

Great Ming 211

Chapter 211: Deity's Unexpected Festival

At noon, a pot of Cantonese beef offal hotpot was placed on Li Daoxuan's desk. While happily eating, he browsed his video channel "Daily Life in the Tiny Kingdom."

Yesterday, he had uploaded a short clip of "Shaanbei Diaoqu," and checking it today brought a satisfied smile. "This piece sounds really old-fashioned!"

"This troupe looks so darn rustic, full of countryside vibes. Did the creator actually travel to rural Northern Shaanxi to find a local band just for this video?"

"Getting this rustic is no easy feat."

"Troupes like this are hard to find nowadays. Hiring them might not cost much, but tracking them down requires extensive wandering through Northern Shaanxi villages. Finding them probably costs way more than hiring them."

"New here? You don't know the creator's quirks yet—he's all about big investments! He splurges wildly on special effects and hiring professionals for every video."

"I totally believe he spent a fortune hiring people to comb through Northern Shaanxi villages to find such a rustic troupe."

Likes poured in rapidly. Many plastic opera stages sold through the shopping cart, selling quite a few plastic houses alongside. He pocketed another small tens of thousands in commission.

Money used to excite Li Daoxuan, but earning so much lately left him mildly numb. He closed the tab without a second thought.

Just then, WeChat blinked.

Opening it, he saw a message from Cai Xinzi: "There's a micro-sculpting art exhibition. Interested?"

Li Daoxuan, surprised, typed: “Huh?”

Cai Xinzi replied: “Remember that client who keeps commissioning miniature Buddha statues? Just messaged me about a micro-sculpting art expo in Magic City (Shanghai), inviting artists nationwide. You bring your pieces for display—mostly for exchange. He thinks your work is amazing and qualifies.”

Li Daoxuan chuckled: “No time to run off to Shanghai.”

Cai Xinzi: “You wouldn’t need to go personally. Masters are allowed some reserve. Just send someone with your work.”

Li Daoxuan: “Like you?”

Cai Xinzi: “Exactly me! I’m heading to Shanghai anyway for an anime merchandise business conference. You’ve made me good money; helping you out is the least I can do.”

Li Daoxuan wasn’t planning to participate, but his gaze fell on the “Dao Xuan Deity Cave” on his desk. Built with the collective effort of over a hundred villagers when they arrived, this tiny Daoist temple had to be dismantled later to make room for the Hakka roundhouse. He’d “taken it up to the heavens.”

Inside sat a tiny “Dao Xuan Deity statue,” miniature incense burner, candle holders, a small table, chairs, and even a playful touch—a miniature “Hanyu Pinyin” book placed on its table.

This thing... seemed quite nice?

Leaving it here felt wasteful. Why not exhibit it? Let everyone enjoy the novelty.

“Fine! I have a miniature Daoist temple. Take it to Shanghai for me.”

“Deal. Dropping by tomorrow to pick it up.”

Closing WeChat, Li Daoxuan picked up his bowl. Just then, a large crowd entered his view.

Cheng Xu had returned. Bai Yuan too. Behind them trailed many disheveled, gaunt, and dispirited commoners.

Over three thousand people appeared—an overwhelming sight. Gaojia Village itself only had around a thousand residents. Seeing so many newcomers, panic was inevitable.

Gaojia Fortress villagers froze in alarm. Many stopped working, eyeing the arrivals warily. Only recognizing the militia and Bai Yuan did they relax.

Thirty-Two (the manager) and Gao Yiye rushed forward.

Thirty-Two shouted from afar: “Mr. Bai, you brought the people of Qingjian County!?”

Bai Yuan smiled back: “Yes! Honored to finally serve the Deity some. These three thousand from Qingjian County left my Bai Family Fortress early this morning. They walked over two hours, covering thirty-some li. They’re exhausted and hungry, Third Manager. See about getting some food arranged to settle them.”

Thirty-Two nodded agreeably: “Food we have plenty, bestowed generously by the Deity. But cooking pots...”

Dian Deng Zi stepped forward: “We brought many pots with us.”

Thirty-Two hesitated: “But... firewood for cooking... We can’t provide much immediately. The trees near Gaojia Village are gone. Gathering wood requires going farther away. Cooking might take time. The friends from Qingjian may have to wait, hungry.”

Everyone fell into an awkward silence.

Listening from above, Li Daoxuan sighed internally: Exactly. A small village of just over a thousand absorbing over three thousand refugees highlighted shortages everywhere. Every practical detail trips them up.

Only his golden hand, his mighty assistance, could solve this kind of bottleneck.

Coincidentally, a pot of Cantonese beef offal sat on his desk. Today, he decided, he'd treat these newcomers to something special. Let them experience what it meant to "search the world later and find nothing tasting quite this good."

Li Daoxuan spoke: "Yiye! Inform everyone. Today is a festival—named 'Deity's Unexpected Festival.' Gather them all for a grand feast."

Gao Yiye immediately boomed the divine edict.

At her call, surrounding Gaojia villagers halted their work. Joyfully, they surged forward. Over a thousand people assembled quickly, everyone adopting a posture of reverence, bowing towards the sky in thanks for the Deity's immense grace. Then, with wide, expectant eyes, they stared intently at the low cloud.

Waiting to see what creation the Deity would "unexpectedly" produce.

The three thousand newcomers looked utterly bewildered. Dian Deng Zi spoke for them: "Who is the Deity? And what strange festival is this 'Deity's Unexpected Festival'?"

Bai Yuan just grinned: "Just watch!"

The low cloud parted. An enormous chunk of meat descended from the heavens. As it neared the ground, it paused mid-air. A strange, non-absorbent sheet unfurled beneath it, settling smoothly on the earth... and the huge meat chunk landed squarely upon it...

This meat differed from the Deity's usual gifts—raw chicken, raw pork meant for villagers to cook. This time, the Deity bestowed cooked meat, its surface glistening with a rich sauce. Even from a distance, its savory aroma filled the air.

“The grain looks like beef... could it be... a huge slab of braised beef?”

Thirty-Two, Bai Yuan, and Cheng Xu were more worldly, yet even they stared. This beef resembled braised beef visually, yet the scent hinted at subtle differences—more complex spices than they'd ever encountered before. Its mere aroma promised an experience utterly foreign.

Chapter 212: Starting a New Life

“Yiye, have everyone share this.” Li Daoxuan said with a laugh: “This is a special gift from the Deity for the Deity's Unexpected Festival, so you should eat it happily.”

Once he said that, the playful girl Gao Yiye could not hold back any longer. She jumped up first, intending to bite it right away, but after thinking it over, she felt a bit embarrassed. With so many people sharing, it was uncivilized to take a bite herself.

Fortunately, a clever villager next to her offered a knife immediately.

He had the knife but did not dare to start first; for such a “major festival ceremony”, one must definitely wait for the Saint Lady to begin.

Gao Yiye cut a small piece from the huge beef using the knife and tossed it into her mouth. At that instant, her facial expression turned utterly stunning.

Cantonese cuisine had an advantage: its strong compatibility matched most Chinese stomachs well, not like Sichuan dishes that might overwhelm out-of-towners.

As this Cantonese beef stew flavor entered her mouth, it was truly amazing.

Such rich seasonings, such deep layers of taste.

Gao Yiye had a big chunk of beef stuffed in her mouth, cheeks bulging as she chewed. She spoke while eating, her words slurred: “Good, really good, everyone... come quickly... share it... good...”

Since the Saint Lady had started, others could naturally begin their meal.

The villagers from Gaojia Village cheered first, grabbing knives to join in...

Then those from Zhengjia Village and Zhuangjia Village also grabbed knives to act...

Finally, the three thousand people from Qingjian County snapped out of their shock over the “meat falling from the sky”. Forget how the meat arrived or who the Deity was; set confusion aside, fill their bellies first, and grab knives to go forward...

“Hey, hey, newcomers, you have starved too long. Do not eat too much at once, or you will get diarrhea,” Thirty-Two shouted, jumping up in the crowd.

“We folks from Qingjian County are not that fragile!”

“Hey, isn’t this unrelated to where people are from?”

