng's forces disappeared as suddenly as they had arrived, leaving no trace behind.

Only then did Lao Huihui finally speak. "Alright. Miss Zhou, you can come out now."

Zhou Daya and her entire group emerged from the dilapidated house.

The moment she appeared, her expression screamed only one word: gossip.

Women were naturally fond of gossip, and as a frontline reporter, Zhou Daya's gossip radar was running at maximum output. She immediately bounced over to Lao Huihui, eyes sparkling.

"General, dear," she said eagerly, "Chuǎng Jiang just said his wife was seduced by Gao Jie. What exactly happened? Could you tell your little sister the whole story? I really love listening to these kinds of things."

Lao Huihui could not help but smile bitterly.

Why did women enjoy these stories so much?

Still, the young lady was charming, and there was no real harm in telling her. Besides, this matter had already been discussed openly at the Xingyang Conference. All three hundred thousand rebel troops knew about it. One more person hearing it would not change anything.

So Lao Huihui recounted the entire affair in detail. He explained how Gao Jie, also known as Fan Shan Yao, had seduced Chuǎng Jiang's wife, how the scandal exploded, and how it ultimately led to Chuǎng Jiang's betrayal and defection to He Renlong.

Zhou Daya listened with shining eyes.

"Big news!" she exclaimed. "Absolutely massive news! Hahaha! This is exactly the kind of thing journalists dream about! This is incredible. I have to make a news segment immediately. This will definitely cause a sensation. The people of Gao Family Village will love watching this!"

Not long after, Jiang Cheng's cargo ship arrived to pick her up.

Zhou Daya leaped aboard in a single bound, immediately directing the special operations soldiers to load the camera equipment. She urged them anxiously, "Quick, quick! Find a place with a Divine Mirror! I need to produce some major news. Truly major news!"

Jiang Cheng still had no idea what kind of storm was about to be unleashed. He smiled helplessly. "What's the rush? This ship can only go so fast."

Zhou Daya waved him off impatiently. "Instructor Jiang, lend me some writing implements. I need to organize my draft first."

"There are some in the cabin," Jiang Cheng replied. "Use whatever you need."

—

The next evening.

At the main fortress of Gao Family Village, Gaojia News officially began broadcasting.

Villagers sat neatly in front of the Divine Mirror, their television. Watching the news every evening had become the greatest form of entertainment at dusk.

Even Gao Yiye sat among them, watching along with everyone else.

Because the news was pre-recorded, Gao Yiye was free during playback and could relax with the crowd.

To her left sat the Old Village Chief. To her right were Gao Laba, Gao Sanniang, Gao Sanwa, and the others. Of the original forty-two residents of Gao Family Village, some were currently away on assignments, leaving just over thirty people gathered here.

The broadcast began with international news, followed by domestic affairs, factory reports, and various village updates.

Everyone thought that was all for the day.

But just as Gaojia News was about to end, a massive golden hand suddenly descended from the sky and began operating the tablet.

Gao Yiye immediately stood up, smiling brightly. "Oh my. The Dao Xuan Tianzun says there's some interesting breaking news. It was provided by our frontline reporter, Miss Zhou. To obtain this report, Reporter Zhou went deep into enemy territory and faced great danger. She personally edited the footage, and now the Dao Xuan Tianzun will show it to everyone!"

Instantly, everyone's interest was piqued.

The gigantic hand tapped several spots on the Divine Mirror. The screen shifted, revealing a dilapidated ferry port.

Zhou Daya's voice narrated from behind the camera. "This is Gudu Ferry. Here, your reporter uncovered a hidden secret among the rebels. It turns out that the wife of the notorious rebel leader Chuǎng Jiang was seduced by his subordinate Fan Shan Yao, and the two engaged in an illicit affair..."

Before she even finished the sentence, the audience erupted in laughter.

People who loved excitement never complained about drama escalating, and gossip was the most beloved form of news.

On the screen, a figure appeared. Chuǎng Wang rode into view, calling out urgently, "Brother Chuǎng Wang, I heard you just ran into He Renlong and Gao Jie?"

The camera swung quickly.

It zoomed in tightly on Chuǎng Wang's face.

Chuǎng Wang replied, "Yes. Their forces are currently just west of here."

The footage playing was exactly what had happened earlier at Gudu Ferry.

The villagers watched, chuckling and whispering.

But at that exact moment, Gao Yiye suddenly jumped to her feet.

"Ah! Second Uncle!"

The Old Village Chief stared at the screen, then exclaimed in shock, "Isn't that Gao Yingxiang, that brat?"

