

Medical 631

Chapter 631: Angel's Wings

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Activating those angelic wings, a golden radiance appeared behind him, and slowly the wings began to take form from those rays of light. Minutes after the golden wings unfolded and spread behind him, Yan Xiaobao allowed them to absorb his martial power as he ascended into the sky. From above, he gazed for a long time at the army he was leading into war.

Beneath him, all the beasts stood upright in humanoid form. Although they varied in shape and size compared to human figures, they all stood in a disciplined line. Their gazes were fixed on the man hovering above them. They had recognized the wolf, but now he was flying in the sky with majestic golden wings. His silver hair flowed in the wind, and his sharp eyes cast downward with great intensity. His light blue robe swirled softly around his form, and anyone looking at him would feel as though a celestial being had descended into their world. The entire army held their breath in awe; their eyes locked onto this strikingly handsome man, unable to look away.

Not only the soldiers, but also the Saints and Commanders gazed at him in the same astonishment. No one knew he could fly—no one except Wan Qiao, who stood unshaken. She had sprouted directly behind Yan Xiaobao, as if she dared not remain alone by herself.

"What a magnificent sight," Yan Xiaobao murmured to himself as he slowly descended in front of the army. Most of the army's commanders were mounted on magical beasts—fierce predators, wolves, winged horses, predatory unicorns, or steeds of varying scales.

Although Yan Xiaobao could theoretically tame and ride a magical beast, he would never do so. His entire army was made up of beasts, and not one of them would transform into their primal beast forms in their path. Instead, they all marched methodically toward the opposing army. The only beasts undergoing transformation were a group of five hundred blood-maned buffalo, assigned the task of hauling the heavy machinery—implements of war meant to aid them in battle.

Hui Yue landed gracefully at the forefront of the army, while Wan Qiao stood by his side. Their mentor and the other forty Saints joined nearby not long after. Yan Xiaobao raised an arm, smiling as he surveyed the beasts waiting before him.

"Let the battle commence!" he shouted, his voice echoing across the entire region. The booming roar from every beast behind him expressed their excitement, shaking the ground and creating tremors that seemed to ripple through the sky. Yan Xiaobao displayed a radiant smile on his face as he began to move toward the Imperial Capital. Behind him, the massive beasts fell into formation, their footsteps and the clanking of machinery filling the air.

At first, they traversed barren land, almost devoid of vegetation. In many places, the cracked soil revealed how long it had gone without water. The sparse vegetation that did appear was withered and dry, long since deceased. This was a region untouched by humans; however, they occasionally passed a solitary, abandoned shack. Upon closer inspection, it was clear that these shacks had been deserted long ago, likely when the drought had begun.

No one spoke as they made their way across the landscape. Each member of the army was preoccupied with observing the surroundings, absorbing every new detail of what they saw. The scenery was so distinct, so alien compared to their familiar surroundings within the Divine Origin, that all of them felt like they had entered an entirely different world. The desiccated land gradually gave way to sandy terrain. Even in the sandy expanse, some plants thrived. Sprouting from the unforgiving ground, these resilient plants seemed to embody sheer survival.

The Beast Tribe moved across this ground, doing their best to avoid stepping on the plants—not out of pacifism, but out of respect for anything that struggled to live. They held great reverence for life forms that fought to survive.

Many of these plants were medicinal herbs. Some had been growing for centuries, while others were less than a year old. These plants were imbued with energy, saturated with the essence of the heavens and the earth. Golden light shone from some of them, while silvery liquid seemed to seep from others. While these herbs were immensely beneficial to anyone who cultivated them, not a single member of the army stepped forward to harvest them. Every soldier showed proper respect to the plants, treating them as equals.

The pace of their march was slow. They maintained order and a strict formation, which made running impossible. But Yan Xiaobao was in no rush. To him, it did not matter if it took a long time to reach the destination. The longer it took, the more anxiety would build in the opposing soldiers, wondering what awaited them and who their enemy truly was.

Yan Xiaobao understood that moving slowly also afforded his army more preparation time. The enemies now knew that the Beast Army was arriving with colossal war machines, yet even so, Yan Xiaobao chose not to act hastily. For the enemy's warfare implements, he planned to have the Saints annihilate them. If

he could involve some Saints in keeping their counterparts occupied, while letting the others destroy the bulk of the weaponry, then everything would unfold as he wished.

When the battle began, none of the beasts would remain in their humanoid forms. Every one of them would revert to their original shapes, which meant that many of the beasts would soar into the sky. They would circle above incessantly, locating their targets before launching swift and vicious attacks. Some would burrow into the ground, laying traps for the humans, while others would become ferocious killing machines with sharp teeth, claws, fangs, and talons. In many ways, these Emperors and Kings would vastly outclass the humans. But they were, after all, just beasts. They could be exhausted, and each had its own weaknesses. If one of their vulnerabilities was struck by a spear infused with Qi or spiritual energy, then the enemy might just have the fortune to defeat the beasts they faced.

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At first, when Yan Xiaobao contemplated this issue, he thought about crafting armor for the beasts, similar to the wildman's armor, but he quickly abandoned this idea. Although humans could fight while armored, it was entirely different for beasts. They needed to rely on their agility, the ability to change direction quickly or make other sudden movements; however, wearing armor would only hinder them.

Sighing, Yan Xiaobao lifted his head and gazed at the blue sky above, walking steadily all the while. The sun's scorching rays beat down upon the beasts moving beneath it. Although these beasts, like Yan Xiaobao, were of the rank of King or higher, they soon began to notice the oppressive heat of the sun. Sweat appeared on their foreheads, and thirst started to make their throats uncomfortable.

"We'd best take a break," Yan Xiaobao muttered to himself as he surveyed their surroundings. The barren sandy ground stretched on endlessly with hardly any vegetation in sight, but in the distance, he spotted what seemed to be a small area with taller plants. He had a feeling this place could offer them shade where they could rest, recuperate, and wait for nightfall before resuming the march. As noted earlier, Yan Xiaobao felt no pressure to rush toward their enemies.

Redirecting the army's course wasn't difficult. Everyone followed behind Yan Xiaobao and the Saints, and when they spotted the tall trees in the distance, smiles lit up their faces. It was easy to discern the intention of their Great Marshall without needing any explanation.

The distance turned out to be even greater than Yueyue had estimated. As they approached the area, he realized that the trees he initially guessed to be three to four meters tall were actually twenty to thirty meters high.