“Do not stuff yourselves! Rest assured, there is more food for the next meal.”

From Li Daoxuan’s perspective above, over four thousand people gathered around the massive piece of beef for a grand feast. It looked like a huge swarm of ants carrying food—thoroughly captivating.

This kind of grand spectacle was impossible to see earlier when the population was too small.

Indeed, the more the village developed and expanded, the more novel scenes one could witness.

This boxed world of little ones certainly was not raised in vain.

The revelry inside the box lasted a full half-hour. The well-fed villagers from the Short-term Workers Village dispersed first, returning to their job positions. In Gaojia Village now, those from the Short-term Workers Village worked the hardest. Following them were the labor offenders, who also hurried back to work hard, earning performance points to reduce their sentences and regain freedom sooner. Then the original forty-two villagers of Gaojia Village patted their bellies contentedly and strolled to aid digestion.

Only over three thousand Qingjian County people remained; after filling their stomachs, they had no idea what to do next, staring blankly at each other, awaiting instructions.

Gao Yiye circled back and walked over, standing before Dian Deng Zi Zhao Sheng with a smile: “Mr. Zhao, the Deity has commanded: take your Villagers first on the small train to your Refugee Valley to settle.”

“Okay,” Dian Deng Zi promptly ordered everyone: “Everyone rise! Do you see that colorful building over there? It is called a station; we go there to board it, to our new home.”

The common folk from Qingjian County looked over curiously. Few had ever heard of a station, but at a glance, they saw an enormous strange vehicle, like a giant caterpillar, sitting quietly beside it.

“Ride in that?”

“Is that really a car? It feels like a massive bug, about to eat people.”

Dian Deng Zi shouted loudly: “No need to fear; it is a car, not a strange bug. Everyone come.”

He led the group towards the small train.

Then a figure in white clothes raced ahead faster than they could run, legs pumping as he charged at the small train. It was Bai Yuan, waving while he rushed: “I will drive; I will drive. Among the Six Arts of Gentlemen, ‘driving’ is my specialty.”

The two train drivers broke a sweat: “Mr. Bai, you just learned; you cannot drive right away. You still need practice. This time, the cars are full of people; if an accident happens, casualties could be severe.”

Bai Yuan: “Hmm... that is a point. Then I will continue to observe and learn in the engine.”

The Qingjian County people queued to board the train.

There were twelve carriages; each held only one hundred people, so this small train could transport just twelve hundred at once—its capacity was insufficient.

It would take three trips to carry all Qingjian County residents to the Refugee Valley.

Luckily, the one-way distance was only six li. At train speed, a single trip took mere minutes. Only boarding and exiting took extra time, so several rounds posed no issue.

Thus, the first group of twelve hundred people boarded the small train, starting toward their new home.

Woo! It made a clunking sound...

To that melodious noise, the small train first passed through the wheat field of Gaojia Village.

All passengers on board chorused a “wow” of marvel. The lovely wheat field was soon to be harvested. The train traversed slopes, with greenery filling the journey everywhere. Rain had fallen nearby, covering the mountains with wildflowers and grass.

In their hearts, some passengers thought: Digging wild vegetables here looks easy; wild greens are all over.

There was more grass root than could be eaten—simply endless.

Shortly, the train reached the Refugee Valley station and halted. Dian Deng Zi disembarked first, then shouted loudly for people from the following carriages to get off.

Twelve hundred people jumped off the train one after another. They then beheld a vibrant village filled with brightly colored buildings, nestled quietly in the valley, exuding a beauty like paradise.

“Wow, is this our new home?”

“What a lovely place!”

“Can we truly move in here?”

Some started running toward the valley.

Dian Deng Zi Zhao Sheng yelled loudly: “No hurries at all; wait. You cannot claim houses yourselves—it could lead to fights. After everyone arrives, we will discuss room allocations with the Village Chiefs.”

The villagers always respected him; hearing his words calmed them down. They sat quietly...

...waiting for the small train to return and bring a second and then a third group. Once all were gathered, they sat grouped by their original villages.

Zhao Sheng sat with several Village Chiefs, deciding which village’s people stayed in which area of the valley. Then villagers entered the valley section by section, living in various large colorful houses.

This was no easy task. With three thousand people, noise abounded; each household had unique issues. It lasted half a day before sunset, when Qingjian County residents finally found their dwellings.

Everyone placed their few possessions inside and stepped out. Meeting on the streets, smiles naturally curved their lips. A new life was about to begin; clearly, it would not be worse than before—only better.

Chapter 213: Please Dont Cause Any Trouble

Li Daoxuan sat by the box, watching the newly arrived little figures scurrying about in Refugee Valley. Arriving in a new place meant countless tasks awaited them. Though they now had houses, they lacked everything else.

Their first priority was solving the problem of food. They had to search for stones, dig up earth to build earthen stoves, gather firewood, and prepare pots, pans, bowls, and utensils.

The list of necessities was long, but these commoners had nothing. Acquiring these household items was far from easy.

Job positions had to be provided to them quickly—ideally, daily-paid work—so they could earn income as soon as possible. With cash in hand, they could buy daily necessities and get their lives back on track.

Li Daoxuan shifted his view back to Gaojia Village, where Thirty-Two, Bai Yuan, Gao Yiye, Tan Liwen, and others chatted on the balcony of the lookout tower's third floor.

Bai Yuan said, "With matters here settled, I must return to Bai Family Fortress."

Thirty-Two cupped his hands in a gesture of respect. "Thank you for your efforts, Mr. Bai."

Bai Yuan smiled. "It's an honor to serve the Deity; there's no hardship involved."

After bidding farewell to everyone with a bow, he left Gaojia Village and headed toward Bai Family Fortress.

The remaining group continued their conversation.

Tan Liwen spoke up, "Dong Weng, this latest group from Qingjian County—over three thousand people—is truly large. We must find them job positions swiftly to avoid trouble. But honestly, I'm uncertain what we can have them do on such short notice."

Thirty-Two frowned. "They are outsiders, I'm somewhat—"

Li Daoxuan's voice interrupted, "Don't treat them as outsiders. Or have you forgotten? To Gaojia Village, you too were once an outsider."

Gao Yiye heard him and suddenly perked up, relaying his words.

Thirty-Two's face flushed slightly at this. Of course! How could I start viewing newcomers as outsiders? Truthfully, apart from the village's original forty-two settlers, everyone here could be considered an outsider.

I was indeed being... that.

He quickly bowed toward the sky. "Deity, that wasn't my intention. I merely worried their numbers are overwhelming. With them being new and largely unknown, I hesitate to lower my guard hastily. Accepting outsiders carelessly might lead to... well..."

He didn't complete the thought, but Li Daoxuan understood—worried they might commit crimes. That concern wasn't surprising.

Not just in the late Ming era like now. Even in later times, with greater openness and stronger legal systems, people viewed "outsiders" with caution and prejudice, fearing they'd disrupt local harmony. Major examples included developed nations rejecting immigrants from poorer regions, prosperous cities discriminating against migrant workers from smaller towns, even housing communities ostracizing tenants.

This mentality existed universally, yet no one could fully erase it.

Because the reality that outsiders could increase crime rates must be acknowledged—a few bad elements could taint a whole group's reputation.

Li Daoxuan could only guide as much as possible, using his "golden hand" from above to ease the "locals'" fears and suspicions toward newcomers.

"Don't worry," Li Daoxuan said with a smile. "It's understandable for a thousand people to feel anxious facing three thousand newcomers. But remember—I watch from above constantly. Whether newcomers number in the thousands or thirty million, what is there to fear?"

Thirty-Two's spirits lifted instantly. "True! We have the Deity's protection! No matter how many come, there's no need for unease."

Tan Liwen also rushed with pride. Yes! With a deity literally looking down from three feet above, why fear three thousand newcomers? We really worried for nothing.

Li Daoxuan continued, “Tomorrow, recruit workers from Refugee Valley for every trade. We need more blacksmiths now that the firearms bureau produces gunpowder—we must begin manufacturing firearms. More firearms mean more gunpowder, so the bureau also requires more apprentices. With population growth, demand rises for pots and utensils; thus, kiln workers and carpenters must increase too...”