Gao Laba shouted, "Brother Yingxiang!"

Gao Sanniang gasped. "Good heavens. It really is Brother Yingxiang."

The original residents of Gao Family Village were completely stunned.

Back in the Tianqi era, Gao Yingxiang had assaulted an official and committed a crime. After that, he fled Gao Family Village and ran north. In those days, information traveled slowly. The villagers never learned what became of him.

And now, after all these years, he had suddenly reappeared on Gaojia News.

Not only that, he had become the infamous Chuǎng Wang.

Li Daoxuan, who was operating the tablet, had been closely monitoring the situation. Seeing the reaction from the villagers, he let out a soft sound of surprise.

"Oh?"

Wasn't Gao Yingxiang supposed to be from Ansai?

So he had actually fled from Gao Family Village and later ended up in Ansai?

The atmosphere instantly became strange.

Whispers spread among the original Gao Family Village residents, then reached the ears of people from Zheng Family Village, Wang Family Village, and Zhong Family Village nearby. The news spread outward layer by layer, leaving more and more people confused and unsettled.

But the most shaken person of all was Shi Kefa, who was mixed in among the crowd.

He was still studying in Gao Family Village and had not yet left.

Hearing such explosive information, Shi Kefa felt his head spin.

He was a Jinyiwei hundred-household commander. Upon learning intelligence of this magnitude, he should have immediately written a memorial to report to the Emperor.

But he also knew that if he did so, everyone in Gao Family Village would be doomed.

The crime of rebellion was unforgivable. It was punishable by the extermination of nine generations.

If this information were reported, it was very possible that not a single original resident of Gao Family Village would survive.

Shi Kefa absolutely did not want that to happen.

He had lived here long enough to form genuine friendships with these people. Bonds that were sincere and precious, untouched by rank or status.

He did not want to expose them.

Yet he also prided himself on being a loyal subject of the court.

If he failed to report such a major incident, what face would he have to stand before the Emperor?

Shi Kefa froze in place.

The atmosphere in Gao Family Village turned deeply awkward.

People whispered nervously.

"What should we do?"

"We've been fighting the rebels all this time."

"The Gao Family Village Militia has fought so many battles against rebel armies."

"Who would have thought it was Gao Yiye's uncle?"

"This is serious trouble."

Suddenly, Gao Yiye sprang to her feet. She looked up toward the sky and shouted loudly, "Dao Xuan Tianzun! I want to go to Henan! I want to find Uncle Gao Yingxiang and persuade him to abandon evil and return to righteousness!"

"I'm going too!" Gao Laba immediately stood up.

"Me too!" Gao Sanwa followed without hesitation.

At last, even the Old Village Chief slowly stood up. He clenched his fists and snorted.

"I'm going to go thrash that brat!"

Chapter 919 The Forty-Two Original Villagers Deploy!

Li Daoxuan gazed at the original villagers of Gao Family Village, a faint crease forming between his brows. These were the people he had nurtured from the very beginning, ever since he first acquired the diorama box. They had been with him the longest, and his connection to them ran the deepest.

He had watched them with his own eyes, rising from nothing to gradually achieve prosperity and live happy, fulfilling lives. Their journey of salvation had, in many ways, been his own journey of self-redemption.

Seeing them happy brought joy to Li Daoxuan. Witnessing them well-fed and warmly clothed brought him a deep sense of satisfaction. They provided immense emotional value to Li Daoxuan.

Now, this group of villagers also wished to save others. This was, of course, a good thing, but...

Could Chuǎng Wang truly be swayed?

He was no longer a mere minor bandit chief. He was the supreme leader of the seventy-two factions and three hundred thousand rebels who had gathered at the Xingyang Conference. If his rebellion succeeded, he might ascend to the imperial throne, though Li Daoxuan knew this was an impossibility.

Gao Yingxiang, unlike Li Daoxuan, did not know the future. He would certainly believe he had a chance at success. Persuading him would be incredibly difficult.

Li Daoxuan furrowed his brow and spoke into the box.

"Yiye. Are you truly set on going?"

Gao Yiye nodded.

"Yes, I am."

Li Daoxuan asked, "Do you understand that once a person gains immense power, it becomes very difficult for them to relinquish that authority?"

Gao Yiye bit her lower lip.

"I understand. You have taught me so much, and my understanding of the world and human affairs is no longer as naive as it once was."

Li Daoxuan pressed further.

"Then you still want to go?"

Gao Yiye replied, "But even so, no matter what, he is still my second uncle. How can I stand by and watch him make one mistake after another without trying to help him?"

