

## Great Ming 51

### Chapter 51: Cross Out Cross Out

Gao Yiye was presently essentially a large decorative vase, standing gracefully as she was unable to do anything. Seeing the massive, scalding blisters on the injured servant's leg, she really wanted to help. However, recalling Third Lady's words, "The more graceful you are, the more respect others will show to the Deity," she refrained from moving.

She didn't want to embarrass the Deity.

Just as she wrestled with her thoughts, amidst the parting clouds in the sky, the Deity's "imposing" visage emerged. A gigantic hand extended down, reaching before Gao Yiye.

The Deity had something for her again. But when she looked closely, she was baffled; the Deity had handed down a strange mass of material—yellowish, soft, and viscous.

Gao Yiye: "Huh? What kind of tasty treat is this?"

Li Daoxuan was both amused and exasperated: "Food again! The last time I gave you the iron plate, food was your first thought too."

Gao Yiye's small face flushed bright red instantly.

"This is medicine, for treating burns. Take it."

Gao Yiye was overjoyed. She had just been heartbroken over her injured companion, and now the Deity bestowed divine medicine. Of course, she needed to accept it quickly. She immediately extended both her hands to receive it.

The ointment was tinier than a sesame seed on Li Daoxuan's fingertip, but to Gao Yiye, it was an enormous and heavy lump. She failed to hold it steady; it slipped straight towards the ground.

Fortunately, Third Lady was always "guarding the divine envoy" nearby. Seeing Gao Yiye about to drop it, she quickly lent a hand. The two women exerted their strength together and managed to support the massive clump of ointment.

Third Lady hadn't heard the earlier conversation and was bewildered by this "suddenly appearing" strange substance. "What is this thing? How did it suddenly appear in your hands? Such a potent medicinal fragrance."

Gao Yiye said: "This is burn ointment graciously bestowed by the Deity. Quickly apply it to the injured servant."

Third Lady was elated: "Divine medicine? Oh my! Extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary!"

She called out loudly: "Someone! Somebody! Quickly bring an empty jar!"

Because of the recent battle, many women were behind the city wall, gathered beside numerous jars ready to be filled with oil. Empty jars were plentiful. A maid from the Bai family hastily brought a large jar.

Third Lady wore a reverent expression as she carefully placed the large lump of ointment into the jar, securing it well. With lightning speed, she found some oiled paper, sealed the mouth of the jar, wrapped it tightly with string, and tied it fast, projecting an aura of “Don’ts let anyone touch this!”

Gao Yiye exclaimed: “Huh? Why seal it? We still need to treat that servant!”

Third Lady replied: “Medicine descended from the heavens must naturally be preserved carefully. As for that injured servant, just casually smear whatever residue remains on your hands onto his wound.”

Gao Yiye looked down. Sure enough, her hands were smeared with plenty of sticky, cool ointment.

She walked over to the injured servant, striving to maintain her graceful poise: “Don’t move about. The Deity grants you divine medicine.”

The servant froze for a moment before delight flooded his face. He immediately tried to kowtow but found it inconvenient with his injured leg. He hastily bowed deeply towards the sky: “The Deity is benevolent and kind-hearted.”

Gao Yiye slowly crouched down and smeared the ointment residue from her hands onto the servant’s wound. Her hands were covered in the medication, forcing her to apply it in haphazard swipes—left, right, even with the back of her hand. Her technique was utterly unprofessional.

The servant hissed sharply several times in quick succession, sucking in cold air through his teeth, thinking: So painful! I’d probably be better off without this medicine.

However, after Gao Yiye finished applying it and stood up, the servant finally sensed: Huh? The wound seems to hurt less now? The spot where the blister formed had been intensely burning, but this heavenly medicine emitted a cool sensation that calmed the stinging pain, making him feel much better.

The servant was ecstatic: "Medicine from the immortal realm is truly miraculous! I feel a lot better."

Envious looks appeared in the eyes of those nearby: "So fortunate, you actually got to benefit from medicine of the immortal realm."

The servant retorted: "Stone and mud, want me to pour a jar of boiling oil over you guys so you can enjoy it too?"

The onlookers laughed: "Ah, we wouldn't dare presume such good fortune. Having you experience it on our behalf is enough."

Mr. Bai parted the crowd and approached: "That injury of yours... it truly doesn't hurt anymore?"

The servant: "It still hurts a little, but it's much better than before the medicine was applied."

Mr. Bai nodded. He said no more. As a wealthy lord, his brief concern for a servant counted as an act of "grace." There was no need to show excessive attention.

He turned his head and glanced at the Dao Xuan Deity Cave at the center of the village, his heart swelling with greater reverence. This Dao Xuan Deity wasn't a fabricated pseudo-god like those invented by the White Lotus cult, nor shrouded in the mystique common to Taoist deities whom no one truly saw; who knew if they even existed?

The one before him was a real deity!

It seemed that he too needed to pay a proper visit to the shrine, to pay his respects.

With the current threat gone, everyone felt relaxed, their minds free to ponder other matters.

Thirty-Two approached, leading Mr. Bai, and presented him to Gao Yiye: "This is Gao Yiye, the divine envoy— the Saint Lady— of the Dao Xuan Deity Teachings. All of the Deity's commands are conveyed through her."

Mr. Bai had already discerned this, but still, he saluted with clasped fists: "My respects to you."

Addressing Gao Yiye, Thirty-Two said: "This gentleman is Bai Yuan (White Kite), a renowned gentleman and benefactor of Chengcheng County. He organizes the local militia, guarding our region, and is deeply beloved by the common people."

The Gao Yiye of old would likely have been terrified upon encountering such a wealthy lord, possibly kneeling or prostrating by the roadside. But her courage had grown, and now she represented the Deity. She couldn't diminish the Deity's stature. She merely nodded slightly in acknowledgment.

Bai Yuan swept his gaze around Gaojia Village before bringing it back: "Protected by the Deity, this Gaojia Village is truly remarkable. Lofty city walls, a large pond with clean, clear water, ample food and drink... Rare indeed in these times of calamity."

Thirty-Two laughed with pride: "Naturally! Why else would I forsake the county town to reside here? This, as they say, is 'Choosing the best wood to roost upon.'"

Bai Yuan was both amused and exasperated. Scolding, he said: "This Third Lady... you have some learning but not enough, constantly misusing idioms. You've compared yourself to a bird! The proper phrase is 'A virtuous minister chooses his lord to serve!'"

Thirty-Two: "..."

Bai Yuan added: "That's why you can only ever be a private advisor, never pass the imperial examinations to gain a degree."

Galled by the jibe, Thirty-Two muttered in retort: "And you? You didn't pass either."

Bai Yuan stiffened as if struck by an acupuncture hit, frozen for a few seconds before sighing: "Indeed. I too am half a bucket of water, my learning insufficient. Among the Six Arts of Gentlemen, writing... cross out, cross it out."

Thirty-Two muttered again, lower still: "Calligraphy is separate from scholarly learning."

Bai Yuan: "..."

An odd silence fell, lasting several seconds. Then, suddenly, Bai Yuan beamed with delight: "Calligraphy! So writing... put that back! No need to cross it out."

Everyone: "..."

Li Daoxuan, overhearing this, couldn't help but laugh inwardly as well. This Bai Yuan fellow, initially seeming quite imposing, was clearly a source of amusement.

Come to think of it... Did writing refer to calligraphy or scholarly knowledge?

Li Daoxuan pondered this for a long moment only to realize he himself wasn't entirely sure. Might as well just... cross out, cross it out.

Chapter 52: An Honorable and Challenging Task

Night had already fallen. The bandit army had arrived at dusk, and after the battle ended, darkness soon set in.

The Bai family entourage couldn't travel further that day and had to stay overnight in Gaojia Village.

The village houses were limited and couldn't accommodate everyone.

The tenant farmers from Bai Family Fortress, accustomed to hardship, didn't mind crowding by the city wall with the refugees living there.

However, Bai Yuan, Madam Bai, and Young Master Bai couldn't squeeze together with those refugees.

After some hesitation, the trio looked toward the newly built "Dao Xuan Deity Cave."