Underneath the trees were tents sewn from beast hides. The scene was bustling with activity as humans darted back and forth, their movements frantic. It was evident that fear gripped everyone there as they hurriedly dismantled their camp, preparing as best they could for the incoming Beast Tribe. Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but sigh at the sight. This was the natural reaction humans should have when faced with such a massive group of beasts, yet Yan Xiaobao had already reached an agreement with the Saints. Even though these beasts were bloodthirsty, they would not attack humans unless provoked first.

Just as Yan Xiaobao was about to send a message to some of the experts, declaring that they would not harm these nomads as long as they didn't start a fight, he saw a large group of men charging toward them on proportioned horses and blood-streaked unicorns. Their faces were pale but resolute; their weapons were raised high as they shouted, attempting to incite their bloodlust to a fever pitch, hoping to drag as many enemies as possible into the grave. Their losses were already foreseeable, but they hoped to buy time for their families to escape. For their loved ones, they were willing to engage in such suicidal acts. Their determination earned great respect but was also recognized by Yan Xiaobao and the other beasts.

"Stop! As long as you do not harm us, we will not harm you," Yan Xiaobao finally shouted. His voice echoed through the air, making it easily audible to every nomad and even those within the oasis. Because everyone froze in place, no one moved. The language Yan Xiaobao spoke was indeed that of the Three Kingdoms, but it was hard for these people to believe his words. Were they merely being lulled into a false security, only to be used as food for his Beast Army later?

No one could say for certain, leaving Yan Xiaobao to sigh once again. He signaled for the army to halt and then ascended into the sky. Golden light radiated once more from his back as he flew alone toward the oasis. No one followed him—not even the two shadowy figures. As he drew closer, everyone stared at him in astonishment. Even amid this barren desert, he seemed almost celestial.

When he reached the center of the tent camp, he looked back at his wings. "Let me speak with your village elder," he requested, his voice melodious and calm, devoid of hostility. Everyone avoided him except for a single young man with black hair and black eyes.

When Yan Xiaobao observed the young man, he noticed the same pride and detachment he had seen in Liluo City's aristocratic families. There was a certain level of arrogance and confidence that only someone in a high-ranking position would possess. By simply looking at this young man, Yan Xiaobao immediately knew he had found the village elder.

"Greetings," Yan Xiaobao said, tilting his head slightly in a polite gesture. This was a display of courtesy that no beast would ever show him. The faint growl of a beast underscored the scene as the elder, surprised by this behavior, quickly responded with a sign of friendship.

"Tell me, what do you need for you to leave us alone?" the elder asked through gritted teeth. While Yan Xiaobao had revealed an air of politeness, the beasts behind him invoked the wild and brutal nature of their kind, making their savagery easy to imagine.

"As long as no one attacks us, we will not touch you or your people. All we seek is shelter in the shade until the sun sets so we can move on once more. We have our own water, so you need not fear us taking yours," Yan Xiaobao said calmly. Without waiting for a reply, he spread his radiant wings once more and soared back into the sky, returning to the tribe that awaited him.

"If they attack us first, that is the only time we will strike back. For now, find a quiet spot in the shade to relax. When the sun sets, we will resume the march. If at any point you run out of water, go to your commander and request some. Do not provoke the humans; we do not want our war to begin with a massacre."

"You do not want our war to begin with a massacre?" someone muttered, but before Yan Xiaobao could respond to the voice, the figure beside him vanished in an instant. A pained scream pierced the air. Turning to the source of the sound, Yan Xiaobao saw an Emperor sprawled on the ground, blood spilling steadily from his lips as his hand clutched his face. His eyes were bloodshot, and his swollen cheeks bore the unmistakable mark of a ferocious slap.

The sight was all too familiar to Yan Xiaobao. Glancing around, he noticed most of the Saints either covering their faces in disbelief or wearing expressions of dismay, though a few distantly showed traces of sympathy. It was clear that, regardless of the Saint's title or power, they were well-acquainted with the Queen's trademark slap.

"Stand up. That slap wasn't so bad," Yan Xiaobao said in a stern voice, his tone full of displeasure toward the outspoken Emperor. What Yan Xiaobao needed was an army that would follow his orders unconditionally. If one beast was allowed to challenge the authority of the Grand Marshal, who was to say others wouldn't follow suit? Perhaps the entire battalion would begin acting independently rather than adhering to his commands.

The Emperor rose, his gaze fixed on Yan Xiaobao, his eyes brimming with hatred. He felt humiliated, believing this silver-haired young man was solely to blame for his disgrace in front of the army.

Yan Xiaobao let out a deep sigh and stepped closer to the disobedient expert. "When I give an order, the only thing I want to hear is, 'Yes, sir!' If I tell you to meet with humans, then you will do exactly that!" Yan Xiaobao declared, his voice showing not a shred of fear toward someone of greater individual strength.

"I am the Grand Marshal of this war. Even the Lord you idolize follows every command I give him. Who do you think you are to defy my orders?" Yan Xiaobao sneered. The more he spoke, the paler the Emperor's face grew, yet his eyes remained filled with resentment and anger.

"We haven't even entered the battlefield yet, and you're eager to fight amongst ourselves? We might inevitably lose some comrades, but I want to minimize casualties as much as possible. I swear, I will ensure as many as I can survive this war, but I can only do that if you'll stop being foolish and start following my orders!" Yan Xiaobao raged, every word a verbal slap to the already chastised expert. Before long, the Emperor hung his head, trying to make himself as small as possible, avoiding the many judgmental gazes directed at him.

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Chapter 633: The Most Successful Way

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"This should be enough," Yan Xiaobao muttered, and then raised his voice again, "Anyone who starts a fight with humans will get a slap from our queen Mansula. You'll also lose one-third of your wages," Yan Xiaobao declared, and everyone immediately understood this was no joke.

The oasis was vast, so large that the nomadic tribes' settlements only occupied a quarter of the shore, and Yan Xiaobao led his army toward the other side. Although he gave the orders, he knew the nature of beasts, and he understood human nature as well. Therefore, to keep the two separated, Yan Xiaobao believed this was the most successful way to prevent any mistakes.

The shade from the trees Yan Xiaobao recognized now came from palm trees—so massive that about one hundred of them were enough to shelter the entire army.

Seeing the beach and lake empty, many of the beasts decided to swim to stay cool. In an instant, beasts like sharp-toothed hippos, black nightmare crocodiles, and Everdream piranhas joined the monkeys, Demon Centipedes, and even Thunder Black Panthers in the lake for a swim.

