

The Great Ming in the Box

Chapter 22: Even If Starving to Death, Do Not Eat Seed Grain

Admin Note: Chapters 20-21 are missing,

“Gao Yiye!”

Li Daoxuan called out loudly.

Gao Yiye immediately respectfully raised her head and looked up at the sky.

When she raised her head, Li Daoxuan could clearly see her face.

Her features were delicate, her cheeks slightly flushed—truly a beautiful woman.

Unfortunately, she was less than one centimeter tall, too beautiful to...

Ahem!

He was thinking too far ahead!

Li Daoxuan opened his mouth and said, “Send Gao Chuwu to the county town for a trip, find Thirty-Two to help, and get a few skilled craftsmen to come to Gaojia Village.”

Gao Yiye quickly responded.

She called Gao Chuwu over.

With a few words of instruction,

Gao Chuwu and the three young men who had gone to the county town together last time,

after eating a full meal and packing provisions, set off toward Chengcheng County.

Li Daoxuan picked up his Lego bricks again.

He prepared to use them to make a temporary wall for Gaojia Village.

It didn't need any complex shapes.

He only had to connect the bricks one by one,

forming a long strip.

Then he gently placed the strip into the box,

arranging it in a circle along the outer perimeter of Gaojia Village...

The villagers were still gathering firewood everywhere at that time,

when suddenly they heard the sound of wind and thunder, and the earth shook.

They looked up.

They saw a huge, multicolored bizarre object descending in midair.

It landed all around the village.

It quickly surrounded all of Gaojia Village,

turning into an enormous “city wall” with only an open gate left...

The wall was surprisingly high at two zhang tall, and terrifyingly thick.

Its material was just a bit odd; not as hard as stone, it seemed like the surface could be cut with a knife?

“Wow? What’s going on?”

“Does Gaojia Village suddenly feel like Gaojia City?”

“What kind of strange wall is this?”

“It has colors like a rainbow!”

Amidst the chattering villagers,

Gao Yiye climbed up along the “stairs” to the top of the “city wall.”

She stood at the high city gate and loudly spoke to everyone: “This city wall was granted to us by the Great Deity.”

“In the coming period, there might be many bandits causing turmoil.”

“The Great Deity wants us to make a wooden gate to seal the gate opening.”

“Have people stand guard in shifts. If bandits attack, we will take up weapons and put on iron armor to protect ourselves.”

The villagers quickly acknowledged:

“We respectfully obey the Great Deity’s commands.”

Li Daoxuan quietly watched.

The villagers quickly allocated some people to chop trees and make the gate.

Their craftsmanship was rough.

They felled trees as thick as an arm and stripped off branches.

Then placed them side by side and tied them together with grass rope...

At the same time,

under the arrangements of the Village Chief,

the villagers established the shift schedule for guard duty.

Two villagers carrying bows and arrows seized from bandits,

stood at the city gate, posing like “sentinels,” and it truly looked convincing.

Very good, now the village had basic self-defense capabilities.

As long as these men weren't foolish, if they saw bandits coming, they could block the gate and defend fiercely; the bandits wouldn't enter Gaojia Village.

And if they held out until he arrived, it would be fine.

Next, he just hoped Gao Chuwu, sent to the county town, would bring back something useful.

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Meanwhile, outside the county office in Chengcheng County.

Thirty-Two changed into a neat long gown.

He faced the door-guarding constable and respectfully folded his hands: "I..."

The constable said blankly: "The County Lord has ordered that if it's you coming, you're not allowed in under any circumstances."

Thirty-Two smiled: "I've not come to see the County Lord."

The constable was puzzled: "Then why are you here?"

Thirty-Two said: "I just wanted to inquire about any big events lately. When I served here as a clerk before, I treated you well. Could you give me a small tip without it being too much to ask?"

"This is called repaying kindness with gratitude."

The constable thought carefully.

True, this clerk always spoke the last four characters with an affected tone that annoyed people a bit.

But the man was decent; he had indeed helped him once before.

Giving him a little news wouldn't cause harm.

The constable lowered his voice: "Let me hint to you—two days ago, the County Lord sent several teams to some villages to collect grain. Do you remember how Mr. San opposed it and was driven out by the County Lord?"

Thirty-Two said: "I remember that incident very clearly; it was deeply etched in my memory."

The constable continued: "Teams were sent to Gaojia Village, Wangjia Village, Zhengjia Village... but the Gaojia Village team didn't bring back a single grain."

Thirty-Two thought to himself: With the Great Deity guarding there, it was no wonder they collected no taxes. He feared those officials had been dealt with harshly.

The constable went on: “The Zhengjia Village team collected a little tax, less than required. The one to Wangjia Village gained the most—they beat up those lowly folks there, burned an unoccupied broken house, scaring the Wangjia Village people so much they trembled. Finally, taking advantage of darkness, they barged into the lowlifes’ homes and robbed them of their seed grain as tax.”

Upon hearing this, Thirty-Two’s heart skipped a beat; he urgently asked: “Seed grain? You robbed them of seed grain? Heavens! How could you dare take such a thing? Haven’t you heard the saying: ‘Even if starving to death, never eat seed grain’? How could you all actually rob that? This... is utterly acting against justice.”

The constable wore an indifferent expression: “Who cares if they starve? The court pressures us constantly. If taxes aren’t collected, the County Lord will face trouble, and all brothers under him suffer too.”

Thirty-Two grew very anxious: “It’s over! Wangjia Village will likely rebel.”

The constable sneered: “A bunch of lowlifes—what nerve do they have to rebel?”

Thirty-Two didn’t dare waste time at the county office entrance any longer.

He quickly sprinted home.

He returned home.

Facing his wife, children, maids, and servants, he said: “Quickly, quickly, pack your belongings. We must leave the county town and hide for safety. This is called fleeing from danger.”

His wife was a plump middle-aged woman.

Hearing this, she asked in confusion: “Run away? Why?”

Thirty-Two rapidly said: “Three years of drought have left people destitute.”

“The County Lord sent men to rob farmers of their seed grain.”

“That will cause huge trouble.”

“We must escape fast. A step too late and we’ll suffer alongside the County Lord.”

“This is called... ah, no time to think of a phrase—just hurry, pack, and flee.”

Third Lady, hearing this, showed no tension: “Why fear just a few villagers rebelling?”

“Even if they rebel, they’ll just become bandits—they won’t attack the county town, will they?”

Thirty-Two lowered his voice: “You don’t understand!”

“That Wangjia Village isn’t ordinary. There’s a man named Bai Shui Wang Er, who came from Bai Shui County to join relatives—a well-known hero nearby.”

“With one staff in hand, dozens of men can’t near him; his fame spreads far.”

“If he leads a rebellion, raising his arm for a call to arms,—oh goodness, it’ll be awful. Chengcheng County and dozens of surrounding towns and villages could face catastrophe.”

“In short, a wise man avoids danger. Since I no longer work at the county office, fleeing far away is wise.”

The Great Ming in the Box

Wangjia Village, back hill slope.

Bai Shui Wang Er looked at the villagers in front of him with a black face.

Last night, he had organized a group of villagers to go to Gaojia Village for water theft.

As a result, each person brought back two buckets of flour, which was truly wild with excitement.

The group was in great spirits, walking as if with the wind.

Unexpectedly, upon returning to the village, their joyful mood was struck like by thunder.

The officials had taken advantage of his absence to launch a night raid on Wangjia Village.

They injured several villagers, burned down a dilapidated thatched hut, and stole the seed grain from the villagers' homes.

Several injured villagers, with cloths wrapped around their heads still seeping blood, lay before Wang Er and cried pitifully: "Brother Wang... you have to stand up for us."

"My seed grain was completely stolen. Even if the drought ends and the heavens grant rain, my family has no grain to plant, and everyone can only starve to death."

