

## Great Ming 141

### Chapter 141: The Martial World Dream Is Far

Ground Rabbit mingled into a large crowd, ready to go working in the “artisans’ well”. He was very confident in his own ability; wasn’t it just becoming an apprentice? Mr. Rabbit only needed to learn for a few days to grasp everything, and then he could collect the carpenter’s wages.

Just then, a Wangjia Villager ran over from the distance, shouting loudly, “I urgently need a group of road construction workers here; no skills required, just strength. The job is digging stones and digging mud; wages are settled daily, with food and lodging included, and three jin of flour issued each day.”

“Food and lodging, and three jin of flour each day!” Ground Rabbit shuddered all over: Mother! And this work didn’t even need skills, just strength was enough.

He immediately began pondering in his heart: If I took on the carpenter apprenticeship job, I wouldn’t get wages at all at the start, only food included; but if I did the road construction work, I could get three jin of flour tomorrow.

This job was doable!

Ground Rabbit leaped out from the carpenter group at once, ran to the front of the Wangjia Villager, and said in an urgent roar, “I can do this job; I’m very strong.”

Gao Yiyi was so angry his nose twisted: “Hey, you guy, didn’t you just sign up to be an apprentice with me?”

Ground Rabbit: “I want to do work more suited to me.”

Gao Yiyi: “Enough, enough. If you can’t even tell which side has a better future, then go ahead and dig mud as you like.”

He led a group of newly signed-up carpenter apprentices into the fortress, heading toward the artisans’ well.

Ground Rabbit followed the Wangjia Villager with an excited face, and a large group of short-term laborers with only strength and no skills followed behind; everyone was drawn by that flour.

Before they had walked many steps, a large crowd dashed out from Gaojia Fortress.

Leading was Cheng Xu with his face covered, closely followed by Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu, and behind them were over forty young adult men. The group walked with a powerful presence; after a few steps, they shouted in unison, "Kill kill kill! Kill kill kill!"

At the same time, they raised the wooden sticks in their hands and made a thrusting motion forward: "Kill kill kill!"

Cheng Xu shouted loudly, "Halted! Continue advancing!"

The young men withdrew their long sticks at once and kept marching forward.

Ground Rabbit saw this scene and his whole body ignited with excitement: "Wow, wow!"

The nearby Wangjia Villager said, "What are you wowing about?"

Ground Rabbit: "Is that troop still hiring? I want to go join them."

The Wangjia Villager immediately laughed and scolded him, "What's wrong with you? You jumped ship from the carpenter group to join me, Artisan Master Gao just scolded you, and right away you want to jump away from me? Even a field frog can't hop this much."

Ground Rabbit chuckled, "Can a field frog compare to me? I am Ground Rabbit."

Wangjia Villager: "..."

With such a senseless guy, there was no point trying to reason.

The Wangjia Villager said in annoyance, "The militia hasn't started recruiting outsiders yet. We only want upright, trustworthy young men from this village. You just got here; no one knows your character. Want to get into the militia? No way!"

Before he even finished speaking, he saw Ground Rabbit charge toward the militia, spread his arms to block the masked Cheng Xu's path, and shout loudly, "Are you the militia instructor? I... I... could you take me into the militia? I can fight extremely well."

Cheng Xu glanced sideways at the man before him: He had a sizable build, but looked horribly starved, with a weary face, wearing ragged clothes, and a rusty sword hanging at his waist without even a scabbard.

Tsk! Where did this wild type come from?

Cheng Xu shook his head: "My militia doesn't take just any cat or dog."

Ground Rabbit said anxiously, "I'm not a cat or a dog; I'm a rabbit."

The crowd: "..."

Cheng Xu covered his face with his hand, feeling troubled. This guy was clearly unreliable; was he here to hassle the general again? In recent days, Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu, those two simpletons, had nearly driven him to illness; he really didn't need another one.

Ground Rabbit saw that everyone had strange expressions, and he quickly said again, "My martial arts are very great. If you don't believe me, test me."

Cheng Xu said, "Martial arts good? How good? Show me a move."

Ground Rabbit said, "Once Mr. Rabbit's long sword is drawn, it must taste blood before it can be sheathed again. Its killing aura is too heavy, not easy to use for performances, only for real combat."

Cheng Xu became furious and said, "Your rusty sword doesn't even have a sheath."

Ground Rabbit said, "This... because... Mr. Rabbit has been a bit down on his luck lately. Like a rabbit falling onto the plain being bullied by dogs, I used the sheath to exchange for a little money..."

Everyone said, "..."

Cheng Xu laughed in anger and said, "Fine, take a swing at me. If you beat me, I'll let you join the militia. Otherwise, get lost."

Ground Rabbit said, "Seriously?"

Cheng Xu said, "Seriously!"

"Then I won't hold back," Ground Rabbit drew his sword with a whoosh and said, "I'm going to use my ultimate move."

Cheng Xu snorted coldly.

Ground Rabbit took a big step forward with a whoosh, brandished his rusty sword, his movements were sweeping and grand, full of momentum, and he shouted loudly, "Heaven! Rabbit! Break! Dominance! Sword!"

Cheng Xu sidestepped to the side, easily dodging his sword, hooked his foot, and Ground Rabbit fell down with a thud.

"Go dig your mud," Cheng Xu didn't even glance at him again, waved to the militia behind, and said, "Let's go, continue the drill."

The people behind said in unison, "Yes, sir!"

The group trudged quickly, ran onto the cement road, and headed towards Zhengjia Village.

Ground Rabbit rolled over and got up, looked left and right, let out a cry of shock, and quickly ran towards Wangjia Villager, saying, "I'm back, I want to do road construction."

Wangjia Villager could only laugh or cry and said, "You bastard."

Ground Rabbit rubbed his head and chuckled with a "heh heh."

"Let's go," Wangjia Villager said. "If we weren't really short-handed, I'd kick you flying away."

Ground Rabbit said, "Don't worry, I'm very diligent at working."

Wangjia Villager said, "You are damn diligent at horseplay. The Deity might even be amused by you."

Ground Rabbit said, "The Deity? Who's that?"

Wangjia Villager said, "Stay here for a few more days, and you'll know who he is."

Ground Rabbit said, "Oh!"

He walked along with Wangjia Villager while turning his head to watch Cheng Xu's militia running farther and farther away. His eyes revealed a gaze of envy and jealousy. He sighed deeply and touched his rusty sword...

The dream of the martial world was far away.

Better focus on working hard!

Li Daoxuan held a bowl of Buddha Jumps Over the Wall rice soup, shoveling it into his mouth while watching Ground Rabbit's performance. He almost spit out his rice from amusement; this new wild figure was interesting.

Most new wild figures were timid, careful, and cautious. Only after getting used to Gaojia Village's environment did they start to show their personalities. But this guy calling himself Ground Rabbit was quite open and unrestrained.

It seemed he could often provide fun.

Thinking of that, Li Daoxuan shifted his perspective. Oh, here came more wild figures. On the official road to the southwest, a caravan walked over. The leader was Xing Honglang, a tough woman who looked like a man, followed by thirty or forty salt smugglers, hurrying toward Gaojia Village.

Li Daoxuan was overjoyed: Gao Chuwu's love story, chapter two, was about to update!

Chapter 142: Xing Honglang Came Again

Xing Honglang had arrived!

She had come happily!

Not long ago, she had obtained a batch of good goods in Gaojia Village and headed towards Xi'an Prefecture, selling as she advanced.

Along the way, she sold smuggled salt in small villages and towns, earning a small profit. Then she plunged into Xi'an Prefecture and started selling the top-tier goods obtained in Gaojia Village.

Chocolate was truly amazing; when first brought out, no one understood it and didn't dare to buy. But once most people tasted a bite, they were captivated immediately.

After her reputation spread, the wealthy nobles of Xi'an Prefecture swarmed over, sweeping away all the chocolate in her hands, each bidding higher than the last. With the last bit of stock, the stewards of two prominent official families almost fought over grabbing it.

And then there was the top-tier white sugar, snowy white and crystal clear, like ice blocks. Even the knowledgeable steward of Qin King Mansion marveled and praised it; without hesitation, he bought it at a high price to present to the prince's concubines for their enjoyment.

In no time, Xing Honglang's goods were sold out. With a team of subordinates, she left Xi'an Prefecture and headed towards Gaojia Village again. This time, she was clutching plenty of gold and silver, gained confidence, and vowed to obtain more good goods in Gaojia Village.

Li Daoxuan saw that Xing Honglang had arrived and was secretly delighted in his heart. "Gao Chuwu, come quickly!" he thought.

But when he turned his head to look, Cheng Xu was leading the militia and running in the direction of Zhengjia Village. Gao Chuwu was also among them, moving farther and farther away from Gaojia Village.

How could this be?

If you didn't meet, how would the love story be updated?

