

Rise 314

Chapter 314: Jinyiwei Arrive in the Dead of Night

Late at night, the entire world was sound asleep.

From the southeast of the capital came a sudden rush of hoofbeats. A group of riders in uniform galloped past, their swords at their waists reflecting the cold gleam of moonlight under the clear and chilly sky.

It was already midnight, and the entire capital was under night curfew. The guards of the Southern Garrison of the Capital Patrol were stationed at street intersections, setting up barriers and patrolling with weapons and batons. No one was allowed to pass.

Just as the patrolling guards were about to find a sheltered spot to drink some wine and warm themselves, they heard the approaching hoofbeats growing louder. Soon, they saw a team of riders galloping toward them. One of the riders sped ahead, with an embroidered Spring Blade at his waist and a command token with tassels in hand.

“Jinyiwei on imperial duty! Clear the way at once!” the advancing Jinyiwei officer shouted, holding up the token to the guards.

The one in charge of patrol tonight was a minor officer with a team of a dozen men. Upon seeing the token with tassels in the Jinyiwei’s hand, his face turned pale, and he trembled all over. This was no ordinary Jinyiwei token. Looking toward the team from a distance, he vaguely saw a high-ranking figure in a Douniu Robe surrounded by the Jinyiwei. How could he dare delay? He immediately ordered his men to remove the barricades.

According to the old Ming system: First-rank wore Douniu, second-rank Feiyu, third-rank Mang, fourth and fifth ranks Qilin, and sixth and seventh ranks Tiger or Leopard. A Douniu Robe—was that person himself present?

The minor officer dared not waste a moment and directed his men to clear the way. But the more anxious they were, the more chaotic it became. Moreover, the barricades were heavy, and the guards struggled to move them properly.

Cough...

The team of Jinyiwei gradually drew near. Among them, the man in his forties wearing the Douniu Robe gave a light cough, clearly displeased with the scene before him.

Hearing the cough, the token-bearing Jinyiwei stiffened. Without hesitation, he put the token away, leapt from his horse like a bird, and before even touching the ground, sprang into the midst of the guards struggling with the barricade.

“Lift!”

With a low growl and veins bulging on his forehead, he effortlessly lifted the barricade, guards and all, and flung it to the roadside in one motion—leaving the South Patrol soldiers staring in stunned silence.

The Jinyiwei team behind didn't even glance over and rode straight through the opening.

The lead officer then jumped back onto his horse and galloped to catch up.

From the moment the token was shown to the moment they galloped away, it was only a minute or two.

The guards of the Southern Garrison stood stunned as they watched the Jinyiwei thunder past. No one reacted until two unfortunate souls—tossed aside with the barricade—groaned and rubbed their feet. Only then did the rest come to their senses.

“Boss, what could the Jinyiwei be doing out on imperial duty in the middle of the night?” someone asked, staring after the receding figures.

“If you don’t want to die, don’t ask!”

The minor officer glared at him and ordered the road cleared thoroughly. Who knew if those lords might return? In this dynasty, the Jinyiwei wielded boundless power, far more than even the Eastern Depot. He dared not provoke them.

Before long, the Southern Capital’s Shuntian Examination Hall received a group of uninvited guests—it was the same team of Jinyiwei galloping through the city.

According to the rules of the examination hall, to ensure fairness and prevent corruption, examiners were not allowed to leave once inside. From entry to the end of grading and rank announcements, they could be locked in for anywhere from three days to over ten. The gates were sealed, not to be opened under any circumstance.

But upon being shown an imperial decree, the gates were opened for the Jinyiwei.

“Guard the entrance. Without my order, not even an ant is to get out!”

The middle-aged man in the Douniu Robe, accompanied by several Jinyiwei, entered the examination hall and gave strict orders to his subordinates. He was tall and strong, with a striking presence. His skin tone had a faint reddish hue, as though fire burned within him, and he walked with the elegance of a crane.

The Jinyiwei posted several guards at the entrance, hands resting on their embroidered blades, vigilant and resolute.

“Lord Lu has arrived late at night—please forgive us for not coming out to greet you!”

Inside the main hall, examiners Xu Jie, Yan Maoqing, and others quickly rose to welcome the newcomer.

This was no ordinary visitor. He was Lu Bing, the chief commander of the Jinyiwei—the most powerful intelligence and enforcement agency in the empire. Known for his brilliance and political acumen, he had even surpassed the infamous Eastern Depot in influence during his tenure. Under his leadership, the Jinyiwei had become a fearsome intelligence machine. If anything stirred in the capital, Lu Bing was always the first to know.

Not only that, Lu Bing had a special relationship with the Emperor. He was the son of the Emperor's wet nurse—he and the Jiajing Emperor had been raised on the same milk. Having grown up together, the Emperor trusted him deeply.

Moreover, Lu Bing had once saved the Emperor's life. In the 18th year of Jiajing's reign, while on tour, the Emperor's temporary palace caught fire in the dead of night at Weihui in Henan. While others fled in panic, Lu Bing charged into the flames, carried the Emperor on his back, and escaped the inferno. This act of loyalty earned the Emperor's deep gratitude and led to constant promotions, ultimately making Lu Bing the supreme commander of the Jinyiwei.

How could the court officials not fear such a man?

So Xu Jie, Yan Maoqing, and the others quickly rose and greeted him with flattering words.

“Lord Xu, Lord Yan, and esteemed officials—your tireless efforts in grading have not gone unnoticed. His Majesty sent me to convey his appreciation...”

Lu Bing was polite and humble, smiling and saluting them.

“Oh no, it is you, Lord Lu, who works tirelessly even in the middle of the night. You deserve the praise...” the officials replied with courteous words of their own.

After a few pleasantries, Lu Bing got to the point and asked, “How is the grading coming along? His Majesty has been asking about it for days.”

“Quite the coincidence! We just finished grading, and the draft ranking list has been compiled,” Xu Jie replied with a chuckle.

The examiners then placed the completed draft list and the top ten red scrolls into a sealed envelope with official stamps and, under Xu Jie’s instruction, handed it over to Lu Bing with both hands.

“Well then, I won’t take more of your time. His Majesty awaits my report. I trust you all will be able to return home for a well-deserved rest tomorrow,” Lu Bing said as he took the envelope and bowed in farewell.

After leaving the Shuntian Examination Hall, Lu Bing immediately galloped off toward the Western Garden, where the Jiajing Emperor practiced alchemy. Once again, the examination hall was locked down, awaiting the Emperor’s review. Once the list was approved, the results would be announced, and the examiners could finally return home—mission complete.