

## Civilization 1121

Chapter 1121: The Second Kingdom Expedition, Welcome from the Taino People, Cohiba "Long Spears"!

"Chief Divine bless us, set sail!"

The morning light is splendid, the sea shimmering. Two intact longships set sail under the rising sun, heading toward the East. Old militia Chiwaco, alongside Nautical Priest MeKate, judged the wind direction and raised the cross-sails at the bow and stern.

The cross-sails have a relatively small wind-receiving area and limited angle but are the simplest to manufacture and use. At present, the Alliance's navigation technology is still at a relatively low level, complex triangular sails, vertical sails, and even spinnakers might require a long time to explore.

With the help of the wind, the sailors on the two longships rowed vigorously. In just two hours, they had traveled over fifty or sixty miles when a green Great Island suddenly came into view. Around the island, some small canoes were faintly visible, as well as a coastal village on the island.

"Captain Chiwaco, this is the Scaled Great Island! Those small boats belong to the Taino fishermen. Their fishing techniques are always outstanding. And that village is the Taino's settlement. Kuba says we can directly visit, they will gladly welcome us!"

Speaking of "welcome", Maya merchant Tikalo seemed hesitant. This journey from the highlands had made the "welcomes" from various tribes along the way quite startling. Chiwaco turned his head and gave Kuba a deep look, only to see the joy on the Cuban guide's face at the sight of the village.

As the fleet approached, the image of the village on the shore also became clearer. The Taino village was fully revealed, with no fences or walls to obscure or protect it, perhaps better described as a settlement. Most of the settlement consisted of low thatched huts, with a few round and pointed thatched huts in the center. There was no sign of a temple or altar characteristic of such settlements, but around the large huts, there were some erected wood carvings, pottery carvings, and stone carvings with undecipherable patterns on them.

On the outskirts of the settlement was a circular plaza formed of stones, its purpose unknown. Further out, by the river, small plots of land were widely scattered. It seemed the fields had many strange soil mounds. And near the seashore flats, several small weirs were enclosed, with something seemingly moving inside.

From a distance, one or two hundred Taino villagers were busy throughout the village, the atmosphere very peaceful. Several fishermen in canoes first spotted the longships. They waved and shouted at the fleet, then sent two people to notify the village. Within moments, the village was buzzing with activity, silhouettes bustling everywhere.

"Chief Divine bless! Put on armor, ready the copper spears, raise the longbows! Prepare for battle!"

Seeing the change in the Taino village, Huitu Puapu's expression turned stern. With a murderous look in his eyes, he ordered preparations for battle in a deep voice.

Four small canoes moved obliviously closer, entering bow and arrow range, until they reached the edge of the longships. Only then did the Taino fishermen aboard put down their oars, stand up, revealing tall figures and bare torsos. The leading Taino fisherman glanced at the weapons and longbows raised by the warriors and sailors on the longships, and smiled brightly and genuinely, shouting loudly.

"Yaya! Piragua? Guarico Ke? Ana Tanama! Uicu? Veycosi?"

"Huh? What is he saying?"

Old militia Chiwaco scratched his head, looked at Tikalo and Kuba. Kuba stared at the fisherman, was stunned for a bit, then translated word by word.

"Great Spirit (Yaya)! Long large ship (Piragua)? Arriving (Guarico) our land (Ke)? Flower (Ana) and butterfly (Tanama)! Fruit wine (Uicu)? Cassava juice (Veycosi)?"

"What? What's this supposed to mean?"

Chiwaco looked confused, while Kuba directly responded in Guanahani, conversing surprisingly yet joyfully with the Taino fisherman. Afterwards, he translated their exchange in a complex expression.

"Great Spirit blesses everyone! Long large ships, you have arrived at our village. Are you guests? Beautiful flowers welcome fluttering butterflies! Come, do you want to drink newly brewed fruit wine or freshly pressed cassava juice?"

"..."

Hearing Kuba's translation, old militia Chiwaco and Huitu Puapu exchanged glances, both with subtle changes in expression. The Taino seemed genuinely friendly, uncertainly sincere. Huitu Puapu thought for a while, then signaled the warriors to lower their weapons. Chiwaco, stroking his chin, spoke gently.

"Tell him we are friends from the Maya Lands! We wish to go to the village to talk with the village chief and trade some food and water. Please let the villagers not be nervous or defensive, we mean no harm..."

Kuba and the Taino fisherman conversed again briefly. The fisherman seemed somewhat puzzled. He scratched his head, then paddled the small boat, leading the two longships toward the crowd gathered at the coast. Upon reaching the edge, old militia Chiwaco was surprised to find that the one or two hundred villagers gathered at the shore had no defense!

The Taino villagers held no wooden spears, stone spears, stone axes, or hunting bows. They carried no weapons except for small flint knives! And the ten or so villagers standing at the front held large baskets filled with long cassava flatbreads, fresh palm fruits and guavas, and pottery jars filled with clean water!

"Friends on the longships! Flowers welcome butterflies, trees welcome birds. We welcome you to our village!"

An elderly Taino village chief, wearing a short feather crown, raised his hands joyfully and approached. His face carried a genuine and sincere smile. He bore no long spears, only a spindle of rolled tobacco leaves, "Cohiba Long Spears".

"Come, friends! Light last year's tobacco leaves, let us share the divine tobacco, Cohiba, and communicate with the Divine! The Great Spirit and immortal ancestors are watching the meeting between the two tribes. In the blessing of Mother Goddess Atabeyra, let's drink water together, await the moon, and continue the tribes!"

"Ah? This... this welcome is truly different from those before!..."

Old militia Chiwaco stepped ashore, observing the warm welcome from the Taino, initially with a dazed smile that soon became genuine.

The tall Taino village chief spread his arms and embraced him warmly. Then the elder chief eagerly lit a long Cohiba, took a deep puff, invigorating himself immediately. Next, he lit a "tobacco long spear", placed it in Chiwaco's mouth, and cheerfully shouted.

"Cohiba! Blessings from Mother Goddess and Ancestors! Guanahani people's tobacco! Welcome, friends!"

"Hiss! This flavor?... Cough, cough!"

Old militia Chiwaco widened his eyes, inhaling the rich Divine Smoke deeply, then couldn't resist coughing. The surrounding Taino villagers chuckled kindly, and the village chief demonstrated smoke exhaling.

In laughter and divine smoke, the old militia took a few more puffs, gradually relaxing his whole body. His thoughts became active, his spirit hazy. A smile involuntarily appeared on his face, as an inexplicable thought crossed his mind.

"Sincere welcomes to friends, sharing Divine Smoke and food. Truly, Taino people are a kind tribe!... But, this kind of tribe, encountering the white-skinned demons from Your Majesty's prophecy, what outcome would they face?"

#### Chapter 1122: The Second Kingdom Expedition, Taino Folk Songs

The warm and humid long wind from the coast wrapped the lush Caribbean islands. On the seaside outside the Taino Village, novel-style longships were docked, from which the Kingdom's Warriors, clad in armor and armed with spears, disembarked. Emerging from the round-roof huts, Taino villagers held food and drinks, their faces gleaming with joy. Under the embrace of the blazing sun and the vast sky, distant tribes met as if reuniting after years, with only enthusiasm and sincere welcomes to offer.

Soon, jars of tobacco were ignited, the fragrant scent wafting everywhere in the air. Young Taino men and women, full of curiosity, stood on both sides, observing the Lake Central Tribe members disembarking one after another.

Huitu Puap, carrying a bronze axe and a long spear on his back, cautiously alighted from the ship. He grasped the bronze axe at his waist, first glancing at the village men.

"Ah! Chief Divine, why are they all so tall? Their clothing is strange too..."

The Taino men were generally tall and robust in physique, yet their appearances were simple and gentle. They all bore shoulder-length short hair, with cat whisker-like black stripes painted on their profile, and necklaces of shells, white stones, pearls, and thin bones adorned their necks. Some men even wore several necklaces, adorned with peculiar engravings that seemed related to the Divine. As for their clothing, most were bare-chested, with rough upper bodies and short loincloths wrapped around their lower bodies, their feet wide and bare.

"Such attire seems to lack cotton fabric, not very affluent indeed!"

Puap squinted and moved his gaze, resting it on the men's empty hands. Most men's hands bore only calluses on the knuckles and palm surfaces, possibly from using daggers and small tools. Only the fishermen descending from the canoes had long harpoons on their backs, their grip marked by thick calluses. As for thumbs thickened by prolonged use of bows and arrows, they were virtually absent among the crowd.

"Eh? Chief Divine witness! How come these Taino people, not one holds long spears, nor has wielded a hunting bow? Their faces appear naïve, as though they've never seen blood, nor killed someone..."

The thoughtful Huitu Warrior Puap observed for a while and pursed his lips. Finally, he confirmed in his way that these island-dwelling, tall Taino had neither battle threats nor malicious traps. These Taino men generally stood at a meter seventy-eight, taller than him by a head. But in his eyes, they were like a harmless herd of deer in a gray wolf's view.

"Ha! No weapons, can't kill, a pity for such tall, sturdy bodies!"

Puap slightly shook his head, shifting his gaze to the surrounding women. In just a moment, the eyes of the Huitu Warrior were seemingly magnetized, a gasp of astonishment escaping his lips.

"Ah this?... This is too?... Tsk tsk!"

The Taino women of the village saved even more fabric than the men. Only the slightly older, married women wore short loincloths to shield the gaze of outsiders. The unmarried girls wore complete naturalness, waiting like fawns for a Hunter's pursuit and exploration. Uniquely, Taino women painted bright and abstract patterns with white lacquer on their abdomens, like a mysterious allure.

"Hiss! Two spikes tilted up, a vertical line going down, connecting three critical points... this symbol?"

Puap widened his eyes, gazing at the most beautiful Taino maiden. On her wheat-colored abdomen was a mysterious three-spike symbol like the "Y" shape of a branch. He inexplicably felt a familiarity with this symbol and watched it for a long time.

"Ahem! Old Pu, stop staring! The village chief wants us to talk in his round-roofed hut."

Chiwaco turned his head, vigorously patting Old Pu's shoulder. Puap shivered, licking his lips, and followed the old militia into the round, tall leader's hut.

Such a large hut could only accommodate thirty to forty people. Most of the Kingdom's Warriors stayed outside. The Taino villagers warmly offered soft cassava breads and fermented sweet cassava drinks. The cold, hard faces of the Kingdom's Warriors gradually unfolded into smiles. Supplies running low, paddling the canoe halfway, they were indeed hungry.

"Yay, another Y-shaped symbol? Is this a wood carving dedicated to the Divine?"

Puap looked around the leader's hut, finding no decent weapons but many tall wood carvings. At the top were carvings of the moon and water, the sun and mud, seemingly symbolizing the two most significant Divine entities, with the moon before the sun. Following closely were wood carvings etched with the white lacquer Y shape, with hills and cassava at the base. As for the subsequent carvings, they varied widely, depicting hurricanes, serpents, dogs, and trees, along with some abstract humans.