If he couldn't see the update, he would itch all over and crawl around darkly, twisting and convulsing.

Li Daoxuan urgently ordered Gao Yiye, "Yiye, quickly, quickly, quickly go chase Gao Chuwu back."

At this moment, Gao Yiye was holding a writing brush and scribbling and drawing on paper. Recently, she had started learning reading and writing and had begun to grasp the basics, but what she liked best was drawing. Over the past couple of days, she had learned a few brush techniques from Mr. Wang and was practicing diligently.

Hearing the Deity's summons, Gao Yiye hurriedly put down the brush. "Ah, okay, I will go chase Brother Chuwu right away," she said.

After saying this, she started running out. But as she ran, she couldn't help asking, "Why are you calling Brother Chuwu back?"

This was known as “executing the Deity’s decree first and only during the execution asking why,” while someone with a scheming mind would first ask why clearly before executing.

Li Daoxuan chuckled. “Cannot say, cannot say; divine secrets must not be revealed.”

...

Xing Honglang’s arrival immediately brought a burst of cheers from the Gaojia Village villagers.

“The brave woman has come again!”

“Wow, last time I wanted to sell a jar of Wuliangye liquor to her, but the brave woman didn’t have any money. Now that she’s here again, I can finally sell my Wuliangye, right?”

“Here I have a jar of beer given by the Deity. She should want it too.”

A group of villagers happily surged out.

Xing Honglang was also overjoyed. She had really been a bit worried that the villagers didn’t have much stock left, so she wouldn’t be able to buy much, but to her surprise, these guys were still quite well-stocked.

“Form a line and come one at a time,” one of Xing Honglang’s subordinates loudly shouted.

“Sugar we want, chocolate too,” the subordinate’s voice continued. “Huh? You want to sell me salt? Damn, are we the salt smugglers or are you?”

“Brave woman, try this. This is called happy fat water. Although it’s gone flat, it still tastes good,” another villager offered.

“Brave woman, here I have a big jar of lard,” said a different villager.

One of Xing Honglang's subordinates snapped angrily, "Your lard has holes scooped out with a spoon; it looks too ugly. If we take it, it won't sell well. No no, not taking it."

"Oh!" The villager carrying the lard jar fussed, "Let me boil it in a pot. Once it melts and solidifies again, it'll smooth out without any spoon marks. Wait a bit, I'll fix it for you right now."

The trading grounds pulsed with activity.

Xing Honglang stood to the side, hand resting on her sword hilt as she watched her subordinates bustle about. She left the petty details to others, focusing only on the big picture. She was pondering just how much profit this run would yield when suddenly, the sound of hurried footsteps reached her ears. Cheng Xu was returning with the militia.

Gao Yiye sprinted ahead, a few damp strands of hair plastered to her sweating forehead from the rush, yet her face shone with undisguised excitement. Clearly, this girl's buzz with excitement was at its peak; she was immensely happy right now.

Xing Honglang glanced over the large militia group, her attention instantly snagging on Cheng Xu. That one's trouble, she thought.

Cheng Xu spotted Xing Honglang and her band of salt smugglers at the same moment. Salt smugglers. If I were still a patrol officer, I'd have to arrest them on sight, or at least make a show of trying. But now... I guess not. No wonder the Deity summoned me back urgently. If these salt smugglers suddenly pulled weapons to rob the villagers, then it'd fall to the militia.

He stole a look at the forty-plus men behind him. This lot definitely couldn't beat thirty-odd salt smugglers in a fight. If a brawl erupts, it'll be dicey – his chances of seeing his grandmother were at least 80%. But this is Gaojia Village. Even if the militia falters, a shout could bring hundreds of villagers rushing in to back us up. So the odds of seeing his grandmother instantly plummeted back to zero.

Humph. A guaranteed win. Nothing to fear, then.

He was still lost in these thoughts when Gao Chuwu suddenly thrust his hand in the air. "Hey! Miss! It's you."

Xing Honglang's eyes swept over Gao Chuwu with no flicker of recognition. Who was this?

Gao Chuwu dashed over eagerly, stopping right in front of her. "Don't you remember me, miss? It's me! The one who proposed to you last time."

"Oh! It's you!" Finally, a spark of memory registered. Few people in the world proposed to bear-like women like her, and Gao Chuwu was the only blockhead who ever did. So yes, she did remember.

Gao Chuwu beamed with earnestness. "I still want to marry you."

Xing Honglang rolled her eyes, utterly unable to muster a response.

"Wait," Gao Chuwu urged, "I'll go get a gift for you."

Xing Honglang continued to ignore him.

Gao Chuwu clattered away towards home, his large feet slapping the ground noisily with each heavy step.

Soon he returned, shoulders straining under the weight of an enormous chocolate slab resting on his back, nearly half the size of a cabinet.

He sprinted clumsily back towards Xing Honglang, laughing doltishly as he ran. "I know you like this! I did something really big to earn it straight from the Deity as a reward. Look! This is huge!"

This truly startled Xing Honglang.

"This huge?"

“Yep!” Gao Chuwu gave an awkward shake of his head. “It’s all for you!”

Xing Honglang refused, “Deserved gifts only. I can buy it, not accept it freely. Little brothers! Weigh that chocolate! Pay him what it’s worth.”

“Don’t need to, don’t need to,” Gao Chuwu protested. “I’m giving it to you.”

Xing Honglang’s phoenix eyes flared angrily. “Old lady said she’ll pay!”

Her glare was genuinely fierce. Anyone else might have flinched, but it rolled right off the thick-skinned blockhead. Gao Chuwu just grinned wider. “I want to give it to you!”

Rage surged through Xing Honglang. Her hand tightened visibly on her sword hilt, muscles tensing in her forearm as if poised to slash him down any second. “Think you can look down on me?! Think I’m that kind of woman, swayed by a valuable gift?!”

Cheng Xu subtly shifted two steps closer to Gao Chuwu. If Xing Honglang suddenly attacked, Gao Chuwu, never wary, wouldn’t defend himself. Cheng Xu would need to step in.

“Huh?” Gao Chuwu blinked in confusion. “I’m not looking down on you at all! I just wanted to give what I treasure most to the girl I like. Why are you so mad?”

The coiled power in Xing Honglang’s sword arm momentarily slackened. She was caught off guard, momentarily unsure whether to unleash her fury.

After two seconds, however, a firm decision crystallized in her expression. “Beat me in a fight, and I’ll take your gift. If I win, you take the money.”

Chapter 143: We Despise You

The moment Xing Honglang spoke, the Gaojia Village villagers cheered. Two duels in one day! The earlier one had been a new refugee challenging Instructor He—utterly predictable from the start that Instructor He would win.

The outcome was no surprise either; the refugee fell in one move. It hadn't been satisfying to watch at all.

But now, hearing the brave woman challenge Gao Chuwu, everyone instantly roared with excitement.

The young men of the militia led the jeering: "Brother Gao Chuwu, go for it! Any man who chickens out ain't worth the name!"

Villagers gathered near the salt smugglers, counting their freshly earned coins, chimed in: "Gao Chuwu, step up! A man who can't beat his wife ain't worth a damn, hahaha!"

Happy laughter echoed everywhere.

Xing Honglang shot a furious glare at the taunting villagers. "Who's whose wife? Watch your words!"

The villagers clamped their hands over their mouths instantly. This brave woman meant business.

Amid the clamor, the mischief-maker Gao Yiye raced over with light footsteps. Spotting the Saint Lady joining the excitement, the villagers parted like a swift current, clearing a path for her to stride right into the center.

One glance at Gao Yiye's prime spot told Xing Honglang all she needed: this woman was the village leader. Fascinating. For a woman to lead salt smugglers already bordered on astounding—now this village actually put a delicate-looking girl in charge? What was going on?

She scrutinized Gao Yiye with a puzzled expression.

But Gao Yiye's attention stayed locked on Gao Chuwu, laughing brightly. "Brother Gao Chuwu, why the hesitation? Too cowardly to fight? The Deity himself is watching us from the heavens."

Gao Chuwu scratched the back of his head, earnest as ever. "I never hit women."

His words only stoked Xing Honglang's fury. "Still underestimating me, huh? I'm no ordinary woman."

Gao Chuwu nodded, wide-eyed with sincerity. "Absolutely! You're unique—the most beautiful woman under heaven! Nobody compares."

The villagers stood silent as statues.

"Ptui!" Li Daoxuan spat out a shred of sea cucumber, nearly spraying it into the box before frantically cupping his mouth to catch it. If that fell inside—utter disaster!

Xing Honglang fumed at his compliment. "Thought you were just a clueless idiot! Turns out you're a silver-tongued creep, pretending to be harmless while playing dirty? Fine! I'm settling this with you today."

She unsheathed the knife at her waist, tossed it to a subordinate behind her, then cracked her knuckles, sharp pops punctuating every word. "You. Get over here and take your beating."

