

The Great Ming in the Box

Chapter 31: Meeting the Dao Xuan Deity

Li Daoxuan had long noticed a problem.

Gaojia Village lacked “organizational structure.”

In fact, Gaojia Village wasn't truly an organization at all—just scattered individuals. Aside from the Village Chief, whose seniority granted him some authority, others had no hierarchy; they all existed independently.

Whenever Li Daoxuan gave them food, the villagers simply divided it haphazardly, took heaps home, left an extra portion for Gao Yiye, and that was it.

They lacked comprehensive resource management.

When Thirty-Two and Li Da first arrived in Gaojia Village, no one hosted them. It took Li Daoxuan's personal instruction before Gao Yiye arranged their shelter and provided food.

Frankly, this was slightly irritating.

Such matters shouldn't require his personal attention.

With Thirty-Two here now, things abruptly changed.

Earlier, Thirty-Two had persuaded Wang Er to leave. Now, Third Lady resolved the issue of "summoning him." Both troubles vanished swiftly, sparing Li Daoxuan considerable effort.

Recalling the forum debate he'd read earlier—especially the argument on the fourth floor—that person indeed made sense.

In the coming days, his priority should focus squarely on "recruiting more capable people."

...

After Third Lady's scolding, the villagers scattered, returning home to resume sleep.

The blacksmiths, Li Da and Gao Yiyi, gathered at Gao Yiyi's home, planning to forge a bell overnight. A true bell would be impossible in one night, so they settled for a simpler version—essentially a large iron tub.

They lit the furnace and got to work. Li Da instructed Gao Yiyi techniques as they labored. He had no fear of teaching a rival; he'd already vowed never to touch a hammer again once free.

“I'd rather starve to death or leap from a cliff than be a smith again!”

Early in the morning,

before dawn, Third Lady marched Gao Yiye to bathe.

The village had only the “big pond” for washing. Daytime crowds ruled it out, but before daylight, while villagers still slept, they could bathe swiftly in near-total darkness.

Of course, they knew nothing of the night-vision-enabled camera outside the glass case, recording their surroundings 24/7. If they knew...

Ahem!

That guy on the forum might've been overjoyed.

After bathing, Third Lady presented a snow-white robe—thick, luxurious fabric—clearly costly.

Her clothes hung loose on Gao Yiye's frame, overly spacious, but it didn't matter. Since she didn't labor in fields, awkward fit just meant moving slower.

Gao Yiye stuck out her tongue. "I'm so hot!"

It was July—midsummer drought. The heat was brutal. Thicker fabrics only intensified the discomfort.

"You have to endure the heat," Third Lady murmured, smoothing creases from the robe. "We must honor the Great deity. After inviting him today, inquire reverently about his formal title. No more chaotic worship. Once we know his divine name, we can build him a shrine and cast a golden statue."

Gao Yiye nodded meekly. "Understood."

Third Lady retrieved her cosmetics and meticulously applied them to Gao Yiye's face...

Li Daoxuan was startled awake by the sound of a 'bell.'

Last night he had been browsing the military history forum, researching historical records from the late Ming dynasty, and accidentally stayed up until two or three in the morning before finally going to sleep. Naturally, he couldn't wake up early.

It wasn't until a jarring "Clang! Clang! Clang!" filled his ears that he shook his head and sat up groggily.

The scenic box now sat right next to his bed, adjacent to his computer desk. The 'bell' noises drifted out from inside it.

Shaking off his drowsiness as his mind slowly cleared, he remembered the events of the previous night. That sound like someone beating a broken bucket was most likely the villagers 'summoning the heavenly god.'

He rolled over in bed, crawled to the edge, and craned his neck over the scenic box to peer inside.

Oh, the little people seem lively today!

Forty-two villagers from the village, plus Thirty-Two's entire family of three along with a maid and servant, and the newly arrived blacksmith Li Da—forty-eight people in total—were now arranged in a huge formation. It looked like a high school class preparing for a flag-raising ceremony.

Gao Yiye stood right at the front. Clearly positioned center-stage for the sake of the entire village's future happiness, she wore pristine white robes and had her hair done up in a complex style peppered with hair ornaments. Already young and beautiful, the added makeup made her truly breathtaking, a feast for the eyes.

Put in modern terms, this appearance would classify her as a goddess. She'd have had at least a battalion of 'nice guy' admirers, a company of simps, and a platoon of rich heirs chasing her. Even Principal Wang might have sent some meme DM like, "What drip entered your veins? Nights filled with thoughts of you."

Li Daoxuan found it amusing: Not bad! This girl gets prettier and prettier. Looking like this, it makes me want to flip her skirt and... Heck, crap. That idiot on the forum is rubbing off on me.

He saw Gao Yiye raise a cup aloft with both hands, making a gesture like offering a toast to the sky, though her movements were awkward—clearly cobbled together last minute. First, a toast to the heavens, then pour the 'wine' (which was actually water) onto the ground, before kneeling down...

The remaining forty-six people knelt down after her.

Gao Yiye began reciting a prayer, probably one written overnight by Thirty-Two and Third Lady for her to memorize. Her delivery was clearly rough, stuttering, sometimes butchering a single phrase three different ways.

Li Daoxuan wasn't interested in hearing this mystical chant, so he tuned it out. Finally, after what felt like a while, she finished and shouted, "We dare to ask the Great deity's divine name, so that we may build a temple and create your statue!"

"Li Daoxuan."

He answered, playing along with their game.

Gao Yiye heard his voice and instantly beamed, turning to Third Lady and exclaiming, "The Great deity answered me! His name is Li Daoxuan!"

"Dao Xuan?" Hearing the name, Third Lady was elated. This clearly denoted a Daoist deity! She herself was a Daoist believer and had actually worried the Great deity might be a Buddhist Bodhisattva. That would have been so embarrassing she might as well have lit incense for Embarrassment's mother.

Now it was basically confirmed as Daoist. Without another word, Third Lady thudded her forehead onto the ground in a kowtow and loudly declared, "We pay tribute to the Dao Xuan Deity!"

Gao Yiye followed suit, thudding her own head down. “We pay tribute to the Dao Xuan Deity!”

The remaining forty-plus people promptly followed, everyone chanting in unison: “We pay tribute to the Dao Xuan Deity!”

Li Daoxuan was delighted. Fun, entertaining. He’d gone from being the nameless Great deity to being the Dao Xuan Deity! He had a proper title now.

Felt a little strange, though.

Gao Yiye started speaking again, haltingly. This was probably also a script prepared by Thirty-Two, who seemed to have prepared different versions for either Daoism or Buddhism.

She was reciting the Daoist version now. First, thanking the Dao Xuan Deity for bestowing the city wall upon the villagers. Then she explained that guards were needed at night, requiring lanterns to be lit all around the perimeter, and for that, they needed a lot of oil. They begged the Great deity to kindly bestow some oil or something similar.

Playing house was actually pretty fun.

As she stumbled through her request, Li Daoxuan picked up his cooking oil canister, poured a minutely-sized portion—a full lid’s worth from a mineral water bottle—into the lid, and gently placed it before Gao Yiye.

The Great Ming in the Box

The mineral water bottle lid wasn’t large, spanning a mere 2.5 centimeters in diameter and just 1 centimeter in depth.

But to the little figures below, it appeared as a gigantic pool with a diameter of seventeen feet and a depth exceeding half a zhang.

The pool was filled to the brim with modern industrially-produced canola oil.

The villagers caught a faint whiff and immediately recognized it.

“Canola oil.”

“Top-grade canola oil.”

“Heavens, such an enormous pool of canola oil!”

“I’ve only ever seen a tiny bottle before.”

“The Deity from the heavens does everything on a grand scale.”

The villagers hadn’t tasted canola oil in a long, long time.

Three years ago, before the drought began, they occasionally planted rapeseed to press a small amount of canola oil for special occasions.

But after three years of severe drought, even staple crops struggled to survive; who could manage to grow oilseed crops?

Now seeing this pool brimming with enough oil to bathe in, their joy was overwhelming.

Gao Chuwu was the first to speak up: “Wow! Using this for lanterns? That’s such a waste. Let’s just eat it all!”

“Silence!” the Village Chief instantly rebuked him. “Didn’t you see the horde of bandits passing outside the village last night? All you think about is eating! Thanks

to Heaven... ahem... under the Dao Xuan Deity's protection, we are no longer starving. Now our concern is protecting ourselves properly."

Gao Yiye raised her voice: "The Deity has spoken. Half of this oil we consume; the other half is for making lanterns. Each night, we'll light lanterns all along the wall, post sentinels to patrol, and show no laxity. If bandits approach, the sentinel sounds the alarm. Everyone must then take arms, guard the gate, and bar the invaders' entry!"

The villagers replied: "We obey!"

