

## Civilization 104

### Chapter 104 - The End of 1482 - Explorer's Pillar

The Congo River, the longest river in Black Africa, traverses east to west, spanning ten thousand miles and reaching a depth of two hundred meters, with the rivermouth as wide as twenty miles. Since its formation in the Pleistocene, it had surged for two million years. It has wholly witnessed the origins of humanity, fostered prehistoric civilizations, and preserved the last traces of dinosaurs.

And today, it appeared before the eyes of Western explorers for the first time, heralding the arrival of a new age.

The expedition leader, flagship captain Diogo Cao, silently made the sign of the cross on his chest. Where there is fresh water, there are people and tribes. Where might this river lead? What lies at its end? No one knew at that time.

The fleet first patrolled the rivermouth, temporarily encountering no dangerous enemies or wild beasts. The sailors observed distant smoke, determining it necessary to delve deeper into the rainforest. Soon, captain Diogo Cao commanded the flagship, leading the fleet into the rivermouth.

"Bruno Cao, measure the water depth!" Diogo Cao commanded authoritatively, for he was the king of this ship.

The experienced sailor Bruno began to hurriedly secure a lead weight to the rope before throwing it into the river. Paulo helped beside him. The rope sank quickly, soon reaching its end.

"Captain, the rope has run out," Bruno reported respectfully.

"Attach the spare rope and continue measuring." The captain's orders must be absolutely obeyed. At sea, there were two contradicting ironclad rules: One was rigid hierarchy, and the other was one man one vote.

The sailors busied themselves again, and after adding the rope three times, the rope finally slackened, the lead weight reaching the bottom.

"How much?"

"Three lengths of rope, uh, 230 meters!" Bruno counted on his fingers for a while before exclaiming in shock. He was capable of basic arithmetic, which was why the captain had tasked him with measuring.

Two hundred and thirty meters! Everyone exchanged glances, such a depth even surpassed some coastal waters.

Captain Diogo Cao nodded silently at this astonishing depth, reassuring that all the world's ships need not worry about running aground. He then directed the exploration fleet upriver, seeking the source of the smoke. Along the way, the measured water depth consistently remained around two hundred meters.

On both banks was dense rainforest, wherein birds flew, vague beasts loomed, crocodiles played dead, and the ubiquitous buzzing swarms of mosquitoes were present.

Bruno grimaced at the mosquitoes over the river's surface, already gathering into visually distinct swarms that emitted a whirlwind-like buzzing. A warm breeze passed between the sailboats, carrying the scent of fresh humans, and the mosquitoes gradually drew closer, like bloodthirsty sprites.

"These damn tropical mosquitoes! Each one as big as my finger, who knows how much it would hurt to get bitten just once!" Bruno tightly fitted his nobleman's hat and then secured his collar, cuffs, and trouser legs, hiding his body within the nobility's long coat.

"Hey, Bruno bro. As a man, we are not afraid of bleeding or being cut, what are you afraid of some mosquitoes for!" Paulo, dressed in shorts, carelessly swatted at the swarms of mosquitoes. "Now, I'm starting to wonder if my sister would really be happy if she ended up with you."

"Damn, you'll know once your sister marries me! By the way, do you think there's gold among these natives?" Bruno looked towards the distant smoke, his desire scratching at him like a cat with an itch.

"Certainly, but who knows how much. Fodesse! Last time we worked all night and only got two pieces of gold, barely enough to share. We almost came to blows." Paulo too, looked forward to the distant smoke. He subconsciously licked his lips, his hand touching the curved knife hung at his waist.

Just then, on the riverbank, suddenly appeared a lean native warrior. He wore a red feather like a bush on his head and was encircled by a bone necklace around his neck—all symbols of an experienced warrior.

The native warrior held a long wooden shield high enough to cover half a man in his left hand, and in his right hand, he clutched a nearly two-meter-long spear, with an iron spearhead one palm long and half a palm wide glinting in the sunlight. He was clothed only in a loincloth, but his entire body was smeared evenly with thick mud and dung. The mosquitoes calmly flew past him, occasionally a few landing on his hand like docile pets.

The native warrior casually crushed the mosquitoes and tossed them into his mouth. The custom of eating mosquitoes had a long tradition among the rainforest tribes, as mosquitoes were plentiful enough to be rolled into dough. Mosquitoes were the best protein supplement, more stable than hunting. He looked somewhat puzzled at the huge ships on the river and the faintly visible white-skinned people on board.

The tribal priests had spoken of boats floating on the water in the northwestern tribes, and of loud weapons on the highlands in the distant northeast. Thus, he knew these were ships, not beasts. But such large ships, with such large pieces of fabric, and white-skinned foreigners?

Seeing the native warrior on the shore, Paulo's eyes narrowed as he picked up an early model matchlock gun from the weapon bucket and started to load it. Bruno, beside him, was puzzled.

"Paulo, what are you doing?"

"Fodesse! A native with a head full of chicken feathers and an iron spear! This is a real tough one, fast and fierce. My last brother fell to such a one. Let me finish him off while he's still dazed, it will save us trouble when we land later."

In less than half a minute, Paulo had finished loading and primed the match cord, clearly a well-trained elite musketeer. He propped the matchlock gun on the gunwale, beginning to aim with one eye.

"The captain hasn't given the order, don't be foolish!" Bruno urgently pressed down on the matchlock gun, attempting to hold him back.