Gao Chuwu waved his hands in flustered refusal. "I really don't hit women!"

Li Daoxuan seethed with impatience. Dammit, Gao Chuwu! The plot's turning sluggish! Dragging out this petty subplot for ages without hitting the climax. Writing romance like this? How should readers stick around? Drat!

He snapped his order aloud: "Yiye! Tell Gao Chuwu: 'gender equality' means 'I don't hit women' is just sexist condescension! Me? I stand firmly with Xing Honglang—and every single woman in this world. We despise him!"

Hearing the Decree of the Deity, Gao Yiye instantly obeyed, thrusting both arms high to shout: "The Deity commands... despise Gao Chuwu!"

The villagers instantly followed suit, roaring as one: "We despise you!"

Xing Honglang froze, wide-eyed: “???”

At last, Gao Chuwu gave in. Even the Deity himself had spoken: now he had to fight.

He stepped forward, coming to a halt roughly one zhang away from Xing Honglang.

Spectators eagerly shuffled back, forming a roaring human circle. On one side stood the thirty-four salt smugglers, cheering their leader on: “Boss! Smash the arrogant punk! He deserves it for insulting the name of Yongji Xing Honglang!”

The Gaojia Village villagers rallied behind Gao Chuwu: “Gao Chuwu! Smack your wife around! Beating is the only way to obedience!”

Before either combatant threw a punch, the cheer-squads had fired the crowd to fever pitch.

Gao Chuwu remained rooted, slack-jawed and still refusing to strike first.

Xing Honglang let out a sharp exhale, took a large stride forward, and threw a straight punch at Gao Chuwu’s chest.

Her fist was incredibly swift and fierce, too fast for the eyes to follow. Watching beside them, Cheng Xu felt a surge of alarm in his heart: So fast! I might not be able to block that either. Gao Chuwu won’t be able to dodge.

Sure enough, Gao Chuwu showed no reaction at all as Xing Honglang’s fist landed squarely on his chest. A dull thump sounded—Gao Chuwu was hit.

Xing Honglang gave a dismissive “Hmph,” withdrew her fist, and decided she had won. There was no need to continue. An ordinary person hit by her fist wouldn’t be able to get up for quite a while.

However, she immediately sensed something was wrong. Gao Chuwu merely cried out “Aiyo!” as he stumbled back five steps in succession, then planted his feet firmly and held his ground.

He even grinned foolishly: “The lady is not only pretty but really strong.”

Xing Honglang: “What?”

Gao Chuwu: “It’s my turn now, lady. Be careful.”

He lunged forward with a large step, his fist whipping through the air with a sharp hiss, accompanied by a powerful pressure as if pushed before him.

Xing Honglang was startled internally. Not daring to block it head-on, she sidestepped swiftly, used her left hand to deflect Gao Chuwu’s fist, and simultaneously drove her right fist into Gao Chuwu’s ribs.

This area was incredibly vulnerable; a single blow there would guarantee anyone crumpling doubled over like a shrimp.

Unexpectedly, Gao Chuwu just exclaimed “Aiyo!” again, stumbled back several steps, yet managed to plant his feet and hold his ground. “Wow, lady, you’re really strong!”

Xing Honglang: “!!!”

What kind of monster is this?

Little did she know that ever since the Deity arrived, this fellow Gao Chuwu had eaten himself full at every single meal—rice, meat, salt, and sugary treats—and worked tirelessly, strengthening his body until his muscles had grown like a set of armor.

To knock him down with just punches was truly difficult.

Xing Honglang gave a sharp chuckle: “Fine! This lady truly shouldn’t underestimate you. Then I’ll bring out some real skill. Try my set of Jin Hong Fist!”

She sprang forward in a flash, both hands beginning to strike in a rapid series, the Jin Hong Fist style roaring through the air forcefully.

Gao Chuwu instantly found the flurry blinding and impossible to track; in the time it took to blink thirteen times, he had been struck over ten times in quick succession.

The watching crowd heard only a series of thump-thump-thump sounds, fists pounding against flesh. As the two figures separated again, they saw Gao Chuwu's tower-like frame begin to fall slowly.

A thud crashed as he hit the ground, sending up a cloud of dust.

Gao Chuwu had lost!

Xing Honglang clapped her hands dismissively: "Settle that chocolate debt."

Her subordinate salt smugglers laughed loudly: "Yes, ma'am!"

Zheng Daniu walked over to Gao Chuwu, picked up a twig, and gently poked him a few times: "Brother, you dead?"

Gao Chuwu mumbled faintly: "Lost... couldn't hit her... not even once..."

Zheng Daniu: "Not dead yet? Then it's fine."

The watching villagers: "Hahaha! Gao Chuwu's proposal attempt fails for the second time!"

Li Daoxuan was also watching with great amusement: Excellent, excellent. Chapter Two of Gao Chuwu's love story is very entertaining. I should reward him with something: "Yiye..."

Gao Yiye announced in a loud voice: “The Deity orders! Gao Chuwu fought brilliantly, though defeated, he fought with glory. Cancel his fool title! Bestow upon him the title ‘Tough Guy’!”

The villagers burst into laughter once more.

Chapter 144: Giving You 10% Rebate

Dusted and disheveled, Gao Chuwu was soon helped aside by Zheng Daniu. Head hung low, he sat under a large tree.

Watching Xing Honglang busily conducting deals with other villagers, everyone appeared joyful—only he remained unhappy.

Gao Chuwu drooped his head. “Daniu, I’m so weak.”

Zheng Daniu patted his shoulder. “We’re both about the same. You’re weak; I’m weak too.”

Gao Chuwu spoke. “I always thought I was the toughest in Gaojia Village—someone impressive. Never imagined women outside our village could be this strong...”

Zheng Daniu spread his hands. “Ah...I didn’t expect that either.”

At that moment, Cheng Xu stepped before him. “Do you know why you lost?”

Gao Chuwu shook his head.

Cheng Xu spoke. “The fist art that woman used is called Hong Fist. It originated during the Zhou and Qin dynasties, gained fame in the Tang and Song, and prevails in our current dynasty. Divided into many schools, her style is Jin Hong Fist—a formidable branch from Shanxi. Your country tricks aren’t fit to even carry shoes for Jin Hong Fist. Losing to her was inevitable.”

Gao Chuwu glanced up at Cheng Xu, resentment flickering in his eyes. “Instructor He, you promised last time to teach me martial arts. But these days you’ve only made me practice standing in queues and formations—not a single actual move.”

“Feeling wronged?” Cheng Xu grinned. “Good! Bitterness sharpens learning. Want to beat that woman?”

Gao Chuwu straightened. “Yes!”

“Good.” Cheng Xu chuckled. “Though Hong Fist is powerful, Jin Hong isn’t its strongest branch. The truly potent one is our Shaanxi Guanzhong Hong Fist. And by coincidence, I happen to know it. Wish to learn?”

Gao Chuwu beamed. “I want to learn!”

Zheng Daniu beamed too. “Me too!”

Cheng Xu waved them onward. “Then move! We’ll take the militia to Zhengjia Village. Train Hong Fist secretly, away from these people.” His voice lowered conspiratorially. “All of us will grow stronger in secret...then amaze everyone.”

The militia stirred into action. Forming a long serpentine formation, they jogged toward Zhengjia Village.

Li Daoxuan inwardly smiled. Excellent! This drive to improve...only this way can they grow strong enough to protect our little people.

He paused.

His gaze caught on a newcomer in the distant road construction team—a refugee calling himself Ground Rabbit. The man had stopped working, eyes locked on the spot where Xing Honglang and Gao Chuwu had fought earlier.

Zooming in, Li Daoxuan saw longing etched across Ground Rabbit’s face. “So good...” he murmured, envy thick in his voice. “Trained people really are different. If only I could be that strong...”

Thwack!

The Captain of the construction crew rapped his head sharply. “Newcomer! No slacking, or you forfeit your pay!”

“Oww!” Ground Rabbit clutched his head, turning quickly. “Working! Right away sir!”

The clamoring crowd gradually quieted. Villagers who had gathered for gossip about love stories dispersed. Only those wishing to sell goods to Xing Honglang still surrounded the salt smugglers.

Xing Hong retrieved her waist knife, reattaching it to her belt. Her eyes flickered toward Gao Chuwu— dirt-streaked and trotting away with the militia. She snorted softly then rubbed the knuckles of her right hand unobtrusively with her left.

Her fist ached. Damn that big lummo! Solid muscles. Beating him had rattled her own hand. A peasant with nothing but country moves, untrained in proper fist arts...if he ever learned a real system, she might be...

Xing Honglang felt immense pressure. Damnation! Men really do have natural advantages over women. I’ve trained relentlessly, yet even brute strength falls short against a true powerhouse.

