

Civilization 1181

Chapter 1181: Second Kingdom Expedition, The Finale in Cuba, Return Voyage!

The night was deep, and the bay was silent. The chaotic shouts of Puapu reached the vicinity of the camp, catching the attention of the patrol Samurai.

Priest Tomato stood calmly in the shadows outside the camp. He had long since sent away the others in this camp and now waved his hand at the patrolling Samurai, indicating not to approach. He listened quietly as the excited shouts gradually diminished, and the anger in the voice slowly turned to desolation. Only then did Priest Tomato lift the corners of his mouth and nod secretly.

"Hmm. Big fire for cooking fish, small fire for soup... Captain Chiwaco's soup-making skills aren't bad either..."

In front of the bonfire, the old Militia Chiwaco lowered his gaze, watching the fish soup by the fire, listening to Puapu's shouting, patiently waiting. He knew the other needed time to face the reality he had been unwilling to face.

After a while, Puapu finally quieted down. He held his head high, pressing his lips together, like a child stubborn after committing a mistake. Only then did Chiwaco glance over and saw that the anger on Old Pu's face had vanished. In its place were eyes full of sorrow and unease, gradually shedding tears.

"Old Qi, you know! This is all... all Tikalo's treachery! I... I never betrayed the Kingdom! Even if His Highness knows, he should punish Tikalo severely, not me!..."

"Nonsense! Puapu, you stupid blockhead, even dumber than that Wei Zi blockhead!"

Looking at the tearful Puapu, Chiwaco felt both anger and a bit of compassion. But even if he felt compassion, the words he spoke were cold and hard as a knife, piercing straight into Puapu's heart.

"You stupid blockhead! Can you and Tikalo be the same? He's been acquainted with His Highness long ago and is familiar with Capital Army Commander Olosh. No matter what, there's old friendship involved. Moreover, he's a descendant of the Mayapan Royalty! He has a maritime sea chart in his hand, the backing of the Kokom Family, guides to Cuba under his command, and something like a

hummingbird, something like a shipwright, some hostages... He had prepared sufficient capital long ago!"

"Look closely! Tikalo isn't just an individual but the last remnant of the Maya Royal Family, holding a Maya status the Kingdom can use! Even if His Highness punishes, warns, whips, or beats him, he wouldn't truly kill him because he has bloodline and family, and he bears significant value!"

"And you, Puapu, what do you have? You're just a common warrior from Tarasco, surrendered after betraying the Family Head! You even made serious mistakes and got entangled with the southern nobility of Tarasco! You've already been exiled once, and if you make another mistake, it won't be easily forgiven!..."

"Ah! Ah! Old Qi, Chiwaco, please stop talking! I beg you!..."

Hearing this, Puapu was overwhelmed, holding his head and kneeling on the ground, tears streaming down his face. He recalled that night in the palace of Qinchongcan City when he betrayed the Hummingbird chief and remembered almost being beheaded by His Highness in the Temple of Zicao City with Oorta of the sky.

"I came from an ordinary family warrior, experienced so much, and finally made it to today!... I, I can't lose everything again..."

Huitu Puapu knelt on the ground, his body twitching like a worm in the dirt, arduously seeking a living path. After a while, he wiped his tears, looked at Chiwaco, who lowered his gaze waiting, and asked in a tearful voice.

"Old Qi, you say... letting me stay here is saving me?"

"Yes."

"With Chief Divine as a witness?"

"With Chief Divine as a witness!"

"Then, how will you save me?"

"You stay in Cuba, continue to lead the warriors, serve Priest Tomate, and fight for the Kingdom. Priest Tomate will leave written letters, and together with me, plead for you in front of His Highness as a guarantee."

The old Militia Chiwaco spoke concisely, casually laying out his arrangements. He did not tell Puapu how he sold his face begging Priest Tomate and even gave counsel to make him agree. He merely sighed again, sincerely saying.

"Ah! You should stay in Cuba for a few years, make some contributions. Thus, in His Highness's eyes, you would also have suffered. Being so far away, for the people's hearts of Cuba, he wouldn't punish you... His Highness values Cuba's management greatly, so as long as you do well, maybe in a few years, it can all be overlooked!"

"Ah? Ah this... it does seem... reasonable."

Huitu Puapu stayed where he was, in a daze for a while, the sadness on his face gradually subsiding, as if accepting his fate. He thought about something for a while before lowly asking.

"Then, how many years do I have to stay here? Surely, you won't let me grow old and die alone on this deserted island?..."

"What growing old and dying alone? Why would you be alone? Cuba Island is so prosperous; where is it desolate?..."

Hearing Puapu's words, the old Militia Chiwaco laughed angrily. He laughed for a while, pouting, and said in a deep voice.

"Priest Tomate is also here, along with so many Kingdom's Warriors and sailors! Settle your mind! Even an old turkey makes a nest! The evil invasion prophesized by His Highness will come in two or three years. How can you not wait until then, kill a few fair-skinned invaders, and perform well!"

