

I. Dynasty 271

Chapter 271: Imitation

Light blue smoke drifted across the firearms training camp, and the smell of gunpowder filled the air.

Many of the civil officials looked pale and unsteady on their feet. Even the military officers, though sturdier, still showed visible shock.

They had never seen such terrifying weaponry. It wasn't just that the cannonball had smashed through three trees—the thunderous roar alone could throw cavalry into disarray.

General Luo Quan had previously only heard about the power of cannons from his son Luo Xin, but now he had seen it with his own eyes—and felt its force firsthand.

“Your Majesty,” Luo Quan said respectfully, “these cannons are fearsome weapons. A hundred isn't nearly enough. I believe we should purchase more from Prince Qi to deter any potential threats.”

Fei Ji nodded in agreement. “Your Majesty, General Luo is right. With weapons this powerful, the more the better.”

Having seen the cannon's power for himself, Emperor Xiao Wenxuan was already making plans. This was a rare chance to widen the military gap between the throne and the other regional princes. He certainly wouldn't let it slip by.

“Well said,” he replied. “Once we return, I’ll issue an order for Prince Qi to continue supplying Chang’an with cannons.”

Among the gathered princes, every one of them wore a different expression.

They couldn’t stop thinking: Prince Qi’s army already had so many cannons. If one of them became emperor in the future, how would they deal with him?

Then their eyes drifted toward the Crown Prince, whose face looked utterly defeated.

He had the most to worry about.

The cannon demonstration went on for a while. After thoroughly experiencing the power of these weapons, Emperor Wenxuan was finally satisfied.

He frowned as he looked into the ammo box—all sixteen cannonballs had already been fired.

He clearly remembered: cannonballs weren’t cheap.

Each one cost 20 taels of silver, which meant that just this short demonstration had cost over 300 taels.

While each cannon had cost 8,000 taels, every cannon came with 300 cannonballs, totaling 6,000 taels just for ammo—almost as much as the cannon itself.

And that didn't even include the cost of gunpowder.

Thinking about the massive financial burden and how similar the cannon was to a fire lance, he suddenly had an idea:

What if they imitated the design and made their own?

Prince Qi had described the technology as deeply complex and mysterious—but Emperor Wenxuan wanted to see for himself.

If the weapon really was difficult to replicate, then the expense was justified.

But if it was easy to imitate, then Prince Qi had lied—exaggerating the difficulty and disrespecting the throne.

Back at court, the emperor had sensed Xiao Ming's reluctance to hand over the cannon blueprints. The excuse was fear of intellectual theft, so the technology stayed in Qingzhou.

But deep down, Emperor Wenxuan still wanted to monopolize cannon technology.

Now that all the court officials had witnessed its power, his goal was clear:

Regional princes would be uneasy tonight.

Back in the palace, the emperor summoned Feng Deshui and ordered him to secretly bring in Fang Chengyou, the director of the Machinery Department under the Ministry of Works.

“So? You’ve seen the cannon for yourself?” the emperor asked.

For years, only the capital’s Machinery Department had been able to produce fire lances—and all of it was thanks to Fang Chengyou’s family, who had passed the knowledge down for generations.

His father had been the previous director. Now Fang had inherited the post.

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Fang said respectfully. “The power is indeed far beyond that of the fire lance.”

But inside, he was bitter.

His family had always been favored for their fire lance designs.

Now that cannons were in use, no one cared about fire lances anymore.

Even before the cannons had arrived in Chang'an, he had often spoken against them.

Now, having seen them in action, he felt not only threatened—but deeply jealous.

“So... can the Machinery Department imitate them?” the emperor asked calmly.

Fang's eyes lit up. This was his chance to restore the Fang family's pride.

“Your Majesty,” he said confidently, “the cannon and fire lance are 70–80% alike. The main differences are size and thickness. If we just make the fire lance longer and stronger, and increase the amount of gunpowder—it might even match the cannon's power.”

“Is that so?” the emperor's interest was piqued.

“Very well. Go back immediately and begin working on a replica. I'll have the firearms camp send you a sample cannon for study. Research it thoroughly.”

“Yes, Your Majesty!” Fang said, thrilled.

After being dismissed, Fang left the palace and made his way to the Machinery Department.

Just then, a carriage stopped beside him.

“Director Fang, the Crown Prince requests your presence,” said an elderly man inside the carriage. It was Zhao Hongyang, Chief Chamberlain of the Eastern Palace.

In the Great Yu Empire, the Eastern Palace was the residence of the Crown Prince. It operated like a mini-court with its own officials and inner staff.

Zhao Hongyang oversaw all Eastern Palace affairs.

Fang glanced around cautiously. Seeing no one nearby, he got into the carriage.

They circled a few blocks before stopping at Red Sleeve Pavilion, a well-known brothel in Chang’an.

“Please, the Crown Prince and the Prince’s heir are upstairs, waiting for you,” Zhao Hongyang said with a smile.

Fang was familiar with the place. He made his way upstairs and knocked on a private room door.

Inside, he was greeted by the sound of gasping—and the sight of naked bodies on a bed.

“Fang Chengyou greets the Crown Prince. Long live Your Highness.”

From the bed, the Crown Prince casually replied while playing with three nude women, “No need for formalities.”

“Greetings to the Prince’s heir as well,” Fang added, bowing toward Zhao Yuanliang, who was sipping tea calmly at a nearby table.

Zhao Yuanliang, having grown used to his father’s debauchery, got straight to the point.

“Director Fang, please sit. Recently, the craftsmen in Zhao Prefecture successfully built a cannon. That’s all thanks to you. Without the detailed instructions you provided, they never would’ve managed to reverse-engineer the fire lance.”

“Prince Yuanliang is too kind,” Fang replied. “It’s an honor to serve Prince Zhao in any way I can.”

Then, unable to help himself, Fang glanced at the scene on the bed—his mouth dry and heart racing.