"My seed grain is gone too. Either way, it's certain death."

Wang Er became furious and clenched his fists: "Brothers, I brought back flour. Use it to make dough balls. First, eat until full, then... rebelled against those damn ones."

The crowd heard this and got a fright: "Rebel? That's a crime punishable by beheading."

Wang Er roared: "Afraid of beheading? Your families don't even have seed grain left, so what's there to fear? Either way, it's the word 'death.' Rather than starving, better to chop off County Magistrate Zhang Yaocai's dog head and then die."

The crowd thought it over: that was indeed true.

Wang Er grabbed a handful of black soil from the ground and smeared his face black.

He then raised his hand and shouted loudly: “Who dares to kill Zhang Yaocai?”

The villagers all smeared their faces black and responded together: “I dare!”

“Good, light the fire, cook the food, eat dough balls. After getting full, kill our way to the county town and chop off Zhang Yaocai’s dog head.”

He glanced around and saw the villagers numbered less than a hundred; that seemed too few for a rebellion.

He beckoned two young men and instructed: “You two, go separately to Zhuangjia Village and Zhengjia Village to contact my two brothers, Zhuang Guangdao and Zheng Yanfu.

“Tell the two of them that Bai Shui Wang Er now wants to rebel, and ask if they dare to join in.”

The two young men hurried off towards Zhuangjia Village and Zhengjia Village.

...

Gao Chuwu led three young men into Chengcheng County.

It was their second time visiting the county town, and their courage was much stronger than the previous visit.

The first time, they had been timid and hesitant; the second time, they were natural and composed.

This was probably the difference between having seen the world and not having seen the world.

The four were still very polite; they asked everyone on the street about “former clerk Thirty-Two’s residence.”

Soon, someone pointed out the direction.

The four wound through streets and alleys, arriving at a large gate.

Gao Chuwu raised his hand, about to knock.

Unexpectedly, the door was pulled open first from the inside.

Gao Chuwu swiped at empty air, feeling a bit awkward, and chuckled foolishly.

The one opening the door was Thirty-Two.

As he opened it, he was calling behind him: “Everyone, move faster, faster... huh?”

His voice stopped as he stared at Gao Chuwu for a second, suddenly understanding: “You’re... that young fellow from Gaojia Village, called Gao something?”

“Gao Chuwu!”

“Ah, yes, yes.”

Thirty-Two's eyes rolled twice, and he immediately understood: "What orders does the great deity have? I listen respectfully."

Gao Chuwu froze: He didn't even say anything yet, and Thirty-Two knew?

Indeed, an educated person was different from a fool like him.

If Village Chief Grandpa wanted to explain something clearly to him, he had to hold his ear and shout for a long while.

Gao Chuwu scratched his head awkwardly. "The Great Deity is having people in our village make iron armor. He says many bandits will soon come out randomly hacking people. He told us to make armor to protect ourselves. But Uncle Gao Yiyi, the only blacksmith in the village, isn't very skilled. So the Great Deity hopes you can think of a way to send some capable blacksmiths over."

Thirty-Two felt his mind go blank the moment he heard "iron armor." Crafting armor privately? That's an offense punishable by death! Wait no, he was focusing on the wrong part. The crucial bit was actually the first half of that sentence: "many bandits will soon come out randomly hacking people."

Thirty-Two instantly understood!

The Great Deity was implying that Bai Shui Wang Er had rebelled.

Earlier, he'd only guessed Bai Shui Wang Er might rebel based on the "seed grain robbery" incident. But now, with this statement from the Great Deity, he was almost one hundred percent sure Bai Shui Wang Er was starting an uprising.

Bloody hell! How terrifying!

Thirty-Two whirled around and roared at his family, "What are you still dawdling for? Leave anything not packed behind! Go! Get moving now. This is called discarding shields and armor."

His wife ran out of the house carrying their daughter, followed by a maid and a manservant, each shouldering a large bundle packed with gold and silver. Flustered, she asked, "Where do we go?"

Thirty-Two gritted his teeth and seized Gao Chuwu's hand. "Gao... Brother Chuwu, right?"

Gao Chuwu was startled by his fervent gesture. "What's wrong?"

Thirty-Two urged desperately, “I beg you and the other three young men to escort my wife and daughter to Gaojia Village. Ask the Great Deity for their protection. Once my family is safe, I will have no worries holding me back. I’ll devote everything to serve the Great Deity with my life. This is called returning kindness for favor.”

Gao Chuwu blinked. “Eh? Eh? Eh?”

His face was a picture of simple-minded confusion, utterly unaware of the situation.

Thirty-Two pressed urgently, “Go! Quickly! Stop dithering here! Bai Shui Wang Er could attack any moment! We won’t be able to escape if we wait any longer! This is called... Oh heavens! Don’t listen to my rambling anymore. Go now! Immediately!”

Gao Chuwu, still perplexed by what was happening, remained clueless. But his simple nature had its advantage: he obeyed instructions well. When the Village Chief gave orders, he listened. When the Great Deity gave orders, he obeyed. Now that Thirty-Two was giving orders, he simply followed Thirty-Two.

He broke into a grin. “Alright then! We’re off.”

The four young men escorted Thirty-Two's wife, daughter, maid, and manservant. The group of eight quickly left the county town, hurrying back towards Gaojia Village.

They had only just exited the town and traveled less than two li when hundreds of men, their faces smeared black, appeared on the hill northwest of the county capital.

At their forefront stood Bai Shui Wang Er himself, flanked by his two sworn brothers, Zhuang Guangdao and Zheng Yanfu.

Bai Shui Wang Er bellowed, "The heartless county magistrate imposes cruel levies! He has seized our seed grain! How can we live another day under such a tyrant? Today, brothers, follow me into the county capital! Let us chop off the magistrate's dog head! Slaughter every wicked, rich bastard inside the walls! We'll break open the granary so the poor can eat their fill! Do you have the courage to follow me?"

The crowd roared, "We do!"

"Who dares kill Zhang Yaocai?"

"I dare!"

“Who dares kill Zhang Yaocai?”

“I dare!”

“Who dares kill Zhang Yaocai?”

“We all dare!”

Bai Shui Wang Er laughed fiercely. “Then what are we waiting for? Charge!”

Hundreds of villagers let out a thunderous cry. Brandishing hoes, wooden clubs, pot lids, shovels, axes, pitchforks, and other weapons, they surged towards Chengcheng County.

The grand and momentous peasant uprising of the late Ming Dynasty had officially begun.

The Great Ming in the Box

Bai Shui Wang Er led hundreds charging toward Chengcheng County.

The two old soldiers guarding the city gates were stunned in an instant.

Due to the peculiar military colony system of the Ming Dynasty, the garrison troops of Chengcheng County were not inside the town proper.

They were farming and loafing about in a garrison post over ten li beyond the county seat.

The gate guards knew they could not expect reinforcements soon; with just two old men resisting several hundreds of rebels, they would never dare even if given a hundred guts.

The two old soldiers decisively ducked into a ditch nearby, then stripped off their military uniforms as fast as possible, becoming two decrepit old men...

The peasant uprising army surged onto the town streets instantly.

Common folks on the street panicked and scrambled back into their homes.

Wang Er did not mean to trouble them; he led the rebel army straight to the county office.

After they had charged past, Thirty-Two emerged from an alley, looked left and right on the deserted street, then ran swiftly toward the artisan household neighborhood.

Actually, after Gao Chuwu had escorted Thirty-Two's wife and daughter away, he was about to go find a blacksmith when battle cries arose outside the walls.

Bai Shui Wang Er had indeed rebelled!