As these thoughts roiled, Gao Yiye approached her, smiling warmly.

Xing Honglang rushed with pride. “So you’re the boss here?”

Gao Yiye shook her head. “No, not boss at all. Just an ordinary girl.”

She had just finished her modest reply when a villager approached her, “Saint Lady, my family is cooking braised pork tonight. We will prepare an extra bowl and bring it over to you at dinnertime.”

Gao Yiye responded, “Ah? How could I possibly impose?”

The villager chuckled, "Ah, these good days are all bestowed by the Deity. You are the Deity's Saint Lady. Honoring you is honoring the Deity."

Gao Yiye couldn't refuse. The villager left cheerfully.

She turned back to Xing Honglang, her expression slightly awkward, "Ahem... well..."

Xing Honglang asked, "Is this Deity the boss of this village? Are you his woman?"

At these words, Gao Yiye's face flushed crimson to the tips of her ears. What's this! Calling me the Deity's woman right away. This woman's way of speaking is really... too... far too... far too much... that much... how delightful.

Seeing her expression, Xing Honglang thought: I guessed right. That Deity must be a 'divine being'. This young girl is his woman. It seems this village isn't a kind-hearted family either. Like us salt smugglers, they must be involved in gray operations.

Xing Honglang inquired, "What instructions does the Saint Lady have?"

Gao Yiye said, "The Deity sent me to discuss something with Miss Xing."

Xing Honglang replied, "Please speak, I am all ears."

Gao Yiye continued, "The Deity says that due to the great drought, it was difficult for people to survive. This has caused bandits to rise everywhere, and trade routes have been largely destroyed. The inability to circulate various goods is a very bad situation. Miss Xing, your ability to travel north and south continuing your business in these troubled times makes you an extraordinary person."

Xing Honglang smiled. Praising me, eh? Looks like he needs a favor from me. Let's hear what he wants.

Gao Yiye relayed, "The Deity says that every time Miss Xing arrives, you re-energize Gaojia Village. Therefore, he hopes you can come here frequently, and take more goods."

Xing Honglang understood now. This 'Deity' just wants merchants to come often. Nothing strange about that. The salt merchant I used to buy from also wanted me to come for goods frequently. But...

Why should I? Why should this lady buy from you every time? There needs to be a proper reason.

As she thought this, she heard Gao Yiye say with a smile, "The Deity says that from now on, whatever quantity of goods you purchase from the villagers, he will secretly give you an extra rebate of ten percent."

Hearing this, Xing Honglang was momentarily stunned, "A rebate?"

Gao Yiye nodded, "That means, if you buy one hundred jin of sugar from the villagers, the Deity will privately give you an extra ten jin."

These words struck Xing Honglang, filling her with immense joy.

The goods she already got from Gaojia Village were cheap. Now, to learn she could get an extra ten percent for free? Damn, that's like a pie falling from the sky!

But...

Why?

Why would this Deity do such a thing? What relation does it have to him, me taking goods from these villagers? Just to get me to come back, he takes such a big loss? What benefit could that possibly bring him?

Chapter 145: SimCity 1628 Begins

Xing Honglang didn't quite understand.

Li Daoxuan knew she wouldn't.

Only a modern person could truly grasp how powerfully the flow of goods impacted a place.

He wanted his Tiny Kingdom to grow ever more prosperous, and that required the help of merchants. But right now, Shaanxi was chaotic with bandits running rampant. Legitimate merchants simply didn't dare enter Shaanxi; if they did, they would only operate in large places like Xi'an or county towns, not bothering to come to a remote backwater like Gaojia Village.

They could only rely on salt smugglers.

Gao Yiye said: "The Deity has said if you are willing to come to Gaojia Village frequently to purchase goods, Gaojia Village can prepare a mansion for you and your subordinates, a place to rest and lodge each time you visit. This would be far more comfortable than braving the elements and sleeping in tents."

Xing Honglang laughed heartily: "Honored by the Deity's favor! Since Gaojia Village is being so generous to me, Xing, I cannot repay your kindness with ingratitude. I shall certainly be troubling you all with frequent visits from now on."

Gao Yiye replied: "Your arrival is always more than welcome!"

That night, Xing Honglang did indeed stay in Gaojia Village. Since her mansion wasn't ready yet, her group could only camp for the time being. Fortunately, salt smugglers, who'd traversed north and south, had endured all kinds of hardships; setting camp was a minor matter for them.

Xing Honglang and her entourage pitched camp beside the big pond in Gaojia Village, drawing water, cooking their meals, and resting soundly through the night. Resting here was much safer than the desolate wilderness they were used to. They all enjoyed a good night's sleep, a rare luxury for them. Early in the morning, Xing Honglang set off again, heading back towards Shanxi.

Seeing Xing Honglang off, Gao Yiye was puzzled. She couldn't help looking up towards Li Daoxuan's voice and asking, "Most Honored Deity, usually when you give houses to villagers, you manifest them instantly, lowering one down from heaven on the spot. Why didn't you give Xing Honglang her house immediately this time?"

Li Daoxuan smiled. "Xing Honglang doesn't know me well enough yet. If I manifested too obviously in front of her too early, it might frighten her. Then, she might never come back to Gaojia Village."

"Oh? Seeing the Deity manifest should inspire utter reverence! She should prostrate herself in awe and come to Gaojia Village frequently to pay homage to you. Why would she be scared away?"

Li Daoxuan chuckled; this wasn't something he needed to explain in detail.

People were truly complex beings.

"Beep... Beep... Beep..."

His phone suddenly rang. Li Daoxuan closed the lid of the scenic box and picked it up. "Ah, Second Aunt? Haven't heard from you in ages! To what do I owe the pleasure?"

Second Aunt was a relative from the countryside. Not long ago, when sowing the autumn wheat, Li Daoxuan had called her to seek advice about farmland pH levels and fertilizer application.

Second Aunt's voice was warm and affectionate. "Your father mentioned you didn't plan to come back for the family gathering this Spring Festival? Your old aunt is worried! Why aren't you coming back?"

Li Daoxuan glanced at the scenic box. He couldn't tell her the real reason. "I'm busy with my online video promotion work. I really can't spare the time. Being stuck in the hometown for over ten days is a bit..."

Second Aunt laughed. "We know you're busy, making your fortune now! Buying your parents that two-million-yuan apartment too! All the relatives are singing your praises. The big busy man doesn't have to stay the whole ten-plus days! Just come back for one day! They allow fireworks here now. Come back for a day, light off a few fireworks with everyone, have some fun. Won't that be nice?"

Her words actually gave Li Daoxuan an idea.

Right!

In the countryside, he could buy fireworks legally. Those things he'd been wanting to acquire would be easy to get there. No need to find shady urban sources anymore.

Li Daoxuan smiled. "Alright, Second Aunt, wait for me. I'll come back to set off firecrackers with everyone."

Time slipped away swiftly over the next few days...

The Spring Festival arrived!

Li Daoxuan got up early. Peering into the box, he saw Gaojia Village steeped in a palpable high-spirited festive atmosphere. Gaojia Fortress was draped in red decorations, bustling with activity. Even the nearby Short-term Workers Village and Labor Offenders Village were overflowing with joy.

On such an important, super-traditional holiday, both the bandits and the officials should calm down. Nothing major could happen now, he figured.

Li Daoxuan packed his backpack, met up with his parents, and boarded the train for the countryside. The rickety, green commuter train clattered along, eventually delivering him to a small, worn-down town on the outskirts of Shuangqing City. This place wasn't even connected to the high-speed rail network; the only link was the old green trains. It remained largely untouched and rudimentary.

True to form, the town featured pyrotechnic stands!

Opportunities to legally buy this stuff were rare, only once a year, and you couldn't buy it in the urban area.

Li Daoxuan showed no restraint, sweeping the goods, sweeping the goods!

His open and generous shopping style made the shop owner spot it at first glance: “A city kid, especially coming to the countryside to set off firecrackers for fun?”

“Haha, yes, coming to my Second Aunt’s place to set off firecrackers for fun.”

“Then have fun.”

That night, relatives gathered joyously.

The New Year’s Eve dinner was lively.

Firecrackers were brought out and set off wildly, turning everything chaotic.

Early in the morning, Li Daoxuan bid farewell to his relatives.

He set off on the road back to the city.

When he came, he had an empty bag.

When going back, it was filled with a large bag of firecrackers.

To avoid trouble, he didn’t even dare take the train.

He called a ride-hailing car.

He paid several hundred yuan in fare.

Only then did he bring the treasures back home.

As soon as he was home, he impatiently sat back down by the box.

“SimCity 1627” was so fun, he had to play on forgetting sleep and food.

No, from today on, it should be called “SimCity 1628”.

Chongzhen Year One, the first day of the lunar new year.

Gaojia Village had a new look for the new year!