Watching all the beasts around him, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but laugh, as some were playing with each other, some were napping, while others were tending to tasks. Most of the beasts retained their primitive shapes, making their surroundings look like a zoo. Many beasts had gathered on this oasis—an unlikely occasion for creatures that would never typically occupy the same space like this.

On the opposite side of the oasis, the nomads stood knee-deep in the shallow water. All the warriors who previously rode out to fight for their lives to help villagers escape were now stationed as guards. Their gazes were sharp, fiercely focused on the beasts, their faces full of suspicion.

Everyone within the Empire knew they were preparing for war because one draft after another was sent to countless tribes and villages across the land. They demanded that every male over the age of fifteen, with at least a disciple-level rank, register for military service. This was the first-ever national draft, and many young men leapt at the chance to join the Imperial Army, hoping to make a name for themselves.

However, things were different for the nomads. They refused to respond to the draft, as they felt no obligation to the crown. Yet, they were the first to encounter the beast tribe.

"Elder," a woman called out upon seeing a young man standing in the center of their temporary village. As he stared across the lake, his brow furrowed, his eyes deep in thought.

"Elder," the woman called again, and finally the young man broke free from his thoughts; a calm smile appeared on his lips as he gently turned to face the woman addressing him.

"How can I help you?" he asked softly, his tone warm as he looked at the woman in front of him. "Great Elder, these beasts, will they really not attack us?" she asked hesitantly, fiddling with her bracelet, her eyes downcast, a slight tremor running through her body.

"Do not worry," he said with a reassuring smile. Resting an arm on her shoulder, he turned to gaze at the many beasts visible in the distance. "These beasts seem proud of themselves. If they wanted us dead, we would've been dead long ago. Hurry, assist the others in packing up the village. We will leave the Siban Empire as soon as possible. Staying here is as foolish as kicking a hornet's nest." He continued

calmly, prompting the woman to nod and rush back to resume her tasks. The elder's smile froze briefly, and his eyes became vigilant once more. Although the beasts hadn't attacked, they were beasts after all. No one could predict if or when they might strike. Standing by the water's edge, the elder kept his gaze fixed on the beasts across the lake.

All the women worked on packing up their temporary shelters. Although this was a routine matter, this time there was no laughter, no playful chatter; everyone was tense. The pervasive sense of danger bore down on them, and the guards remained alert.

Across the shore, Yan Xiaobao approached the water as well. But unlike the elder, his face carried a cheerful smile. Watching the beasts enjoying themselves, he, too, felt relaxed. Despite his calm demeanor, he never ceased his sharp vigilance toward all the beasts. Even a moment of distraction could be enough for a beast to ignore their orders and swim toward the nomads. After all, they were beasts. The humans across the water were the first fresh meat they'd seen in quite some time, and some beasts found it harder to resist than others. Luckily, Yan Xiaobao wasn't the only one keeping an eye on them; many Saints were also carefully monitoring everyone around them, ensuring even the smallest beasts wouldn't escape their keen observation.

The day passed quickly, and soon after, the sun vanished below the horizon, allowing the moon to rise. The region's oppressive heat quickly dissipated, replaced by a biting chill; had the army not been composed of beasts, it would've been uncomfortable. As temperatures dropped, Yan Xiaobao gathered the army again. Slowly, the beasts began to move, leaving behind the oasis where they had rested during the day.

This time, Yan Xiaobao hoped to leave the desert region as quickly as possible, hastening their pace. The daytime heat wasn't kind to his beast tribe, though the chill was more tolerable, yet still taxing in extreme conditions. Although these beasts were kings and emperors in their own right, they had to rely on their inner strength to endure the harsh weather. They would be fine, but traveling under such conditions was undoubtedly more bothersome than in ordinary climates.

Chapter 634: The Most Successful Way_2

Not long after, Yan Xiaobao and his army disappeared from the oasis. They spent over an hour crossing countless dunes. Just before dawn, the edge of the desert became visible. Xu Yue followed numerous beasts out of the desert without much trouble.

The guide who had once led them out of the Divine Domain was now merely an ordinary soldier. The one leading the army now was Wan Qiao. This woman remembered her direction towards the Capital.

"Hurry up! Take our valuables and let's leave; they could appear at any moment!" A woman shouted to her husband, while the man stood in their house with an uncertain expression. He wished he had more time to prepare and pack his belongings, but in the end, he did as the woman insisted. Before rushing outside, he grabbed several storage stones and hurriedly stored as many items as possible in them.

In the distance, a cloud of dust could be seen. It moved slowly toward their village, while the man, now pale as a sheet, stared at his livestock. He stood quietly for a moment, but after casting one last glance at the dust cloud in the distance, he let the animals rush in the same direction the woman had disappeared toward. Gritting his teeth with an anguished look on his face, it was clear how deeply the man was hurt by the need to abandon his livestock. As a small farmer, although he owned some valuables, his true wealth lay in the livestock he raised in his fields. Now, he had no choice but to leave.

This scene was common in the Siban Empire. As the dust cloud appeared, villages, small towns, and even medium-sized cities were abandoned, followed by the advancing beast tribe. Fear overtook the first significant city when it spotted the beasts. Its soldiers relocated to the Capital, leaving only civilians behind, with no one left to protect the city.

Large families living within the city—elders, and all the kings—gathered together to welcome the beasts. However, once they realized all of the beasts were kings or emperors, they fled across the border. Rather than protecting the city, they prioritized their own safety, hurrying home to assist in evacuations while giving up on the remaining citizens.

Some families evacuated towards the Capital, hoping their Emperor would have the ability to protect them. As they traveled, they brought gossip about the beast tribe—thousands upon thousands of beasts, all of them kings and emperors. Their power was unprecedented, and no one dared to stand in their way. Because of their strength, many chose to flee—not to the Capital, but to other Kingdoms. Some hoped to reach the vast southern plains, while others aimed for the Sun Kingdom. Wherever migrants could be seen, abandoned cities lay in their wake as they journeyed toward safety. Even in the Capital, some families opted to migrate to other Kingdoms, as the tension weighed heavy on each household. If they didn't fully trust the Emperor, they chose to leave.

As the beast tribe drew closer to the Capital, half of the Empire had already fled to other Kingdoms. The other half either evacuated or departed from the Capital itself.

"It's truly desolate," Yan Xiaobao remarked as they reached another small village. The only things visible were the remaining livestock—animals doomed to starve if left unattended. Thinking of this, Yan Xiaobao ultimately ordered their army to slaughter them. Every evening, the livestock was transported to various soldier encampments and roasted for dinner. While Yan Xiaobao hadn't intended for their

march into the Siban Empire to turn into a mass killing, it was precisely what unfolded. As the animals were slaughtered, dismembered, and stored for later distribution among the army, rivers of blood flowed relentlessly.