Two low wooden stools surrounded the Divine carvings. On the topmost stool sat the elder Taino village chief. That stool also bore a Y-shaped symbol representing the village chief and the tribe's name, "Yucama." The Yucama Village Chief lit a censer filled with Divine Smoke, gazing at Chiwaco, indicating the stool beside him. The old militia, not one to refuse, sat on the honored guest stool at the chief's invitation.

Everyone else sat on the ground, including over ten elder Taino individuals. Huitu Puap also settled next to the elders, watching them take out leather drums and wooden flutes, striking and blowing them while singing ancient welcoming songs for guests.

"Boom boom boom!... Sun and moon, both emerged from the Holy Mountain's cave, ascending high into the sky!

Boom boom boom!... Pure Ancestors also emerged from the cave, dispersing across the various islands!

Boom boom boom!... We at the seaside saw distant arriving ships, realizing: 'Ah! Brothers coming from afar...'"

The aged songs arose, accompanied by a low drumbeat, intermittently, as if narrating ancient stories, resembling the origin of the Taino people.

Chiwaco's expression suddenly turned solemn, his old back straightening. He knew such songs were not only sung for the guests but more importantly, to inform the Divine and Ancestors, to acquire testimony and Blessing.

"Boom boom boom!... Moon Mother Goddess Atabeyra, turned the moon into the sun, illuminating the island people and the sailing ones.

Boom boom boom!... The White God Yucahu, from cassava bore soul, across the sea and hills, bringing us food.

Boom boom boom!... Storm Goddess Guabancex, controlling the sea and the waves, let people meet, and let people part.

Boom boom boom!... Divinity Ancestor Maquetaurie Guayaba, transformed into a dog, guarding the deceased, deciding our afterlife..."

Moon Mother Goddess, Cassava God, Storm Goddess, God of Death Ancestor... these four Divine entities were the most frequently prayed to in the Tainos' daily lives.

Chiwaco listened closely, his attention rapt. He couldn't understand the language of these songs, but he could feel the peaceful and reverential atmosphere and the singers' full emotion. Those feelings encompassed reverent admiration, calm recollection, and beautiful hopes and aspirations.

"The Taino people are really a friendly tribe... It seems they have no sacrifices and bloodshed, nor so bloody rituals..."

The old militia recalled the indoor and outdoor scenes of the leader's hut, seeing no common red altars of the Mexica and Maya tribes. He turned his head, intending to ask Translator Kuba, only to find him moved to tears by the ancestral songs.

"Boom boom boom!... All things have spirits; humans have spirits too. We transform into all things; all things transform into us.

Boom boom boom!... The souls of the departed go deep underground. They become bats roosting and from bats reincarnated into all things.

Boom boom boom!... Divine and Divinity's Ancestors, in the sky above, watching our brief lives. We are the roots of trees, connecting souls under the vast earth.

Boom boom boom!... Cassava sprouts emerge, producing tubers. Flowers bloom and fall, life arises, and death comes..."

This is the song cherished by the Taino people for millennia, perpetuating the tribe's spirit and understanding of the world and humanity. With rudimentary herbal knowledge, the Taino's lifespan was usually not long. They lived in village clusters, without complex social structures, generally pure-hearted. They believed in the afterlife and reincarnation, much at ease with life and death.

Divine Smoke swirled in the hut while the leather drum resonated in the heart. The aged chants floated to the outside, drawing in the villagers' harmonic low singing, like prayers indifferent to life and death, and like peacefulness unhindered by worldly affairs.

"Boom boom boom... Oh, faraway guests! Flowers welcome butterflies, cassava welcomes birds. We welcome you to our village!"

"Let our roots connect, let our fruits grow, let us share the Divine Smoke, let us drink together... until the moon descends, until the tribe endures!"

Chapter 1123: The Second Kingdom Expedition—Shocking! Cassava Yields of 500 Jin per Mu...

The songs of the Taino people, ancient and joyful, accompanied by the beat of drums, echoed inside and outside the leader's hut. The old militia, Chiwaco, listened patiently, his face full of a peaceful smile. Until the singing ceased, the ritual informing the spirit and ancestors also came to an end.

The hut returned to silence, and the old village chief, Yucama, reached into his arms, once again taking out a handful of Cohiba tobacco "Long Spears," handing them to Chiwaco. Soon, the two were puffing away, smoking the most primitive cigars, and began an honest conversation through the translator, Kuba.

"Respected Village Chief Yucama, our fleet needs food and water. I am willing to offer the goods of our fleet in exchange with you!"

The old militia, Chiwaco, spoke sincerely, revealing the purpose of his journey. Hearing this, the old village chief, Yucama, was startled for a moment and then replied with a smile.

"Tribes of the Lake, friends from afar! The All Gods and ancestors watch over the village, and you are our guests. You can directly share our food and replenish what you need."

"Uh..."

Upon hearing this, Chiwaco scratched his head. He thought for a moment but still shook his head and said.

"Praise the Divine and thank you for your generosity! However, our fleet has many people, and the amount of food needed is also substantial. We cannot take your food for free. We have sufficient goods for exchange, whatever you prefer."

Saying this, Chiwaco waved and called to Shan Bird, who carried a bamboo basket.

"Shan Bird, bring the goods up!"

Soon, in front of the old village chief Yucama, appeared a small bag of cocoa, a handful of cotton cloth, a small bag of Lake Gem, a small bag of gold and silver, and several bright feathers. These were the most common trade items from various tribes that the fleet had collected along the way.

The old village chief, Yucama, pondered for a while, first pointing at the gold, silver, and feathers, shaking his head. The Taino tribes did not produce gold and silver, nor did they find any use for these stones which neither feed nor clothe them.

As for the feathers, while the Taino tribes needed them for headdresses or interior decorations, the Yucama tribe itself produced many bird feathers. They would use domesticated birds to emit crisp chirping to lure bright wild parrots, and they also set traps with bait to catch coastal seabirds.

Then, the old village chief, Yucama, gazed at the cocoa, a bit puzzled, as if recalling something, and slightly shook his head, pointing at the cocoa and shaking his hand again.

The crops on Cuba Island included cassava, tobacco, corn, beans, pumpkins, cotton, chili peppers, peanuts, pineapples, gourds, and also palm fruits, guava, and Zemi fruit. Cocoa, revered by the highland and Maya tribes, was not part of the daily diet of the Taino tribes. It was only because of multiple visits by Mayan merchant caravans that the old village chief recognized it.

Not far away, the Nautical Priest, MeKate, watched the scene with thoughtfulness.

"Cocoa is the sacrificial drink shared by the Nuaa religions and Maya religions. Since the Taino did not consume cocoa, their polytheistic beliefs might have entirely different origins compared to the highland and rainforest tribes!"

Subsequently, the old village chief, Yucama, felt the soft cotton cloth, smiled, and nodded. The Taino tribes also grew cotton and wove fabric, but both the quality of the cotton produced and the textile materials' quality were much lesser than that of the Nava and Mayan peoples. In fact, throughout Central America, the centers of various tribal civilizations lay in the highland Mexican Valley and the lowland Maya basin.

Finally, the village chief Yucama opened the little bag of gemstones, the brilliant light reflecting in his eyes. He was visibly stunned for a moment, then suddenly a bright smile spread across his face as he grabbed a white Lake Gem.

"This one! It's good! It can be strung into a necklace, worn around the neck, or offered to the Ancestors!"

Seeing the flashing white bead in the chief's hand, the Taino elders inside the hut were momentarily surprised but then broke into smiles. The necklaces around their necks served as a medium of communication with the Divine and ancestors, and were also their soul's safeguard in reincarnation. According to ancient legend, the more pristine and translucent the beads, the more attention they would receive from the Ancestors and the God of Death, guiding their souls.

"Good, Chief Divine witness! Respected Village Chief Yucama, we will trade your food with Lake Gems and cotton cloth!"

Chiwaco let out a sigh of relief, his face also revealing a relaxed smile. There were still many gemstones on the ship, especially the white ones.

"The tribes of the Wilderness prefer green and blue, the Maya tribes prefer green and red. Unexpectedly, the Taino people like white and semi-transparent. The Lake Gems produced by Your Majesty, surprisingly, can be universally accepted, which is truly strange!..."

"Good! This bead is good!"

Village Chief Yucama laughed heartily, nodding in agreement. Holding the flashing white bead, he instructed nearby villagers. Quickly, someone came with a basket of food and placed it before Chiwaco.

"This, cassava cake, for the road, can last four to five days. This, dried cassava chunks, soaked and peeled, then dried. Don't get them wet, and they can last ten to twenty days. This, dried corn, lasts very long. This, cassava leaf powder, can be added to water for drinking, or mixed in with the food..."

Village Chief Yucama picked up the food one by one and explained. Chiwaco listened attentively, nodding continuously.

The main food for the Taino tribes is the highly productive cassava. Cassava can be planted on mountains or plains, ideally suited for a warm, year-round climate with average rainfall. However, this crop is not picky about soil, drought-resistant, and heat-tolerant. Even with insufficient rainfall and high summer temperatures, it can still yield reasonable harvests. Its strong vitality allows it to withstand weed competition, requiring minimal field management. Later, it became the staple food of the African continent, and the raw material for pearls in pearl milk tea is cassava.

"Respected Captain Chiwaco, this is the Taino cassava. It's more filling than squash and almost like corn!"

Seeing the food brought by the village chief, the Maya merchant Tikalo raised his eyebrows and added with a smile.

"Of course, the texture of cassava is not as good as corn. Even cassava cakes are just a little better than cassava chunks, barely edible. It is toxic in its raw form and requires peeling and soaking in water for a day before it can be cooked for consumption. In the Lowland Maya, ordinary commoners on the mountains would plant cassava to make a living, but the nobility usually don't eat it. However, the leaves of the cassava, once cleaned and soaked properly, make a really good vegetable!"

"What? This cassava, like sweet potatoes, can be planted on mountains?"

Upon hearing this, the old militia Chiwaco's eyes lit up, and he asked further.

"How much yield can an acre of land produce in the Alliance?"

"Oh! Once the cassava grows, it resembles a short tree. The edible parts are the tubers buried underground, not fruit produced. As for the yield..."

Tikalo reached out and touched his divine-like head. He pondered for a moment but had never focused on such a crop's yield. The old militia then turned to the old village chief and asked Kuba to translate.

"Cassava is a gift from the white god Yucahu in the southern rainforest to our ancestors! Cassava has nurtured the Taino people. Whether in storms or floods, it provides us with precious food! A single cassava tree can produce five or six tubers, each at least the size of a fist. Look, what grows on the soil mounds in the nearby fields are cassava plants, and what's buried within are the tubers!"

"Ah? A single cassava can produce five or six tubers?"

