

I. Dynasty 201

Chapter 201: Debate

Golden sunlight blanketed the palace buildings, and the early morning palace seemed to radiate a strong aura of auspiciousness.

Luo Quan's words made Xiao Ming nod slightly. He wasn't agreeing to give the cannons to the imperial guards, but he did agree with Luo Quan's distrust of the vassal lords.

This was exactly what a loyal general should say and a reason that made Luo Quan worth winning over.

"This cannon production technology—I will give it to no one," Xiao Ming answered Luo Quan with a firm tone.

"Your Highness... this..." Luo Quan looked confused, even slightly angry. It was understandable if Xiao Ming didn't want to give it to other vassal lords, but to refuse even the imperial guards, who were directly under the emperor—this he couldn't understand.

Lu Fei, standing behind, let out a big sigh of relief. He had truly been worried Xiao Ming might agree too easily. Luo Xin seemed deep in thought.

Luo Quan's reaction was just as Xiao Ming had expected. Once he said this in court, the ministers' reactions would be even stronger.

But before that, he needed to win over Luo Quan's support in court.

He explained, "General, the imperial court is no longer truly the royal court. How can the imperial guards still be called royal? Be honest with yourself—are the guards now all truly loyal to the royal family?"

Luo Quan was instantly speechless. He admitted, "That's not true. Many officers in the imperial guard come from noble families of other vassal states."

"If that's the case, giving cannon technology to the guards is no different than giving it to the vassal lords," Xiao Ming said calmly.

Luo Xin agreed, "Exactly, Father. His Highness is right. If the cannon technology falls into the hands of the vassal lords, it's only a matter of time before the barbarians get it too. When that happens, combining cannons with their cavalry, Great Yu will face even greater hardship."

"But does that mean Your Highness plans to hoard the cannon technology?" Luo Quan still felt uneasy.

The war hawks had just seen hope in shifting the balance against the barbarians with cannons—now Xiao Ming's refusal seemed to crush that hope.

Xiao Ming chuckled lightly and said, "General, don't worry. I haven't finished. Whether it's the imperial guards or the northern vassals fighting the barbarians—what they need is cannons, not the technology. To prevent the technology from being stolen by the barbarians, I believe it's safest to keep it in Qingzhou. As for the cannons, I can sell them to the court and the three northern lords. Isn't that me already being very generous? After all, these cannons are a matter of life and death for Qingzhou."

Luo Quan immediately relaxed. At least Xiao Ming hadn't gone too far—what he said did make some sense.

If cannon technology spread, it would be more harmful than beneficial, especially with how complicated the current situation in Chang'an was.

"Your Highness is righteous. I misjudged you," Luo Quan said.

"It's nothing. The reason I'm telling you this, General, is because I hope you can speak on my behalf in court later. After all, I stand alone—if I say it myself, it might attract criticism."

"Don't worry, Your Highness. I'll argue on your behalf in court," Luo Quan replied.

In his eyes, Xiao Ming clearly intended to firmly hold on to the cannon technology in court, and by speaking up for him, he could gain some favor.

Xiao Ming nodded with satisfaction.

Now that the cannons had been exposed, there was no way Xiao Ming could keep them to himself—that was clear.

Even Xiao Wenxuan wouldn't stay calm—he would definitely want to equip a cannon unit to maintain deterrence against the Golden Horde and to have bargaining power at the negotiating table.

Moreover, cannons involved national interest. Even if Xiao Ming made great contributions, if he made a wrong move here, he would still be cursed by the public, which would be terrible for developing his territory.

So after discussing with Zhan Xingchang, Pang Yukun, Niu Ben, and others, Xiao Ming decided to sell the cannons but not share the technology. This would be morally justifiable and silence public opinion.

And historically—what makes the most money? Selling weapons.

Once sold, cannonballs and gunpowder are consumables, and maintenance is also costly.

Once his military factories became profitable, he would have funds to continue upgrading industrial technology, buy materials, and develop more weapons.

Also, once the northern lords bought Xiao Ming's cannons, they would be wary of him—after all, if he refused to sell more, wouldn't they go crazy? Especially since the imperial guard would surely get cannons first, breaking the military balance.

In short, Xiao Ming would be holding their lifeline.

But Xiao Ming wasn't foolish—he wouldn't sell the most powerful cannons. Like modern arms sales, he would create an export version to ensure his military edge.

For example, if his cannon had a range of three miles, he would only sell ones that reached one or two miles.

Then, when his cannon's range and power improved, he'd sell the three-mile version.

Constant upgrades would naturally trigger new rounds of purchases, giving him a steady stream of income.

While discussing the cannon issue, the four of them arrived at the Chengqing Hall.

Court hadn't started yet, and ministers stood in small groups chatting.

Xiao Ming's arrival immediately drew attention. Many generals swarmed over to greet him.

Xiao Ming didn't know many of them, but still returned each greeting.

"Dear nephew, dear nephew!"

As Xiao Ming was exchanging pleasantries, a familiar voice rang out. A chubby man squeezed through the crowd—it was the Prince of Wei.

“Dear nephew, I’ve been waiting for you in Chang’an for days!” The Prince of Wei came up and gave Xiao Ming a heavy pat on the shoulder, looking affectionate.

Xiao Ming winced from the slap. His victory in Cangzhou had brought him great merit—and the Prince of Wei had benefited too.

He’d already heard from Feng Deshui that the prince had written to the emperor listing all the coal, iron, and saltpeter he had supplied, clearly asking for credit.

So now the prince was desperate to see Xiao Ming, afraid he wouldn’t get his support in court.

He’d wanted to visit yesterday, but Xiao Ming was in the palace all day, and by the time he returned, the city was under curfew—making it inconvenient for the prince to go out.

“Third Uncle, if I hadn’t been delayed yesterday, I would’ve gone to visit you. This Cangzhou victory was thanks to your support with provisions,” Xiao Ming said, fully aware of the prince’s intentions.

Now that Cangzhou was secure, Xiao Ming was ready to grow the economy. Building ties with the Prince of Wei was necessary.

Though they may hate each other, they still had to put on a show of harmony—after all, who wants to argue with money?