The revelation hit Thirty-Two. “All trades must recruit from Refugee Valley! Mix their people with ours through shared living and work. Soon enough, they’ll become part of Gaojia Village.”

Exactly! Absorption and assimilation. Li Daoxuan silently applauded. My greatest pride in Chinese civilization? Our immense capacity to absorb! No matter how formidable outside forces are, once they enter our land and engage with us, they eventually integrate into the fabric of our civilization—becoming one of our fifty-six ethnicities.

Mongolia invaded and became Mongols; the Manchus conquered and became Manchus.

Even once-foes transform into friends and kin, jointly building new homes.

Gaojia Village should cultivate this very same power!

Assimilating wild figures into loyal ones—problem solved.

The key to assimilation? Culture. Gaojia Village must radiate its own unique charm. Let newcomers sense its distinctive atmosphere and happiness—they’ll voluntarily become one of us.

And truthfully, Gaojia Village was indeed happier and more prosperous than the outside world. Everyone who arrived found its lifestyle irresistibly appealing, yearning to belong.

That was Gaojia Village’s greatest strength.

“Fear nothing. Boldly scatter them among you.”

With that final instruction, Li Daoxuan stopped speaking. He even closed the lid—Gao Yiye could no longer see him or the box.

Thirty-Two watched the low cloud in the sky gradually disperse. Knowing the Deity had departed, he made a long, deep bow toward the fading wisps. Solemnly, he said, “I will not fail this duty.”

Gao Yiye blinked her eyes playfully and chuckled. “The Deity’s gone—probably visiting other immortals now.”

Li Daoxuan smiled beneath the lid: I haven’t left! I’m just watching you through the glass. He could hear her perfectly—the lid wasn’t soundproof.

“Hehehe.” Gao Yiye giggled again. “Steward Thirty-Two, there’s something I wish to have your printing house publish... to sell to villagers.”

Thirty-Two studied her expression. “Not commissioned by the Deity?”

“Nope!” Gao Yiye grinned impishly. “I painted it myself—just finished it! It’s an amazing comic book story. I sketched it secretly, hiding from the Deity! So much effort went into this!”

At “hiding from the Deity,” Thirty-Two’s expression grew solemn. “Saint Lady Gao Yiye,” he said gravely, “please, don’t cause any trouble.”

Chapter 214: Dao Xuan Deity’s Demon Elimination Tale

“No mischief, I really didn’t cause mischief.”

Gao Yiye kept denying mischief, yet a sly smile crept into the corners of her eyes.

After all, she was still just a fifteen-year-old child. Though treated as a Saint Lady by many over the past half year, her playful nature remained unchanged.

Thirty-Two grew increasingly uneasy. “What kind of troublemaking thing did you draw? And why must the Deity not know? Let me tell you, my publishing house won’t print anything too outrageous.”

Gao Yiye pouted. “It’s not that mischievous. Only a tiny bit, but the rest is quite proper.”

Thirty-Two eyed her warily. “Show it to me.”

Gao Yiye giggled and slipped back into her room, reappearing moments later with a thick stack of papers. Every sheet was densely covered with drawings, and Arabic numerals in the bottom right corner marked the page numbers.

Thirty-Two grabbed the first page and gasped in shock. Wasn’t this a drawing of Dao Xuan Deity?

Though he had never seen the Deity’s face in person, who didn’t view his statue daily? The resemblance was unmistakable at a glance.

Li Daoxuan, outside the box, saw it too. Wasn’t that my face? True, she made me 32% more handsome and 3200% more imposing—whoa there! The little minx painted me for fun, and has she ever sharpened her drawing skills!

Thirty-Two was horrified. “You... you didn’t use the Deity for mischief, did you?”

Gao Yiye chirped, “Hehe, I’d never dare use the Deity mischievously! I drew a tale of him banishing monsters and demons.”

Thirty-Two hastily flipped to the second page... then the third...

Li Daoxuan peered alongside them.

He grasped the tale swiftly. It truly centered on subduing evil—its basic arc mirroring those in Shaanbei Diaoqu’s Dao Emotion plays. Without strong creative muscle, the young girl borrowed that world-view wholesale from the plays she knew.

The story went like this: Dao Xuan Deity descended to the earthly realm for an immortal's journey and encountered a small village. Nearby mountains housed vicious bandits who stormed the village, slaying and setting fires to plunder grain.

Enraged, Dao Xuan Deity smote them—with one resounding slap, he flattened a bandit into paste.

After the bandit's end, the Deity bestowed grain upon the village. Then he journeyed onward.

But when he was barely gone, another savage monster descended upon the village—this creature bore a startling likeness to the lobster man from Ultraman!

The little minx had clearly drawn it right off the lobster man's image!

The lobster man wrought misery upon the settlement, preying on villagers cruelly. With the Deity absent and peril closing in, a Daoist priest materialized just then.

The priest unmistakably mirrored Ma Tianzheng—even his robes matched!

Summoning Daoist magics, the priest battled the lobster man. But fortune turned. The beast struck the priest's sword from his grip, poised to devour him whole.

Just then Dao Xuan Deity reappeared, wielding immortal arts. He magnified one hand colossally and—SLAM—crushed the lobster man into a paste-stain upon the earth.

Gratefully, the priest knelt in reverence.

Ecstatic, villagers swarmed outside. They harvested lobster meat and cooked it into fragrant porridge. Crowded around the giant cauldron, many sang, danced, and sipped Wuliangye liquor—

The story concluded.

The minx truly was a Level 4 chimera creator! Her comic book fused so many odd elements!

Li Daoxuan nearly choked with stunned laughter.

After finishing, Thirty-Two wore an exceedingly odd expression. “This... this... what a bizarre tale this is—”

Gao Yiye blinked innocently. “What? Don’t you like this story?”

Thirty-Two wiped his sweat. “I’m not sure if it’ll work. It feels doable, yet something seems off.”

Gao Yiye said, “That means it’s possible, doesn’t it? Thirty-Two, please help me get this book printed.”

Thirty-Two felt immense pressure. “It depicts the Deity. What if the Deity dislikes it? I should...I should...ask the Deity for permission.”

Gao Yiye pouted. “But we’re giving the Deity a surprise! If you ask him, he won’t be surprised.”

“Well...” Thirty-Two hesitated. “What if it causes shock and anger instead?”

“It won’t!” Gao Yiye insisted. “The Deity will love it—it shows him doing good deeds and eliminating evil. Why would he be angry?” She stuck out her lower lip slightly. “I didn’t portray him as a bad celestial.”

Thirty-Two pondered carefully. She was right. Though the comic book’s plot blended chaotic equipment, it didn’t smear the Deity’s image. The stories themselves were righteous. Alright, he’d try printing a few copies. After all, this was the Saint Lady’s request, and in this village, the Saint Lady held the highest authority.

“Then...I’ll have the woodcarver engrave the blocks...” Thirty-Two said. “Understand this clearly: we won’t print many copies—just a few for your amusement. The woodcarver’s fees cannot come from the village treasury; you must pay them yourself. The costs for paper and ink are also your responsibility.”

Gao Yiye giggled. “No problem! I have many treasures the Deity gave me—I’ll just give some to the woodcarver as payment.”

Truthfully, Gao Yiye lived directly above the village treasury. No one could stop her if she wanted something from it, yet aside from cotton, she never stole anything else. Even the fabric she secretly wove from the cotton ended up back in the village treasury.

Thirty-Two’s remarks were merely a gentle nudge, a reminder for the girl not to take things too far. While the Saint Lady held the highest rank, she remained a child, still requiring guidance from adults.

Gao Yiye cheerfully handed the stack of papers over. “Don’t you dare damage them. This is my only copy.”

Thirty-Two nodded solemnly. “Every single leaf in here bears the Deity’s image. Who would dare destroy it?”

He shook his head, descended the watchtower, and made his way into the artisans’ well.

The woodcarver and his apprentices were idly carving characters, simply passing the time.

Recently, they had become quite bored. Having completed ‘Hanyu Pinyin,’ ‘Elementary Math,’ ‘Middle School Math,’ ‘Yang Family Generals,’ and even a volume of ‘Middle School Physics,’ they found themselves without further tasks. Idle days stretched before them.

