

CASTLE OF BLACK IRON

Chapter 8: Mental Arithmetic by Abacus



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Walking out of the grocery store, Zhang Tie kept Donder's words in mind. Thinking of Donder's words, "soft tongue is sharper than any weapon as it can break hard bones and smart brains!", the depressed teenager felt a bit better.

When Zhang Tie passed the flea market, carbide lamps along the street were ignited one by one. Lamplighters in the Blackhot City were shaking bells on their four-wheelers and parked them in front of each lamp. They climbed onto the poles, removed the lampshades, added fuel, and ignited them. When they left, sexy women with half exposed breasts appeared under the shadows of carbide lamps close to the railway station as the passersby ogled. A couple of those women gathered and talked about something to their companions.

Following that, some of them laughed presumptuously and madly.

Zhang Tie walked and peered at those women under lamps. They made him upset and gradually aroused his desire.

"Baby, come here to your aunt. Let me teach you how to be a man..." a forty-odd year plump and enchanting woman with red curly hair greeted him at the end of the alley beside a lamp pole. Zhang Tie could see her clearly. Looking into Zhang Tie's eyes, the woman slightly lowered herself so that Zhang Tie could notice her magnificent white breasts. She squeezed the two exposed balls outside the collar and groaned slightly, "Mmm.....". She then opened her mouth and slowly licked one finger. Seeing this, Zhang Tie felt that a muscle in his throat was shaking like a rubber band, his blood had rushed to his brain,

and his crotch instantly rose up. Zhang Tie escaped under the lecherous laughter of the women.

The flea market beside the railway station became really noisy at night. People from all walks of life appeared when the darkness arrived. Zhang Tie recovered his composure when he was almost 100 meters away from that terrifying and alluring woman; however, the untamed thing was still raising high. In order to avoid embarrassment, Zhang Tie had to pretend to hide his hands in his pockets so as to press down the wild thing.

The moment Zhang Tie walked out of the flea market, a voice from a roadside stall slowed him down.

“Boss, you got all these things from the ruins?”

“Of course, look at this book. The characters on it are Chinese and Andaman City-States Alliance has no such publishing. Look at its cover. it’s an abacus from a Chinese clan, a computing tool that could date back to several thousand years before the catastrophe. How could it be preserved so well if not from the ruins?”

“We are not idiots, I also know that this is Chinese; however, nobody recognizes it. Bullshit, what motherf**king abacus. Nobody uses such an antique at all.....”

“I’m telling you the truth...”

Zhang Tie was attracted by the word “Chinese”. He moved over towards the stall and squatted together with the other two in front of the roadside stall. Many things were placed on a water-proof cloth in a disorganized way. The cloth was no larger than two square meters. The only attractive goods were daggers and copper wrist guards on the four corners of the cloth. In the flea market, each stall owner would declare that their odd goods were from the ruins after the Catastrophe, and even idiots would never trust their words...

One of the two beside him purchased a nice sheathed dagger for 8 silver coins and 60 copper coins. Then, the two went away, leaving Zhang Tie alone.

The stall owner was a sixty-odd year obscene man with a red brandy nose. Once Zhang Tie spoke to him, he could directly smell the smell of hedge wine. The old man reminded him of an animal — a mouse.

After Zhang Tie glanced over the stall casually, he took an abacus book and asked, “How much?”

“This is a treasure from the ruins, so at least twenty silver coins...” replied the old man treacherously.

“What’s it used for?”

“Well, it may be a technical book on how to compute using an abacus!” the old man was also not sure about it. He had read it, but didn’t understand its contents at all. He also invited an alleged expert to authenticate it; however, the expert could only identify some simple numbers inside. The contents were strange number arrangements like three three two two five five six six...

“What is it used for? Teach me how to count sheeps to fall asleep?”

“Erm, well... Sixteen silver coins, no less!” the old man added reluctantly.

“Do I look like an idiot? The book is no more than sixteen pages in total which is not even enough for me to clean shit. You want sixteen silver coins? No way! I asked about it out of curiosity,” Zhang Tie threw the book angrily. He was familiar with the flea market. If you didn’t bargain aggressively, you would be ripped off by them.

“So how much can you afford?”

“Eighty copper coins!”

“Eighty copper coins?” the old man sprung up like a mouse having its tail stepped on. “Boy, at least ten silver coins. I got this out of the ruins!”

“What motherf*cking ruins, I am not an idiot. There is no ruins within one thousand kilometer radius of Blackhot city. Even if there truly were some, they would have long been removed. It was never your turn. Eighty copper coins!”

“Nine silver coins, no less!”

“Well, as I respect you, ten more copper coins! ”

“Ninety copper coins?” exclaimed the old man like a pig being slaughtered. “It’s even lower than my price!”

“One silver coin!”

“Seven!” the old man gritted his teeth...

After a ferocious bargaining for two minutes, Zhang Tie directly stood up and left instantly. Surprisingly, the old man shouted anxiously after Zhang Tie took five steps, “No, don’t leave. As you said, pay me four silver coins and the book is yours!”