Although this was indeed a massacre, it was limited solely to livestock. Xu Yue expressed gratitude for the abundance of food left behind, knowing it extended their army's preparation time, yet he simultaneously felt pity for the countless farmers forced to abandon their livelihoods.

"Stop overthinking it," Wan Qiao said, walking over with a smile and patting his shoulder. "The beasts grow more motivated the fresher the meat they get. Their power surges skyward. If anything, you should be grateful for the food left behind, as now no one feels the urge to hunt humans. Every day, we feast on roasted pork, beef, and chicken. Throw in lamb and mutton, not to mention goat, and we have everything we want."

Yan Xiaobao knew Wan Qiao was right and allowed himself a faint smile. The village they were in now was just as empty as all the others they had encountered. The beasts were rummaging through every house, searching for anything of practical use or value left behind. Even Yan Xiaobao picked up some spices to add extra flavor to his cooked meals.

"We'll stay in this village for one hour!" Yan Xiaobao's booming voice resonated through the village—no one could miss it. In response, the beasts roared, then began storming through houses at an even faster pace. When Yan Xiaobao said they'd leave in an hour, he meant it—by then, every beast needed to be ready to depart. Failure to comply would result in harsh assignments, like pulling heavy machinery alongside oxen—a fate none of the soldiers wished to endure if avoidable.

Although Yan Xiaobao recognized their progress was slow due to frequent breaks, he remained unhurried. The longer the march to the Capital took, the more the news of his army would spread. Because of this, his forty-thousand soldiers easily grew in the minds of their enemies into an army of one million beasts. Another advantage was that it encouraged more people to flee the Empire—something of utmost importance to Yan Xiaobao. He didn't want to see humans treated as livestock, mass-slaughtered, and later devoured by magical beasts.

Seeing the furrow in Yan Xiaobao's brow, Wan Qiao understood what he was thinking and let out a sorrowful smile. She was a magical beast herself, and when in her primal form, she had no qualms about eating humans. On the battlefield, it was impossible to tell beasts not to prey on their enemies. They fought with teeth and claws, and sometimes they bit their opponents. That's simply what beasts did in battle. She was a beast herself, and she understood exactly what beasts were like.

Yan Xiaobao had now become a half-beast. He could feel the bloodlust bubbling within him—the urge to tear apart the animals they encountered. It required immense willpower to maintain control, and this beastly instinct was common among all beasts. No magical beast was herbivorous; they all relished meat—the fresher, the better, and the happier they became.

An hour passed, and Yan Xiaobao once again set out on the march. Everyone was prepared, and no one faced punishment. Several hours had passed before they reached yet another small village, though it was so insignificant that there was no reason for the entire army to stop. Instead, one of the forty squads stayed behind to slaughter the livestock and collect any valuable items. They would later catch up with the main army as it continued forward.

The closer they drew to the Capital, the more excitement stirred among them. Observing the surroundings, Yan Xiaobao was surprised to find that none of the bridges they crossed over rivers had been destroyed. No traps had been laid, nor had any other obstacles been imposed to hinder their progress. If anything, traversing closer to the Capital was remarkably easy.

Soon, the entire army regrouped as the sun began to rise. Yan Xiaobao ordered everyone to rest. Wan Qiao gazed into the distance and spoke hoarsely with layered emotions in her voice, "We're almost there." Feathers began surfacing on her body, betraying her unease at the thought of war finally beginning.

"We're this close, aren't we?" Yan Xiaobao said as he, too, looked ahead. Beyond the wider roads, the Capital itself remained out of sight.

The humans and beasts alike said nothing, staring together at the horizon. Their adversaries waited there, along with the war that was about to begin. One more day of walking, and they would arrive. Another day, and they would have to face combat. The time was nearly upon them, and Yan Xiaobao felt his heart racing.

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Chapter 635: Staying Away from War

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After a while, Yan Xiaobao let out a deep sigh, feeling his rational thoughts take over. He calmed his heart and managed to distance himself from the war. No matter what happened, he would follow the beast tribe. If they lost, he would die with them; if they won, he would celebrate with them. Tension would help no one, and Yan Xiaobao decided to seize the opportunity to meditate. It was a chance to refine more of heaven and earth's essence while calming his mind, rather than allowing his doubts to grow and overwhelm his thoughts.

The entire camp buzzed with noise; all the beasts were brimming with energy and excitement because they knew the next day was when they would face the enemy. Even the Saints carried sly smiles as they walked around. Some sat together, eating their dinner, others trained in solitude, while some quarreled with one another. Observing the Saints' reactions, which radiated bloodlust into all their strength, the lower-ranked experts quickly understood they were very close to the human army of another kingdom. They were nearing the start of the war they had long desired.

This night was not as calm as previous ones; all the beasts were restless with unease. As time wore on, the camp silenced. Everyone sat motionless, counting down the minutes until the sun rose into the sky. No one spared effort, and hardly anyone tended to farming; most simply sat waiting for the first ray of sunlight so they could break camp and prepare for the war after nearly a month of marching.

Yan Xiaobao soon abandoned the idea of cultivation; instead, like the others, he sat and waited for the new day to emerge, so they could begin marching again. Unlike the beasts, Yan Xiaobao knew the likelihood of fighting the day after reaching the capital was extremely low.

Yan Xiaobao knew that although his army had trained together for some time and understood the necessity of war, they were far from being experienced soldiers who had mastered the War Art learned from youth. Thus, the battlefield was bound to be chaotic. A sinister smile crept across Yan Xiaobao's face as excitement for war filled him. Although his soldiers were not the best-trained, they possessed strength and determination. They would certainly cause significant destruction and bring chaos.

With the sun peaking over the horizon, the camp of silent beasts moved faster than on any other morning. Everyone was eager to begin the march; everyone understood today marked their first face-off with their opponent. It was the day they would first see the human army and finally comprehend how the war would unfold.

The scenery before them was flat. Plants grew along the sides of a vast road, a road usually bustling with life but now empty as everyone had fled before the beast tribe's arrival.

Now, four hundred thousand beasts moved slowly down the wide road. The landscape was no longer sparse vegetation but vast fields of crops. As farmers fled, corn and rice had been abandoned, yet the army did not stop to harvest anything. If they won the war, Yan Xiaobao resolved to remember to assign some of these fields to the beasts as a reward for their hard work. After all, the lives of some beasts were very similar to those of humans. Eating grains was something they did not mind, but it required fertile soil to cultivate. In the Divine Domain, there was some agriculture, but it was limited due to the overwhelming presence of jungles everywhere.

