

## I. Dynasty 396

### Chapter 396: Signing the Agreement

Only Yang Zhen and Emperor Xiao Wenxuan remained in the room.

A scar ran across Yang Zhen's face from left to right. Most people would be shocked by such a mark.

But Xiao Wenxuan didn't show any disgust. Instead, his eyes softened when looking at the scar.

Years ago on the battlefield, Yang Zhen had taken a knife wound meant for Xiao Wenxuan — that was why he trusted him so deeply.

"But Your Majesty, if the Second Prince is truly behind this, it will be a serious problem for you," Yang Zhen said suddenly.

Xiao Wenxuan nodded slightly. Yang Zhen had hit the key point: even if it was the Second Prince, what could be done? At best, the matter would be smoothed over like before.

For many years, Xiao Wenxuan had handled disputes between princes this way — after all, they were his own flesh and blood.

"This matter has no final conclusion yet. You should continue investigating," Xiao Wenxuan said calmly.

Yang Zhen bowed and left the imperial study.

Sighing, Xiao Wenxuan shook his head and murmured, “Second Prince, don’t push me to act.”

Leaving the palace, Xiao Ming went straight to Prince Yong’s residence.

As expected, Prince Yong agreed to Xiao Ming’s conditions without hesitation.

The only price was that Xiao Ming keep the truth of the Jizhou battle secret and provide fifty cannons.

Compared to the trade agreement and the fifty cannons, this was nothing to Xiao Ming.

His contract with Prince Yong had another part — about mining rights.

Prince Yong’s territory stretched all the way to what is now Shanxi Province, rich in coal.

The agreement gave Xiao Ming mining rights for twelve coal mines — famous quality open-pit mines in later history.

Near Qingzhou, there was coal, but the mines were deep and poor quality. Mining them would waste too much manpower and resources.

That was why Xiao Ming had long been eyeing Prince Yong's lands.

The Jizhou battle gave him the opportunity. Otherwise, Prince Yong's temperament would have made dealing with him difficult.

Now things were different.

Prince Yong not only needed help in war, but after seeing the power of cannons and firearms, he was fascinated. To get those weapons, Prince Yong was willing to sell even his pants — let alone some worthless coal mines.

Coal was not very valuable now, since the Great Yu Empire didn't use much.

For Prince Yong, it was better to trade coal for something useful.

"Dear nephew, I sign this agreement. From now on, you can take whatever you want from my lands," Prince Yong laughed heartily.

To Prince Yong, Xiao Ming was a fool — but he was a useful fool.

Xiao Ming had accepted hundreds of thousands of refugees from his land, solving famine problems. He had also traded coal for cannons.

Prince Yong didn't care about free trade of goods. Merchants were lowly in his eyes, and this treatment was just like adding another royal merchant guild.

"Uncle, your frankness moves me deeply. No more words — consider this a gift," Xiao Ming said, placing a box on the table.

Inside was a short-barreled firearm — a short musket.

"Dear nephew, this is a firearm? It looks different," Prince Yong said.

He had seen flintlock muskets before but didn't know the details. He knew muskets were long, but this one was very short.

"Uncle, do you think I'd give you something ordinary? Those are for common soldiers. This firearm symbolizes power and status," Xiao Ming said.

Prince Yong grinned, scratching his head, and gave a thumbs-up. "You really treat me well."

While talking, Prince Yong played with the firearm.

Xiao Ming explained how to use it. Having helped fire the first shot, Prince Yong grew even fonder of firearms.

After confirming the details of the agreement, Xiao Ming returned to his mansion.

With Prince Yong taken care of, Xiao Ming thought about who to approach next.

Just then, Prince Wei came again, agreeing to the agreement — but only if firearms were supplied.

Xiao Ming naturally agreed. Since no one knew how to properly use firearms, in their hands, they were no more than sticks for fire.

Besides, King Chu was already secretly arming with firearms. Arming Prince Wei could keep the southern lords in check.

“Dear nephew, to make the agreement more specific, why not write this firearm supply into the contract?” Prince Wei said, still uneasy about the firearms, and after much hesitation, asked to make it a clause.

“If that’s your wish, Uncle, I’ll add it,” Xiao Ming smiled slyly like a fox.

Once the agreement took effect, he controlled trade — a few firearms were nothing.

After redrafting, Xiao Ming and Prince Wei officially signed. The trade agreement was basically finalized.

Afterwards, Prince Wei said, “Dear nephew, besides firearms, I heard you also have hot air balloons. When can Your Uncle have a look?”

“No need to wait. After tomorrow’s court session, you can see them,” Xiao Ming said with a smile.

The next day, Xiao Ming attended the morning court with officials.

As agreed, Emperor Xiao Wenxuan granted him the title of Prince of the Three Pearls, and ordered that the Qingzhou Chamber of Commerce enjoy royal merchant privileges.

Because of Xiao Ming’s great merits, the court was surprisingly quiet — no minister opposed the Emperor’s decision.

But thinking carefully, Xiao Ming knew the ministers were secretly pleased — they believed the Emperor had purposely suppressed Xiao Ming by granting only royal merchant status. They didn’t realize this was a prior agreement between Xiao Ming and the Emperor.

“Prince Qi, I heard you used two powerful weapons in the Jizhou battle. Can you show us?”

After announcing the reward, Emperor Xiao Wenxuan smiled brightly. This was what he was most looking forward to.

“Of course. The items are just outside the palace. Please allow them in.”

“Approved,” said Xiao Wenxuan.

Feng Deshui immediately shouted, “Bring Prince Qi’s goods into the palace!”

Voices echoed all the way to the palace gate.

Outside, Luo Xin’s carriage announced their arrival: “Enter the palace.”

Liang Yubin and He Cheng nodded and followed the young eunuch into the palace.

Meanwhile, Xiao Wenxuan and the ministers waited in the square before Chengqing Hall.

“Start, Luo Xin,” Xiao Ming said.

Luo Xin nodded and immediately took the firearms from the box. Liang Yubin and He Cheng began preparing the hot air balloons.