

Great Ming 81

Chapter 81: You Dont Need to Sacrifice Your Self

The video had barely been uploaded, yet it already had one hundred thousand likes and the number kept climbing rapidly.

Comments flooded in instantly.

“Holy shit, how was this video shot? How’d they get that giant hand into the frame?”

“Has short video VFX tech already reached this level?”

“The image of this bus being pushed around an ancient village by a giant hand is just hilarious. The key point is the actors are amazing—they genuinely look like country bumpkins.”

“Top-tier acting, top-tier VFX... though the bus looks kinda cheap, total toy material, nothing like a real bus.”

“The hand is a real hand, the bus is a toy, and the tiny people inside are VFX. Incredibly mind-blowing VFX.”

“But I can still tell it’s VFX, hmph hmph hmph, my eyes are sharp.”

“What kind of reverse-thinking went into designing this effect?”

“Insane special effects! Fuck me! Absolutely insane!”

The likes kept sprinting upward. The small airplanes, ships, and high-speed trains in the Little Yellow Bike still weren’t selling, but the miniature toy bus featured in the video sold over ten thousand units in no time.

At 49.9 yuan per order, ten thousand orders meant over 500,000 yuan. Li Daoxuan earned a 25% commission of the sales. After paying TikTok its 5% platform fee, he pocketed 100,000 yuan in an instant.

WeChat flashed—a message from A Barrel of Pudding arrived: “Boss! Boss! Our orders exploded! Totally exploded! Everyone from Sales is working emergency overtime packaging toys. Holy heavens, this video of yours... I’m genuinely blown away. That level of VFX... You’re opening our eyes!”

Li Daoxuan replied: “See, toys like the little planes and ships just won’t sell. The mini-bus sold well because it featured in my video. If you could get some ancient-style micro-toys—small house, small castle, small carriage models—for me to film, those could be the real explosive sellers. Remember that.”

A Barrel of Pudding: “Got it! I’ll convince Product Development. Within our technical limits, we’ll try to create some toys tailored for your video theme.”

Li Daoxuan: “Looking forward to it. Together we can win!”

Closing WeChat, Li Daoxuan felt a bit tired. He turned to glance out the window. Shuangqing City was under night sky. Drunks downstairs were yelling again: “Wukuishou, Liuliuli...”

Two guys zoomed down the street on motorcycles, deliberately revving the throttle—VROOM VROOM VROOM—playing noisy drag games.

Li Daoxuan could only shut the window tighter. The double-glazed glass muted the racket from the young troublemakers.

He took a shower, went to his bedroom, turned off all the lights, and got ready to sleep.

A faint glow persisted in the bedroom, emanating from the scenic box. Oil lamps lined the fortress wall of Gaojia Fortress. Two sentinels patrolled diligently.

After experiencing two consecutive battles, the villagers of Gaojia Village understood the dangers now. The sentinels patrolled with much greater seriousness.

The corner of Li Daoxuan's mouth lifted slightly. He was about to say goodnight to the box and slip into sleep when he suddenly noticed a tiny figure standing on the third-floor balcony of the tallest watchtower in Gaojia Fortress.

"Huh?"

Li Daoxuan recognized her: Gao Yiye.

Nighttime Gao Yiye wasn't formally dressed like during the day. She wasn't wearing the thick white robe, but her old, coarse hemp clothing—faded, patched, tattered.

This was probably her nightgown—unwilling to wear her good clothes to bed and crease them.

She seemed troubled. Standing high on the third-floor balcony, gazing up at the starry night sky, she opened her mouth several times, hesitating. Finally, unable to resist, she spoke softly towards the heavens: "Why me?"

Why me?

The question floated clearly to Li Daoxuan's ears, making him pause.

He instantly grasped what the young girl was questioning.

Yes, why her?

Honestly, Li Daoxuan didn't understand that either.

Gao Yiye murmured quietly: "Deity... You are probably handling other celestial matters in the immortal realm right now. Only when You're away... only then do I dare whisper like this... I... I... little girl... she has felt so uselessly idle lately!"

Li Daoxuan: Pfft!

Gao Yiye continued: “No one lets me do anything. They just want me to stand there. They won’t even let me move around. They say it diminishes Your divine dignity. But... but... I... that was never me! I loved running! Jumping! Being wild! I loved chasing big brother Chuwu! Hearing Sanwa waddle after me! Hunting frogs in the fields! Scooping clams out of the river... Before the severe drought, I was the fiercest, most playful girl in the whole village!”

Li Daoxuan was amused.

Gao Yiye: “A few days ago, I ... I took some cotton to weave cloth. When I showed everyone the cloth... they just glared at me like I’d grown horns! Earlier, Third Lady pulled me aside... so earnestly... gave me this huge lecture... told me I must uphold my image.”

Li Daoxuan: Pfft! Pfft! Pfft!

He felt like laughing but, strangely, a touch of sadness also stirred within him.

Gao Yiye: “But I really can’t hold it in any longer! I have to do something—otherwise, I might just die!”

Li Daoxuan heard the genuine distress in her voice.

Gao Yiye lifted her face with utmost seriousness towards the sky. Moonlight bathed her features in a silver, hazy glow. She looked particularly lovely. “Deity... I still want to take some cotton and weave cloth. No matter what Third Lady says... I can’t help but weave! Please... please don’t blame me for dishonoring Your glorious name?”

Swish!

Li Daoxuan swiftly lifted the lid of the scenic box and brought his face close.

With the lid covering, even Gao Yiye couldn't see him; sound didn't penetrate. But with it open, Gao Yiye clearly saw his face materialize among the clouds, and his voice reached her clearly.

Seeing the Deity suddenly manifest in the night sky startled Gao Yiye terribly. She stumbled backward several paces—thump!—and knelt instantly.

“You... You... Deity... were listening?! Forgive this guilt! Little girl... she... won't take the cotton! Won't take it!”

Li Daoxuan smiled gently, softening his voice as much as possible. “Go take the cotton. It's alright. I'm not upset with you.”

Gao Yiye's head snapped up. Joy washed over her.

“Live the life you want to live. Listen to no one who advises otherwise,” Li Daoxuan spoke earnestly. “Above all, you need joy. Everything else comes after that.”

Gao Yiye: “But... if I seem coarse... wouldn't that cause others to disrespect You, Deity?”

Li Daoxuan: “False entities require affected theatrics to intimidate. But do I need such devices to enhance my stature? My reality can be proven at any moment. You never need to sacrifice your true self to uphold my dignity.”

Chapter 82: It Will Be Convenient Soon

Gao Yiye skipped her way to the second floor.

The second floor of the watchtower was piled up with various materials bestowed by the Deity, including an entire room filled with cotton. In the past, Gao Yiye had to sneakily take some, but this time she felt confident. She reached into the cotton pile and pulled out a huge clump, larger than her own body.

Carrying such a big lump of cotton up the stairs was extremely strenuous; she couldn't even see the steps clearly and nearly tumbled down. Yet, her mood remained excellent.

Back on the third floor, she set up the spinning machine in her own room. As she hummed a song softly, she didn't know its name, only that her mother had taught it to her...

"Hey, I'm the most mischievous girl in Gaojia Village, willful and as bold as brass."

"First I want to be happy, everything else is just after that..."

Li Daoxuan watched the girl under the lamp, happily spinning away, and for some reason, his mood became remarkably good. He laid down his head and instantly fell asleep.

...

Early in the morning of the next day, the sound of the "Seventh Set of Radio Calisthenics" began to echo once more over Gaojia Village.

Gao Yiye led a large group of little children, starting their morning exercises in the "study well."

One of the wells in the Hakka roundhouse of Gaojia Fortress had now been officially named "study well." Mr. Wang had personally written the characters "study well" and hung them at the entrance to the courtyard.

As soon as those two characters were put up, no idlers dared to set foot even half a step into that courtyard.

Villagers thought the place for studying was a sacred spot. Uneducated, rough people entering it would be a desecration, so they had to stay far away.

Thus, no one could see Mr. Wang, who always acted very strict and unsmiling during lessons, hiding behind the children and secretly joining them in the exercises.

At the main gate of Gaojia Fortress, Bai Yuan turned over and mounted a fast horse. He clasped his fist toward Thirty-Two and said, "Third Lady, I plan to return to Bai Family Fortress now."

Thirty-Two bowed deeply in return and said, "Thank you, Mr. Bai, for coming to assist."

Bai Yuan laughed heartily. When he had come, he brought Gao Chuwu along, riding two horses. But when returning, he rode one horse himself, while the other horse had two large jars strapped evenly on each side.