Chiwaco extended his hand, hefting the cassava tubers in the basket, each weighing about a pound or two. He glanced outside the thatch hut, estimating the density of the cassava mounds, and his expression turned to shock.

"You can plant a cassava every 2-3 paces, with 240 paces per acre. With each producing 5-6 tubers, even if each tuber weighs just over a pound, the yield per acre... that's... that's..."

"At least 500 pounds per acre. If peeled and washed, some weight would be lost. Moreover, harvested cassava spoils easily and doesn't store as long as corn or squash. However, I remember this crop can grow for many years in the ground and can be harvested whenever needed..."

Seeing the old militia calculating with his fingers, the Maya merchant Tikalo smiled secretly and replied casually. Then, he stroked his chin and, upon seeing the wide-eyed, incredulous expression on the old militia's face, asked curiously.

"Respected Captain Chiwaco, what's the matter? Is this yield very high?"

"Ah, praise the Chief Divine! Damn it! That blind someone finally did something right!"

Chiwaco gritted his teeth hard, nearly biting his tongue. His eyes turned red as he replied through gritted teeth.

"High, very high! This yield surpasses even the Chief Divine! It's higher than sweet potatoes and squash! We must take these cassavas back, to be planted in the Alliance!"

"If there's a barren year, this crop, like squash and sweet potatoes, could be life-saving..."

The Yucama old village chief looked curious. He doesn't quite understand what these Lake Central Tribe people mean while pointing to the most common cassava. This ordinary crop has been domesticated by the ancestors of the Taino people, the Awa ancestors from the southern Amazon Jungle, for thousands or tens of thousands of years. It's the most common food on the Southern Continent.

"Cassava is a gift from the white god Yucahu bestowed to our ancestors in the southern rainforest, nurturing the Taino people!..."

Thinking of this, the Yucama old village chief held the shiny white bead and looked at the divine rune wood carving, quietly praising it for a while until Chiwaco solemnly saluted him and requested again.

"Respected Village Chief Yucama, thank you! I have another request... Our fleet has three longships lost along this coastal area. I hope you can send messengers to inquire with the surrounding villages and villagers..."

"Additionally, we will bring the damaged longships into the village for nearby repairs. With the villagers' help, the work should go faster... Of course, we will offer you the white Lake Gem as a gift."

"May All Gods and ancestors bless you, bless us! No problem, my friend. We are willing to help you, just like helping our kin. We also like your shiny white beads, the best gift for the All Gods and ancestors!"

The Yucama old village chief smiled kindly. He nodded without hesitation.

"Come, friends! Please stay in our village for a while. The women in the nearby villages welcome your arrival. We've been a long time without new blood to sustain the tribe's vitality..."

"Flowers welcome butterflies, and the butterflies will make them bear fruit. Cassava welcomes the sparrows, and the sparrows will spread the seeds. We welcome you to our village, take the cassava blessed by the white god, leave behind the Lake Tribes' gem, and continue our brothers' bloodlines!"

Chapter 1124: Alliance Spring Plowing Festival, Heart of the Jaguar, Known Among the Pack

In mid-May, the kingdom's expedition fleet arrived at the southern island of Cuba, stopping at the Taino village of Yucama. The fleet repaired ships, replenished food and water, and contacted nearby tribes, searching for lost ships.

The old militiaman, having some leisure time, walked among the Taino cassava fields. The spring breeze brushed his face, and the scent of grass and wood greeted him, fresh and pleasant. He looked at the rows of cultivated mounds, with lush green branches and leaves on them, and genuine joy appeared on his face.

"Oh Chief Divine, what a beautiful spring it is!"

"Oh! Oh!"

Seagulls chirped, cassava sprouted new branches, and the bright spring light lingered along the Taino villages of the Cuban coast. Spring light shimmered for five thousand miles, and the spring breeze swayed for two thousand meters, reaching the highlands of the Mexica Alliance.

On the highlands, it was also a splendid spring, suffused with the scenes of spring plowing at Lake Texcoco, and meandering in the prosperous valleys of Mexica. It was a peaceful season, accompanying the hurried steps of farmers, and the spring smoke from the slash-and-burn season. The army corps from the northern city-states of the alliance, carrying numerous spoils of war, returned from the eastern expedition to participate in the city-states' spring agriculture.

The alliance's spring plowing began, and this year's spring plowing festival was unprecedentedly grand!

At this moment, the Lake Capital City was bustling with people, the scent of pine resin filled the air, rising continuously. Priests chanted scriptures, samurai performed war dances, and the grand spring plowing festival was held at the top of the towering Great Temple pyramid. King Aweit, wearing the newly made Divine King Headdress, stood tall on the highest Divine Platform. He raised the Yellow

Gemstone Scepter in his hand and declared aloud to the cheers of tens of thousands of citizens of the capital city.

"The god says, the sun rises high, the moon falls below. The Chief Divine is pleased, swallowing the Cloud Serpent... No war this year!"

Beside the Divine King, the twelve Elder Priests stood reverently. They listened to the Divine King's decree and repeated it in unison, followed by the loud shout of hundreds of priests.

"The Chief Divine is pleased, no war this year!"

"Roar! The Chief Divine is pleased! Awooo!"

The cheers of tens of thousands of people echoed through the Lake Capital City, like deafening thunder! And below the Great Temple, hundreds of the alliance's great nobility simultaneously bowed, paying respectful homage to the supreme King.

"No war this year, praise the Divine King! Praise the Chief Divine!"

Confirming there would be no war this year, most nobles of the city-states breathed a sigh of relief. Mountain Clan Leader Izel bowed his head in salute toward the high King, sighing inwardly.

"The sacred Jaguar sits high above, increasingly majestic and awe-inspiring! Just a few words make one feel intimidated, not daring to look directly..."

Since the elder's passing, the Divine King's rise to supremacy led to rapid changes in world affairs, and the alliance's political situation became unstable and uneasy. The King and the High Priesthood were implementing centralization step by step, while in the hearts of the nobility, the dissatisfaction caused by damaged interests was increasingly accumulating. At this time, all around the alliance, the great nobility was constantly vigilant about the King's actions, worried about their family's survival. They truly had no motivation to heed the royal family's call to participate in expansionist conquests.

"The god says, abundant fertilizer, the lake fields fertile. The Chief Divine is pleased, drinking fresh crimson... Harvest this year!"

King Aweit, with a cold and hard expression, once again raised the divine staff and sternly announced. Hundreds of priests followed suit, then thousands of nobles and tens of thousands of people, all together, their voices shaking the sky!

"Harvest this year, praise the Divine King! Praise the Chief Divine!"

The nobles' praises came from the heart, as did the people's cheers. Mountain Clan Leader Izel's eyes sparkled with an inexplicable unease, hiding some anger. As he looked around, there seemed to be something unusual in the faces of many great nobles cheering, but it was hard to discern clearly.

"The god says, practice self-restraint, do not squander. The Chief Divine guides, elders enshrined... Self-restraint this year!"

King Aweit, with a solemn demeanor, raised the divine staff once more, sweeping over the nobles below the temple. Seeing the King's gaze, many nobles bowed their heads in unison, and some even knelt on one knee to show respect to the Divine King.

"Self-restraint this year, praise the Divine King! Praise the Chief Divine!"

This divine war of the east consumed a significant amount of the alliance's food, exhausting years of reserves. Last month, the High Priesthood already issued a new religious decree, enforcing frugality and supervising all regions, which both nobles and priests must abide by!

"The Divine King's decree: nobles of all city-states are to reduce feasting and refrain from excessive indulgence. To honor the elders and High Priests lost in the eastern expedition, observe one year of prudence. Violators will face punishment!"

The decree of the High Priesthood, once united with the king's decree, represents the supreme will, restraining the words and actions of the nobility. Elder Izel lowered his eyes, clearly feeling that another chain has been added to those binding the great nobility!

"First, the elite samurai were extracted, followed by interference in the inheritance among the great nobility, and now even the daily feasts are to be restricted... Step by step, the sacred Jaguar returns from the eastern conquest, mercilessly extending its claws, pinning the pack of wolves under them!"

The return from the eastern conquest saw the great nobility of various states plundering a large amount of gold, silver, spices, population, and wealth, but they were also forced to expend over ten thousand of their private noble armies, significantly weakening their strength. In contrast, the central power of the royal family suffered far less attrition.

After capturing Tree Snake City, King Aweit forcefully conscripted elite Third Level samurai from various states to rebuild a two-thousand-strong Tonsured Guard. Upon returning to the capital city, the king, riding the wave of great victory, subdued the High Priesthood, incorporating two thousand Temple Guards and one thousand Elder Guards into the direct jurisdiction of the royal family.

Thus, with the triple blessings of supreme divine authority, victorious prestige, and mighty military power, the central authority of the Mexican royal family finally gained an overwhelming advantage over various local states and tribes!

"Establish the supreme religious laws and affirm the order of the Alliance. The Chief Divine grants the Divine King the authority to campaign against all the tribes under heaven and to protect the Alliance nobles!"

King Aweit, holding the advantage, did not hold back, further dismantling the power of the nobility to strengthen central authority. A few months ago, after holding a grand victory ceremony, the king intervened for the first time in the inheritance of the Glory family of Tzompantli following the death of Xochitl. This was the first time in decades that the royal central authority openly decided on the division of a factual Glory family.

"The honorable noble Xochitl sacrificed for the divine in the divine war of the eastern conquest! Blessed by the Chief Divine, bestowed with grace! His four legitimate descendants, regardless of gender, have the right to inherit the family's land and maintain the identity of the honorable nobility!"

The king's envoy brought an irresistible divine grace, dividing all the land, population, and warriors of the Glory Tzompantli family among the four opposing legitimate heirs to inherit. Thus, amid the bitter gratitude of the family elders, the once-powerful Tzompantli family lost its esteemed clan leader, many warriors, and control over Tzompantli City, splitting into four nominal 'Glory families.'

To mediate the land inheritance disputes among the four new clan leaders, the High Priesthood, following the king's decree, sent an arbitration priest to the Tzompantli City-State. This new Fourth Level Chief Priest was Tonaya, the nephew of Elder Priest Tonaltliu, who once managed the Temple of the Sun.

"Divine King's decree: Fourth Level Chief Priest Tonaya shall serve as the arbitrating judge of the Mexica General Parish, to protect every revered Divine Bloodline according to the religious laws compiled by the High Priesthood, and to fairly uphold the status of every noble and the deserved benefits blessed by the Chief Divine..."

The Temple of the Sun lineage holds a revered position within the Alliance and has befriended many great nobles for generations. The disputes among the four clan leaders indeed required a higher king's judgment. The nobles had no choice but to accept this decree. Soon after, Chief Priest Tonaya arrived in Tzompantli City and made decisive arbitration on the interests and demands of the new clan leaders. He also strongly ensured the arbitration's execution, relying on the supreme authority of the royal family and the High Priesthood!

