

## Civilization 1161

Chapter 1161: Second Kingdom Expedition, Traces of the Ciguayo, Bahamas

The clouds gathered at the edge of the sky, and the waves surged at the coast's edge. Cuba's unique blackbird, on the approaching storm's horizon, let out its last mating call. When the August hurricane sweeps in, the coastal lowlands will be flooded by unending rain and wind, and the Cuban blackbird's half-year breeding season will abruptly end in August.

The chirping of the birds was loud, circling endlessly. The seven longships of the Kingdom quietly anchored at the palm-covered cape. Here was the eastern end of Cuba Snake Island, while the Great Island of Haiti across the strait silently looked on from afar.

"Chief Divine's blessing! Such thick clouds, such large waves... I reckon, a storm capable of sweeping fish to their deaths is coming soon!"

Old Militia Chiwaco raised his head, gazing into the sky to the east of the coast, deeply furrowing his brows.

After drifting at sea for two or three years, he had become increasingly accustomed to the unpredictable power of the sea, developing a heartfelt awe. This terrifying Caribbean Sea was much more ferocious compared to the tranquil Western Sea coastline! The current situation was clearly a prelude to a great storm, likely to occur in the next two or three days.

"Priest Tomate, the fleet cannot stay here! We must set sail immediately, along the coast, heading to the northwest where the storm hasn't reached!"

"Ah! Chief Divine's blessing! The storm is about to arrive, what a pity..."

Priest Tomate stared at the sea and sky of the east in silence for a long time, letting out a gentle breath.

The prophecies of His Highness have all been verified, and there is no longer any doubt among the fleet. According to His Highness's prophecy, to the east of Cuba Snake Island lies another large, fertile island filled with jungles and rivers, as well as a series of small fertile islands extending to the southeast. Few days ago, from the mouths of the Guata Tribe chieftains, everyone learned that this wealthy great island indeed exists. The name of that large island is "Haiti."

"What a pity! This cape is probably the furthest point the fleet can reach to the east! Exploration and visits to the tribes of Haiti will have to wait for the future... what a pity!"

In Priest Tomate's eyes, there was deep regret. He still had a ship full of illustrated "Book of Ama Colley" that hadn't been delivered. But the terrifying storm encountered crossing Cuba was still vivid in the memories of the fleet. Now, neither the impending storm and waves nor the fatigued and weary morale of the troops allowed him to continue eastward.

"Praise the Chief Divine! His supreme glory will certainly shine brightly in the vast sky and sea under my fervent efforts!"

Priest Tomate clenched the Sun Amulet around his neck, praying loudly, making a sincere vow. Moments later, he no longer hesitated and turned his gaze toward the coast. The gentle Cuban coast was right here, sketched out by a palm tree-studded sandbank curving toward the northwest.

"The east wind rises, raise the sails!"

"The east wind rises, raise the sails!..."

"Turn towards the northwest, full speed ahead!"

"Turn towards the northwest, full speed ahead!..."

The resounding shouts rose from the flagship. Then, this command was transformed into conspicuous flag signals, instructing the surrounding longships.

"Chief Divine's blessing! His Highness's Divine Revelation!"

Priest Tomate straightened up and made an impassioned proclamation.

"After traveling eight thousand miles, the end of this journey is right before our eyes!... Set sail!"

"Praise the Chief Divine! Praise His Highness! Set sail!"

Upon hearing this, the sailors on the flagship raised their heads and shouted in unison. Then, with the strong east wind, the seven longships suddenly accelerated, sailing along Cuba's northern coast, heading towards unknown tribes.

With the aid of the wind, the fleet's speed suddenly increased, accelerating by more than double. In just one day, the exploration fleet sailed over 120 miles, reaching the first Great Tribe on the northern side of Cuba Snake Island, the Baracoa Marine Tribe.

According to convention, the fleet took a two-day break at the Marine Tribe, replenishing food and water, and also took the opportunity to preach the Chief Divine's teachings and prophecies. During the rest, old militia Chiwaco found Priest Tomate, looking somewhat serious.

"Something feels off!... Tomato Priest, the situation at the Marine Tribe seems off. We've visited so many Taino tribes, but it's only in this tribe that the villagers have such wary eyes! Um... the feeling I get, they seem like frightened bucks, bowing their heads, showing their antlers, and making threatening calls!"

"Chief Divine bear witness! Captain Chiwaco, you noticed it too! This Marine Tribe is indeed more vigilant than all previous tribes. Look, they even have over a hundred militia patrolling with Wooden Spears. And the fish ponds around the village are desolate, unkept..."

The two chatted briefly and grew even more convinced of their views. The old militia pondered for a while, then brought out the last two bottles of Tequila he'd cherished for a long time hidden onboard. The sociable Priest Tomate, carrying the fine liquor, went to meet the elder Chieftain of the local tribes. Not until after a simple banquet did Priest Tomate calmly return with new information.

"The Marine Tribe is indeed under threat! A Ciguayo Tribe's hunting tribe migrated to this area this year. According to local tribal descriptions, the Ciguayo are different from the Tai Nuo people, naturally fierce, with vicious expressions! They have dyed long hair, painted black tattoos, adept at rowing and hunting, wielding bows with poison arrows. They dislike farming on land, preferring to paddle in fleets, launching large-scale raids, even hunting enemy tribes for food!..."

"What? What are 'Cigar Oil People'? Sea predators rowing fleets and shooting poison arrows?"

Upon hearing this, a warlike expression appeared on Huitu Puapu's face. He patted the sharp bronze axe at his waist, confidently shouting.

"Where are these raiders? Let me take the samurai of the fleet and hack them all to death, piling their heads into mounds!"

Hearing Puapu's words, Priest Tomato raised an eyebrow. He remained calm and looked toward the old militia Chiwaco.

"Captain Chiwaco, what do you think?"

"Hmm... The Marine Tribe is also a large Tai Nuo tribe with at least two to three thousand tribespeople. Even if they are as weak as grass mice, once in numbers, they can also bite a jungle cat to death! Their situation, though threatened, is not urgent..."

Chiwaco thought for a moment, stroked his chin, and asked carefully.

"How many warriors does this raiding Ciguayo Tribe have?"

"According to the local chieftain, the Ciguayo people have sent out, at most, two to three hundred warriors at a time... It's estimated that the whole tribe has around a thousand people. If there were more, migration wouldn't be so easy."

Priest Tomato recalled for a moment, then smiled confidently and said.

"Blessings of the Chief Divine! With the strength of the fleet, as long as we don't disperse, encountering this Ciguayo people... defeating them should be an easy task! However, these rowing tribes move unpredictably, and catching them is not easy!"

"So, does the Marine Tribe know where the Ciguayo people's lair is?"

"The various Ciguayo tribes are most active on the northern side of Haiti Island, with dozens of large and small tribes. Their ancestors seem to have migrated from smaller islands further east... and this group of Ciguayo people mostly emerge from the northern sea. Their migration camps should be on the 'islands in the shallows', southeast of the 'Bahamas' island group!"

"Islands in the shallows, Bahamas?..."

Chiwaco squinted his eyes, looking towards the northern sea. He chewed over this obscure Taíno word, his expression subtly changing. After a while, he calmly said.

"Since the whereabouts of the Ciguayo people are hard to capture, and they have not actively attacked the fleet... then let's ignore them for now and continue west to find the great iron ore!"

"Ignore them and continue west?"

Priest Tomate was slightly taken aback, pondering. After a while, he spoke thoughtfully.

"With the Tai Nuo people's weak strength, even with several times the number advantage, they might not be able to defeat this group of Ciguayo people. If we ignore it and let this sea raider establish a foothold... perhaps more Ciguayo tribes will find it advantageous to migrate..."

Hearing this, the old militia's expression remained unchanged, and he asked calmly.

"So, has the local Marine Tribe asked our fleet for help?"

"No, they have not. The Tai Nuo people's Marine Tribe has known us for only two days. They still harbor wariness towards the fleet, let alone asking for help..."

"Then, has the local Marine Tribe converted to the Chief Divine?"

"Hmm... not quite. The chieftains all listened to my teachings and offered the Zemi God Card of the Chief Divine. But they only regard the Chief Divine as one of the many gods from a distant west, one among dozens of divine spirits..."

"In that case, then ignore it. Continue west!"

The old militia Chiwaco's expression became serious, making a decision. He looked around at the few leaders on the flagship, speaking meaningfully.

"Earned maize cakes do not smell as sweet; begged-for pumpkin mash does! The great iron ore marked on the map is not far from here... In my view, the emergence of this Ciguayo raider benefits the kingdom's foothold in this area, with no bad outcome!"

"Hmm? Only benefits, no drawbacks?... Chiwaco, you mean..."

Priest Tomate lowered his head, thought for a few moments, then his eyes lit up. Then he turned his head slightly, glanced at the confused Huitu Puapu, and then at the Mayan merchant Tikalo with sparkling eyes, feeling inwardly pleased, and laughed out loud.

"Good! Very good! The more Ciguayo people, the better; the more storms at sea, the better!... Without storms, how can we tell what is truly a sturdy longship, what is truly an immortal divine spirit!..."

"Praise the Chief Divine, let us raise the sails and continue west!"

#### Chapter 1162: The Second Kingdom Expedition—Warblers and Red Soil

The black-feathered warblers soared above the sea, their golden shoulder feathers glinting brilliantly. These small songbirds were swift and beautiful, so fond of lively places. They blinked their tiny eyes, landing on a nearby mudflat, curiously observing the unfamiliar longships.

Before long, the longship docked by the sea. Familiar two-footed beasts jumped ashore, brandishing unusually long sharp claws, uttering strange rhythmic chants.

"Blessed by the Chief Divine! We have landed once more!"

At this sight, the timid warblers collectively drew back their brilliant neck feathers. Then, they hurriedly turned around, chirping to remind each other, their wings swiftly carrying them into the jungle, vanishing in an instant.

"Ah! Praise the Chief Divine! These are the warblers of our homeland, symbols of auspicious omens! I never thought I'd see them here!..."