One jar held sparkling clear "divine sugar," the other contained snow-white "lard," both scarce treasures hard to find in this year of drought.

Even as a wealthy landowner, Bai Yuan found it tough to get such items these times; money alone wasn't enough to buy them anywhere. Getting two big jars this time as thanks from Gaojia Village naturally made him extremely happy.

Back home, he could enjoy a few hearty meals properly.

Bai Yuan held the reins with one hand and waved the other toward Thirty-Two and the accompanying villagers, saying, "Everyone, I'll head back to Bai Family Fortress first. If anything happens, don't hesitate to have someone notify me. Speaking of which, it's about time for Gaojia Fortress here to buy some horses—otherwise, just walking over to Bai Family Fortress takes two hours."

Third Lady clasped his fist and said, "Mr. Bai's words are absolutely right, only the journey back and forth to the county town isn't safe now. The roads are dangerous; last time heading back to the county, we almost had an incident there. Luckily, we met Wang Er midway. Once the roads become stable, we'll go buy horses."

Bai Yuan smiled and said, "Convenience will arrive imminently. If my guess isn't wrong, the road leading from Gaojia Village to the county town should become obstacle-free within a few days."

Third Lady asked, "?"

Without explaining, Bai Yuan laughed loudly, spurred his horse, and called out, "Off I go!"

The fine horse immediately raised its hooves and galloped toward Bai Family Fortress. The horse carrying the white sugar and lard swiftly followed. With one man and two horses, they vanished far away in an instant.

The crowd felt quite confused—what did his final remark mean?

Though Bai Yuan excelled in every other aspect, he loved putting on airs. He ran off without clarifying his words, leaving no way to ask.

Thirty-Two turned to the villagers and said, “Alright, stop crowding here; go about your own business. Look, the Deity has released the labor offenders through divine intervention, and a fresh day has started again.”

Everybody turned to see the circular “colorful wall” making a rumbling noise. Quickly, it shifted to open a gap.

Nearly two hundred labor offenders stepped out timidly, all gazing eagerly at Thirty-Two as if waiting for him to speak that sentence...

As anticipated, Thirty-Two opened his mouth and said, “Give each of them two grains of rice and let them cook it themselves. Once they’re full, commence the [labor reform].”

The labor offenders, upon hearing this, were overjoyed immediately and cheered in unison.

Thirty-Two angrily yelled, “Stop celebrating! You are being punished, so learn your status. If it weren’t for the Deity issuing an edict to have you fed, I’d starve you fools half to death, or else I wouldn’t go by the name Three-Two.”

The labor offenders ignored Thirty-Two’s furious roar and kept cheering, “We have food! So great!”

“I’d gladly do forced labor for a lifetime.”

“Forced labor is truly fantastic.”

Thirty-Two: “...”

Witnessing this, Li Daoxuan secretly felt amused inside.

He suddenly noticed that on a few labor offenders, tiny light spots slowly rose up and flew into the box’s four walls; then, the Rescue Index surged sharply, increasing by five points.

This rise was directly equivalent to saving many lives.

“Oh? Does this just count as rescuing these people successfully?”

Li Daoxuan understood at once: these men were already content, as their life goal was merely to survive and eat their fill; the current forced labor existence had met all their life hopes.

But...

Such people were rare!

Li Daoxuan pressed the “north, south, east, and west” button outside the box. Sure enough, his view expanded outward by a large margin.

...

Two days later...

In Chengcheng County, at the county office.

The Ninth Rank Patrol Inspector Cheng Xu lay collapsed in the county magistrate's chair, feeling utterly hollow.

After Zhang Yaocai was killed, Cheng Xu led troops into the county to replace the dead county magistrate and maintain order, then rushed around everywhere putting down unrest.

But the more he suppressed it, the more rebels appeared, with trouble flaring up all over, leaving him exhausted.

Lately, during nights, he repeatedly saw his grandmother's face and voice in his dreams, terrifying him into waking suddenly from deep sleep.

"Can't kill 'em all, absolutely can't kill 'em all," mumbled Cheng Xu to himself: "Rebels everywhere, countless rebels; it's impossible to finish them off."

"Report!"

An archer rushed in from outside and shouted loudly, "Leader, bad news!"

Cheng Xu: "How much worse can it get? Messes are everywhere anyway."

The archer blurted out quickly, "The new Chengcheng County Magistrate will arrive in three days, and he's... from the Donglin Party."

Cheng Xu: "Damn it!"

Actually, Cheng Xu was linked to the Eunuch Party; hearing a Donglin Party member would become magistrate naturally startled him.

Given Chengcheng County's situation now, once the Donglin Party arrived, they'd definitely exploit it fully and dump all blame onto Cheng Xu, the Eunuch Party associate.

The pen of civilian officials—anyone hit by them felt sick; a report sent upward might not be saved by Nine Thousand Years—no, Nine Thousand Years couldn't care less about a minor figure like him. After all, he had only leaned slightly toward the Eunuch Party, not being an actual member.

Cheng Xu sprang up instantly: "It's over now, finished; I see my grandmother waving at me."

Chapter 83: Hanyu Pinyin

Cheng Xu was panicking, pacing back and forth in a fluster within the county office hall.

The image of his grandmother appeared everywhere. At one moment, she beckoned to him smilingly from the doorway; the next, from the window; then from behind the screen; and suddenly, she was seated in the county magistrate's chair, waving him over. At times, more than a dozen grandmothers joined hands, swirling and flying around Cheng Xu...

Grandmothers were everywhere!

"My wonderful great-grandson, Grandmother loves you most," they cooed, "come down below to keep me company."

Just then, another figure burst through the main entrance. Swishing right through the phantom image of the grandmother at the door, he leaped before Cheng Xu. It was the deputy inspector, Cheng Xu's loyal confidant. Beaming with joy, he announced, "Boss, great news!"

Cheng Xu grimaced, "Great news? Nothing can save me now. Over a dozen Grandmothers are on their way to fetch me."

The deputy inspector pressed on, "Boss, hunters from the mountains report that Wang Er's rebels have been defeated. Zheng Yanfu and Zhuang Guangdao are dead. Wang Er himself suffered severe injuries."

Cheng Xu's spirits instantly soared, rushing with pride. The dozen or so grandmothers encircling him were simultaneously flung backward, tossed far away. "Eh? What happened? Tell me quickly!"

The deputy inspector explained, "The night before last, Wang Er led his rebels in a night raid on Gaojia Village. Unexpectedly, the village was prepared. Under the command of Bai Yuan, the instructor of the

Bai Family Fortress militia, the Gaojia Village Militia ambushed Wang Er's rebels. They killed Zheng Yanfu and Zhuang Guangdao, and critically wounded Wang Er. Wang Er now only has a hundred or so men left in his command. They've gone into hiding in the mountains, too scared to cause any more trouble. Hearing this news, nearby rebel forces have been terrified into silence, trembling with fear."

His information was entirely wrong. Had anyone from Gaojia Village heard this, they would have laughed their teeth out. But this misinformation wasn't accidental; it had its reasons.

Indeed, after Wang Er left, he feared implicating the people of Gaojia Village. He deliberately instructed his men to spread false news, claiming that his attack on Gaojia Village had failed. This way, no one would suspect the villagers of collaborating with him.

It also preserved the reputations of Zheng Yanfu and Zhuang Guangdao. It prevented other forest heroes from learning that these two had betrayed their leader, saving them from a legacy of treachery after death.

He protected everyone except himself. Now, everyone knew he was severely wounded with only a hundred men left.

A tiger fallen onto the flats could be bullied even by a dog.

How could Cheng Xu resist such an opportunity? He was overjoyed. Planting his hands on his hips, he roared with laughter: "Hahaha! Excellent! A heaven-sent opportunity! Gather the troops immediately! We pursue and suppress Wang Er's rebel force now! We have three days before the Donglin Party magistrate arrives. Let's strike while the iron is hot and capture him!"

"As long as Wang Er is dealt with, the rebels who rose in his wake will naturally disperse. I'll write a report blaming all the Wang Er troubles squarely on that dead ghost Zhang Yaocai. I, Cheng Xu, worked diligently, just cleaning up Zhang Yaocai's mess behind the scenes, suppressing the rebel hordes. Handled this way, we might just forge a path out of this dead end."

The grandmother at the door vanished. The kind smile at the window blurred. The dozen grandmothers swirling around him dissolved into streaks of light...

Do you believe in light?