In ancient times, travelers often sought lodging in temples. Unoccupied temples without resident monks could be freely used.

But in Gaojia Village, things were different. The Deity hovered above them, and His divine power had manifested just recently.

Who would dare irreverently barge into His sanctum?

Others might not understand Bai Yuan's hesitation, but Thirty-Two did. Smiling at Gao Yiye, he asked, "Mr. Bai wishes to stay in the Deity's cave. Might the Deity grant permission?"

Gao Yiye tilted her head as if listening to the heavens, then beamed. "The Deity has permitted it."

Bai Yuan joyfully bowed toward the sky. "My deepest apologies for this intrusion. In future days, I shall build a temple and cast a sacred statue in Your honor."

Gao Yiye added, "The Deity decrees: One hour from now, when all villagers have rested, Thirty-Two, Third Lady, and Bai Yuan must come to the Deity Cave. He has tasks for each of you."

The named individuals straightened up immediately. Third Lady especially was astounded; she'd never expected a woman like herself to be summoned by the Deity. Shivering with excitement, she whispered, "This lowly woman... to earn the Deity's esteem... it's a blessing earned over three lifetimes."

All began eagerly counting down the hour.

Darkness came swiftly. As the sun plummeted below the horizon, the world turned pitch-black, lit only by the moon above and the dim glow of lanterns along the city wall.

The villagers rested. Only two sentinels patrolled the walls.

A few oil lamps flickered to life inside the Dao Xuan Deity Cave. Gao Yiye, Thirty-Two, Third Lady, and Bai Yuan sat circled around them.

Madam Bai and Young Master Bai, unsummoned, dared not approach and stayed well away.

Gao Yiye tilted her head, listening. "The Deity has arrived!"

The others straightened their posture, backs rigid.

Li Daoxuan gazed through his window. "Only you few are summoned because only you, in Gaojia Village, can accomplish this. This is an honorable and challenging task."

The moment Gao Yiye finished translating, Thirty-Two rushed to respond, "No matter how arduous, I shall strive with utmost dedication."

Bai Yuan also offered a deep bow to Li Daoxuan's statue nearby. "This life was saved by the Deity. I dare not refuse any command."

Li Daoxuan: "I wish to save more suffering souls, freeing them from hardship and violence, granting them peaceful lives." He paused briefly. He nearly said "let things unfold naturally," but that applied only to his own perspective. Others needed their own efforts. He swallowed those words.

Both men blinked in uncertainty.

It was Third Lady who caught the spirit. Seeing herself as compassionate, she thrilled at the prospect of rescue work. Chiding the men beside her, she said, "What are you dazed about? The Deity, in boundless mercy, seeks to save all humanity! What a magnificent vision! And you're stunned?"

The men hastily bowed. “The Deity’s benevolence is profound.”

Yet, how to effectively save the masses left them baffled. Where to even start?

Li Daoxuan: “In this drought, I can bestow grain upon the people to ensure survival. That too is rescue. But if saved, they become idle parasites, is that true deliverance?”

Instantly, they grasped it. “Give them tools for fishing, not just fish.”

“Exactly!” Li Daoxuan agreed. “Salvation is complex. Some require merely life preserved; survival alone propels them onward. Others need more – souls saved alongside lives. Perhaps only then are they truly alive.”

Li Daoxuan’s understanding of the “Rescue Index” remained incomplete. He felt his way, testing possibilities.

Li Daoxuan’s voice deepened. “Yet, happiness isn’t something everyone deserves. For the virtuous, I embrace my role as a merciful fool, aiding them unstintingly. For the vile, those who engage in illegal activities or cruelty? They deserve not salvation, but divine slaying. To spare them is to harm others. Eliminating evil is rescue.”

Truthfully, after realizing the box overlooked the Ming Dynasty, Li Daoxuan resolved to rescue widely. Yet he remained fiercely protective, smiting the unrepentant. A “merciful fool” who loathed evil intensely, his salvation was selective. He preferred limited vision over saving monsters.

Li Daoxuan addressed Bai Yuan: “You return to Bai Family Fortress tomorrow?”

Bai Yuan: “Yes! With their chief slain by the Deity’s divine palm, the remaining bandits pose little threat. I must return and restore order.”

Li Daoxuan: “The common folk near your fortress suffer terribly now. Yet your treasury, emptied by bandits, leaves you powerless to help them rebuild.”

Bai Yuan: "..."

Li Daoxuan: "Step outside. Look inside your carriage."

Baffled, Bai Yuan hurried out. The carriage stood at the cave's entrance. He reached it swiftly, flung the curtain open, and gaped. Inside lay half a carriage full of flour balls, loaded there unseen.

Li Daoxuan: "Carry this food back to aid those around the fortress. This is insufficient, of course. Dispatch men and carts later to Gaojia Village for more grain. Ensure no villager endures hardship. Then guide them toward new lives."

Bai Yuan breathed deeply, bowing profoundly skyward. "The Deity's benevolence is boundless."

Li Daoxuan then spoke to Third Lady: "You hold one jar of burn salve already. Tomorrow, prepare more vials. I shall confer sacred medicines of varied potency. Take them to heal the world's afflictions."

Third Lady understood instantly. "With each life cured, I shall proclaim Your glorious vision."

Li Daoxuan: "That isn't necessary. They needn't know their savior. Healing is grace enough. But tell them: This gift of life must never become a blade aimed at others."

Hearing this, Bai Yuan felt a jolt of comprehension and added swiftly, "When aiding villagers around my fortress, I'll teach them the Deity's truth: Salvation belongs to the worthy. Those who engage in illegal activities forfeit its grace. Rescue includes instruction in virtue."

Li Daoxuan: "Yes. So it shall be."

With that, He "vanished" beyond the "clouds" ...

Gao Yiye: "The Deity has returned to His heavenly realm."

A collective sigh of relief filled the cave.

Bai Yuan shook his head. "I nearly made a grave mistake. For a moment, I misunderstood the Deity, fearing He acted an indiscriminating fool... Saving all indiscriminately? How deeply disrespectful! As for the Rites of the Six Arts of Gentlemen... cross that one out."

Chapter 53: Blooming Along Both Paths

Just as daylight broke, Bai Yuan and his family prepared to depart.

More than ten Bai family servants and dozens of tenant farmers would accompany him back to the Bai Family Fortress.

The journey from Gaojia Village to Bai Fortress took a full two hours, so everyone needed a hearty meal before setting off.

Thirty-Two lent them pots, pans, and bowls, arranged for giant rice, cabbage, and chicken strips, and cooked several large pots of fragrant chicken and cabbage porridge. Everyone ate two large bowls each.

Many of Bai Fortress's tenant farmers had never eaten such good food before. Some ate until tears fell, thinking: I fled dozens of miles from pursuing bandits, yet the food I eat while fleeing is better than what I had at home? What kind of matter is this?

If we also want to live like this, what path should we take going forward?

Bai Yuan sighed beside them: "I lack the capability to lead you to such a good life. But no matter, now that we enjoy the Deity's care, our Bai Family Fortress will surely prosper."

Before departure, Madam Bai and Young Master Bai climbed into the carriage. Soon, however, they poked their heads out, exclaiming in alarm: "Master! This carriage is covered entirely with white dust! We cannot remain inside..."

Bai Yuan snorted: "Endure it!"

So Madam Bai and Young Master Bai had no choice but to endure. The carriage was half-filled with flour balls. As the carriage moved, every slight jolt caused the balls to roll, making white dust fly until the entire interior swirled with white powder.

Madam Bai and Young Master Bai contemplated jumping out to walk several times. Yet, as pampered members of a wealthy household, they could barely endure walking dozens of miles. Bearing it as best they could within the carriage, once they finally arrived at Bai Family Fortress and emerged, both had been utterly transformed into white ghosts.

True enough, Bai Family Fortress had been thoroughly plundered by the bandits. All the Bai family's possessions — furniture, cloth, grain, money — were entirely carried off. Not a single item remained, just the hollowed-out shell of a mansion.

This, however, was no real challenge for Bai Yuan.

He dismissed the other servants, taking only his son to the rear courtyard. There, he pried up a large bluestone slab on the ground, revealing a long passageway beneath. They walked to its end, arriving at an underground chamber filled with gold, silver, and jewels.