He quickly took off his long scholar's robe, changed into coarse servant clothes from home, and messed up his hair to resemble a disheveled middle-aged beggar before stepping out, darting through alleys until he spotted Wang Er leading hundreds of rebels surging past the main street up ahead, murderously heading for the county office.

Only after they all left did Thirty-Two take deep breaths to embolden himself, emerge from the alley, and continue running toward the artisan household neighborhood.

Soon afterward, he reached Craftsmen Street.

It was a dark, narrow lane with crumbling houses and filthy water pooling everywhere.

Those residing there were all artisan households: blacksmiths, carpenters, potters—all were included.

These people were very poor.

After inhaling deeply, Thirty-Two knocked on the blacksmith's door.

Outside, the peasant uprising raged; the blacksmith cowered alone at home, trembling, suddenly jumped by the knock and terrified to open up.

Only when he heard Thirty-Two's soft voice call out did he gather courage to unlatch it: "Ah, is it Third Lady? Why have you come to my place? And dressed like that?"

Thirty-Two slipped inside fast and closed the door: "Shh! Rebels rioting outside—that's why I'm disguised."

The blacksmith: "Ah!"

Thirty-Two lowered his voice: "Don't fret about those rebels; they won't target you. At most, they'll kill County Lord, county clerk, principal, minor officials, and yamen runners before looting the granaries—it won't shift here yet."

The blacksmith: "Then what about you?"

Thirty-Two said hastily: "Li Da, you're Chengcheng County's finest blacksmith, yet no official treats you like a human. Only I appreciate your skills—that's what you call discernment."

Indeed, this blacksmith was named Li Da and truly the best in Chengcheng County, having forged many quality weapons and armor for the patrol officer and garrison troops.

But the imperial court disregarded artisan households; no matter your skill level, you ranked lower than commoners—the county magistrate barely glanced at artisans, much less cared about quality.

Only the private secretary aiding the magistrate knew his ability.

In truth, Thirty-Two was a decent guy who often spoke up for the poor; Li Da owed him favors, or else during this turmoil he might not have opened the door earlier.

Li Da admitted awkwardly: "Right, only Third Lady recognizes this humble man's craft."

Thirty-Two said: “I know you stay poor and dream of wealth. I’ve an opening: follow me to serve as a private blacksmith for an extremely wealthy lord—do you want to?”

Li Da looked puzzled: “An extremely wealthy lord? Private blacksmith? But... I hold artisan registration. If I flee casually, won’t that be bad?”

Thirty-Two pointed outward: “Now rebels rampage and slaughter everywhere—catch this moment to escape. Officials won’t chase you; everyone assumes rebels hacked you to mincemeat. You’ll shed artisan registration forever, join a new wealthy lord, and labor hard. If pleased, he might secure a fresh household register for you, cleansing your status down to white.”

On hearing this, Li Da got tempted at once.

He couldn’t recall which ancestor, captured post-defeat and forced into craft, condemned descendants to artisan registration—their life turned wretched, finding wives near impossible, and he remained single still.

Hearing Thirty-Two’s pitch of escaping to serve a lord with white status potential maxed the temptation.

Ancient minds stayed simple—unversed in tricks like organ harvesting in Myanmar—so trusting easily, especially as Thirty-Two stood reputable as a private secretary.

He whispered: “Will it truly grant me a good life?”

“Trust me,” Thirty-Two urged. “Go, let’s quit fast—with rebels causing havoc, yamen runners tied to county office, and guards hiding, your artisan registration can slip free. Once rebels calm, escape becomes impossible—you’ll remain artisans forever through generations.”

That talk turned bone-chilling!

Li Da clenched his teeth and resolved: “Go, take me to meet that wealthy lord.”

Thirty-Two rejoiced inwardly: Good, the blacksmith was tricked! By my silver tongue—swindling, conning, reckless—I’d finally helped Great deity secure a blacksmith. Haha, now my niche as Great deity’s lackey stood firm.

This beat tailing a county magistrate hands down.

He patted Li Da’s shoulder, tugged his arm, and both slipped out the door.

The county town still clamored intensely; chaos centered near county office and wealthy blocks—yells signaled its fall, battle noise swelling into mansions as guards fought rebels.

Now and then, female shrieks pierced through!

Without needing sight, Thirty-Two knew many women suffered assault in this frenzy—especially magistrate daughters and maids with pretty looks and tender skin in rebels' grasp likely to...

He sighed long: Seizing seed grain was the government's fault, but these women committed what crimes?

Officials held no good; rebels showed the same.

Indeed, only Thirty-Two acted with unstained conscience amid this world—truly, “while the whole muddies, I alone stay pure.”

He tugged Li Da's arm: “Hurry hurry, off we scam! Once rebels finish rich houses, turmoil will hit here.”

Dashing along streets, they spotted the wide-open gates ahead—absolutely no gate guards patrolled.

The instant they burst outside, Li Da's mood soared: Haha, this artisan household had fled official dominion at last.

The Great Ming in the Box

While Chengcheng County was in complete chaos,

A problem emerged during the construction of Gaojia Village's city gate.

The issue lay with the rope.

The city wall Li Daoxuan hastily built with Lego bricks was tall, large, and wide. Though he deliberately left the gate arch smaller, it still stood two zhang tall and two zhang wide.

Gates this enormous required numerous tree trunks bound tightly together.

But the villagers' grass ropes, lacking both quality and quantity, proved useless.

Grass ropes were already scarce. Hand-twisted by the villagers using crude techniques, they barely sufficed for tying table legs, bed legs, plows for farming, or pitchfork handles. For trunks as thick as arms, though? Utterly inadequate...

“Disaster! The rope here snapped again.”

“Village Chief, your rope crumbles with a light tug.”

“Someone tie those two posts over there! They're about to fall!”

The villagers scrambled in utter disarray.

Li Daoxuan watched from outside as the tiny people toiled for shichen, only for two grass ropes to break, causing the entire row of bound trunks to collapse. The poor folk had no choice but to start over.

What could help them?

His gaze swept over the chaotic equipment scattered at home, suddenly landing on the dust-covered fishing tackle bag in the corner—an idea flashed in his mind.

Fishing line!

He vividly recalled researching fishing line specs when purchasing some. Among them was a 0.4-gauge line, just 0.104mm thick.

Even magnified 200 times within the box, its diameter would only reach 2cm. Compared to the villagers' grass rope, it was like heaven and earth.

“Gao Yiye! Gao Yiye!”

Gao Yiye, desperately twisting grass rope, heard the Great deity's call. She hurriedly looked up, her small, quite lovely face etched with reverence and devotion. “Great deity, what is your command?”

“Take this rope. Have everyone use it to bind the city gate timbers.”

Li Daoxuan cut a length of the 0.4-gauge fishing line and slowly lowered it.

Gao Yiye quickly beckoned the villagers. All looked up to see a transparent rope descending from the sky—no thicker than a finger, resembling a cooked wide glass noodle...

The crowd exchanged bewildered glances. “What... what kind of strange rope is this?”

Gao Yiye announced, “The Great deity bids us use this to tie the wood, to secure the city gate.”

The villagers: “Huh?”

Though filled with doubt, none dared voice it aloud.

Only when the “wide noodle” touched the ground and they touched it themselves did their faces light up with awe. “This transparent rope... it’s unbelievably strong.”

“Far stronger than our twisted grass rope.”

“Though only finger-thick, it’s tougher than grass ropes thick as arms.”

“Quick! Fetch a knife! Cut a length to test binding some timber!”

Villagers brought knives to cut the line. But the line’s formidable toughness posed quite a challenge to their dull blades. Sweat poured as they finally managed to sever a length after immense effort.

However, the harder this thing was to cut, the stronger it proved to be. Delighted, the villagers cut a few more sections, bound two logs together, and had people pull from both sides, trying to snap it. But no matter how hard they pulled, the fishing line remained unstrained.