Gao Yiye added: "The Deity commands that this oil be left to Thirty-Two's management. The rest of you, return to your duties. The gate remains unfinished; the armor must still be forged; and Li Da's new-style firearm project demands great effort. Much remains to be done."

The villagers were surprised the oil had been entrusted to Thirty-Two. They thought the Deity, as usual, would divide it among them. Instead, it was assigned solely to the Third Lady? Truly strange.

Yet while curious, none dared question. They dispersed obediently to work.

Thirty-Two secretly rejoiced: Ha! The Deity noticed my value and entrusted me a task! My rise begins here! First, small tasks for His Excellency, then increasingly

important duties... until I become his right hand! Immeasurably greater than being a mere clerk at the county office!

“Thirty-Two!” Li Daoxuan’s call came.

Thirty-Two immediately stood at respectful attention: “How may I serve the Deity?” (“The Deity has instructions?”)

“You likely realize why I left the oil arrangements to you?” (“You must know why I entrusted the oil to you?”)

“This humble servant understands. The villagers are scattered like loose sand—each only cares for his own household, illiterate and innumerate. If managing nightly lantern oil fell to them, chaos would ensue in days. Errors would abound, even pilfering for domestic use.” (“This lowly one understands. The villagers are scattered like loose sand, each only concerned with their own family, lacking literacy or numeracy. Letting them handle the lantern oil nightly would quickly descend into disorder, riddled with errors and even theft for household use within days.”)

“Good, that insight is crucial.” (“En, your understanding suffices.”) Li Daoxuan noted: “Hm? No idioms to conclude this time?” (“En? No idiom to cap it off this time?”)

Thirty-Two scratched his head awkwardly: “This unworthy one used idioms to project learnedness among others. But before the Deity, my knowledge is but candlelight before the sun and moon—no pretense could ever...” (“This humble one’s adding idioms after each sentence was an attempt to display erudition before others. But before the Deity, such petty learning is like candle flame facing the sun and moon—no disguise could ever...”)

“Enough, no need for lengthy explanation.” (“Alright, no need for lengthy explanations.”) Li Daoxuan had long discerned his idiom habit but dismissed it with amusement. “What does Gaojia Village need most?” (“What do you think Gaojia Village lacks most?”)

“People!” Thirty-Two replied without hesitation. “Lacks people.” (“People!”)

“Excellent. Now you see clearly.”

Li Daoxuan gently extended a hand. A small mountain of flour balls manifested before Thirty-Two. “Use these to bring more people here.”

Delighted, Thirty-Two bowed deeply toward the sky. “The Deity can rest assured. Amidst this severe drought, flour is more precious than gold! With this, I am confident of deceiving... ahem... enticing... no... inviting many to join us.”

Li Daoxuan asked: “What are your specific thoughts?”

Thirty-Two elaborated: “Many villagers from nearby villages—Wangjia Village, Zhuangjia Village, Zhengjia Village—joined the rebel Wang Er’s forces. But some remain, unwilling to turn bandit. These survivors endure greater hardship than ever. If I toured these villages with merely a sack of flour, I could persuade them all to join us.”

A faint smile touched Li Daoxuan’s lips. Excellent. Their thinking coincided perfectly. With this man assisting him, things were becoming much simpler.

Historical records often revealed this pattern: in county offices, clerks handled practical realities, while magistrates dealt in abstractions.

Magistrates planned policy; clerks executed the gritty details.

When the magistrate speaks, the clerk’s legs break.

Thus, regarding practical competence, clerks often excelled, while magistrates dominated policy matters.

Li Daoxuan stated: “Good. Then it’s settled.”

With that, He fell silent. Gao Yiye watched His face gradually vanish into the clouds, seemingly withdrawing His gaze from the world, before announcing: “The Deity has returned to the immortal realm.”

Thirty-Two let out a gleeful “Ha!” jumping a foot high. “Marvelous! Today, I am His Excellency’s appointed clerk! Hahaha! Ahahaha!”

He’d longed to erupt in jubilant laughter earlier but restrained himself in the Deity’s presence. Now free of scrutiny, he threw his arms wide, laughing heartily.

Gao Yiye also relaxed, stretching her limbs. “Ah,” she sighed to Third Lady beside her, “Maintaining this solemn posture in these heavy robes is utterly exhausting!”

Third Lady gazed at her enviously. “I don’t know how I envy you, yet you complain it’s tiresome.”

Gao Yiye quickly amended: “Ah! I don’t mean it like that! It’s just... unfamiliar.”

Third Lady spoke earnestly: “Miss Yiye, you are the Saint Lady serving the Dao Xuan Deity. Your dignified demeanor enhances His reverence among all. Never forget this.”

Gao Yiye struggled to adopt a solemn expression. “I understand.”

Turning to Thirty-Two, Third Lady suggested: “Darling, the villagers remain ignorant. All this time, not one thought to properly honor the Deity. Shouldn’t our family contribute funds to build Him a temple and craft a golden statue?”

Thirty-Two didn’t hesitate a moment: “Build! Even if it means selling the pots and pans, we will erect it! But... within Gaojia Village, having money may not suffice...”

The Great Ming in the Box

Li Daoxuan had “vanished into the clouds,” but he hadn’t actually left. He was still outside the box watching, merely covering it with its glass lid and gazing through the glass instead.

After these days of study, he had discovered that removing the lid allowed Gao Yiye to see him “appearing in the clouds,” while viewing through the glass made him invisible even to Gao Yiye.

Humans were quite peculiar!

Watching openly would have been fine, but secretly watching felt strangely satisfying.

Observing Gao Yiye, Thirty-Two, and others expressing their true nature after “the Deity had left” was quite interesting.

Building a temple and crafting an idol seemed unnecessary to Li Daoxuan, but if the villagers liked to stir things up, he let them be without intervening. After all, only about forty people were in the village, and whatever they wanted to do required labor they simply lacked—he just watched how they played it out.

Thirty-Two first ordered the villagers to bring out every oil jar and oil bottle from their homes. Everyone went to fill these containers with canola oil, and once every household’s containers were full, half a pool of oil still remained.

Next, he organized the young adults in the village to lift the mineral water bottle lids together, resembling a swarm of ants carrying heavy loads, transporting the remaining half lid of oil to his temporary small house. Then, they began processing the pile of flour.

The flour Li Daoxuan had placed inside the box had all formed into spheres.

Thirty-Two borrowed a millstone from the Village Chief and assigned youths like Gao Chuwu to grind the spherical flour back into powder, making it resemble ordinary flour.

Gao Chuwu complained while grinding, “Third Lady, why do we have to crush them again? It’s so much trouble.”

Thirty-Two smacked his forehead with a “thwack.” “You understand nothing! I’m taking this flour out of the village to meet outsiders, to draw people to our village. How bizarre would these ball-like flour appear to outsiders? If officials see it, who knows what trouble it might stir. Grinding it into powder is the only way to deceive Heaven to cross the sea.”

Gao Chuwu dimwit replied, “If officials see it, just tell them the Deity gave it to us.”

Thirty-Two gave him another “thwack.” “You understand nothing! These years, the court has been cracking down on cults. Anyone deemed a cult heretic is executed without pardon. Me handing out ball-shaped flour and calling it a gift from the Deity? That’s practically throwing oneself into the net!”

Gao Chuwu scratched his head. “Ah? Stop hitting me. I’m already dumb enough—if you keep smacking my head, I’ll get dumber.”

Li Daoxuan found this amusing. He shifted his gaze to another corner, where Third Lady sat under the eaves with Gao Yiye, holding a Taoist text and reading it aloud to her.

As Gao Yiye listened, her head seemed to double in size, overwhelmed, but she still listened with intense focus, straining to memorize every word without any sign of retreat.

The villagers were striving hard!

Li Daoxuan thought, “I should strive too. For my livelihood, I’ll pick up another small job.”

He opened his work QQ, messaged the task assigner: “Bro, got any work lately? Throw me a task.”

The person replied laughingly, “I was waiting for you. Here, take this one. A gaming company needs monster designs—main theme black, ferocious, disgusting, stomach-churning at first glance. 800 yuan, deliver within two days.”

...

Two days passed in a flash.

At dusk, the setting sun descended below the western sky.

Li Daoxuan stretched, loosening his stiff muscles.

The client had just reviewed the work. On the whole, they were satisfied with the monster designs Li Daoxuan created, but felt it needed two fangs. He added them quickly, but then the client thought fangs were too common and preferred a long tongue instead.

So, Li Daoxuan gave the monster a long tongue. The client examined it, decided the tongue should have spikes, so he shrank the fangs and stuck them onto the tongue.

The client was thoroughly pleased. Li Daoxuan's savings increased by 800 yuan.

Busy with work these two days, he had paid little attention to the villagers inside the box. Now task complete, he finally had time to look.