As a result, in the Tzompantli City-State in the western part of the Alliance, besides the original Third Level City-State High Priest, there was now an actual highest judge. This judge could not only adjudicate disputes over noble interests but also decide on the domestic affairs of great nobles!

Facing such a significant new position as "Arbitration Priest," the great nobles with real power in the city-states across the Alliance, if they had any insight, felt quite anxious and uneasy.

As controllers of their respective city-states and towns, the great nobles naturally enjoyed privileges superior to the lesser nobles in terms of tax tribute, farmland and orchard rights, samurai maintenance, and even canal distribution. In other words, due to the differences in status and power, an inherent conflict of interest existed between the great and lesser nobles within states!

"Whew! Tribute of the fief, the samurai of the nobles, inheritance of family rank, even daily enjoyments, all cannot be determined independently... The sacred Jaguar is so eagerly revealing its intentions, making it harder for the nobles with each passing day... The Alliance will be more tumultuous from now on!..."

Elder Izel lowered his head and body, his face full of respect, his mind swirling with thoughts until the ceremony concluded.

King Aweit, holding the Divine Staff, descended step by step from the Divine Platform, embraced by the Twelve Elder Priests as he entered the expanded Main God Temple. His mouth gradually curved into a smile. Within the temple, new murals were completed, depicting the Jaguar perched on the mountain peak, dominating the prostrating pack of wolves as the Divine King atop the Great Temple oversaw all tribes!

With the spring farming festival concluded, the crowd in the central square dispersed. The Alliance's great nobles began to lead their familial warriors away in a chaotic exit. Elder Izel, with his head lowered, left, but after taking a few steps, a silent figure unexpectedly approached, extending an invitation with a smile.

"Praise the Chief Divine! Honorable Elder of the mountains, the spring farming festival has ended, and the nobles of various states will soon return. Before leaving the capital, there will be a banquet in the Reed Manor to pray to the Goddess of Spring... If you are not too busy, why not join us?"

"Ah?"

Elder Izel turned his head and found the familiar Reed Chief Xintle. He paused, his heart suddenly leaping, his eyes flashing for a moment before he nodded slowly.

"Praise the Chief Divine! Honorable Reed Chief, I would be delighted to join you. Perhaps we could invite some more friends..."

Upon hearing this, Reed Chief Xintle raised his eyebrows, staring into Izel's eyes. After a moment, he smiled sincerely and gently nodded.

"The Chief Divine's blessing! Very well~"

Chapter 1125: The Wolves' First Secret Council

The spring sun floats in the sky, and the lake breeze is leisurely. The birds are singing, and the flowers have just begun to bloom. It is the perfect time in late spring, an ideal day for the nobility to go out. In

the southwest corner of the Lake Capital City, there is a small manor with little human activity and a tranquil environment, where the nobility can rest when they go out. Outside the manor, green reeds sway, and a few small boats are moored at the nearby dock.

At this moment, outside a stone hall in the manor, dozens of noble samurai wearing different leather armor were cautiously vigilant. Several great nobles wearing light robes and feather crowns were seated inside the stone hall, drinking tequila and discussing angrily.

"...The Era of Divine Spirits creating five suns! Each city-state is like an independent wolf pack, existing in a jungle-like order. The subordinate wolves must obey the Wolf King's guidance. And the Wolf Kings from different places lead the packs to follow the highest Jaguar King. The order between heaven and earth is clear, and the hills remain independent. This is the unchanging rule for thousands of years!"

Clan Leader Pachjo of the Strait Gold Clan drank the tequila in one go, widened his eyes, and stood up. He looked around at those present, raising his arms to express his anger and fear.

"Now, the King and the High Priesthood have united, interfering with the autonomy of the nobility of various states, overturning old rules! It is like a Jaguar entering a wolf pack, disrupting the unity of each pack and inciting the subordinate wolves to fight against the leading Wolf King! Such a vicious plan might not be the intention of the King and the Elder Priests, but perhaps comes from the ruthless Chief Intelligence Officer!"

"Exactly! The order of the world is changing, and the hierarchy of the Alliance overturned. Despicable people are like dark clouds covering the sky, and there is no longer an impartial and eternal Sun!"

In front of several familiar great nobles, Clan Leader Xintle of the Reed Clan sighed deeply and expressed his concerns.

"The Royal Family centralizes its greedy tiger claws, rapidly grabbing towards various city-states, seizing tributes, population, and warriors all at once! They treat the great nobles who share the same fate with the kingdom as light feathers! I fear this is not the will of the Chief Divine but a temptation from underground demons..."

"Hush! Don't speak recklessly. Clan Leader Xintle, you are drunk!"

Clan Leader Huitzilihuitl of the Spruce Clan appeared uneasy, showing signs of anxiety. He well knew the terror of the royal Secret Guard and was unwilling to revile the Chief Intelligence Officer, who controls the Secret Guard in the Lake Capital City, as a villain or demon. He glanced at the drinking crowd, lowered his voice, and cautiously advised.

"In any case, King Aweit conquers every tribe under heaven and is invincible; he is the Supreme Divine King! In recent years, under the Divine King's guidance, the Alliance has grown stronger. We Mexica have already become the ruling tribe worldwide, and all of you honorable nobility stand above the Divine Descendants, sharing the glory of the Chief Divine! ... This is all the Divine King's merit, even surpassing previous Predecessor Monarchs..."

"Huitzilihuitl of the Spruce Clan, you are also an honorable nobility of Tzompantli City! Watching the neighboring Tzompantli Family split into four, with an additional Chief Priest presiding over them... oh, what the future holds! Haha!..."

Clan Leader Pachjo of the Strait Gold Clan drank another cup, his face slightly flushed. He glared at Clan Leader Huitzilihuitl of the Spruce, shouting loudly again.

"Huitzilihuitl, I don't believe you have no thoughts! If I remember correctly, your legitimate wife has given you three grown children... Don't you also fear that after you die, the Spruce Family will be split into three?"

Upon hearing these probing questions, Huitzilihuitl's face darkened. He drank water to hide his unease. What really happened to Clan Leader Iztico of the Tzompantli Family? What is the King's true attitude toward powerful great nobles? ... As someone who was once involved, he knew the details all too well.

Before he controlled the Tzompantli Army, he could collaborate with the Royal Family without hesitation to plot against Iztico and seize city-state power. But now that he's grasped real power over the city-state, his seat naturally lies with the representatives of each state, instinctively resisting the Royal Family's centralization!

"Oh, praise the Chief Divine! Revered King Aweit, like a Divine Eagle leading us! His divine gaze was supposed to watch over the enemy tribes under heaven, not to be diverted by the trifling family affairs of local nobility."

Clan Leader Izel of the Mountains looked up, gripping the Sun Amulet around his neck, praising the King for a moment. Then he lowered his voice, looking at the others, and cautiously asked.

"Perhaps we can invite an elder from the Royal Family to appeal on behalf of the nobility in various places... such as the revered new Chief Minister, Elder Cacamatzin?"

"Elder Cacamatzin is kind-hearted and very friendly with the great nobility of various states. But he never meddles in politics and will not oppose the King's will."

Elder Mitou of the Yu Yan Clan shook his head, speaking for the first time at the banquet. The Yu Yan Family ruled the Sun City of Tonatico, in effect a branch of the Mexican Royal Family locally. At this moment, Clan Leader Mixcoatl of the Yu Yan Family was still leading the Yu Yan Corps, stationed in the Southern Army. And when Elder Mitou came to the banquet, he never expected to encounter such a situation.

"The real power great nobles of the Alliance, the representatives of each state, all complain in unison, dissatisfied with King Aweit's governance... Alas! Indeed, it's too oppressive."

Hearing the complaints of the great nobility, Elder Mitou pursed his lips, feeling both shocked and worried. The fundamental reason for his visit to the Capital City was the sensation caused by the Tzompantli Family's division into four, which considerably affected the Yu Yan Family.

Clan Leader Mixcoatl of the Yu Yan Family was actually the child of the Predecessor Monarch Asayacatl and the Female Chief of Tonatico. And the elders, including Elder Mitou, belonged to the maternal side.

Therefore, Prince Montezuma II is Mixcoatl's half-brother. This is a potential succession crisis, especially since not long ago, Prince Montezuma II formally married Mixcoatl's half-sister, gaining full inheritance rights over the Yu Yan Family!

"If the Royal Family central takes this as an excuse to split the Yu Yan Family, or if Clan Leader Mixcoatl meets with an accident during a campaign, the family's future and the city's governance might be..."

Carrying the elders' authorization, Elder Mitou hurriedly came to the Lake Capital City, wanting to communicate with the Royal Family central using his status as a royal branch to obtain the King's promise and clarify the future heir for the family.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the King's decree to the nobility is like a stone falling into the water, not only splashing up countless droplets but also frightening the birds by the lake! And when such stones keep falling, who can sit idly by?"

Reed Clan Chief Xintle's expression became solemn. As a landlord, after a brief pause, he once again guided the conversation of the banquet, discussing the most important inheritance disputes.

"Last month, some elder members of the great nobility formed an alliance and sent an elder to the High Priesthood with a petition, making the most sincere suggestion: 'Since the first predecessor monarch Acamapichtli, the inheritance of the great nobility has always been decided internally by the council of elders within the family! In the 160 years since the founding of the Lake Capital City Tloquiditlan, the royal family has never intervened in the local nobility inheritance practices...'"

"I also heard about this! The High Priesthood rejected the noble's suggestion, and they responded..."

Strait Gold Clan Chief Pachjo flushed red with suppressed anger and recounted in a deep voice.

"In the history of the Alliance, there have been two instances of the King's decision establishing instances of noble successors. The Chief Divine bestowed divine revelation, elders established doctrines precisely to regulate the order among nobility and protect the rights of nobility, both large and small! The newly established arbitration chief priest will not actively interfere in the family affairs of the nobility. Unless an heir encounters darkness as deep as the moon and injustice and actively invites arbitration for the sacred sun to dispel the darkness..."

"Listen to this! What is this about? This stirs our progeny, causing the fledgling eagles to slaughter each other, disregarding the family heritage, smashing the household's pots to pieces!"

Upon hearing this, the young Mountain Clan Chief Izel's expression changed, and he felt a strong sense of dissatisfaction.

As a humble bastard, he first delayed in secret, watched his brother being killed, then conspired with the chief intelligence officer to send his father to the Divine Kingdom, finally ascending to the position of Mountain Clan Chief. He knows better than anyone the fervent desire of suppressed heirs, how they might resort to any means to seize inheritance rights within arm's reach using external forces!

"If the royal family intervenes in inheritance, heirs equally divide the family. Once such a precedent is set, the honorable nobility will likely have no peace ever again! Sibling rivalry will also bring filth..."

Mountain Clan Chief Izel closed his eyes, sighed long and low, and gently echoed.

Despite climbing his way up by stepping over the corpses of his kin, he never wished for his descendants to undergo the same scenario. Among all the great nobility present, he is the one who longs the most for brotherly harmony and fatherly compassion, for that is what he sought but never achieved since childhood.