Before the festival, Clerk Tan had bought a large amount of red dye from the county town.

He distributed it to the villagers for use.

On the first day of the new year, people in red clothes were running all over the village.

Amid the laughter and joy, Li Daoxuan spotted at first glance a solitary fellow.

He was practicing boxing on the hillside outside the village.

Gao Chuwu!

It was freezing cold, but he wore only a thin cotton jacket.

He had his sleeves and trousers tightly tied.

“Hei,” “Ha,” he punched into the air non-stop.

Shaanxi Guanzhong Hong Fist, thirty-six sequences.

He had only learned a few moves.

He practiced them repeatedly: Sticking to the Wall Like a Painting, Meng Hu Climbing the Wall, Arhat Carrying Treasure, Judge Removing Boots.

Cheng Xu wasn't wrong.

Only when you were sufficiently wronged did you train with all your might.

In the entire Gaojia Village, only Gao Chuwu practiced most desperately.

Even Zheng Daniu couldn't keep up with Gao Chuwu's fierceness.

Probably because Zheng Daniu hadn't met love yet.

Li Daoxuan couldn't help but silently give Gao Chuwu a thumbs-up.

Huh?

Suddenly he noticed a small surprise.

Li Daoxuan's gaze flew over a hillside.

Behind a large stone at the back of the slope, he spotted a person.

It was that refugee who called himself "Ground Rabbit".

He was hiding behind the stone, secretly watching Gao Chuwu practice boxing from afar.

Whenever Gao Chuwu threw a punch, Ground Rabbit followed with a swing of his fist.

He seemed to be pondering that punch's movement.

Whenever Gao Chuwu kicked a foot, Ground Rabbit followed with a kick.

Li Daoxuan found it amusing, fun fun.

In ancient times, secretly learning others' kung fu seemed a big taboo.

Such people were generally beaten to death when caught.

Then the question arose.

Should I expose him?

If I poked him with a finger while he was stealing a lesson and more focused, he'd probably be scared to death.

Chapter 146: Transitional Equipment

A mischievous impulse struck Li Daoxuan. After all, this person wasn't part of his "own figures" yet; he was still just a "wild figure."

Wild figures were fair game for all sorts of pranks.

Li Daoxuan really stretched his hand inside and lightly tapped the back of that self-proclaimed "Ground Rabbit."

Ground Rabbit was currently secretly practicing Guanzhong Hong Fist, wholly absorbed in his efforts, when he suddenly felt a tremendous force surge against his back. It shoved him forward hard, and he landed face-first with a thud, eating dirt.

This startled him badly. Had he been caught learning kung fu in secret? That could get him beaten to death!

Ground Rabbit, tense with fear, immediately rolled several times close to the ground, already stammering out words of surrender. But when he looked back, there was nothing behind him, absolutely nothing.

Had he been an old villager of Gaojia Village, he might have guessed it was the Deity playing with him. But he was an outsider. Although he had heard others talk about the “Dao Xuan Deity” during his short stay working in the village, he wasn’t very familiar with it.

He hadn’t personally witnessed the Deity manifesting, so he was half doubtful. Naturally, he wouldn’t think to blame the Deity just yet.

Ground Rabbit warily scanned the space behind him for a while, looked left and right, and confirmed there was nothing there. He climbed to his feet, patted the dust off his bottom, completely forgot the incident, and resumed sticking his backside up as he spied on Gao Chuwu.

Li Daoxuan was amused: Is this guy still daring to spy? He forgot what happened just moments ago? What incredibly thick nerves!

Alright, have another taste.

He stretched his hand again and lightly tapped Ground Rabbit’s back.

Ground Rabbit once again felt a powerful surge against his back. Thud! He ate dirt once more. He rolled frantically across the ground, putting a good distance away instantly. Turning his head, he saw, to his shock, the space behind him was still completely empty.

“Who? Who dares mess with Ground Rabbit?!”

Ground Rabbit flashed his rusted, ancestral sword: “Come out! This master will show you my ultimate move: ‘Celestial Rabbit Sword’!”

Li Daoxuan chuckled silently. His finger moved behind Ground Rabbit again and gave a little push.

Thud! Ground Rabbit went down once more.

This time, he seemed somewhat prepared. As he fell, he pushed off the ground with one hand, flipping back onto his feet while simultaneously swinging his rusty sword hard behind him. But Li Daoxuan’s finger had already retracted.

The sword slashed through empty air. Off-balance from the wild swing, he spun and fell heavily again – thud! Once more, he ate dirt.

Ground Rabbit finally realized he’d encountered a “superior master” – one who came without a trace and vanished the same way. Not someone to mess with. Retreat! He sheathed his sword and scampered sheepishly down the hillside.

Li Daoxuan shook his head with a smile. Want to spy? That’s fine. But first, be acknowledged as one of my “own figures.” Then, if you want to learn Army Combat Techniques, I can even find a video for you to study.

This thought suddenly woke Li Daoxuan up. Ah, while Hong Fist is excellent, a treasure of our traditional martial arts, modern Army Combat Techniques are the real deal for killing. We need both tradition and science. Two hands must grasp, both hands must be strong.

Before, it hadn’t been feasible. But now, with Cheng Xu around, he could try.

He opened his regular military history forum, posted anonymously asking: “Which bro has a high-def video of Army Combat Techniques? None of that fuzzy crap.”

Reply 1: I do, 64GB, HD. Link here: XXXXXX

Reply 2: Don't believe No.1! The link's fake. I recognized it right away. Damn, last time the same link claimed it was 'some teacher' stuff. I downloaded for a day and night only to get Calabash Brothers.

Reply 3: Let me be the good guy. Click my profile, my Netdisk's there. You can download from it.

Li Daoxuan thanked No.3, clicked in, found the video – over ten gigabytes, quite large. He started the download and let his computer chug along.

He turned his attention back to the diorama.

Gao Yiye had sneaked up the hill. She was wearing red cotton clothes, her little face flushed red too, either from the cold or the running. She crept up behind Gao Chuwu and suddenly shouted “Wah!” right into his ear.

Gao Chuwu, intensely focused on his kung fu practice, jumped violently at the shout. “Wah!” he yelped, nearly falling over. Turning around and seeing it was Gao Yiye, he relaxed with a sigh: “Yiye, you scared me to death!”

Gao Yiye laughed brightly and ran back down the hill.

Li Daoxuan chuckled and gently called out: “Yiye!”

“Huh? The Deity is here?” Gao Yiye looked up joyfully. “Deity, Happy New Year!”

Li Daoxuan felt warm inside unexpectedly receiving New Year greetings from a figure. “I was visiting relatives yesterday. Were you all okay?”

Gao Yiye: “Ah! So the Deity was visiting other immortals? Gaojia Village is doing great! Everyone was very happy.”

Li Daoxuan: “Go to the artisans' well for me now. I have something I wish to say to Li Da.”

Gao Yiye acknowledged the instruction and scurried off swiftly towards the artisans' well on her little legs.

Many people greeted her along the way: Old Villagers, new laborers, even several labor offenders waved to her. She returned the greetings and soon arrived inside the artisans' well.

Reaching the front of the blacksmith's shop, she found Li Da under the eaves, deeply engrossed in examining a spring he had just produced.

Though he had the spring from the lighter Li Daoxuan had given him before, Li Da couldn't understand why the spring he made, after he heated it red-hot, hammered it thin, coiled it into shape, and finished it... lost all its springiness.

It had spring before being heated! Why did heating it make it flaccid? Utterly baffling.

When Gao Yiye arrived, he was pressing down the small spring he had made with both hands. When he let go, the spring just stayed squashed flat. His head sank; he looked utterly dejected, on the verge of tears.

Gao Yiye: "Li Da, the Deity sent me to tell you something."

Li Da hurriedly wiped away his despairing expression and performed a respectful bow.

Seeing Li Da fail at making the spring, Li Daoxuan wasn't angry. Actually, he fully expected it. Scientific progress worked this way. Giving him a sample was just inspiration. Whether he could reverse-engineer the principles depended on whether his knowledge could spiral upwards.

"Li Da, I remember you said you could make Three-Eyed Divine Firearms?"

Li Da answered quickly: "Yes, I can, Lord Deity."

Li Daoxuan: "I see that your research on the new-style firearm needs a long, long time. Before it's ready, it would be good if our militia could have some transitional firearms to use. So, I want you to teach other blacksmiths how to forge Three-Eyed Divine Firearms. From now on, they can make those, and you can continue focusing on your new-style firearm project."

Li Da immediately replied: "I obey the Decree of the Deity."

Li Daoxuan: "Then I shall bestow some gunpowder upon you. Manage it carefully. Give it to the other blacksmiths for experimenting with the Three-Eyed Divine Firearms."