Seeing the golden feathered warblers fly away, Mokai, the Putun warrior, was momentarily stunned, then his face broke into a long-lost smile.

After a prolonged sailing voyage, over a hundred Putun warriors who boarded had lost four to five dozen in battles and disease. Mokai, as the leader of the Putun warriors, felt a heavy heart. Though known for endurance and accustomed to death, he could not suppress his weariness of this seemingly endless maritime exploration.

Meanwhile, the Prepecha warriors and sailors aboard were on the voyage for even longer, nearly a year. They also felt deeply fatigued by this lengthy exploration. Despite the inspiration of faith in the Chief Divine, the comforting words from the accompanying Priest, and the abundant food and water provided by the villages along the way, including some extra solace... the morale of the entire exploration fleet inevitably continued to decline.

It was simply because the sailors had been tossed about for too long, and traveled for too long. They longed for stability, even just resting somewhere on the island, unmoving, was a hundred times more comfortable than continuous wandering at sea. Maritime voyages of this era, even along the coast, were a rigorous and exhausting ordeal.

Until a few days ago, the trustworthy captain of the longship, Chiwaco, solemnly announced that the fleet was turning west, and the destination was just ahead! It was only then that everyone's morale slightly improved. And Mokai found some interest, bearing his sharp javelin, watching the countless flying birds in the sky.

"Awoo! The tribe elders have said, encountering warblers is a good omen for hunters!"

With Mokai's joyful shout, Putun warriors from several ships also began to cheer loudly, followed by the Silver Raven warriors under the leadership of the Osprey, and then the rowers of various tribes.

In the Campeche region of Central Maya, one could also see the agile, fluttering warblers. These beautiful and colorful birds were almost ubiquitous along the Caribbean Sea coast and were beloved by various coastal tribes. However, among the entire fleet, only the Prepecha warriors exchanged puzzled looks, not recognizing these pretty little birds that were not present in the highlands.

"Praise the Chief Divine! Encountering warblers is a good omen for the fleet!"

Priest Tomate was the first to react. He listened to Tikalo's translation, then became excited, raising the scriptures high while calling out to everyone.

"This is the Chief Divine's will, also the Chief Divine's blessing! He tells us that the destination of our voyage is just ahead! Praise the Chief Divine! Divine blessings upon us!"

Soon, the old militia, Chiwaco, along with the ship's backbone, chimed in. The shouts turned into cheers, gradually spreading far, echoing throughout the entire exploration fleet.

"Praise the Chief Divine! Divine blessings upon us!"

The deafening cheers continued incessantly, soon attracting the attention of the coastal Taino people. Dozens of Taino militia cautiously approached, armed with long spears, and exchanged a few words with the fleet's translator, Kuba.

Subsequently, the faces of these simple Taino villagers also showed joyous expressions. They raised their wooden spears, shouting the names of the local tribes.

"Yaya, Yaya! Piragua, Piragua'! Guarico Ke, Guarico Ke'!... The great spirit of divinity welcomes the guests of the longships to our land! Beautiful warblers greet our distant kin; this is the 'Cassava Tribe of Red Soil', the Red Soil Clan!"

The Red Soil Clan was located on the coastal plains, relying on a large river flowing from the interiors, and a lagoon rich in aquatic life outside the bay. Observing such terrain, Chiwaco immediately comprehended that it was bound to be a large tribe! On Cuba Snake Island, the prerequisites for large tribes included plains providing food, rivers offering freshwater, and coastal or interior lagoons supplying fish. Each large tribe's population was approximately between two to three thousand people. The population among tribes was neither particularly large nor small, appearing quite balanced, likely the natural carrying capacity limit.

Traveling along Cuba Snake Island, the fleet had covered three thousand miles, circling half the island, passing through a dozen large tribes without encountering any particularly massive Tribal Alliances. This implied that there had been no large-scale battles or brutal annexation wars among the major tribes.

For thousands of years, the peaceful and kind Taino islanders had persisted in maintaining the most simplistic societal structures and the most harmonious tribal relations, without progressing further toward higher organizational formations...

And this also hinted that, on the three thousand miles of Cuba Snake Island explored by the fleet, no Tribal Alliances nor even the embryonic form of a Kingdom had emerged. Within the Taino villages, there were no warriors dedicated to combat nor any higher-status, powerful Divine Descendant Nobility arising from the warrior clans. Villagers shared more equal statuses, laboring and celebrating together, raising children together.

The tribe lacked herbal medicine, liked inhaling Divine Smoke, and due to insufficient processing techniques, consumed slightly toxic cassava over the long term. Therefore, villagers often had very short lifespans, with elders in the tribe typically living only three or four decades. This high mortality rate population renewal steadily maintained the island's population balance, even retaining ancient matriarchal clan characteristics.

Everything remained in the oldest and purest state, seemingly frozen in time, just as it had been thousands of years ago.

"Hmm... the Red Soil Clan has also formed patrol militias with wooden spears!"

The old militia, Chiwaco, scanned the welcoming Taino militia, immediately noticing something different. Speculation gleamed in his eyes as he looked towards Priest Tomate, who affirmed with a nod.

"The fish ponds outside the village are vacant; initially, villagers approached with caution, and the village's canoes are collectively stationed with designated guards... the Red Soil Clan must have also suffered the harassment of the Ziguayu!"

"Then let's adapt to the situation and observe the local chieftain's attitude!"

"Alright!"

The local chieftain did not display any particular stance. They quickly confirmed that the visiting longships were unrelated to the Ziguayu marauders but related to former Mayapan trade caravans.

"Praise the Moon Mother Goddess! Praise the Cassava God! Praise the Storm Goddess! Praise the Ancestor God of Death!... You are friends, not enemies!"

Since friends had come to visit, the welcoming banquet naturally arrived as usual. Everyone in the fleet, after an evening of joyful labor, bore faces of bittersweet delight.

The next day, Priest Tomate rose early, eagerly waking everyone. Then, he excitedly announced.

"I conversed all night with several young women of the Red Soil Clan! They told me that this place is called 'Red Soil Clan' because the land is red! And to the south of the tribal village, there are a few red earthen hills!"

"Puap, gather a squad of warriors! Let us go and see if these red soil hills contain the minerals the Kingdom needs!"

Chapter 1163: Second Kingdom Exploration, Moa Nickel-Cobalt Mine, Maliya Great Iron Ore Deposit

The lively cone-tailed parrots shook their bright red neck feathers, watching the excitement in the small woods on the red soil. They chirped and chattered, watching the large group of two-legged beasts digging pits on the copper ore hills, just like crocodiles nesting before laying eggs by the sea. Not even the unexpected rain dampened the birds' enthusiasm.

In fact, in this season abundant with food and frequent rains, animals and people on Cuba Island alike have few things to do.

This time, the exploration of the red soil hills lasted for a full three days. On one hand, it was due to the impact of rain, which delayed the progress of the exploration. On the other hand, Priest Mekate encountered a dilemma. He was absolutely certain that the taste of these red soil ores was not right; they didn't melt under fire, were heavy and hard, and had some magnetism... they must be a mineral deposit! But limited by the lack of Divine Revelation knowledge, he still couldn't identify what exactly these minerals were.

"Not copper, not lead, not tin, not gold, and silver, nor gemstones... there may be iron, but it doesn't quite match the description given by Your Majesty, and the magnetism is insufficient... Ah! Chief Divine! Please grant me more knowledge!..."

After painstaking contemplation, facing Priest Tomate's inquiries, Priest Mekate frankly admitted that these minerals exceeded his knowledge, requiring consultation with a higher authority.

"Everyone should continue to explore carefully, collect some stone samples, and report back to His Majesty! Perhaps His Majesty could recognize them..."

Priest Tomate suggested, and the old militia Chiwaco nodded in agreement. Of course, both of them overestimated; Xiulote couldn't recognize these minerals either.

Soon, the large group of warriors scattered around busily, roughly measuring the range of this red and gray stone mineral belt. Estimating just from the surface, this mining area is easy over a dozen miles, not to mention underground. The group then simply collected various mineral samples, including red-gray, white-yellow, and black ones, not knowing if they were even the same mineral.

After finishing all these tasks, the group bid farewell to this "Jewel Mountain", waving goodbye to the massive nickel mine belt. This incredibly large nickel mine belt stores nearly one-third of the globally explored nickel reserves of future generations! The forms of these nickel mines include red nickel soil, nickel-iron ore, and the more precious nickel-cobalt ore!

Yes! Nickel-cobalt ore, the emphasis on "cobalt ore." Cuba's cobalt yield ranks in the top five in future generations, all buried here at this moment. And "cobalt," the crucial element for lithium batteries, will only truly shine with dazzling brilliance hundreds of years later.

As the heavy rain slightly paused, the fleet quickly replenished supplies and set sail once again. The various Taino tribes on Cuba Island were never short of food, displaying friendly attitudes, making the supply of food and water quite easy. Hmm, at least much easier than in the Mayan lowlands.

The Kingdom Fleet sailed smoothly, covering more than two hundred miles in two days, entering a natural bay. The group arrived at the most important destination of this exploration, the Mayali Region.

"Praise the Chief Divine! We've sailed nine thousand miles to finally reach this place! According to the sailing records of the Mayapan fleet, the foretold Cuba Iron Mine should be around here!"

Arriving here, everyone's face was filled with hope. Priest Tomate gazed brightly, old militia Chiwaco's old face cracked a smile, the Huitu Puapu was eager to try, only the true guide, Mayan merchant Tikalo, sweat like rain sat on pins and needles.

"Hoo! Hoo! This August's Cuba Snake Island is truly hot! Even with just a robe, the sweat won't stop flowing... Ah, yes! Tomorrow we'll set off, taking local guides, according to the notes in my hand, to the south to find the Iron Mine!..."

Tikalo forced a confident smile on his face, his heart pounding like a drum. In truth, he had never personally seen the "Iron Mine Mountain," relying on the encrypted sailing records that only members of the Kokom Royal Family could understand.

