

## I. Dynasty 151

### Chapter 151: Unexpected Disaster

The first cannon was successfully cast, and the atmosphere in the Machinery Department was as fiery as the coal burning in the furnace.

Every craftsman's face was beaming with joy.

Over the past month, they had worked day and night, each losing over ten pounds, all to complete the task assigned by Prince Qi.

Now, all that remained was the test firing of the cannon. If successful, it would mean the Machinery Department had truly mastered the production technology of cannons.

"Your Highness, please let us test it. The craftsmen are eagerly waiting," Chen Qi said, worried that Xiao Ming might not allow them to witness the test firing. To him, this was as unbearable as being shown a newborn baby without knowing whether it was ugly or beautiful.

"Yes, Your Highness, let us see it for ourselves!" The craftsmen in the Machinery Department pleaded, their eyes filled with anticipation for the cannon's power.

Sweat and iron dust covered the craftsmen's bodies, and a metallic scent mixed with sweat permeated the air in the Machinery Department.

With so many people urging him, Xiao Ming naturally couldn't refuse. He had only been teasing Chen Qi earlier.

The cannon's testing required the participation of these craftsmen—only then could problems be identified and corrected in time.

"Fine, but we can't do it today. We need a suitable testing site, and transporting the cannon is also an issue—it's extremely heavy. Not to mention, we still need cannonballs."

When he mentioned cannonballs, Xiao Ming's tone grew heavier.

The cannonballs naturally had to fit the current cannon. If they were too large, they wouldn't load; if too small, the gunpowder's effectiveness would be greatly reduced, possibly resulting in the cannonball landing at their feet.

Before the cannon was produced, the Machinery Department couldn't accurately calculate the required caliber for the cannonballs, so they hadn't dared to produce any yet.

This left Xiao Ming somewhat frustrated. After all, in this era, there was no precise measurement system, making it impossible to manufacture products with exact specifications. For now, they could only produce cannonballs by matching the cannon's muzzle diameter.

Otherwise, the cannonballs might not fit at all.

He thought to himself—a precise measurement system needed to be established. That way, cannon and cannonball production could proceed independently.

They would only need to strictly adhere to standardized dimensions, which would also be essential for Qingzhou's future industrial development.

Once lathes could be integrated into production, a uniform measurement standard would be even more critical for mass-producing components.

Though Chen Qi and the others were impatient, test-firing the cannon required preparation—not just for cannonballs, the site, and transportation, but also for something beyond Chen Qi's control: gunpowder.

Thinking of this, Xiao Ming left the Machinery Department and headed straight for Lu Tong's chemical laboratory.

Like the Machinery Department, the chemical laboratory was heavily guarded, with every participant in gunpowder production under strict surveillance.

"A nation's vital secrets must not be carelessly revealed." Such security measures were only natural—these matters concerned the safety of the fiefdom.

Lu Tong and the others had long grown accustomed to this environment.

Compared to cannon production, gunpowder manufacturing was far simpler. But Xiao Ming demanded high-quality gunpowder, so Lu Tong and his team still had their hands full.

Any substandard granulated gunpowder had to be remade.

In such a facility, to avoid accidents, no metal objects were allowed inside—all tools were made of wood to prevent gunpowder explosions.

“Your Highness, why have you come here? It’s too dangerous!” Lu Tong said anxiously when he saw Xiao Ming arrive.

This chemical laboratory wasn’t the one in Bowen Academy—otherwise, Xiao Ming would have worried that Lu Tong might one day blow up the entire academy.

The current laboratory was located outside Qingzhou City, adjacent to the industrial district but separated by several hundred meters and multiple walls.

“If you all aren’t afraid of danger, why should I be?” Xiao Ming replied with a smile.

Lu Tong was momentarily stunned. He had never interacted with other feudal lords, but he was certain that this prince was unlike any other.

There was no sense of superiority or detachment in Prince Qi—instead, Xiao Ming always carried an approachable and amiable demeanor.

After a brief moment of reflection, Lu Tong snapped back to attention. “Your Highness, the granulated gunpowder you requested has been partially produced.”

“Oh? How much?” Xiao Ming asked with interest.

Lu Tong led Xiao Ming through the front courtyard straight to the rear.

This area was designed to function as both a laboratory and a factory—the front section was the factory, while the laboratory was in the back.

The entire compound consisted of twenty buildings of varying sizes, each serving a different purpose.

The warehouse was also in the rear, where Lu Tong had stored the produced gunpowder.

Inside the warehouse, Lu Tong pointed at a sack. “Your Highness, this is it. I’m not sure if it’s enough.”

The sack was about half a person’s height and as thick as a man’s embrace, likely containing around a hundred pounds of granulated gunpowder.

“Far from enough,” Xiao Ming said. “You’ll need to speed up production. If you’re short on manpower, let me know—I can allocate more at any time. Output must increase.”

In ancient warfare, battles often dragged on, and cannons were fired repeatedly. A single sack of gunpowder wouldn't even be enough for one cannon.

Lu Tong nodded. "Understood, Your Highness. I'll have them work faster. But, Your Highness... the materials—"

"The gunpowder materials are running low too?" Xiao Ming frowned.

"Yes. Saltpeter mostly comes from a few saltpeter caves in Shu. There are no other sources. Just before you arrived, Chen Bingcao left—he said all available saltpeter on the market has been bought, but no merchants are willing to sell any more to Qingzhou."

Lu Tong's words sent a chill down Xiao Ming's spine. In the Great Yu Empire, saltpeter primarily came from a few open-air saltpeter caves in Shu.

Because extraction was easy and demand was low, the Great Yu Empire didn't prioritize saltpeter mining. No other regions had dedicated saltpeter production.

Xiao Ming had previously checked the resource distribution maps in the Tech Library. His fiefdom did have saltpeter deposits, and he had tasked Qian Dafu to search for them—but so far, there had been no results.

He couldn't blame Qian Dafu for this. In this era, aside from surface-level deposits, finding buried minerals was like searching for a needle in a haystack.

He had assigned Qian Dafu to search for multiple minerals, and though the man had endured harsh conditions with little reward, saltpeter mines remained undiscovered.

Now, with the saltpeter supply cut off, Xiao Ming faced a heavy blow.

Seeing Xiao Ming's darkening expression, Lu Tong hesitated before asking, "Your Highness... do you think Prince of Shu is behind this?"