“As expected, this thing is much stronger than grass rope!”

“A divine rope!”

“Could this be... the Binding Immortal Rope used by immortals?”

Someone had inadvertently said this, causing everyone nearby to turn ashen:
“How awful! We cut the Binding Immortal Rope... would that bring bad fortune?”

Gao Yiye laughed heartily: “Look at how useless you are! The Great deity says this isn’t a Binding Immortal Rope, just a toy of His. Feel free to use it, it’s fine. He has plenty more.”

Hearing this, the villagers grew even more awestruck. If even the Great deity’s toy thread was this incredible, how astonishing must the Binding Immortal Rope be?

With this thought, some villagers began dropping to their knees again.

Li Daoxuan scolded impatiently: “Stop kneeling all day! Spend more time on proper work!”

Impersonating his tone, Gao Yiye laughingly berated them. Those villagers awkwardly scrambled up, scratching their heads, and rejoined the gate-making effort.

With the strong rope, the pace of work accelerated rapidly. In no time, they bound a row of logs into a shape resembling wooden rafts. Standing it upright, it formed a large gate panel, two zhang tall and one zhang wide. They just needed to make two such panels to assemble an operable city gate.

Just then, a villager standing sentry atop the gate shouted loudly: “Ah! Gao Chuwu and the others are back! Huh? They’ve brought outsiders!”

The villagers set aside their work and gathered near the gate to see the commotion.

Li Daoxuan’s gaze, however, went straight to the edge of the scenic box...

Soon, Gao Chuwu dashed into the scenic box first. Following him were a man dressed as a manservant, a plump, fair-skinned middle-aged woman holding the hand of a ten-year-old girl, a maid protecting the girl’s side, and finally, three village youths.

The panicked and disheveled group of eight ran desperately toward Gaojia Village.

When Gao Chuwu’s party had left Gaojia Village early in the morning, Li Daoxuan hadn’t yet placed the Lego bricks wall into the box. So, Gao Chuwu and the others had no idea a wall now existed. Seeing from afar that Gaojia Village was encircled by an enormous, strange, multicolored brick wall, they were filled with dread, unsure what had happened at home.

Thankfully, the sentinel on the gate waved toward them and called: “Gao Chuwu! Chuwu! You’re back?”

Recognizing the villager, Gao Chuwu felt relieved. Running closer, he yelled: “What happened in the village? Why is there suddenly such a weird wall?”

The sentinel scolded him laughingly: “What ‘weird wall’? It’s the Great deity’s gift! Dare you call it weird? If the Great deity stops feeding you, just see if you cry!”

Gao Chuwu’s face paled in fright upon hearing this. He quickly shouted at the sky: “Great deity, I was wrong! I’m brainless, my words are like farting! Please don’t take offense, dear Great deity!”

Li Daoxuan wouldn’t get angry over such trifles; he just chuckled heartily.

Gao Chuwu’s group hurried through the still gateless archway and slipped into the village. The four newcomers—three women and one man—appeared timidly, their eyes cautiously darting around the surrounding people.

Finally, their gaze settled on the colossal wall and the strange transparent ropes, unable to look away. Yet, as newcomers, they dared not ask questions outright; any doubt they kept bottled inside.

Gao Chuwu spotted Gao Yiye in the crowd, ran up to her, and blurted in haste: “Yiye, tell the Great deity—those four are Thirty-Two’s wife and daughter, servant, and maid. He went to find a blacksmith for the Great deity! Please ask the Great deity to watch over his family.”

Chapter 26: This Village Possesses Many Divine Objects

Gao Yiye raised her head, intending to seek the Great deity’s guidance.

Li Daoxuan spoke first, “Yiye, one family was slaughtered by bandits. Their house stands empty now. Take Thirty-Two’s wife and daughter there. Settle them in that dwelling.”

Gao Yiye quickly acknowledged and approached Thirty-Two’s wife and daughter. “Follow me,” she said.

The servant and maidservant dared not speak. The ten-year-old girl, timid, also shrank back silently. Third Lady, however, had bolder spirits. Seeing Gao Yiye looked kind – clearly a good person – she found her courage as they walked. “Young lady,” she asked, “what’s the story with this Gaojia Village? Such enormous walls? These walls surpass the county town’s fortifications by far!”

Gao Yiye replied, “Those walls are a blessing of the Great deity. Our Gaojia Village enjoys the Great deity’s protection and possesses many divine objects. Now that you are here, you will soon witness them.”

Third Lady looked utterly bewildered. “Deity protection? Divine objects?”

She didn’t really understand!

In truth, throughout the journey to the village, she had been inwardly cursing her husband relentlessly. Initially, she assumed escaping the city meant hiding in a nearby village. Little did she know Gao Chuwu led them on a trek covering over thirty li.

Thirty-plus li!

For a pampered, portly middle-aged woman, this was torture of the most hellish degree. Several times along the way, she had wanted to simply collapse onto the ground and refuse to move. But the terrifying sounds of fighting echoing from the city shortly after their departure forced her to grit her teeth and continue the arduous journey behind Gao Chuwu.

Finally arriving at their destination, she found it was a tiny “blink-and-you-miss-it” village. Were it not for the strange, colourful wall, she wouldn’t have found anything remarkable about the place.

Inside her mind, Third Lady was harshly criticizing her husband. Suddenly, she looked up. On an open patch of land in front of her stood row after row of wooden frames. Hung densely upon them were countless strips of chicken meat, cured with salt, drying in the air...

Normally, this wouldn't be unusual. But the sheer scale was staggering – countless frames, packed tightly together, stretching out as far as she could see, every frame hung with drying chicken strips. It was a veritable ocean of drying meat.

A massive chicken strip drying operation!

Third Lady was stupefied. Wasn't this a severe drought? Weren't people suffering? Didn't the farmers have nothing to eat, starving to such desperation that they rebelled? How could there be these innumerable drying chicken strips here? They even had this much salt for curing? It was beyond absurd.

Her family's maidservant and servant also stared dumbfounded, their eyes glued to the chicken strips, their entire beings radiating a "Is this a dream?" stupor.

Gao Yiye brought them to a dilapidated house. "You can stay here temporarily," she said.

The building was truly rather shabby. Third Lady felt some disdain, but she assumed it was merely a "temporary refuge until the rebels left, then we return to the county town." She held her tongue.

Gao Yiye heard the Great deity's voice once more in her ear, "This isn't the county town. Even with money, they couldn't buy food. Give them two grains of rice, one small vegetable leaf, a few chicken strips, and a handful of salt. Let them fill their bellies."

Gao Yiye acknowledged and went home to fetch the food.

When she placed these items before Third Lady, the woman was nearly frightened to death. "Thi... this... this rice? Why... why so big? And this salt... It's enormous! Like chunks... chunks of white crystal!"

Gao Yiye said, "Didn't I just tell you? Our Gaojia Village possesses many divine objects. This rice and salt are divine rice, precious gifts from the Great deity. Just accept them with gratitude."

At that moment, Third Lady truly grasped the meaning of "divine objects." Hurriedly clasping her hands together, she bowed deeply towards the sky twice before accepting the food.

Li Daoxuan had no further instructions for now. Gao Yiye thus left Third Lady and her group, exiting the house and heading towards the village gate.

Third Lady tasked her servant and maidservant with cleaning the room and tidying the bed, while she herself had little to do. Taking her daughter's hand, she slipped back out of the house to wander casually about the village.

The entire settlement, encircled by the colossal, colourful wall, gave her a profound sense of security.

The vast spread of chicken strips near the house shocked her anew, but that was minor. Soon, she noticed an enormous pond nearby, filled with clean water. This astonishment was immense. We were amidst a severe drought! Riverbeds were parched and vegetation withered everywhere else. How could such a large pond exist here? It was utterly inconceivable.