The moment he focused on the interior, he saw Thirty-Two leading a large group of ragged people through the city gate. Counting them, he found over a hundred—102 to be precise.

These newcomers scanned Gaojia Village's "towering city walls," seemingly intimidated, and shuffled nervously into the village. Standing in the open square at its center, they looked utterly awkward, unsure how to position their hands and feet.

Thirty-Two stood before the group and declared loudly, “I already told you all the details on the way here. In short, at Gaojia Village, you’ll definitely get a bite to eat, but mark my ugly words clearly—after eating the Deity’s meal, you must serve the Deity. Do whatever the Deity commands, obey faithfully, and never slack off or loaf around. Otherwise...Heh...”

He deliberately paused, offering a sinister, villain-like grin. “Losing food is minor trouble—if you anger the Deity, He will surely make you understand what Heaven punishes, earth annihilates means.”

Li Daoxuan secretly enjoyed this; “He’s terrifying the newcomers, painting me as a fierce being.”

Just then, Gaojia Village’s Village Chief approached: “Third Lady, who are these people?”

Thirty-Two chuckled grimly: “They are villagers from Wangjia Village, Zhengjia Village, Zhuangjia Village, and several others nearby. The chaos stirred by Wang Er swept away many from their villages, leaving too few people behind. I called out over there, and they followed me.”

Humans are social creatures; when village numbers dwindle below a certain point, the survivors can’t endure and must relocate.

Land usually tethers peasants, preventing such movement. But after a three-year drought, the land became utterly worthless. A handful of people stuck in a village with nothing but dried, cracked yellow soil faced only death.

The Village Chief hesitated awkwardly: “So many come at once—where will they live? There aren’t enough houses in the village.”

Thirty-Two dismissed the concern: “Couldn’t care less where they bunker down. I only provide food—they figure accommodation out themselves.”

The Village Chief suggested, “How about we ring the bell and request help from the Deity?”

Thirty-Two’s eyebrows shot up as he glared furiously at the Village Chief. “Don’t pester the Deity with every scrap of minor hassle! Only bother Him when it’s beyond our own fixing. Things we can handle ourselves, we must manage with all our might. Otherwise, someday, the Deity might kick you squarely in the crotch and tell you to piss off.”

Li Daoxuan had been cutting a can when Thirty-Two spoke. He set aside his scissors and aluminum can. “That makes sense—perhaps I’ve been overly mothering?”

He decided not to cut the can and instead observed how the villagers sorted it out themselves.

His takeaway meal had just arrived. Li Daoxuan picked up his shredded pork with potatoes over rice and started eating, watching the box while he shoveled mouthfuls.

Thirty-Two handed each newcomer a small sack of flour. These half-starved villagers, their faces pallid with hunger, erupted in tearful gratitude. They borrowed pots to cook noodle paste, ate their fill, and savored a full meal.

Darkness settled swiftly!

Unfazed by shelter, they simply plucked dry grass from outside and piled it against the city wall base. Without undressing, they laid down atop it—no rain fell these days anyway, so needing a roof felt irrelevant.

Once settled, they gaped in awe as lantern after lantern flickered alight atop the wall, encircling Gaojia Village's massive walls every ten steps. Inside these lanterns, no candle burned—only a canola oil lamp glowed, casting faint halos over the nearby vicinity while releasing a fragrant aroma as the oil burned.

Two villagers carrying bows and arrows climbed atop the wall to begin patrolling.

The newcomers froze in shock: “Using canola oil like this? How rich is Gaojia Village?”

The Great Ming in the Box

Early in the morning, the small scenic box buzzed with activity.

The addition of one hundred new inhabitants significantly boosted the village's vitality.

The newcomers wandered around the village as if touring some exotic spectacle, pacing back and forth while making embarrassingly awestruck exclamations.

“This iron roundhouse is amazing—how was it even built?”

“What's the deal with this huge pond? With the drought lasting three years, even rivers are nearly dry. How does Gaojia Village still have such a big reservoir?”

“Chicken jerky! This whole place is covered in dried chicken jerky!”

The newcomers soon received an overwhelming lesson in wonder.

This was precisely what Thirty-Two wanted. He deliberately didn't rush to greet them first thing at dawn, assigning them no tasks. Instead, he let them roam freely, hoping the village's "divine artifacts" would awe them into compliance for later orders.

Only once this group grew thoroughly dazed did Thirty-Two gather them together: "The village urgently needs various skilled workers, especially blacksmiths. Those who can forge iron, step forward. You'll receive an extra two liang of flour daily."

Three middle-aged men immediately jumped out, stomping their feet in excitement. Never did they imagine their mediocre skills could earn them two extra liangs of flour per day.

Thirty-Two asked them, "Your households must have hammers and anvils, correct? Go fetch them. From now on, follow Master Li's orders on what to forge."

The men obeyed obediently.

Thirty-Two then addressed the remaining villagers: "The first task for the rest of you is to build a temple for Dao Xuan Deity."

Watching from outside as Li Daoxuan saw this, he couldn't help feeling both amused and exasperated. The village had countless pressing matters awaiting attention—it was practically starting from scratch—and here they were prioritizing a temple?

Such a useless distraction!

He started to summon Gao Yiye to intervene. But then he recalled something: in his favorite Civilization games, founding a new city didn't begin with functional buildings; it often started with temples.

Expanding city borders relied on cultural influence.

Religious structures in early stages doubled as cultural centers.

Though just game mechanics, their design drew from historical precedent. A profound insight stirred within Li Daoxuan.

Instinct told him not to meddle with Thirty-Two's actions. This seemingly chaotic approach might yield unexpected benefits.

Li Daoxuan abandoned the idea of calling Gao Yiye, choosing instead to observe silently.

Thirty-Two continued: “Those skilled in masonry, step forward. You’ll receive an extra one liang of flour daily.”

Several middle-aged men stepped out, faces beaming.

“You three will lead others in temple construction...” Thirty-Two paused, suddenly remembering something. “Does anyone here know how to carve statues?”

“I do!” Two men raised their hands instantly. After witnessing the blacksmiths and masons gain extra flour, they understood that specialized skills meant rewards. Hiding their talents no longer made sense—they needed to volunteer.

“The life-sized City God statue in the county’s City God Temple—I carved that.”

“Me too—I once carved a Guanyin figure.”

Both turned out to be seasoned sculptors. Delighted, Thirty-Two declared: “Excellent! The rest—gather stones and timber. Begin building. You two sculptors, come with me.”

He led them to where Gao Yiye stood: “Miss Gao, I brought two statue-makers. Kindly describe the Deity’s appearance so they can sculpt an image of Dao Xuan Deity.”

Gao Yiye reacted with surprise: “Oh? This... I need to ponder carefully...”

Li Daoxuan felt amused and deliberately lifted the top cover of the scenic box, moving his face above the scenic box and looking down below.

Gao Yiye saw it immediately. In the clouds, a young face vaguely appeared, with neat features, kind eyes, handsome and good-looking.

She couldn't help murmuring: “The Deity is very young, with no long beard, and the features...”

The two middle-aged men quickly memorized it in their minds.

Before long, the two men dug out two lumps of yellow mud from a nearby ditch. First, according to Gao Yiye's general description, they molded a young man's head and then made minor adjustments.

“Here... the eyes need to be a little bigger...”

“The bridge of the nose a bit higher...”

“The lips should curve slightly upward. The Deity isn’t fierce; he’s kind and gentle.”

“The ears are a bit too large.”

In less than two hours, Li Daoxuan’s face was carved out.

He held a magnifying glass and carefully examined it through the glass. The face was carved vividly, yet Gao Yiye, when recounting his appearance, had clearly added some personal feelings. She gave him a makeover, changing his hair to long locks, enlarging his eyes a little bit, raising the bridge of his nose a tiny bit, and making his gaze more commanding a fraction...

All these little bits added together made him overall 32% more handsome and boosted his majesty by 320%, instantly transforming him from a modern young man to the imposing, youth-preserving Dao Xuan Deity.

After the head was done, making the body was much simpler.

The two middle-aged men worked together. Using a lot of yellow mud, they made a body sitting cross-legged, wearing a Taoist robe, holding a dust whisk in the right hand, and cradling a Tai Chi diagram in the left.

Finally, they attached the head...

The solemn and dignified Dao Xuan Deity Statue was officially completed.

Li Daoxuan held the magnifying glass, looking at his “statue” left and right, front and back. Hmm, he was satisfied, very satisfied. He really wanted to reach into the box, take the thing out, and place it in his collection cabinet.

The craftsmanship of this thing was way more detailed than those Gundam models or plastic soldiers. Though less than one centimeter tall, all details like the gaze, hair strands, and fingertips were exquisitely rendered.

“Huh? Wait a minute!”