According to the records, the Kokom family's caravan indeed discovered a massive black-gray mountain here, and picked up the "Black Gemstone" to present to His Majesty, known as the "chromite spinel" in His Majesty's words. These few "Black Gemstones" were the earliest seed for Cuba exploration, initiating the arduous and distant voyage!

"Chief Divine! If the fleet fails to find the Cuba Snake Island Iron Mine here, then... what should I do? The leaders on the ship would definitely tear me apart alive and sacrificially offer me to the Chief Divine!..."

That night, Tikalo lay on the grass bed in the Maryai Region, tossing and turning, unable to sleep peacefully. He prayed quietly to the Chief Divine, rarely imbued with a few notes of sincerity.

Moonlight flowed like water, surrounding villages lay silent. To prepare for tomorrow's iron mine exploration, even the sailors who landed bid farewell to the enthusiastic Taíno women for a well-deserved rest. This voyage of nine thousand miles left only one final, essential punctuation mark.

The next day, just at dawn, before the jungle parrots even chirped, Priest Tomate donned ceremonial attire, wielding a Bronze Axe, knocked on Tikalo's hut. Warriors and sailors on the ship were fully equipped, mobilizing a full hundred men. Under Tikalo's anxious guidance, they eagerly headed southeast into the mountains.

However, Tikalo's nervousness at this moment was truly unnecessary. The astonishing scale of the Mayari Iron Mine belt, as long as the general location was confirmed, even deviating a dozen miles couldn't miss it.

The group set off from the Mayali Region, only walking for an hour, when Mekate Priest's compass started spinning wildly. The erratic spinning resembled a male Hummingbird failing to find a mate during mating season.

"Ah! Chief Divine! We, we've arrived!"

Priest Mekate shouted joyfully, rushing ahead to the hilltop. The old militia and Priest Tomate exchanged glances, also dragging the anxious Tikalo, climbing the hill together. Suddenly the view before everyone's eyes widened, a panoramic vista!

"Chief Divine! This... This blind...!"

Old militia Chiwaco stared dumbly ahead, his old face twitching in shock. Before him stretched a black-gray with a red mountain range, quietly lying between sparse trees, endless, almost extending the entire horizon. If these were all iron mines, this would be a mineral mountain range beyond everyone's knowledge.

"This! Really? All iron mines?... genuinely hit on by that blind..?"

"Praise Chief Divine!!"

Priest Mekate shouted, quickly running down the hill. Holding the wildly spinning compass in one hand, he clutched a small mining hammer in the other. He picked up a widely available black-red ore, cracked off some powder, and tasted it.

"A little salty, a bit fishy, with a faint blood scent! This is, this is, it must be..."

Priest Mekate paused, his excited face glowing.

"Praise Chief Divine! This is iron ore! The entire mountain, the whole mountain range, is all iron ore!"

"Ah! Ah! Chief Divine's blessing! We've finally found the foretold Cuba Iron Mine!"

Upon hearing Priest Mekate's affirmative judgment, Priest Tomate immediately kneeled, raising his neck's Sun Amulet, praying loudly. His eyes brimmed with tears, his face adorned with a jubilant smile.

"Praise Chief Divine! Praise His Majesty! Our journey has finally reached its end!..."

"Praise Chief Divine! Praise His Majesty! Howl!..."

Puap drew Bronze Axe, shouting, raising it high, while over a hundred Kingdom's Warriors roared fervently. Amid the crowd's cheers, Mayan merchant Tikalo's eyes were dazed. He stood dumbfounded for a while, then suddenly began to yell recklessly.

"Praise... Chief Divine!"

Deafening cheers echoed throughout the mountain forest. The accompanying Mayali Region guide Black Stone blinked, confused. He did not understand what excitement these foreign tribesmen felt. These were merely common black stones, ordinary like his name. He perplexedly looked into the distance, the

familiar black-gray with red mountain range showing no difference from usual. Such ordinary scenery had been witnessed by village inhabitants for countless years.

"Ooh, hey! Truly strange Longboat Tribe..."

Guide Black Stone tugged his hair, muttering low. Moments later, seeing everyone's joy, he also happily cheered. Hearing Translator Kuba's joyful shouting, he repeated the Longboat Leader's declaration.

"Tonight drink fruit wine to your heart's content! No one leaves without getting drunk!"

The boiling cheers reverberated through the sparse mountain forest, startling countless flying birds. The Mayari Iron Mine belt, with a storage of over 20 billion tons, stretching dozens of miles, quietly lay before everyone, across millions of years, waiting to be disturbed by future generations.

Chapter 1164: Second Exploration of the Kingdom, First Cuban Outpost

As the sun set and stars became scarce, birds and beasts called amidst the wilderness, and the tropical coast jungle was full of vitality. Everyone lit bonfires, set up a camp in front of the spectacular iron ore belt, took out the wine and food they brought, and celebrated indulgently until dawn. And from the next day, careful and busy scouting work began.

Under the guidance of Priest Mekate, everyone roughly determined the surface range of the Mayari Iron Mine. To be honest, the scale of this open-pit iron mine far exceeded everyone's expectations. The northernmost end of the iron ore belt was actually only thirty li from the nearest coast. Meanwhile, the southern end penetrated deep into the mountain forest, covering a vast area. The surface outcrops alone extended over twenty to thirty li.

After all, the Mayari Iron Mine is one of the largest shallow iron ore belts in the world. The iron ore here ranks high globally in terms of both reserves and quality. Moreover, what is more precious in later generations is the "chrome" contained in the ore belt, a critical element indispensable in special steels.

Along the way, six mineral deposits with abundant reserves—nickel, cobalt, manganese, chromium, iron, and copper—are concentrated in the eastern part of Cuba Snake Island, within a four-hundred li snakehead area. Added to this are the dormant tungsten mines on the Scaled Island and the oil in the near-shore Gulf of Mexico... Indeed, "Cuba Rich Mines" lives up to its name.

"Praise the Chief Divine! Praise His Highness! The reserves of this iron ore belt are sufficient for the entire alliance to mine for an era! And the quality of the ore here is also far superior to Black Rock Mountain!"

Three days later, Priest Mekate gathered all the information and resolutely gave a conclusion. Even though several days had passed since the discovery of the large iron mine, the excitement and enthusiasm on his face had yet to subside. Because each day, the scouting teams brought back new discoveries, expanding the new boundaries of the iron ore zone.

"The Maria Iron Mine must be firmly controlled by the kingdom! We must establish a permanent camp to control this vital forest and coast to the kingdom!"

Upon hearing this, Priest Tomate and the old militia Chiwaco exchanged a glance and nodded simultaneously. Then, Priest Tomate held the sun amulet around his neck and spoke firmly.

"Chief Divine, bless us! Now that we've found the large iron mine in His Highness's prophecy, the kingdom's fleet needs to establish the first permanent foothold here, as well as the first main god temple on Cuba Island! The Chief Divine's glory must spread across Cuba Snake Island, and the suppression by the Feathered Serpent Divine must also be completed by the Main God Temple!..."

Pausing here, Priest Tomate's expression was solemn, with an indomitable will.

"Praise the Chief Divine, I will dedicate my life to you!... I will stay in Cuba to oversee the construction of the foothold and temple, and preach to the surrounding Taino villages! The several Chief God Priests who came with the ship will also stay!" Upon hearing Priest Tomate's words, the old militia Chiwaco lowered his gaze, filled with emotion. Priest Tomate chose to stay, as was his duty. But this time staying, across an eight-thousand-li long voyage, returning to the kingdom, he did not know in which year it would be...

"Devout priests of the Chief Divine! Truly a group... hm, a group of moths willing to plunge into the flame..."

Chiwaco was complex in his thoughts, silently unresponsive. To be honest, if he were asked to dedicate the rest of his life to the divine and bury himself overseas, he couldn't do it.

"The kingdom's fleet sailed here, with sailors dying and being replenished, recruiting Putun warriors along the way... Currently, there are four hundred people in the fleet. Among these four hundred, only slightly more than two hundred are samurai and sailors that departed from the kingdom."

Chiwaco didn't speak, and Priest Tomate spoke again, stating the cold reality.

When the fleet set out from the kingdom, there were more than three hundred loyal Prepecha warriors and sailors. Yet now, at the Cuba destination, a full third of these initial people were gone! Storms, disease, slaughter, getting lost... Each of them would continually claim lives. The difficulty of long-distance navigation could be seen at a glance.

"The kingdom needs to establish a permanent foothold here, build warehouses, stockpile food, cut timber, construct temples, and even mine iron ore to lay the groundwork for more manpower to arrive!... And to achieve all this, not only wealth is needed to mobilize the manpower of nearby tribes but also sufficient force to control the surrounding..."

Priest Tomate remained solemn. He looked around at the leaders of the fleet, speaking his Highness's will word by word.

"Before I set out, His Highness granted me the authority to make decisions! I need the fleet to leave behind three longships, at least half of the manpower, that is, more than two hundred warriors and sailors, to stay with me in Cuba! Among these two hundred people, at least one hundred must be reliable Prepecha tribesmen... Um, most of the gemstone cargo, weapons, armor, and fabric wealth in the fleet must also be left behind as much as possible."

After Priest Tomate solemnly finished, the first person he looked at was the captain of the exploration team, the old militia Chiwaco.

"Captain Chiwaco, what do you think?"

"Leave two hundred people?..."

Chiwaco pursed his lips, tugged at his hair. Familiar young faces flashed in his mind. At this moment, he would decide the fate of these young men, whether to leave them here or let them return... It was a long time before he nodded and promised.

"I will leave three ships, select one hundred reliable Prepecha lads, um, eighty sailors, and twenty warriors. For the remaining deficit of one hundred... more than fifty Putun tribesmen familiar with the tropical jungle environment can all stay. And of the more than thirty members of the Silver Raven Tribe, half are shipwrights, familiar with woodworking, so I'll leave them with you too! As for the last remaining twenty or so..."

