

## **I. Dynasty 337**

### Chapter 337: Shortcomings

The hot air balloon was still drifting above Qingzhou.

Lin Wentao and his fellow students chased after it relentlessly. Just as they were gasping for breath, the sound of horse hooves thundered toward them.

“Get on.”

Xiao Ming, mounted on horseback, had arrived in front of Lin Wentao.

Lin froze, momentarily stunned and unsure of what to do.

“What are you standing there for? If that balloon floats away, I’m not making you another one,” Xiao Ming scolded with a sharp glare.

At that, Lin panicked and immediately climbed onto Zhao Long’s horse.

Fixing his gaze on the balloon, Xiao Ming spurred his horse forward, with Lin Wentao behind him. Zhao Long and Zhao Hu followed closely.

The hot air balloon floated steadily westward. A rope dangled from below—thankfully, Lin had at least tied it long enough.

Probably treated it like a kite, Xiao Ming thought.

They chased it out of the city, and soon the balloon began to descend over the fields outside Qingzhou.

On horseback, Lin hurriedly explained that the balloon had only a small amount of tong oil left and that they had only meant to heat it briefly—it had unexpectedly floated off on its own.

As the balloon continued to sink, Xiao Ming let out a sigh of relief. Had there been more fuel, who knows where it might have flown?

Moreover, a falling balloon could easily injure someone. Thankfully, it was now descending over farmland—not a densely populated area.

“Your Highness, I’ve got it!”

The balloon finally lost lift. Lin leapt from the horse, ran over, and grabbed the hanging rope.

Xiao Ming nodded.

“Now you understand how a hot air balloon flies, don’t you?”

Lin nodded solemnly.

“It travels with the wind. If someone were aboard, they’d have to follow the wind’s direction.”

“Exactly. You’ve created the most basic model, but a truly practical hot air balloon still requires further development. I hope one day you’ll make it fully operational.”

Xiao Ming’s words were, in effect, a mark of approval.

“Flight is just the start,” he continued. “Your next task is to figure out how to carry a person, and how to adjust altitude to catch different wind directions and steer the balloon.”

Xiao Ming’s textbooks clearly noted that wind direction varies by altitude, and hot air balloons—driven by air currents—could only go where the wind went.

Lin nodded again. He knew that this was only the first step.

“Your Highness, give me a little time. One day, I’ll ride the balloon around Qingzhou City myself.”

Xiao Ming burst into laughter.

“I look forward to it. It’ll become a scenic symbol of Qingzhou.”

Privately, Xiao Ming dreamed of using balloons as bombers, but the technology just wasn’t there yet.

These were not hydrogen balloons, and their flight altitude and agility were poor.

Being wind-powered, the balloon couldn’t hover in place—it could only drift helplessly with the current. Even dropping objects was nearly impossible unless the wind blew precisely toward enemy camps.

And then there was accuracy—even if you dropped something, by the time you circled back, it’d be too late.

Add to that the limited passenger capacity—there just wasn’t much military use yet.

So instead of inefficient bombing, Xiao Ming shifted focus to aerial reconnaissance, tourism, and—amusingly—advertising.

Imagine a giant banner hanging from a hot air balloon... how many eyes would that catch?

He could already picture merchants clamoring to display their brands aloft.

Finally, in the worst-case scenario—say, a city under siege—balloons might transmit messages or evacuate key individuals.

Of course, he hoped it would never come to that.

No matter what, Xiao Ming admired Lin Wentao's daring in pioneering balloon flight.

However, passenger-ready flight would still require time.

He had Zhao Long and Zhao Hu help Lin reel in the balloon. Soon, more students from the Physics Department arrived.

They greeted Xiao Ming respectfully and then joined Lin in packing the balloon.

Xiao Ming watched the busy students with satisfaction. He could already sense a shift in mindset—a change that would only grow over time.

Back in the city, meanwhile, the news had caused a stir.

Curious citizens and merchants crowded toward the city gates.

People swarmed around the balloon's landing site, faces filled with wonder.

Seeing the growing crowd, an idea sparked in Xiao Ming's mind:

Why not use this moment to teach the people some basic science?

This could be a chance to enlighten public understanding.

In the crowd, he noticed Cao Zhengyang, who was stunned, his mouth agape, staring at the balloon and the busy students.

Since ancient times, humans had revered the sky, and flight had always seemed an unattainable dream. The sight of a floating balloon overhead left people awestruck.

To visiting merchants, the balloon made Qingzhou feel even more mysterious, and Prince Qi even more unfathomable. A deep sense of respect settled in.

If Prince Qi could even send things flying through the air... what couldn't he do?

Local merchants, on the other hand, beamed with pride, as if saying:

Look! This is OUR Qingzhou. Not so backward now, is it?

With the crowd growing too large, a unit of guards arrived. Some formed a protective ring around Xiao Ming, while others dispersed the civilians.

With Qingzhou's situation still tense, Xiao Ming's safety was paramount.

Once the balloon was packed and loaded onto a cart, Xiao Ming returned to the city.

It was his first time seeing a real hot air balloon. Though he knew its structure well, the real thing still left him curious.

On the way back, Xiao Ming and Lin chatted excitedly.

Lin explained his next plans for passenger-capable flight. Xiao Ming shared ideas about using balloons for aerial surveillance and other functions.

When Xiao Ming mentioned making money with the balloon, Lin's eyes lit up.

At least this invention isn't just for show, he thought. The silver I spent wasn't wasted.

Xiao Ming promised that if the balloon proved commercially viable, all profits would go to Bowen Academy.