"Besides, staying in this warm Cuba isn't considered suffering at all. Over the past few months, you've left seeds everywhere! Considering how your teapot's mouth is long, and the water in the pot is also plentiful, staying for two to three years might produce a few more children! An old man like me, how can I compare to you..."

Upon hearing this, Puapu's face turned pale; the retribution came too quickly. He stammered, hurriedly lowering his head to apologize.

"Uh!... Old Qi, you... I was just joking, please don't take it to heart! I... I'll give you all the gemstones, gold, and silver I've hoarded! When you stand before His Highness, you must speak well of me!"

"Hmm? You, this guy, still have hidden treasures? Right, what did you just call me?"

"Old Qi... brother!"

"Hmm, not bad! Shout a couple more times."

"Bro! We are brothers through life and death! For the sake of our hometown and camaraderie, you must help a brother out!"

"Hmm. I will consider it..."

Chiwaco looked at Huitu Puapu with a half-smile. Then, with a haunting expression, he murmured a few words.

"Alright! Get some sleep early! I'm leaving tomorrow... The sea is unpredictable; who knows when we'll meet again, or if we'll meet again... Brother, just stay in Cuba with peace of mind, and leave a few more behind..."

"Ah! May the Chief Divine protect! We will surely meet again! Hmm, Old Chi, you're getting older, and you don't have a son. If it comes to that, I'll help you have one, and pass him to you..."

"Get lost!..."

The camp gradually quieted down until all was silent. That night, the two slept in close tents, without any snoring, both tossing and turning with difficulty in sleeping. And when the new red sun rose from the East the next morning, the camp became busy again. The bustling activity continued for half a day, and by the time the sun reached its peak, Chiwaco had boarded the flagship, bidding farewell to those on shore with the departure of four longships.

"Respected Priest Tomate, you are an excellent follower of the Chief Divine! May you spread the glory of the Chief Divine on Cuba Island!"

Chiwaco clenched his fist on his chest, nodding with a smile towards Priest Tomate on the shore. Hearing this familiar greeting, Priest Tomate paused, smiled, and bowed in return.

"Respected Captain Chiwaco, you are the fearless whale in the sea, leading the fleet forward! May you return to the Kingdom soon, bringing back our gains and good news!"

"Good! May the Chief Divine protect!"

Chiwaco nodded solemnly. He looked into Priest Tomate's sincere eyes and smiled as he spoke leisurely.

"Cassava seedlings, tung oil tree seeds, the large iron mine in Cuba, the large copper mine in Cuba... the Iron Bay Town stronghold, converted Taino believers, the tribes' distribution in Cuba, the larger Haiti Island to the East... as well as the navigation route to Cuba, the Maya's power distribution... and the allied Putun Tribe, details along the coast of Totonac, the prospects of gemstone trade... I remember all the important gains!"

Saying this, Chiwaco paused again, glanced at the smiling Mayan merchant Tikalo beside him, and continued to add.

"Of course, there's also the allied Kokom family, the converted Kokom clan leader, the promised sea chart of the Southern Continent, the shipwright from the Royal Family, the honey servant from the Royal Family, the young Royal Family hostage... none of these important gains will be missing!"

Upon hearing this, Tikalo's expression froze, and his face paled instantly. However, old Militaman Chiwaco did not look at him again but bid farewell to the dejected Puap.

"Huitu, next, you must heed Priest Tomate's words well and make contributions to the Kingdom!"

"Yes, I understand. May the Chief Divine protect! Old Chi, may you have favorable winds and a smooth return!"

"Hmm, may the Chief Divine protect!"

Old Militaman Chiwaco nodded once more, looked at the camp by the bay for a while, then, without hesitation, without melancholy, without saying anything more, directly waved the command flag, ordering the ready four longships!

"Raise the sails! With the east wind, head west! The next target is 600 li away at Fish Bay! May the Chief Divine protect us as we traverse the waves!"

"May the Chief Divine protect us as we traverse the waves!"

Hearing the captain's order, the sailors responded in unison and swiftly got busy. Soon, the four longships raised the front and back sails, gradually accelerating, and resolutely set out on their return journey.

Priest Tomate stood on the shore, watching as the departing fleet became distant, heading towards the horizon's end. From afar, he could still hear the familiar song, still emanating from the heart, still fearless and resolute, and the same inscrutable Patzcuaro tune.

"Oh hey, setting sail!..."

"The sea, it's all water! Walking all the way, there's no end!... Your Majesty, with just one word! Poor old farmer me, about to run my legs off!..."

"Running my legs off, walking everywhere! Walking everywhere, the sun burns!... The sea churns like boiling soup, in Her Majesty's tent, she shakes the fan!... Shake it, and set sail!"

"Setting sail westward, going eight thousand li! Eight thousand li away is home! Looking to the endless expanses!... Home is far, I cannot see! Your Majesty, truly you're a scoundrel!... Oh truly a scoundrel!"

As he listened, Priest Tomate's face broke into a subtle smile. This time, he didn't ask the nearby Puap what was being sung. He just smiled, shook his head lightly, and silently murmured.

"Captain Chiwaco, to sing such bold songs, you are indeed a fearless captain!..."

