

Mythical 70

Chapter 70: Life is Nothing More Than Fame and Fortune

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"Wow," Lu Su gasped as he saw the identical handwriting on the two books and the meticulously crafted text spanning tens of thousands of characters. "How much did this cost?"

"The more you make, the cheaper it gets. If it's just those two in your hand, the price won't be much less than a hand-copied manuscript," Chen Xi rolled his eyes.

"Then it can't be widely promoted," Lu Su sighed.

"But if you produce thousands of copies, it becomes much cheaper than bamboo slips," Chen Xi said nonchalantly.

"Hey, why didn't you correct the typos in here? Look, there's an extra stroke in the character for '繁' (繁)," Lu Su pointed out, momentarily sidetracked from the conversation.

"It's too troublesome. A mistake is a mistake," Chen Xi rolled his eyes. "Mass production has its drawbacks, and the craftsmen who make these can't read. So, they can only carve based on what I write. Plus, if there's a mistake on one page, you have to redo the whole thing. As long as it's not a critical word and there aren't more than a couple of mistakes per page, I just let it go."

The reason Chen Xi didn't bother correcting every mistake was practical: the craftsmen, who couldn't read, had to reverse-engineer his text to carve the blocks. Each block contained an entire page, and any error meant starting over. Therefore, unless it was a crucial error or there were too many mistakes, Chen Xi preferred to overlook minor typos.

As for movable type printing, Chen Xi admitted he didn't have the ability to implement it. The craftsmen's skills, materials, and his own limitations posed challenges. Instead, carving blocks was a more straightforward solution, leveraging ancient techniques that had been around since the Shang Dynasty, offering no real technical barriers.

"True, even handwritten copies have errors," Lu Su nodded. "But if the typos and handwriting are identical, it's easy for people to notice something's off."

"Let them notice. Everyone knows about seals and stamps, but who has the resources to produce paper en masse? This technology has existed for millennia, but without sufficient resources, it's like a dragon hiding in a pool," Chen Xi dismissed Lu Su's concern with a laugh. The use of seals and stamps had been common knowledge in China for thousands of years, and the ability to produce paper could revolutionize their spread.

"If you can control the source, using this for elementary education is feasible. This way, you can achieve your goal of mass-producing civil servants. Since ancient times, countless scholars have remained obscure due to a lack of resources. Now, by providing opportunities, you ensure loyalty and gratitude. In ten years, even if Lord Xuande stands alone against the world, the outcome is still uncertain," Lu Su remarked.

"But not yet. I don't want to oppose the aristocracy now. Distributing these would make them fight us tooth and nail. Wisdom and land never go out of style. Even if land's value diminishes, no state can afford to abandon it, lest it becomes a house of cards. And wisdom is the foundation of any nation," Chen Xi sighed, knowing the timing wasn't right. Publishing the books would provoke fierce resistance from the aristocracy, as wisdom and land were timeless assets.

"What's your plan then?" Lu Su understood this point and appreciated that Chen Xi, despite being tempted by a monumental achievement, remained rational.

"Sell them. A hundred gold pieces per book. This contains tens of thousands of words, worth a thousand gold in bamboo slips. Given its convenience and rarity, a hundred gold isn't too much," Chen Xi said nonchalantly.

This was indeed a lucrative venture. In an era where knowledge was valued above life itself, and wealth was considered trivial, offering books at such a price was a goldmine. The aristocracy would eagerly buy them, as knowledge was priceless. Historical examples showed scholars trading land and estates for valuable texts. As long as you had books to sell, land, wealth, servants, and concubines were at your disposal.

However, selling books was unconventional since antiquity, typically involving gifting rather than commercial transactions. Yet, in this case, selling books wouldn't be considered dishonorable.

"A hundred gold?" Lu Su quickly skimmed the text, noting that each page had over a hundred characters, with the entire book containing tens of thousands. "Before today, I would have gladly paid a thousand gold for this. Others would too. Your pricing is fair and considerate."

"Alright then. These books will be priced at a thousand gold each, with ninety-nine pages symbolizing completion, leaving the last page's cost as travel expenses," Chen Xi explained, already planning to attribute the price to Lu Su should there be complaints.

"This method is good. But I feel guilty accepting such a great gift without any merit," Lu Su, a man of integrity, felt uneasy about benefiting so much from a mere suggestion.

"No worries. If you're interested, write something, and I'll print it for you," Chen Xi replied casually, offering Lu Su another significant opportunity.

"Since you insist, I'll accept with gratitude. But please retract the offer to publish my writings. I'm not confident in my skills," Lu Su said humbly, though his eyes betrayed his excitement.

Chen Xi chuckled inwardly, knowing the allure of publishing one's work was irresistible. In this era, writing a book and disseminating it signified reaching the pinnacle of one's career.

The drawback was that these books were rare and difficult to produce in large quantities. Major scholars had disciples who painstakingly copied their works, often simplifying texts to ease the process. With Chen Xi's printing capabilities, producing large quantities was feasible, allowing scholars to reach a wider audience.

Chen Xi had once casually suggested that Zhao Yun document his agricultural practices, offering to compile them into a book. Zhao Yun had been ecstatic, struggling to contain his excitement.

Chen Xi realized the significance of publishing in this era: it was the ultimate enticement for attracting talented individuals. He believed offering this incentive could sway even the most prominent families.

"Let me handle the printing. Ten thousand words on various topics delivered to the Xun family. I refuse to believe Xun Yu won't join us if we offer to publish his uncle's work," Chen Xi mused.