Li Daoxuan turned to glance at his model collection cabinet, his eyes locking onto a plastic model that was only two centimeters tall but cost a whopping 288 yuan. He turned back to look at the Dao Xuan Deity Statue in the box, then back at the 288-yuan plastic model, then back to the Dao Xuan Deity Statue...

He compared and confirmed repeatedly.

That model he once couldn't put down, spending 288 yuan to bring home, now compared to the Dao Xuan Deity Statue in terms of fine craftsmanship, was just a piece of crap, yes, really a piece of crap.

If that piece of crap could sell for 288 yuan, how much could this Dao Xuan Deity Statue sell for?

Hey! He had an idea.

Li Daoxuan spoke: "Gao Yiye, tell these two sculptors that I am very satisfied with their skills. There are some things I need them to do next. If they do well, they'll receive enormous rewards."

After speaking, he pulled up an image on his computer and clicked print. Soon, an A5 sheet printed with Supreme Treasure's Sun Wukong from 'A Chinese Odyssey' slid out from the printer.

Chapter 35: Lying with Eyes Wide Open

This time, Li Daoxuan did not print on an entire A5 sheet. He printed the image of the Supreme Treasure version of Sun Wukong in one corner of the A5 paper, then cut out that corner with scissors.

It became a tiny picture only three centimeters long and two centimeters wide.

It couldn't be made smaller, or the details on the picture would become unclear.

Next, he gently placed this little picture into the scenic box, setting it before Gao Yiye and the two sculptors.

This sudden appearance of paper out of thin air startled the two sculptors. It was the first time they had witnessed the "Deity manifesting" since arriving at Gaojia Village. They immediately dropped to their knees, knocking their heads on the ground several times with loud thuds.

After Gao Yiye instructed them to rise, they took a closer look. They recognized it immediately: "This is... Sun Wukong, the Victorious Fighting Buddha."

As professionals in sculpting, they were familiar with far more deities than anyone in Gaojia Village. Gao Yiye couldn't identify the figure at a single glance.

"The Deity bids you craft this Buddha statue. It must be identical to this painting. Oh, and avoid using clay. Use wood."

"Make it as large as the painting? Twenty feet tall?" The two sculptors were horrified.

In their understanding, a twenty-foot Buddha statue already qualified as a colossal figure. Moreover, how thick a tree would be needed for a wooden statue that size? Could such massive trees even be found nearby?

Gao Yiye shook her head. “That won’t be necessary. Make it merely the height of a person.”

The two sculptors replied, “That’s much simpler. With our craftsmanship, we can complete an ordinary person-sized statue in just a few days. However, making it identical to the painting will require intricate work, extending the process for a few more days to carve the details.”

Gao Yiye tilted her head as if listening to a voice from above, putting on a serious expression. “It needs to be painted.”

At these words, the sculptors stiffened awkwardly. “We don’t have colorful paints. Such things are prohibitively expensive.”

Gao Yiye responded, “This is a minor matter. Go find the wood first. When the wooden form is completed and needs painting, return to me again.”

The two sculptors hurried off in search of wood.

Li Daoxuan stood up from beside the scenic box. “Another trip outside it is.”

Across the east gate of his residential complex stood a Hongxing Meikailong furniture market. He vaguely recalled it sold various paints. Following his memory, it took him ten minutes to locate the paint store tucked in a corner.

He bought mini cans of paint costing fifteen yuan each, one small can per color. The paints were surprisingly heavy; purchasing every color made the load excessive. With great effort, he hauled them home and placed the clusters of pots and tins beside the scenic box.

Having stepped outside and returned, he found the village abuzz. Inside the blacksmith's shop, several blacksmiths were gathered around Li Da, guided by him, loudly striking chunks of iron.

Newcomers and Old Villagers jointly carried stones and timber in a lively bustle to prepare for temple construction. Thirty-two stood with hands clasped behind his back, weaving through the crowd, directing villagers here and there in urgent waves.

Life surged tangibly; shouts and cries crisscrossed ceaselessly.

Li Daoxuan wore a tender, matronly smile as he observed the scene, like witnessing the growth of a beloved child.

By sunset, outsiders arrived at the village outskirts...

Li Daoxuan's gaze shifted beyond the village walls. Tsk, quite the crowd.

A seemingly imposing general led them, mounted on a tall horse, clad in armor and helmet. Behind him trailed over a hundred soldiers draped in cloth armor, clustered raucously as they approached Gaojia Village.

Officials were coming.

Li Daoxuan needed no brain power to guess why they were near here. He furrowed his brow. Knocking them all out with a few slaps would be easy, but... completely unnecessary!

He bowed toward the scenic box. "Gao Yiye, go fetch Thirty-Two. I'll teach him how to bluff these officials away."

...

The leading soldier was named Cheng Xu, a ninth-ranked military officer of the Ming Dynasty, a patrol officer.

He was mounted on horseback, cursing Bai Shui Wang Er's ancestors with fervor.

His insults paid rich tribute to millennia of Chinese traditions of respecting elders and cherishing the young. Examples included: "Screw your mother!" "Fuck your father!" "Cut up your whole family!" and "May your descendants lack assholes!"

His rage was understandable. After all, his duty as a patrol officer spanned catching bandits and maintaining law and order.

A few days earlier, he'd been relaxing at a theater with an opera troupe when news arrived: Wang Er rallied a few hundred peasants, stormed the county seat, chopped the magistrate Zhang Yaocai to death, followed by the county clerk and the principal. They slaughtered a few wealthy landowners, raided official grain stores, and seized the official grain.

The catastrophe was abrupt. By the time Cheng Xu received the news and rallied his troops to reach the county seat to suppress the revolt, it was too late.

Zhang Yaocai's head swung left and right on the city gate like a morbid wind chime. The gang led by Bai Shui Wang Er had vanished like smoke, leaving only the utterly ravaged husk of Chengcheng County, several sections still oozing black tendrils of smoke from smoldering rooftops.

Any assessment pointed squarely to Cheng Xu's dereliction of duty. He could surely expect to be investigated and prosecuted in the aftermath.

He spent two days restoring order to the spiraling county town. Now, seizing Wang Er alive offered the sole chance of making amends to lessen his sentence.

Cheng Xu had just emerged from Wangjia Village—now deserted as a ghost town, not a soul in sight. Unable to learn which direction Wang Er had fled, he simply roamed. Wandering near blindly, he drifted toward Gaojia Village.

His first glimpse halted him cold. Rubbing his eyes in disbelief, he barked out, "Fuck me... am I hallucinating?"

His deputy inspector spoke quietly beside him. "Leader, you're not mistaken. That absolutely is a walled city."

Cheng Xu hissed through clenched teeth. "Could Wang Er have built himself a massive fortress in these mountains already?"

His heart raced. If Wang Er commanded such a city, his hundred-strong force was utterly pointless—capable of nothing. Storming fortifications was impossible. His hope of making amends by capturing Wang Er felt shattered.

“Catastrophe looms... if rebels wield such power, the court will surely have me executed... seems the beckoning spirit of my late grandma beckons me toward doom...”

“Oh, if it isn’t Commander Cheng!” The gates of Gaojia Village swung open. Out jogged a familiar figure—the magistrate’s steward, Thirty-Two. He waved at Cheng Xu as if hailing an old friend before merrily striding toward the officials. He halted before Cheng Xu’s horse. “What wind brings you to Gaojia Village? Such honored guests truly grace our humble gates.”

Normally, Thirty-Two’s pompous jargon made Cheng Xu itch to throttle him. Yet this time, oddly, it sounded like sweet music. He dismounted. “Ah? Chief Steward Thirty-Two? This fortress appeared from nowhere—I feared that traitor Wang Er was already this strong! Truly scared me half to death! But seeing you reassures me greatly. Quickly now, explain this fortification.”

Thirty-Two adopted an exquisitely confused expression. “Fortress? What fortress?”

Cheng Xu pointed bluntly toward the massive front wall. “How isn’t this a fortress wall? How tall would these ramparts need to be otherwise?”

Thirty-Two turned toward the village entrance. He looked left. He looked right. Playing the blind fool, he turned back to Cheng Xu with elaborate confusion. “Fortress walls? I see nothing. Just a remote little village sheltering refugees. No walls, no fortresses anywhere. How could you conjure accusations with nothing real to accuse?”

With a screech, Cheng Xu half-drew his blade. “SHIT! Thirty-Two! You dare tell these lies with eyes wide open?! Are you playing games with my fucking life?!”

Chapter 36: There Was No Fortress Here at All

Thirty-Two waved his hands repeatedly. “I wouldn’t dare to tease the general. There really isn’t any fortress here.”

Cheng Xu was furious. Pointing forward, he yelled, “Such a huge fortress! So huge! Look clearly! If you keep spouting nonsense, I’ll chop your head off with one stroke!”