Chiwaco paused, wanting to leave behind the manpower newly supplemented in the Maya lowlands. In his heart, he still held some favoritism, thinking to bring back as many of his fellow Prepecha compatriots as possible.

"The last twenty or so should still be loyal Prepecha warriors!"

Priest Tomate raised his eyebrows, discerning Chiwaco's thoughts, and decisively interrupted. He gazed into the old militia's eyes and spoke sincerely.

"I believe that the Prepecha warriors participating in this voyage have unwavering loyalty to the Chief Divine! Here in Cuba, reliable manpower is needed!... Furthermore, the return voyage ahead spans eight thousand li of difficult sea routes. Staying here is actually lighter and safer than returning to the kingdom!"

The eight thousand li long sea route might just be the boundary between life and death. When the fleet came, nearly a third died, and during the return, the deaths would certainly not be few.

Thinking of this, the old militia remained silent for a while, looking toward Deputy Captain Huitu Puapu. Puapu casually nodded his head, indicating agreement. In his view, letting the Prepecha warriors and sailors stay here was not a bad thing. No worries about food and drink, women throwing themselves at them, without needing to fight hard battles. If it were him, he would also be happy...

"Phooey! I, Huitu Puapu, am esteemed by both the Divine Eagle and the Serpent! His Highness has promised me, I'm destined to become a Commander-in-Chief of the legion, how could I remain on this barren island of Cuba!... Um, I still have a dozen young wives in my hometown in the Lake..."

Thinking of this, Puapu felt his chin, a rare wistful look in his eyes. This voyage, he had suffered the mental torture of being cursed and no longer wished to sail out.

"Chief Divine bless! When I return to the kingdom this time, based on my valiant efforts in battle, slaying the Maya Prince, and discovering the large iron mine... I must beg His Highness, in any case, not to send me to explore the sea again..."

The old militia's eyes flickered as he watched Huitu Puapu's expression, then pursed his lips again. Knowing Puapu well, he shook his head inwardly and said nothing further. Subsequently, the old militia looked at Priest Tomate, his expression solemn, and raised a matter that was crucially important to him as well.

"Respected Priest Tomate, you will stay in Cuba, establish the kingdom's foothold, spread the glory of the Chief Divine... Then, how do you plan to interact with the simple Taino people?"

Chapter 1165: Second Kingdom Exploration, Fleet Council, Cuba's Population

"How do the kingdom's people stationed in Cuba interact with the simple Taino people?"

Upon hearing this question, Priest Tomate stroked his chin, roughly guessing Chiwaco's stance. As for the old militiaman's soft-heartedness, he neither approved nor disapproved in his heart. He glanced around the surrounding woods, his eyes flickering with a burning ambition!

To his south lay the sprawling iron ore and sparse, low-lying woods. To his north, beyond the hills two miles away, stretched a flat and expansive coastal plain. The plains were covered in tall grass, affected by hurricanes, the trees were not tall. And beneath the tall grass was easily tillable fertile land. Coastal fertile land, along with the iron ore belt, several interwoven streams and rivers, and excellent coastal transportation conditions... Undoubtedly, whether for farming, mining, or trade, this was truly a "fertile land"!

"The kingdom must control this iron mine, and seize the entire coast. The nearby Taino villages must supply food and labor. Crucially, the faith in the Chief Divine must be ignited among the nearby Taino tribes, becoming the sole supreme radiance!"

Priest Tomate, with a calm expression, declared the objectives he needed to achieve. Toward the simple and kind Taino people, he bore no hostility, and even some appreciation. But to accomplish the kingdom's mission, spreading the Chief Divine's faith as quickly as possible, he wouldn't hesitate to use force if necessary.

"Haha! The Taino people are so weak. Controlling this coast and spreading the Chief Divine's faith, isn't that easy?!"

Upon hearing their conversation, Warrior Puap laughed out loud. Confidently, he patted his chest, looking northwest, his eyes flashing with coldness.

Twenty miles to the northwest was where they set off, the Mayali Region. That large Taino Tribe had approximately over three thousand defenseless and weak villagers and around one or two hundred unarmored militia armed with wooden spears and short bows. The entire tribe was almost defenseless and had rarely seen bloodshed.

And the kingdom fleet, with a full four hundred warriors, most battle-hardened, accustomed to killing. The warriors were equipped with refined leather armor or even bronze armor, each person armed with two copper spears and bronze axes, and about a hundred greatbows, as well as Tiger Squat Cannons that, though damp from gunpowder, could still produce thunderous sounds. With such overwhelming force, capturing any large Taino tribe on Cuba Island was quite effortless!

"Let's go back, gather the warriors and sailors on the ship, distribute the copper spears and armor. Then, my trusted aides and I will don the bronze armors, serving as the vanguard assaulting in the battalion!... Tonight, we can break through the Mayali large tribe, capturing all the able-bodied men and women in one fell swoop!"

At this point, Puap's eyes showed pure murderous intent. He counted as a veteran warrior, emerging from heaps of corpses, where ordinary humans' lives meant nothing to him.

"Afterwards, we'll decapitate all the chieftains, leaders, and sages who hold sway in the tribe! Then command the remaining captives to take a blood oath, converting to the Chief Divine. Those who refuse will also be executed! Following that, make the surrendered able-bodied men personally burn all the Zemi God Cards in the village, severing ties with their past. Finally, carry them off to attack other Taino villages, with bloodstained hands, severing routes of retreat..."

"Haha, witnessed by the Chief Divine! Just give me six months, and I can conquer all the Taino villages within hundreds of miles in this Cuban Snake Head region! All conquered Taino people will also convert to the Chief Divine!"

Hearing Puap's fierce and wolf-like words, Chiwaco's brow twitched, and his old face convulsed.

"Damn Puap! I knew you couldn't say anything good, with your mind full of nonsense..."

What Puap proposed was entirely along the brutal approach of Black Wolf General. Though feasible, it meant piles of bodies and seas of blood to instill fear from the bones of the conquered tribes. Should this method be used to devastate all Taino villages within hundreds of miles, tens of thousands of Taino people in the Cuban Snake Head might be halved.

Moreover, within the Taino villages, there were actually none of the sharp contrasts between nobles, warriors, and commoners as often seen in various Central American divisions. The kingdom could not rely heavily on slaughtering the upper echelons, toppling the order to win over many grassroots guides.

"The Taino villagers have never shown enmity toward the kingdom. Their clean eyes lack the blood-red shade of the highland divisions..."

The old militiaman lowered his gaze, reflecting on the goodness and friendliness of the Taino villagers during their journey, finally feeling restless. His inquiry at this moment was because he keenly realized that as the kingdom's fleet initially taking root, their choices now would formally begin diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of the Lake and various Cuban divisions.

Should it proceed as Puap said, using force and slaughter to establish themselves, pushing the various Taino divisions against the kingdom... then successive waves of kingdom warriors would continue this approach, advancing the bloody process until fully conquering the Cuban Snake Island through violent means!

In this process, undoubtedly tens of thousands of Taino people would die, numerous Taino villages would be destroyed, and the peace and tranquility of various Cuban divisions would be utterly disrupted... All this went against his conscience, making it hard to accept and even cultivating guilt within him.

"Oh Chief Divine! Since I hold the power to choose and influence, I cannot watch this unfold!... The kingdom and various Taino divisions should be like corn and entwining beans, mutually promoting growth, and must not be the ravenous wolf and captured wild hare, engaging in one-sided slaughter..."

The old militiaman Chiwaco lowered his head, pondering for quite some time before opening his mouth slowly. He didn't immediately refute Puap but instead turned to the unspoken Divine Revelation Priest Mekate, posing a new question.

"Respected Priest Mekate, you excel at statistics and have observed various Cuban divisions in detail along the way... In your view, how many tribal populations are there on this Cuba Snake Island?"

"Hmm? The tribal population on Cuba Island?..."

Priest Mekate was taken aback by Chiwaco's sudden inquiry. As a Divine Revelation Priest with skilled technology, his temperament was relatively mild. During the fleet leaders' meetings, he usually only spoke on issues related to navigation and minerals and did not participate in other fleet decisions. However, with his status as a Second-Level Divine Revelation Priest, he certainly held an important place in the decision-making process.

"Along the way, we've circled most of Cuba Snake Island, hearing of or contacting nearly thirty large tribes with thousands of people... As for the smaller tribes of hundreds or thousands, they are too numerous to count."

Priest Mekate calculated silently with his fingers. In fact, along the way, he had indeed been continuously recording the scale of the tribes encountered, gaining a rough estimate of the population on Cuba Island.

"The east-to-west length of Cuba Snake Island is at least two thousand five hundred Li, and the distance between the north and south coasts ranges from two hundred to four hundred Li... The entire island is warm year-round, with abundant rainfall and fertile land. Most of the land can be cultivated... The yield of cassava crops is astonishing, producing over five hundred jin per mu without any fertilizer..."

After finishing his analysis, Priest Mekate paused and gave a preliminary conclusion.

"This fertile Cuba Snake Island, conservatively estimated, has a tribal population of 400,000 to 600,000! And if the entire island were fully developed like the Mexican Valley, supporting 2 million people shouldn't be difficult!"

Hearing Priest Mekate's conclusion, everyone nodded in agreement. As they traveled, the abundance of Cuba Snake Island had indeed impressed everyone deeply.

In fact, this 110,000-square-kilometer Great Island is only slightly smaller than the 130,000-square-kilometer England. The entire island features a tropical savanna climate, ideal for cultivation. More than two-thirds of the island's area consists of long grass plains and low-tree prairies that can be farmed into good arable land, unlike the difficult and treacherous tropical jungles found on other Caribbean Islands.

From an agricultural perspective, "Cuba" truly lives up to its name as a "fertile land." Even in future generations of Cuba, where blockades severely limited access to agricultural machinery and fertilizers, and where large areas of farmland were used to grow sugarcane, it still managed to support a population of twelve million! In terms of disease control, Cuba, primarily consisting of tropical savannas, is the only place in the entire Caribbean Islands that can control the spread of malaria effectively.