To a surge of triumphant music, Ninth-rank Inspector Cheng Xu revived, full of health and vigor. Transformed from a coward into a hero, he launched his offensive!

...

Early in the morning, Gaojia Village was as peaceful and harmonious as ever.

Labor offenders were released by the Deity's giant hand and began cooking their own breakfasts. Every day of their labor reform started with a meal – who would believe that if told?

Law-abiding citizens from other villages might weep with envy.

Inside the “study well,” a group of children finished their radio calisthenics, getting ready for class.

Mr. Wang held the “Book of Family Names,” prepared to teach them “Zhao, Qian, Sun, Li; Zhou, Wu, Zheng, Wang.” Before he could start, Gao Yiye suddenly stood up. “Master, a divine message has come from the Deity!”

Mr. Wang immediately straightened solemnly. Having been in Gaojia Village for some time, he had personally witnessed the Deity manifest miracles on several occasions. He was now a true believer in the Dao Xuan Deity Teachings, though following “Confucius didn't speak of gods and spirits,” he kept his faith to his heart and not his lips.

“What message from the Deity? I am all ears,” he responded respectfully.

Gao Yiye announced, “The Deity says that he possesses a celestial method that can allow children to learn reading and writing much faster. It helps them pronounce every word correctly.”

Mr. Wang was instantly overjoyed upon hearing this. “A celestial method!”

Don't just teach it to the children, I want to learn too!

Gao Yiye continued, “The Deity instructs that this method should be taught to Master Wang first. Then, Master can pass it on to the children. This is the best approach.”

Mr. Wang was so thrilled he almost began hopping like a monkey. “Wonderful! Absolutely wonderful! This lowly scholar... ahem... we scholars aspire to inherit the lost wisdom of past sages. This celestial method of the Deity... I shall devote every effort to mastering and transmitting it!”

Gao Yiye said, “Then listen carefully. This method is called: Hanyu Pinyin.”

Mr. Wang sighed, “Just hearing the name fills me with an aura of immortality.”

...

Li Daoxuan watched Gao Yiye and Mr. Wang begin studying Hanyu Pinyin, a faint smile playing on his lips. It was often tricky dealing with learned but impoverished scholars like Mr. Wang from ancient times. Trying to instill new knowledge or ideas into them was like trying to add oil or salt that wouldn't stick. Yet, use the trick of framing it as a “celestial method,” and these ancients became remarkably easy to persuade.

It was rather frustrating. Progressive ideas and new teaching methods had to be packaged as divine revelations just to be accepted.

Lost in these thoughts, he suddenly caught the buzz of tiny voices and turned his head.

Visitors had arrived outside the village!

Familiar face – Inspector Cheng Xu.

The last time Cheng Xu visited, Gaojia Village was surrounded by that colorful Lego-brick wall. The village population was small, its people timid. Li Daoxuan, wishing to avoid complications, had resorted to using “sorcery” to scare him away.

But now, Gaojia Village was entirely transformed. There was no need for tricks this time. Let's see how Thirty-Two handles this.

Li Daoxuan entered spectator mode.

Cheng Xu spotted Gaojia Village ahead from afar and felt a twinge of apprehension. Last time he came here, he nearly got eaten by ghosts, scaring him away from this place for a long time. But it was still Early in the morning. He'd never heard of ghosts running amok so early.

Summoning his courage, he marched towards the gate of Gaojia Fortress at the head of over a hundred soldiers.

Raising his head, he saw the place had changed again. Last time, the walls were two zhang high (around 6.6 meters), brightly colored, and decidedly odd-looking. This time, they stood three zhang high (approx. 10 meters), looking like a proper fortress residence.

Stone and mud... this place truly felt eerie.

Thirty-Two's face appeared atop the fortress wall. He waved down at Cheng Xu outside. "Ah! General Cheng! Long time no see! Missed you immensely! Please wait! I'll be right out to see you!"

As Thirty-Two descended the wall, he whispered to a servant beside him, "Notify all the villagers immediately. Hide the armor."

Chapter 84: Pay Attention to Traffic Problems

Outside the gate of Gaojia Fortress.

"General Cheng Xu, it has been so long, really so very long," Thirty-Two said with a smile. "Since Bai Shui Wang Er started the rebellion and I fled the county town, I have never seen you again. Seeing you today, I was overjoyed."

Cheng Xu glanced sideways. "I was here just a few days ago, and you greeted me then, didn't you?"

Thirty-Two said, “Huh? What happened?”

Cheng Xu felt a pang in his heart and thought to himself: So, I wasn't truly in Gaojia Village back then? I must have fallen under demonic arts and gone to a Ghost Village, with female ghosts disguising as Third Lady to trick me into entering. Luckily, I didn't go in then, otherwise I would have been devoured by those ghosts long ago.

At that thought, sweat poured down his brow like large beans.

Forget it, the past was over, and he was still alive and well—no need to panic anymore. Cheng Xu pulled himself together and pointed at Gaojia Fortress. “This little Gaojia Village, when did it build such a huge fortress?”

Thirty-Two smiled. “This was funded by Mr. Bai from Bai Family Fortress. I also chipped in some silver, plus every villager from the nearby ten-mile stretch helped out. It took a great deal of joint effort to get it up.”

“Bai Yuan funded it?” Cheng Xu didn't know whether to believe it; damn, a three-zhang-high fortress wall, could a village gentry really afford that? But whatever, now wasn't the time for unnecessary complications. He only had three days before the Donglin Party county magistrate took office; no time to meddle in trivial matters—pretending not to see was the wisest move.

Cheng Xu asked urgently, “I got news that two nights ago, Bai Shui Wang Er raided Gaojia Fortress at night. Bai Yuan led the Gaojia Village Militia in an ambush and killed Zhuang Guangdao and Zheng Yanfu. Is this true?”

Thirty-Two had already heard the rumors spread by Wang Er and knew his well-meaning intent, so why not cooperate? He immediately put on a smug expression. “Beyond all doubt.”

Cheng Xu said, “Where are the bodies of Zheng Yanfu and Zhuang Guangdao?”

Thirty-Two pointed at a nearby hill slope. “They're buried there. See, over there with two stones set, right under them.”

Cheng Xu was overjoyed and quickly sent men to dig. After a few shovels, they indeed unearthed several charred, rotten corpses emitting a foul stench.

Cheng Xu didn't mind it and didn't bother identifying them formally; in those times, there was no technical means for an autopsy. "Chop off the heads of these charred remains and put them in a bag."

His soldiers complied swiftly.

It was a revolting task, but his men were regular troops after all, used to all kinds of corpses—be it burnt or decayed, they worked without batting an eye.

Cheng Xu was in high spirits. "Third Lady, you and Mr. Bai have done great deeds. Later, when the new county magistrate takes office, I'll bring you to him to claim merit; he's sure to give you some reward."

Thirty-Two said, "We only took out a few remaining bandits; those two bandit chiefs were personally slain by you, General Cheng Xu. All villagers in Gaojia Village witnessed it—you are the real hero of all the hard work."

Cheng Xu grinned and chuckled. "Third Lady, you truly know how to read the room."

After laughing, his expression darkened sharply. "Which way did Wang Er flee?"

Thirty-Two stretched out his hand, pointing at the north hill slope. "That way!"

He hadn't lied; he genuinely indicated where Wang Er had gone because he knew Wang Er had planned ahead by spreading the news.

Without another word, Cheng Xu pointed at the northern mountains. "After him!"

He led over a hundred soldiers into the forested hills, soon disappearing into the distance.

Only then did Thirty-Two withdraw his gaze, muttered “tch,” returned to the fortress, and stood atop the high fortress wall. He thought for a moment: No wonder Bai Yuan said the road to the county town would soon be open; so that’s how it was... Once news of Wang Er’s severe injury came out, Cheng Xu became active again. So, the rebel forces around here would quiet down.

He turned and shouted to the village: “Gao Chuwu, Zheng Daniu, get ready! After Cheng Xu stirs things up for a few days, it’ll be safe outside. We’ll go to the county town to buy some horses and hire a few helpers.”

Gao Chuwu popped up from a rooftop. “Huh? But no one here knows how to ride a horse. Even if we buy them, how would we ride them back to the village?”

Zheng Daniu popped up from another rooftop. “Do you want us two to carry the horses back?”

Gao Chuwu grinned foolishly. “Oh? Right, if the two of us team up, we’d have the strength.”

Zheng Daniu said, “I’m very confident in my strength.”