"Ahem! The division of the Tzompantli Family should be an exception. The wise King Aweit's aspiration is for the world and to conquer the four corners! He certainly will not abuse the power of the Divine King, repeatedly crossing the bottom line of the great nobility."

Seeing the discussion veering toward danger, Yu Yan Elder Mitou had to step in, smiling to round off the tense atmosphere.

"At this very moment, His Highness Xiulote is leading three legions from the Southern City-States, besieging the last fort of the Telascallans and campaigning against the rebellious Totonac people. The territory of the Alliance is about to expand once again, and the hundred-year-old enemy will shed its last drop of blood... Let us raise our glasses to celebrate His Highness, the King, and the Chief Divine!"

"To His Highness, the King, the Chief Divine!"

Leaders of the City-States looked at each other, their expressions changing, all smiling as they raised their glasses to celebrate. Spruce Clan Chief Huitzilihuitl's eyes glittered, his round face smiled, full of sincerity.

"I heard that once the last Cloud Serpent Fortress of the Telascalans falls, the Telascula Four States will be reassigned to the nobles of various states in the Alliance, with His Highness Chimalpahin as King! You have seen in this eastern campaign how fertile the Trascal Basin is!... The generous King has already promised to exchange double the Four States' territory for nobles willing to relocate!"

Upon hearing this, everyone's expressions shifted, thoughts flickering in their minds. Reed Clan Chief Xintle thought about it, then smiled and asked.

"Oh? Yunshan Huitzilihuitl, are you planning to relocate to Trascal Land?"

"Indeed! Following His Highness, pioneering towards the Eastern fertile lands, expanding our Mexica city-states, is precisely the Chief Divine's guidance!"

Spruce Clan Chief Huitzilihuitl gestured with his hand, drawing a sacred "☉" character. In Tzompantli City, the Spruce Family long stood beneath the Tzompantli Family, the territory and population they controlled were not considered the largest. His control over the Tzompantli regiment was far from adequate, not able to command it as smoothly as the deceased Xochitl.

"Therefore, as long as the price is right, it is not a pity to abandon everything in Tzompantli City and relocate to the Eastern fertile lands!"

Currently, the royal family's central directly controlled territory has expanded around Western Tzompantli City. Huitzilihuitl assessed the situation and decided long ago to sell out other nobles in the city-state, handing Tzompantli City to the royal family. Of course, the condition is to receive ample territory compensation and a promise of independent family inheritance.

"By the Chief Divine's blessings! We shall continue to march towards victory, ruling over tribes across the world! Come, come, drink, drink, savor this Tequila that has been treasured for over ten years in the Tree Snake City Royal Palace!"

After understanding the Spruce Clan Chief's relocation plans, Reed Clan Chief Xintle's eyes flashed, and he stopped pursuing the earlier topic. He exchanged glances with Strait Gold Clan Chief, then looked at Mountain Clan Chief, smiled, raised his glass, and drank heartily with everyone. Then, he clapped his hands and loudly ordered the guards.

"With fine wine, how can there be no beauty? Come, let the noble ladies of Tlaxcala, with snake-like bodies, perform the close-bodied Cloud Serpent dance for the esteemed Mexica Fierce Tigers!"

Chapter 1126: The Wolves in Chaos, the Fierce Tiger's Weakness

"Ding-a-ling~~"

Soon, the soft ringing of bells filled the air, a fragrant breeze swept through, instantly transforming the atmosphere in the Stone Hall, adding a touch of ambiguity and allure.

Over twenty young and graceful serpentine figures, wearing only silver hand and ankle bracelets, approached the seated members of the Great Nobility. On their exquisite faces were expressions that were either cold, passionate, fearful, resentful, unyielding, or compliant. At this moment, regardless of their willingness, they danced earnestly, trying to please the Mexica nobility who had conquered them.

"Offering the Divine Descendants of our sworn enemies, enjoying their wives and daughters, this is the exhilaration of victory and conquest! As long as the Divine King leads us to one victory after another, the Fierce Tigers of the Mexica will always bow their heads, following the King's orders! No matter how stringent those orders might be..."

The Mountain Clan Leader Izel stroked his chin, a heavy expression on his face, lost in thought. Yet, in just a few breaths, his chin and the back of his hand were caressed by a slippery and warm touch. Soft breathing gradually moved downward, as did the warmth and slickness. The young Mountain Clan Leader suddenly shivered all over, his palm tightened, and his body swayed slightly.

"Haha! We Mexica value abstinence the most, emphasizing endurance and restraint! And now, it's the Cloud Serpent of the enemy challenging the Warriors of the Alliance, seeking the weakness of the Fierce Tiger!"

The Reed Clan Chief Xintle laughed aloud, tearing off his robe to reveal the tattoo of a tiger among the reeds on his chest. Soon, four fragrant and warm serpentine figures encircled the nebulous tiger body, wrapping, binding, and biting intermittently.

"Roar! I want to see which Fierce Tiger today can sit atop the tiger body, gritting his teeth unmoved, withstand the longest test of the Cloud Serpent, and win the glorious victory witnessed by the Chief Divine!"

Upon hearing this, the Great Hall instantly fell silent, leaving only the tinkling of the silver bells and the low, enchanting breaths. Several members of the Great Nobility gritted their teeth in endurance, sitting as straight as they could, trying not to move. Meanwhile, the soft serpentine figures delved deeper, continuously probing, searching for the weakness of the Fierce Tiger.

"The Jaguar has dominion over the Kingdom, sitting high on the Throne of the Gods, never fearing the provocation of the Cloud Serpent... So, what exactly is the weakness of the Mexica Fierce Tiger?"

Mountain Clan Leader Izel lowered his eyes, trying hard to divert his thoughts from the burning sensations and fragrant allure. At this moment, his senses were sharper than ever, alienated from reality, pondering those he should not think of.

"The Fierce Tiger's weakness... Is it age?... "

"Cough! Such pleasures for the middle-aged are not meant for an old man like me to enjoy."

A moment later, the Elder Yu Yan Mitou shook his head, the first to struggle and stand up from the serpentine figures. His robe had been half-torn away, revealing his still robust body.

The nobles of the Alliance, unlike the decayed nobility of Cholula, maintain a tradition of military training from youth to old age. Despite being over fifty, Elder Mitou's body was still strong, able to respond normally. However, at his age, he cherished his body more, fearing death, unwilling to squander it like the young. Thus, Elder Mitou stayed only for a brief moment before rising to take his leave.

"Even over fifty, still a strong Fierce Tiger. King Aweit is scarcely over forty... Age is not a weakness!..."

Mountain Clan Leader Izel shook his head, glancing lightly at a mature noble lady serving beside him. The lady was noble and elegant, of quite an age. While she exuded an aura of maturity, her eyes carried signs of inevitable wear.

Such noble lady captives were most beloved and even obsessed over by the lesser nobility and Samurai. But Izel had been a Great Nobility of the Alliance for several years, long past the phase of youthful lust. At this moment, he was motionless, murmuring to himself.

"Then, the Fierce Tiger's weakness... Is it the children?"

The Great Hall was filled with the ringing of anklets, breathing, and the rustling whispers. The Great Nobility gritted their teeth in silence, their breathing growing heavier, and their eyes becoming fierce. Another quarter passed, yet faint shouts were heard from outside the hall.

"Father? Father? The Chief Divine granted me honor, you mustn't stop me! I must find my father, is he drunk?..."

Upon hearing the call from outside, Yunshan Clan Chief Huitzilihuitl's expression changed, hurriedly standing up. He quickly donned his robe, covered his body, and apologized to those remaining.

"Ha, Chief Divine has witnessed! My eldest son is not yet of age, and hasn't seen such a scene of conquest and celebration. I must beg your leave!... Chief Xintle, thank you for today's hospitality, I will surely host a return banquet someday!"

"Haha! Huitzilihuitl, you truly cherish your eldest son! Already eighteen or nineteen, yet never exposed to jubilation, could it be you are grooming him to be a formidable Jaguar Warrior? ... Phew! Hiss!..."

Straight Gold Clan Leader Pachjo flushed red, laughing as he panted. Reed Clan Chief Xintle chuckled, nodding toward Yunshan Clan Chief. Huitzilihuitl hurriedly squeezed out of the Great Hall, and before exiting, he straightened his robe and hair before going to see his eldest son.

"Phew! I heard Yunshan Clan Chief Huitzilihuitl values his eldest son greatly, nurturing him meticulously. This time, he brought his son to the Capital City to participate in the ceremony, probably intending to have the King see him and strengthen their bond... After he goes to the Divine Kingdom, the place of Yunshan Clan Chief is certain to be passed to his eldest son... Hiss! Damn it, this biting Snake Woman!"

Straight Gold Clan Leader Pachjo trembled all over, nearly biting his tongue. Mountain Clan Leader Izel glanced over, then chuckled softly. Reed Clan Chief Xintle raised an eyebrow, waved his hand, and another young Snake Woman bowed her fine head, approaching the Mountain Clan Leader.

Chapter 1127: The Wolves in Chaos, the Fierce Tiger's Weakness (Part 2)

"Izel, your test is not enough, let's add more weight to your burden!"

"..."

Izel closed his eyes, ignoring the ups and downs of moist sensations, striving to pull his thoughts back on track.

"Huitzilihuitl values the eldest son to inherit the Spruce Family, and the King also values His Highness, to inherit the power of the Mexica Alliance. Although the little Highness is growing up day by day, His Highness's illustrious military achievements, commanding tens of thousands of troops, have already made him unshakable! His Highness's expeditions for the Alliance are also the King's greatest support. As long as the King remains sane, he won't rashly change the successor..."

"The Fierce Tiger's weakness isn't in the children! At least within a few years, even if there's such a trend, there's absolutely no such possibility!..."

Izel's thoughts floated, thinking of the divinely inspired His Highness Xiulote, he pursed his lips apprehensively. Xiulote was brave and resolute, sweeping away the Tarasco nobility, then waging war everywhere, without a single defeat. If such a figure were to inherit the Mexica Alliance, how much could the situation of the Great Nobility improve?

"His Highness is brave and valiant, while the King falls slightly short. So, is the Fierce Tiger's weakness... not being fierce enough?"

"Roar! Damn Snake Woman, I will make you know the power of the Mexica Fierce Tiger!"

The valiant Clan Leader of Strait Gold, Pachjo, let out a tiger roar, unable to withstand the fiery heat any longer, suddenly stood up. His eyes were red, his face flush, his whole body tensed, his long robe already disappeared, like a peeled corn.

"The valiant Fierce Tiger is taking on three alone!"

The strong Clan Leader of Strait Gold spread his arms, carrying two Snake Women on each shoulder, and holding one in his arms, displaying astonishing strength. Ignoring everything, he carried all three, striding into the inner chamber of the side hall. Then, the violent tiger roar overwhelmed all the murmurs, pouring into the ears of the last two.