As he spoke, he started unpacking firecrackers: "Oh, one more thing. The gunpowder particles I have are quite coarse. Before you use it, you must grind it finely first. Be extremely careful during the grinding process. Don't blow yourself up."

Chapter 147: His Father Remained His Father

Li Da spoke respectfully, "Reporting to the Deity. In our mortal realm, crafting firearms and blending gunpowder are tasks undertaken by two distinct types of craftsmen. This humble one is responsible only for forging firearms and lacks proficiency in mixing gunpowder. I dare not recklessly accept this task, fearing that any misstep on my part might cause an explosion with severe consequences."

These words reminded Li Daoxuan of the "Tianqi Explosion," and he pressed further, "Oh? What kind of craftsmen are responsible for gunpowder? Summon them and have them take charge."

Li Da answered respectfully, "The craftsmen appointed by the imperial court to produce and manage gunpowder are called 'gunpowder makers.' Because private possession of weaponry among commoners is considered a treacherous crime deserving decapitation, and gunpowder is managed with extreme strictness, the court keeps these 'gunpowder makers' under very tight control. There isn't a single one in our Gaojia Village right now."

Li Daoxuan asked, "Are there any in Chengcheng County?"

Li Da shook his head, "None there either! On the rare occasions Chengcheng County requires gunpowder, it must be requisitioned from Xi'an Prefecture."

Now Li Daoxuan understood. Only in the Xi'an Prefecture's official workshop were there gunpowder makers, and this profession was heavily guarded by the court.

It seemed firecrackers wouldn't be usable for the time being.

If he entrusted gunpowder management to the unprofessional and mischievous residents of Gaojia Village, they might very well cause a "Tianqi Explosion" right in the middle of the village. The thought of his little people suffering heavy casualties was unacceptable.

When playing simulation games like Sim City, disobedient NPCs often drove players to near-strokes. Li Daoxuan certainly didn't want to introduce a giant bomb just to give the mischievous little people a chance to make him apoplectic.

Fireworks and firecrackers would remain sealed for now. Expanding into this territory would have to wait until they recruited specialized talent.

Talent!

Every advance Gaojia Village made required a corresponding talent. Without talent, they could only remain stagnant, which was incredibly frustrating.

Just as this thought crossed his mind, he spotted, in the corner of his vision, another visitor approaching Gaojia Village from outside.

A horse-drawn cart arrived before the fortress gate.

It was driven by Bai Yuan. The cart's curtain opened, and Madam Bai and Young Master Bai stepped out.

It turned out that yesterday, when Li Daoxuan returned to his rural hometown to see his family, Madam Bai and Young Master Bai had also returned to Bai Family Fortress to reunite with Bai Yuan for the New Year. They shared their reunion dinner on New Year's Eve, and today, Bai Yuan personally drove them back to Gaojia Village.

As soon as Bai Yuan brought the cart to a halt, he abandoned his wife and child without a second thought and sprinted straight into the fortress.

Being a familiar face at Gaojia Fortress, the sentinel naturally didn't stop him and even called out loudly from the fortress wall, "Mr. Bai, what's the rush? Should I call Thirty-Two for you?"

Bai Yuan shouted back, "Too slow! I'll go myself!"

He rushed in one continuous dash towards the discussion hall in the Hakka roundhouse.

At that moment, Thirty-Two was in the discussion hall studying Gaojia Village's inventory list when Bai Yuan shot in, grabbed his arm, and urged, "Quick, quick! Give me a set of the entire 'Elementary Math' from first to sixth grade—all twelve volumes of the celestial text!"

Thirty-Two was stunned for a couple of seconds before suddenly understanding. He chuckled, "Ha! Mr. Bai, has your math gotten beaten by your son?"

As soon as the words left his mouth, Bai Yuan's face flushed a deep purplish-red—the color of pig liver.

Correct!

He had been lectured by his own son.

Yesterday, New Year's Eve, Madam Bai brought Young Master Bai back to Bai Family Fortress to have the reunion dinner with Bai Yuan. Having been apart for so long, Bai Yuan naturally inquired about his son's studies.

After casually testing him on some topics from the Four Books and Five Classics, the conversation inevitably shifted—as Bai Yuan's talks always did—to the Six Arts of Gentlemen.

After a few stilted exchanges, Young Master Bai proudly mentioned that he was currently learning math and doing quite well.

Bai Yuan exclaimed, “Mathematics? Ha! That’s your father’s specialty! I have always been deeply proficient in the ‘Mathematics’ aspect of the Six Arts of Gentlemen. Alright, your father will test your mathematics!”

Thus began the battle between father and son.

Addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, problems like “chickens and rabbits in a cage” ... The two traded blows fairly evenly in their mathematical duel.

Unexpectedly, Young Master Bai proved ungallant. With a swift move, he threw out fractions from the upper volume of the third-grade Elementary Math material, instantly knocking Bai Yuan senseless.

Seizing his advantage, the young master followed up with decimals from the lower volume of the third-grade material.

Addition, subtraction, multiplication, division—with fractions and decimals! How intimidating was that?

Although Bai Yuan could eventually calculate the results, his methods were slow, far outpaced by his son’s speed. The outcome was unambiguous: the “Mathematics” aspect of his renowned Six Arts of Gentlemen was decisively crossed off the list.

Bai Yuan, a man fiercely protective of his pride, simply couldn’t tolerate losing to his son! Where did that leave a father’s authority?!

Therefore, early in the morning on New Year’s Day, harnessing the “Charioteering” art of the Six Arts, he personally drove his wife and son back to Gaojia Fortress. The moment he deposited the mother-son pair right by the fortress gate, he ignored them completely and dashed in, frantic to find Thirty-Two and demand the math textbooks.

Thirty-Two was greatly amused, “Mr. Bai, it’s natural that the student surpasses the master. There’s nothing to get so worked up about. Losing to your own son isn’t losing to an outsider; it’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

Bai Yuan fumed, “Nonsense! I am not some doddering old man! Bai Family Fortress is far from needing to be handed over to my son for management. How could I, still in my prime, concede defeat to my son? Hurry up! Hand over all twelve volumes of the celestial text immediately—the entire ‘Elementary Math!’”

Thirty-Two couldn’t stop laughing but nevertheless led Bai Yuan to the storeroom packed to the brim with textbooks.

Stacks of Hanyu Pinyin and Elementary Math, divided by grade and split into upper and lower volumes, filled the warehouse floor.

“Celestial texts! All celestial texts!”

Bai Yuan plunged into the sea of books and quickly dug out the complete set of Elementary Math. Clutching them to his chest like prized treasures, he threw his head back with a triumphant laugh, “Ha ha ha ha! The twelve volumes of celestial math tomes are finally in my grasp! Within a few days, my proficiency in the ‘Mathematics’ art of the Six Arts of Gentlemen will soar to the celestial levels of the immortal realm! No one in the mortal world will be able to withstand a single clash with me on this! Ha ha ha ha!”

Seeing Bai Yuan so arrogantly gleeful, Li Daoxuan found it amusing too. He felt a mischievous urge to deflate him. He spoke, “Yiye, go tell Bai Yuan, the path of mathematics is as vast as the sea. What he holds is merely elementary math. Beyond that lies middle school mathematics, university mathematics... He still has a long way to go.”

Gao Yiye quickly ran to relay this message.

Bai Yuan was still laughing triumphantly to the heavens when he heard Yiye’s words. He paused, momentarily stunned. Then, instead of being discouraged, his delight intensified. “So the Deity implies that once I finish mastering these twelve volumes, He will grant me even more powerful celestial texts, like Middle School Math and University Math?”

Li Daoxuan couldn’t help but be amused. This Bai Yuan... his perspective is nothing if not optimistic. I meant to discourage him, and instead it fuels his resolve.

Bai Yuan threw back his head with another hearty laugh, “Then I must master these twelve celestial volumes before me as quickly as possible! Once the Deity bestows the even greater celestial texts, I will devour them all! I shall ascend to the pinnacle of the ‘Mathematics’ art, unmatched under heaven! Ha ha ha! That confounded brat will learn—his father remained his father!”

#### Chapter 148: Deity Shows the Way

After thanking the Deity, Bai Yuan returned happily to Bai Family Fortress with a large pile of “heavenly books.” As he left, he even forgot to say goodbye to his wife and child, completely absorbed in the “number” part of his Six Arts of Gentlemen.

Fortunately, this was ancient times, where women had low status, so Madam Bai wouldn’t get angry over such a matter. If it were modern times, Bai Yuan not kneeling on a washboard for days would make this issue impossible to resolve.

Li Daoxuan watched Bai Yuan depart cheerfully and thought: Good, the huge volume of textbooks I prepared will slowly spread through people like Bai Yuan, growing branches and leaves, and one day bear fruit.

Just then, Li Daoxuan suddenly heard noisy voices from the bamboo forest in the southwest and quickly shifted his attention there.