Thirty-Two said, “Both of you fools, shut it! Even if you can’t ride, you could lead the horses back. Why the need to carry anything? Is it people riding horses, or horses riding people?”

The two men were silent.

Li Daoxuan overheard the two naive guys talking and found it amusing. After laughing, he pondered more deeply: Although Gao Chuwu was a bit dull, he’d raised a crucial point—that “riding horses was an advanced skill.”

This skill wasn’t easy to master!

For the villagers of Gaojia Village, even if they got horses, learning to ride would be a long-term process, and only a few might ever manage to use them effectively.

Besides, horse-drawn wagons had limited carrying capacity. If villagers wanted to transport some of the strange items he provided later on, like that plastic catapult before, a wagon probably couldn't handle it.

Traffic problems needed serious attention.

Li Daoxuan just opened the military history forum and anonymously posted: Respected experts, I'm back. I'd like to ask: with modern materials and technical data available, what's the highest level of land transportation they could achieve in the Ming Dynasty?

Reply 1: The Apollo spaceship.

Reply 2: Bury the first reply! Even with modern materials, people from the Ming Dynasty couldn't understand modern technical data, so they couldn't build anything proper. Wait until you've trained talents who grasp those docs—that'd take at least a decade. Better stick to wagons.

Reply 3: I've seen steam trains in Ming Dynasty time-travel novels.

Reply 4: Those are just for fun, speeding up tech developments. With untapped basic science, all wild ideas stayed on paper, like in the Ming's "Military Preparations Book"—packed with odd weapons, have you seen any actually built? Do you even believe in time-travel tropes?

Reply 5: I believe it! Especially plots with buying dozens of concubines for orgies at home—totally feasible in the Ming era.

All replies scolded together: "Why hasn't this guy been banned? Where are the mods? Where's that dead mod vanished to?"

Li Daoxuan realized he wasn't getting much useful info from the forum; he couldn't precisely explain how his golden hand worked, so netizens couldn't help much.

Fine, he'd search on his own!

He opened all online shopping sites and searched for miniature toys...

As they say, if you set your mind on buying something that's not illegal, you can definitely find it online—it all boils down to how hard you look.

Chapter 85: The Solar Car

Finding a vehicle suitable for the tiny people was extremely difficult.

Toy cars all shared one common flaw: they “required remote control”.

None were designed with “operating from inside the vehicle” functionality.

Wasn't that obvious? What idiot would even consider such a design?

Li Daoxuan had already tested this. A remote-controlled car, or even a remote-controlled plane, when operated by him, couldn't leave his line of sight. It would just crash into the glass walls of the box.

Clearly, the box's “anti-exploit mechanism” was restricting him, preventing him from reaching beyond his viewable range. Otherwise, he could just mount a camera on a remote-controlled tank and drive it beyond his vision—wouldn't that grant him mastery over the entire miniature world?

Therefore, what he needed was a vehicle the tiny people could drive themselves.

The difficulty of this task wasn't just high; it was practically impossible.

He scoured every shopping website but still found nothing.

Just as he was about to give up, his eyes suddenly lit up. Huh? Tucked away in a corner of a shopping site was a strange little toy. He clicked in to see: a Miniature Solar Car.

The car was 3 centimeters long, 2.5 centimeters wide, and weighed only 4 grams.

It was solar-powered. When sunlight shone upon it, it would automatically move forward. The brighter the sunlight, the better it ran. Without sunlight, it stopped immediately, dead still.

A metaphorical light bulb clicked above Li Daoxuan's head. This little car had very high potential for customization!

He quickly placed an order and bought it. He immediately private-messaged the shop owner: "I want this car. I'll pay extra. Send it via SF Express, top priority. I need it in my hands as soon as possible."

Shop owner: "Dear customer! With extra payment, nothing is impossible! Just wait, SF Express will depart immediately!"

Delivered in the morning, received by evening.

Around three in the afternoon, the solar car arrived.

Li Daoxuan took it out of the package and walked into the sunlight. As soon as he set it on the ground, it started scooting forward with a "whoosh whoosh whoosh" sound. When he blocked the light, it immediately became sluggish and stalled.

Seeing such an incredibly amazing and cool little toy, Li Daoxuan's mind flooded with inspiration. The little sparks of his ideas were practically threatening to ignite a full-blown wildfire.

He hurriedly hailed a taxi and rushed towards Cai Xinzi's model shop.

Upon arrival, Cai Xinzi was lounging with her feet propped up, sitting contentedly behind the counter. Business at her model shop hadn't really improved. But lately, she had helped Li Daoxuan flip one or two 1-millimeter Supreme Lord Lao sculptures. The commission from one deal alone earned her over a hundred thousand yuan — enough to cover two years' shop rent! She felt extremely relaxed now.

Seeing Li Daoxuan enter the shop, Cai Xinzi sprang up instantly: "Haha! Daoxuan! What brings you here? Here to pick models? Go ahead, take whatever you fancy. If any model in this shop catches your eye, just take it!"

Li Daoxuan: "I need your help to customize a little toy."

"Customize?" Cai Xinzi was baffled.

Li Daoxuan stretched out his hand, palm open. The solar car on his palm immediately sensed the "light" and lurched forward, almost escaping his grip. Li Daoxuan was so startled he quickly clenched his fist, trapping it securely.

Cai Xinzi recognized it instantly. "A 3-centimeter-long solar car? What's there to customize on this thing?"

Li Daoxuan: "I want to install a steering wheel on it to control the direction, and I also want to install a set of brake and accelerator pedals."

"Pfft!"

Cai Xinzi sprayed a mouthful of Nutri-Express beverage a full meter across the room.

Li Daoxuan almost got hit. Thankfully, his youth granted him quick reflexes. He dodged sideways just in time. The spray of Nutri-Express hit a model shelf behind him, staining a Freedom Gundam model.

Cai Xinzi pointed at the models in the shop: "Pick any you want! Take it and leave quickly! Don't bring me these absurd customization requests anymore! I truly cannot do it, Your Majesty!"

Li Daoxuan: "What? You think my request is that difficult?"

Cai Xinzi: "A 3-centimeter-long car?! Steering is one thing—that's easy. I'll just add a handle like on a walking tractor to the front and use a small mechanism to guide the wheels. But what in the world are throttle and brakes?! Just have them hack me to death with blades!"

Li Daoxuan: “How can you call yourself a model maker? Your brain’s not working. Tell me, what kind of power does my car run on?”

Cai Xinzi: “Solar.”

Li Daoxuan: “If you block the sun, can it still run?”

Cai Xinzi: “No!”

Li Daoxuan: “Then aren’t the brakes figured out? Block the sun, and it stops.”

A lightbulb went off over Cai Xinzi’s head. “Damn, Daoxuan! You’ve gotten really clever. That solves it! We don’t need caliper-style brakes—just add a simple sunshade curtain that can slide over the solar panel. Flip the brake lever, and the curtain covers the panel.”

Li Daoxuan: “Exactly. Same with the throttle. Flip the throttle lever, slide the curtain open, done.”

Cai Xinzi: “I’m a professional model maker, and you’re actually teaching me? Your brain’s sharp these days.”

Li Daoxuan chuckled: “Haha! Now you know what a genius looks like? So why not lend this genius buddy a hand?”

Cai Xinzi: “You didn’t start playing the ‘I’m the client’ card this time.”

Li Daoxuan: “I didn’t want to become exactly what I vowed to destroy.”

That night, Cai Xinzi worked late into the night. Li Daoxuan had helped him earn quite a lot of money before, and he carried some unspoken gratitude toward his old friend. He had no way to repay him before—this was his chance to put in his best effort.

First, he fitted the car with a steering mechanism—a handle shaped like those on a walking tractor—then crafted a paper-thin sunshade curtain for the throttle/brake... However, for such a tiny scale, it was impossible to rig a mechanism to control the curtain's opening and closing. The throttle and brake systems failed—it only allowed manual curtain adjustments.

He assumed Li Daoxuan would be dissatisfied with this compromise. But when he delivered it Early in the morning the next day, Li Daoxuan just paused in thought for two seconds, then smiled: "This'll do just fine. Thanks, brother."

Cai Xinzi: "No throttle or brakes... Is that really okay?"

Li Daoxuan revealed a mysterious smile: "Two-person driving. One operates the steering, the other handles the sunshade curtain."

Cai Xinzi: "..."

A three-centimeter-long car... and you're already planning for two-person operation? What kind of monster are you?

He reached over and touched Li Daoxuan's forehead: "Bro... did you eat poison mushrooms today?"