“Ready...”

“One, two, three...”

Shouts rose from the direction of the village gate. Third Lady turned to see four or five villagers straining to lift a huge, newly assembled gate section upwards, aiming to install it in the gate opening.

The gate was solid wood, tremendously heavy. One villager slipped and fell. The massive gate structure groaned and tilted precariously sideways, threatening to crash downward directly onto the aged Village Chief.

The villagers cried out in alarm!

Third Lady and her daughter jumped, terrified.

At that critical moment, the half-fallen gate suddenly stopped. It hung suspended mid-air, not crashing down upon anyone...

The villagers froze mid-action, struck dumb.

Several breaths passed before Gao Yiye's loud voice rang out, "The Great deity has reached out His hand and caught the gate! Why are you all just standing there? Quickly! Get a hold on it!"

Gao Chuwu rushed over, bracing the gate. Eating well recently, his body had grown swiftly; muscles were evident on his arms. Upon his joining, those supporting the gate immediately felt the pressure ease significantly.

Other young men swiftly joined them. Together, they painstakingly lifted the gate back up and cautiously maneuvered it into the gate opening. They secured it tightly with the "divine rope" before finally breathing sighs of relief.

Watching from a distance, Third Lady rubbed her eyes vigorously. “Just now... did... did an invisible hand halt that falling gate? My heavens! Great heavens above!”

Third Lady was a Taoist believer. She frequented Taoist temples when free, offering incense to the Deity, donating, making small wishes, and reciting Taoist scriptures fluently. Her mastery of chants and invocations, like “By the decree of Supreme Pure One, act swiftly!” matched that of any priest.

But she had “insufficient affinity with the divine.” Despite a lifetime of devout faith, she had never witnessed an actual divine manifestation.

Finally, here, she saw it with her own eyes.

Without a word, Third Lady threw herself to the ground. Her forehead thudded against the dirt, coating it in dust, but she paid no heed. Lifting her voice, she cried out, “Deity manifesting! This unworthy disciple is graced to witness it! May my three lifetimes be blessed! I die content, without regret!”

The Great Ming in the Box

In the evening, the sun was setting.

Thirty-Two arrived, and he brought a new face with him.

Blacksmith Li Da had been tricked into coming.

After fleeing from Chengcheng County amid the chaos, the two ran all the way to Gaojia Village. Covering thirty-some li, with a long stretch of mountain paths, the journey was not easy.

When they reached the place, both were tired, hungry, and thirsty, and they felt they couldn't hold on much longer.

"We're here, ahead of us," Thirty-Two pointed in the direction of Gaojia Village. "Ah, after a few days away, there's a new colorful city wall here; this is truly amazing. This is called 'changing day by day and month by month.'"

Li Da had been growing more puzzled as he walked, seeing the place become increasingly desolate and uninhabited. But the moment he saw the colorful city wall in front of him, he was momentarily stunned, then overjoyed. How majestic this wall before him was—it was actually two zhang high!

This indicated that the wealthy lord stationed here was very powerful.

Moreover, he had painted the city wall, which showed he was so wealthy that he could spend money on frivolous things. Such a wealthy lord who liked to waste money was usually very generous.

He couldn't help but ask, "There's actually such a big city here? Where exactly are we?"

Thirty-Two said, "Gaojia Village!"

"A village?" Li Da couldn't quite believe his ears. Even if Thirty-Two had said it was Xi'an City, he would have dared to believe it. But to call this a village, with a wall two zhang high? How could that be?

"Since it's just a village, this must be a fortress," Li Da asked curiously. "I haven't heard of a wealthy lord with the surname Gao in our Chengcheng County."

Thirty-Two said, "This lord is called the Great Deity."

A huge question mark slowly popped up on Li Da's forehead.

Thirty-Two said, "Once we enter, ask less and observe more. Don't offend the wealthy lord and get kicked out; I won't be able to save you then. This is called 'walking on thin ice.'"

Li Da was not some naive bumpkin like Gao Chuwu; he had grown up in the county, mingled with many officials and gentry, and of course understood the principle of asking less and observing more when entering a wealthy mansion. He quickly nodded and said, "I understand this."

Thirty-Two led the way, and the two, one after the other, walked into the city gate of Gaojia Village.

Currently, only one gate leaf was finished; the other was too late to be made today, making the scene quite comical. Li Da thought to himself: This city was just built; they haven't even finished the city gate. No wonder the wealthy lord needed a blacksmith; it seemed there was an opportunity for me to shine here.

No sooner had this thought crossed his mind than he was startled by the "laborers" sitting in the gate arch eating. These laborers held large earthenware bowls filled with white broken rice, covered with cabbage leaves and chicken strips, forming a delicious bowl of chicken and cabbage rice.

What kind of conditions did this wealthy lord have at home?

Even the laborers working for him could eat this?

Once when I forged armor for the patrol officer, I didn't get such good food.

Moreover... weren't these laborers rather too healthy?

Due to three years of drought, the lower-class people that Li Da often encountered were almost all sallow and emaciated, looking as if they could be toppled by a breeze.

But this group of "laborers" before him each had a full and healthy complexion—this was utterly unbelievable.

Little did he know that since Li Daoxuan started providing food to Gaojia Village, the villagers had had rice, meat, vegetables, salt, and water in every meal, with rich nutrition and hearty eating; naturally, they were in great health.

He really wanted to say something, but Thirty-Two had warned him to ask less and observe more, so he had to hold it in, which was very uncomfortable.

Thirty-Two brought Li Da to the front of Gao Yiye and smiledly cupped his hands: "Miss Gao, following the instruction of the Great Deity, I have brought the blacksmith. This is called 'not dishonoring the mission.'"

Gao Yiye responded, and as she was about to look up and call out, she heard the gentle voice of the Great Deity: "Yes, praise him. He did very well."

Actually, Li Daoxuan was eating at this time, holding a bowl of pickled cabbage with shredded pork rice noodles, grinning foolishly as he stared into the scenic box. As soon as Thirty-Two and Li Da entered the scenic box, he saw them.

Gao Yiye said, “The Great Deity praised you; you did well.”

Thirty-Two said, “My heart blossomed with joy.”

Li Daoxuan was about to ask serious questions, and his tone became stern: “Yiye, have Thirty-Two introduce this blacksmith.”

(From this point on, it is understood that Gao Yiye is relaying.)

Thirty-Two quickly introduced: “His name is Li Da; he’s the best blacksmith in Chengcheng County. He forged armor for the patrol officer of the county, and many weapons for the garrison soldiers also came from his hands. This is called ‘a skilled and clever craftsman.’”

Li Daoxuan thought to himself: He actually has the same surname as I; we must be from the same family five hundred years ago.

Hearing Thirty-Two speak well of him, Li Da felt grateful, but he was a bit puzzled. Third Lady was someone of importance in the county; why was he bowing and scraping before a little girl? She was dressed like an ordinary village girl.

Li Daoxuan’s gaze locked onto Li Da: “Li Da, do you know how to make iron armor?”

When asked about his profession, he immediately became inspired with pride and said somewhat proudly: “Reporting... miss... This humble one has been in the armaments bureau since childhood, learning to forge various weapons and armors, and there’s nothing I can’t forge.”

“Oh, quite confident,” Li Daoxuan laughed. “Can you also make firearms?”

“Yes!” Li Da answered confidently: “This humble one can make the Three-Eyed Divine Firearm.”

Li Daoxuan said, “Not bad, not bad. Quite skilled. It seems you can teach the villagers how to forge iron armor.”

Privately forging iron armor? That was a major crime of rebellion.

Li Da immediately became nervous, but after careful thought, so what if it's a major crime? That this person dared to do such a thing proved his might. Only such a mighty person could help me shed my artisan registration and become free.

