

I. Dynasty 155

Chapter 155: The World-Shaking Cannon

“What exactly is it, Your Highness?” Lu Fei asked impatiently. It wasn’t a ballista or a trebuchet, and the suspense had been eating at him for days.

Luo Xin also came over, his eyes still crusted with sleep—three days of standoff had been more than boring.

By now, Xiao Ming couldn’t keep it a secret any longer. He signaled to Chen Qi and the others to remove the burlap covering.

In an instant, a large, jet-black, cold metal object was revealed—its imposing presence undeniable.

“Eh? Isn’t that just a fire lance?” Luo Xin said with a puzzled expression. “Well, it does look sturdier than most fire lances.”

Niu Ben didn’t jump to conclusions. Instead, he circled the object carefully, inspecting it thoroughly. Then he turned to Xiao Ming and asked, “What do you call this, Your Highness?”

“I call it a cannon,” Xiao Ming replied. Luo Xin wasn’t wrong, technically—after all, the fire lance was a predecessor to the cannon.

Niu Ben nodded, then tapped the side of the cannon and even peered down the barrel. “This is much better made than any fire lance,” he said. “Fire lances are crude and short, with a range of just about 200 meters. Surely, Your Highness isn’t planning to take down a fortress with this?”

“Sharp as ever, General,” Xiao Ming replied with a smile. “This cannon is very different from a fire lance. You’ll see soon enough. And Luo Xin—try not to wet yourself.”

Luo Xin grinned. “Your Highness underestimates me. I’ve used fire lances before.”

“Is that so? Then I’ll leave the firing to you,” Xiao Ming said seriously. “No one else has the experience.”

Luo Xin, who had grown up in Chang’an as the son of Grand General Luo Quan, had the laid-back arrogance of a noble. He waved it off. “It’s easy.”

Lu Fei, who might normally have jumped in to claim the task, stayed quiet this time. He knew Xiao Ming too well—there was a mischievous smile on his face. Something was definitely up.

With Luo Xin taking on the role of guinea pig, Chen Qi and his team had no choice but to help. They brought down the cannon from the cart and mounted it on a firing base, aiming it at Wubao Fortress’s front gate at a slight incline.

Then they laid out all the necessary tools and supplies: cannonballs, gunpowder, fuse ropes, and the tools for cleaning and loading the barrel.

Up on the wall, Liu Chuang observed their movements. When he saw the large unfamiliar object being positioned, a bad feeling crept over him.

“How’s the tunnel coming along?” he asked the man beside him.

What few knew was that the Liu family fortress had two escape tunnels. One had been destroyed. Liu Chuang had hoped to use the other to escape—but part of it had collapsed due to years of neglect.

He had been sending men to clear it day and night. So far, they had cleared over fifty meters. “We’ve got about fifty meters cleared,” said the man. “I remember only this stretch has soft soil. It should be easier after that.”

“Work faster. If we don’t get out soon, we’re finished. And take all the grain with us.”

“Yes, sir. But what about the cement?”

“Idiot,” Liu Chuang snapped. “That stuff is heavy and useless. You can’t eat it, can’t wear it.”

He had learned from captured workers that the material was called cement, but to him, it was worthless.

Back outside, Liu Chuang looked down again. He saw a captain-type soldier jabbing something long and thin into the strange object.

That was Luo Xin, cleaning the cannon barrel using a special cleaning rod. The cannons built by the machinery department were front-loading smoothbore cannons. Powder and shot had to be loaded from the muzzle, and everything had to be done in the right order—this wasn't something you could just wing.

Xiao Ming had already planned for this. During production, he'd made sure Chen Qi prepared ramrods, loading scoops, fire pokers, and lighters—everything needed for a smooth operation.

At first, Luo Xin tried to stuff gunpowder and cannonball straight into the barrel, but Xiao Ming quickly stopped him.

Unlike fire lances, cannons required tight seals. The cannonball had to fit the barrel exactly, or the explosion wouldn't generate enough pressure for a proper shot. Worse, sand or debris could cause the cannon to misfire or explode.

After cleaning the barrel thoroughly, they proceeded to loading.

Using a powder scoop, Luo Xin measured out one full load of gunpowder and poured it in. The scoop was designed to carry the exact amount needed for one shot.

Then he loaded the solid cannonball into the barrel and used the ramrod to pack it tightly over the gunpowder.

"Ready, Your Highness?" Luo Xin asked.

He'd never gone through so many steps for a fire lance.

"All good," Xiao Ming replied.

The firing method was the same as a fire lance. He didn't need to say more. Xiao Ming simply stepped back—far back.

Everyone else followed his lead and backed away too.

Luo Xin looked around and realized he was now standing completely alone. A sense of dread crept over him.

He turned to Lu Fei. "Captain Lu, care to join me?"

Lu Fei smiled politely. "No no, this honor belongs to you."

Luo Xin glanced at Xiao Ming, who gave him a thumbs-up and a smirk.

Gritting his teeth, Luo Xin inserted the fuse into the vent hole at the back of the cannon.

Chen Qi had already lit the matchstick used for ignition. All Luo Xin had to do was touch the flame to the fuse.

“Here we go, Your Highness!” Luo Xin shouted.

“Don’t forget to cover your ears. And stand back!” Xiao Ming reminded him.

Luo Xin nodded, lit the fuse, and immediately stepped back and covered his ears.

*Sizzle—*the fuse caught fire, burning rapidly. It had been soaked in oil, ensuring a fast burn.

Then—

BOOM!

The sound was deafening, like thunder shaking the heavens. A burst of flame and smoke erupted from the muzzle.

A solid black cannonball shot out like lightning, slamming violently into Wubao’s gate.

Horses in the Qingzhou camp reared up and neighed in panic, throwing the ranks into brief chaos.