

I. Dynasty 203

Chapter 203: Verbal Battle with Cui Hao

The court was so silent that even the sound of a pin dropping could be heard. The ministers looked at Xiao Ming, each with their own thoughts.

After a while, Emperor Xiao Wenxuan looked at Xiao Ming and asked, "Prince Qi, is this cannon matter true?"

Xiao Ming replied, "Father Emperor, the cannon is real. However, I simply changed the name of the fire tube. The cannon looks similar to the fire tube, but its range has been increased."

"I see."

Xiao Wenxuan nodded. Xiao Ming did not hide the matter of the cannon, which made him feel reassured.

At this point, Cui Hao said, "Since that's the case, Your Highness should hand over the cannon technology. Whether it's a fire tube or a cannon, as long as it can defeat the barbarians, Your Highness should contribute it for the sake of the Great Yu Empire."

With just a few words, the topic in court shifted from rewarding achievements to demanding the cannon technology. This shift in focus was exactly what Cui Hao and his faction intended.

They were unhappy that the Prince of Qi and Prince Wei would receive rewards. For Cui Hao, extracting the cannon technology was his true goal.

“Hand over the cannon technology? Cui Dafu, you’re so concerned about this tech—it makes me uneasy. Everyone knows you’re always soft on the barbarians, practically licking their toes. If I hand over the cannon tech, are you planning to gift it to the barbarians?” Xiao Ming said coldly.

“Your Highness, how could you insult this old official like that? I have always acted for the peace of Great Yu. And yet you doubt my loyalty? Your Majesty, you must stand up for me!”

With that, Cui Hao fell to his knees and cried out.

Xiao Wenxuan frowned. Although Xiao Ming’s words were harsh, they served as a reminder. He said, “Prince Qi, your temperament hasn’t changed at all. Apologize to Minister Cui.”

“Father Emperor, your son is not wrong, so why should I apologize? This is a matter of national importance. We can’t share it lightly. The country is plagued by internal and external troubles. I happened to find a way to increase the range of the fire tube. Now Cui Dafu demands that I hand over the technology. I ask you, Father—if this tech is handed over, can the Weaponry Bureau in Chang’an ensure it won’t be leaked? There are many in Great Yu secretly colluding with the barbarians, and I believe you know that. If the barbarians get this tech, never mind reclaiming Shanhai Pass—even Cangzhou may be reduced to rubble. By then, who will turn the tide?” Xiao Ming said anxiously.

“Seventh Brother, if you hand over the cannon tech, naturally others will turn the tide. Or do you think you’re the only one in Great Yu who can fight a war?” a mocking voice came—it was the Fourth Prince.

“You speak so lightly, Fourth Brother. It’s true you’re no good at fighting, but you’re quite good at scheming. That assassin from last year—I think I’m starting to figure things out,” Xiao Ming said with a sinister smile.

The Fourth Prince's face turned pale. If Xiao Ming pursued this matter now, with his current merit, the emperor would surely be furious. He quickly defended himself, "I had nothing to do with it!"

"Oh? I haven't even asked yet. Why are you in such a hurry to explain, Fourth Brother?" Xiao Ming smiled.

"You—" The Fourth Prince was both angry and anxious, realizing he had walked into Xiao Ming's trap.

Xiao Wenxuan frowned deeply. He sternly asked, "Xiao Ming, have you gotten to the bottom of the assassin matter?"

Before Xiao Ming could respond, the Fourth Prince suddenly said, "Father Emperor, I think Prince Qi has a point. The cannon tech must not be given out lightly. If it falls into the wrong hands, it would be a disaster for Great Yu."

His sudden shift in attitude clearly indicated he wanted to make a deal with Xiao Ming. The Fourth Prince even signaled him with his eyes, confirming Xiao Ming's suspicion.

Xiao Ming sneered internally and said, "Father Emperor, I have not yet found conclusive evidence."

Xiao Wenxuan's eyes swept between Xiao Ming and the Fourth Prince. He snorted, understanding what was going on, but chose not to pursue it. He then turned to the other ministers and said, "What do the rest of you think?"

“Your Majesty, I believe Prince Qi is right. The cannon technology should not be casually handed to the Weaponry Bureau. For safety, why not let the imperial army buy the cannons from Prince Qi instead? This way, the army gets the weapon, and the technology remains safe,” Luo Quan chimed in to support.

Xiao Wenxuan already had a plan in mind. This was a perfect opportunity to strengthen imperial power.

He clearly understood the risk of handing the cannon tech to the Weaponry Bureau. From the beginning, he had no intention of doing so.

In recent years, he’d felt his body weakening. He also realized that the struggles between princes were influenced by non-royal vassals behind the scenes.

He suddenly recalled a teaching from Emperor Gaozu Xiao Yuanzhi: The struggle between royal princes is a matter of the royal family, but external vassals are a national issue. It’s better to let the princes fight among themselves and let the strongest rule Great Yu than to allow a non-royal prince to usurp the throne.

With this in mind, he decided not to demand the cannon tech. If princes backed by external vassals obtained the tech, they would immediately pass it to those vassals.

The same was true for disloyal ministers. Instead of taking that risk, he would allow access to the weapon but not the knowledge.

And for his own safety, Xiao Ming would surely guard the cannon secret closely.

“Your Majesty, I also believe Prince Qi is right. This cannon must not be handed out freely. If the barbarians get it, it’ll be dangerous,” Prince Wei finally spoke in support of Xiao Ming.

After all, Xiao Ming was family, and he had no fondness for those external vassals.

Prince Wei’s words helped Xiao Wenxuan make up his mind. He said, “This cannon matter is of great importance. For safety, the technology will remain in Qingzhou. However, if the imperial army wants to buy cannons, you must not refuse.”

Xiao Ming was delighted—this cannon issue was now resolved. Xiao Wenxuan proved himself shrewd; the cannon could deter not only the barbarians but also non-royal vassals.

The louder Cui Dafu yelled, the more anxious those vassals must be.

Sure enough, upon hearing this, Cui Hao looked as if all hope was lost.

“Wise decision, Father Emperor!” Xiao Ming complimented him again.

Xiao Wenxuan nodded. He had known beforehand that Cui Hao would bring up the cannon issue and had purposely allowed Feng Deshui to leak the idea of demanding the technology.

As expected, Cui Hao raised the issue in court.

But Cui Hao was still too naive for him. He had merely used Cui Hao's mouth to raise the cannon topic and used that to naturally get Xiao Ming to supply weapons.

"There's no need to discuss the cannon anymore. I will work it out with Prince Qi. Today's court meeting is about rewards, not to make things difficult for him. Otherwise, wouldn't that chill the hearts of our soldiers who fought in the Cangzhou battle?" Xiao Wenxuan said with a note of anger.

Cui Hao was furious inside. He had always prided himself on reading Xiao Wenxuan well but had failed miserably this time.

Still, he was unwilling to give up and said, "Your Majesty, even if the cannon tech is not handed over, we mustn't let Prince Qi take control of Youzhou so easily."

"In that case, Minister Cui, go reclaim Youzhou for me. In fact, all of you! Whoever can win back Youzhou, it will belong to him!" Xiao Wenxuan roared and stood up.