Li Daoxuan firmly declared: "I did not!"

Cai Xinzi: "Then... woke up on the wrong side of the bed?"

Li Daoxuan laughed: "Stop messing around! Actually, this little car is just a prototype. If it works, I'll commission you again to build bigger solar cars. I'll need your help then too—for proper steering control and sunshade curtain setups."

Cai Xinzi: "Stop adding the word 'system' to these utterly absurd ideas! It doesn't make them sound advanced at all."

Chapter 86: The Two Fools

Li Daoxuan took the modified version of the solar car and sat down in front of the scenic box.

It was still early in the morning, and the little people in the box had just gotten up.

By now, Li Daoxuan didn't need to bring his phone in to play the "Seventh Set of Radio Calisthenics" anymore, because the children had memorized the whole set of movements and were reciting it together aloud: "Section one, stretching exercise... 1, 2, 3, 4..."

Just as the children started their morning exercises, the labor offenders had finished breakfast and began working.

After several days of labor by these labor offenders, many rooms in the village had wooden doors and windows.

The doors were properly built, but the windows weren't covered with window paper, because Gaojia Village still lacked the ability to make paper, so the windows had only frames.

Li Daoxuan searched around the village for a while before finding Gao Yiye. Today, she wasn't wearing that dignified-looking white robe; instead, she wore ordinary cotton clothes. Smiling at anyone she saw, she said, "Look, I spun and sewed this cotton outfit myself. Isn't it nice? My tailoring is almost as good as Gao San Niang's."

The crowd shook their heads, half-amused and half-aghast. "Saint Lady, you doing this... what about the Deity..."

Gao Yiye pouted her small mouth and said, "The Deity personally gave a decree allowing me to do this."

The crowd: "..."

Li Daoxuan was in a good mood and called out softly, "Yiye, Yiye!"

Gao Yiye suddenly looked up. "Ah, Deity, you are here. What is your command?"

As soon as she spoke, the villagers beside immediately stood with hands at their sides, gazing devoutly at the sky.

Li Daoxuan said, "I have a vehicle here that requires two brave, tough, durable, and fearless people to drive it."

Once he said this, the choices were beyond doubt.

The crowd shouted loudly together, "Gao Chuwu, Zheng Daniu! The Deity summons you both to meet him."

The two fools hurriedly set down their tasks and rushed over eagerly to Gao Yiye's side, looking up and asking, "What does the Deity want us to do?"

Li Daoxuan said, "Leave the village and stand on the flat ground outside."

Everyone quickly obeyed, rushing to the open space outside the village. Thirty-Two also joined in to see the excitement, along with many male and female villagers. Except for the children at school, the whole population of Gaojia Village was present. Even the labor offenders on the hillside couldn't resist stopping their work and turning to look from afar.

Only then did Li Daoxuan slowly lower the solar car from his hand.

The villagers looked up and saw a strange thing descending from the sky. Just by the sight of its four wheels, they could guess it was a vehicle, but it was too bizarre—completely different in shape from a carriage, with an odd cloth canopy on top.

And it was huge, about 6 meters long, nearly 5 meters wide, and 3 meters high.

Li Daoxuan asked gravely, "Gao Chuwu, Zheng Daniu, have either of you ever driven a vehicle before?"

Both shook their heads.

“Then you’ve held a plow before?”

Both nodded.

“That’s enough then. At the very least, you should have some basic concept of turning left and right.”

Li Daoxuan pointed at the thing in front of the solar car that resembled the handlebar of a walk-behind tractor and said, “Think of that thing as a plow. Turning left and right, can you understand how it works?”

Gao Chuwu grinned broadly. “I understood just by looking, haha. I’m so clever.”

The crowd drew a sharp breath of cold air: They seemed to doubt the sincerity of his words.

Li Daoxuan said, “Good. You’ll be in charge of steering soon. Zheng Daniu, do you see that strange cloth on the vehicle?”

Zheng Daniu: “I see it!”

Li Daoxuan: “Later, when you pull open this sunshade, the car will move forward. Pulling it back makes the car stop.”

Zheng Daniu: “Open to move, close to stop. I get it, hahaha! Guess I’m no idiot either.”

The crowd collectively drew a sharp breath: Do you honestly think that makes you clever?

Li Daoxuan: “Alright, get aboard. You two work together and try making this car run.”

Under everyone’s gaze, the two clumsy companions climbed onto the solar car.

The vehicle itself stood ten feet high (translating to 1.5cm in real life, equivalent to Great Ming's 3 meters). Clambering up from the tire rim was strenuous for the pair; someone with poorer physical coordination genuinely couldn't have scaled such a height.

Li Daoxuan thought silently: Seems I overlooked this. Need to add a ladder for easy access. Cai Xinzi will probably assume I've been eating hallucinogenic mushrooms again.

No sooner had they climbed aboard, Gao Chuwu, who was supposed to steer, hadn't even reached his position when Zheng Daniu approached the sunshade. Grinning broadly, he reached out and yanked it open completely.

The solar panels kicked into full power.

The car instantly sprang to life, rumbling loudly as it surged forward.

Though it crawled at a mere ten-plus centimeters per second at full solar power in the real world, scaled up 200 times in the late Ming era, it soared close to 100 kilometers per hour.

Completely unprepared, Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu were hurled off their feet by the extreme acceleration. Ordinary reflexes stood no chance. Both inepts tumbled simultaneously as the car shot straight toward the "colorful wall" built by the labor offenders.

"Wah! So fast, so fast!" Zheng Daniu roared. "Chuwu, steer! Steer quick, we're gonna crash!"

Gao Chuwu, clinging to the car, didn't dare move: "Wah, I can't get up! I can't get over there now! You pull the sunshade shut!"

Zheng Daniu was also flattened against the car: "I fell down! Can't get up! Can't close the sunshade now!"

Gao Chuwu: "Waaah! We're gonna hit!"

Zheng Daniu: “Aaaaah! We’re gonna die!”

The villagers all covered their ears.

Just as the solar car was about to crash onto the Lego bricks, Li Daoxuan reached in, plucked the car up, lifting all four wheels off the ground.

The vehicle hovered suspended in mid-air, its wheels still spinning crazily.

Finally, Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu could scramble to their feet.

They first thanked the Deity for saving them. Then, Zheng Daniu pulled the sunshade shut, and the wheels stopped spinning.

Gao Chuwu glared wide-eyed: “Daniu, you idiot! You only open the sunshade after I’ve reached the steering plow!”

Zheng Daniu: “How was I supposed to know you’d be so slow, you oaf?”

Gao Chuwu: “Anyway, you’re the idiot!”

Zheng Daniu: “You’re the idiot!”

“Enough, stop squabbling.”

Li Daoxuan set the car gently back on the ground: “Zheng Daniu, when you pull the sunshade open, do it slowly. Don’t yank it completely open in one go. Open it gradually for a slow acceleration; that way you can keep control. This car is ruled by light. More light makes it run faster. No light makes it stop. Understand?”

Zheng Daniu nodded: "I understand."

"Good. Try again."

Li Daoxuan withdrew his hand.

Gao Chuwu gripped the "steering plow" firmly with both hands. Zheng Daniu slowly, gradually, pulled the sunshade open just a little...

The car rumbled to life once more, this time accelerating to a controlled speed of roughly 60 kilometers per hour.

Gao Chuwu burst out laughing: "Watch me turn left!"

He wrenched the steering plow violently to the left. It was far too abrupt. The tiny car screeched into a spectacular rollover. Both simpletons wailed: "Aaaaah! We're gonna die!"

Nearby spectators swiftly covered their eyes.

Li Daoxuan had no choice but to reach in again, supporting the tumbling car with a hand. He couldn't help but chuckle and scold aloud: "Utter fools!"

Gao Yiye: "Decree of the Deity: Utter fools!"

The entire village shouted in unison: "Utter fools!"

Then they burst into simultaneous laughter.

Chapter 87: You're a Total Genius

The two fools began to play wildly.

Gao Chuwu continuously made various turns, testing the solar car's steering capability. Gradually, he grasped the trick, learning precisely how sharp a turn to make at which speeds.

Slowly, he stopped flipping the car over altogether.

Meanwhile, Zheng Daniu experimented with how different openings of the sunshade affected the car's speed. He learned when to accelerate and when to decelerate.

Originally, farmland surrounded the village, offering little space for such play. But the severe drought had left the fields barren—just cracked, dried yellow earth—which actually made perfect terrain for their experiments.