Damn it, let's do it!

Li Daoxuan said: "Also, I want to assign you a daunting task."

Upon hearing the words "daunting task," a confident smile flashed across Li Da's lips. How daunting could it be? Li Da could forge any weapon or armor; no matter how complex, it was just a pile of iron. I just need to spend more time; I can always forge it.

If he were facing a real wealthy lord, he might have been a bit fearful. But just facing a village girl like Gao Yiye, he wasn't the least bit daunted. He straightened his chest and said: "Miss, just report to the wealthy lord that there's nothing I, Li Da, can't forge. Whatever the wealthy lord wants, this humble one can create it. I only ask the wealthy lord to help; once the matter is completed, grant me freedom from registration so that my descendants are free from artisan registration; I would be infinitely grateful."

With him so confident, Li Daoxuan didn't hesitate; he picked up a piece of A5 paper and placed it on the open ground behind the city gate...

Chapter 28: What Weapons Could Ming Dynasty Smiths Make?

A big group of villagers were eating when they saw a strange large white paper suddenly descending from the sky. They quickly picked up their rice bowls and scattered while running away, laughing as they fled: "What strange thing has the Great deity sent us this time? This one doesn't seem edible, ah."

The A5 paper lay flat on the ground, with many odd patterns drawn on it. Viewed obliquely, it seemed like it might have a firearm?

Gao Yiye pointed at the paper and said: “Li Da, what’s on that paper is meant for you to forge. Go take a look.”

Li Da saw nothing in the sky when the big paper suddenly dropped out of thin air. His whole mind went blank, and for a long moment, he couldn’t react, until Thirty-Two grabbed his shoulders and shook him twice, and only then did he jolt awake.

The paper was pond-sized. Li Da stood on flat ground looking at it obliquely, but could only spot something like a firearm and a pile of parts with it; he couldn’t get a full view. So he climbed onto the nearby two-zhang-high city wall and gazed down at the paper’s surface.

“Huh? In the center, that seems to be a novel firearm? The surrounding patterns are detailed diagrams of all its parts.”

Li Daoxuan chuckled darkly: “Exactly! The Chassepot rifle—a fine model among early breech-loading rifles. This is its design blueprint.”

As it turned out, Li Daoxuan hadn’t been idle these past days. He had constantly pondered what kind of weapons could be forged by Ming Dynasty smiths’ craft level, given that he could supply the materials himself.

He also anonymously posted a thread on his usual military history forum, asking: “Folks, if you traveled back to the Ming Dynasty, and used Ming Dynasty smiths’ craft level with modern raw materials at hand, what’s the highest-level weapon you could make?”

Reply 1: Death Star Destroyer.

Reply 2: First, bury the first floor! Of course, it’s the AK-47. Now, any home workshop can make one; in the Ming Dynasty, they could pound it out with a hammer.

Reply 3: Don’t be foolish. Just knocking out a shell casing is useless—precise fit isn’t achieved; one shot might blow up the chamber, and you still can’t solve the ammo problem. Rifled guns are the most reliable; time-travel experts all use rifles.

Reply 4: Upstairs seems to forget OP said “with modern raw materials.” Since that includes modern stuff, we have rubber to fix gas sealing. So, why skip rifled guns and jump straight to breech-loading rifles? The Chassepot rifle is quite good—its precision demand isn’t as high as an automatic rifle’s, and Ming Dynasty smiths could truly hand-forged it.

Reply 5: Is everyone missing the point? Traveling back to the Ming Dynasty, you should buy several maids, lift their skirts, and peek at their baths. After all, bought maids can’t resist their master; I’d play all kinds of games with them.

Li Daoxuan: Dang it, it’s you again!

All replies cursed together: You jerk, get out of this military history forum!

After the chaos, Li Daoxuan noted down “Chassepot rifle.” With help from the forum’s seasoned folks, he miraculously got photos of that rifle, design blueprints, and actual snapshots of parts. He printed it on an A5 paper and was ready to bring it out when the smith arrived.

Li Da stood on the city wall, looking very intently at the A5 paper below.

He looked left, he looked right, he spun around to view it. After seeing it all, sweat suddenly gushed down: “This... this firearm... I... I dare not promise I can craft it.”

Li Daoxuan said: “Don’t be pressured. Try hard to make it happen. I’ll give you a very long time—years don’t matter. If you truly succeed, I’ll make your dream come true.”

For Li Da, the dream meant becoming an ordinary commoner without obligations.

That was no simple thing. When it came from Gao Yiye’s mouth, it felt rather unreliable.

He couldn't help but shout aloud: "Miss, Third Lady, I do trust you all somewhat, but what I must do isn't ordinary business. I... I don't even know who the wealthy lord is, so I feel a bit..."

"Hasn't that big paper dropping from the sky enlightened you?" Gao Yiye shouted loudly: "Try jumping down from the city wall right now; instantly you'll know who the wealthy lord is."

Li Da got startled: "Jump down?"

Thirty-Two also laughed: "Go on, take a jump and see."

Li Da looked downward.

This was a two-zhang-high city wall!

What's he playing at—testing my courage?

Year after year, he hammered iron, so his body was still robust. Jumping from this height, if he landed carefully, might not injure him; even if hurt, it'd likely be no worse than a broken leg. If this act could get the wealthy lord to free him from the artisan registration, it wasn't... impossible or not worth a gamble.

Li Da gritted his teeth. Better see that wall beneath him as the artisan registration. Escape required risking his life—it was a deadly deal. “I’ll go all in,” he clenched harder and leaped down.

The moment he leaped, he had mentally prepared to land with a crouch and roll to dissipate the force.

However, just as he cleared the city wall, before he even began to fall, he felt something catch him. His feet stepped onto something? It was so unexpected that he couldn’t maintain his balance. He fell forward, his hands landing on the invisible “ground,” yet the sensation felt distinctly like touching someone’s palm.

“Huh? Huhhuh?”

Li Da was terrified, scared stiff and unable to move.

Gao Yiye called out loudly, “You are now on the palm of the Great Deity.”

Li Da: “!!!”

Li Daoxuan deliberately moved his hand slightly, supporting Li Da as it slowly traversed the half-sky.

Li Da felt as if he was flying through the air, though his posture was exceedingly undignified. Orz – whichever way you looked at it, it was not a proper flying stance.

Before entering the village, Thirty-Two had told him that the wealthy lord of this village was the Great Deity. At the time, Li Da had been utterly confused, unable to understand what Thirty-Two meant. But now, it seemed like, just maybe, he grasped a little bit.

Li Daoxuan's hand slowly lowered towards the ground, then tilted slightly. Li Da slid off, landing seated on the dusty yellow earth. His face was filled with terror and panic, yet there was also a tiny spark of elation.

The elation, of course, was because his dream now had a guarantee!

As his mind cleared, he flipped over, changing from sitting on the ground to kneeling prostrate. He exclaimed loudly, "This humble servant, this humble servant guarantees he will exert all his strength to forge the firearm you commanded. However, this thing seems rather complex; this humble servant may require a long time – as you said, perhaps one or two liang worth."

If Li Da swung his hammer and produced a Chassepot rifle in just a few days, he would definitely be a System-possessing time traveler. Li Daoxuan, of course, knew this was impossible: “Mmm, take it slow, no need to hurry. Teach Gao Yiyi how to forge armor while you slowly research this firearm! If you need any materials, have Gao Yiye report them to me. In short, whenever you succeed in forging it, that is when your dream will come true.”

Here, his tone shifted: “Gao Yiye, are there any empty houses left in the village?”

Gao Yiye replied, a little embarrassed, “No, the only inhabitable empty cottage was allocated to Third Lady’s family.”

Li Daoxuan said, “Oh! Then wait a moment.”