Idleness meant no extra wages—a disheartening situation. They yearned for the Deity to devise some new project needing printing. Yet the Deity was preoccupied with the small train and welcoming visitors from Qingjian County; the cultural endeavors seemed temporarily forgotten.

So, the woodcarver and his apprentices carved mere characters for practice, killing time.

Thirty-Two approached them and held out the thick sheaf of paper. “Work’s come in. Engrave this. The Saint Lady will provide your payment.”

The woodcarver and the apprentices gathered around. They took the papers and scanned the top page, instantly startled. "Stories...of the Deity subduing demons and vanquishing evil spirits?"

Seeing their expressions flicker between shock, reverence, and an urge to worship, Thirty-Two thought to himself: Should I tell them this is the Saint Lady's playful pastiche?

Forget it! Best left unsaid.

Thirty-Two confirmed, "Indeed. This book is titled 'Dao Xuan Deity's Demon Elimination Tale.'"

Filled with pious reverence, the woodcarver and apprentices carefully cradled the papers. "Rest easy, Manager Thirty-Two. We pledge our utmost dedication to carve this story flawlessly."

Li Daoxuan smiled: Have fun, you all.

Chapter 215: I Sneaked a Peek at Middle School Physics

The early morning sky had just brightened.

The people of Qingjian County were already lining up at the train station, waiting for the small train.

After five days of recruitment work, most Qingjian County residents had found jobs of their own; those with skills were absorbed into the artisans' well, and those without skills put their strength into road construction and tree chopping.

Women also had work; the small train transported large quantities of spinning machines and cotton bales from the main fortress into their hands, requiring them to weave the cotton into cloth before sending it back to the main fortress.

Under Li Daoxuan's guidance, Thirty-Two had already started using the "piece-rate pay" method for the women; the more cotton cloth anyone wove, the more wages they earned.

After adopting this method, Gaojia Village's cotton cloth output had seen a qualitative leap, so it was now also applied in the refugee village.

Even the elderly had found things to do.

Due to the huge influx of people, there was great demand for bamboo baskets, bamboo chairs, and similar items; the elderly went to chop some bamboo, sat under the eaves, and wove bamboo products; although their income was less than the young people's, they could still exchange for some things.

The only ones without anything to do were the children.

Li Daoxuan glanced casually and saw Refugee Valley full of children, at least over four hundred; the slightly older ones helped with household chores, but the younger ones just played blindly.

This was unacceptable! They had to get these children educated.

But the ill effects of overreaching were showing here too; the study well in the main fortress could not hold so many kids, and even if it could, Mr. Wang alone wouldn't teach over four hundred children.

Evidently, they needed to hire more teachers and build a large plastic school.

Tan Liwen could recruit teachers again in the county town; as long as they spent money freely, luring some teachers over shouldn't be hard—and as for the school... he had to rely on his old brother Cai Xinzi again.

Opening WeChat: "Hey, where are you hanging out?"

Cai Xinzi: "I'm still in Shanghai; I just delivered your miniature little Taoist temple to the Micro-sculpting Art Exhibition organizers—they loved it and specially set up an exhibition stand for you—and I still need to attend a figurine business exchange..."

Li Daoxuan: "Oh? So my model request can't be handled now?"

Cai Xinzi: "Oh, come on, of course it's possible—I have staff holding down my shop; submit the design to my workers and let them handle it. What exactly do you want made this time?"

Li Daoxuan: "A school! I want a 1:200 school model."

Cai Xinzi: "Don't tell me you haven't had enough studying yet, and you want to display a school in your home to reminisce about your school days."

Li Daoxuan: "That's right, I want to collect one—model it after our alma mater, Thirty-Two Middle School, which I'd love to burn every time I see it."

Cai Xinzi sent a voice message in a sarcastic tone: "Adding wheels this time?"

Li Daoxuan laughed and voice-replied: "My mistake! Adding wheels seems pointless—last time with the Hakka roundhouse, it was rash, and it hasn't been useful since."

"Serves you right for messing around." Cai Xinzi chuckled. "Fine, I'll take the job—I'll have my staff make a 1:200 Thirty-Two Middle School and send it to you. But I must warn you: don't actually burn it and set your house on fire."

Li Daoxuan: "Then make it with fireproof materials for me."

Cai Xinzi: "Damn—typical, bizarre requests always pop up at the end."

The two exchanged a few laughing curses and ended the call.

Li Daoxuan hadn't focused on the school in ages, but this reminded him to check the study well right away.

Switching his view over, he saw Young Master Bai standing solemnly on the podium, teaching math class to the children below.

As predicted, Mr. Wang had finished the “language class”; now it was Young Master Bai’s turn to “impart skills on behalf of the Deity,” teaching math to all the youngsters.

Li Daoxuan listened briefly: he was covering content from Elementary Math Grade Three, Volume One...

He taught incredibly fast!

In modern-day schools, children took three years to reach that level, yet here Young Master Bai was, cramming it in just half a year.

Thinking it over closely, he understood roughly: they had very few subjects!

Modern elementary students studied Chinese, math, art, music, physical education... after school, they attended cram classes—piano, calligraphy, dance, taekwondo, skating, swimming... their time got shredded to bits.

But these pre-modern children only had two subjects: language and math.

With only those two hammered at all day, the progress couldn’t help but be swift.

Honestly, it wasn’t that healthy, but it still beat them blissfully roaming the fields or helping with chores.

As he pondered this, Young Master Bai’s math class wrapped up; the regular students left, but Thirty-Two’s daughter wandered over to Young Master Bai with a giggle: “Brother Bai, they’re all gone—just us two for extra class now, Elementary Math Grade Six, Volume Two, last lesson...”

Young Master Bai nodded: “Alright, let’s study it together.”

Li Daoxuan chuckled inwardly: Oh? So that’s how it is?

Young Master Bai at thirteen and a half, the Third Miss nearly twelve, two older kids sat side by side at a desk and flipped open Elementary Math Grade Six Volume Two—both close to finishing it.

The Third Miss: “Brother Bai, after this book, do we start Middle School Math?”

Young Master Bai nodded seriously: “Yes! My father’s progress is way ahead of mine; I must catch up fast, or he’ll be disappointed next time he quizzes me.”

The Third Miss: “I heard the Deity has another book, Middle School Physics, entrusted to my father—he said after Elementary Math, we must study both Middle School Math and Middle School Physics together, though they seem really tough.”

Young Master Bai smiled: “Not so bad—I snuck a peek ages ago.”

“Ah?” The Third Miss: “You sneaked a peek? Won’t you get scolded?”

Young Master Bai: “No way! Why scold reading? Saint Lady said the Deity adores book-loving kids—last time I fetched Middle School Math, I didn’t sneak-look; I leafed through it right with her watching. She never scolded me—even said the Deity yearns for someone to read these books quickly.”

The Third Miss asked curiously: “What did it cover?”

Young Master Bai: “Length, time, sound, temperature, light, mass, density, motion and force...”

He rattled off a jumble of chaotic equipment, bewildering the Third Miss: “What in the world is all that?”

Chapter 216: Harvest Season Arrived

Young Master Bai chuckled, a mysterious grin spreading across his face. “I didn’t look too closely; it was just a quick peek back then. But after glancing at just a tiny bit, it felt like the entire world shifted before my eyes. Everything I saw became utterly different. Heh heh heh! That book is the true divine scripture of the heavens, unraveling all the universe’s mysteries. If we master it, we’ll reign truly invincible across the lands.”

Third Miss's eyes sparkled joyfully. "Then we must quickly finish Elementary Math and won't need to peek anymore—we can gaze upon that divine book openly!"

Young Master Bai grinned broadly. "Just one last section to go. Keep up the fight!"

Witnessing the two youths' fervent enthusiasm, Li Daoxuan felt pleased within. His thoughts drifted: Young Master Bai will likely be Gaijia Village's pioneer in physics, making him destined as its first Physics Representative.