Gathering a bag of gold and silver, he exited the secret chamber and carefully replaced the bluestone slab.

Hmph!

The Bai family was reborn.

Standing before Bai Family Fortress, Bai Yuan made a sweeping gesture with his hand and commanded his servants and tenants: "Each receives one liang of silver and two jin of flour. Go out and call back the scattered Villagers. We shall rebuild Bai Family Fortress. All shall remember: do not engage in illegal activities! Otherwise, not even the divine will aid you!"

In unison, all responded: "We obey!"

Bai Yuan mused internally: I have conveyed the very words the Deity taught me this time, observing the rites perfectly. Surely this means the 'Rites' aspect deducted from my Six Arts of Gentlemen can now be restored?

...

In Gaojia Village, the sky was clear and bright.

Third Lady was embracing a pile of jars and bottles in manic delight.

These jars held medicines.

The Deity, Li Daoxuan, had delivered them to her with the tip of His finger. Carefully, reverently, she had placed each kind in one of her finest family jars, labeling every container.

"Burns," "Wounds," "Ringworm," "Cold and Flu," "Stomach and Intestines"...

It was chaotic equipment – both Chinese and Western medicines jumbled together.

Li Daoxuan wasn't an expert in medical matters; he simply gathered small samples from his household first-aid kit.

Ointments were easy; he scraped off a blob to give her.

Medicines in pill form, like cold pills or anti-inflammatories, were trickier. He could only break off a tiny fragment for her to grind into powder herself.

This process consumed two days, resulting in around a dozen jars.

Li Daoxuan repeatedly emphasized the crucial importance of dosage.

Topical medicines were somewhat forgiving; applying too much caused relatively minor issues. But internal medicines? Overdosing could be fatal. Explaining doses in grams was impossible – ancient people had no concept of “grams.” Converting to traditional units like jin, liang, or qian proved extremely difficult.

All he could do was consult the medicine box instructions while instructing Third Lady:

“For a Cold and Flu medicine like this? Err on the side of less, never more. Per dose? Give the patient no more than a fingernail-sized amount.” “Administer three times daily, AFTER meals.” “Never consume on an empty stomach! Failing this means agonizing stomach pain...”

Third Lady bowed respectfully, noting everything. She added: “Deity, rest assured. This little girl dare not be wasteful. Overdosing is unthinkable.”

“For this anti-inflammatory medicine? Extreme caution is required. Also just a fingernail amount per dose, twice daily. Less is absolutely safer than more...”

Third Lady noted this respectfully as well.

Over a dozen notes, each detailing how to use its corresponding medicine, were attached to the jars.

Holding these jars felt, to Third Lady, like clutching the whole world.

For the next two days, she was ecstatic.

She guarded the medicine jars fiercely, instinctively shielding them behind her back from anyone approaching. Even when Thirty-Two tried to touch one, she unleashed a flurry of “Tigress Fist” strikes that painted his face with bruises.

“Do you know what these ARE?” Third Lady raged at Thirty-Two. “Heaven-sent elixirs! Elixirs! Delivered personally by the Deity to my charge! My VERY LIFE binds me to their safekeeping! And you dare lay a casual hand upon them?! Off with that reckless limb!”

Thirty-Two wasn't about to amputate his hand. He could only relentlessly apologize to his wife, nearly prostrating himself until she finally calmed down.

Reconciled, Thirty-Two stayed far from the precious pots, lowering his voice, "Wife, with these jars of divine elixir under our care, what path will you tread next?"

"Isn't it obvious? We return to the county seat!" Third Lady declared. "The Deity commands us to save the people! How many can we truly save trapped within this tiny Gaojia Village? Here? Everyone already receives the Deity's grace." "My place is BACK in the county seat! Only THERE can we spread the Deity's benevolence to the masses!"

Thirty-Two's brows furrowed deeply. "The county seat... The instability there endures." "Returning now carries significant risk. If the chaos spills into the town again? Danger is imminent." "Remember, the Deity favors Gaojia Village. His divine interventions manifest HERE."

His words struck icy fear into Third Lady. Death terrified her. Yet, seconds later, conviction replaced fear. She activated a fanatical belief buff, weakening her dread.

"Hmph!" Third Lady retorted. "I walk according to the Heavenly Path to save humanity! Though no Saint Lady stands here, a divine envoy does!" "Evil spirits, demonic fiends, all malcontent forces... THEY should scatter before ME! What, then, is there to fear?"

Thirty-Two: "..."

How does one reply to that?

He, who prided himself on agility of thought, found his mind utterly blank.

All he could do was sigh deeply, "Very well then." "Within a few days, after handing village affairs over... I shall select a few strong young lads from the village." "We shall protect you all the way back to the county seat – Escorting you to safety." "Once I see you secure? I return here to Gaojia Village to manage the Deity's earthly tasks."

## Chapter 54: We Still Lack Materials

Early in the morning of the next day, the sun was still dazzling.

Li Daoxuan had just gotten out of bed when he saw Thirty-Two standing outside Gao Yiyi's home, scolding someone.

“Li Da, Gao Yiyi! You two useless trash who only eat without working.”

Thirty-Two, hands on hips, pointed at their noses and yelled, “The Deity ordered you to forge armor. More than half a month has passed in the blink of an eye. When bandits attacked a few days ago, you only managed to produce two sets of two-panel armor! What use does the Deity have for you? Don't you feel ashamed eating the rice awarded by the Deity?”

The scolding indeed made the two blacksmiths blush. Behind them stood other blacksmiths who had come to the village from Wangjia Village, Zhengjia Village, Zhuangjia Village, and other places, and they also flushed red.

After a while, Gao Yiyi finally stepped forward, lowering his head. “This... this isn't Master Li Da's fault. The Deity ordered him to forge that strange new-style firearm. My orders were to forge the armor. I... I didn't expect the bandits to really come, and so many at once... So... I only made two sets of two-panel armor... then spent my time slowly studying how to forge various armors.”

“The armor plates... we've actually forged a lot already; they just haven't been assembled into armor yet.”

The group of new blacksmiths also apologized in agreement. “We were also learning armor crafting from Master Li Da. We forged a huge pile of plates but haven't assembled them.”

Thirty-Two scolded, “Stop making excuses! Plenty of plates, you say? Bring them out! Let me see!”

Gao Yiyi rushed back into his house and soon came out holding a large winnowing basket. Inside were indeed many armor plates of various shapes—some obviously meant for shoulders, some for arms, some for the chest...

Thirty-Two asked, “You have this many? Why haven’t they been assembled?”

Gao Yiyi scratched his head, wearing an awkward smile, unsure how to explain.

Li Da took over the response. “Steward Thirty-Two, this is indeed our fault. First, we didn’t expect the bandits to really come, and in such numbers. We thought Gaojia Village wouldn’t need armor for the time being and became negligent. Second... we lack the materials needed to assemble these plates.”

The Village Chief had wandered over from the side. “The Deity gave you so much iron. How can you lack materials? Is the iron insufficient?”

Li Da shook his head. “The iron is sufficient, but armor isn’t made entirely of iron. Think about it—if it was all iron, how heavy would that be? We wouldn’t even need to fight; the armor would crush us into the ground.”

The Village Chief couldn’t help asking, “Then what do you use?”

Li Da answered, “Cotton.”

Hearing this, Li Daoxuan outside the box immediately understood. “Cotton”—or, more accurately, “cotton cloth.”

He vaguely recalled reading in some material that existing unearthed armor from the Ming Dynasty had no pieces made purely of iron. They all used cotton cloth to some degree, with metal plates connected by cotton ribbons. Some armor even used more cotton than iron plates, hence the name “cotton armor.”

Cotton armor had many advantages over traditional iron armor.

First, it was light, preventing the armor itself from crushing soldiers before battle. Second, it was cheaper, easier to maintain, less prone to decay, and had excellent insulation—especially suitable for the cold winters of the north. Unlike traditional heavy armor which required custom fitting, it also offered strong protection against early firearms.

These were advantages lacking in traditional iron armors like plate armor, chainmail, or scale mail.