Though some beasts still curiously looked around, the entire army remained tense and uneasy. As they scanned the horizon for movement, signs of the Imperial Capital, or even better—the army they were set to fight—they stayed alert.

With the sun rising high in the sky, a pagoda finally emerged in the distance. As they approached, tall structures began to join the pagoda. Soon, city walls came into view, and as they drew nearer, they could see a sea of humans stationed beyond the surprisingly massive walls.

Looking at the towers created by Yan Xiaobao, the young man let out a sigh of relief. He was pleased to have constructed towers tall enough to reach the tops of these walls. At first, he considered whether he truly needed to make them as large as he had; however, upon reflection, everything in this world seemed grander and more astonishing than in his old world. Thus, he had ultimately increased the size of all the mechanisms, and now he was grateful for the decision he had made.

The sea of humans kept stirring. Fierce ripples broke across the ocean until it finally fell silent. The army ceased all movements; instead, the horizon was now filled with stern and anxious soldiers. All of them feared the beasts before them, but as the beasts approached, traces of recognition flickered in their eyes. Though these beasts remained terrifying, they were not as formidable as the soldiers had heard—they lacked knowledge of warfare. After all, they were simply beasts.

That was precisely what the Great Marshall of the human army believed. He was convinced these beasts knew nothing of war, but upon hearing that a man named Yan Xiaobao was leading them, he grew somewhat uneasy. A human might know something about war, but to him, Yan Xiaobao was merely a king's subordinate, and despite his astonishingly young age, he was far from achieving the rank of a Saint. This made the entire situation bizarre. If it were true, this young man had indeed persuaded these bloodthirsty beasts to allow him to lead their army.

Chapter 636: Staying Away from War_2

Although in his thoughts, the Great Marshall had forgotten that he, too, was below the Holy Level, he was the one who controlled the Saints among the Saints.

The Great Marshall observed through his binoculars, noticing many beasts advancing. His gaze quickly landed on the white-haired youth at the forefront. Surrounding and behind him were numerous Saints, and a sour taste lingered in his mouth.

This young man was undoubtedly the one Li Meilin had told them about in his younger days—the one who allowed Li Meilin to return and warned them of the impending arrival of the beast tribe. Gazing at this striking young man, a frown appeared on the Great Marshall's face, for he didn't know what to do. This was indeed a great help to them. Without the warning, this nation would have been shrouded in corpses, the blood flowing endlessly, and they surely would have faced defeat.

"What is your opinion of the little man?" the Great Marshall complained as he observed the young man with binoculars. With a final grunt, the Great Marshall placed the binoculars on the table beside him and pinched behind his nose with both hands. He despised anything new and incomprehensible, and this half-man, half-beast creature was certainly someone he couldn't understand.

The Great Marshall stood up and moved to a tall platform where he could oversee every soldier in the army. His face was solemn as he used Qi to amplify his voice.

"The beast tribe is upon us, but do not be afraid!" As his voice boomed out, everyone fell silent to hear his words. "They may be ferocious beasts, their ranks might be higher than yours, but they are nothing more than beasts! Even beasts of higher ranks can be slain by a united effort. Aim for their vital points, and instill it deeply in each of you. We may face heavy casualties, but this is the price we pay to preserve our Kingdom. Imagine what would happen should the beast tribe emerge victorious; imagine what might occur to your families behind the walls if we are destroyed."

Every word the Great Marshall spoke invigorated the once frightened and discouraged soldiers, filling them with energy and the desire to kill. They no longer cared about their own safety; what mattered most was slaying as many beasts as possible.

"Stop!" Yan Xiaobao raised his arm, and instantly all four hundred thousand beasts came to a halt. They were now a kilometer apart, close enough for beasts and humans to see one another. While humans exuded killing intent and bloodlust, there was a slight tension within them. The primary difference in attitude between the armies came not only from their ranks but also from the fact that the beast troops were composed of experts who had honed their skills for centuries. These experts spent all their time perfecting their personal combat techniques rather than team strategies or warfare tactics.

"Not bad," Yan Xiaobao remarked with a smile as he looked at the crowd before him. Outside the city walls, awaiting them, were experts under the King's command. They had Dukes and Masters amongst them, but most of their soldiers came from practitioners and teams of Masters—a complete tier lower than Yan Xiaobao's army.

Yan Xiaobao halted his army and gazed skyward, a subtle smile lingering on his face. As they approached the frontline more closely, he also felt the slow surge of excitement. Yan Xiaobao reveled in the bloodlust stirring within him. Yan Xiaobao had already merged with monks and wolves; though the monk's temperament was more dominant, one must not forget the deep-seated fury hidden within the wolf. A wolf that had ascended to God's List, and in this case, its character began to gradually manifest.

Yan Xiaobao's teeth sharpened, and the sinister grin on his face grew wider. The atmosphere around him intensified, saturated with killing intent. The air chilled, his blue eyes transitioned to red. The wolf deep inside was on the brink of revival, but before it could take over, Yan Xiaobao regained control of himself. Taking a deep breath, he began to recall every tactic from War Art, calming himself as the murderous intentions resolved into clarity.

The Saints were stunned, rendered speechless. None uttered a single word, but the killing intent they felt from Yan Xiaobao vastly surpassed anything they could produce themselves. This was a killing intent cultivated only by slaughtering millions of lives—a power so overwhelming it erases one's own identity. This murderous intent was so potent that even Saints trembled under it, cold sweat forming on their foreheads. It was a pure embodiment of Cold Blood, representing a total lack of compassion, the kind of intent held by someone who wouldn't hesitate to kill anyone in their path.

Turning around, Yan Xiaobao smiled faintly at the many Saints, as though nothing had transpired. Seeing their dumbfounded expressions, he laughed heartily.

"Beasts!" Yan Xiaobao shouted, his voice so loud that even human soldiers standing a kilometer away could hear him distinctly. His tone was steady and calm. On a warm summer day, it was like a refreshing breeze. "Beasts, we have arrived! Before us stands a Spanish army, but they are merely weak humans! If you desire freedom, then we must carve a path of slaughter through their forces. If we want a place to live and for our descendants to grow, then fight as if there is no tomorrow!"

"This is your one and only chance! Prove to the world that beasts are not to be laughed at. Prove to the world that you do not cower in fear at the borders of the Divine Domain. Prove to the world that we are fighting for our freedom with utmost resolve!"