He'd soon need to impart physics to others as Heaven's proxy instructor. Such burdens weighed heavily on a youth still growing. Teaching both physics and math risked exhausting him entirely.

Once Young Master Bai became Physics Representative, a Math Representative would need appointing. Li Daoxuan's gaze lingered on Third Miss.

Twelve years old. A girl. Could she bear this responsibility?

Women of antiquity shunned the public eye. Even those willing faced scolding, shackled by social virtues. Forcing her into such duties as "teacher" might crush her spirit... yet if she accepted willingly, he'd deploy Heaven's decree to bolster her. Let anyone who condemned her face unified village retribution, backed by divine mandate.

So be it.

His attention shifted from the book-well to village outskirts.

By the wheat fields, commotion stirred. Forty-two of Gaojia Village's old residents crowded the fields' edge. Even the aging chief—who'd long embraced leisure—now walked the fields once more.

Villagers watched as the Old Village Chief stretched a skeletal hand, stroked a wheat ear, and plucked one grain. Chewing it slowly, his face brightened. "It's time—harvest begins now!"

With cane uplifted, he declared with booming laughter, "Three years! Three years have passed since grains flourished here! Tomorrow, we reap!"

“Tomorrow—harvest begins!” The Gaojia natives erupted in cheers. Soon, Zhengjia Village voices joined: “Our Zhengjia wheat’s ready too!”

By mid-fifth month of Chongzhen Year One, harvest came to both villages first blessed by Heaven’s rain-summoning Dragon King. Jubilation surged.

Villagers already planting sorghum clutched tightened fists: Today you celebrated; autumn’s triumph would be theirs.

Refugees, short-term laborers, and Qingjian County wanderers gazed enviously before lifting chins: Their hand-earned wages rivaled farm yields. Here—absent officials’ greed, under Heaven’s shield—industrious hands would forge better days.

At dawn’s first glow, Gaojia and Zhengjia folk charged wheat fields. Young, old, male, female—bodies bent, sickles flashing.

Gao Sanwa skipped class that morning, sickle in hand amid crops. Mr. Wang stormed the fields, discipline ruler brandished. “Gao Sanwa! Villain—return to class!”

Gao Sanwa screamed in fear, darting through wheat stalks taller than youth. “Master, spare the rod! I’m laboring for my kin! Delay harvest and rains could ruin crop—we’d lose the year’s food!”

Mr. Wang’s beard bristled in fury. “Fool! When last did rains fall? Without Heaven’s Dragon King, would you even have sown seeds? Rain fears? Let parents manage this. Back to class!”

He wheeled to Gao San Niang. “Three Mother, discipline your son! Reading and writing promise futures beyond soil-digging. Squander learning for farm toil—you doom him!”

Trembling under rebuke, San Niang seized her boy and flung him toward Master Wang. Rushing to Short-term Workers Village, she cried, “Hire help! Harvest urgently—wages are negotiable!”

Meanwhile, at militia headquarters, Cheng Xu's roll call stalled. "Where's the third idiot? Zheng Gouzi—new Zheng recruit—is missing too. Anyone know where either fled?"

Gao Chuwu raised his hand. "Instructor He, who are the three idiots?"

"Clearly our densest trio!" Ground Rabbit declared, chest thrust out. "Zheng Daniu and Gao Chuwu are locks—but the third? Someone dull-witted. Not myself, surely."

Silent stares pierced him.

Just then, Zheng Daniu lumbered up, panting heavily.

His sight eased Cheng Xu's scowl: "All idiots accounted for. Where's Zheng Gouzi?"

Daniu saluted: "Report, Instructor! Zheng's father hauled him back to Zhengjia Village at dawn for harvest! I argued for drill duty, delaying him here."

Rage ignited. "Unauthorized absence from training? Desertion for farmwork? Does discipline mean nothing? Right turn—march! To Zhengjia Village—punish the fool!"

One hundred strong, the militia sprinted down the cement road, an iron serpent toward Zhengjia Village.

Sipping thin porridge, Li Daoxuan inwardly sighed: Zheng Gouzi's sin dwarfed Gao Sanwa's truancy. Militias—however informal—would become armies. Unreported desertion? A cardinal breach.

He'd watch Cheng Xu's justice unfold.

His vision shifted with the convoy. Traversing six li of cement road meant little to trained bodies. In moments, they reached Zhengjia Village.

Instantly spotting Zheng Gouzi—sickle wildly arcing through grain as he aided parents.

Cheng Xu's bellow tore across fields: "Zheng Gouzi! Criminal! What defense for desertion?"

The new recruit froze mid-motion. Turning, his face blanched. The sickle clattered to earth.

Chapter 217: An Army Fighting for All Living Beings

Zheng Gouzi held his head in both hands and squatted defensively on the ground.

Cheng Xu circled around him. "What should I do with a bastard like you? Tell me yourself? Should I behead you according to military law, or should I behead you according to military law?"

The crowd found it strange. "Eh? Why are both options the same?"

Cheng Xu flew into a rage. "Because you have no choice! Violating military law has only one consequence—death. There is no second path. Do you think the army is some kind of joke? Huh? A joke?"

Those beside him broke into a cold sweat, rather frightened. It was the first time they had seen Instructor He so enraged.

After a long while, Gao Chuwu's timid voice finally spoke up. "Instructor He, we... we're the civilian militia... not the army."

Furious, Cheng Xu lashed out with a kick aimed at Gao Chuwu but retracted it halfway. His expression softened slightly. Indeed, they were indeed a civilian militia, not quite the same as a regular army.

Heaving a long sigh, he declared, "Folks! It's true, we are the civilian militia. That's correct. But look at the armor you're wearing! Look at what the Gaojia Village Firearms Bureau is producing! The words 'rebellion' are practically written all over you! Do you have any idea? When the Deity arms you like this, is it truly just for self-defense?"

The crowd froze in unison.

Cheng Xu lifted his head. "The day will come when our Gaojia Village rises in rebellion."

The crowd was startled once more.

Cheng Xu continued, "I wouldn't speak these words to commoners. It's far too early to tell them now. But I must tell you. In fact, telling you this now is already too late. The moment you put on that armor, you should have already been prepared! You are not a civilian militia. You are an army that will fight for all living beings under heaven!"

His face instantly twisted back into a ferocious scowl as he roared at everyone, "Look at yourselves now! Slacking off, smirking and giggling, not a single ounce of bearing that shows you will fight for all living beings in the future..."

He pointed a finger at Zheng Gouzi. "A worthless piece of shit who dares skip training!"

Then he pointed at Gao Chuwu. "A worthless piece of shit with nothing but women on his mind!"

His finger shifted to Zheng Daniu. "A worthless piece of shit who flops down after eating, no drive whatsoever!"

Finally, he pointed at Ground Rabbit, ready to blast him, but suddenly let out a long sigh. "You're beyond hope. No scolding will wake you up. Take him away. Next..."

Ground Rabbit protested, "Eh? Eh eh eh? Why?"

Cheng Xu systematically berated each member of the civilian militia group, pointing accusingly at their noses one by one. Only then did he conclude, "Search your hearts and ask yourselves—does any one of you look like a hero capable of saving this world?"

The crowd: "..."

Cheng Xu heaved another long sigh and circled back to Zheng Gouzi. Pointing at his nose, he declared, "Considering you've just joined the civilian militia and don't yet know you're a soldier, I won't deal with you by military law this time. Run fifty laps on the cement road between Gaojia Village and Zhengjia Village. But next time you trespass, it will be military law without fail. Execution!"

Zheng Gouzi hastily acknowledged the order and obediently ran out.

Cheng Xu then turned his gaze to the still-stunned members of the militia. He bellowed, "You fools! I fine you to work harvesting wheat for the villagers right now. Damn it! Use your waist knives! Treat it as practicing your knife skills. Get to work immediately!"

Everyone remained frozen for two seconds, then let out a cheer and rushed toward the farmland.

—

Li Daoxuan, watching this, breathed a sigh of relief. He'd been genuinely afraid Cheng Xu might have enforced "military law" on Zheng Gouzi. Now, it seemed Cheng Xu still exercised measured restraint. Finally ordering everyone to harvest the wheat was truly a merciful act.