Thirty-Two felt uneasy inwardly. This military official was coarse-tempered and violent—if he said he’d kill someone, he meant it. Thirty-Two feared he’d really strike.

But every word he said now came straight from the Deity’s instruction. He couldn’t disobey the Deity’s command.

After all, the Deity was watching from above. Surely he wouldn't let Cheng Xu actually kill him. Plowing ahead with the act, Thirty-Two said, "General Cheng, did you oversleep and wake up too suddenly? There really isn't a fortress here."

"Damn it!" Cheng Xu drew his steel blade.

Seeing this, Li Daoxuan knew it was his turn to intervene.

He placed his phone inside the scenic box.

Then, high in the air behind the officials, he activated the pre-loaded horror film soundtrack and hit play...

"Whoa... hahahaha... Woooo... ohohoho..."

The strange laughter of a woman erupted behind the officials.

Loud! Overwhelmingly loud!

Horror movie ghost laughter was terrifying enough, but amplified at full volume, the horrifying, unnatural cackling filled the entire world.

Cheng Xu had just drawn his blade when the enormous, eerie female laughter boomed behind him. He shuddered violently. His steel blade clattered to the ground as he spun around.

All his soldiers performed a simultaneous “about-face.”

Li Daoxuan swiftly withdrew his hand, retrieving the phone.

When the officials turned, all they saw behind them was endless yellow sand—dust swirling in the wind, but nothing else.

“What was that just now?!”

“What happened?!”

“Who was laughing?!”

“Oh heavens! That sound just now... could it be... a ghost?”

The officials murmured among themselves, eyes wide, desperately scanning around.

Li Daoxuan chuckled inwardly. While their attention was focused the wrong way, he reached in and picked up the Lego bricks used to build the fortress wall, placing them outside the scenic box. Then, he reached in again to remove the water-containing Lock & Lock box. And oh—there was also a half-buried Pepsi cola can. He grabbed everything out.

More than a hundred villagers in Gaojia Village watched as objects in their village rose one by one, vanishing into the clouds. The view...

Was utterly breathtaking.

Li Daoxuan finished clearing the items and dusted sand from his hands. Time to keep watching the show.

The officials stared at their rear for a long time but found nothing. They couldn't locate the source of the dreadful woman's laughter. Uneasily admitting defeat, they reluctantly turned back to face Thirty-Two.

The moment they turned, every man stiffened. They stood frozen, as if paralyzed by a spell.

A full ten seconds crawled by before Cheng Xu finally stammered, “The fortress wall? That huge fortress wall... it was right here just now... the enormous wall...”

Thirty-Two finally grasped Li Daoxuan’s plan. Confidence surged within him. Absolutely, obeying the Deity was correct! The order to pretend not to see the wall was for this trick! Ha! Now it was his turn to shine.

Belly laughing inside, Thirty-Two kept an utterly baffled expression. “General Cheng, what are you talking about? There isn’t... and never has been... a fortress wall here. This is simply 【as things always have been】 !”

Cheng Xu roared, his voice cracking. “Damn it! I swear! There was a fortress wall here! A HUGE fortress wall! Two zhang high! Did you all not see it?! THERE WAS A HUGE WALL! RIGHT HERE! And then... the woman’s crazy laughter... and the wall... vanished!”

His speech dissolved into incoherence.

Thirty-Two shook his head with a sigh. “General, I heard no strange woman’s laughter. And this place has never had a fortress wall...”

Cheng Xu whipped around, bellowing at his men while wildly gesturing forward. “You all heard it! Saw it! Saw that massive wall just standing there! It was real! Tell them!”

His troops broke out in cold sweat. They had seen the wall! But now... there was nothing! Should they believe their eyes from moments ago, or their eyes now?

Utterly mind-boggled! Completely bewildered!

Thirty-Two curled his lips into a sinister grin— the kind a mountain ghost gives its trapped prey. “The pursuit of Wang Er must have strained the General greatly. Why not enter our village... rest well for a night? Recover your spirits... then take up the hunt for Wang Er’s gang tomorrow? Heh heh heh... Hiss...” He even flicked his tongue, moistening his lips, as if contemplating a tasty morsel.

Cheng Xu’s gaze flickered between Thirty-Two’s grotesque expression and the village itself. Dust hung thick in Gaojia Village. Crowds of villagers knelt with zealous fervor, worshipping... something unseen. Scattered rocks, logs, unbaked mud bricks, and clumps of earth littered the vicinity. The entire place radiated indescribable wrongness.

The memory of that chilling laughter echoed in his mind.

Creeping dread tightened Cheng Xu’s chest. “What cursed place is this?! Is that... my grandmother beckoning me from the village?! I won’t go in! I’d rather die than enter! Let’s go! Find Wang Er! I need to find Wang Er... need to get far, far away from here! Yes, that’s it! We hunt Wang Er! Grandmother... I... I must go! Still young! Can’t enter the village to meet you yet...” He turned and fled.

He ran several steps, then scrambled back to snatch his fallen steel blade, sheathing it. Spinning again, he ran away. After a few more paces, he turned back once more, leaped onto his warhorse, and finally galloped off.

He looped back and forth three chaotic times.

The deputy inspector, the archer Xiaoqi, and the others... they just stared, dumbstruck.

After a stunned pause, Thirty-Two grinned his ghastly grin again. “The General has fled. Not following? Fine. Fine indeed! Stay then. Be our honored guests in Gaojia Village, won’t you? Heh heh... Hiss... 【exquisitely delicious】 ”

The deputy inspector shrieked and bolted after Cheng Xu. The hundred-plus soldiers scrambled to follow, utterly disheveled and covered in dust.

In moments, the entire group vanished.

Only after they were well out of sight did Thirty-Two plant his hands on his hips and roar with laughter. “Entertaining! Utterly entertaining! HA! HA HA HA! You looked down on me before, Cheng! Know this clerk’s power now? HA HA HA! HA HA HA! Should’ve scared the stupid out of that fool!”

Li Daoxuan spoke. “The officials are gone far enough. Tell everyone to clear away from the original wall location. I’m returning the wall.”

Gao Yiye quickly relayed the message.

Awe, reverence, and shock filled the villagers—especially the newcomers witnessing Lord Dao Xuan Deity’s divine might for the first time. It was overwhelmingly staggering. They scrambled frantically, putting distance between themselves and the former wall site, lest they obstruct the immortal’s workings.

Soon, they witnessed the fortress wall descend slowly from the sky once more, landing precisely where it had been before. The sight of this giant monolith floating down was profoundly humbling. Then, Blacksmith Li’s cylindrical workshop descended too, settling back into place. Finally, the massive pond floated down, pouring back into the massive depression it had left... filling it once more.

Chapter 37: Of Course in Summer, One Must Drink Happy Fat Water

The temple of Dao Xuan Deity was under frantic construction.

After the incident where the Deity teased the officials, the newcomers to the village were utterly shocked, transforming into staunch fanatics of the Dao Xuan Deity Teachings almost in an instant.

As for people, once they become fanatics, they work for their faith as if their lives depended on it; even though they themselves lacked houses to live in, they put forth every ounce of their strength to build the Deity's temple.

The entire Gaojia Village was filled with a thriving, bustling atmosphere.

This atmosphere persisted for six straight days, and today was the seventh.

It was noon.

The sunlight was scorching!

The temperature was climbing back towards 40 degrees.

Li Daoxuan had just moved his face over the box, intending to observe the little figures' daily lives, when he heard Gao Yiye shouting loudly from below: "Deity, the two sculpture uncles want to speak with you."

“Let them speak,” Li Daoxuan thought silently to himself: It’s come! The thing I’ve been waiting for has arrived.

Sure enough, the two sculptors approached, knelt respectfully and kowtowed first, then reported: “Deity, the clay statue we carved for you, and the wooden statue of Sun Wukong you asked for, are both finished and ready for painting.”

“Very good.” Li Daoxuan had been waiting for this day; he was fully prepared. He took out a small sheet of tin foil, placed it inside the box, spread it flat before the two sculptors, then used a pre-prepared straw to suck up a bit of red paint and dripped it onto the tin foil.

What he dripped was merely a drop less than five millimeters in diameter, but to the sculptors, it appeared as a paint ball three inches wide that landed on the “tin foil board” with a splat, spreading out with a startlingly loud noise.

The two sculptors cautiously walked up to the puddle of paint, dabbed a tiny stick into the red paint, and sniffed it: “So this is divine paint from heaven! Much better than the paint from our mortal world.”

The paint used during the Ming Dynasty was called xiuri lacquer, a natural paint made by processing juice from lacquer trees mixed with pigments, and though it was close to modern paint, it had flaws like chipping easily and poor shine, so after painting, they often added a layer of tung oil to protect it and boost the gloss.