"Hmm, 400,000 to 600,000 tribal population, simply put, is 500,000 people."

Veteran Militia Chiwaco straightened slightly, looked seriously at Puap, and asked in a deep voice.

"Old Pu, there are 500,000 Taino people on Cuba Island, more than the bees in the forest! And our fleet only has over 200 personnel! ... Do you really believe you can conquer the hundreds of thousands of Taino people with just 200 men?"

"Uh? I... huh? Old Chi, that's not quite right, is it? We're fighting one tribe at a time..."

"I haven't finished, listen to me!"

Chiwaco waved his large hand, interrupting the bewildered Puap, and continued seriously.

"Even if we manage to win this aggressive conquest, how many warriors must perish? And even if the Tainos aren't skilled in combat, won't they flee? How do we have enough men to watch them?... If they escape inland, how many do we have to pursue them? Even if we catch them, then what? If they are captured, they might escape again. If we need to kill them, why capture them at all?..."

"Moreover, how many thousands of Taino villagers must be killed in such a bloody conquest? His Highness once said, 'Heads are not weeds, they won't grow back once severed...' The Taino people hold no animosity toward the kingdom. With proper methods and enough patience, they could originally be like green beans surrounding us and become devout sincere believers of the Chief Divine!... Uh, Priest Mekate, what do you think?"

Chiwaco glanced at the attentively listening Priest Tomate, then inquired of Divine Revelation Priest Mekate. Priest Mekate considered it; in fact, he also held a favorable view of the Taino people, and thus he nodded somewhat in agreement.

"Indeed! Captain Chiwaco, you make a very valid point! The Taino people, being numerous and gentle in nature, should not be treated as enemies. Instead, they should be transformed into citizens of the kingdom!..."

Priest Mekate was gentle in nature and rarely voiced his opinions, but his standing on the ship was not low. At this moment, his suggestion carried more weight than the erroneous Puap. The combination of Exploration Captain Chiwaco and Divine Revelation Priest Mekate constituted a significant influence, which could not be ignored by others.

Priest Tomate bit his lip and looked at the veteran militia Chiwaco, finally asking.

"Respected Captain Chiwaco, you mentioned proper methods to peacefully subdue the Taino people. So, what is your plan?"

Chapter 1166:: Second Kingdom Exploration, Discussion on the Kingdom's Power and Identity in Cuba

"Hmm... my method..."

Upon hearing Priest Tomate ask solemnly, the old Militia Chiwaco pondered in silence. He knew that whether he could truly convince everyone and initiate peaceful exchanges between the Kingdom and the various Taíno divisions depended on his upcoming suggestion.

The old Militia troubledly scratched his head and pulled out a tuft of hair. He looked at the nearby palm tree, adorned with the bright and beautiful colorful Cuba snails. At the base of the tree crawled a large group of ants, and an idea suddenly struck the old Militia, prompting him to speak thoughtfully.

"Witness, Chief Divine! Back when I was in my homeland by the lake, I once saw ants coexisting with aphids!"

"Hmm? Ants and aphids living together?"

Upon hearing, Priest Tomate was momentarily stunned. He listened thoughtfully to the old Militia's explanation.

"...Among the small animals on the ground, ants are actually very strong. They have organization and force, fierce like Samurai, and many larger insects are no match for them. As for aphids, they are extremely weak and gentle, but they can suck the sap of plants, producing very sweet honeydew..."

"...The warlike ants will protect the docile aphids, even raising a group of aphids, continuously obtaining honeydew. If any larger insect comes to prey on the aphids, they will be killed by the ants. And if a tree doesn't produce much sap, or if there are too many aphids on a tree, they will move the aphids to another tree!..."

As he spoke, the old Militia Chiwaco's thoughts became clearer. He blinked his eyes, and his old face broke into a gentle smile.

"So, the ants' attitude towards aphids is, on one hand, protection, safeguarding the aphids from harm. On the other hand, it's demand, acquiring the food produced by the aphids. Besides that, they are responsible for transportation, attempting in every way to make the aphids better produce honeydew!..."

Hearing this, Priest Tomate stroked his chin, thoughtfully asking.

"Hmm... Captain Chiwaco, so you mean the relationship between Kingdom's Warriors and Taíno villagers should be like that between ants and aphids?"

"Exactly! Witness, Chief Divine! In my opinion, the kingdom's presence on Cuba Snake Island should have four identities!"

"Four identities?"

"Yes, the first one is to protect the aphids, that is the protectors of the Taíno people. The Taíno divisions are gentle in nature, and in this region, they are facing the harassment of the Sigualo. We can announce to the surrounding Taíno tribes, becoming their protectors. And as a price for protection, they need to provide enough food to the Kingdom's people, and during farm free time, contribute some labor."

At this moment, Chiwaco's eyes were bright, and his thoughts clearer than ever before. This journey of thousands of miles opened his eyes to so many sights, and he experienced much in human affairs, his wisdom growing daily deeper, increasingly turtle-like.

"Taíno people's food is plentiful, and the cassava planting area is easily expanded. During farm free time, their abundant labor has nothing much to do, so why not help the Kingdom mine? Of course, we can offer some gemstones or cloth for trading to increase their enthusiasm for labor... Similarly, through attacking Sigualo or other raiders, we can demonstrate the Kingdom's might in the form of protection! And if the chieftains of Taíno villages witness this firsthand, knowing the ferocity of the Kingdom's Warriors, they will naturally become reverent and obedient!"

"Taíno people's protectors employ force in the form of protection, obtaining food and labor..."

Upon hearing, Priest Tomate nodded. This suggestion was indeed in alignment with his thoughts.

"Very good! Captain Chiwaco, please continue!"

"Hmm... the Kingdom's second identity is the one who transports aphids, um... or rather, the organizer of trade between the divisions, establishing trading markets, providing trading goods, offering unique Kingdom merchandise, and conducting trade between various distant tribes!"

"Throughout this journey, the Kingdom's gemstone trade has made a handsome profit, as have the trade of cloth, copperware, and other goods. The output from various Cuba tribes is different. For example, the Salt Coast Tribe produces salt, the Lake Bird Tribe is rich in feathers, the Palm Bay Tribe

produces wooden items, while the Gold Lake Tribe is situated next to a large copper mine... Furthermore, the tobacco produced in abundance by various Cuba tribes is the currency widely purchased by Mayan merchants!"

"The distance between Cuba tribes is quite far, trading by canoe is not easy. Mayan merchants come voluntarily, often pressing tobacco prices very low..."

Speaking of this, the old Militia Chiwaco shot a fierce glare at the Mayan merchant Tikalo. Tikalo touched his divine head, smiling awkwardly.

"If the Kingdom's longships could control the trade between Cuba's tribes, Cuba and Maya, and even Cuba and Haiti, even just a part of the trade... the benefit we could gain would far surpass enslaving a few Taíno tribes! Moreover, when the large iron mine and large copper mines at the eastern tip of Snake Island are mined and smelted by the Kingdom... we will continuously produce valuable goods, obtaining benefits from all the coastal tribes!"

"Ah? Maritime trade organizers, trading between divisions, gaining benefits?!"

Upon hearing, Priest Tomate showed surprise for the first time. He hadn't anticipated that Chiwaco could think of this. Without a doubt, if trade among divisions could be promoted, the Kingdom would occupy an absolute advantageous position, gaining developmental nutrients from the divisions of 'aphids.'

Even merely a shipload of gemstones would yield profits dozens of times over. While the Alliance's tobacco trade is tens of times more profitable. However, these maritime trades are not yet developed at this time. And the few existing trades are held by several coastal Mayan Clan Kingdoms, it certainly wouldn't be complete without force to fully take over.

"Good! Excellent! Honorable Captain Chiwaco, do you have any other suggestions?"

"Hmm... the third kind of identity..."

Chiwaco bit his teeth and pulled some hair from his head. Then, he organized his thoughts and spoke again.

"We can mediate the relationships between the 'aphids' and become the arbitrators of the various Taíno divisions! Once we establish prestige by demonstrating force, we can actively accept appeals from various divisions, resolving disputes between and within tribes... Even the simple Taíno people will have internal and external conflicts, such as food distribution, land use, and property trade..."

"Especially the matter of property trade! As sea trade expands, related disputes will inevitably arise. Once the kingdom controls arbitration rights, it effectively sits above the tribes. Hmm... In the former Tarasco Kingdom, only the city nobility could decide whether villages outside the city could buy salt. Similarly, only the nobility could determine whether the water from a river should be given to the upstream or the downstream, deciding which village gets it for irrigation..."

"Becoming the arbitrator of the various Taíno divisions is to become their de facto ruler..."

Upon hearing this, Priest Tomate's eyes sparkled, quickly making a decision. In his view, the supreme arbitrator among the divisions should naturally be the Chief God Priest of the kingdom! The kingdom's doctrine will bind all divisions impartially and spread the majesty and glory of the Chief Divine!

"Hmm, as for the last kind of identity, being the ant herding the aphids..."

Chiwaco paused, gave a deep look at Priest Tomate, and then smiled.

"The faith of the Chief Divine must spread across the land of Cuba! The kingdom's priests are indeed the disseminators of the Chief Divine's light. And the kingdom priests possess the technology for agriculture and the Divine Power to ensure abundant food production, familiar with medicine and herbs, able to heal the sick... If the priests can bring tangible benefits to the local tribes, it may well spread faith more effectively than hastily resorting to violence!..."

"Haha! The protector of the Taíno people, organizer of maritime trade, arbitrator of the various Taíno divisions, and the spreader of the Chief Divine's light!"

After listening to Chiwaco's narrative, Priest Tomate burst into laughter, full of joy. By now, he had a complete and well-formed plan in mind, certain to let the light of the Chief Divine shine upon the various obscure divisions at sea! He stood up, grabbed the arm of the old militia Chiwaco, and sincerely praised.

"Excellent! Captain Chiwaco, you spoke very well! With your abilities, you are enough to govern a territory for the kingdom on Cuba Snake Island! It's a pity you cannot stay here..."