Li Daoxuan said, "There is one more thing you must know. What Gao Yingxiang is doing now is a capital crime. If he clashes with our Gao Family Village Militia, he will certainly be killed."

"If you can persuade him to cease his actions, then it will count as a surrender. With a surrender, the standard sentence can be reduced by up to forty percent, and in most cases the death penalty would not be applied."

"However, after returning to Gao Family Village, he will still be held accountable for the atrocities committed by the rebels. He will undoubtedly be sent to Huanglong Mountain Prison as a labor reform prisoner. As for how many years he will serve, I have not yet decided. It may even be life imprisonment."

Gao Yiye bit her lower lip again.

"I understand. Uncle, as the supreme leader of the rebels, must take responsibility for their burning, killing, and looting."

"For Dao Xuan Tianzun to spare his life is already immense compassion. Labor reform is essential."

"I only ask Dao Xuan Tianzun to show leniency when the time comes."

Li Daoxuan said, "Mm. It is good that you understand this."

Gao Yiye replied, "Thank you, Dao Xuan Tianzun."

All the original villagers of Gao Family Village bowed together.

"Thank you, Dao Xuan Tianzun."

Whoosh!

Shi Kefa suddenly leaped forward.

"Wait!"

Everyone instantly turned to look at him.

Shi Kefa declared loudly, "Is that all the discussion? What about the Great Ming Code? What about it? Setting aside the extermination of nine generations of relatives for a moment, for someone like Gao Yingxiang, the Great Ming Code dictates only one path: death."

"He rebelled against the imperial court. Should he not be handed over to the court for trial?"

Shi Kefa raised his head and looked toward the sky.

"Dao Xuan Tianzun. You are a deity and possess celestial methods of judgment. Your subordinate dares not offer an opinion."

"But what about the Great Ming Code of the mortal realm? Your subordinate is dull-witted and humbly asks Dao Xuan Tianzun for guidance."

Li Daoxuan sighed deeply.

"Shi Kefa."

Shi Kefa quickly straightened.

"Your subordinate is listening attentively."

Li Daoxuan said, "According to the Great Ming Code, if a rebel leader lays down his weapons and accepts imperial pacification, how should he be dealt with?"

"Consider how the Great Ming has handled such individuals over the past two hundred years. List them."

Shi Kefa thought carefully. Then cold sweat instantly broke out on his back.

"According to the Great Ming Code, if a rebellious chieftain lays down his weapons and accepts imperial pacification, he may face extermination of nine generations of relatives, death by slow slicing, execution by waist cutting, be pardoned and restored to civilian status, or even..."

"...receive promotion and wealth as a great general."

By the time he uttered the final words, his face was flushed with embarrassment, and he wished he could sink into the ground.

Li Daoxuan remarked calmly, "The Great Ming Code is remarkably flexible. Truly impressive."

Shi Kefa was rendered completely speechless.

Li Daoxuan continued, "You should first return and carefully review the Great Ming Code. There are many areas that require improvement."

"Until it is reformed into something more reasonable, using it to judge cases may well be inferior to my own celestial methods."

Shi Kefa bowed deeply.

"Your subordinate understands."

Li Daoxuan turned to Gao Yiye.

"Go. But you must prioritize safety. Especially the Village Chief. He is advanced in age. Do not place the elder in danger."

All the original villagers bowed deeply together.

"Thank you, Dao Xuan Tianzun!"

The original villagers immediately began preparing for their departure.

This group held an extraordinarily important status within Gao Family Village.

Whenever Gao Yiye traveled, she was always accompanied by guards.

Whenever the Village Chief prepared to leave, his reputation alone was enough to draw countless helpers, turning the entire village into a bustling scene.

Someone even drove a special car at full speed toward the Chang'an Automobile Factory to summon Senior Technical Director Gao Yiyi.

Before a full day had passed, Gao Yiyi rushed back on a large train, exclaiming anxiously, "Brother Yingxiang is actually Chuǎng Wang? This is... alas. I must go persuade him to return as well."

Another day later, Gao Laba's son, Gao Shan, who was far away in Yan'an Prefecture, also rushed back.

"I want to go with you all."

"How do we get there?"

"First, take the train to Hedong Circuit to pick up Gao Chuwu."

"Right, we need Gao Chuwu. He alone can fight ten men."

"With him, we could even charge into Gao Yingxiang's main camp if necessary."

"We might not get in. He has three hundred thousand men."

"There is always a way."

"After meeting Gao Chuwu, we will go to Luoyang to see Mr. Bai Yuan and ask him to find a way to contact Gao Yingxiang."

The group boarded the train bound for Hedong Circuit.