He took a can of Pepsi Cola from the fridge, gulped it down in a few swallows—glug glug—let out a burp—ahh, refreshing. Then, he grabbed scissors and cut the can in half, resulting in a cylindrical cup. He cut out a small door and two small windows in it. Finally, he inverted this half-can and placed it over an empty patch of ground in the village...

Thump!

The villagers heard a tremendous bang; the earth seemed to tremble. Then, a peculiarly shaped, brightly colored small blue domed hut appeared in a corner of

the village. The characters for “Pepsi Cola” were printed backwards on it, looking rather comical.

Li Daoxuan announced, “Li Da, you will live in this temporary hut for now. After a while, I will arrange better houses for everyone.”

The villagers, though they had been shocked by “divine miracles” several times already, today were once again startled so badly they nearly dropped their bowls. The Great Deity’s method of constructing a house truly inspired immense, bewildered awe.

Third Lady, who had been secretly watching nearby, started kowtowing like pounding garlic, unable to stop.

...

To avoid disrupting the flow of the story, it should be noted here that the massive sheet of A5 paper was retrieved that night. It was later reprinted much smaller before being placed back into the box and given to Li Tie to store in his house.

There will be many such points like this in the future. I dislike writing about these details explicitly in the story, as it fragments the narrative and wastes significant word count on explanations irrelevant to the main plot, affecting the reader’s experience. Therefore, I often omit unimportant matters and would appreciate it if

readers could mentally fill in such trivial chores themselves. Spare readers these minor details.

Chapter 29: Bai Shui Wang Er Came Again

The house was built, but the tin can house was entirely empty, without any furniture.

The Village Chief carried a large bundle of dry grass into the room, using it as a temporary bed for Li Da, and also lent him an old quilt.

Gao Yiye brought him a big bowl of cooked chicken and cabbage rice, allowing Li Da to enjoy a hearty meal.

While they were fussing over Li Da, Thirty-Two reported the events that happened in the county town to Li Daoxuan.

Bai Shui Wang Er's rebellion was not a surprise to Li Daoxuan; he hadn't expected it to happen so quickly. After listening, there was nothing much to say, so he just sighed for the innocents in the city who died in that battle.

The sky was already completely dark. Li Daoxuan took another piece of iron and temporarily sealed the half-door opening of the city gate that wasn't fully finished. The villagers then returned to their own houses to rest.

The scenic box entered a “non-static scene.”

There was nothing worth seeing.

Li Daoxuan shifted his gaze away from the box, glancing toward his own window outside. Shuangqing City's sky was also darkening, but the city sparkled with lights, as nightlife was just beginning.

He sat back in front of the computer and clicked on Cai Xinzi's icon on QQ, “Old Cai, how's the progress on my Hakka roundhouse?”

Cai Xinzi said, “It's too early! Still building the frame; how could it be so quick? Ask me again in a month.”

Li Daoxuan replied, “...”

Alright then, that roundhouse model really needed a lot of work; it couldn't be rushed.

He opened the military history forum he often visited and anonymously posted again, “If you traveled back to the late Ming Dynasty, and after securing a sturdy

castle, firearms, iron armor—thus solving basic safety issues—what would be the second thing you'd do next?"

Reply 1: Date more chicks, don't waste the good girls, don't miss out on the bad girls, and arrange them all in eighteen positions.

Reply 2: Moderator, please ban that idiot on Floor 1; I've been putting up with him for a long time.

Reply 3: Kill them all! Wipe out the Eunuch Party first, then kill off the Donglin Party, exterminate Li Zicheng's bunch of bandits, slaughter all the Jurchens in the northeast, kill anyone who disobeys me, eliminate anyone I hate, and then lead a group of obedient followers to build a new country and sweep across Europe and America.

Reply 4: If you have no ambition, do as Floor 1 says. If you're ambitious but full of shit in the head, do as Floor 3 says. If you actually want to fight the Qing and save the country, and aim for the Chinese nation to dominate the globe, then you must be courteous to learned men, desperately recruit all kinds of talent—use useful people from the Eunuch Party, useful ones from the Dongling Party, talented individuals from the bandit gangs, and even capable people from the wild boar skin side... The more useful people you have on hand, the bigger things you can accomplish.

Reply 5: Floor 4 is talking nonsense! Why would I need to use those trash? I'll train my own team from scratch.

Reply 6: Start training kids? How many years will it take for them to grow up and help you? The Ming Dynasty is going to fall in the seventeenth year of Chongzhen; will you still be hiding in some mountain hollow as a tutor then?

Reply 7: So don't bother training any team; instead, cultivate some lolis—they don't take years to become consumable.

Li Daoxuan said, "Damn dumbass, you idiot again?"

The discussion ended; the post was locked by the moderator. If it continued that way, he feared being invited for tea.

Li Daoxuan carefully read the replies from the earlier posters, weighing the options, and still thought that Floor 4 made the most sense.

Not going too far, just focusing on the immediate, this little village with only a few dozen people urgently needed manpower. They didn't even require talents; just people would do—men could be used for cutting trees, logging, and repairing gates, women for cooking, washing, and miscellaneous tasks. Everywhere needed people.

Just as he had that thought, a faint cluster of human voices rose in the scenic box, as if many people were talking together, gathered and noisy. Li Daoxuan turned to

look: activity coming—hundreds gathered, pushing carts big and small, holding torches, walking along the loess dirt road toward the outside of Gaojia Village.

Their intention was likely to enter Gaojia Village, but now Gaojia Village was surrounded by a giant wall made of Lego bricks. In the pitch-black night, relying only on moonlight and torchlight for vision, their sight was very limited; they couldn't even find where the gate was.

These hundreds were all bewildered, whispering to each other. What Li Daoxuan heard earlier was the sound of their murmurs.

He leaned in with great interest beside the scenic box. At a glance, he spotted a tall, sturdy man standing at the front of the group—it was Bai Shui Wang Er.

Apparently, that day, after rising in rebellion, killing the county magistrate Zhang Yaocai, and opening the granary to seize official grain, he loaded it onto those carts behind and escaped the city. Traveling over thirty li, he ran to Gaojia Village.

Wang Er was a bit anxious now!

He knew the pursuers might come at any moment, so he wanted to repay the debt to Gaojia Village quickly. But this strange Gaojia Village, in what seemed like a blink of an eye, had inexplicably gained a giant wall, preventing him from finding a way in.

First, Wang Er quieted those around him, then raised his voice and shouted aloud toward Gaojia Village, “People of Gaojia Village, can you hear me? I’m from the neighboring Wangjia Village; I’m Wang Er, Bai Shui Wang Er. I once stole your water, but you held no grudge. Instead, you gave me much flour. Today, we’re here to repay the favor—I have grain, and I’ve brought two carts of grain for you... Gaojia Village people? Can you hear me?”

Li Daoxuan chuckled silently: this Bai Shui Wang Er wasn’t a bad person. He seized official grain and immediately came to return the favor. No wonder he became one of the leaders of the peasant uprising army—someone who can make a large group willing to shed blood for him must have considerable charisma.

“People of Gaojia Village...” Bai Shui Wang Er shouted again a couple of times. A dark shadow appeared on the city wall—Gao Chuwu had come.

With a simple-minded look on his face, he spoke toward the outside of the wall, “Huh? So you were the thief who stole our water.”

Wang Er felt a bit awkward. Luckily, in the heavy night darkness, lit only by moonlight and torches, no one noticed his slightly reddened face, “Yes, I’m the one who stole it. Ah, this isn’t the time to talk about that. Please open the city gate; I’ll give you two carts of grain, and then I’ll leave straightaway.”

Gao Chuwu had a simple mind—he was the type who wouldn’t judge unless someone gave him an order. At that moment, he didn’t know what to do.