In contrast, the modern paint Li Daoxuan gave them was a top-notch product, developed in the 20th century using polymer compounds—doesn’t that phrase

sound awesome? Yet it only cost 15 yuan per small can! Not only did it grip stronger, but the colors were more vivid and the shine higher. Once applied, it didn't need extra tung oil and gleamed like an oily middle-aged man's forehead, surpassing Ming Dynasty paint in every way.

After just a look, the two sculptors were certain this was divine paint from heaven.

“We have red! Next is green, blue...”

Li Daoxuan dripped a drop of each color for them, which was nearly enough.

When he first started giving items to the small people, he hadn't mastered portioning, leading to blunders like dropping a whole egg on them and wasting resources, but now he knew how to control the amounts and conserve supplies.

Seeing a full array of paint colors, the sculptors were thrilled; in their trade before, they only had access to three or five dull-colored options—never such a rich palette to pick from.

Especially gold paint, which was so precious that it was personally managed by an agent sent by a wealthy lord, only brought out for supervised use and never entrusted to them in such large quantities.

Only the Deity was this generous, giving us so much gold paint.

Now they could unleash their creativity freely.

Taking brushes and dipping them in paint, they worked with gusto, drawing on the wooden statue of Sun Wukong as Supreme Treasure.

Li Daoxuan didn't interrupt them; he looked over to the workers constructing the temple under the fierce noon sun.

As he glanced that way, he saw a villager carrying stones stumble underfoot and almost fall; someone nearby quickly supported him. The villager set down the rock, held his forehead, and sat slumped with help from companions, looking unwell.

“Heatstroke?”

Li Daoxuan reacted instantly.

In this sizzling heat of a late July noon, during a severe drought, it was no surprise that villagers laboring in the blazing sun suffered heatstroke; in fact, it was a miracle only one case appeared after three days—how had they managed to hold out earlier?

Thirty-two ran over and urgently directed villagers to fetch water from the pond, while a crowd circled around the heat-stricken little figure.

Li Daoxuan felt a pang of pity for his little people.

What to do?

Why, the answer was obvious!

He strode to the refrigerator, yanked open the freezer door, and pulled out a tray of ice cubes.

Tiny ice shards clung to the tray's edge. He scooped one up with his fingertip and placed it before the heat-struck villager.

A crowd of little folk had gathered anxiously around their swooning companion. Someone had fetched a bucket of water from the pond and was soaking a cloth scrap, intending to cool him with a damp compress, when suddenly a massive ice block descended from above. The villagers froze in surprise, then shouted in realization: "The Deity has bestowed ice upon us!"

One villager promptly laid the damp cloth over the ice. Once the fabric chilled completely, they draped it over the stricken villager's forehead.

Another broke off a small chip from the ice, dropped it into a water bowl, and fed the icy drink to the swooning man.

After much bustling, the afflicted man finally showed signs of recovery.

Li Daoxuan breathed a sigh of relief. With the immediate crisis averted, he turned his attention to preventing further heatstrokes.

He chipped another sliver from the ice block and placed it inside a mineral water bottle lid. Then he cracked open a bottle of cola and poured it into the lid.

Clink! Clink!

A miniature version of iced cola was complete.

He returned to the scenic box and carefully lowered the lid brimming with cold cola before his tiny people.

The villagers gaped stupidly at the huge pond of strange, brownish liquid that frothed and fizzed. Stuck upright in its center stood an ice chunk nearly as tall as a person itself. Icy vapor rose from the whole pool, and just standing near it sent a wave of cool relief washing over them.

“What in the world is this?”

“Never seen anything like it.”

“I smell something sweet... there’s sugar in here.”

“It is sugary!”

“But it’s bubbling weirdly. Could it be poisonous?”

“Since when has the Deity ever poisoned us? Calling this ‘poison’ disrespects His Excellency!”

“Someone! Beat this jerk to death!”

“Wait... I’m sorry... I didn’t mean it...”

The villagers erupted into commotion, momentarily forgetting their heat-struck brother altogether.

“Stop fussing! And no beating!” cut in Gao Yiye’s voice. “The Deity says this is called ‘happy fat water.’ Drinking it wards off the heat.”

Thrilled, the villagers surged to the “pond’s” edge, scooping up the liquid with cupped hands and gulping it down.

“Ah!”

“Cough! Cough! Splutter!”

“So fizzy! But somehow... feels great.”

“It feels... joyous.”

“So that’s why it’s called happy fat water! I get the ‘happy’ part, but ‘fat’ eludes me. What do those characters mean exactly?”

Dozens of pairs of eyes turned expectantly toward Thirty-Two, eager for the learned man’s interpretation.

Thirty-Two snorted. “‘Fat’ means plump, but it can also signify something large. ‘Fat home’ signifies a grand, prosperous family. Therefore, ‘happy fat water’ means water that brings joy to an entire, large household. See? That’s an immortal realm’s profound logic.”

The villagers had an epiphany. “Third Lady is ever so learned!”

Thirty-Two roared with laughter, fetched a large teacup, scooped a full measure from the pool, and downed it in one go. Instantly his eyes squeezed shut. Cough! Cough! Gag! Burp! The taste assaulted him fiercely... yet it was incredibly refreshing. Joy indeed!

A feeble protest came from the heat-struck villager still on the ground. “How... come... no one... cares... for me...?”

The villagers snapped back. “Huh? Quickly! Get him a cupful!”

Gao Yiye shouted, “Hold it! The Deity says heatstroke victims should not drink happy fat water. They must drink plain water first. Only after recovering may they partake of happy water.”

The stricken villager whimpered, “Do I... not deserve... the Deity’s... largesse then...?”

His head lolled sideways...

“Brother! Don’t die! Don’t die!”

Several villagers hurriedly knelt beside him, only to discover he was feigning death. Laughter erupted again. “This rascal seems revived—energetic enough to fake dying! Haul him up! Let’s make him swallow a tiny sip of happy fat water...”

“Hahaha... burp... ah... so joyous... so joyous...”

The Great Ming in the Box

August 1, 2023, Shuangqing City.

Today was Army Day, and business at Cai Xinzi's model shop was booming.

Especially military models. They were flying off the shelves every minute. Models of the Liaoning, the Chongqing, paratrooper figures... It was open season for selling today.

Cai Xinzi was delighted, her eyes sparkling as she grinned.

While counting money, the shop door opened. She was about to greet the customer when she saw it was her old friend, Li Daoxuan.

Cai Xinzi smiled and called out, "Daoxuan, what brings you here today? Here for the Hakka roundhouse? Hold on, it won't be ready for another ten days or so."

Li Daoxuan wore a mysterious smile. "I'm not here to pick up an order today. I'm here to supply you."

Cai Xinzi eyed him sideways. "Trying to cheat me again?"

Li Daoxuan replied, "I'm here to help you make big money, and you accuse me of cheating? Tsk, what a waste of a friendship." As he spoke, he slid his hand into his pants pocket, pulled out a tiny figure only about one centimeter tall, and placed it on the counter in front of Cai Xinzi.

The figure was so small that Cai Xinzi barely glanced at it. “A Supreme Treasure version of Sun Wukong model? Where’d you get such a tiny one? Plastic? This thing is worth five yuan at most.”

Li Daoxuan chuckled. “Solid wood.”

Cai Xinzi: “?”

The words “solid wood” piqued her interest.

Wooden figures were definitely more upscale than plastic ones. But being this small kind of defeated the purpose.

Li Daoxuan said, “Want to get a magnifying glass and take a closer look at this little wooden figure?”

Hearing him say that, Cai Xinzi knew something was unusual. She temporarily set aside her work, let the shop assistant handle the other customers, composed herself, took out a magnifying glass, and examined the little wooden figure closely.

She hadn’t looked properly before, but one close look made her jump in surprise.

Though only one centimeter tall, this little wooden figure was crafted with extreme precision. Every detail was meticulously carved. The tiny facial features were an absolute match for Supreme Treasure. Even the fine hair on its face was depicted. The armor Sun Wukong wore was detailed down to each individual plate, painted with incredible finesse.

This... this wasn't a toy anymore. It was a handicraft!

Undoubtedly a Micro-sculpting craft piece.

Cai Xinzi inhaled sharply. "Where did you get this little wooden figure?"

Li Daoxuan: "Secret."

Cai Xinzi: "It's not stolen goods you're trying to fence through me, is it? Shit!"

Li Daoxuan: "How many years have you known me? Am I the kind of guy to engage in illegal activities?"

Cai Xinzi thought carefully. "That's true. Not only are you a hopelessly nice guy, you're also someone who hates evil. You'd be the first to charge in if someone shouted 'Stop thief!' There's no way you'd steal things to fence."

“Glad you know me,” Li Daoxuan smiled. “I want to offload this thing, but I don’t have sales channels, so I thought of you, my old brother who sells models. Sell it here for me. You can take a cut.”