Good. He felt gratified that he, Li Daoxuan, had such a subordinate who knew when to be strict and when to relent. Even if Li Daoxuan had handled it personally, he might not have done better than Cheng Xu.

Just then, Li Daoxuan suddenly noticed the characters "Gaojia Village" on the side of the box were flashing. They twinkled brightly, as if sending some kind of signal.

He couldn't help but exclaim, "Huh?" This was the first time he'd seen the box flash like this. Why hadn't this happened before?

He touched the flashing characters "Gaojia Village." His viewpoint instantly jumped back.

Then he saw Gao Yiye on the watchtower, striking a bell. A large "prayer bell" hung there. Gao Yiye held a heavy hammer, clanging the bell loudly.

Li Daoxuan understood: Ah, so that's it! Usually, his view was firmly locked on Gaojia Village. Villagers could easily find him as Gao Yiye often just lifted her head to speak, and he'd hear her. So villagers of Gaojia Village rarely rang the bell.

This time, he'd shifted his view to Zhengjia Village. People back in Gaojia Village must have been trying to call him, but couldn't find him. Thus, Gao Yiye rang the long-unused bell.

That was how he discovered this feature of the box!

If someone needed him in a certain area, ringing the bell would make that area's name flash. Quite user-friendly! In the future, as his view expanded, managing things would be much more convenient.

Li Daoxuan brought his face close above the watchtower, looking down at Gao Yiye. "Yiye, what matter do you seek me for?"

Gao Yiye was overjoyed. "Ah! The Deity has arrived! I... I didn't dare disturb the Deity's peace. Minor matters I wouldn't dare bother you... But... this time, it concerns your command. When we achieved a result, we wanted to notify you and ask you to see."

Li Daoxuan: "Oh?"

Gao Yiye elaborated, "The first batch of black powder from the Gaojia Village Firearms Bureau has been successfully prepared. Also, under Li Da's direction, the blacksmiths have forged the first Three-Eyed Divine Firearm! Gao Yiye is preparing to lead all the blacksmiths out of the village for a test firing of the firearm. I felt this was worth notifying the Deity... Earlier... calling for the Deity brought no response, so I..."

"So you rang the bell, right?" Li Daoxuan chuckled. "Good. Any truly important matters in the future, you may ring the bell to summon me. You did nothing wrong."

Gao Yiye beamed with happiness. She pattered down the watchtower and plunged into the artisans' well. "The Deity is here! The Deity is watching us from the heavens! Let's go test the firearm!"

The blacksmiths were instantly invigorated, rushing with pride. Having the Deity watching over them naturally boosted their spirits a hundredfold.

Artisan Master Gao Yiyi reverently held up a firearm.

One of the Ming army's standard-issue weapons: the Three-Eyed Divine Firearm.

It was essentially three iron tubes bundled together side-by-side. To use it, one loaded gunpowder and bullets, then lit the fuse, producing a "BOOM!" when fired.

After firing, it became an iron staff that could be swung to club enemies.

To Li Daoxuan, this firearm possessed extremely low technological content, little better than junk. But to the Ming army, it was already considered highly potent weaponry—immensely powerful, effective both at range and in melee, seamlessly shifting from firing to clubbing enemies. Practically invincible in their eyes.

The blacksmiths, clutching this "advanced weapon," happily charged out of the main fortress, heading toward the direction of the firearms bureau.

Gao Yiye was amidst them, constantly glancing up at the sky. Seeing the cluster of low cloud—representing the Deity—hovering overhead brought her joy, her legs churning rapidly.

—

"Kai Yuan Tu Shuo" (On Fortifications) Excerpt on Three-Eyed Firearms:

Four hundred regular soldiers armed with firearms are divided into four directions, one hundred per direction, governed together by a Captain. There are thus four Captains. Each Captain is divided into four squads; each squad has twenty-five men led by a Captain. There are thus sixteen Captains in total.

Each direction features ten large cannon, thus forty cannon across all four directions. Each cannon crewed by two men totals eighty artillerymen.

Each direction features eighty Three-Eyed Firearms. Thus three hundred twenty Three-Eyed Firearms across all four directions. Totaling three hundred twenty gunmen.

Between every ten Three-Eyed Firearms sits one large cannon. Thus eight large cannon positioned this way. The remaining two large cannon are placed before the camp gate.

Chapter 218: My Firearms Bureau Chief Is Way Too Cautious

On the road from Gaojia Village to the firearms bureau, numerous workers were already applying cement. The last time, Li Daoxuan had casually scraped a flat dirt path with a metal scraper. Immediately after, Thirty-Two organized a large number of day laborers to start transforming this road into a cement road.

Currently, half of the road was being paved with cement, while the other half remained in its original state.

Gao Yiye and the blacksmiths passed through on the half not yet paved.

The road construction workers waved at them, "Master blacksmiths! Where are you off to?"

Gao Yiyi smiled back, "Heading to the firearms bureau. Got some work ordered by the Deity."

The road workers' eyes filled with envy, "I really wish I could apprentice in the artisans' well! Once I finish this job and save up some money to buy a few pieces of furniture for the house, I'll go be an apprentice in the artisans' well! After learning a skill, I can upgrade from apprentice to artisan."

Someone newly arrived from Qingjian County didn't understand, "Aren't artisans part of the lower class? You have good commoner status; why wouldn't you want that? What's the point of wanting artisan registration?"

"Hey! You're new here, you don't get it. Artisans get the best treatment in our Gaojia Village."

“Yeah, the Deity likes artisans the most. Artisans get the highest wages. And as soon as someone comes up with an important technological invention, they immediately become rich... rich what-now? What was that phrase Steward Thirty-Two used last time?”

“Become as wealthy as Dao Bai!”

“Ah, yes yes yes! What does that even mean?”

“No idea. Anyway, it means becoming rich.”

Only then did the Qingjian County native understand the situation with artisans. Secretly, they thought: I’m new here and penniless right now. After I work some day labor, earn a bit of money, and life stabilizes, I’m going to learn a trade too. Since there’s no farmland anymore anyway, having a skill could come in handy someday.

The blacksmiths continued forward. The two-li distance was covered in a blink. Ahead lay the small mountain valley where the firearms bureau was located. A massive, smooth stone vat was upturned in the valley, resembling a gigantic military fortress from some future era.

Above the main gate hung a plaque that read: “Gaojia Village Firearms Bureau.”

This was the hottest new department in Gaojia Village, offering the highest wages. Many aspired to become apprentices there. However, the chief, Xu Dafu, was notoriously strict in his selection. Anyone showing even a hint of mischievousness was dismissed outright. He only accepted trainees who were cautious and thoughtful, the type who carefully considered things before acting.

Therefore, only Xu Dafu and a dozen or so apprentices occupied that enormous building at the moment.

Every prospective apprentice had to hear Xu Dafu tell the “Great Explosion of Beijing” story—ten times. Only those who could recite it from memory were permitted to join the firearms bureau.

Xu Dafu had specially built separate rooms using stones. One room stored the materials provided by the Deity; the other stored the manufactured gunpowder.

He forbade any apprentice from entering those two rooms. He managed them personally, retrieving materials or gunpowder only by his own hand.

Chosen for their cautious nature and further intimidated by the “Great Explosion of Beijing” story they’d heard before joining, the apprentices were all extremely careful. None dared to mess with the gunpowder.

Upon reaching the firearms bureau entrance, Gao Yiyi called out loudly, “Xu Dafu! Chief Xu! I’m here to collect some gunpowder!”

Xu Dafu poked his head out the door, waving at the group, “Step back, step back. Retreat farther!”

Gao Yiyi was puzzled, “What for?”

Xu Dafu explained, “This place is full of highly explosive stuff! The slightest spark could set it off. With such a large group showing up, have all your belongings been inspected? Does anyone have ignition strips or anything? I can’t be sure! I can’t let you get close.”

Gao Yiyi found this simultaneously irritating and funny, but decided, Fine, we’ll retreat.

The group retreated quite a distance.

Only when they were at a safe distance did Xu Dafu ask, “Is this gunpowder collection approved by the Deity? Gunpowder isn’t a toy for just anyone! Without the Deity’s word, not one single ounce can be taken from here!”