Hearing Li Da's explanation, Thirty-Two's expression softened, his anger diminishing. "You lack cotton cloth? Why didn't you say so earlier? I could have arranged someone to take flour to the county town to exchange for cotton."

Li Da and Gao Yiyi scratched their heads awkwardly. "We truly didn't expect the bandits to come so quickly and in such numbers... We weren't in a hurry to mention it."

"Ugh!" Thirty-Two shook his head. "Such fools!"

Hearing them reach this point, Li Daoxuan chuckled internally. I have an old cotton jacket I don't want anymore. Maybe I could pull out some cotton batting and give it to them?

But... after the fiber thickens by 200 times, could it still be woven into cloth?

He suddenly paused. Wait, there's something wrong here!

Reflecting on various things he'd placed into the box, he sensed the rules governing this diorama weren't that simple. It seemed things invisible to the naked eye—"microscopic" items—didn't enlarge upon entering the box.

For example: the cabbage leaves he put inside. If their fibers also thickened by 200 times, the tiny people couldn't possibly eat them. Similarly, if "molecules" or "atoms" inside eggs or rice enlarged, chaos would arise. If bacteria in water enlarged, could the pool water still be consumed?

Considering this, Li Daoxuan vaguely realized that microscopic entities like bacteria, molecules, or fibers likely didn't enlarge by 200 times when placed inside.

Speculating is useless... might as well test it. Such things would be clear once tried.

Li Daoxuan opened his wardrobe, pulled out the old cotton jacket he no longer wanted, reached through a hole in the hem, grasped a clump of cotton batting inside, and forcefully tore it free.

Then, gently, he placed it in front of Gao Yiyi and the others.

Just as Thirty-Two was pondering where to buy cotton, a mass of cotton drifted down from the sky, lightly landing before Gao Yiyi.

Everyone looked: an immense ball of cotton, the size of a house!

This was clearly bestowed by the Deity.

All promptly thanked the Deity.

Thirty-Two rose after kowtowing, reached into the cotton mass half the size of a house, plucked out a handful, rolled it between his fingers, and exclaimed excitedly, "Celestial cotton! Truly divine! So white, so fine, so long!"

Of course it is! Li Daoxuan thought, amused. This is top-grade Xin Jiang long-staple cotton! A variety introduced from the Soviet Union in 1955—a Central Asian long-fiber type. Unheard of in the Ming Dynasty. No wonder you find it so marvelous.

He observed something: the cotton fibers hadn't thickened. They retained their original fine texture.

This proved his earlier thought: microscopic items didn't enlarge by 200 times inside the diorama.

Despite the fiber size remaining unchanged, the entire cotton mass was huge. That meant the number of cotton fibers had multiplied!

Therefore, for microscopic items placed inside—molecules, atoms, fibers, cells—their volume didn't increase. Instead, their quantity multiplied proportionally, causing the entire object to become macroscopic.

Contemplating this, the perplexities that previously troubled him suddenly fell into place.

Thirty-Two, clutching the long-staple cotton, joyfully declared, "Village Chief! Quickly summon all the women of the village! Anyone who knows weaving cloth now has work!"

Seeing such a vast amount of cotton, the Village Chief was already overjoyed. "It seems every person in our whole village can have new clothes now!"

Chapter 55: To Bend or Not to Bend

All the women in Gaojia Village became excited.

Since the Deity descended and blessed Gaojia Village.

The men of Gaojia Village took on various tasks: today helping at the blacksmith shop with work, tomorrow building the city gate, the day after building a Taoist temple...

But for the women, it was awkward; there was nothing for them to do.

Now, with a sudden large pile of cotton as big as half a house, the women's excitement was understandable.

"The weaving machine at home can finally be brought out for use."

"Mother of Sanwa, you are an expert in tailoring; now you can put your skills to use."

"Yes, yes, if I can help the Deity, perhaps I might receive some blessings too."

The women noisily chattered around the cotton pile as big as half a house, chirping away so loudly that even with ears strained, Li Daoxuan struggled to make out what they said.

Thirty-Two roared: “All of you shut up!”

The women fell silent instantly.

After two seconds of silence, with a buzz, they started chattering again.

Thirty-Two: “...”

Li Daoxuan: “Pfft, hahahaha.”

Thirty-Two took a deep breath and shouted: “If anyone speaks again, I won’t give them cotton!”

Whoosh! Instantly, it was so quiet one could hear a pin drop.

Li Daoxuan laughed so hard he nearly rolled on the ground.

Indeed, only through self-interest could one control others; authority was false. Just like a company boss wanting to control employees, the only way was to grant or dock pay, for no other methods worked.

Thirty-Two said: “The Deity wants you to turn this cotton into cloth, then cooperate with the blacksmiths to make armor. I won’t waste words on nonsense. In short, the family that does more work, produces better cloth, and quickly helps the blacksmiths make armor will get extra cotton, so she can make two outfits for her own.”

These words worked; the women were overjoyed and rubbed their hands eagerly.

Thirty-Two had them line up; each carried a large clump of cotton back to weave into cloth and submit quickly. For each woman who came to get cotton, he glared and fiercely threatened: “Don’t forget the Deity is watching you. If anyone steals the Deity’s cotton, for instance weaving two feet of cloth yet turning in only one foot, they will surely suffer divine punishment.”

He well knew the habits of some rural women—they liked tiny gains. Without scaring them, plenty would be stolen.

A few women indeed planned to hoard cotton; frightened by Thirty-Two's glare, they glanced up at the sky and felt guilty, thinking: There are gods above all heads. Serving the Deity isn't like serving any ordinary master; I better be honest.

One woman took the cotton and stepped aside; the next came forward. Thirty-Two was about to give her a batch of cotton but suddenly felt something wrong. Looking closer, it was Gao Yiye standing before him.

Thirty-Two: "!"

Gao Yiye, her face slightly flushed, said: "I... also know weaving cloth."

Thirty-Two: "Pfft! Miss Yiye, what are you joining in for? You're the divine envoy of the Deity; why come to weave cloth? It's downright disgraceful."

Gao Yiye said: "Weaving cloth helps share the Deity's burden; I want to serve the Deity too. I'll weave with graceful motions, so as not to harm the Deity's dignity."

Thirty-Two rested his hand on his forehead, dizzy, dizzy...

Li Daoxuan watching this laughed uncontrollably.

Thirty-Two sighed deeply: "Like one lost after drawing a sword."

Gao Yiye said in surprise, "Third Lady, what do you mean by suddenly reciting a poem?"

Thirty-Two said, "It's nothing, I was just randomly sighing."

Li Daoxuan could indeed understand what he was sighing about. That vast Gaojia Village had previously been Li Daoxuan's sole worry; it was mentally exhausting. Now it had become Thirty-Two taking it on,

with no one else to share the burden. Even Gao Yiye, as the Saint Lady, acted recklessly. Naturally, it left him feeling completely bewildered.

The thing Gaojia Village lacked most was still talent!

But how could talent be so easily obtained? In the vast Liangshan Marsh in “Water Margin,” those who could manage reading and writing could be counted on one hand. Wu Yong, just a lowly scholar, became a military advisor. This showed how scarce talent was in that era.

Li Daoxuan thought to himself: Talent must be cultivated oneself.

At that moment, Third Lady came over, bringing her daughter and a maid. She had been packing these past few days, preparing to return to the county town to “spread the Dao Xuan Deity Teachings.” There were quite a few things to get ready.

She walked quickly to Thirty-Two’s side and whispered softly, “Scoundrel, I’ll be heading to the county town in a couple of days, but our daughter can’t go with me—it’s not as safe there as Gaojia Village.”

Thirty-Two nodded. “That’s only natural.”

Third Lady whispered again, “You’re busy with serious matters, and I won’t be in the county. Who will teach her reading and writing, or womanly virtues and needlework?”

This question made Thirty-Two freeze.

Right!

After his wife left, how would their daughter’s education be handled? Womanly virtues and needlework were one thing, but reading and writing absolutely couldn’t stop. Otherwise, if their daughter grew up illiterate, what would become of her?

Thirty-Two crouched down, holding his head in frustration.