The two fools played all day until sunset, the sunlight fading to a weak glow, until finally the car wouldn't run.

"Ah? Trouble!" Zheng Daniu yelled. "No light! The Deity said this car runs on light. Now the sun's down, it won't budge!"

Gao Chuwu: "Oh no! We're still five or six hundred feet from the village! What do we do? Leave it here and walk back?"

Zheng Daniu shook his head violently: "What if someone steals it overnight? Such a fine magical car—if thieves got it, I'd rather just die!"

Gao Chuwu nodded: "True. If it's stolen, I'd rather die too. We must get it back to the village!"

They locked eyes and declared simultaneously: "Then we'll just push it!"

"Woof, let's push it then."

Strength wasn't lacking for these two fools. Lately, they'd stuffed themselves with big hunks of meat daily, even bulking muscle. Rolling up their sleeves, they bared their gleaming arms and strained together: "Heave-ho! One, two, three... PUSH!"

It moved! ... Or not by any devilish chance!

That massive cart—six meters long, five meters wide, and three meters tall—even with wheels beneath, was no burden for two simpletons to shift.

Yet after pushing fruitlessly until every muscle burned and sweat poured like rain, it hadn't budged an inch.

Laughter echoed from the hillside nearby. Turning, they saw a group of labor offenders lounging there.

Their day's labor complete, they were enjoying a brief "free air" break before returning to the colorful-walled compound. None were foolish enough to flee—escape meant no food.

Gao Chuwu shouted: "Hey! Labor offenders! Come help push this cart!"

They whistled mockingly. A bold one retorted: "Our punishment labor's done! The Deity decrees half an hour free time—wander and rest as we please! No way we'll help you push!"

Gao Chuwu: "Huh...?"

Zheng Daniu: "I know how to make them push it."

Gao Chuwu: "???"

Zheng Daniu: "Labor offenders only get fed enough to keep working—no extra rewards. They've nothing?"

Gao Chuwu nodded: "Right. Nothing at all."

Zheng Daniu: "Then it's easy."

He bellowed toward the hillside: "ANYONE WHO HELPS ME PUSH THIS CART GETS ONE LIANG OF CHICKEN STRIPS!"

The laughter died instantly. Every labor offender froze, as if paralyzed. Momentarily, the entire scene became a "non-still image" on the hillside.

This bizarre stillness lasted through exactly thirteen blinks of an eye.

You didn't really count thirteen blinks to time this, did you?

A labor offender sprang right up: "I'll do it, I'll do it!"

Another labor offender jumped very high: "I'll come too."

With a rumble from the hillside, over a dozen labor offenders ran down. These dozen or so people joined forces, some pushing from behind, some pushing from the side, and others taking ropes to the front to pull. Immediately, the situation changed.

That huge solar car was pushed swiftly by these dozen people. In the blink of an eye, it reached Gaojia Fortress and stopped beside the main gate.

After finishing the job, the labor offenders looked eagerly at Zheng Daniu, fearing he might go back on his word.

Zheng Daniu grinned widely: "Relax, I won't lie."

He went back home and grabbed a large handful of dried chicken strips.

That fellow Zheng Daniu was very strong, willing to take on responsibilities, and often earned merits. Whether it was chopping trees, fighting battles, escorting Thirty-Two to the county town, or saving Wang Er, Zheng Daniu was always involved in every major event. Thus, he frequently received rewards.

At first, when he asked for happy fat water, Li Daoxuan satisfied him every time. But after handing it out several times, it didn't feel right anymore. Although happy fat water tasted good, it needed to be consumed moderately, as eating too much of any food was harmful.

So Li Daoxuan began controlling his happy fat water and instead rewarded him with various chaotic equipment. Zheng Daniu didn't like these items, so he piled them at home with no useful place for them. Now, however, he had found a way to utilize them.

Each of the dozen labor offenders received one liang of chicken jerky, treasuring it immensely.

They carefully hid the chicken jerky in their ragged burlap clothes—some tucked it into their sleeves, some hid it in their chest pockets, some stuffed it into their belts...

To the natives of Gaojia Village, this was nothing special, but for these poverty-stricken labor offenders, it was a huge fortune. Not only was it meat, but it also had salt on it. Eating one piece replenished meat and salt, was nutritious, and brought joy that surpassed even the immortals.

“Two fools... uh... big brothers.” The labor offenders immediately said flattering words, showing ingratiating expressions toward Zheng Daniu and Gao Chuwu: “From now on, during our routine break time, just feel free to boss us around. Hand any tasks over to us, and we'll guarantee to do them perfectly.”

Zheng Daniu laughed heartily: “Good. If our car can't run again tomorrow, I'll come right back to get you to push it.”

The labor offenders were thrilled: “Yes, definitely, it's a deal.”

They piled on compliments, praising the two fools as the smartest men in the world. Then, happily, with their one liang of chicken jerky, they returned inside the multicolored wall, walking with newfound confidence.

These dozen or so men became the wealthiest among the labor offenders.

In this year of severe drought, carrying one liang of salted chicken jerky on their bodies.

Wasn't that worth boasting about?

Watching their retreating figures, Gao Chuwu scratched his head: "Hah! I feel like something's strange. What is it?"

Zheng Daniu said: "I also think something feels odd. Where is it though?"

Gao Chuwu slapped his forehead: "Ah, I've got it."

Zheng Daniu said: "Huh? What did you think of? I haven't figured it out yet."

Gao Chuwu replied: "I've been driving the car all day and forgot to eat."

Zheng Daniu grabbed Gao Chuwu's shoulder: "Chuwu, you're so clever. Only after your reminder did I realize my stomach is starving. No wonder I've been feeling weird this whole time."

Gao Chuwu said: "Come on, let's go eat at my place. I have so much cured meat there. Can't finish it, not possible to finish it."

Zheng Daniu replied: "Hahaha, let's go."

Chapter 88: What the Hell

Two days later, Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu had become proficient at driving the solar car, handling acceleration, deceleration, and turns with great coordination. They had also figured out many key issues on their own.

For example, when driving on bumpy roads, it was best to reduce speed a little, otherwise going too fast could easily tip it over.

If there was a ditch on the ground, they could not recklessly drive into it; otherwise, the wheels might get stuck, and they would have to offer some food as a reward to labor offenders to help pry it out. But if the ditch was narrow, less than a third the width of the wheels, they could just drive straight over it.

If they encountered a large pit that was truly impassable, they should not be stubborn; they should stop the car first, move rocks and soil to fill the pit, and then drive past.

Of course, the most important thing was: they definitely needed light!

Li Daoxuan saw that the two had practiced skillfully and decided to test them on a crucial matter.

That was the question of “whether they could drive out of the box.”

He had already tested it himself; if he controlled it remotely, or if he pushed it with his hand, nothing could be forced out of the box. For instance, a car he personally controlled would hit the glass wall of the scenic box and stop.

But could the little people drive the solar car he provided and go beyond the box?

“Yiye, go tell Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu to drive the car along the official road for three li, then come back.”

When the order was delivered, Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu did not care what it meant; they always obeyed commands without asking why, as the Deity’s decree should just be followed.

“Let’s go, drive along the official road for three li,” shouted Gao Chuwu, gripping the steering plow.

“Daniu, open the sunshade.”

Zheng Daniu replied, “Onward.”

The sunshade was opened, and the solar car started quickly, soon driving onto the official road.

Yellow dust flew up; the solar car ran much more smoothly on the official road than on rough ground and quickly reached the edge of the scenic box in no time.

Li Daoxuan watched the glass wall of the scenic box intently...

Anything he controlled remotely would stop upon hitting the wall.

However...

Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu were not bound by this restriction; the solar car passed through the glass wall without any obstacle and vanished from sight in a flash.

“Hey, it worked!” Li Daoxuan felt a little happy, like a scientist whose experiment succeeded. “Indeed, my own remote control is unreliable; making tools that the little people can operate is really the way to go.”

The three li journey flew by; soon, a shadow moved near the edge of the scenic box as the solar car returned. Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu had excited expressions and laughed heartily in the car, saying, “We’ve completed the Deity’s decree.”

Li Daoxuan thought: Yiye, go tell those two fools that next they’ll need to expand the driving range a bit more, at least ensuring travel back and forth between Gaojia Village and Bai Family Fortress first.

Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu received the order and immediately looked up at the sky. Good, it was cloudless, and today’s sun was scorching, so there was no worry about light running out halfway to Bai Family Fortress.

The two bowed toward the sky and said, “We’re heading to Bai Family Fortress right away.”