“Of course it’s approved by the Deity,” Gao Yiyi replied. “Look, the Saint Lady has come with us.”

Xu Dafu turned his gaze to Gao Yiyi.

Gao Yiyi smiled, “It has been approved by the Deity. See that low cloud up there? The Deity is riding the cloud, following us to watch. You have nothing to worry about.”

Xu Dafu looked up at the sky, spotted the low cloud, and finally relaxed. He gave a deep bow towards it, "Since the Deity is here too... that means you do have permission. I suppose I can give you some gunpowder."

He glanced at the three-eye firearm in Gao Yiyi's hands, "Three portions should be enough, right?"

Gao Yiyi reacted with a mix of frustration and amusement, "Hey! You're only giving us enough for one test volley? Give us more! We need to test it thoroughly to see if this firearm is sturdy or if it'll blow up."

Xu Dafu conceded, "A few more portions might be possible. But I have to supervise its use. If I give you ten portions, I must hear that firearm fire ten times. Not one shot less! I won't have you intentionally skip two shots to hoard extra gunpowder. One mishap, and the whole Gaojia Village could get blown sky-high!"

Watching him take such extreme caution seriously, Li Daoxuan found it amusing. My firearms bureau chief is indeed ludicrously cautious.

Gao Yiyi was also exasperated by Xu Dafu, finding the situation both maddening and ridiculous, "Alright, alright! You watch the whole thing. We'll fire exactly as many times as we have portions. We'll return any unused portion, okay?"

"That's more reasonable," Xu Dafu retreated inside. A moment later, he reappeared holding a small earthen jar filled with a fine, sand-like black powder.

This was the "Ming Dynasty black powder" he had produced by re-processing the "firecracker gunpowder" provided by Li Daoxuan.

The composition of the "firecracker gunpowder" given by Li Daoxuan differed somewhat from true combat black powder, but Li Daoxuan had enlarged it by placing it in a box.

Xu Dafu had easily been able to separate the saltpeter, sulfur, and charcoal, grind them into fine powder again, then readjust the proportions according to the modern formula Li Daoxuan provided. This created true black powder.

This stuff exploded with far more force than firecrackers and was extremely dangerous.

He carefully handed the jar to Gao Yiyi, "Here are ten portions. I expect to hear ten shots." He then opened a small pouch, pulled out a pack of ignition fuses, counted out exactly ten, and handed them to Gao Yiyi.

Gao Yiyi couldn't help but complain, "Not even one extra fuse?"

Xu Dafu shook his head with utmost seriousness, "Absolutely not! No more, no less! Gunpowder must be used this way. Any discrepancy can lead to disaster."

"Alright, alright, you're the boss."

Gao Yiyi carried the jar and led the blacksmiths to an open area beside the valley. Xu Dafu also scurried after them, positioning himself to one side as a spectator.

Chapter 219: I Also Need to Understand Mortal Suffering

Gao Yiyi set up the Three-Eyed Divine Firearm. He grabbed gunpowder and stuffed it into the firearm. Xu Dafu beside him immediately shouted, "Too much! A bit less. Ah, too little now. A bit more..."

After several rounds of his "minor adjustments," Gao Yiyi finally grasped the correct amount. He packed it into the barrel, used a small ramrod to compact and compress the gunpowder, then loaded a small bullet inside.

The bullet was made of lead.

The Ming Dynasty actually suffered from severe lead shortages, but for Li Daoxuan, it posed no problem. Buying one lead wire from an online shopping site and snipping a small section yielded enough material for blacksmiths to produce countless bullets.

After compressing the bullet, he inserted a fuse into the small hole on the Three-Eyed Divine Firearm's tube.

Gao Yiyi still felt uneasy. Having never used it before, merely heard about it, he dared not stand too close. Once the fuse was lit, he immediately grabbed the firearm's wooden handle, extending it as far forward as possible, aiming towards the mountain wall ahead.

The fuse burned away, followed by a thunderous "boom."

Gao Yiyi's hand trembled violently, nearly numbed by the recoil.

White smoke swirled. Everyone looked bewildered. "Is it over?"

The crowd surged towards the mountain wall. Searching carefully, they finally spotted a small hole in the rock face. A misshapen lead bullet was embedded within.

"Wow, a hole this big punched through stone."

"The firearm is truly formidable!"

"We succeeded! Hahaha!"

Seeing the successful test fire, Li Daoxuan felt mildly pleased. He'd only seen the Three-Eyed Divine Firearm in online archives; witnessing it firsthand was rather entertaining.

Hold on!

This firepower is intense! The Ming army seems equipped with many firearms. What if I encounter troops armed with them later? If I reach in to protect my followers and take a few hits...

I might actually get grazed?

Looks like I need some sturdy gloves for my hand.

Thinking it, he acted. He opened an online shopping site and searched for “Thanos Gloves.” Surprisingly, they were available, not expensive either. A higher-quality version with a metal shell cost just over a hundred dollars. He swiftly placed an order.

Gao Yiyi was now preparing to test fire a second shot. He seemed to have forgotten the exact gunpowder amount again, turning to Xu Dafu with an embarrassed look. “Is my grasp now too much or too little?”

Xu Dafu replied, “Too little. Add a bit more.”

Watching this, Li Daoxuan chuckled and spoke, “Yiye, tell Xu Dafu, they can adopt the ‘pre-measured’ method for distributing the gunpowder. That way, they won’t need to worry about it being too much or too little.”

Gao Yiye hurriedly conveyed the message.

“Pre-measured?” Xu Dafu had never heard the term before. “What does pre-measured mean?”

Li Daoxuan explained, “You can use paper to pre-wrap the precise amount of gunpowder needed for a single shot. When someone like Gao Yiyi comes to you requesting powder for ten shots, you hand him ten small paper packets. Every time he fires, he just needs to tear open one packet and pour the entire contents into the firearm. No need to ask you each time about the quantity. This speeds up the loading process and enhances safety.”

Xu Dafu’s eyes lit up. “A splendid method! I’ve constantly worried this gunpowder falling into the hands of the three idiots. If they carelessly overfill the firearm, it might explode and kill them! The Deity’s pre-measured method is truly excellent!”

Li Daoxuan thought to himself: Actually, many regions have started adopting pre-measured methods already—never mind Europe’s lead. Japan’s Warring States period used bamboo tubes for pre-measured powder, speeding up loading immensely. Areas like Jiangnan and the border army in the Ming Dynasty northeast likely use pre-measured powder too.

Xu Dafu, however, is a gunpowder maker in the northwest—where advanced tech arrives slower. He probably just hasn't heard of it yet.

But no matter!

With this Deity extending a golden hand and a solid boost, all they need to do is cling tight... Oh, wait, not possible. The tiny people are too small; they couldn't even hug a leg—they can only hang on to the fine hairs...

Li Daoxuan explained the details of the “pre-measured” approach to Xu Dafu. He even printed a recipe for “granulated black powder,” handing it directly to Xu Dafu. He instructed him to supervise his apprentices in making the current black powder while simultaneously experimenting with crafting the more powerful granulated black powder form.

Xu Dafu received this “celestial prescription,” thrilled to hear it could produce “immortal realm gunpowder.” Overjoyed, he rolled up the giant sheet of paper. He directed several apprentices to carry it back into the firearms bureau for secure safekeeping.

Hearing that this thing was more powerful than black powder, being careful and cautious like him, he absolutely dared not let anyone touch it.

After a long time, the blacksmiths had handled all ten test shots of the Three-Eyed Divine Firearm. The result from ten consecutive shots was that the firearm remained intact and did not explode.

The blacksmiths returned to the main fortress joyfully, preparing to mass-produce the Three-Eyed Divine Firearm.

Li Daoxuan, however, opened his mouth and instructed, “Don't make too many Three-Eyed Firearms. Just casually make a few for play, for practicing techniques and testing gunpowder. The future main weapon must still be the new type of firearm.”

The blacksmiths quickly obeyed the order.

Gao Yiye's task of conveying messages was finished, and she returned to the main fortress with light steps.

