

## I. Dynasty 397

### Chapter 397: The Test

At the square in front of Chengqing Hall, the ministers formed a crescent shape around Luo Xin and his group.

Emperor Xiao Wenxuan and Xiao Ming stood in the middle of the formation.

Xiao Wenxuan looked surprised as Luo Xin took out one long stick-like weapon after another from wooden boxes. He asked Xiao Ming, “Ming’er, are these the firearms?”

“Yes, Father. These are the firearms used in the Jizhou battle. Actually, it’s quite simple — just a smaller version of a cannon,” Xiao Ming explained.

All ten firearms brought were matchlock muskets, which had a slow-burning cord called a matchlock at the firing mechanism.

To fire, the soldier had to light the matchlock, which was also a disadvantage.

Since firing required the matchlock, musketeers had to carry several meters of cord on themselves.

In humid weather, the matchlock was hard to light. Usually, soldiers lit both ends so they could fire a second shot quickly. But the cord burned out fast, so during sieges they might run out of cord and be unable to fire.

Another drawback was the burning cord gave away their position at night, making night raids difficult.

Because of all these problems, the matchlock musket was quickly replaced by the flintlock musket.

Xiao Ming was confident in the advantages of the matchlock over the flintlock, which was why he wanted to sell these weapons.

Xiao Wenxuan laughed happily, “Hmm, it does look like a small cannon. Ming’er, you’re clever. This means every soldier now can carry a cannon, right?”

The Great Yu Empire had struggled against the tribes because it lacked horses. This new weapon gave Xiao Wenxuan hope.

He had been paying close attention to the firearms unit, and now a new weapon was ready — he was very excited.

Xiao Ming added with a smile, “Though it’s a smaller cannon, the power is much weaker.”

Luo Xin handed all ten muskets to the soldiers. These soldiers had already practiced loading and firing in Qingzhou, so they loaded quickly and waited for the command.

Xiao Ming gave Luo Xin a signal.

“Fire!” Luo Xin shouted.

At once, the soldiers lit their matchlocks, igniting the gunpowder and firing. A loud bang echoed, followed by white smoke.

Though prepared, Xiao Wenxuan was still startled by the noise. Some ministers even trembled.

“Wow, these firearms are loud,” someone said.

“Yes, but why didn’t a single target get hit?” another asked.

After the muskets fired, the ministers whispered among themselves.

No one dared criticize Xiao Ming in court — partly because of his great merits, and partly because he held Shanhai Pass, the key to the north.

More importantly, the new firearms represented the interests of many noble clans. No one wanted to offend Xiao Ming, since they all wanted this weapon.

Xiao Wenxuan heard their whispers and felt a bit awkward. He asked Xiao Ming, “Ming’er, why didn’t any bullet hit the target?”

Xiao Ming said calmly, “Father, the musket works with volley fire. It’s very different from archery. In fact, muskets aren’t as accurate as bows.”

At the time when cold and hot weapons were exchanging dominance, muskets were criticized for being unreliable. The famous Ming general Qi Jiguang once described soldiers fumbling with muskets — forgetting to load bullets, accidentally swallowing bullets, or dropping ammunition. Even when fired, the accuracy was poor.

Because of these problems, Qi’s troops only equipped two muskets per squad; the rest used cold weapons.

So even though Xiao Ming brought the muskets for demonstration, it was still uncertain if the commanders would accept them.

“If muskets are worse than bows, then what use are they?” one general suddenly asked.

Other ministers shared this doubt. Without Xiao Ming’s victories over the tribes using firearms, they would have been even more disdainful.

Then Luo Quan spoke loudly, “Your Majesty, a single musket isn’t as useful as a bow on the battlefield. But I’ve seen Prince Qi’s musket squad — thousands formed in ranks, firing while riding. The power is huge. A skilled archer needs years of training, but even a common man with a musket can kill tribal cavalry. The tribes have many horses, but the Great Yu Empire has many soldiers.”

Xiao Wenxuan looked at the empty targets and the muskets again. Luo Quan spoke exactly what he was thinking: the tribes' advantage was cavalry and skilled archers — which was the Empire's weakness.

Muskets could make up for that.

He asked again, "Ming'er, how about the musket's power and range?"

"The range is less than a bow, but the power is much stronger. It can pierce tribal armor from ninety paces away," Xiao Ming said.

For Xiao Ming, bringing the muskets was all about selling weapons and making military profits.

Now the north was stable, and the blood oath signed. Whether or not it worked, the princes should behave for now.

After marrying Feiyue'er, Xiao Ming wouldn't come to Chang'an often. He would focus on building up his lands and closing the technology gap with the west.

This trip to Chang'an was about money — trade agreements and military sales.

As long as these two succeeded, he could profit and upgrade his territory's industry.

Xiao Wenxuan was tempted by Xiao Ming's words about the musket's power.

He thought for a moment and said, "In that case, like cannons, equip a batch for testing. Let's give the firearms unit five thousand muskets."

The last cannon purchase cost millions of taels of silver, and buying muskets would also be expensive.

So Xiao Wenxuan didn't want to buy too many at once — ministers might complain. After all, the firearms unit was still new, with no real battlefield experience.

Also, the muskets' accuracy made him doubt their effectiveness in battle.