“Go on, and bring Bai Yuan some more food,” Li Daoxuan’s pet-owner instincts kicked in; he worried his little people might starve. “Take him rice, flour, and also salt and sugar.”

“Right-o,” the two fools sprang into action, loading several hundred jin of food onto the solar car. It covered a small corner of the solar panels, reducing power by at least 10%.

Seeing this, Li Daoxuan thought to himself: this solar car was designed as a toy without considering cargo capacity; for the next one, I need Cai Xinzi to add a compartment, and place the solar panels on top, so they won’t be blocked during shipments.

Okay, time to act on it!

He quickly opened the shopping website and found the previous shop owner. “I want more solar cars. Do you have smaller or larger sizes?”

The shop owner was thrilled. “Dear, no smaller ones, but we have larger ones, like 5-centimeter and 14-centimeter ones.”

Li Daoxuan was pondering internally: putting a 5-centimeter model into the Ming era would make it 10 meters long, like a bus. A 14-centimeter one would become 28 meters, akin to a massive truck—both could be useful.

“Fine, send me three 14-centimeter ones, ten 5-centimeter ones, and thirty 3-centimeter ones. Make sure each is good quality; I don’t want damaged goods in the shipment.”

Upon hearing this big order, the shop owner was overjoyed. “Dear, rest assured, I’ll test each one properly before shipping.”

While Li Daoxuan was placing the order, Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu had already loaded the food onto the solar car and were ready to head for Bai Family Fortress.

Bai Family Fortress was quite far from Gaojia Village, over thirty li away. Walking would take two hours, but with the magical car, it was no trouble; they even felt excited.

Zheng Daniu asked, "Chuwu, do you remember how to get to Bai Family Fortress?"

"Of course I remember," Gao Chuwu replied. "I'm stupid, but remembering routes is something I can do."

"Let's go!"

"Open the sunshade fully and hit maximum speed!"

...

Meanwhile, in the mountain forest.

Patrol Officer Cheng Xu had just spotted a bandit army.

A few days ago, he left Gaojia Village to pursue Wang Er into the northern mountains and quickly found the cave where Wang Er's group was staying. But it was futile; Wang Er had fled further north with people from Wangjia Village.

Cheng Xu only found several corpses of villagers from Wangjia Village, killed during Zheng Yanfu and Zhuang Guangdao's rebellion.

With a Donglin Party county magistrate arriving soon, what could be done?

Cheng Xu had a crooked idea. He picked one of the Wangjia Village corpses at random, cut off the head, smeared it with blood and mud to obscure the face, and then claimed it was Wang Er's head, hanging it above the city gate of Chengcheng County.

Surprisingly, the trick worked.

News of Wang Er's beheading spread instantly through Chengcheng County, terrifying all rebel armies.

Things began to calm down everywhere. Many bandit chiefs across the county abandoned their posts and ran off, while numerous rebels put down their weapons and went home to dig up grass root for food.

This made it much easier for Cheng Xu to clean up; he just needed to crush the few remaining bandit armies to declare that he had turned the tide and made amends.

Now he was targeting one of the remaining bandit armies.

This bandit army's chief was named Little Overlord, a common nickname and weak in combat, with fewer than two hundred bandit troops under him. Cheng Xu could defeat such a foe with no effort.

He led over a hundred officers and hid in the trees beside the official road, watching Little Overlord and his slow-moving bandit army on the road. A cold smile curled his lips: "Wait till they get closer. At my command, charge out, go straight for the bandit chief, and be sure to chop off Little Overlord's dog head."

The soldiers chorused, "Understood!"

Cheng Xu's gaze was fixed on Little Overlord, unaware that on the distant official road, a strange large vehicle was approaching at 80 kilometers per hour, heading straight for them.

Chapter 89: Miao Ri Star Officials Car

Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu were happily driving the magical car at full speed.

A man is a boy until he dies, but as he ages, his toys just get more advanced; however, his love for toys never changes.

For Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu, the magical car was the best and most fun big toy.

In the village, they hadn't been able to drive freely, scared of hitting things at high speed, but on the official road, running over thirty miles to Bai Family Fortress, why not charge ahead wildly?

They pulled the sunshade to the limit, maxed out the speed, raising the car's speed to eighty kilometers per hour; if not for the piled food blocking some solar panels on the vehicle, they would have driven the magical car at one hundred kilometers per hour.

Up ahead, there was a small slope.

Experienced drivers know to slow down near a slope's top because it blocks the view and you can't see the road ahead, making accidents easy; but these two fools hadn't learned "traffic safety" and had no common sense about this, so they just charged onward at full speed.

As a result, the magical car climbed the slope at 80 kilometers per hour, and the two only then saw people standing full in the middle of the official road on the other side; by then, trying to brake was already too late.

Little Overlord's bandit army were climbing the slope.

Sun out, I climbed the slope, and reaching the top, I wanted to sing...

Little Overlord had just been about to open his throat to sing a couple of lines when he heard Inspector Cheng Xu roar from the woods nearby: "Attack!"

Instantly, hundreds of officials soldiers appeared on both sides of the official road!

The officials' gear was far better than the rebels'; both sides had dozens of bows pulled at once, aimed at the center ready to shoot, and Cheng Xu waved a longsword, shouting loudly for the archers: "Rebel Little Overlord, next year today will be your death anniversary..."

His boastful words had only just ended when a "rumble" noise came from the slope's other side, and a large car flipped over the crest and shot out.

Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu on the car shouted together: "Get out of the way!!! Too late to stop..."

No one could react fast enough.

Eighty kilometers per hour, huh? How many people could react?

Both the bandit army and the officials soldiers were stunned.

Then, the huge car rammed straight through the bandit troop formation in the middle of the official road, sending men flying; bandit chief Little Overlord had no time to utter a fierce word before being hit full on by the car, and he fell without a sound.

Several of his close followers beside him were also knocked flying in an arc.

The officials soldiers on both sides of the road all took a breath of relief, thinking: Good thing I didn't rush onto the middle path, or I'd be flying with the bandits now.

Zheng Daniu: "Oh no, we caused trouble—we hit and killed someone!"

Gao Chuwu: "Bad, what to do? Should we stop?"

Zheng Daniu: "Can't stop—the victim's family would kill us, run!"

Gao Chuwu: "Huh? But that feels so wrong."

Zheng Daniu: "It's better than being killed right now, hurry run! Later, we'll prepare compensation money and go to apologize."

The two didn't dare stop at all; they sped ahead powerfully, scattering the bandit army, and went toward Bai Family Fortress's direction.

How many years in prison for a traffic incident causing death plus fleeing the scene?

This question, no one thought about it!

Because both the bandit army and the officials soldiers couldn't use their brains in the short time.

All the bandit troops were stunned; the repeated shocks kept their minds frozen, and the officials soldiers on both road sides were also stunned and forgot to fire their already drawn bows.

This eerie stillness lasted several seconds before Cheng Xu bellowed, "What are you all standing around for? The bandit chief is dead. Swiftly clear out the remaining bandits!"

The officials snapped back to their senses. Only then did the arrows in their hands fly out, scattering the rebel troops in disarray. Immediately after, the officials surged forward. The Little Overlord's rebel cavalry proved no match for the officials, offering no real resistance. In no time at all, the situation was pacified.

Only after the bandits were either killed or had scattered, and the scene quieted down, did Cheng Xu turn to look in the direction where the strange giant vehicle had vanished. He wondered: That was no earthly creation! Could it be a divine object descended from heaven to aid my mission to wipe out the bandits?

...

The Bai Family Fortress presented a thriving sight.

Under Bai Yuan's direction, it had undergone reorganization. The fortress wall had been repaired and even slightly reinforced. Though it was nowhere near as tall as the walls of Gaojia Fortress, Bai Yuan did his best to emulate them, erecting watchtowers at each of the four corners. He also had defensive positions carved into the wall top.

The Bai family was wealthy; sourcing supplies was never an issue. The only thing lacking now was grain.

Grain was something exceedingly difficult to buy with money these days.

Bai Yuan was deep in thought about whether to ask Gaojia Village for help when he heard a servant shout, "Lord Bai! Lord Bai! A strange big cart has come into the village entrance! The driver is from Gaojia Village!"

Rushing with pride, Bai Yuan hurried out to greet them.

"Oh! You're from Gaojia Village... Gao Yi? Gao Er? Gao San?"

Gao Chuwu's face looked utterly miserable. "Lord Bai, I am Gao Chuwu."