Every word Yan Xiaobao uttered made the beasts tremble in excitement. Their gazes burned with the desire for battle. Muscles coiled tensely beneath various skins and fur. Each creature grew impatient, eager to start the war; even the Saints beside him showed signs of yearning to participate in the fight.

With a sigh, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but smile at the beasts roaring toward the heavens, demonstrating their intense thirst for battle. Even Yan Xiaobao felt infected by this sudden impulse to prematurely commence the fight.

Gazing at the sun overhead, Yan Xiaobao summoned wings from the depths of the Dantian Cave and soared into the sky. The sunset bathed him in light, making him resemble an angel surrounded by a golden aura. Yan Xiaobao looked down at his soldiers and smiled.

Initially, the young commander had planned to let the opponent make the first move. If his army charged ahead first, they risked placing themselves in a disadvantageous position. However, now he realized his soldiers were more prepared for war than ever before. As he flew through the sky, he let out a deep sigh, closed his eyes briefly, and reopened them, emitting an intense glow from within.

"Take your positions!" he commanded, and the beasts complied perfectly with his orders. They lined up like a proper military force. All wore smiles; some trembled with excitement, while others let out uncontrollable howls.

Seeing everyone in formation beneath him, Yan Xiaobao turned away from his army and gazed in the direction of the enemy army.

"Let the battle commence!" he roared. With a few powerful flaps of his golden wings, he surged toward the enemy with maximum speed. Below him, the beasts charged forward. Some reverted to their original forms, while others maintained human shape, wielding weapons in their hands. In the sky, wave after wave of avian beasts took flight, joined by dragons and winged horses. The air quickly became dark with menacing beasts determined to combat the humans. As Yan Xiaobao's cries echoed, howls, screams, and roars filled the air, making the earth tremble. On the ground, the beasts no longer held back as some returned to original forms, others dug into the earth, and most sprinted forward, directly following Yan Xiaobao's lead.

At the forefront, Yan Xiaobao continued pressing forward, relying on his wings to accelerate. He reached out to Lord Pan and Wan Qiao, gesturing toward the crossbow cannon aimed at the enemies' weaponry situated behind their forces. One arrow was already prepared to launch skyward, intent on piercing

through one of the many corpses occupying the air and ensuring they'd never rise again. Seeing Yan Xiaobao's signal, the two Saints immediately understood their task and hurried toward the weapon.

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Chapter 637: Beast Form

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"Then I don't have to worry," Yan Xiaobao murmured while lying on the ground, replaced only by the sight of those beasts that had taken on animalistic forms. Watching some of the beasts charge ahead, the young man couldn't help but sigh. Had these beasts forgotten they should fight in groups of five? They were supposed to battle together and protect each other's backs.

"Oh, huh?" Upon closer observation, Yan Xiaobao noticed that before fiercely slamming into the towering humans, they regrouped. Suddenly, screams pierced the air, followed by the sharp stench of blood; on such a quiet day, the sound of bones crushing was deafening.

Yan Xiaobao sighed deeply, staring at himself. His heartbeat raced as he licked his lips; he nearly tasted the blood in the air. The inner beast within him was breaking free. With one last glance at the numerous beasts lunging toward the humans, Yan Xiaobao felt his muscles swell and his physique expand. His hands transformed into massive, razor-sharp claws, his legs into powerful hind limbs, concealing tremendous strength within.

Yan Xiaobao was no longer human; he had fully morphed into a beast. As a beast, he felt his bloodlust intensify over time, spurred by the pungent metallic scent of blood around him.

He unleashed a massive howl, one carrying such overwhelming pressure that even the beasts nearby were compelled to back away from him.

"How tragic," Yan Xiaobao muttered as he surveyed the battlefield before him. The beasts had ferociously smashed into the immense human wall and began to wreak havoc. They used claws, teeth, and weapons to assert themselves as the superior species. Human corpses lay scattered across the ground as the beasts gradually formed their five-member teams again, denying the humans the advantage of their sheer numbers.

Yan Xiaobao stood alone on the battlefield. Many human soldiers quickly realized they could target this lone beast who appeared to be working without any allies. As this unfolded, the bodies of several beasts had already littered the ground—beasts that had succumbed beneath the overwhelming tide of humans.

Spotting Yan Xiaobao by himself, a group of thirty human practitioners rushed toward him, their faces twisted in fake sneers. The sinister expression on Yan Xiaobao's face revealed his sharp teeth. Before the group could make any move or react, Yan Xiaobao leapt at them. His jaws sank deeply into the neck of the nearest human, shaking his head violently side to side, nearly ripping the unfortunate man's entire head from his body.

The blood-drenched cruelty of the execution shocked and overwhelmed the others, making their hearts quake. After all, they were merely masters and practitioner-level experts, all far inferior to the enormous red wolf standing before them.

Yan Xiaobao savored the taste of blood on his tongue, closing his eyes briefly as he felt himself teetering on the brink of losing his humanity. The beast within him was entirely consumed by the act of slaughter, and with a release of shockwaves, his claws rippled through the air. The force of the shockwaves was so devastating that upon reaching the humans, three of them were instantly shredded into pieces; their blood mingled with the soil as their lifeless bodies collapsed, their eyes frozen in an idiotic stupor.

Dealing with the remaining humans was swift for Yan Xiaobao. He activated the blue cloud, then effortlessly tore the rest apart with his powerful claws. He refrained from using his teeth again, knowing that the taste of blood might push him over the edge, robbing him of control over himself.

Noticing the sun beginning to set, he prepared to attack another group of humans but swiftly transformed himself back into his humanoid form. Wings sprouted again from his back as he soared into the sky, shouting, "Retreat!"

The command was simple yet effective, causing all the beasts to immediately step back. Their expressions were difficult to discern, but Yan Xiaobao's authority was firm and severe, ensuring that every beast followed his orders. After hours of relentless battle, the battlefield finally grew silent, littered with the bodies of humans and beasts alike. For every dead beast, at least ten to twenty humans had perished.

"Fools," Yan Xiaobao muttered upon seeing the multitude of fallen beasts, though he understood it was inevitable. After all, they were beasts—it was never easy for them to adhere to discipline and strategy, and forgetting their training was something he always knew would happen.

Under Yan Xiaobao's orders, the beasts retreated roughly a kilometer from the combat zone. As they did, Yan Xiaobao quickly distributed various pills and herbal medicines among the heavily injured beasts. Other wood element practitioners utilized their expertise to heal the gravely wounded. Before long, the camp bustled with beasts darting to and fro, ensuring everyone received food and treatment.