Cai Xinzi laughed and scolded him. “Take a cut, my ass! After all these years? I’ll just sell it for you.”

“No, you should take a cut,” Li Daoxuan’s tone turned serious. “This isn’t a one-off deal. It’s long-term. So you must get your percentage.”

“Long-term?” Cai Xinzi blinked, then immediately understood. “Ah, you found someone who can do Micro-sculpting to collaborate with? They carve, you sell, and you take your cut from the middle? Well, since that’s the case, I won’t be polite either. I’ll take ten percent.”

“Deal!” said Li Daoxuan. “I don’t know how much this thing is worth, and you’re probably a bit lost too. Test the waters with the price.”

“Okay, I’ll try. I’m just a model seller. I’ve never sold Micro-sculpting crafts before. If I end up selling it at a loss for you, don’t go blaming me.”

“Hey! Don’t be nervous, sell it boldly. Even if we lose money, I won’t blame you.”

Once their plan was settled, Li Daoxuan hailed a taxi home. While the car was still en route, he noticed a new update on Cai Xinzi's WeChat Moments.

“New rare treasure just arrived! A one-centimeter-tall Supreme Treasure micro-sculpture. Its exquisite detail can only be appreciated under a magnifying glass. Only one available! First come, first served. Latecomers will regret it. Friends and family discount: ¥8888...”

This was followed by several photos taken with a high-end camera in “macro” mode. One photo deliberately showed the sculpture resting on a fingertip, highlighting its minuscule size against the finger.

Li Daoxuan chuckled, “She’s really putting effort into this.”

He reached out to give it a like...

Unexpectedly, as soon as his finger tapped the like button, a prompt popped up: “Operation failed.”

“Huh? Can’t give a like?”

Li Daoxuan refreshed the page. Cai Xinzi's just-posted Moment had vanished. No wonder the like failed.

Shortly after, a message from Cai Xinzi arrived: "Wow, your micro-sculpture! I just posted it to Moments, and a regular customer snapped it up instantly!"

Li Daoxuan: "It really sold that fast?"

Cai Xinzi: "That guy definitely knows his stuff. Seeing my price was too low, he bought it outright without a word—transferred ¥8888 immediately to secure it. He's on his way to pick it up now. Damn it, I should have priced it hundreds higher! I screwed up. Both of us just took a big loss."

Li Daoxuan laughed: "It's fine, it's fine! ¥8888 is plenty of profit. I don't feel cheated at all."

Cai Xinzi: "You still have stock available, right? That guy is coming to pick it up soon. We can definitely negotiate further purchases. I need to discuss follow-up orders with him. This time, we must set the right price!"

"Current stock is gone. I'd need to carve another."

"So... that means... custom orders are possible?"

“Of course! Any custom request.”

“Hehehehe,” Cai Xinzi messaged: “Just wait for my good news.”

Li Daoxuan said: “Don’t price it too rigidly. Leave some profit for others; that’s how we build long-term partnerships. I can take a smaller cut on my end.”

Cai Xinzi: “No need to teach me that. When it comes to business, I’m way more experienced than you. Just watch.”

【Cai Xinzi transferred ¥8000 to you】

Li Daoxuan tapped “Receive,” secretly delighted. Not bad, not bad at all—finally earning money! For over half a month, raising those tiny people only cost money; now he could finally earn something back from them. Indeed, talented individuals were the most important key. As the variety of talents inside the box increased, his own ability to devise new money-making ideas would grow stronger.

His mood became exceptionally cheerful!

Soon, the taxi reached the entrance of his residential compound. Li Daoxuan hopped out and ducked into the supermarket by the gate. He bought a pork tenderloin, humming a tune as he strolled back home.

Inside the box, dusk was falling. The little people were cooking, wisps of smoke curling upwards from their fires.

Li Daoxuan cut off a very small piece from the fresh tenderloin and gently placed it on the open ground in the center of the village.

The villagers gasped in astonishment: “Meat! What a huge piece of tenderloin!”

Li Daoxuan smiled and instructed: “Yiye, tell everyone: extra meat for dinner tonight! Twenty grams per person. The two sculptors eat last—all the leftover portions go entirely to them both, as a reward for carving the Fighting Buddha statue.”

Chapter 39: No Rest for the Wicked

The villagers were overjoyed and rushed to the village center to divide the meat.

In the past, the Village Chief would preside over such matters, yet the villagers would disorderly divide portions themselves. Leftover scraps would be

haphazardly tossed to Gao Yiye's doorstep before fleeing—utter chaos. Some would even sneak an extra share.

But since Thirty-Two arrived at Gaojia Village, its once-disorganized state began transforming into a structured community.

The villagers no longer divided the meat disorderly. Instead, they looked expectantly at Gao Yiye and Thirty-Two.

Gao Yiye stood nearby, serving as the overseer. As Saint Lady, her presence warned villagers that the Deity watched their every move, discouraging any mischief.

Thirty-Two managed the specifics, waving his hand to instruct: “Gao Chuwu, you handle the cleaver and slicing. Bring the scale to weigh the cuts...”

“Gao Laba, receive two liang of pork.” Thirty-Two noted each name on paper, marking a check once received.

“Wang Er, received.”

“Zhong Datou, received.”

“Zheng Aniu, received.”

“Gao Sanwa, received.”

...

Over a hundred villagers lined up to receive their portions. Only afterward did Thirty-Two distribute shares to Gao Chuwu, Gao Yiye, and his own household. Saving allocation for the “management” last showcased their spirit of selflessness.

Once all villagers had their shares, only the two sculptors remained.

Anxious after waiting, the sculptors felt slighted—everyone else had received meat except them. They wondered why Saint Lady and the steward had kept them till last.

Gao Yiye beckoned them forward. They scurried eagerly to her. “Saint Lady, what do you bid us do?”

Gao Yiye replied, “The Deity decrees all remaining pork be rewarded to you.”

Both sculptors froze, eyes wide. They turned to the leftover meat. Though over a hundred villagers had taken two liang each, the remainder still filled two washbasins—dozens of pounds at least.

Gao Chuwu grinned and cleaved the enormous loin into two halves. “Take it. One half each.”

The sculptors stared. “So... so much? All for us? Others only got two liang...”

Gao Yiye explained, “The Deity is exceedingly pleased with your carving of the Victorious Fighting Buddha statue. This meat is your special reward.”

Overwhelmed, the sculptors prostrated and kowtowed fervently. “We thank the Deity! We thank the Deity!”

Thirty-Two lowered his voice sternly. “Henceforth, both of you must strive harder in serving the Deity.”

“Of course! We’ll serve wholeheartedly!”

Previously hired by the wealthy to craft temple Buddhas, their rewards had been meager—scraps of food or copper coins. Never had they imagined receiving such an abundance of pork.

Even if uneaten, this meat could be traded for goods—an enormous fortune during famine. Nothing held value like food in these years.

But... fresh pork would spoil within days.

They shifted awkwardly. “Might we... possibly have...”

Thirty-Two smiled. “Take these two salt bags to cure the meat.”

Ecstatic, they thanked Third Lady, hoisted their pork and salt bags, and bolted toward their makeshift hut: “Wife! First-born! Second-born! We’ve struck gold! Ha! We’ve struck gold!”

Not long after, the two piled up pine branches behind the village and began smoking cured meat. As everyone knows, the smell of smoking cured meat made all the surrounding people green with envy.

The other villagers craned their necks, thinking secretly: When will I perform a meritorious deed for the Deity to receive such extravagant rewards?

Such is the nature of human desire!

When starving, we crave mere morsels. But once fed, we yearn for more than others possess, and driven by such ambition, we endlessly strive to climb higher.

Of course, some prefer to give up.

For instance, Zheng Daniu from Zhengjia Village felt no envy toward the two sculptors smoking cured meat. Not only had he eaten his fill, but he'd also consumed two liang of pork. Patting his round belly in great contentment, he mused: Why strive so hard just to climb higher now that everyone's fed? Why not just lie down and rest?

Only...

That "happy fat water" he drank last time brought such joy. He longed to taste it again, but there was none left now.

Oh no. Unable to just lie idle, I crave the Deity's reward! I want that happy fat water!

Springing up like a carp leaping from water, Zheng Daniu grabbed his axe and dashed out of Gaojia Village. With the last sliver of sunlight illuminating the

mountains, he charged into the woods, searching wildly. Before long, he found a sturdy, premium tree.

He swung his giant axe vigorously. Fuelled by his full belly, thump, thump, thump—the massive tree soon crashed down. Cutting off the best section, a hefty log nearly two meters long, he found it too heavy to carry. Instead, he dragged, rolled, and pried it with great effort to bring it down the mountain.

Pushing the log, he rushed excitedly to Gao Yiye. “Saint Lady, Saint Lady! Look what I brought from the mountains. Perfect for carving the next statue! I’m useful, right?”