Li Daoxuan was reminded of something by the two of them. He spoke: “Yiye, go and speak a few words to Third Lady on my behalf.”

Gao Yiye heard the voice from the sky and quickly looked up. She saw the Deity’s face faintly appear in the clouds, so she saluted deeply, ran over to Thirty-Two and Third Lady, and began acting as a messenger.

Li Daoxuan said, “Third Lady, when your wife returns to the county town in a couple of days, you’ll be escorting her back and going to the county yourself, correct?”

Thirty-Two responded promptly, “I do plan on returning briefly, but I’ll only stay a short while—merely one or two days at most—then come straight back to Gaojia Village to handle affairs for you.”

Li Daoxuan said, “I want to ask: Is it possible to hire a teacher to come to Gaojia Village?”

Thirty-Two stiffened. He froze for a long moment before lowering his head, slightly ashamed. “Reporting to the Deity, teachers are very prideful. Persuading them to come teach in this mountain hollow, over thirty miles from the county town, would be extremely difficult.”

“Prideful?” Li Daoxuan said. “How prideful exactly? Try offering more money.”

Thirty-Two sighed. “Scholars, you see... they don’t bend for mere dou of rice... Even with large sums, they might not agree.”

“A dou of rice obviously won’t work,” Li Daoxuan said. “Show him this and see if he bends.”

With that, Li Daoxuan pulled out a pure 999 silver necklace from a drawer—it was for men, and extremely thick.

Back when he was a rebellious teen playing non-mainstream, he’d worn a ridiculous leather outfit, dyed his hair, and paired it with this big silver chain, making himself look like a rogue fighter.

Later, after leaving that phase behind, the silver chain became useless, even a dark secret.

He took off a small clasp from the necklace, a silver ring about one centimeter in diameter, and placed it before Thirty-Two.

Thirty-Two felt a dazzle before his eyes. A massive silver ring, its diameter taller than a person, appeared before him. Made of fine silver, it glittered blindingly, enough to blind anyone.

Thirty-Two, Third Lady, Gao Yiye, and everyone around who saw the silver ring all gaped, their mouths wide enough to swallow a kiwifruit, and they were unable to close them for a long time.

Though they had seen the Deity produce many large foods, this enormous chunk of silver shocked them all over again—it was silver, not a grain of rice or a piece of pork, but silver.

Li Daoxuan said, “Now tell me, will he bend?”

Thirty-Two stammered, “He’d break his own waist with a stick.”

Chapter 56: Customizing the Little Mans Face

The silver ring with a diameter taller than a person was obviously unusable for Thirty-Two and his companions.

Li Daoxuan had put it in just to show off, but after showing off, he had to process it into a size they could handle normally. He took out the silver ring, pulled out his household toolbox that was always ready, found a pair of pliers, snapped off a very tiny grain, and placed it into the box.

It then appeared in front of Thirty-Two as a silver lump big fist size, extremely heavy.

Thirty-Two held the huge silver lump in both hands with a regretful expression: “Such a wonderful magical ring, cut into such a small piece—what a pity!”

Li Daoxuan laughed and scolded: “If not cut, could you even move it?”

“Oh... this... it still feels so regrettable.”

Li Daoxuan: “After you escort the lady back to the county town, no need to rush back. Take silver with you, find a teacher to bring back. If he refuses to come, hit him with a silver lump big fist size. If he still refuses, hit him twice.”

After speaking, he put another piece of silver into the box: “If he still refuses to come...”

Thirty-Two understood now: “I’ll hit him twice more!”

“No, if he doesn’t come after the second hit, stop.” Li Daoxuan: “Directly take the silver lumps and leave. Make him regret missing the chance for wealth—he’ll then chase after you, apologizing all along the way, humbling himself to beg you to hire him.”

Thirty-Two: “...”

The Deity occasionally teased people!

Thirty-Two bowed deeply toward the air: “Thank you, Deity. For my daughter to learn reading and writing, you even cut the magical ring. This great kindness, I’ll never forget.”

Li Daoxuan said leisurely: “It’s not just for your daughter—I want that teacher in Gaojia Village to teach all people reading and writing. Whether male or female, old or young, as long as they’re willing to learn, all should be taught.”

Thirty-Two froze for a moment, then immediately understood. He bowed deeply to the ground: “This humble one will fulfill the mission without dishonor.”

“Ding ding ding!” Li Daoxuan’s phone suddenly rang.

He pulled his attention back from the box and answered the call, hearing Cai Xinzi's frantic voice: "Daoxuan, you're not replying to QQ or WeChat, never seen in person all day. Must contacting you always be a call? I detest calling most."

Li Daoxuan: "Ah, I've been addicted to 'SimCity 1627' recently, so no time for QQ and WeChat. What's up? Why so urgent?"

"'SimCity 1627'? What the hell? I've only heard of 'SimCity 2000,' never of 1627."

"A niche mod."

"Oh oh, okay, that's not important—business now." Cai Xinzi said: "I have a strange customer here who placed an order to torment me. After much thought, only you can help."

Li Daoxuan: "Tell me."

Cai Xinzi said: "That customer ordered a custom robot from me, extremely complex, precise, and impressive—every armor piece must detach and combine."

Li Daoxuan: "Oh, what's that got to do with me?"

Cai Xinzi: "He made a perverse demand: He wants the robot's cockpit hatch to open, with a pilot seated inside. This pilot must be made in his likeness—facial features exactly like his own, detailed down to clear eyebrows, eyes, nose, everything."

Li Daoxuan understood now: "You want me to make this little man?"

Cai Xinzi: "Yes, a pilot one centimeter tall—dammit, he wants the face like his. How could I manage? But if I say I can't, he won't give me the robot order at all."

Li Daoxuan chuckled: "Fine, I can take this order. What material this time?"

Cai Xinzi: “Plastic, of course! I made most of the pilot body, only the face left. You handle its face. We’re old friends—none of the fuss. The robot total is twenty thousand yuan; he paid extra two thousand just for the pilot’s face. So if you help, I keep the robot money, the two thousand fully yours.”

“Two thousand yuan.” Li Daoxuan’s first reaction was it’s too cheap. Still, after careful thought, the Pearl Saint Statue cost too much—sales limited, few orders feasible. Then those two sculptors would idle, and just feeding them might turn them useless.

The real way to help was to give them long-term, stable work. Even more sculptors coming to Gaojia Village should find tasks—best for them.

Some old state-owned enterprises took unprofitable orders—why? Just so workers could labor.

Cai Xinzi: “I know two thousand isn’t much—just help as a brother.”

Li Daoxuan laughed: “Last time, didn’t you call me generous? Less profit isn’t no profit—of course I’ll help. I take this order.”

Cai Xinzi was overjoyed: “Good buddy.”

Li Daoxuan: “Your customer’s idea is actually fun—carving one’s own face onto a small toy man. This market has potential. Promote custom little man faces in your shop—many might be interested. Prices lower are fine—small profits, high turnover. Also, microscopic details on models—if anyone wants customization, we accept all.”

Cai Xinzi considered: Indeed! Customizing miniature model parts might sell—worth trying. After all, no effort needed—just toss orders to Li Daoxuan and take a cut.

“Then it’s settled.”

The call ended. Shortly after, Cai Xinzi drove over and gave Li Daoxuan a plastic little man.

This little man sat in posture, clad in a tech-style military uniform—details messily made, too intricate for Cai Xinzi’s craft at that scale.

Its face was a flat plate without any features.

“Handed this face to you. Here—customer’s photos: front, both profiles.”

“Got it, no worries.”

After seeing Cai Xinzi off, Li Daoxuan started his color printer, printed the customer’s face onto a photo paper corner, cut it out with scissors. He raised the box lid and called: “Yiye, go fetch the two sculptors.”

Soon, Gao Yiye brought the two sculptors, set to listen reverently for the Deity’s command.

Li Daoxuan gently placed the seated plastic little man before the sculptors, adding the photo: “See? Carve this face look like the picture.”

Of course, the sculptors knew their task at first glance—but...

One sculptor couldn’t help asking: “Deity, what strange material is this? Not metal, wood, or stone... What tools must this humble one use to carve?”