One tent stood larger than the rest, and within this tent, forty-one experts gathered around a table.

"So we lost roughly two thousand beasts today," Yan Xiaobao said with a sigh. Although he had anticipated a high number of casualties, he hadn't expected them to mount so rapidly. "Considering we only number 400,000 and the real war is far from beginning, losing two thousand is quite substantial." He sighed again. "I suppose it's hard for them to remember what they need to do, but tomorrow we will remind them. Let them rest for now; they need it." He sighed once more before turning to Wan Qiao and Lord Pan.

Chapter 638: Beast Form_2

"How many people have you tasked with destroying their spheres?" he asked curiously. He hadn't seen the arrows in the sky during the battle but had to admit that he was much more focused on killing the soldiers in front of him than watching the heavens above.

"We've taken out four of them," Wan Qiao said proudly. "Though we only got four, they only have two left. However, the two remaining ones are under the protection of the Saints, and we're not sure whether we should engage in battle with the Saints Team, so we held back," she shrugged. To her, claiming four out of six spheres was already a great outcome, though Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but let a bitter smile creep onto his face.

"You are permitted to attack their Saints," he said seriously, looking at all the experts gathered within the tent. "The sooner you confront them, the better. Coordinate with them, do whatever is necessary, just ensure there aren't too many Saints left once you're done. If they have too many Saints during the siege, we will be at a significant disadvantage." Yan Xiaobao's words carried weight, and everyone understood how earnest he was about this.

"The war will continue tomorrow. Tomorrow, we will allow the Humans to make the first move. If they come to us, all the better—the walls will have no arrows and no safe spheres. Wan Xun, Mr. Pan, be sure to eliminate the last two Crossbow Cannons as soon as possible."

Sighing, Yan Xiaobao sat on the chair. His head ached, and his soul seethed with chaos. Killing was nothing new to him—even if they were Humans, he didn't feel pity for those he had to kill. What truly unsettled him was how he seemed to be losing himself, almost like a wolf. How much he relished the metallic taste of the liquid entering his mouth, and how he yearned to taste more. He thought of himself as more human than beast, and this contradiction deeply confused him. If he hadn't merged with the monk, which made him think calmly and rationally, he knew that long ago, he would've succumbed to panic.

Waving his hand as he sat down, he dismissed the experts within the tent and wondered if he should set up any traps to welcome the Humans. Thinking back to War Art and his personal war experiences, he left the tent with a smile on his face. Then, he proceeded to summon an army of ten thousand experts.

The first battalion was assigned a task. Watching them, he saw their excitement for the mission they had received. Soon enough, they completed their task and swiftly began to carry out their orders.

The second group of soldiers was given a large number of wooden logs, ten centimeters thick, along with blueprints. Their Commander was responsible for overseeing the construction of the items Yan Xiaobao had in mind. Then, the young man walked toward another group of experts.

This group of experts wasn't entirely satisfied with their assignment, but the Commander understood the importance of the task and ordered all the soldiers to complain less and work harder.

The night that was supposed to be completely tranquil was no longer silent; instead, hammering and digging sounds echoed throughout the camp. The sun had set, the moon hung in the sky, but even then, no one could escape the din coming from the Beast Army's camp. The noise was so loud that even a kilometer away, the Humans knew something was happening, but they couldn't fully grasp what it was.

"Don't worry," the Great Marshall said as he gazed into the darkness toward the Beast Army. "While they are cunning, they remain beasts. The common sense of beasts will always lose out to their instincts, and as long as their instincts dominate, we will win. Not to mention, we have tricks hidden up our sleeve." He smiled at the many experts standing beside him, each of whom nodded in agreement. Preparations had been underway for a long time, and they knew their adversaries were beasts. They had taken every imaginable defensive measure, even more than Yan Xiaobao could have anticipated.

As the first rays of sunlight appeared on the horizon, they illuminated a battlefield littered with corpses, where crows and other birds ravaged the scattered remains. The air was crisp, and one could see their breath as little clouds formed from the cold. As the sun peaked above the horizon, the beasts stood at the forefront, gazing ahead.

The camp now looked vastly different from the day before. The beasts had been working tirelessly throughout the night, and now a massive trench surrounded the entire camp—a trench three meters deep and three meters wide. There was a twenty-meter entrance deliberately left undug so entities could pass through. Even the camp's rear was trenched, making it difficult for the experts to surround the beasts during combat.

The trench wasn't the only thing created during the night. Wooden fortifications had also been constructed, clustered together to resemble massive wire fences made of timber. Should any experts leap over the trench and land on the ground, it would spell grave consequences.

"This should cause them some trouble," Yan Xiaobao murmured contentedly. He was uneasy about the losses he had suffered the day before, but today he resolved not to surrender to his beastly desires. He decided to let the calm side of his personality dictate the pace of war; no matter what happened, he would maintain a level head.

Those standing across from the beasts were visibly tense. Some shifted from one foot to the other, others gripped their weapons tightly, and a few nervously gnawed on their bottom lips.

Chapter 639: Beast Form_3

They are all experts. Though their ranks may not be as high as every member of the Beast Army, their eyesight far surpasses that of ordinary people. They can clearly see the massive trenches dug around the enemy encampment, not to mention the wooden barriers erected—all of this accomplished overnight.

"F*cking hell!" The Great Marshall swore as he looked at the barriers surrounding the beasts. "Looks like that white-haired bastard actually knows a thing or two about warfare." His eyes gleamed with frustration as he muttered, "How could someone come up with such an absolute defense?" He spoke loudly, continuing his train of thought, but stopped abruptly as anger overtook him. "Find Li Meilin immediately!" The Great Marshall commanded loudly, and a large group of experts instantly mobilized. Nodding in acknowledgment, they scrambled to be the first to bring the woman before their master. The faster they acted, the less likely they would be blamed for incompetence.

Soon, they found her. She was discovered inside a tent, sitting on her bed. Her hands were clasped over her knees, and her eyes seemed filled with worry. The woman, once known for her beauty, now

appeared disheveled. Her pearl-white skin had turned pale, her long and smooth hair now unruly. Tangled strands were visible, and the once-lustrous sheen of her hair had completely dulled. Her eyes, once brimming with arrogance and confidence, were now clouded with anxiety and fear. It was evident that something had deeply unsettled her.

"Miss Li," an expert called out to her hurriedly as he stood at the entrance of the tent and softly addressed her. The worry in his eyes was evident when he saw the normally radiant woman reduced to a blank, expressionless state in such a short amount of time. It seemed that after realizing the white-haired young man was most likely the leader of the beasts, her current demeanor took hold. The reason for her reaction, however, remained a mystery to everyone.