With a long whistle, the large train carried them forward.

Gao Chuwu had already received the news and prepared his luggage, joining the group without delay.

At this point, all forty-two of Gao Family Village's original villagers had assembled.

There were no more trains available. The railway from Hedong Circuit to Luoyang was still under construction and not yet open. Fortunately, the cement road had already been completed.

The group boarded a Solar Car, drove across the Xiaolangdi Yellow River Bridge, transferred once more, and finally arrived in Luoyang.

The mobilization of this group was no small matter. Even Bai Yuan personally came out to greet them.

After exchanging greetings and skipping an entire mountain of pleasantries, Bai Yuan said seriously, "Meeting Gao Yingxiang will not be easy. He is constantly pursued by government forces and rarely stays in one place."

Gao Yiye asked urgently, "Then how can we find him?"

Bai Yuan replied, "The easiest way may be through Lao Huihui."

Gao Yiye bowed deeply.

"Please, Mr. Bai, help us contact Lao Huihui. No matter how dangerous it may be, we must meet Uncle Gao Yingxiang."

Chapter 920 Tell Me the Story

The forty-two original villagers from Gao Family Village temporarily settled in Luoyang, waiting for Bai Yuan's envoys to make contact with Lao Huihui.

Luoyang was a bustling city, lively and crowded, which provided a welcome distraction. Although the forty-two original villagers were not in the best of spirits, having come this far, they decided to take the opportunity to stroll through the city and have a look around.

Seizing a rare chance to accompany Gao Yiye, Li Daoxuan activated his Co-sensing ability. His consciousness descended into the Puppet Dao Xuan Tianzun, allowing him to walk beside her at the front of the group.

"Why are all the trees here bare, without any leaves?" Gao Yiye asked curiously as she looked around.

"Not long ago, there was a severe locust plague," Li Daoxuan explained softly. "Nearly all the leaves were eaten clean."

Gao Yiye gasped. "That serious?"

As she spoke, her gaze was drawn to a scholar standing by the roadside, enthusiastically hawking a painting. The painting depicted Luoyang engulfed in a sea of locusts, while in the sky above, a colossal deity held a tube-shaped divine artifact, sucking the locusts away in a mighty torrent.

The scholar shouted at the top of his lungs, "Paintings for sale! Paintings for sale! The 'Dao Xuan Tianzun's Divine Locust Eradication Painting'! Cheap prices! Take it home and hang it on your wall. What a magnificent sight!"

Gao Yiye pointed at the painting. "Oh!"

She turned her head to look at Li Daoxuan.

Li Daoxuan spread his hands. "That is exactly what happened."

Gao Yiye sounded regretful. "Ah? What a pity I was not here to see it. I really wanted to witness it myself."

The scholar continued shouting enthusiastically, "Paintings for sale, paintings for sale!"

Gao Yiye hurried over and took out some silver. "I will take this one."

The scholar was overjoyed. "My lady, you truly have an eye for quality!"

Holding the painting in her hands, Gao Yiye asked, "Could you tell me in detail what happened back then?"

The scholar replied, "My lady, have you only just arrived in Luoyang?"

Gao Yiye nodded. "Yes. I would like to understand the events more thoroughly, so I can later organize them into a story."

The scholar burst into laughter. "My lady, you jest. As for Dao Xuan Tianzun's deeds, there is already a book circulating throughout the world called Dao Xuan Tianzun's Demon Extermination Legend. That book was personally illustrated by the Saintess herself."

"How could any ordinary person be qualified to write a biography of Dao Xuan Tianzun? For someone like me, painting a single picture is already daring enough."

Gao Yiye murmured softly, "Oh, right."

Suddenly, the scholar felt something was off.

His gaze swept behind Gao Yiye, and he saw the figure who had been walking beside her just moments ago.

Was that not the Miraculous Hero Xiao Qiushui?

And everyone in Luoyang knew that this Miraculous Hero was the incarnation of Dao Xuan Tianzun in the mortal realm.

Cold sweat instantly streamed down the scholar's face.

"May I ask, my lady, your esteemed name?" he asked nervously.

"Gao Yiye," she replied.

The scholar's hands began to tremble. He hastily reached into his sleeve, pulled out a copy of Dao Xuan Tianzun's Demon Extermination Legend, and flipped it open. His eyes landed squarely on the author's name.

Gao Yiye.

His tongue instantly tied itself into knots.

"S-Saintess... Your Ladyship..."

Gao Yiye asked calmly, "I did not personally witness Dao Xuan Tianzun gathering the locusts. Could you tell me about it?"