Li Daoxuan saw her hopping around and looking very spirited, so he couldn't help but tease her, "Yiye, in these recent days, are you still drawing?"

"Yes, oh." Gao Yiye grinned and raised her head, "The second volume is almost finished."

Li Daoxuan thought to himself: The second volume of "Dao Xuan Deity's Demon Elimination Tale"? The first volume hasn't even been printed yet, and you've almost finished the second volume? This little girl really is enthusiastic.

It's like how some author writes a novel online, with the first volume not uploaded yet, but the draft for the second volume already nearly done—are you trying to defy heaven?

Tsk! What's this all about? Why am I wanting to see it so much?

Even though this little girl is a patchwork mess, and her comic book plots are very cobbled together, they look quite amusing. Li Daoxuan really felt a bit curious and wanted to know what she had patched together again in the second and third volumes.

Tsk, tsk, couldn't that woodcarver move faster?

Li Daoxuan deliberately teased her, "Surely you're not drawing some parody junk?"

Gao Yiye said, "What I draw is... well... it's definitely very good stuff."

Li Daoxuan laughed, "Then when it's printed, I'll also take a look."

Gao Yiye exclaimed, "Ah? Deity, please don't look! Keep reading books from the heavenly realm; these shabby books from the mortal world aren't fit for you to see."

Li Daoxuan said, "I also need to understand the hardships of the mortal world."

Gao Yiye stammered, "Well... the hardships of the mortal world... you could just calculate by pinching your fingers... with a snap... they appear..."

Li Daoxuan responded, "I prefer to see them with my own eyes."

The little girl's face flushed deeply, and she didn't know what to say, so she lowered her head and fiddled with the corner of her garment.

Right then, someone ran toward them, precisely Dian Deng Zi Zhao Sheng, waving at Gao Yiye from afar and calling out, "Saint Lady!"

Gao Yiye rushed with pride, "Mr. Zhao, are you looking for me?"

Zhao Sheng hurried over, appearing anxious but running extremely slowly despite great effort. He was out of breath after just a few steps, and by the time he reached Gao Yiye, he panted heavily like an ox, "Saint... Saint Lady... I... cough... want... to request... Deity..."

Li Daoxuan said, "Tell him to slow down and catch his breath before speaking. I'm really afraid he might not exhale and suffocate himself dead."

Chapter 220: We Will Reclaim Wasteland

Zhao Sheng panted heavily. This frail scholar had run a long distance, completely exhausted. After panting for a while, he finally caught his breath: "Whew... Saint Lady, I came to find you to report something to the Deity."

Gao Yiye said, "Oh? Say it then. The Deity is above, listening."

Zhao Sheng looked up, glanced at the low cloud in the sky, and quickly performed a big bow.

Having been in Gaojia Village for quite a few days, he understood that a low cloud visible at about sixty to seventy zhang in the sky meant the Deity was present; without a low cloud, the Deity was absent.

Zhao Sheng addressed the low cloud: “Deity, I wandered outside Refugee Valley on the hillside for days, constantly thinking about the future for my three thousand Villagers. Though you’ve provided them with various jobs, the village now has four thousand mouths to feed. The daily food requirement is enormous.”

“All this food,” Zhao Sheng performed another big bow, “is given to us by you. We’re very grateful for your kindness. But I wondered: if one day, you become busy with other matters and have no time to care for Gaojia Village, what will these four thousand people eat? Just relying on Gaijia Village’s current farmland, even with Zhengjia Village and Wangjia Village surrounding it, is far from enough.”

Li Daoxuan mentally agreed with him: Excellent! His concerns are sensible, or rather, farsighted.

Zhao Sheng said, “Please allow us to reclaim wasteland and open up new farmland. We must have land that can sustain over four thousand people; it’s necessary preparation. With more farmland, you could reduce or stop providing Celestial Food, saving your effort.”

Just as Li Daoxuan was about to say: Approved!

Gao Yiye said curiously, “Mr. Zhao, I suspect the Deity will allow you to reclaim wasteland, but... Chengcheng County’s soil... there aren’t many places suitable for farming.”

Zhao Sheng looked embarrassed: “That’s right. The land around Refugee Valley is poor, good for weeds and wild flowers but not for crops... But... my Villagers are hardworkers. With land available, no matter how poor, they’ll find ways and grow suitable crops.”

Li Daoxuan had checked Chengcheng County’s details long ago. Chengcheng County was part of the Weibei Loess Plateau, with the Loess Plateau dominating its landscape.

The Loess Plateau was a nightmare for farming crops.

It was tough to find land in Chengcheng County suited for crops; the best spots were already developed, like those wheat fields near Gaojia Village. Finding better farmland wasn’t easy.

But!

Li Daoxuan recalled that in later times, Chengcheng County had a key crop: corn! In the modern era, corn covered 310,000 acres there.

No matter how barren the loess land, just plant corn with ample fertilizer, and it would grow fast.

Li Daoxuan couldn't provide modern corn seeds to the people in the box because "living things" died instantly passing through. Plant seeds were "living things" and couldn't enter.

But...

In the late Ming period, corn had already spread to the Heavenly Nation. If they searched, they could find it.

Since Zhao Sheng had the drive to reclaim land on the Loess Plateau, Li Daoxuan thought it was the perfect time to promote corn.

"Yiye, is Xing Honglang preparing to leave the village again for Xi'an?"

"Yes!" Gao Yiye looked up. "Sister Xing leaves tomorrow."

"Great. First, tell Zhao Sheng they're approved to reclaim wasteland around Refugee Valley, developing it in bulk as farmland. Then, find Xing Honglang. Tell her to search for 'corn' in Xi'an on her next trip. If it's available, bring back heaps, fast. It might get scarce soon."

Gao Yiye nodded: "Mr. Zhao, the Deity has approved. You can reclaim as much wasteland around Refugee Valley as possible."

Zhao Sheng was elated. He shouted and ran out: "I'll notify the Villagers."

“Run slowly,” Gao Yiye called loudly. “Don’t get winded again.”

Zhao Sheng said, “I can handle it. I’m strong... whew... very strong... whew... Such great news needs spreading... whew...”

After only two hundred meters, he leaned on his knees, panting hard: “Oh my, no good. I must... rest... such news... but slowly... spread it slowly...”

Gao Yiye burst out laughing: “Haha!”

Li Daoxuan couldn’t help smiling: With this guy’s poor fitness, who’d believe he rose in rebellion?

That evening, villagers from Qingjian County returned after working short shifts and heard the fantastic news: the Deity allowed them to reclaim wasteland.

Though Refugee Valley was surrounded by barren Loess Plateau land, the villagers were thrilled. They were “refugees,” unfit to own land, yet permitted to reclaim.

It was an immense blessing!

Hardworking villagers grabbed hooves immediately and left the valley. Tired from a day’s work, they gained energy hearing about reclamation. Quicker they worked a plot, the sooner it became theirs?

With that thought, they raced to get ahead, not wanting to be late.

However, some villagers who could calculate, especially those with craftsman skills, did the math: “If I spent all time working, and my current job under Thirty-Two paid about three taels of silver a month, a year would be thirty-six taels of silver.”

“But if I devoted time to farming, on this poor Loess Plateau, I’d yield at most one or two shi of food yearly. Even in famine with higher prices, that’s only a few taels of silver.”

“Working clearly earns more than farming. With my skills, no need to reclaim and farm. Leave it to farm-lovers. I’ll work for life.”

So, artisans and farmers took different approaches.

From one starting point, they diverged, like forked branches stretching to different lifepaths.

The next dawn, Xing Honglang departed for Xi’an with her small trade team.

This time, she wouldn’t sell salt. A diligent patrol officer like Fang Wushang made smuggled salt riskier. Why not sell legitimate goods? Selling celestial candy made more profit than salt.

Gao Yiye saw her off at the village entrance: “Bring as much corn as possible. Also, anything rare not in Gaojia Village, bring them back. The village is wealthy—rarities sell well. Most importantly, craftsmen, teachers, any talents: lure them here at any cost. That’s the Deity’s word.”

Xing Honglang laughed heartily: “No problem. Leave it to me.”