A slight smile appeared on Zhang Tie’s mouth. Naturally, those outsiders didn’t know the name of the book; however, Zhang Tie was stunned when he saw it — . He skimmed over it and found a mental arithmetic method that was related to the abacus. He thought it was special and decided to buy it...

On the way home, Zhang Tie’s stomach was already growling; however, Zhang Tie was satisfied when he touched the book in his pocket. In this age, knowledge was expensive and any skill or knowledge acquired outside the school gate was unique and precious. Zhang Tie remembered that Donder watched him for more than three months before he taught him how to use the strange thing known as the abacus. Even then, he still felt reluctant to teach him. Whereas, Zhang Tie found that only a few people in the Blackhot City

knew how to use the abacus. Ordinary calculations were usually made on paper. As for superior calculation methods, there were metal hand-driven calculators in exchanges and commercial firms. Thus, the abacus seemed useless. Still, it was a special skill that could not be easily gained. When Zhang Tie noticed the abacus pattern and pithy formula on the title page of the book, he recognized the value of this book. Generally speaking, Zhang Tie thought it was worth the price. Even if its value couldn't be seen for now, Zhang Tie still felt it was valuable, let alone the fact that those silver coins weren't even his to begin with.

"Learn more, at least it's not harmful to you," Zhang Tie's dad always taught him when he was young.

His parents had always forced him to learn Chinese by slapping his hand with a bamboo clapper when he was young. It took him ten years to recognize all characters on the big-headed Chinese dictionary; it was Zhang Tie's darkest period. A dozen years later, today, Zhang Tie finally found what he had learned to be useful. He was a little pleased about this experience.

Zhang Tie never trusted the old man's word when he said that this book was from the ruins. As goods from the ruins were at least one thousand years old, this book doesn't seem that old. He suddenly found several gloomy Chinese characters under the abacus pattern, "Recommended afterclass reading for students". "I almost ready to enter society, yet I don't know about this at all. What students?! After-class reading?! Comparisons are unpleasant!"

After being beaten inexplicably, he joined the brotherhood and lost face in front of Miss Daina. Besides that, he used his war trophy to buy a book.

On the way home, Zhang Tie recalled that he had spent money and gained money today; he didn't even know whether he earned or lost today... Zhang Tie's house was in the commoners gathering area north of Blackhot City. When the upper eastern area in Blackhot City was the backyard garden of the

rich, the northern areas were the cozy nests of the regular workers and citizens. Compared with the upper eastern areas, blocks in the northern area were not beautiful; however, they were tidy and safe. The parasol trees on the two sides of streets here made it somewhat warm and ordinary. Through a dozen years of effort, his parents could only afford a building with less than 100 square meters on one side of a street. The building was attached with a small log cabin in the backyard. His parents opened a roadside rice brew store in the room downstairs. His dad was a worker in the mill, while his mother ran this store. The business was so-so as it was mainly taken care of by neighboring households, and the thin profit could only slightly improve their quality of life.

When Zhang Tie returned home, it was almost 9pm. His parents were not at home; he guessed that they were at church. The rice brew store was also closed. Supper was in warm water to keep the food warm. It contained a pot of mixed vegetables, a bowl of bacon braised with kidney beans, and a huge bowl of cooked white rice. A few slices of broad bean-like sliced bacon could be seen on top of the kidney beans. This was specifically left by his parents who always said that they didn't like them as an excuse. Eating the supper, Zhang Tie felt somewhat moved. He vowed to himself that when he became rich in the future, he would provide enough fish and meat for his parents everyday.

He finished supper quickly and cleaned the kitchen. With a fatigued body, he went upstairs. When he arrived at the second floor, he could hear the rhythmed clashes and evidently depressed breath from his elder brother's room, although the door was closed. This was not the first time, and Zhang Tie naturally knew what was happening. Silently passing, he moved to the hallway. At the end of the hallway, Zhang Tie touched the rope on the wall and slightly pulled it down. Then, a wooden plank glided from the ceiling at the

end of the hallway, and a flight of stairs appeared on the other side of the plank which directly connected to the above attic.

These days, the pulley might be in need of lubricating oil, as there was a big creak when the flight of stairs was lowered. The rhythmical clashing from his brother's room stopped for a few seconds before it continued more violently than before Zhang Tie had climbed up.

He finally reached the top and pulled the stairs back to reset the plank. The tiny attic with a triangular roof belonged to Zhang Tie.

The house was not large, and with a rice brew store opened downstairs, less space was available; therefore, Zhang Tie had no other choices but to live in the attic. Almost half of the tiny space was occupied by iron sheets and planks for sundries. As a result, the rest space was only available for a bed, a desk, and a small wardrobe. There was only enough space for one person to move in. The paint on the furniture had already started to fade. They were all second-hand commodities that Zhang Tie bought in the flea market and were worth less than two silver coins in total...

A room smaller than eight square meters and several second-hand furnitures were all that the miserable 15-year old teenager owned.....