The scholar straightened immediately. "This humble one will tell you everything that happened, in full detail, right away!"

It was clear that their conversation would not be ending anytime soon.

The Village Chief smiled and said, "Yiye is being watched over by Dao Xuan Tianzun and the guard team. There is no need to worry about her. Let us continue our walk."

The rest of the group moved on, wandering through the streets and alleys of Luoyang.

As they walked, Gao Laba gazed at the shops lining the road. "You know, even though Luoyang looks a bit dilapidated, its population is far larger than our Gao Family Village."

"I have been thinking, if I opened a shop here, would I not earn much more?"

The Village Chief chuckled. "What, are you planning to leave Gao Family Village? If you leave your hometown, you will just be inviting trouble."

Gao Laba thought it over seriously. That made sense. How could he easily leave his own village?

After pondering for a moment, he said, "Then I could open a branch here and hire a few people to manage it for me."

Everyone burst into laughter.

"No, no, that will not work!"

"It is too far away. You would not be able to supervise them."

"If they pocketed the money, you would not even know."

Gao Laba sighed helplessly. "It is all because of my son. He refuses to inherit my trade. He insists on opening a bookstore and selling books."

The Village Chief scolded him with a smile. "Gao Shan is an educated child. Selling books is a good thing."

"If he followed you and sold rice noodles, he would make plenty of money, but he would also smell like cooking oil all day."

Gao Laba nodded. "Village Chief, you speak wisely. Very wisely. It is fine if my son does not make rice noodles anymore."

The whole group laughed together.

As they continued walking, a small shop appeared ahead with a signboard that read "Duck Blood Vermicelli Soup."

Everyone's spirits lifted at once.

"Oh! We have not tried this before."

"And we are hungry. Let us go in and have a taste."

At the moment, Gao Yiye was not with them, but the remaining group still numbered forty-one people. A small roadside vermicelli shop could hardly accommodate so many customers.

As they poured inside, four people squeezed around each table. All eight tables were quickly filled, leaving nine people with nowhere to sit.

The shopkeeper was startled. He hurriedly borrowed stools from the neighboring shop, urging everyone to squeeze in and make themselves comfortable.

"Shopkeeper, forty-one bowls of duck blood vermicelli soup!" the Village Chief laughed heartily. "I am treating everyone!"

"The Village Chief is treating us again, hahaha!" Gao Laba laughed. "Another free meal!"

The Village Chief smiled broadly. "I do not have many years left anyway. Dao Xuan Tianzun has bestowed endless wealth upon us. Truly endless. I might as well treat everyone to a few more meals."

Gao Sanwa piped up, "Grandpa Village Chief, you are talking nonsense. You will live for another hundred years!"

The Village Chief burst into laughter. "Hahaha! Sanwa always knows how to talk!"

While they chatted and laughed cheerfully, the shopkeeper was worked to the point of exhaustion. With forty-one customers arriving at once, he was flustered and spinning around nonstop.

Just as he was at his busiest, several more people squeezed through the shop entrance.

The leader was dressed in eunuch's attire. His left hand was wrapped in thick bandages and hung from a sling, making him look especially pitiful.

It was none other than Eunuch Zheng from the Prince of Fu's estate.

Last time, to atone for his wrongdoing, his left hand had been deliberately broken. Such a serious injury required at least a hundred days of recovery, and even now, his hand still needed careful attention.

The moment he stepped inside, Eunuch Zheng called out, "Shopkeeper? Is the shopkeeper here? This humble eunuch has come to... hiss..."

He suddenly froze.

"Why are there so many people here?"

He was completely stunned by the sight of forty-one people crammed into the tiny shop.

Forty-one pairs of eyes turned to look at him at the same time.

The atmosphere instantly became strange.

In the past, Eunuch Zheng would have sneered and shouted, "What trash dares stare at this eunuch? Do you know who I am?"

But after the previous incident, he no longer dared to be arrogant.

With an awkward expression, he asked, "What are you all doing here?"

The Village Chief replied calmly, "We are customers, waiting to eat vermicelli."

"Oh." Eunuch Zheng nodded stiffly. "I see. Please take your time."

He then turned toward the inner room and shouted, "Shopkeeper! Is the shopkeeper here?"

The shopkeeper hurried out to greet him.

Eunuch Zheng pulled out a large money pouch filled with silver fragments and copper coins. He shook it lightly, producing a clattering sound.

"Our estate has thoroughly interrogated all the local ruffians," Eunuch Zheng said. "Anyone found to have eaten without paying was dragged out and given ten planks."

"We then ordered them to pay double as compensation, along with a small token of goodwill from our Prince..."