

I. Dynasty 137

Chapter 137: Gunpowder

“Your Highness, will this gunpowder really explode?”

In the dim night, only the side hall of the palace was illuminated. Lu Luo, who was naturally timid, looked on the verge of tears.

Ziyuan glared at Lu Tong. “Shame on you—handpicked by His Highness to study chemistry, yet you’re so useless. Move aside, let me do it.”

Without waiting for a response, she took over Lu Tong’s task and began carefully grinding the saltpeter.

Lu Tong’s expression turned awkward. As a man, how could he lose to a woman? Steadying himself, he silently picked up another rolling pin and resumed grinding.

Xiao Ming had summoned Lu Tong tonight for hands-on instruction. Though gunpowder wasn’t a secret in the Great Yu Empire, not everyone knew how to make it.

The formula he was using—one part sulfur, two parts saltpeter, and three parts charcoal—was the optimal ratio for black powder.

Over the past few days, Xiao Ming had researched the various gunpowder formulas used in the Great Yu Empire, only to find a chaotic mess of inconsistent ratios. Unsurprisingly, the resulting gunpowder was weak and unreliable.

Thus, from the very beginning, his gunpowder would have an advantage.

Naturally, Lu Tong was unaware of this formula. After tonight's lesson, he would not only understand it but also oversee gunpowder production.

After all, casting cannons was one thing, but equipping them involved many other tasks—gunpowder, cannonballs, and artillery mounts were all separate challenges.

However, tonight's goal wasn't just to teach Lu Tong how to make traditional black powder. Xiao Ming intended to upgrade it further into granulated gunpowder, a method to enhance its potency.

Granulated gunpowder had appeared in the West by the 15th century in his original world, so replicating it now wasn't technically difficult.

Once Ziyuan and the others had ground the sulfur, saltpeter, and charcoal into fine powder, Lu Tong mixed them according to Xiao Ming's specified ratio.

Soon, a small pile of black powder lay before them.

"Your Highness, is this it?" Lu Tong asked excitedly. The process hadn't been dangerous at all!

“Mm, that’s it.” Xiao Ming had been exaggerating earlier to keep Lu Tong cautious. The real danger began now.

Lu Tong had only heard of gunpowder before but had never seen it. Curious, he asked, “Your Highness, how is this used?”

Qingzhou’s first batch of gunpowder had been born under his hands, and Xiao Ming felt a thrill. He scooped up a small amount and carried it to a more distant spot.

Then, lighting a small twig with a candle, he said, “Like this.”

The moment the flame touched the powder—hiss—a sharp crack rang out, followed by thick blue smoke and the acrid smell of gunpowder.

“Ah—!” Lu Luo, unprepared, screamed and hid behind Xiao Ming.

Even the braver Ziyuan paled slightly.

The gunpowder burned rapidly, vanishing in a flash of white light. To those unfamiliar with it, the spectacle might have seemed like sorcery.

Lu Tong, who had been nervous earlier, now looked fascinated. “Your Highness, it burns incredibly fast. But just this alone can’t kill barbarians, can it?”

“Of course not. But you’ll see its real power soon enough.” Xiao Ming waved, and a servant approached carrying a cylindrical object.

Lu Tong frowned. “Your Highness, what’s this?”

Xiao Ming grinned. It was essentially a firecracker shell made from rolled paper.

The bottom had already been sealed with yellow clay, leaving only a small opening at the top for gunpowder.

“You’ll find out tomorrow.” Xiao Ming filled the firecracker with gunpowder, then sealed the top with more clay.

Using a needle, he poked a small hole for the fuse.

Once the clay dried, the firecracker would be ready.

Originally, Xiao Ming had planned to teach Lu Tong the cold mixing method for granulating gunpowder, but it was already late. That lesson would have to wait until tomorrow.

Dismissing Lu Tong, Xiao Ming instructed Purple Iris to tidy up. The gunpowder production lesson was over.

After seeing Lu Tong off, Lu Luo and Ziyuan lingered instead of returning to their quarters.

Stretching, Xiao Ming asked, "Why haven't you gone back yet?"

"Your Highness works tirelessly day and night on governance, and now you're exhausting yourself preparing for the barbarian invasion. Though Lu Luo and I cannot assist in political matters, we can at least serve you in daily life" Ziyuan said dutifully.

Xiao Ming studied them. Since ancient times, relationships had been built on mutual understanding.

Lately, he had treated the palace servants well, and in return, they were deeply grateful.

The servants worked harder than ever.

"They say women can rival men. Who says you can't help me with governance? There's something I'll need your assistance with soon," Xiao Ming said suddenly.

With war looming, every person in Qingzhou had to be utilized.

Ziyuan blinked in surprise. “What does Your Highness need us to do?”

For now, the Qingzhou army’s armor problem had been temporarily resolved. But soldiers couldn’t just wear armor over bare skin—they needed proper clothing and shoes.

With the barbarians at their doorstep, Xiao Ming had no choice but to prioritize military needs above all else.

Many Qingzhou soldiers currently wore straw or hemp sandals, which were impractical for marching.

Xiao Ming wanted them equipped with cloth shoes. In this era, spinning and weaving were women’s work, so mobilizing women for this task was essential.

However, sending men to organize this would be inappropriate, as women rarely left their homes.

But if Ziyuan and Lu Luo took charge, things would be different.

First, as Xiao Ming’s personal attendants, they carried enough authority that no one would dare oppose them.

Second, both were skilled in weaving and familiar with textile work.

They were perfect candidates to establish this era's first textile and uniform factory. Otherwise, the weaving machine technology he possessed would go to waste.

Explaining his idea, Xiao Ming watched as Ziyuan and Lu Luo burst into laughter.

"Your Highness, we can certainly help with this. But since when did you learn about spinning and weaving?" Purple Iris covered her mouth, giggling.

In this era, men plowed and women wove—textiles were purely women's domain. No wonder she found it amusing.