"Ah! Ah, this..."

Upon hearing he might stay in Cuba, the old militia Chiwaco's face twitched, and his straight back bent halfway in an instant. Given his age and physical condition, staying in Cuba for a few years might mean he ends up buried here. He stammered, forcing a smile.

"Nowhere... nowhere... it's all under the Chief Divine's protection, just using my mouth to speak some ordinary ideas... I can only say so much, actually doing it still depends on the honorable priests... Praise the Chief Divine! May the Divine bless the kingdom!"

"Praise the Chief Divine! May the Divine bless the kingdom!"

Priest Tomate nodded, prayed devoutly for a moment, and then made a decision in his heart. A moment later, he blinked and leaned closer to the old militia Chiwaco, whispering with a smile.

"Captain Chiwaco, your suggestions have greatly inspired me! In honor of you, in the letter to His Highness, I will... and your previous proposal, giving him a chance... I also..."

The two spoke a few words in low voices. Chiwaco turned his head, looking at Puap, who seemed curious and confused, and sighed secretly.

"Good! Then thank you very much! Actually, since arriving in Cuba, he has performed quite well..."

"Captain Chiwaco, I am only considering your face."

Priest Tomate smiled and repeated once again. Then, he glanced lightly at Tikalo, and said in a deep voice.

"As for the other, I'll leave it to you! The sea chart, shipwrights, bee slaves, and hostages of the Kokom Family, please make sure to bring them back to the kingdom and hand them over to the heir of the Divine Revelation!"

"Understood! I will do my best!"

Chiwaco solemnly nodded. The two of them exchanged a laugh, then closed their eyes together, praying devoutly, making their vows on the coast of Cuba and in front of the Iron Mine Mountain of Mayali.

"Praise the Chief Divine! May He shelter us! May the sailing be smooth, and may everyone have long lives! And the glory of the Chief Divine!"

Chapter 1167: The Second Kingdom Exploration—Site Selection, Shooting the Crocodile, and Gifts

The wind and rain cleansed, and the vegetation was lush. The iron mine mountain lay like a giant beast, and the small river at its foot meandered like a long snake. In the lowlands of the bay, there was a gentle ripple of clear waves, and all things burst with vitality.

"With the protection of the Chief Divine! To the northeast of this mining area, there is just a river, connecting the flat northern bay and the undulating mountains to the south. As the first settlement the Kingdom established on Cuba, it might as well be located at the foot of this mountain!"

Priest Tomate stood at a high point, gazing around with a face full of smiles. The fleet meeting was over, and a foothold proposal was made. The preliminary scouting of the Mayari Iron Mine was also almost complete. Only then did he enthusiastically drag the old militia Chiwaco around, determining the location of the first settlement.

"This place is forty li from the western Mayali Region, and less than ten li from the northern bay. The coastal transportation is convenient, the terrain along the river is flat, the arable land area is vast, and the settlement has enough room for expansion... Hmm, there's also clay along the river, which can be used to make bricks."

Orioles and sparrows flew, parrots chirped, making the riverside lively. Priest Tomate watched for a long time, becoming more and more satisfied. He touched his chin and smiled as he spoke to Chiwaco.

"This kingdom's first settlement should smelt the Serpentine Iron Ore and build the Chief God's Great Temple! Since it's meant to suppress the Feathered Serpent Divine, why not call it 'Serpent Town'?"

"Uh, Serpent Town..."

Upon hearing this, Chiwaco scratched his head, thought for a while, and offered another suggestion.

"Chief Divine witness! We came to Cuba Snake Island to search for traces of the Feathered Serpent Divine. But strangely, these local tribes do not seem to revere the Feathered Serpent Divine, nor even know of its existence. If we name it Serpent Town, the local tribes might inquire about the origin and find out that the serpent divine's body is suppressed here..."

"It might be better to name it according to the local geography. The south has the iron mine, the north has the bay, combining them, it could be called Iron Bay! And since the settlement hasn't been established yet, the name doesn't have to be too grand; it can just be Iron Bay Town."

"Iron... Bay?"

Priest Tomate pondered for a while and also found it satisfactory.

"Good, let it be called Iron Bay Town! Like the Iron Bay, it shall become an unbreakable fortress of the Chief Divine, standing firm in the east of the Cuba Main Island!"

With the location selected and everything settled, the fleet members didn't stay longer and embarked on their return journey the next day. Seven longships were docked forty li away, at the coastal Mayali Region Village. Their destination was back to the village, and on their way back, they happened to pass a river teeming with prey.

Dart Mokai, with excellent eyesight, spotted a floating piece of "driftwood" while wading through the river. He pointed to the riverside with his hand, joyfully shouting.

"Crocodile! There's a crocodile in the river! What a big catch!"

The crowd looked and indeed saw it. A large Cuban crocodile, black mixed with yellow, lay quietly ambushed in the river, nearly three meters long!

This fierce large beast, with protective bony protrusions over its eyes, was immensely powerful, capable of leaping entirely out of the water to seize prey. To the local Taino people, such a thick-skinned, immensely powerful beast had almost no natural enemies in the area, and hunters from three or two tribes generally never wished to encounter it.

While for the exploration fleet, such a large prey could not be missed! Apart from the hundreds of pounds of crocodile meat, the crocodile skin alone could be tanned into two pieces of leather armor.

Dart Mokai's face lit up with excitement as he called upon seven or eight Putun Warriors, all of them taking out their sharp bronze short spears from their backs, and slowly approached. No matter how powerful this beast was, and how dangerous it was at close range, one round of heavy javelins would surely put it out of action.

"Mokai, wait a moment!"

Priest Tomate, observing the Cuban crocodile, felt a stir in his eyes and stopped Mokai with simple Maya language. Then, he touched his chin and called Puap over.

"Deputy Captain Puap, your archery has always been excellent. Witness the Warrior's endurance! Can you shoot this giant crocodile with a bow and arrow? Use an armor-piercing bronze arrow, just one shot!"

"Hmm? Use an expensive armor-piercing arrow to shoot a crocodile? And only allowed to shoot one arrow?"

Huitu Puap scratched his head in confusion but Tomate Priest mentioned the Warrior's honor, so as the self-proclaimed "First Warrior" of the fleet, he could not refuse. He nodded decisively, took off his greatbow, and moved cautiously within about a dozen paces of the crocodile, carefully observing this massive yet quiet beast.

"A crocodile's heart is particularly robust, even having several lobes. If I am to kill it with one shot, I mustn't aim for the heart; I have to pierce its cranial armor and hit its thumb-sized brain!"

Puap's gaze turned sharp as he moved a few steps closer. At less than ten steps away, the floating "driftwood" barely started sensing something. Only then did he suddenly draw his greatbow fully, nock the armor-piercing arrow, aim for a few seconds, and then release!

"Hit!"

"Sss! Splurt!"

The low sound of the arrow hitting, accompanied by the crack of piercing the bone plate, echoed softly by the riverside. Puap immediately stepped back, but a furious wave splashed toward him first! The once-still crocodile burst out with incredible force, leaping entirely onto the water's surface. Its powerful long tail slapped down heavily, sending water splashing ten meters high!

"Hmm? Did it fail?"

Priest Tomato frowned but saw a confident smile on Huitu Puap's face.

"Haha! With such penetrating arrows, I truly am like a Black Wolf General warrior!"

Hearing Puap's laughter, the crowd looked again. The giant crocodile, after a few powerful struggles, lay limply on the river. This time, its posture was not one of ambush, but its muscles had fully relaxed.

The fierce arrow had penetrated its sturdy skull and destroyed its tiny brain. After its reflexive thrashing, the beast of the jungle and river was paralyzed, unable to resist again. At this moment, its body was still alive, but the brain was already dead!

"Good! Praise the Chief Divine! Puap, well done!"

Priest Tomate nodded and for the first time in a long while, patted Puap's shoulder. A faint smile appeared on his face as he carefully instructed the samurai to step forward and handle the situation.

"Tie up this crocodile for me! Do not remove the arrow in the forehead, nor inflict another wound!"

"Yes! Just like that! Keep it as it is, have six people carry it together and bring it back to the Mayali Region!"

"Haha! When we return to the Mayari Village, this crocodile shot dead will be the best gift for the Water Chief Anani!"

Tomato Priest's laughter echoed by the riverside, filled with bold ambition. The old militia Chiwaco raised his eyebrow, pondered slightly, and nodded gently.

"Phew! Before negotiating with the Mayali Region's chieftain, this indeed is the best gift..."

Chapter 1168: The Second Kingdom Expedition—Blue Scorpions and Negotiations

"Haha, the Chief Divine blesses us! Water Chief, we bring you a 'great gift' from our journey this time!"

When the six Kingdom's Warriors, carrying a three-meter-long giant Crocodile, arrived at Anani Chieftain's wooden hut, Chieftain Anani was bowing his head, carefully handling a deceased blue Scorpion with a Bone Dagger in hand. Carefully, he gently pierced the blue Scorpion's blue shell on both sides, squeezing out a few drops of blue venom into a small wooden tube. The menacing blue stinger was treated the same way.

On Cuba Snake Island, the blue Scorpion is perhaps the most terrifying poisonous creature. Its venom, even a small drop the size of half a thumbnail, can easily kill a person. This blue luminescent venom can be applied to blowguns or arrowheads, becoming the most precious and powerful weapon for Taino Hunters, even posing a threat to Warriors wearing Copper Armor. However, the blue Scorpion is extremely dangerous, typically only the most skilled old Hunters dare to capture and handle it.

In later years, this toxic blue Scorpion venom would surprisingly appear in the global medical world, with its value skyrocketing a hundredfold! The Cuban Blue Scorpion peptide extracted from the blue Scorpion venom would become an important medication for alleviating cancer symptoms, particularly effective in

pain relief. In fact, the local Taino Tribe also dilutes the blue Scorpion venom, mixing it with alcohol as an emergency anti-inflammatory and pain relief medicine.