The southwest bamboo forest was where the Short-term Workers Village stood. Li Daoxuan had set down dozens of plastic houses there, scattered along the rocky embankment beside the bamboo forest, forming a separate small village.

A big group of outside short-term workers were gathered by the bamboo forest, seeming to argue over something.

Li Daoxuan looked down and saw a man lying on the ground inside the circle of workers, his forehead bloody and unconscious, appearing to have been hit on the head.

“This is Old Shi Si, what happened to him?”

“I don’t know. I came here earlier to cut bamboo for a bamboo basket and found Old Shi Si lying on the ground with his head bleeding.”

“Oh dear, quick, call a doctor.”

‘Where would we find a doctor in our village?’

The crowd was thrown into disarray.

Right then, Old Shi Si, lying unconscious on the ground, actually woke up. He opened his eyes, yelled “Aiya,” and rubbed his head: “Damn it, I was robbed!”

With his words, the onlookers sighed in relief.

Old Shi Si looked displeased: “Early in the morning, I carried a bag of flour and a piece of meat from home to go give gifts to a blacksmith master in the fortress, aiming to apprentice.”

Hearing this, the short-term workers understood—bringing gifts at New Year’s, if the master was happy and taught a skill or two, they could become artisans. Then their wages would boom. Old Shi Si was truly clever; why hadn’t they thought of it?

Old Shi Si: “I never expected, shortly after leaving home, to be dragged into the bamboo forest. Then four or five Fearsome Deity guys waving clubs threatened me, demanding I hand over the flour and meat. I refused, so they hit me with a club, stole the things, and ran. Damn it.”

The short-term workers were startled at those words: “Are bandits back again?”

“No way, the bandit troubles in Chengcheng County just stopped recently.”

“Oh God! I never want to fight again.”

The short-term workers were thrown into disarray.

Li Daoxuan couldn't help frowning. He casually opened the Surveillance Camera app and pulled up all the videos from dawn to now. The bamboo forest was at the box's edge, so the recordings only showed the forest's fringe, with vague figures moving inside but no clear details.

One short-term worker said: "Everyone, stop the noise. With this happening, we should report it to Thirty-Two and have the fortress send the civilian corps to handle it, right?"

Another short-term worker shook his head: "What are we? Outside villagers here for short-term jobs; how can we be like the fortress locals? Would the civilian corps care about our troubles?"

"That... makes sense..."

The short-term workers felt small concerns.

Hearing this, Li Daoxuan felt sympathy for these wild figures. They had come from afar seeking a Common Trade in Gaojia Village, placing themselves lowly, cautious and careful, fearing their livelihood would be ruined. Even with this incident, they dared not report it to the fortress.

That mindset was truly painful.

Just as Li Daoxuan planned to call Gao Yiye to manage this, suddenly, a man in tattered clothes, with a rusty sword hanging at his waist, burst from the worker group—it was that "Ground Rabbit" who secretly studied martial arts from Gao Chuwu, rabbit master.

Ground Rabbit stepped forward!

Ground Rabbit, believing himself a true hero, couldn't stay silent at such a time. He immediately took center position and shouted to the anxious workers: "Brothers, don't panic. Whether the fortress helps or not aside, can't we act ourselves?"

The crowd was puzzled: "You are..."

Ground Rabbit said proudly: "My name is Ground Rabbit. I'm a recent short-term worker too, but unlike you all, I never back down when trouble hits."

The crowd: "..."

Ground Rabbit yelled: "Haven't you seen? This isn't bandits or rebels; it's just some stupid thieves robbing things. What are you scared of?"

The short-term workers buzzed with noisy discussion.

Ground Rabbit: "All of you, shut up! Stop the noise and listen to Mr. Rabbit. You few, grab clubs. You others, grab some too. Then all follow Mr. Rabbit. We'll reclaim Old Shi Si's things, teach those thieves a lesson, and scare them off. Otherwise, if they robbed Old Shi Si today, tomorrow they'll rob Zhang Laowu. How would our lives go on?"

Hearing this, the short-term workers realized: That made sense!

If this bunch of thieves wasn't dealt with, any of them could be dragged into the bamboo for a clubbing anytime. How could that be allowed?

The group acted right away, grabbing clubs. Soon, over a dozen men were armed and ready. Ground Rabbit waved his hand: "Follow Mr. Rabbit!"

Someone asked: "Mr. Rabbit, do you know where the thieves fled?"

Hearing someone call him Mr. Rabbit, Ground Rabbit got prouder. He laughed aloud: "Mr. Rabbit has rich underworld savvy. One look at the footprints shows where they went."

"Report, Mr. Rabbit, no thief footprints found here. The ground is all rocks."

Ground Rabbit: "..."

Sheer awkwardness!

Frozen scene!

Li Daoxuan found it fun too. Amusing, I'll help you out.

He reached for "West" and "South" buttons, jabbing them wildly to shift his view rapidly, like playing StarCraft and hunting a zergling on the revealed map without fog of war.

Soon enough, he actually found them.

Five ragged men ducking behind some small slopes gathered dry sticks and were lighting a fire, apparently to roast the meat stolen from Old Shi Si...

Li Daoxuan moved his view back above the bamboo forest, reached into the box, and drew a huge arrow on the ground before the workers.

Ground Rabbit was still dazed then, unable to find footprints and unsure how to track, when suddenly a rumbling sound came. An invisible force seemed to push aside chunks of rocks, revealing a giant arrow on the ground pointing far away...

Longer-tenured workers cheered instantly: "The Deity guides us."

Only Ground Rabbit was shocked: "Huh? Was that... Deity manifesting?"

Chapter 149: Sent to the Labor Offenders Village

Ground Rabbit hadn't been in Gaojia Village for long. Though he'd often heard villagers talk about the Deity, he'd never seen the Deity manifest personally and remained skeptical, half-believing, half-doubting.

This time, however, was his first firsthand encounter with the Deity manifesting.

That enormous arrow on the ground—what immense power could have pushed aside the scattered stones to etch such a massive symbol!

Suddenly, Ground Rabbit remembered how he'd been shoved from behind when spying on Gao Chuwu practicing his punches. Could it have been...?

“Ahhhhh!”

Thoroughly terrified, Ground Rabbit slammed to the ground, prostrating himself like a child who'd been beaten with a bamboo stick by his mother and now knelt in apology. “Deity, I was wrong! I shouldn't have spied on others' martial techniques. Please spare this lowly one!”

Li Daoxuan had already taught him a lesson. Since the principle is no double punishment for one crime, he smiled and withdrew his hand.

Ground Rabbit stayed face-down for several seconds. Noting no calamity came from the Deity, he sighed in relief and sprang up instantly. “Brothers! Follow Old Rabbit! With the Deity guiding us, we're taking back Old Shi Si's things!”

The short-term workers' morale surged. “The Deity protects us!”

Ground Rabbit charged ahead toward the arrow's direction, leading the pack. The arrow adjusted constantly, guiding them behind the hillside.

Ground Rabbit spotted a group of men ahead starting a fire, likely preparing to roast meat. “Hey! Fools! How dare you rob us short-term workers? Take my blade!”

He drew his rusty sword and rushed at them.

The men by the fire startled, scrambling to their feet and grabbing wooden clubs.

Ground Rabbit closed the distance in three strides and bellowed, “HEAVEN! RABBIT! BREAK! DOMINANCE! SWORD!”

He swung his rusty sword in a grand arc to deliver a mighty strike—

The blade never landed.

His foot caught on a rock, and he slammed face-first onto the ground.

Short-term workers stampeded over him—several boots landed squarely on his back...

By the time Ground Rabbit struggled up, groaning “Ouch!”, his comrades had already subdued all five bandits. Old Shi Si was recovering his flour bag from the grass, clutching it protectively to his chest.

Ground Rabbit: “...”

Fearful of being humiliated and mocked, he was instead met with earnest gazes. “Mr. Rabbit, the fools are caught and the goods are back! What now?”

Huh? Still calling me “Mr. Rabbit”?

Rushing with pride, Ground Rabbit picked up his rusty sword and approached the bound bandits.

He glared for a long moment. “Nothing to eat? That why you robbed us?”

The five cowered, heads lowered. In such harsh times, stealing food invited death—any word could bring a fatal club strike. They stayed silent.

Ground Rabbit: “Outlaws ‘robbing the rich to aid the poor’ is one thing, but robbing the poor? Wrong!”

He pulled Old Shi Si forward. “See him? Worn-out clothes, barely any flour saved for a kungfu teacher’s gift! How could you steal that? Want to be real heroes? Storm the capital! Rob the emperor! Then I’d call you five brave men!”

One bandit finally snapped back, “You talk so big! Why don’t you rob the emperor first?”

Ground Rabbit:” ...”