“Tools for carving jade will chip it.” Li Daoxuan: “Carve carefully—don’t ruin it. Unlike a clay prototype that can be patched, once broken, it’s irreparable.”

The sculptors were startled: Understood! This was celestial rare material—breaking it wouldn’t be repaid even by their heads. They must tread extremely carefully—only fine work produced exquisite results.

Chapter 57: Go

The two sculptors were now a bit anxious.

The master craftsman had encountered a new problem!

The material from the immortal realm felt truly strange—hard to the touch, but when a chisel struck it, a hole could easily be dug. They feared their clumsy hand might accidentally damage it.

Fear and trembling! Fear and trembling!

The two of them looked at the enormous “picture.” The person to carve was genuinely ugly—slit eyes, a flat nose—neither way did he look like a good person, nor did they know why the Deity was carving such a figure.

“Do you recognize which god in heaven this is?”

“I can’t tell; I’ve never seen any god dressed like this.”

“If it’s not a god, it must be a monster.”

“Ah, your words reminded me. This could indeed be a monster. The Deity creates his statue, sticks a talisman paper on its back, then sets it ablaze. When the statue burns, the monster’s true body will scream, turn to ash, with its soul extinguished.”

“Yes, yes! The storyteller mentioned this spell; I was overjoyed when I heard it.”

“So the faster we carve it for the Deity, the swifter we can destroy this monster, and perhaps fewer good people will be harmed in the world.”

“Right! Let’s work quickly.”

The two sculptors glanced at the photo, turned to make a light cut at the model’s face, glanced again, made another cut...

Firm in their resolve to aid the Deity in “eliminating demons and protecting the Way,” they worked tirelessly, carving from morning till night, lighting a canola oil lamp to continue under its glow. Fearing

an imperfect likeness might cause the wrong person to burn if the Deity's spell misfired, they studied the "monster portrait" repeatedly, striving to carve an exact replica.

Even the finest wrinkle at the corner of the eye was carved with vivid precision.

The next evening...

Li Daoxuan was chewing on a warrior's fried chicken leg at his computer when the box chimed with "dong, dong, dong," a melodious bell sound.

This sound meant the little people were summoning him.

He leaned over to see Gao Yiye with the two sculptors kneeling before the great bell, worshipping the sky.

Seeing the Deity's face appear in the clouds, Gao Yiye promptly reported, "Reporting to the Deity, the two sculptors have fulfilled your entrusted task without disgrace; it is complete."

Li Daoxuan, "Huh? That fast?"

The two sculptors had dark circles under their eyes, looking weary but highly excited, loudly declaring, "If we can aid the Deity in eliminating demons and protecting the Way, we would die without regret."

Eliminating demons and protecting the Way?

Massive question marks arose in Li Daoxuan's mind, but he felt it unnecessary to probe deeper; these little people's thought patterns were from another era.

Since they believed they were heroically defending righteousness, he let them enjoy it.

Whenever these two made something for him, he rewarded them with food—rice, flour, oil—all given before, so what to give this time?

Li Daoxuan pondered, dashed to the kitchen, and brought over his sugar jar.

Gently pinching a tiny bit of white sugar with his fingers, he set it before the two sculptors.

“Wow, sugar, such a big piece.”

“This is great, we can eat sugar.”

“This sugar is white and shiny, like ice.”

“From childhood till now, I’ve only seen dark brown or red-yellow sugar lumps; this is my first time seeing ice-like sugar.”

“This must be celestial sugar from heaven.”

The two sculptors were ecstatic and overwhelmed.

Sugar was quite valuable in the Ming Dynasty, nearly a luxury; the little heap gifted by the Deity could fetch a fortune if sold.

“Oh dear, the valuables at home keep growing,” one sculptor commented. “If not for the war-torn unrest outside, I’d love to take some to sell in the county town, trade for silver, and pay the artisan registration fee.”

The other sculptor chuckled, “What a coincidence! I also want to pay the artisan registration fee. In a few days, the Third Lady is heading to the county town; let’s go together—more people means more safety.”

“Eh? That sounds fantastic! It’s settled then.”

Li Daoxuan took the plastic model, moved it extremely close, and examined it closely. Tsk, this face was carved excellently, nearly identical to the photo. The only subtle difference was that the carved face looked slightly “ferocious.”

“Ah, a minor difference in aura. Not sure if the customer will like it, but send it to him first regardless.”

Li Daoxuan stepped out, hailed a taxi toward Cai Xinzi’s model shop, and casually called ahead, “Old Cai, I’m bringing your model; arriving in fifteen minutes.”

Cai Xinzi, “Eh? That quickly? Excellent! The customer lives close; I’ll call him to collect.”

Fifteen minutes later, Li Daoxuan entered the shop.

Cai Xinzi chatted with a young man—slit eyes, flat nose, rather ugly—identical to the photo guy, fiddling with an ornate robot.

The robot’s craftsmanship was beyond reproach, so detailed every armor plate could attach or detach. Its eyes lit up when powered, covered in blinking breathing lights, and all finger joints moved.

A remarkable piece worth twenty thousand yuan.

Spotting Li Daoxuan, Cai Xinzi hastily stood, “Sir, your pilot has arrived; final assembly can finish now.”

The ugly man beamed, leaping to his feet joyfully.

Li Daoxuan approached and handed over the plastic model.

The ugly man took it, scrutinizing the face left and right, then burst out happily, “Superbly done! This... this face... surpassed my expectations! So intricate, so like me. Hey, even intentionally made my

expression fiercer—that's perfect! A battle robot pilot about to fight should look menacing, radiating an 'annihilate all enemies' vibe. Haha, I adore it!"

Cai Xinzi smiled as she introduced, "My friend Li Daoxuan crafted this; his micro-sculpting is unparalleled worldwide."

Li Daoxuan laughed, "Unparalleled? Just flattery; it's my common trade."

Their awkward chatter went unheard. The man gingerly opened the robot's chest cockpit cover, set the model inside, sealed it—its cover was even transparent, showing the face clearly.

The ugly man roared with laughter, "Haha, so thrilling! See this? Don't I look like an ace pilot? Ha! Take that... Eat this... High-speed Mega Particle Cannon..."

Li Daoxuan and Cai Xinzi exchanged a glance, thinking together: At this age, he's still a chuunibyou.

Chapter 58: TikTok Goes Viral

On the morning of August 16, 2023, in Shuangqing City.

Li Daoxuan awoke to find the village bustling within the realm box.

Thirty-Two, Third Lady, two sculptors, Gao Chuwu, Zheng Daniu, and several young villagers were preparing to set off for the county seat.

Before, traveling to the county town had been a simple affair: pack some dry rations, cover the over thirty li on foot, and reach it within an hour or two.

But now, the journey to the county had become perilous.

Outside the towering walls of Gaojia Village stretched a wilderness governed by the law of the jungle.

Mr. Bai's recent message had relayed that the court had entirely abandoned efforts to subdue the bandits, opting instead to let events resolve naturally until "plundering ends with the spring." The extent of the ensuing chaos was beyond imagination.

Thirty-Two was naturally timid. When he learned that bailiffs had seized Wangjia Village's seed grain, he bolted immediately. He wasn't the bold type to confront danger head-on. But this time, Third Lady was resolute about returning to the county seat. He couldn't stop her and reluctantly steeled himself to undertake this risky expedition.

"The Deity destroyed the Supreme Bright King and scattered the largest faction of bandits," Thirty-Two paced anxiously, trying to reassure himself. "There shouldn't be large groups of bandits anymore."

Gao Chuwu grinned broadly, "Don't be scared. I'll protect you. Look, I'm wearing my two-panel armor. So dashing... ah... though a bit hot."

Thirty-Two was alarmed, "Take it off, you fool! It's one thing to wear armor when fighting bandits, but wearing it to the county seat? You'll be beheaded in no time."

Gao Chuwu: "Huh? Why?"

Thirty-Two hastily explained the dangers, frightening Gao Chuwu into immediately stripping off his armor and returning it to Gao Yiyi's blacksmith's shop.

After the commotion, Gao Chuwu, Zheng Daniu, the two sculptors, and another ten young men set out from the village, each equipped only with a knife and burdened with large and small packs.