"Ah? Praise All Gods and Ancestors! Tomato Priest, your harvest is impressive, catching such a ferocious giant Crocodile! Even the tribe's Hunters would find it hard to capture such a beast... Hmm, judging by the smile on your face, you finally found the Divine Mountain in the tribe's prophecy?"

Anani Chieftain's face beamed with a sincere smile, gentle as "Water Flower." In the Taíno language, Anani means "Water Flower." It's a beautiful name, yet it lacks the grandeur and superiority of the Divine Clan Chiefs' names from the Mexican Plateau and the Maya Tribes.

Because, in the Taino Tribe's villages, many Tribe Chiefs are elected by the tribal elders, not hereditary nor related to any bloodline. Young Anani Chieftain was an outstanding tribal Huntsman, frequently bringing prey back to the village. It wasn't until he was over thirty that he was officially made the Leader, through the tribe meeting's nomination.

"Indeed! After a journey of ten long months, we finally traversed the vast Mexican Plateau from the distant West, traveling across thousands of miles to find the Divine Mountain in the prophecy!... Praise the Chief Divine! All this is worth it for His glory!"

"Ah? You sailed for ten months at sea? Just for the Divine, to find the Divine Mountain?"

Water Chief blinked, looking at the Tomato Priest's genuine devotion, feeling somewhat amazed. The farthest he had ever traveled in his life was to the Marine Tribe, four hundred miles east in Baracoa. Many Taino villagers had never ventured beyond a hundred miles from the village in their entire lives.

"Yes. Water Chief, the Chief Divine's glory is beyond your imagination! He stands above All Gods, guiding all tribes under heaven. No amount of hardship or stormy waves can stop His loyal Warriors!... And our fleet is merely a small Vanguard. Behind us, thousands of Warriors are about to come across the sea..."

Priest Tomate gazed into Water Chief's eyes, his expression serious and imposing. His voice was deep, seemingly hinting at something.

"Water Chief, the Chief Divine is above all! As long as you devote sincere faith, you and your tribe will receive the Chief Divine's protection and power.... Please consider carefully, don't miss this rare honor!..."

"Uh..."

Hearing this, Water Chief scratched his head, smiling wryly. The Longboat Tribe's priest came again to preach about the tribe's Chief Divine to him. Various Taíno divisions believe in spirits in all things, and don't mind worshipping an additional "War God" from afar. But to claim it as the supreme "Chief Divine"... it seems he hasn't yet witnessed any "Chief Divine's" mighty Divine Power.

"Haha! Chief Divine bless us! Water Chief, this prey here is a gift from the Chief Divine, brought to you through our hands!"

Seeing Water Chief's expression, Priest Tomato didn't say much. He gestured broadly, loudly commanding the accompanying Kingdom's Warriors.

"Come! Bring this captured giant Crocodile into the Chieftain's hut to place it well!"

"Ah?"

Water Chief opened his mouth, wanting to tell the Tomato Priest that such a big Crocodile didn't need to be brought into the hut, as it would take up too much space. Moreover, placing the Crocodile outside would be more convenient for skinning and processing.

However, before he could speak, six fierce Warriors dressed in Leather Armor, expressionlessly carried the giant Crocodile into the hut, laying it out in front of the Chieftain's grass bed. The Crocodile's body was twitching slightly without awareness, with a two-inch-deep arrow embedded in its head.

"Hmm... alright! The Longboat Tribe certainly is enthusiastic..."

Water Chief shook his head helplessly, not paying attention to the Crocodile's condition. He warmly seated the Tomato Priest on the grass mat in the hut, pouring some slightly sweet cassava juice. Then, he smiled sincerely again, speaking gently.

"Tomato Priest, besides bringing gifts today, do you have any other matters? If the food on your ship is insufficient, you may come to the village to take some. There's plenty of cassava in the village, they just need to be dug up in advance and soaked in water for processing..."

"Hmm, you all may leave!"

Priest Tomato sat cross-legged, motioning again. The six Kingdom's Warriors silently, stern-faced, departed without saying a word. Seeing this, Water Chief's eyelids twitched. Priest Tomato then smiled, looking towards Water Chief.

"The Chief Divine witnesses all! Respected Water Chief, I came this time, besides delivering gifts, I have some significant matters I wish to discuss with you earnestly!"

Hearing this, Water Chief's expression turned serious. He straightened his back, sitting upright on the mat, with dozens of Zemi God Cards behind him. Surrounding these sacred cards were colorful turban snails and pure white Lake Gems, radiating light as if divinity flowed through them.

"Mmm, All Gods and Ancestors witness! Priest Tomato, my friend, please speak!"

"Alright! Water Chief, before the Divine, I won't beat around the bush..."

Priest Tomato paused, looking into Water Chief's clear eyes, solemnly declaring.

"We have found the Divine Mountain in the prophecy, as instructed by the tribal sages before we set out... We will stay here, remain here, and will not leave again!"

Chapter 1169: The Second Kingdom Expedition—Land and Glass Beads

"What? Longboat Tribe, you want to stay?"

The wooden house was low, with a faint tobacco scent lingering at the tip of the nose, along with a fresh earthy smell of Crocodile. Hearing the words of Priest Tomate, the Water Chief widened his eyes in surprise, his mouth gaping in disbelief.

Priest Tomate, calm and composed, wore a faint smile, ready for negotiation. The Water Chief's shock was within his expectations. However, the subsequent conversation from the other party was entirely different from what he had anticipated!

"Ah! Priest Tomate, you want to bring the Longboat Tribe to join our Mayali Tribe?"

The Water Chief scratched his head, feeling a bit troubled, but then showed a sincere smile.

"Hmm, with a few hundred able-bodied men joining in, the tribe's food and houses might be a bit tight. But it's okay! With so many able-bodied men, we can divide the stalks and open up a new cassava field! Once the new cassava is planted, it should take only about eight months to grow and harvest, then we can keep harvesting for many years..."

"Oh, and you have long longships that can go to deeper seas for fishing. I know a few northern bays where there are plenty of fish, and they are very plump!... Oh, and your huts, once the rainy season is over, in September and October, you can cut grass to build the houses. The ground for building houses on the south side near the small mountain is ready. I'll call everyone to help with that..."

The Water Chief, counting on his fingers, thought of one thing after another, speaking faster and faster. Priest Tomate, new to the Taino Language, had limited ability, and by the end, he was already bewildered. He stared blankly at the Water Chief, whose face indeed showed sincerity, without the slightest intention to insult the Kingdom.

"...Let the elite and valiant Kingdom's Warriors join the Mayali Tribe, and then farm, fish, and build huts? Water Chief, are you really serious?..."

Priest Tomate's face twitched, with countless thoughts flashing through his mind, but they turned into simple, straightforward Taino Language at the tip of his tongue.

"Ah! Water Chief, you've misunderstood! We're staying not to join the Mayali Tribe, but to... to establish a new tribe by a river in the bay north of the Divine Mountain!"

"Oh! Establish a new tribe? So that's it... The bay north of the 'Divine Mountain', by the river? Hmm, I know that place. If you walk quickly, it's just a day's journey. Right?"

Seeing Priest Tomato nod solemnly, the Water Chief paused. He carefully considered the terrain and then smiled again.

"I remember that place, went there once when hunting. It's indeed very nice! You can plant cassava by the river, and the northern bay is enclosed by a lagoon, making it very suitable for fishing!... Mm, it's a good place to establish a tribe!"

Hearing the Water Chief confirm the location of Iron Bay Town, Priest Tomato's expression became serious. He straightened up, ready for negotiation once more, and spoke calmly.

"Respected Water Chief, the tribe we are establishing is to protect the entire Divine Mountain and also that bay... Therefore, from the Divine Mountain to the bay, we need a fifty-mile radius of land!"

"Oh!"

Upon hearing this, the Water Chief paused slightly, nodded, and said nothing. Then he and Priest Tomato stared at each other, large eyes gazing into small eyes, and neither spoke for a long time.

After a moment, Priest Tomato couldn't help but take the initiative to ask in a deep voice.

"And then?"

"Huh? What then?"

"That piece of land should belong to the Mayali Tribe, right? What price do we need to pay to buy that land?"

"Ah? Price? Buy land?"

Upon hearing this, the Water Chief's face instantly showed confusion. Priest Tomate scratched his chin and patiently explained a few more words. The Water Chief listened for a while and then shook his head with a laugh. He confessed frankly, his gaze as clear as the streams flowing down Cuba Mountain.

"Haha! Priest Tomate, your tribe of origin is really interesting... How can the land protected by All Gods and Ancestors have an owner? The land is a gift from the Heavenly Divine, not like the tobacco and pottery produced by villages, so how can it be traded and purchased?..."

"This vast land originally belongs to all Tribes, and no one is the master of the land. We only work on the land and receive the gifts of the earth!... The land around the Divine Mountain is very hard and barren, unable to yield food, so there shouldn't be Tribes present. As for the surrounding areas of the bay, there might be some small tribes with a hundred people occupying a little bit of land..."

"So, whether it's the 'Divine Mountain' or the bay, as long as it's undeveloped land by other Tribes, you can settle and develop, plow fields and build settlements... Once the village is established, the surrounding small tribes might also choose to join you. After all, you have many able-bodied men, good bows and arrows for hunting, and good boats for fishing..."

Saying this, the Water Chief hesitated but then added with a smile.

"Mm, if the young people in the village want to join you and build the new tribe with you, I won't stop them. After all, establishing a new Tribe requires manpower. In the oral epic of the Tribe, the Mayali Tribe was separated in a similar way many years ago... Only you have too many men and lack women. But luckily, you have lots of things on your boat..."

"Once your village takes shape, I can send some Hunters to connect with the small tribes in the surrounding mountain forests and invite them to join you! Some small tribes in the mountains are not living well, have fewer men, and can just complement each other with you... A Tribe must have both men and women to continue for a long time..."

The Water Chief rambled on for a long time, even worrying about the gender ratio in the Kingdom's settlement.