"Hiss! Clan Leader Pachjo is indeed so brave! He is undeniably one of the top warriors in Strait Gold City-State!"

Clan Leader of Mountains, Izel, gasped, amazed, and praised. He had heard of Clan Leader Pachjo's reputation since childhood, knowing that the other was not only incredibly brave but also a strategic Commander-in-Chief. However, such a warrior general, in the presence of the not-so-brave King, could only submit humbly and obey orders.

"The Alliance is built on strength, with nobility advancing through military achievements, continuing for over a hundred years! Each City-State lacks not prominent Commanders-in-Chief, nor heroic warriors."

"Under the King, His Highness Xiulote is adept at leading the masses, Giant Bear Stanley is the bravest of the army. The old General Casal is a seasoned Commander-in-Chief, and Last Month Iskali is an extraordinary Warriors general. As for Dead Dog Chichimiqui and Hua Diaochirto, they are emerging Royal Army Commanders, both loyal and capable..."

Izel bowed his head, immersed in deep contemplation. He never had the courage or ambition to dare oppose the King, but the King forced him to think and find the Fierce Tiger's weakness.

"The Royal Family has brave generals and heroic warriors, each City-State has mighty figures and heroes to conquer the world for the King!... So, the Fierce Tiger's weakness isn't lacking bravery either. Because in most cases, he doesn't need to act personally..."

"Then, what exactly is the Fierce Tiger's weakness?"

Izel reached out, looking at the serving Snake Woman, stroking her tearful-like side face, mysteriously familiar. He suppressed the irritation and desire in his heart, looking towards the remaining Reed Clan Chief. Reed Clan Chief also gritted his teeth, staring at the persistently enduring Izel.

"You, go over! Serve him well, along with...!"

The Reed Clan Chief whispered a command, and a young, lovely Snake Woman crawled on the ground, slowly reaching Izel's front. She arrived at Izel's feet, looked up, smiled coquettishly at the young Clan Leader, and extended her tongue, licking her tender lips.

"Master... My sister and I, and also... will serve you..."

Hearing this, Izel paused. He looked at the familiar face of the Snake Woman, then turned his head, looking at the young face under his palm.

"Huh? Are they twin sisters?"

The Reed Clan Chief Xintle smiled, first nodding in confirmation, then softly shaking his head in amusement.

"Haha! Izel, they are Snake Women from the Glory family, the favorite wives and daughters of Oak Tree City Lord! I exchanged them with difficulty from my old friend Iskali..."

"Old friend Iskali?"

Upon hearing this, Izel's eyes flashed; he didn't know the Reed Clan Chief Xintle was friendly with the Royal Family's branching Iskali. However, the ancient Great Nobility inherited by the Kingdom all intermarried with various branches of noble family members, secretly maintaining connections. Although the royal nobles obeyed the King's command, they absolutely couldn't sever ties with the Great Nobility...

Izel's thoughts spun, vaguely grasping something, yet unclear. Until the sudden disorder of breath in his ears, he moved his expression, surprisingly speaking.

"Them? Wives and daughters?"

"Yes! It's them three..."

"Ah? Chief Divine!"

Izel widened his eyes, stunned for several moments, then came to realization. He reached out, swiftly grabbing the mature noble lady next to him, cupping her aggrieved face, staring into the evasive gaze.

"This! This appearance..."

A wave of heated warmth surged within Izel's heart, like flames erupting, devouring the remnants of his rationality. His eyes turned red, once again looking at the two kneeling girls, scrutinizing their faces.

"Ah! Truly, truly similar!... Three... three from the Glory family's wives and daughters!... Ah! Conquer! Conquer them! For the Chief Divine!"

A raging fire finally ignited the young Clan Leader of Mountains, turning him into a beast following instinct. He roared, completely losing self-control, pushing the mature noble lady to the ground before the two girls.

In the moment of losing reason, the last thought flashed in Izel's mind, yet it was enlightening, suddenly clear.

"Ah! I know! I understand!"

"The Fierce Tiger's weakness is the uncontrollable urge to conquer! The stronger he becomes, the more he desires to conquer, swelling until it exceeds the limits of endurance... Just like now!..."

"So that's it! I should always endure, always be submissive, waiting for that day to come! Then... roar! Roar roar!"

A low roar exploded in the Stone Hall. The Reed Clan Chief laughed heartily, revealing a victorious smile. He glanced amusedly at the lost Izel, then stood up, leaving with several obedient Snake Women.

"Haha! Truly young fellow, how can you possibly win against me in my Manor? Tsk tsk! The craving for conquest is truly the instinct of the Mexica Fierce Tiger. And on someone else's territory, unable to suppress his own instinct, the weakness is bound to be exposed! Haha!..."

A few red sparrows chirped, circled noisily on the roof, emitting "tweet tweet" calls. Yet a robust golden eagle spread its wings, suddenly descending from the sky. Amid the shrieks of frightened sparrows, the golden eagle swooped towards the lake, grabbing a big fish from the water. Then, it crooned twice disdainfully, glancing at the bird flock, before spiraling upward, flying toward the southwestern horizon~

#### Chapter 1128: Reed and Creeper Grass

The sky was clear as if washed, the lake surface mirrored, and the manor stood isolated by the shore, with tall and lush reeds. Two figures cloaked in shadows hid within the reeds by the lake, observing the happenings within the noble manor. When the golden eagle soared with a proud "yo yo" call, the two simultaneously looked up, watching the majestic bird silhouette fade into the distance, whispering softly.

"Praise the Chief Divine! What a magnificent golden eagle! Such a wide wingspan, such powerful presence, and not afraid of people at all!"

A young secret guard widened his eyes, exclaiming in admiration.

"Praise the Chief Divine! This golden eagle was raised by the Princess and is called the Divine Eagle Ahuehuete. Divine Eagle Ahuehuete loves to eat fish but seems a bit afraid of snakes..."

The older secret guard recalled with a smile.

"It's said to possess divinity, incredibly intelligent, able to recognize familiar people, and remember the location of its home. Even if released thousands of miles away, it can return to the Lake Capital City!"

"Oh, Chief Divine!"

The young secret guard gasped, eyes flickering.

"In the past three years, the Lake Region started training messenger pigeons. Could it be the inspiration brought by the Divine Eagle?"

"Yes! That was a suggestion from His Highness, said to be one of the divine revelations. However, despite raising hundreds of pigeons, only a handful can be trained to instinctively return. It takes time to perfect the training method for the messenger pigeons..."

Saying this, the older secret guard licked his lips, recalling the taste of roast pigeon. In recent years, they had eaten quite a few pigeons.

"Pigeons only fly back one way, returning to the Lake Capital City from hundreds of miles away. While flying messengers are quick, they're not reliable. If an eagle attacks or a Hunter shoots them, they're gone... It's hard to know when they'll really be useful."

"May the Chief Divine's protection be with us! We still rely on ourselves for truly reliable messengers."

The young secret guard nodded in agreement, speaking softly. Then, he squinted, gazing southwest, pondering aloud.

"The Princess isn't in the Capital City. The golden eagle was heading southwest, perhaps to... the Temple of the Sun on the Holy Mountain?"

"Damn it, stop speculating! The Princess's escort duties are arranged separately by His Majesty; we're forbidden to meddle as secret guards."

The older secret guard's expression turned serious, speaking coldly.

"Don't overthink it, just act as if you don't know! The focus now is to keep an eye on this noble manor and then report to Lady Snake..."

"Yes!"

The young secret guard pressed his lips tightly and nodded emphatically. The two fell silent, and tranquility returned to the reeds. Only occasionally did the croaks of frogs resound at the lakeside, waiting to hunt flying insects.

The golden eagle Ahuehuete spread its wings and soared, like lightning, quickly traversing seventy to eighty miles, arriving at the foot of the Alliance's Holy Mountain. The golden eagle circled the tall Temple twice with sharp "yo yo" cries, scanning the ground's mountain forest with its keen eyes, then suddenly brightened its gaze and fiercely swooped down!

With the sound of the whistling wind, it neared a hot spring on the ground, dropping the large fish from its claws. Then with a "swoosh," it landed on the ground, near a stone house by the hot spring.

"Yo! Yo!"

"Ahuehuete, you're back!"

A charming figure in red appeared from the stone house, with a radiant smile. She opened her arms and embraced Ahuehuete, rubbing its little head vigorously. Then eagerly, she pressed Ahuehuete to the ground, reaching for the message scroll on its hind leg.

"Let me see, what did he write in the letter. Oh, it seems to be a poem..."

Alisa's bright eyes opened wide as she unfurled the cotton paper scroll gently, familiar handwriting appearing before her, filled with a longing aroma.

"The reeds stand bright and lush, white dew congeals as frost. The one I miss stands across the water. I must go against the river to find her, regardless of the obstructed, long road. I must follow the river to find her, she's at the center of Lake Texcoco..."

Alisa read silently for a while, eyes gradually moistening. After a moment, she folded the letter carefully, placing it gently in her bosom, softly giggling.

"Oh my, what a mischievous monkey! Always writing such poems, unsettling the heart, yet unable to meet. It's been over a year and a half now, and even Xiu Hua is nine months old..."

Alisa muttered to herself for a while, smiling yet somewhat desolate. Ahuehuete tilted its head, watching its mistress's shifting emotions with a puzzled expression. After pondering for a moment, it extended a claw, nudging the caught fish closer to the lady in red.

"Yo! Yo!"

"What a cute little golden eagle. Wherever it flies, it always keeps me in mind."

Alisa's eyes sparkled as she glanced at the fish at her feet. She embraced Ahuehuete again, rubbing its head, and softly asked.

"Ahuehuete, your eyes are the sharpest, just returned from the military camp of Tree Snake City. Tell me, what's that naughty monkey doing? Is he okay? Have both Snake Cities fallen?... When will he come back? Is there someone taking care of him..."

"Yo! Yo!"

Ahuehuete blinked, then raised its head, crying out crisply twice.

"Everything's still fine! And who is the one accompanying him?..."

Alisa chuckled, seemingly able to understand. Releasing her grip, she turned and returned to the house. In a moment, she reappeared at the hot spring, dressed in a gossamer-thin white short gown, donning a delicate feather crown adorned with Chagel feathers.

Misty vapors rose from the hot spring, ethereal as if among the clouds. By the water, a spirit stretched, her reflection mirrored upon the lake, softly singing and dancing.

"The reeds stand bright and lush, white dew congeals as frost. The one I miss stands across the water. I wait at the river's upstream for him, no matter how slowly the days pass. I wait at the river's downstream for him, right in the center of Lake Texcoco... like a lotus waiting for a hummingbird, blooming only for it!..."

The gentle, melodious song floated along the lakeside. The breeze rose, swaying the reeds by the lake in a gentle accompaniment. A golden eagle perched by the shore, watching its lady by the water's edge, unable to comprehend her mood. It merely tilted its head, listening to the rising and falling song, observing the unfolding and retracting petals, as if soaring amidst the clouds.