Everyone was somewhat fearful. After all, just a few days ago, they had faced a bandit army attacking Gaojia Village. Who could afford to be careless venturing out now?

But remembering this journey was under the Deity's command to save lives, everyone took heart.

The Deity had done so much for us; yet, what little we could do for the Deity weighed heavily.

"Move faster, move faster. Reach the county seat quickly, and we'll be safe."

Thirty-Two kept urging them onward, though the group was already hastening their steps without being told.

Li Daoxuan watched them leave the village and head toward the county town. He tapped the “West” and “South” buttons on the box, shifting his view to follow their progress.

But after tracking them merely a few hundred meters, his view stuck.

The group moved beyond the box’s visual range and vanished into the outside world.

The worry a mother feels sending her child a thousand li away. Li Daoxuan finally understood the poignant anxiety of an elderly mother seeing her son off on a distant journey.

He turned his attention back within the village. Shortly after Thirty-Two’s departure, the villagers noticeably slackened their pace. Blacksmiths in the forge slowed their working rhythm. The women who had just begun weaving cotton cloth paused their work, gathering together to chatter about domestic matters.

Gao Yiye slipped stealthily from her house, crept to the dilapidated hut storing cotton, glanced around, and seized a large clump of cotton unseen. Hidden inside her clothes, she scurried back home, locked doors and windows tight, and started up her spinning machine...

Fortunately, she had never repaired the hole in her ceiling. Otherwise, Li Daoxuan couldn’t have seen her secretly spinning cotton cloth indoors.

Li Daoxuan chuckled.

With Thirty-Two away, should I emerge to oversee these villagers?

He pondered this for half a second and dismissed the thought.

For what purpose?

These past days, the villagers had been driven hard: building a Daoist temple, battling enemies, spinning constantly. Why not let them enjoy a few relaxed days during Thirty-Two's absence? They deserved a break.

He deliberately shifted his attention away from the realm box.

He recalled that the surveillance camera trained on the box had been recording footage continuously for quite some time. It was time to clear out some old recordings.

Li Daoxuan sat down at his computer and opened the camera's management software. He selected the recording list, chose all clips, and saved them to the local hard drive...

Then, idly, he opened one clip, chuckled at its contents, closed it, and opened another randomly to watch for a short while.

"Good god! This clip is... not right."

In the night vision footage, Gao Yiye was undressing beside the pond, clearly about to bathe...

Instinct and Morality instantly armed themselves, locked in combat, swinging knives and swords wildly for dozens of seconds, until Morality barely won out, striking down Instinct.

Li Daoxuan slapped the "delete" button, jettisoning that recording far from sight.

Opening another clip, he found the villagers bustling about constructing the temple—a scene quite vibrant and entertaining.

Enjoyment is better shared. Why not upload it to TikTok? Let netizens enjoy this novelty. After all, they'd assume it was actors portraying the Ming Dynasty, not knowing it was authentic.

He quickly sprung into action, editing the clip into a 30-second video and adding a caption: “Late Ming Dynasty — A group of hardworking villagers constructing a temple...”

His creative juices dried up there. He had little literary flair for crafting moving narratives. That would have to suffice.

Uploaded to his TikTok account, he moved on.

Setting aside his phone, he went to boil water for instant noodles. Minutes later, noodles in hand, he picked up his phone again and was stunned: the video he’d just posted was trending! Heaps of comments had flooded in within mere minutes.

“The production value is insane! Every actor portrays a downtrodden laborer so believably—unlike your typical actors.”

“Definitely. The props and costumes show incredible attention to detail. Nothing like those cheaply made junk period dramas.”

“The visual effects are strangely captivating—almost like a land of tiny people!”

“Pfft, don’t be clueless. That’s tilt-shift photography. It makes full-scale stuff seem miniature.”

“Yeah, that’s tilt-shift for sure. Honestly, it’s not that special—any semi-decent photographer can pull it off. But wow, the blogger must’ve spent a fortune! Hiring so many extras raided from set sales to act in a temple-building clip? The production costs must be insane.”

“With this many extras and props? Even for 30 seconds, no way this cost less than \$20,000.”

“Pure respect for the craft means I’m liking, saving, and sharing this video.”

“You guys are all morons. Why else would the blogger invest heavily in a mere 30-second clip? To make way more cash later! Any day now, this account will feature a Little Yellow Bike link. Then the blogger

will livestream: ‘Hottest Deal!’ Screaming how he’s crashed the market price—Not \$999! Not \$99! Just \$9.99 shipped! Until he empties your wallets, you sheep.”

Li Daoxuan’s eyes lit up at this last comment: Whoa, that hadn’t even occurred to me. But now that you mention it — thanks for the brilliant idea! Let the scam games begin.

#### Chapter 59: Daily Life in the Tiny Kingdom

Li Daoxuan outright changed his TikTok account name to “Daily Life in the Tiny Kingdom (tilt-shift photography).” With this switch, he could brazenly post videos that clearly depicted the Tiny Kingdom without restraint. After all, he’d plainly admitted it was “tilt-shift photography”—surely no one would suspect he actually had a Tiny Kingdom at home, right?

He earnestly reconsidered things. The earlier video of building the temple, while attractively genuine, lacked shock value. To draw a massive wave of traffic, he’d need something more thrilling, more spectacular.

Obviously—combat!

He rummaged through his video archive and quickly found the clip of the “Supreme Bright King” attacking Gaojia Village. Perfect. He’d start here.

He meticulously edited it, adding some filters.

Uploaded it again!

With the caption: “Hardworking villagers of the Tiny Kingdom face a bandit army’s assault. Everyone has taken up arms to defend their homeland...”

Damn it...if only I’d studied harder back in school. His caption writing was utterly pathetic. Thank goodness he hadn’t become a writer—he’d have been a dead, pathetic wretch.

...

Thirty-Two and his group were hurrying toward the county seat.

No one spoke. Everyone was terrified of encountering bandit troops.

But fate plays tricks. Murphy's Law is no joke—the more you fear something, the more likely it is to happen.

When they were about ten li from the village, sudden drumming and shouts erupted from both sides of the road. Dozens of figures burst from the woods, rustling through the undergrowth, nearly a hundred of them. Their weapons were a motley, bizarre assortment. As soon as they appeared, they blocked the mountain path both ahead and behind, their eyes fixed greedily on the bundles carried by Thirty-Two and his companions.

Third Lady, seeing their ill-intentioned stares, instinctively clutched her own bundle. It contained several jars of "elixir," sacred objects that absolutely could not be taken.

Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu drew their swords first.

All the young men brandished their weapons.

But they knew perfectly well: with sheer numbers so overwhelmingly against them, mere blades couldn't save them.

Thirty-Two feigned calm and shouted loudly, "Think carefully who you're messing with! I am Thirty-Two, the County Lord's secretary! These...these behind me...they're all 'auxiliaries' from the county office! If you dare attack us, it's rebellion! Punishable by death, extermination of clans—not one of you would survive!"

In this situation, he had no choice but to bluff boldly. He dragged out his old position to intimidate them, passing Gao Chuwu and the others off as "auxiliaries," government-connected figures. Maybe that would scare these thugs.

Sadly, Thirty-Two's words failed to intimidate the group. The leader chuckled darkly, "We even dared to kill a magistrate. You think we fear a mere secretary?"

That statement shocked everyone.

However...

Thirty-Two's eyes lit up. He understood instantly. "Your—your men belong to Bai Shui Wang Er, Hero Wang's troop?"

The leader sneered, "Exactly! We follow Brother Wang Er! Scared now? Hah! Who doesn't know we killed Magistrate Zhang Yaocai around here? You think throwing a secretary title at me scares me? Hahaha!"

His laughter only offered Thirty-Two a lifeline. Thirty-Two loudly pleaded, "If you're Hero Wang's brothers, this can be settled amicably! Honorable sir, Hero Wang and we are old acquaintances, friends! You absolutely cannot harm us. If Hero Wang found out you attacked us... wouldn't it damage the bond between brothers?"

The leader froze momentarily before cursing, "What nonsense is this? First, you claim an official's relation with a magistrate! Now you're trying to claim brotherhood with MY Brother Wang? You strike me as no good person!"