Li Daoxuan thought for half a second: of course, they couldn't accept the two carts of grain, and they shouldn't let Wang Er and his group into Gaojia Village. It was still the early stages of the peasant uprising; the world situation was relatively stable, and the imperial court's control remained strong. If Gaojia Village got involved with Wang Er and his group at this point, it would invite major trouble.

Chapter 30: Your Disrespect Towards the Deity

Trouble is something to be avoided whenever possible. The fragile Gaojia Village simply couldn't afford any turmoil at this time.

Li Daoxuan was about to wake Gao Yiye so she could relay a message for him.

Just then, another figure climbed onto the wall. It was Thirty-Two. He patted Gao Chuwu on the shoulder, signaling him to stay quiet. Then, he raised his voice and shouted towards Wang Er outside the wall: "Brother Wang, Gaojia Village appreciates your kind intentions. Since you've rebelled, government soldiers are hot on your heels. Your road ahead will be one of desperate flight across the land. Receiving those two cartloads of grain won't make life much better for us here, and without them, it wouldn't be much worse either. They are essentially superfluous to us. For you, however, this grain is vital sustenance for your perilous journey ahead. It holds far greater significance. Keeping it would be far more beneficial. This is what we call 'using resources to their utmost potential.'"

Li Daoxuan chuckled inwardly: This guy is useful. With Thirty-Two around, I need to worry less.

Hearing Thirty-Two's words, Wang Er also hesitated. Zhuang Guangdao, another rebel leader who had risen with him, whispered by his side, "Brother Wang, what he says makes sense. Since Gaojia Village gave you flour last time, it shows they aren't short on food. Meanwhile, we are about to take refuge in the mountains, where grain will truly be scarce."

Another rebel leader, Zheng Yanfu, chimed in, "Brother Wang, repaying their kindness can wait until we are firmly established. Look at Gaojia Village's stance – it's clear they don't want any connection with us."

Wang Er thought it over carefully and understood: It seems Gaojia Village dares not accept my grain either.

Being a decisive man, he didn't dwell on it. He cupped his fists towards the wall and called out loudly, "In that case, I, Wang Er, shall take my leave for now. The debt Gaojia Village is owed, Wang Er will not forget."

He waved his hand. "Let's go!"

Seeing him about to leave, Thirty-Two suddenly spoke up, "Brother Wang!"

Wang Er halted and turned back.

Thirty-Two sighed deeply, his voice low and heavy, “The womenfolk from the wealthy households in the county town... what became of them?”

Wang Er froze as if struck by lightning. He stood stunned for several seconds, then turned his head. He threw two sharp, displeased glances at Zhuang Guangdao and Zheng Yanfu beside him before turning back. He cupped his fists silently at Thirty-Two, then spun around and strode off.

They didn't take long before vanishing into the night.

Li Daoxuan noticed the direction they were heading was the same way they had retreated after the Water Theft incident. That way probably lay Wangjia Village, though he didn't know how far it was from Gaojia Village.

After the brief commotion, peace returned to Gaojia Village.

Thirty-Two tugged Gao Chuwu down from the wall. Behind them, a large crowd of villagers had already gathered. Wang Er's loud calls had woken many, though few dared to actually climb the wall.

Thirty-Two immediately started lecturing the villagers, “You may have walls around this Gaojia Village, but you have no proper defense! Not even a night watch rotation! This time it was Wang Er – he announced himself and woke us up to talk. But if other bandits came? If they quietly threw grappling hooks over the wall and scaled up, we'd be dead before we knew it!”

His complaint matched precisely what Li Daoxuan had wanted to raise.

The Village Chief stepped forward, shaking his head. “For a night watch, you need lanterns. Though this village is small, lining the entire wall with lanterns would require dozens. Where would we get that much lamp oil?”

Thirty-Two frowned. That was a fair point. But then he laughed and said, “You worry about oil? Gaojia Village is under the protection of a Great deity! Bright and Early in the morning tomorrow, let everyone kneel properly and kowtow reverently to the heavens. Won’t the oil just... arrive?”

The villagers pondered this. “True! The Great deity always grants us food early in the morning. If at that time we all kneel properly and beseech him, earnestly begging, maybe we can receive some oil.”

Seeing them like this, Li Daoxuan found it quite amusing. Why wait until tomorrow morning? I can give you the oil right now.

He walked to his kitchen, picked up a large bucket of vegetable oil, and found a mineral water bottle lid. He intended to pour a capful into the box.

However, before he could act, a middle-aged woman stepped out from the crowd of little people. It was Thirty-Two’s wife, the Third Lady.

The Third Lady pointed a finger at the villagers, her voice full of reproach: “I haven’t been in this village long, but I have a few words to say. You lot! You all show far too little respect to the Great deity!”

The villagers were baffled. “Disrespect? How have we disrespected the Great deity?”

Secretly cursing ‘A bunch of ignorant bumpkins!’ though she knew better than to say it aloud, the Third Lady sniffed contemptuously, “The Great deity has manifested his power in this village, aided you greatly. Yet, have you built him a temple? Cast him a golden image? Offered incense? Whenever you pray to him, all you do is kneel, kowtow, demanding this and that, insatiably greedy, without even the slightest semblance of proper ceremony!”

Her barrage of questions left the villagers utterly bewildered.

Seeing they genuinely seemed unenlightened, the Third Lady continued, exasperated, “When monks beseech the Buddha for blessings, they still bathe, change into clean clothes, ring bells, beat wooden fish, chant scriptures... and the Buddha doesn’t even always heed them! If you truly wish to beseech the Great deity for something, consider at least ringing a bell, burning some incense, lighting a candle... show some proper etiquette!”

Her words struck the villagers with clarity. Yes! Their manners were incomplete. What face do we have to ask for this and that?

Li Daoxuan, hearing this, almost burst out laughing. These rituals mean nothing to me, truly...

Wait!

A light bulb went off in Li Daoxuan's head. These rituals... might actually be meaningful.

Because the little people were so small, their voices faint, he often struggled to hear them clearly. Even when they shouted towards the sky, he could easily miss their words.

If, every time they wanted to speak to him, they first grabbed a large bell and clanged it loudly a few times with a heavy hammer... then he would hear them easily.

So that's the practical purpose of monks ringing bells! Dammit. Who would have thought I'd find meaning in feudalistic ritualistic formalities? Oh no... my materialist heart seems to be wavering...

The Third Lady continued her scolding: "Tomorrow morning, everyone wash up and put on clean clothes. Especially you, Miss Gao Yiye! You are the divine envoy chosen by the Great deity. Come to my house. I'll find you a better dress and help

you dress properly. You will be the one to lead the prayers to the Great deity... Hey, you two blacksmiths! Don't sleep tonight! Work through the night forging a large bell. We'll need it tomorrow morning!"

Facing these arrangements by the Third Lady, the villagers dared not voice a single objection. They all obediently complied.

Li Daoxuan, observing this discussion silently from his "place in the sky," found it quite entertaining. I planned to give them the oil right away, but now... I think I'll hold off. Let's see what happens tomorrow morning.

Also...

His gaze lingered on Thirty-Two and the Third Lady. The arrival of these two in the village has proven remarkably helpful to me.

...

I have a cat at home – the same one as my avatar – and I've had it for several years.

I dote on it. I bought it a beautiful cat bed and a ton of toys. I love watching it frolic around with its toys.

Whatever food it wants, I buy for it – cat sticks, cans, kitty lollipops. Recently, I even started growing cat grass specifically for it.

When it got sick, I took it to the pet hospital.

I've spent over ten thousand yuan on it already.

Of course, this treatment is reserved for when it behaves.

If it misbehaves or causes trouble, it earns a firm slap.

This is the mindset of a pet owner, and it is also the mindset of the protagonist in the book.