Gao Yiye had no idea whether it was useful, but after listening to the voice from the sky, she smiled. “Zheng Daniu, you’ve done well. The Deity praised you.”

Zheng Daniu beamed with joy.

Gao Yiye added: “The Deity says you may be rewarded with—”

“I—this humble one ventures a small request,” Zheng Daniu interjected hastily.

Gao Yiye: “?”

Zheng Daniu: “I seek no meat. I only wish... to drink another sip... just one sip of that happy fat water. Just a sip, no more.”

Gao Yiye paused briefly, then laughed: “The Deity says that’s fine. Do you own a washbasin? Hurry, fetch it.”

Zheng Daniu had arrived from Zhengjia Village with nothing, but he carved a wooden basin shortly after settling in. Hearing this, he rushed home at once and set his washbasin on the ground.

To Li Daoxuan’s eyes, the washbasin measured merely 3 millimeters in diameter—pitifully small. Using a needle tip, he drew a tiny amount from his cola bottle, then gently pushed the syringe. A single drop fell...

Just one drop filled Zheng Daniu’s basin to the brim, spilling over the edges.

“It’s overflowing! So much is wasted!” cried Zheng Daniu in distress. “Ah, no... spare happy fat water seeping into the ground! Heavens... lost in the soil!”

Thirty-Two yelled beside him: “Stop howling! You’ve got a basinful! What’s spilling matter? Now scam!”

Li Daoxuan suppressed a chuckle. Two thoughts formed clearly in his mind:

One: A grove lay not far beyond the village, hidden just beyond his view.

Two: Villagers must bring their own containers for rewards to conserve resources. This way, he wouldn't cause such excess waste with each gift.

The Great Ming in the Box

Night had fallen completely, plunging Gaojia Village into a “non-static shot.”

Wait—actually, it wasn't entirely static anymore. Villagers now patrolled the walls in 24-hour shifts. Beneath the flickering dim lamplight, two villagers circled the fortress round and round.

Still, the scene felt unbearably dull. No one could stand watching it for long.

By this hour each day, Li Daoxuan could comfortably shift his gaze away and return to his real-life routine.

Too lazy to boot his computer, he grabbed his phone instead.

Just then, a message from Cai Xinzi popped up: “Daoxuan, after hours of negotiation with the customer, we finally struck a deal.”

Li Daoxuan replied: “Oh? So what’s the verdict?”

Cai Xinzi: “Our Supreme Treasure piece was exquisitely crafted, but sadly, that character lacks broad appeal in that market. It skews too much toward ‘toy’ territory—doesn’t carry much value. The buyer only shelled out RMB 8,888 as a networking gift to open the door.”

Li Daoxuan grasped it immediately: “So if we switch the theme, we can actually make money?”

Cai Xinzi: “Exactly! Buddhist or Taoist deities are worth infinitely more than Supreme Treasure. That’s when it sheds the ‘toy’ label and becomes true ‘art.’”

Li Daoxuan chuckled: “I carved Supreme Treasure just for kicks. I can handle religious statues too. What’s his offer?”

Cai Xinzi: “For a standard, non-parody theme at one centimeter tall, matching Supreme Treasure’s detail level? He’ll pay RMB 48,888.”

Li Daoxuan grinned privately: “Nice! That’s twenty Hakka roundhouses right there.”

Cai Xinzi groaned inwardly: “I painstakingly build you a half-meter model with tires, motors, remote controllers, and over two hundred rooms—gobbling up heaps of sheet metal and materials—and barely charge you RMB 2,000. Yet you sell a one-centimeter wood scrap for RMB 48,888? Unacceptable. I’m coming to punch you.”

Li Daoxuan laughed: “Hahahaha!”

Cai Xinzi added: “The client also tossed out a wild request. See if you can handle it.”

Li Daoxuan: “Oh? Shoot.”

Cai Xinzi: “He wants something smaller. Tinier than one centimeter—down to five millimeters. Can you do it?”

Li Daoxuan: “...”

Seeing the ellipses, Cai Xinzi assumed defeat: “Sigh, impossible after all? He’s willing to pay RMB 228,888 for five millimeters.”

Li Daoxuan: “Why so little faith? You surely added him on WeChat? Ask him right now: isn’t five millimeters too bulky? I can deliver one millimeter—only fear is it’d be too minuscule for him to see. Might refuse it.”

Cai Xinzi: “Holy sht!”

Li Daoxuan: “Language, please.”

Cai Xinzi: “Are you freaking serious? One millimeter? Smaller than a grain of rice?”

Li Daoxuan: “The artisan who made my Supreme Treasure? A micro-sculpting master. So one millimeter’s no hurdle for me. Just ask if he wants it.”

Cai Xinzi: “Hold on. Let me check.”

Two minutes later, Cai Xinzi’s reply lit up: “If a one-millimeter piece holds even half the detail of your Supreme Treasure, he’ll pay RMB 1,288,888.”

Li Daoxuan: “Deal. I’ll take it.”

Cai Xinzi: “You mad lad! How can you pull off such an order? Color me impressed.”

Li Daoxuan: “Hahaha, fine—what’s this thing he wants?”

Cai Xinzi: “A statue of Lord Laozi.”

Li Daoxuan asked, “What can a millimeter-sized Grand Supreme Elderly Lord statue even be used for?”

Cai Xinzi replied, “I was curious too, so I asked. He said it’s for ‘saint statues in beads.’”

Li Daoxuan was astonished, “What the heck is a ‘saint statue in beads’?”

Cai Xinzi teased, “No clue, eh? Ha! Well, neither did I until I asked him. You’ve heard of sandalwood Buddhist prayer beads and Taoist beads? Little round pieces, often strung together to wear around the wrist.”

Li Daoxuan acknowledged, “That much I have heard of.”

Cai Xinzi explained, “The ‘saint statue in beads’ involves hollowing out the center of a bead and placing a tiny deity picture inside. Then it’s filled with a special liquid and sealed, leaving just a small window to peek through. When you hold one bead up, squinting into it, you see an image of a Buddha floating inside. For devotees, it’s practically priceless.”

Li Daoxuan exclaimed, “Wow, that actually sounds quite impressive.”

Cai Xinzi continued, “But an average craftsman can only manage a crude drawing inside. With your micro-sculpting skill, he could cram a lifelike statue in there. Imagine how much more three-dimensional that is! Way more sophisticated than a flat image. The statue could even float and rotate in the liquid – something a drawing could never do.”

Li Daoxuan finally grasped it: the thing really did seem like a clever trick.

Cai Xinzi predicted, “I bet he’ll take your statue for 1,288,888 yuan, pop it into a bead, and then dare to sell that single bead for three million.”

Li Daoxuan chuckled, “Haha, interesting! How much he sells it for is his own skill. We’re fine here. Just be open-minded about it.”

Cai Xinzi insisted, “Open-mindedness is fine for a person, but not for business. I need to haggle harder.”

Li Daoxuan agreed, “Sure, whatever you manage to get is your skill. I just need 1,150,000. Anything extra is your commission.”

Cai Xinzi sighed, “Damn, you really are open-minded. If we were back in ancient times, you’d be one of those ridiculously generous heroes, like that ‘Small Whirlwind’ Chai Jin from Water Margin – handing out money to anyone, useful or not, just making everyone respect you by flinging cash around.”

Li Daoxuan thought: Hey, nailed it. I’ve been flinging money at those villagers all month. Got their ten out of ten respect now. Since being called generous wasn’t bad, he just smiled and accepted it.

...

The time ticked away...

...

Soon, days had passed.

During these recent days in Gaojia Village, aside from Gao Yiye and Thirty-Two, the two newly arrived sculptors had garnered the most attention. After consecutively offering statues to the Deity, both earned substantial rewards multiple times.

Beyond the initial two large pieces of pork loin, they received many bags of flour, rice, canola oil, and a huge lump of pure white lard.

In this time of drought, these items were more valuable than any jewels or gold.

They traded them with fellow villagers for daily necessities and even hired several people. During breaks from constructing the Dao Xuan Deity Temple, these hired hands built simple shelters for the two sculptors' families.

Thus, the sculptors became the first among the new arrivals to gain solid roofs over their heads.

However, Zheng Daniu, another diligent newcomer who chopped wood relentlessly every day, hadn't prospered. Though he too received rewards, he only ever asked for happy fat water.

The villagers found it enjoyable to drink, yet none willingly traded their limited supplies for it.

Simply put...

If it was free, they'd happily gulp it down. But asking them to pay? They'd rather die than drink.

Zheng Daniu didn't mind skipping trade either. He'd slurp down a basinful, gather more wood, then refill his basin. He couldn't care less if others were willing to work for it; his own happiness mattered most.

And so, amidst this atmosphere of contentment, the Dao Xuan Deity Temple was finally completed...