Priest Tomate stayed dazed, all the prepared negotiations were in vain, unable to speak for a long time. At this moment, he quietly regarded the face of the Water Chief, with a myriad of complex emotions surging in his heart.

He had sailed thousands of miles, been through countless battles, seen many highlands and the City-States and Tribes of Maya, and laughed and talked with many Great Chiefs! What kind of flashing knives and axes had he not seen? But at this moment, in front of an ordinary Taino Chief, he felt lost.

After a while, a sense of unprecedented calm surged in Priest Tomate's heart, along with rarely felt trust and a low sigh.

"Witnessed by the Chief Divine! Simple Taino people, I will ensure you all convert and become the Citizens under the Chief Divine! Because without the Chief Divine's protection, you would never survive the evil invasion of white skin..."

"Ah? Priest Tomate, what are you reciting?"

The Water Chief paused, curiously watching Priest Tomate's prayer. The other party just smiled slightly and replied with a smile.

"Water Chief, I am praying for you to the Chief Divine! The Chief Divine replied to me, saying he is willing to protect you... What do you say, why don't you convert to the Chief Divine?!"

"Uh..."

The Water Chief's face once again showed embarrassment. Priest Tomate smiled broadly, patting the Chief on the shoulder. Then he straightened up, asking in a deep voice.

"Respected Water Chief, the Kingdom is preparing to settle by the river at the bay, to cultivate that piece of land. But since it's within the former range of the Mayali Tribe's activities, do you really not need any compensation?"

"Compensation?..."

The Water Chief scratched his head, thought carefully for a while. Shortly after, seeing the bird feathers hanging in the wooden house, he replied.

"There are quite a few birds and beasts on that land. The tribe's Hunters often go there to hunt. If you settle there, the Hunters will have to find another place..."

"Hmm... Priest Tomate, if you really want to compensate, send some gifts to the Hunters!"

"Alright! What kind of gifts do you want? How much?"

Without hesitation, Priest Tomate agreed readily, preparing to be generous. Hunters have always held a high status in the Tribe, and he would not be stingy. Moreover, to him, this was some form of price for the land and a necessity to establish good relations with the Mayali Tribe.

However, for the Water Chief, this was truly just a gift for the Hunters. He counted on his fingers, trying hard to calculate the number of Hunters, and guessed an answer.

"For each Hunter, give two white gemstones, to offer to the Zemi God Card for hunting... So, just send a small bag of Lake Gem!"

#### Chapter 1170: The Second Kingdom Expedition, Snails and Omens

The colorful ribbon snails, with their vividly spiraled shells, clung to the wooden walls inside the chieftain's hut, resembling moving gemstones. These stunning snails are unique land mollusks of Cuba Snake Island and are beloved by the Taino Tribe as beautiful little creatures.

In ancient legends, the appearance of the ribbon snails was credited to a young Taíno Chief who, for his beloved, overcame numerous obstacles to beseech the Heavenly Divine for the world's most beautiful colors, which he then imbued into the snails' shells to create these wondrous beings! Thus, the Taino people adore these snails; they are not only gifts exchanged between young lovers as tokens of affection but also sacrifices offered to the Heavenly Divine.

In later times, they came to be known as "Cuban Candy Snails," moving "candies," the most beautiful snails in the world!

"The Taíno's ribbon snails are peaceful and beautiful, just like their souls! ... They are the type of followers the Chief Divine would love..."

Priest Tomate's gaze lingered, watching these otherworldly colorful creatures, a smile touching his lips. Water Chief also smiled gently, his face a picture of simplicity and joy. The two sipped cassava juice before continuing the seemingly ordinary but immensely important discussion.

After addressing the crucial matter of strategic locations, Priest Tomate relaxed visibly. He then proceeded, one point at a time, following the fleet meeting's plans, to propose ideas to Water Chief.

The first proposal was for the Kingdom Fleet to offer protection to the Mayali Tribe in exchange for food and labor. However, Water Chief's response differed from Priest Tomate's expectations.

"Mm, the Ziguayu people keep raiding our coasts, stealing towns' food and fish, even injuring villagers... they are dangerous raiders! Priest Tomate, indeed, we should unite and jointly guard against the Ziguayu people..."

"Oh! Your tribe is newly established and indeed needs help. The village can first supply you with a few months of food, give you some plant cuttings, and teach you to plant cassava until your cassava field ripens. As for building thatched huts, once the rainy season is over, I'll bring some villagers to help!"

"Mm... Water Chief, thank you for your help!..."

Hearing this response, Tomate politely replied and then fell into prolonged contemplation.

He began to realize that for the Taino people, who saw little violence and almost no combat, even the chieftain of a great tribe lacked a clear understanding of the Kingdom's Warriors' formidable power. From their conversation, it seemed Water Chief didn't fully grasp, he might even simply believe, that the Kingdom Fleet's guards were not necessarily a match for the "ferocious" Ziguayu raiders!

"Combat, with the Ziguayu people... only a real fight and bloodshed can show the Taino people the Kingdom's mighty forces!"

Quickly, Priest Tomate sorted his thoughts and decided on the next steps. He paused slightly, suppressing the "protection" proposal, switching to a new "training" plan.

"Water Chief, our fleet's warriors have traveled vast distances. Many of them are highly skilled in archery, adept with the javelin, and seasoned hunters good at close combat!..."

To the Taino people presently, a seasoned hunter was considered the pinnacle of might. Hence, Priest Tomate described the fierce Kingdom's Warriors in this manner.

"During the idle moments of this rainy season, I can have them train the village's young militia, teaching some combat skills! Mm, as a token of friendship from the Mayali Tribe!"

"Ah? To have seasoned tribal huntsmen train the tribe's young militia..."

Hearing this proposal, Water Chief's face broke into a genuine smile. He indeed acknowledged the prowess of the Kingdom's hunters, the giant crocodile captured inside being the best proof.

"Agreed! Thank all Gods and the Ancestor! Then you have my gratitude!"

"Chief Divine's blessing! It is what we should do."

At this moment, to Priest Tomate, although no formal alliance was signed, the Mayali Tribe was already effectively an ally of the Kingdom and a potential vassal. Thus, through militia training, not only could the Kingdom's military strength be showcased peacefully, but its influence over local tribes could also be enhanced, and the allies' combat power slightly improved. This was a relatively suitable entry point and could be extended to more tribes.

The second point was about organizing trade. Priest Tomate proposed establishing a large marketplace for inter-tribal trade at the soon-to-be-founded Iron Bay Town, offering exclusive Kingdom merchandise, including some sturdy bronze weapons.

Water Chief welcomed this proposal warmly. He promised that once the Longboat Tribe's marketplace was established, he would invite neighboring tribes to a large gathering to exchange goods.

"Good! Establish assemblies, show your goods, trade with various tribes... This benefits all tribes and is an excellent method to attract small mountain tribes and grow your newly established tribe rapidly!"

Praising with a smile, Water Chief shared some concerns, scratching his head.

"However, the fierce Ziguayu people are raiding the nearby coast. The tribes along the eastern coast might worry and not send too many people. And a large marketplace, gathering many goods, could indeed attract the Ziguayu raiders!..."

Dismissively confident, Priest Tomate smiled at Water Chief's worries. Their important conversation ended there. Subsequent third and fourth points, a tribal arbitrator and Chief Divine's missionary, required the Kingdom to have more prestige and the foundation of strong military display!

The sky gradually darkened, clouds brewing new rain. In the wooden house, the two smiled and lit divine smoke, chatting leisurely.

Water Chief spoke about nearby tribal situations and shared stories of interesting jungle prey. Priest Tomate described some voyage observations and talked about common knowledge among priests, such as composting concentrated waste to increase production and filtering mud in water to reduce disease... The long, joyful talk lasted until dusk, formally concluding.

"Thank the All Gods and the Ancestor! Priest Tomate, your stories and insights are far more fascinating than tales shared by tribe bonfire storytellers!"

Divine smoke soothed souls, bringing relaxation. Water Chief beamed with joy, and Priest Tomate appeared serene, nodding with praise, gripping the chieftain's arm firmly.

"Praise the Chief Divine! Water Chief, your friendship draws the attention of Divine Spirits! Trust me, we will be good friends, basking in the Chief Divine's glory together!..."

The two reluctantly agreed to meet again and said their farewells. As total darkness enveloped the village, small torches lit in larger huts. It being the peak of the rainy season, with damp earth, open-air bonfire banquets were not held. The village quietened, leaving only the calls of forest birds and cicadas.

"Whew! That's a huge crocodile! Tomorrow, I need to gather a few skilled lads to help skin and tan it..."

In the dim firelight, Water Chief smiled, stretching out his calloused hand, rubbing and inspecting the giant crocodile within. He sought the skinning starting point by checking for its wounds. As he continued, his expression turned serious, and his eyes widened.

"This giant crocodile... it hasn't bled, and its belly still breathes?!"

Water Chief murmured incredulously. As a skilled hunter, he knew capturing such a massive crocodile was challenging and required creating numerous wounds for blood loss. Yet, the current "living dead crocodile" scenario seemed to suggest one improbable possibility...

"Only one arrow..."

Water Chief pursed his lips, quietly standing before the crocodile's head, eyes full of disbelief as he stared at the arrow lodged in its head. But indeed, this was the sole explanation, a feat that Taíno hunters had never achieved. For the Taino lacked such strong bows and sharp arrows.

"Only one arrow, piercing the bone plate on the head, hitting the thumb-sized brain... just one arrow!..."

"Longboat Tribe... seasoned hunter..."

Torchlight flickered, casting wavering shadows. Bewildered, Water Chief stood silently before the crocodile's head, holding a slender bronze arrow he had painstakingly extracted. He stared at it for a long time, an unexplainable fear rising in his heart before he sighed softly.

"They... are they really the Chief Divine's... protectors?... Are they?... They are..."

The murmuring question lingered in the air, mingling with the gentle divine smoke and flickering light, within the small wooden hut. Nearby, a ribbon snail extended, responding with its delicate beauty, a dark golden glow gliding over its shell, like an answer or an omen of the unknown.