"Wild grasses cover the outskirts, the chill dew is dense. A beautiful one, as serene as the morning light. She will encounter and meet with you, basking in the Divine Light, walking together through the long journey."

The song shifted smoothly, becoming another tune, also from a letter from Tree Snake City. Alisa stood on tiptoe, dancing the Mistec people's Dance of the Deer, adding numerous graceful moves. Her rhythm was gentler, her movements more fluid, like the "Cloud Deer" dance. Such exquisite dance flourished by the tranquil hot spring, without an audience, only a docile golden eagle.

"Yo! Yo!"

Ahuehete watched for a long time, issuing two clear calls. Then, its wings spread open, soaring high into the sky, circling above the hot spring, as if dancing alongside its mistress.

Alisa watched the clumsy dancing golden eagle, bursting into laughter, her dance growing even more joyous. A woman and an eagle danced together for quite some time until two clear cries suddenly resounded from the stone house nearby.

"Wah! Wah!..."

Chapter 1129: Xiu Hua's Mother, the Princess

The cry of a baby echoed within the stone house, and Alisa's expression instantly changed, her actions coming to a halt. She hurried into the house and came back holding a chubby baby.

"Oh, oh, oh! May the Chief Divine bless little Xiu Hua. Little Xiu Hua, don't cry. Mama will feed you..."

Alisa, carefully cradling Xiu Hua, showed a gentle maternal glow on her face. The lively and carefree girl vanished, replaced by the graceful and serene presence of a young mother. She unbuttoned her short dress and brought little Xiu Hua to her chest, her brow gently raised, letting out a soft hum.

Once a pure spirit moving between the clouds and flowers, it was only upon becoming a mother that she gradually transformed into the dignified image of the Earth Mother Goddess. Two maids hurried over to assist on either side, naturally displaying respect on their faces.

"Praise the Chief Divine! What a strong Divine Son!"

"Yes! Look at how he sucks the milk, so strong, like a divine little Jaguar!"

At this, Alisa blushed. She gazed at little Xiu Hua, who was sucking vigorously, gently stroking his wrinkled, rosy face, which resembled Xiulote's in his childhood.

"Oh dear! Indeed, just like your father, so vigorous in eating..."

Feeding her child, Alisa's cheeks flushed hot, lost in thought. Only when Xiu Hua had eaten his fill, did he open his round eyes silently. Alisa, carrying the child, returned inside and sang a lullaby.

"The child on the earth, in the mother's arms, grows healthily. He will grow tall like the Cocoa Tree, will be strong like the prickly pear, will be robust like the Jaguar, will soar high like the Divine Eagle...chasing after the sun, his father..."

The pure singing carried warmth, with an undertone of expectation and resolve. Little Xiu Hua, in Alisa's embrace, slowly fell asleep, letting out adorable snores. Alisa held him quietly for a while, until her arms ached, then laid him onto a small wooden bed filled with cotton cloth.

"Praise the Chief Divine! For giving me a strong child. Please bless him to grow up..."

Alisa prayed silently for a while, then turned her head and gave a stern look to the maid. The maid nodded quickly, indicating she would stay by the little Highness's side at all times.

Only then did Alisa leave the stone house and enter the adjacent wooden house. With a pharmacist's skill, she expertly prepared a cup of invigorating herbal tea. Then, she spread out a sheet of durable tree bark paper, picked up a quill, and began to reply to Xiulote.

"Xiulote, I have received your letter. I was so happy that I danced two dances by the lake, both newly choreographed ones I want to show you. You mischievous monkey, you surely won't be able to resist... Xiu Hua is very healthy and spirited, looking just like you did when you were young..."

The young mother, with a smile, wrote about everyday matters and then, with a few simple strokes, drew a picture. The small drawing depicted a tiny baby nestled in a small woman's arms, with the woman holding the baby, leaning against a slightly larger man's shoulder. After some thought, she added three stars above them.

Alisa examined her little drawing, nodding in satisfaction. Then, she unfolded another sheet of bark paper, her expression turning serious.

"...Father has ascended to supremacy. The High Priesthood of the Capital City has all bowed before him. Several decrees have been issued in the Royal Palace, reducing the power of the Great Nobility—tributes, population, samurai, inheritance rights... Father's determination to consolidate power is unwavering. All the alliances within 240 miles of the Lake Capital City are to be gradually brought under direct control."

"In the past few months, several elders of the Royal Family have petitioned the King, and older noble ladies from various regions have lamented throughout the Capital City. Father has been indifferent, but the royal nobles are in some disorder. I don't understand much about these state affairs, but it's evident that the nobility is becoming unsettled. The Immortal Elder has passed away, and Father's prestige is still far from that. He can only suppress the alliance with force..."

Writing here, Alisa felt a bit concerned. She sighed, drawing a tall Divine Tree beneath which lay a field of corn. Flames flickered on the corn.

"I always feel Father is being too hasty. Xiulote, as you said, small flames can also ignite a large tree. And around him, the only one who can continuously support him is you..."

Alisa paused her pen, stayed silent for a while, and then wrote about the recent significant events in the Capital City.

"Recently, the young Montezuma II has just married the daughter of the Yuyan Family. The Silver Raven Tribe of the Vastec also sent their daughter to betroth Little Quetelawak. As for the enfeoffment of Little Chimalpahin, the High Priesthood and the royal nobles have reached an agreement. A large number of nobles will be reappointed to the Trascal Land in the East, especially those from the western Three States—Tzompantli City, Gold Mountain City, and Sun City..."

"Father is recruiting samurai in the Capital, replenishing the depleted royal legions, and promoting many generals of lesser nobility and commoner samurai origin. With a large influx of eastern spoils of war into the Capital, the sales of Lake Gem have doubled. The priests of the Goddess of Spring said that the slave markets in the Capital are crowded, and various luxurious indulgences are popular... but food is somewhat tight in the Capital, and the price of corn cakes is rising..."

Stopping here, Alisa lowered her eyes, pondered for quite some time, her expression becoming solemn. After a moment, she wrote down a wife's yearning and blessing at the end of the letter.

"Xiulote, my only love. You are the tall Divine Tree, and I am the twining vine. The Chief Divine will protect you, standing tall on the Eastern Divine Mountain! May you return victorious soon; the dewy flowers and newborn trees are waiting for you..."

Alisa took the letter and gently left a lipstick kiss on the blank side. Then, she laid down her pen, summoned a maid, and whispered an instruction.

"Go, invite the esteemed Priestess Aqiya in charge of the nearby Temple of the Goddess of Spring."

"As you command, Princess."

The maid turned and hurried away. Around the Holy Mountain, there is not only an ancient Temple of the Sun God but also a major temple of the Goddess of Spring. The temples of the Goddess of Spring are traditionally managed by the line of the priestesses. In each City-State, there are numerous temples and sacrificial altars dedicated to the Goddess, even more than the Rain God Temple.

Although there is no representative Elder Priest among the High Priesthood from the line of the Goddess Priestesses, their relationship with the Royal Family is always intimate, and their influence among the samurai is remarkably significant.

Because, according to the Alliance's traditions and teachings, adulterers are punished by death, and the open existence of prostitutes is not allowed. The only ones that can provide daily pleasure for the samurai are the priestesses from various temples...

"Praise the Supreme Main God! Aqiya greets you, esteemed Princess Alisa!"

A few quarters later, a priestess in her thirties appeared in the stone house with a sincere smile. She wore a vibrant cloak, her arms and legs adorned with gemstone-inlaid bands, and inside she wore only a scant garment for modesty. She bowed her head in greeting to the esteemed princess, revealing a startling voluptuousness that made Alisa raise her eyebrows.

"Also, greetings to the esteemed spirit of light, Your Grace Xiu Hua!"

Aqiya's eyes flickered as she turned slightly to bow towards the stone house where Xiu Hua resided. After completing these courtesies, she then lifted her head to look at the solemn and silent Princess Alisa.

"Esteemed princess, may I know why you've summoned me... is there something you need me to do?"

"Yes. Aqiya, I not only need you, but I also need the priestesses of the Goddess of Spring to join me in accomplishing a certain task!"

Alisa spoke gently, yet there was a trace of fierceness in her demeanor. With both her father and husband being supreme kings, she had been influenced by their presence, gradually transforming from a

pure magnolia into a dignified dahlia. At this moment, though seated on a low wooden stool in a stone house, she exuded the aura of being seated high in a temple.

"Upon return from the eastern campaign, many warriors in the capital suffered casualties. Compensation has been issued, yet the absence of a man in the household inevitably brings hardship. A large influx of war spoils has flooded the capital, and the prices of corn and squash have risen by more than half..."

"Aqiya, I will provide a substantial amount of lake gems and cotton cloth to exchange for food and resources, to additionally compensate the fallen capital warriors, and to relieve the women, children, and the elderly in various communities. These need to reach the families of the warriors and the community women and children, and I rely on the help of you priestesses of the Goddess!"

Upon hearing this, Priestess Aqiya was taken aback. She looked at Alisa closely, surprised by her earnest expression, then smiled and said.

"Esteemed princess, is this the king's decree, or His Highness Xiulote's directive?"

"No, it is my directive."

With a bright gaze and resolute eyes, Alisa's expression carried a hint of majesty. Since the birth of Xiu Hua, she had felt a greater responsibility, which constantly guided her transformation.

"...I will obey you, esteemed princess. You are the morning star, hanging high in the night sky, bridging the God of Death and the Sun!"

A few breaths later, Priestess Aqiya pursed her lips and respectfully lowered her head, accepting the command. Strictly speaking, in the capital, Princess Alisa's status was surpassed by only a few people. With the lucrative gemstone trade at her disposal and personnel from both the king and His Highness, she had position, wealth, and manpower to accomplish tasks, significant tasks. Now, as the princess decided to wield her authority to do something legitimate and substantial, there were truly few who would dare to refuse her in person.

Priestess Aqiya bowed, and Princess Alisa accepted the courtesy with composure. Watching her father and husband, she earnestly admonished.

"Aqiya, this is the first time I am working with the priestesses of the Goddess. I will be appointing people to oversee and thoroughly inspect the distribution... Do not disappoint me!"

"...The sect of priestesses will work tirelessly to fulfill your command, never defying it. We are far more frugal than the chief god priests of the various states!"

With a calm smile, Priestess Aqiya answered solemnly. Alisa nodded in agreement and spoke no more. She would naturally assign her trusted aides to take responsibility and coordinate the specific matters.

The two continued their conversation for a while, agreeing to gather a few days later at the temple of the Goddess of Spring for blessings. At that time, the elder priestesses of the Goddess of Spring would convene in the temple to meet with the princess. Before leaving, Priestess Aqiya hesitated for a moment, then inquired.

"Princess, this round of compensation and relief, will it be in the name of the king or His Highness, or in your name?"

Alisa's bright eyes flickered with thought, perceiving subtleties. After a moment, she smiled and shook her head, making a decision.