Seeing the woman remain unresponsive, the expert stepped inside the tent and gently placed a hand on her shoulder. This slight gesture caused the woman to jolt upright in her seat. Warily, she fixed her eyes on the man before her, scrutinizing him for a while before accepting that the young man standing in front of her was not the one she'd encountered in the Divine Domain. It was clearly not Yan Xiaobao, and this realization nearly drove her to a breakdown.

Li Meilin was usually a strong-willed person. She had navigated countless schemes in the Imperial Palace. She survived missions that had pushed her to the brink of death and even served as an assassin—something most experts abhor. Yet now, she was but a shadow of her former self.

"He deceived me," she muttered to herself while staring at the young man before her. Her eyes pleaded silently, begging someone to end her suffering. "He told me to go back and warn you, but it was just part of his plan all along. If we lose, isn't it my fault?" Fear coated every word she spoke as she thought about the situation. She had followed his instructions to the letter, did everything exactly as he'd wanted. And now, their entire army was gathered here alongside all the experts of the Siban Empire, united in one location. Everyone who hadn't already fled the Empire was here. If they lost now, then the Empire would be left with no experts strong enough to endure the battles to come. Undoubtedly, this would mean losing the entire Empire. She felt it was all her fault—that she had brought this nightmare to life. And even if she hadn't directly caused it, she had still helped Yan Xiaobao get what he wanted. That alone was enough to drive her over the edge. She had aided the enemy.

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Chapter 640: The Woman in Tears

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Behind the expert stood a young woman, trembling incessantly. Her eyes darted in every direction, always fearful that Yan Xiaobao might appear at any moment to either mock her or thank her for her involvement in his plans. Though such thoughts were completely irrational, Li Meilin couldn't think clearly; her mind was consumed entirely by guilt over her betrayal.

"I didn't mean to do it," she muttered under her breath, biting her lip. Tears burned in her eyes. "I didn't know I was helping the enemy," she continued, her voice choked by an emotional outburst. The words became incoherent, barely audible to anyone nearby.

The expert leading her began to feel increasingly uneasy. He remembered when Li Meilin was a resolute and unyielding woman—someone who would do anything for the Emperor. But now, she was nothing more than a bundle of shattered nerves, a person on the brink of madness.

As the expert spotted the Great Marshall's tent in the distance, he heaved a sigh of relief and unconsciously quickened his steps. He tugged along the sobbing woman whose quiet muttering went unnoticed by everyone around her.

Li Meilin showed no change in her trembling demeanor. When the Great Marshall saw her, he let out a deep sigh. It was immediately evident to him that extracting any useful information from her would be impossible.

"Ms. Li," he called gently. When the woman flinched as if struck, he sighed once more. Her wide, frightened eyes resembled those of a desperate deer cornered with no escape. Her body quaked uncontrollably, her lips opening and closing in silent attempts to speak, though no sound escaped.

"I truly am sorry, Ms. Li," the Great Marshall continued, his voice soft. "But I believe this is likely for the best. I've been told it won't hurt, though I can't offer you any guarantees beyond the fact that you will no longer feel fear." With that, he gently guided her to a nearby chair. The woman looked around with wide, tearful eyes, her beautiful face contorted with anxiety. A shadow of distrust was evident, and as the last fragments of rational thought surfaced within her, it was clear they were accompanied by an undercurrent of terror.

The Great Marshall rested a hand on her shoulder, shaking his head with a somber, weary smile. "This is not your fault," he said gently. "You acted under orders from that young man. He is far more adept at warfare than any of us ever imagined." He gave a bitter smile. "No one blames you, but for His Majesty's sake, we must ensure that you remain of use. Tragically, as you are now, you're of no value."

"Can I help?" she asked in a trembling voice, a glimmer of hope igniting in her eyes. The Great Marshall nodded with a faint smile. "It would be a tremendous service to His Majesty. All you need to do is sit here and let the Crusaders assist you."

Li Meilin's face lit up like that of a child as soon as she learned she could be of help to His Majesty. Her joy was so overwhelming that she seemed to forget all the fears and worries that had consumed her.

"Stay in your seat and let these men take care of you," the Great Marshall instructed her, patting her head lightly before turning to leave the tent. As he exited, he made sure that no one outside could see into the tent. Standing at the entrance, he closed his eyes, his expression grave and discomforted. Passersby, curious about what might be happening inside, dared not voice their questions aloud.

A sudden, piercing scream shattered the camp's silence. A number of guards rushed toward the sound, only to find the Great Marshall standing at the tent's entrance. His hands gripped tightly at the tent's flaps, preventing even the smallest glimpse inside to discern what might be happening.

As quickly as the scream had started, it abruptly ceased. Many of the experts questioned whether they had truly heard it at all.

Cold sweat beaded on the Great Marshall's forehead as he too noticed the deafening silence. No sound came from within the tent—there was nothing. The surrounding atmosphere felt as still as a graveyard. Yet there was no mistaking it: just moments ago, Li Meilin had undeniably screamed.

Suddenly, the tent flap lifted, and the Great Marshall took four steps back as cloaked figures emerged one by one. His gaze swept over the group, and when he counted six cloaked individuals in total, he inhaled sharply. Not one of them spoke a word. They revealed no skin, no identifying features, and moved with eerie, deliberate slowness as they headed toward the Imperial Palace.

When the Great Marshall glanced back into the tent, he saw four drops of blood on the chair where Li Meilin had been sitting. Nothing could be more telling—both Li Meilin and the Crusaders had vanished. As for how they had done it, only the Crusaders knew.

Watching the Crusaders retreat toward the capital, the Great Marshall wiped the sweat from his brow, his expression tense. The bloodstained chair, almost as unsettling as the Crusaders themselves, lingered in his vision. Clapping his hands together to summon aid, he instructed two experts to enter the tent.

"Remove this chair and bring me a new one," he said gruffly. As the task was carried out, the Great Marshall quickly seated himself. Resting his hands over his eyes, he began to contemplate a way to deal with Yan Xiaobao.

"The fool crafted an impressive defense, but he made a crucial mistake," the Great Marshall said, a wry smile spreading across his face as realization struck. "Bring out the archers and advance them. Rain arrows upon these beasts trapped in their own defenses. To counter our archers, they'll be forced to abandon the barriers they've built around themselves. Once they leave that narrow opening they've created, our soldiers will find it far easier to overwhelm them."