

I. Dynasty 138

Chapter 138: The Spirit of Craftsmanship

“Sigh... For the sake of the people in my fief, I’m willing to do anything.”

Xiao Ming responded righteously as Ziyuan and Luluo looked at him with puzzled expressions. But after hearing his words, their faces turned serious, filled with admiration. In their eyes, Xiao Ming now truly had the bearing of a wise and noble ruler.

In ancient times, what girl didn’t secretly admire a handsome prince or a refined scholar? You could see this kind of fantasy everywhere in the old romantic novels.

Xiao Ming smiled with satisfaction. His former self only knew brute force and never understood the heart of a woman. You can’t force love—going with the flow brings true joy, he thought.

Leaving behind a tired figure, Xiao Ming returned to his room to rest. It wasn’t time yet to “sleep on a beauty’s lap.”

The next day, at noon, a loud boom! suddenly echoed through the Prince Qi’s residence, shattering the peaceful air. The guards rushed toward the sound, weapons drawn.

When they reached the side hall, they found Prince Qi unharmed. The others nearby, however, were pale and visibly shaken from the explosion.

In the center of the hall, a glass bottle had shattered into countless pieces. The floor was littered with glass shards, some of which still gave off a faint smoke.

“Your Highness, is this the power of gunpowder?” asked Lu Tong, clearly stunned.

Xiao Ming nodded. “Exactly.”

Lu Tong gasped. “If that was just a small amount... then wouldn’t a full barrel blow up the entire palace?”

As soon as he said it, everyone turned to glare at him. Realizing his poor choice of words, Lu Tong quickly tried to fix it. “Ahem—my bad, Your Highness! I didn’t mean to say this palace. I meant the Bowen Academy! No, no—I meant it would blow me up...!”

After spending time with Lu Tong, Xiao Ming had come to know his bad habit—blurting out whatever came to mind. “Be careful,” Xiao Ming warned. “If you really blow yourself up, I won’t be able to save you. Now that you’ve seen the power of this black powder, it’s time for you to learn how to granulate it.”

Lu Tong clearly had no idea what that meant. Just like the night before, Xiao Ming decided to demonstrate the entire process personally.

Granulating gunpowder isn’t complicated. The key is adding a binder to the powder—this is called the cold-mix method. First, Xiao Ming mixed the powder in a wooden mortar, then added alcohol to turn the mixture into a damp paste.

He stirred the mixture continuously with a wooden pestle. It was very important not to let sand or stone particles enter the mix—any collision during grinding could cause a spark and ignite the powder.

As he carefully demonstrated, Xiao Ming explained, “Traditional black powder is powerful, but it has a problem. During storage or transport, the ingredients can separate—just like how liquids of different densities layer. This reduces the powder’s performance and affects the weapon’s reliability.”

Granulating the powder fixed this problem. It wasn’t a difficult technique—it was simply that people in the past hadn’t realized it was necessary. Now that Xiao Ming understood the issue, it was easy for him to fix.

Lu Tong watched Xiao Ming’s every move with intense focus, afraid to miss a single step. This wasn’t something you could afford to mess up.

“Remember,” Xiao Ming said firmly, “no sand, no metal tools. Only use wood. You can’t afford sparks.”

Every step in the process was done with wooden tools to avoid metal-on-metal contact.

After the mixing, Xiao Ming waited until the mixture was nearly dry, then added a little more water and stirred it again to ensure an even blend.

Once finished, he spread the mixture out under the sun to dry. Luckily, it was spring and the sunlight was strong enough to dry it quickly since he wasn’t making a large batch.

Then it was time for the quality test.

He took a small portion of the dried granules and lit them on a sheet of paper. The powder burned rapidly—but the paper remained intact. Xiao Ming nodded with satisfaction.

“You see this?” he said to Lu Tong. “If it burns fast without damaging the paper, the powder is good.”

Lu Tong nodded. Then Xiao Ming scooped up some of the granules and was about to light them in his palm.

“Your Highness, let me do it!” Lu Tong said quickly. “If anything goes wrong, at least you won’t get hurt.”

“Alright,” Xiao Ming said casually—and before Lu Tong could react, he lit it.

The granulated powder flared up in Lu Tong’s hand—fast and harmless.

Surprised, Lu Tong said, “I don’t feel any heat!”

“If it were hot,” Xiao Ming replied, “that would mean the powder failed. Now, I’ve taught you what you need to know. When you go back, begin production. Just remember: if the paper shows black marks or your hand feels hot, the powder is not up to standard. Regrind and redo it until it’s perfect.”

He added, “Once the granules are done, sort them by size. First break them up, then use sieves with different mesh sizes. Only keep the ones suitable for cannons. The rest—use as ignition powder. Any leftover dust must be discarded.”

Lu Tong nodded solemnly. The technique wasn’t difficult, and he understood it. He bowed and turned to leave.

But Xiao Ming called out, “Lu Tong, this work is serious. No sloppiness allowed. If something goes wrong, I’ll take your head.”

Lu Tong felt a chill crawl down his back. Over the past few days, Xiao Ming had treated him almost like a mentor would a student. But when it came to things that affected Qingzhou’s safety, Xiao Ming didn’t tolerate carelessness.

Lu Tong turned and said firmly, “If anything goes wrong, I’ll bring you my head myself.”

Xiao Ming nodded. “Technology is one thing. But the spirit of craftsmanship is just as important. Even the best designs are worthless if built by careless hands.”

He had seen it in his past life—the fall of the Ming Dynasty wasn’t due to poor firearm design, but because of corruption and laziness. Officials stole funds, craftsmen cut corners, and the weapons that

were produced were useless in real battle. Guns misfired, cannons exploded—soldiers couldn't even fire in defense.

That's why, here in Qingzhou, Xiao Ming placed great emphasis on cultivating a true craftsman's mindset. No shortcuts, no carelessness. On this matter, he showed no mercy.

He had worked too hard to build this industrial foundation—and neither the nomads nor the rest of Great Yu would give him a second chance.

Just as Lu Tong stepped out, a soldier rushed in, panicked and shouting, "Your Highness! Something's happened—Captain Lu and Captain Luo are fighting!"