"Neither, neither is good. Let it be... in the name of little Xiu Hua!"

"As you wish! The princess is wise."

Priestess Aqiya once again bowed, respectfully taking her leave. Alisa watched Aqiya's retreating figure, her gaze radiant like a flower experiencing fresh dew for the first time, invigorated in spirit.

"Perhaps, I can do more. For my Xiulote, and even more for my son...."

"Wah! Wah!..."

The clear cry sounded again from a nearby stone house. Alisa's demeanor shifted into disarray, the princess's authority disappearing in an instant. She hurriedly and messily rushed next door, not even having time to change shoes. Meanwhile, a cup of prepared herbal tea sat quietly on the table, beside a rolled-up letter and a neatly folded short garment, still carrying its fragrance.

#### Chapter 1130: Zicao Harbor, Return and Journey Forth

In late May, it was the busiest season of spring. Zuvaro led the returning fleet of merchant ships, finally sailing into Atoyac Lake, and docking at Zicao Port, south of Zicao City. The Southern Shipbuilding Department occupied the port's rear side, with hundreds of shipwrights inside and outside the shipyard constructing ships, while even more civilians moved large timber and planks under the command of shipwrights.

"Praise the Chief Divine! After four to five months, we finally returned to the port of departure!"

Zuvaro stepped onto the dock and watched the busy scenes of the shipyard for a while, showing surprise on his face.

"One hand, two hands... there are ten tens-longships of dozens of tons being built at the same time? Oh, that finished longship, with Copper Beasts placed both fore and aft, are they Rain Divine's Tiger Squat Cannons?"

People came and went on the dock, each running about, with no one answering Zuvaro's question. But there was no doubt that the Southern Shipyard of the Kingdom was frantically building the expedition longships at any cost.

Zuvaro sniffed and smelled the smoky aroma of burnt fields, as if he could smell the fervent scent of war. He looked far out into the fields, where thousands of agricultural slaves from Tlaxcala were busy in the vast farmland. Looking toward the port, a fleet returning with grain from upstream was under the watchful shout of Prepecha Warriors, escorting hundreds of Totonac war prisoners ashore.

Several newly built oar-sailed longships not only carried Tiger Squat Cannons but also loaded with numerous short and stout Bronze Heavy Cannons, while being personally led downstream toward the East by Mexica Priests.

"Ah! With such a wide barrel, what weight of stone bullets do you need to fire?! Priest Mickey, where are these going? To the Eastern battlefield?"

Soon, Second Level Divine Revelation Priest Mickey came hurriedly from the shipyard. Zuvaro stepped forward to welcome him, unable to refrain from asking. As a priest graduated from Divine Power University, he understood a simple truth: the wider the barrel, the larger the stone bullets fired, and thus the greater the firearm's power. And on the longship, the new short and stout Copper Cannons had barrels that could fit stone bullets the size of a human head. That power in the blast...

"Zuvaro Priest, that was newly built last month, intended for delivery to Your Majesty's army! The Mortar Cannon's barrel is a full seven or eight inches, capable of firing thirty-pound stone bullets. Once these heavy guns arrive, the last two fortresses of the Telascalans will also fall soon!"

Divine Revelation Priest Mickey proudly explained a few sentences with a smile. Then, he solemnly looked at Zuvaro behind the merchant fleet and asked calmly.

"Chief Divine's blessing! On this northern expedition, did you bring back the guano and coal the Divine Revelation Place specifically requested?"

"Chief Divine's blessing! The fleet brought back thirty tons of guano. I tasted it; it is indeed salty, astringent, and bitter, matching the description of the kingdom's exploration team and Your Majesty."

"Only thirty tons?"

Upon hearing this number, Divine Revelation Priest Mickey slightly furrowed his brows. The farmland area is so vast; at least 50 jin must be spread per acre. Thirty tons of guano sounds a lot, but in reality, it's only enough for a little over a thousand acres.

"Time is tight, and we were understaffed, only mined this much. The fleet's cargo space is also quite limited... Actually, the best approach is to leave some personnel on the Bird Guano Stone Islands to establish a quarry settlement. Let the stonemasons mine for three to four months, just in time for the large fleet to go back and forth, to be taken away in one go."

"Hmm, makes sense! We can jointly sign and present this suggestion to Director Talaya of the Divine Revelation Place."

Divine Revelation Priest Mickey pondered for a moment, then smiled. Seeing that Mickey wanted to propose together with him, Zuwaro raised his brows, thought for a while, then nodded.

"Mickey, my friend, do you want to join the expedition too? At sea, the winds and waves are strong, and there might be attacks; it's indeed life-threatening!"

"Hmm. Sea exploration and trade, despite great risks, can be a shortcut for advancement! Zuwaro, as per the director's intentions, this batch of guano will be quickly ground and spread into selected hundreds of acres of fields. If the autumn harvest shows a significant increase, your credit for this expedition will be enough to elevate you one level!"

Zuwaro chuckled, nodded faintly. Mickey was right; leading a fleet to sea was indeed a shortcut for advancement.

In fact, he had also reached a trade agreement with the Torpan unit of the Huichol people, and drafted an ambitious plan for their subjugation. The Huichol and the Kingdom speak the same language, have similar cultures, and are rather combative. If this subjugation plan could be realized, as the bridge communicating with various Huichol units, he would truly ascend! For enough support, he must personally return to Lake Capital City and report face-to-face to Director Talaya of the Divine Revelation Place.

"Hmm?"

Divine Revelation Priest Mickey approached the fleet, swept over the covered baskets of grass on the ships, and a glimpse of golden light flashed. He squinted, pursed his lips, and deeply gazed at the somewhat tense sailors, saying nothing.

The fleet at sea brought back gold, silver, copper, and ore, with regulations to submit seventy percent, keeping thirty percent for the fleet. But in practice, strict management was challenging. Captains and sailors had significant leeway to earn excess profits. Reportedly, to encourage sea voyages, Your Majesty also tacitly allowed these covert operations.

Priest Mickey scanned for a while, frowned, and asked solemnly.

"Zuvaro, did you bring back only these few ships of coal?"

Hearing this, Zuvaro's smile froze on his face. He lowered his head somewhat awkwardly, lightly replied.

"During this voyage, I exchanged over forty tons of coal in various northern units. But when I docked at Trout Town, it was seized by the Divine Revelation Priests from Black Rock Mountain Iron Ore, who detained two-thirds. They said to smelt tough and durable good iron on the ore for Your Majesty to forge sharp and firm Divine Weapons, they must use the good coal brought from the North! They had Your Majesty's command, and I couldn't stop it..."

"Damn it! These guys from the military department dare to plunder the Shipyard's goods!"

The Divine Revelation Priest Miki gritted his teeth, muttered a few curses under his breath, yet was helpless. Among the various divisions of the Divine Revelation Place, the Shipbuilding Division held great power, with high priority for its affairs. However, the Military Supplies Division, which directly supplied the various legions with the ability to forge weapons, armor, and copper cannons, held an even greater influence. Among the divisions and bureaus, the only one that could rival the Military Supplies Division was the Special Trade Bureau, which, though not large in number, supported the entire kingdom's finances.

"Ah! These remaining bituminous coals need to be sent to the Special Trade Bureau. They've specifically asked for bituminous coals from the North, saying the firepower is extremely strong and it's needed for some very important firing process. It seems there's a problem that has troubled them for a long time, which they hope can be solved with higher firepower..."

Upon hearing the Special Trade Bureau's request, Zuvaro promptly nodded.

"Alright! I'll immediately arrange for the sailors to unload the bituminous coal. Our fleet relies on the lake gemstones provided by the Special Trade Bureau. Without these gemstones, the cost of overseas trade is unimaginable..."

"Apart from the lake gemstones, the next time we set sail, the Special Trade Bureau will also provide a batch of lake gemstone artifacts! Take some out and see what kind of price the noble chieftains along the northern coast will offer."

"Lake gemstone artifacts? What are those?"

"Well, just say they're small implements made of gemstones, imbued with the divinity of the gemstones, capable of communicating with the divine!"

"Huh? Such small implements, the various tribes in the wilderness might not... but the noble chieftains of the Northern and Southern Ticos certainly will love them dearly!"

"Indeed, these lake gemstone artifacts are also very much liked by the great nobles of the Alliance. Only those great nobles with long-standing traditions have such taste, able to offer corresponding value! Haha!"

At this point, the two Divine Revelation Priests exchanged glances and laughed understandingly. As priests involved in seafaring, they had seen tons of lake gemstones, naturally harboring some unspeakable speculations. After the laughter, Divine Revelation Priest Miki's expression turned solemn. Pondering for a moment, he still asked Zuvaro.

"Zuvaro, on your northward journey to the Capital City, will you personally meet with Director Talaya to report your sea voyages?"

"Hmm?"

Zuvaro's eyes moved, his heart becoming slightly wary.

"Praise the Chief Divine! I indeed plan to report the specifics of the sea voyage to Director Talaya, and I'll also write a report to Your Majesty..."

"May the Chief Divine witness! I heard a piece of news, which might be your opportunity, but you need to take me along..."

Divine Revelation Priest Miki bit his lip, focusing on the surprised eyes of Zuvaro, giving him a hint.

"Your Majesty once had a plan to send an exploration fleet along the western coast to explore southeastward! This exploration route would pass through the Mistec's coast, the Zapotecs' valley, and even the southern highlands of the Maya!..."

"Currently, ten longships of the Shipyard will be completed within months. The kingdom's exploration fleet has already gone to distant Cuba, and it's uncertain when they will return. At a time like this, if the Shipyard proposes revisiting this exploration plan, the best candidate for the role of Exploration Captain would be someone with seafaring experience..."

"Ah, exploring the Southeast! Who else but me could lead a new maritime exploration at a time like this!"

Upon hearing this, Zuvaro's eyes shone brightly, his face unable to suppress his excitement. He clearly understood what great merits lay behind this plan! Even if they couldn't make contact with the southern Maya, collecting enough intelligence from exploring the heartlands of the Mistec and Zapotec people for upcoming conquests would still be an extremely illustrious military achievement!

"Praise the Chief Divine! The fleet setting sail, exploring the Southeast..."

"Zuvaro!"

Divine Revelation Priest Miki reached out both hands, grasping his old friend's wrists. He looked into the other's excited eyes, repeating word by word.

"You need to take me along! You need the full support of the Shipyard to ensure the exploration plan gets approved as much as possible!"

"...Alright!"

Zuvaro tightly pressed his lips, was silent for a moment, then nodded heavily.

"May the Chief Divine witness! If the proposal goes through, we will board the longship together!"

"May the Chief Divine witness! I will persuade the priests within the Shipyard to fully support you!"

The two young Divine Revelation Priests locked eyes tightly for a moment, then once again laughed aloud. They turned together to face the southeastern coast, their eyes alight with the anticipation like the shimmering waves of the sea.