Bai Yuan: "Ah! Right, right! You're Gao Chuwu. I remember you perfectly."

Where had he heard this exchange before?

Bai Yuan felt a vague sense of déjà vu about this scene. "You're a grown man! Why pull such a doleful face?"

Gao Chuwu looked ready to cry. "I... we... we hit someone on the road coming here."

Bai Yuan's gaze swept over the strange vehicle. On the front bumper were marks of a collision, stains of blood, and torn scraps of coarse cloth. It seemed they had hit more than one person.

He picked up a piece of the torn coarse cloth, frowned for a moment, then his expression eased. "Don't worry. In these chaotic times, what decent person would be wandering recklessly outside? You definitely hit bandit scoundrels. Look at this cloth. A large group dressed in coarse fabric like this, walking on the main road? It could only be bandits."

Hearing this, both Gao Chuwu and Zheng Daniu felt much better. Both were simple-minded, easily trusting, especially words from a learned man like Lord Bai who was proficient in the Six Arts of Gentlemen. Such words were enough for them to accept as absolute truth.

Gao Chuwu broke into a grin. “Ah! That’s good then, that’s good! Hitting bandit scoundrels, no need to fret.”

Zheng Daniu added, “Lord Bai, we’ve come on the Deity’s orders to deliver some grain to you.”

Overjoyed by this news, Bai Yuan exclaimed, “The Deity shows great benevolence!”

The two simpletons unloaded a large pile of rice, flour, salt, and sugar from the cart. This timely aid lifted Bai Yuan’s immediate worries. Instinctively, he straightened his posture and bowed deeply towards the direction of Gaojia Village several times. “The Deity still remembers this insignificant mortal. Such great kindness and profound virtue shall never be forgotten!”

Only after expressing his gratitude did his attention shift back to the enormous, strange vehicle. “What is this thing?”

Hearing this, the two simpletons sprang into action, eager to explain.

Gao Chuwu gestured animatedly, brimming with excitement. “This is the ‘magical car’ bestowed upon us by the Deity! It moves when the sun is out; it stops when the sun sets.”

Bai Yuan, startled by this, asked, “It runs at sunrise? Then... could it possibly be... the chariot of the Miao Ri Star Official?”

Chapter 90: You Lack Sincerity

By late August in Year Seven of Tianqi (1627 CE), Chengcheng County had finally settled down.

The prolonged peasant uprising gradually subsided due to the unrelenting efforts of Cheng Xu, the ninth-rank inspector.

Bai Shui Wang Er fled north through the mountains, leaving Chengcheng County. None knew where he went.

Next, the new County Magistrate Liang Shixian took office.

His very first decree upon arrival announced: “The emperor has passed away; all under heaven shall mourn in white.”

So it turned out: on August 22nd, the famed Carpenter Emperor Zhu Youxiao had died of illness. On August 24th, Emperor Chongzhen Zhu Youjian ascended the throne. A political shift had swept Beijing, yet Chengcheng County lay far from the capital’s influence—the news hadn’t arrived until the new magistrate brought this “somber tidings.”

Ordinary folk reacted: “Oh, the emperor changed? So be it. Can the new emperor make it rain? If not, we’ll carry on as always—just wash up and go to sleep.”

The side hall of Chengcheng County’s City God Temple now bustled with activity.

Third Lady sat solemnly in her Taoist robes. Before her, over a dozen devout believers crouched in gratitude. After lavishing thanks upon the Dao Xuan Deity, they chanted scriptures alongside her before finally departing.

These were all poor souls unable to afford medical care, illnesses cured only by Third Lady’s divine treatment—their very lives saved.

As they left, a gaunt-faced middle-aged man scurried inside. Dressed in burlap clothing, emaciated and bony, he fell to his knees before Third Lady: “Pious lady, save me!”

Third Lady asked, “Oh? What sickness has struck your family?”

The man shook his head. “None in my household is sick.”

Third Lady murmured, “Oh?”

The man whispered, “I am a permanent worker.”

Third Lady didn't grasp the term "permanent worker," so she kept an inscrutable silence, waiting.

The man continued, "Every month, I spend twenty days working at government workshops. The pay is scraps, not even enough for food. I work tirelessly the other ten days, hustling odd jobs just to survive."

"Days ago, two clay sculptors arrived at the workshop. They suddenly struck it rich, paid thirty years' worth of artisan registration fee at once. Now they never need labor for the government again."

Hearing this, Third Lady couldn't see the relevance. How did it concern her?

The man pressed on, "Those clay sculptors refused to name the source of their fortune. They only muttered they'd received the blessing of the Dao Xuan Deity. I asked everywhere about which deity this might be, until finally a path led me to you."

At last, Third Lady understood.

The man pleaded piteously, "Pious lady, please guide me. How can this humble soul win the Dao Xuan Deity's grace to free me from misery?"

Inside Third Lady's mind, the metaphorical abacus clattered. She possessed divine medicine that healed illnesses but couldn't pull people out of poverty—this "permanent worker" was beyond her reach.

But what she couldn't do, the deity certainly could.

Therefore, only one path remained.

Third Lady adopted a high and mighty air, shaking her head. "You lack sincerity. Not even the Deity could help you."

The man panicked. "I am sincere, pious lady! Deeply sincere!"

Third Lady said, "If your devotion runs true, walk beyond Chengcheng County, trek northeast for more than thirty li. Find a small village named Gaojia Village."

The man recoiled. "But...it's in the chaos of war outside..."

Third Lady spoke lightly. "Indeed, you lack sincerity. Since you dread the journey, no deity may aid you."

Desperate, the man insisted, "I am sincere! Truly sincere! I...I'll go to Gaojia Village right now! But once I arrive...what then?"

Third Lady mysteriously smiled and said, "Once you arrive at the village, everything will become clear on its own."

The middle-aged man gritted his teeth, kowtowed to thank Third Lady, left the City God Temple, and returned home as fast as possible. He had just finished the 20 days of work required by the government for that month, so he now had ten days to rest and could arrange it freely.

He simply decided to strive during these ten days right away.

He took the only few copper coins at home, the only two dry biscuits, the only two pieces of clothing, and a cast-iron pot, packing all his belongings into one bundle.

With his head bowed low, he walked timorously to the city gates.

The old guard at the gate watched the passing crowds expressionlessly, showing no intention to question him. Blending into the people entering and leaving the city, he walked out, then constantly asked people for directions as he headed towards Gaojia Village.

The whole way, he was terribly timid, but everything outside was not as chaotic with war as he had imagined. Cheng Xu was not one to loaf around and had already subdued the bandits nearby long ago.

In the evening, as the sun set in the west, the middle-aged man finally saw several li ahead a tall fortress standing high. Hey, he had reached Gaojia Village.

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In the evening, the sky on the horizon was ablaze with clouds.

Li Daoxuan was unpacking the delivery box.

September was about to arrive soon, and the time for sowing autumn wheat was almost upon them.

The villagers of Gaojia Village had already started rubbing their hands eagerly, preparing to make a big effort. Many villagers had dug the canals well, getting ready to channel water from the “big pond” to their fields.

Relying solely on the canals, the irrigation capacity was limited. For fields that had been dry for a long time, it was still best to get a rainfall first to moisten them up.

Li Daoxuan should probably be about to “give some rain” to the villagers soon as well.

For over a month earlier, he had never given any rain, of course because the temperature was too high and it wasn’t suitable for sowing. His providing a big pond had been enough.

But now it reached the end of August, and the temperature inside the box had clearly started to drop. As the time to sow autumn wheat got closer and closer, rain became a necessary thing he had to consider.

Household humidifiers and sprayers weren’t any good; these devices sprayed water mist particles that were too large, a minimum of 0.3 millimeters in diameter, and very dense. Once sprayed into the box, the water droplet diameter would become two hundred times bigger, equivalent to densely throwing water balls with a 6-centimeter diameter from a height of 200 meters above the ground. That wasn’t rainfall; it was calamity.

So, he searched for some information online and finally discovered a great thing that could spray extremely fine water mist.

Medical nebulizer.

This device was often used to treat asthma, pneumonia, and respiratory infections; it turned liquid medicine into super-fine water mist of 2.2 micrometers and sprayed it into the patient's respiratory tract, achieving the treatment goal.

At 2.2 micrometers, after the diameter increased 200 times, it was only 440 micrometers, meaning 0.44 millimeters.

Medical things were indeed fine!

Rain of this size surely could not cause any disaster.

He ordered one in the morning with SF Express urgent delivery, and it arrived now.