Sweating beaded on Thirty-Two's forehead. This was life or death; one wrong word could doom them. He forced himself to look unyielding. "I warn you bluntly—Hero Wang truly knows me well! Touch me if you dare. Hero Wang would rip your bones from your flesh!"

That bluff actually stopped the petty leader in his tracks. He stood frozen, unsure whether to order, "Kill them!" Without his command, the other bandits dared not move. A stalemate gripped the scene.

At the very rear of the bandit troop, a young man quietly slipped away, sprinting toward the hill behind them.

The petty leader felt uneasy inside. What if he did offend his boss's friends? He muttered uncertainly, "You're lying for sure! How on earth would my Brother Wang know a fat slob like YOU?"

Thirty-Two felt equally terrified inside—he had no idea if Wang Er still remembered Gaojia Village’s kindness—but he could only brazen it out. “Then come cut me down! KILL us! Your boss will reward you... by chopping YOU into eighteen pieces and hanging your bones from a tree!”

Both sides were all bluster but no guts.

Another deadlock descended!

Tension choked the air, radiating from both camps. One misstep meant death.

At that moment, a sharp shout sliced through from a distant hill: “DROP YOUR WEAPONS!”

Everyone turned as one toward the slope. Bai Shui Wang Er had arrived, led by the young man who’d slipped away moments earlier.

Wang Er strode long and fast down the hill. Reaching the clearing, he glanced left. “Indeed, they’re Gaojia Village folk.”

He glanced right. “White Cat, withdraw your men.”

Ah—the minor leader’s name was White Cat (“White Cat”). Trembling inwardly, White Cat thought: Fate saved me! They really KNOW Brother Wang! Thankfully, I didn’t just hack them to death.

Thirty-Two’s legs instantly turned to jelly, collapsing into a heap on the ground: Whew! Thank heavens Wang Er is a bandit chief with some principle! Anyone else... we’d all be corpses.

Bandits began dispersing around them. Yet, as they drifted away, their gazes lingered greedily at the villagers’ bundles: this bandit group had gotten addicted to plundering recently... the simple sight of another’s belongings ignited belief they should be theirs. Only after Wang Er glared ferociously at them did they scatter like startled animals.

“Third Secretary... Brothers from Gaojia Village,” Wang Er clasped his fists at the group. “What are you doing out here? In these chaotic times of armies on the march? Hiding safe in Gaojia Village was best... Yet here you are, rushing about weighted by packs? Are you seeking death?”

Thirty-Two awkwardly glanced at Third Lady: It’s this wife of mine demanding we journey to the county seat.

But, she wanted to save lives—that was also the Deity’s command—so he couldn’t complain. He awkwardly raised his fists. “Reasons... compel our journey to the county seat.”

Wang Er frowned thoughtfully for several seconds. “In that case... I’ll escort you partway. And when you return from the county seat to Gaojia Village, I’ll escort you back again. Gaojia Village did me a great favor; I cannot risk endangering lifesavers.”

Joy flooded Thirty-Two’s heart: he’d known Brother Wang valued honor... but such extent?! Brother Wang had integrity as hell!

Thirty-Two stiffened with deep respect and cupped his fists: “Hero Wang... for a man such as YOU to be driven to a bandit’s path... it truly... sigh... truly proves that times are unfair.”

Chapter 60: Leveraging Viral Fame

The series “Daily Life in the Tiny Kingdom” exploded in popularity overnight.

The clip depicting tiny figures in battle became an overnight sensation on TikTok.

It garnered hundreds of thousands of likes and over ten thousand comments.

Li Daoxuan leaned against his crate, scrolling through the comments with amusement.

“The tilt-shift photography here is damn incredible! Holy crap, this captures the Tiny Kingdom vibe perfectly!”

“Incredible props! That Lego brick city wall with little warriors standing atop it is pure comedy gold.”

“Seriously, how much did this scene cost? Building the wall and painting it like Lego must’ve cost tens of thousands?”

“It has to be CGI. Actually constructing a Lego-style wall would be absurdly expensive compared to digital effects.”

“Definitely CGI, but top-tier work. My eyes can’t spot any flaws—this isn’t cheap special effects.”

“Even if the walls are fake, those costumes and weapons—bows, rusty swords, hoes, pitchforks, pot lids—are all physical props. That’s serious money!”

“Right! There must be over a thousand bandit soldiers charging outside the city. Custom outfits for so many extras? Costumes alone would drain a budget!”

“Nah, maybe thirty or forty actors. Rest are digital copies.”

“Bullshit! Every face and outfit is unique. No way that’s digital manipulation!”

“Modern CGI can handle this easily. Think Marvel battle scenes—only the front row is real. Everything else is pixels.”

“I’m crying at those plastic catapults! How’d they even craft those? No way they built functional plastic siege engines!”

“Did actors actually get crushed? Looks terrifyingly real!”

“Don’t be stupid. Who kills extras for a video? It’s computer-generated!”

“Agreed. Just insanely realistic effects.”

“This CGI quality surpasses major films. Who blows a fortune on a one-minute viral clip?”

“Massive investment like this? Bet the creator’s prepping something big.”

“One hit won’t last. Countless TikTok flashes vanish without consistent quality. Fail to deliver? You’re toast.”

Laughter bubbled out of Li Daoxuan as he devoured thousands of such reactions, forgetting even to eat.

Though new to short-form content, he understood: sustained hits would lock in viewership. Then? Live-stream sales. His decent looks would help. Just needed to polish his pitch...

Time to practice before a mirror: “Fam, I’m slashing toy prices! Get your Tiny Kingdom wall bricks now—not ¥999, not ¥99, just ¥9.9 with free shipping...”

Escorting Thirty-Two’s group, Wang Er halted miles from Chengcheng county.

The settlement was now visible in the distance.

Wang Er could advance no further. As a known rebel, even with officials tolerating his pledge to “submit next spring,” appearing openly meant suicide.

“Third Lady, brothers from Gaojia Village—farewell here,” Wang Er clasped his fists. “Recall us at dawn tomorrow for your return escort.”

Thirty-Two reciprocated the gesture. “Our thanks, Brother Wang. Please distribute this silver to your men.”

He offered scattered pieces of silver.

Wang Er chuckled, shaking his head. “We’re hunted. Silver buys nothing now. Your kindness is gift enough.”

Fair point.

Thirty-Two nodded. “Dawn tomorrow, then.”

As they parted, Thirty-Two’s group hastened to the county walls.

Ming Dynasty counties typically held just over thirty constables under a seventh-rank County Magistrate. Garrison troops occupied forts miles away under ninth-rank inspectors like Cheng Xu—keeping civil and martial powers separate.

But Chengcheng’s gates now hosted soldiers.

Two armored men—sweating in cloth armor despite midday glare—scrutinized entrants with hostile intensity.

Thirty-Two’s entourage stood out: a dozen men laden with packs and blades. Soldiers swiftly shut the gates halfway.

“Halt! State your business!”

Thirty-Two raised his voice. “I am Thirty-Two, former aide to Ex-Magistrate Zhang Yaocai. These are my assistants.”

The guards froze at his name—their faces paling.

“T-T-Third Lady? Didn’t you... die... at Gaojia Village?”

Thirty-Two blinked. “Die? Since when?”

Then he recalled the day the Deity helped terrify Inspector Cheng Xu. These guards bore Cheng Xu's insignia—likely among those who'd witnessed the "haunting."

Indeed, these two had fled screaming that night, needing days to recover from nightmares.

Seeing Thirty-Two now, their bodies trembled.

Thirty-Two suppressed laughter, feigning sternness. "Accuse me in broad daylight? The ghost dwells not in me, but your guilty minds!"

The guards flinched. Sunlight indeed blazed overhead—unlikely hour for specters.

They squinted at him. "What... are you, Third Lady?"

Thirty-Two frowned, bewildered. "After Bai Shui Wang Er's uprising, my wife and I fled. Hearing peace restored Chengcheng, we returned. Why? You've seen someone resembling me?"

The soldiers exchanged nervous glances. "That night... it must've been his ghost. This one... seems like flesh."