That stunned him. Once, he planned to follow Big Brother Wang Er on a heroic quest across the land... including robbing the emperor! So why, after arriving at Gaojia Village... was he stuck laboring?

Huh? Huh? Huh?

What happened?

I, Ground Rabbit—a famed hero—why am I here... laboring?

His rusty sword clattered to the ground.

Ground Rabbit crouched, clutching his head— +999 mental contamination. Thinking became impossible.

Seeing their “leader” incapacitated, the short-term workers took matters into their own hands. “Hey Old Shi Si, they beat you! What to do with them?”

Old Shi Si: “Me? I... I’m hardly qualified.”

“Just say: beat them or free them?”

Old Shi Si: “The Deity... must be watching from above! We should ask His guidance!”

Everyone looked hopefully skyward.

Li Daoxuan had no intention of micromanaging. If he handled every small crime, expanding his territory would be unbearable. His people needed to think!

With no divine command coming, they had to brainstorm. Gears turned... and a lightbulb went off above Old Shi Si's head! "Got it! Labor Offenders Village! Aren't those people criminals serving penance? Make these five join them!"

The others cheered. "That's how it should be!"

They hauled up the bandits. Passing Ground Rabbit—still bewildered on the ground—Old Shi Si gave him a pull. "Mr. Rabbit, we're going back."

Ground Rabbit mumbled, numbly picked up his ancestral rusty sword, and trailed behind.

Li Daoxuan approved. Excellent! By demonstrating principles, then letting them innovate, they'd forge a new legal spirit beyond "The Great Ming Code".

A legal mindset was vital!

That phrase always rang true: "People on modern streets don't randomly slash you. Not because they're saints—but bound by law!"

The short-term workers delivered the five bandits to the fort entrance and reported to Thirty-Two. Thirty-Two agreed instantly: "Good! Throw them into Labor Offenders Village!"

Kicked through the entrance, the bandits were left standing inside, utterly confused. Why no jail? Why no punishment?

Wasn't this a death sentence?

They stood paralyzed—unsure if escape was even possible.

A labor offender waved at them. “You five for reform? Saw you getting kicked in. Come here! I’m generous—I’ll teach you the rules.”

#### Chapter 150: The Development of Gaojia Village

Xing Honglang and her group departed from Gaojia Village, journeyed eastward, passed Heyang County, stealthily crossed the Yellow River at an illegal crossing point, and entered Shanxi Province. Continuing their rapid march eastward, they soon arrived at Pingyang Prefecture.

Pingyang Prefecture, present-day Linfen County, administered six departments and twenty-eight counties. The prefecture connected with Shangdang to the east, bordered the Yellow River to the west, linked with Bian and Luo to the south, and was shielded by Jinyang to the north.

It was a land frequently ravaged by war.

Pingyang Prefecture was bustling with numerous merchants and travelers. Though it couldn’t compare to Xi’an Prefecture, it was still an excellent place to sell goods.

Arriving in this place, Xing Honglang naturally intended a big operation. The high-quality goods sourced from Gaojia Village were quickly brought out for vigorous selling. In no time, all the goods were sold out, and her pockets were once again filled with gold, silver, and copper coins.

This meant it was time to return to Gaojia Village to replenish their stock.

Leading her thirty to forty subordinates, Xing Honglang left Pingyang Prefecture, planning to return to Gaojia Village. After crossing the Yellow River back into Shaanxi and traversing Heyang County, they encountered several commoners fleeing in disarray along the mountain path leading to a small village.

Some were shouting as they ran, “Run! Bandits are coming! So many bandits! Hurry!”

Villagers immediately retreated into their homes and bolted their doors.

The village fell silent in an instant, leaving only Xing Honglang and her thirty to forty salt smugglers standing there.

Xing Honglang muttered, "Great. Now we're conspicuous targets."

Before her self-mockery was complete, hundreds of bandit troops surged out thunderously ahead. Their chaotic equipment clearly marked them as hastily assembled rioters. At their forefront was a large, imposing man with coarse features radiating viciousness.

This burly man instantly spotted the conspicuous group led by Xing Honglang.

A woman on horseback, followed by thirty to forty reasonably well-dressed men—clearly people of some means.

The big man grinned widely, "Brothers! Charge! This haul should net us a big prize."

Xing Honglang cursed, "Damn it! How dare you think about robbing your granny?"

A subordinate sweated, "Boss, that's the wrong gender!"

Xing Honglang shot him a furious glare.

The salt smugglers drew their waist knives with sharp, synchronized sounds.

Xing Honglang also drew her own waist knife, laughing loudly, "Your granny has roamed north and south for years! This is the first time I've met someone who charges straight to robbery without even a word of greeting! None in the righteous brotherhood these days are real men! All a damn bunch of unruly bandits! Brothers! Charge for your granny!"

The salt smugglers roared as one and charged with knives raised.

A chaotic clash ensued between the two sides.

The combat effectiveness of professional salt smugglers was incomparable to that of a hastily assembled rabble. Despite being outnumbered, Xing Honglang's group quickly gained the upper hand. In a short time, they battered the bandit troops into a humiliated, mud-streaked retreat.

"Hmph! Trash." Xing Honglang thrust a dismissive gesture at the fleeing bandit army's back, only to suddenly notice her right sleeve was entirely soaked crimson. Blood dripped down steadily, pattering to the ground.

Huh? She was wounded? When did that happen?

...

In the first month of Chongzhen Year One.

The population of Gaojia Village had once again increased significantly.

More and more refugees were arriving at Gaojia Village seeking food.

Liang Shixian, the magistrate of Chengcheng County, of course knew about this, but he did nothing to stop it.

Back when Li Daoxuan had promised him relief grain, Thirty-Two and Magistrate Liang Shixian's steward had held detailed talks concerning disaster relief measures. When discussing establishing congee distribution points in various locations, it had been agreed that Gaojia Village would host one such point.

Liang Shixian was desperate to aid the people and certainly wouldn't stop such a charitable act.

Therefore, when numerous refugees spread news in the county town that Lord Li of Gaojia Village distributed more congee than the county and could actually fill stomachs, Liang Shixian heard this without anger; instead, he felt greatly encouraged.

Having struggled with the refugee crisis over the past months, Liang Shixian was weary to the bone. Now that they voluntarily went to Gaojia Village for food, it could save him some trouble—why not welcome it?

Under such circumstances, Gaojia Village's population inevitably grew.

Especially the Short-term Workers Village, whose numbers swelled dramatically.

Li Daoxuan continuously placed plastic houses.

Soon, the area southwest near the bamboo grove ran out of space. Li Daoxuan had to place another cluster of houses along the official road to the southwest. In no time, that area too became overcrowded...

Before anyone realized, "satellite villages" had formed around Gaojia Fortress.

The original Gaojia Village, with its 42 villagers, had transformed into a large town of over a thousand people.

Unconsciously, Li Daoxuan's viewing scope expanded significantly. The "Zhuangjia Village" where Zhuang Guangdao initiated his rebellion now appeared on the box's surface, along with unfamiliar names like Zhangjia Village and Li Family Village.

With more people came a greater need for job positions.

This proved troublesome.

Li Daoxuan lacked enough job positions to offer them. After much thought, only one solution emerged: "Begin road construction! All surplus labor must work on road construction."

Centered around Gaojia Village, cement roads began extending toward nearby villages. Zhengjia Village was the starting point. The cement road toward Wangjia Village was nearly ready for travel, while Zhuangjia Village, Zhangjia Village, Li Family Village, and others simultaneously began roadwork.

Construction sites buzzed with activity across a ten-li radius around Gaojia Village.

At this moment, Li Daoxuan understood why the road near his apartment underwent constant repairs—laborers needed work.

As cement demand rose, Li Daoxuan stopped taking construction site supplies. Instead, he bought a large bag of cement himself, while villagers sourced river sand independently.

Whenever possible, villagers handled tasks themselves—this strategy also created more job positions.

Increased territory meant more blind spots in Li Daoxuan's view. He usually kept his perspective fixed above Gaojia Fortress, occasionally inspecting other areas or triggering rainfall on farmlands when needed. Beyond these moments, he preferred watching Gaojia Village.

When incidents occurred beyond his sight, he simply couldn't be everywhere.

Sometimes he sighed: even deities couldn't protect every life on earth, let alone a mere mortal like himself.

This underscored the growing importance of the militia.

Cheng Xu's militia now exceeded one hundred members.

The sixty new recruits all came from the Short-term Workers Village.

Able-bodied youths who spent considerable time in Gaojia Village and proved trustworthy would earn Cheng Xu's recruitment offer. Once enlisted, militia members stopped manual labor—they enjoyed better meals and generous pay.

Yet... daily training was arduous, with most civilians incapable of enduring it. After drills, they reported to the Saint Lady, who taught them principles of conduct while they recited one hundred times: "You are children of the common folk—you mustn't take even a needle or thread from them."