"I am a preaching priest, graduated from the Divine Power University in the Capital City. If I couldn't speak the Patzcuaro dialect, how could I preach to the villagers of the Lake Region?..."

"Only in this boundless sea, only courage and faith can inspire. May your fearless courage inspire the Kingdom Fleet to traverse the thousands of waves!..."

"Traversing the thousands of waves, from Cuba to the Highland, may the glory of the Chief Divine always protect you!"

Chapter 1182: The Holy War of Granada in the Autumn of 1489 AD

October 1489, southern Iberian Peninsula, Emirate of Granada.

The long Granada War has reached its eighth year. The continuous flames of war still burn between the mountains and the coast in the southern Peninsula. From Malaga to Granada to Baza, the once extremely prosperous lands of Granada have almost been reduced to barren lands by the cruel slaughter and plunder.

By now, the farms, orchards, and canals that the Moors had built over 700 years and were proud of have all been destroyed by the flames of war. In the fertile mountainous valleys of the South, there are burnt villages and markets everywhere, plundered workshops and mines everywhere, deserted fields and

pastures everywhere, and everywhere you can see knights and their chamberlains in cross-emblazoned garments, charging with fanatic zeal, chanting Holy War slogans.

"Praise the Almighty! After six or seven days of running in the wild, we finally caught a decent Moorish captive!"

The sound of horse hooves comes from the end of the valley. Soon, over a dozen cavalymen in cross-emblazoned chain armor, with a pair of horses each, appear from behind the hillside, bringing light dust.

The leading knight is young, with a slightly long face, distinct facial features, and a look of excitement on his face. He is dressed in a polished compact half plate armor, which is lighter than the full plate armor, suitable for long-distance raids. In this era when plate armor is yet to be manufactured on a large scale, the price of this exquisite plate armor on the Iberian Peninsula equals a dozen chain mail or a property in Seville.

The warhorse beneath the knight is clad in protective horse cloth painted with the family's insignia. Upon closer inspection, the emblem is a flying lion with wings, the Saint Mark lion. Undoubtedly, the knight's family hails from the Republic of Venice.

"Bless the Almighty! This time, King Fernando of Aragon leads tens of thousands of Crusaders southward. The Moors are in a state of decline, forced to retreat into the castles... Giovanni, they won't be able to hold out for much longer!"

Beside the young plate armor knight is another slightly older plate armor knight with graying hair. He is composed, talking with the young knight while observing the path ahead. His movements are efficient and straightforward, riding like he was born on horseback, clearly an experienced veteran. His warhorse also wears protective horse cloth, only without the family emblem.

"Lorenzo, why do you say the Moors won't be able to hold out for long?"

The young knight Giovanni turns his head, curiously looking at the older knight Lorenzo. He blinks his eyes, smiling as he speaks.

"Seeing the battles so far, you've observed that the Moors are building fortresses everywhere in the mountains. These stone fortresses are exceptionally sturdy, benefiting from the advantageous terrain. If it were up to me, I would simply withdraw the troops. I feel they could guard these mountain fortresses until old age!"

"The mountain fortresses of the Moors are indeed solid in defense. If it were over two hundred years ago, when Governor Enrico led the Fourth Crusade, these fortresses would have to be sieged for several years. The impregnable city of Constantinople would have been unconquerable without Byzantine internal turmoil and Prince Alexios IV's support."

The older knight Lorenzo remains unchanged in expression. He first nods affirmatively, recounting the old stories of the Fourth Crusade and the sack of Constantinople before offering his own perspective.

"However, times are different now! Forty years ago, Constantinople was conquered by the Ottoman people, relying on unheard-of cannons. Two years ago, King Fernando, with dozens of large mortars, captured the seaside Malaga fortress. Facing terrifying artillery, the once strongholds are likely to fall..."

"Ha! Artillery...such heavy and slow things, useful only at sea and during sieges..."

At the mention, the young knight Giovanni curls his lip in disapproval. He has seen Venice's warships equipped with artillery and the might of artillery during sieges. However, the knightly honor still engulfed his heart, making him instinctively dislike this powerful weapon that shows no distinction between knights and militia.

"Witness the Almighty! What does it matter if there is artillery? King Fernando and his forces set up the Crusader camp, besieging Baza fortress. They've been laid siege for nearly six months; supplies are running low, yet the fortress within remains firm!"

"Yes, Baza fortress is, after all, the most solid mountain fortress in the northeastern Granada. This city is built on a flat mountain, and the terrain is indeed treacherous. To siege, one must attack upwards along the rugged mountain paths. The cannons in the camp cannot pound the towering fortress... however, even without artillery, the Moors cannot hold this fortress for much longer."

"Oh? Lorenzo, are you sure?"

Hearing the old knight's assertion, the young knight Giovanni raises an eyebrow. He turns to look into the old knight's eyes and asks in a serious tone.

"Witness the Almighty! If Baza fortress is really about to fall, why do you suggest I lead the chamberlains out here, seeking some kind of merit?"

"May the Almighty protect us! After such a prolonged siege, the army's supplies are insufficient. The Castilian troops in the camp are morale-low, frustrated and restless; you've witnessed that atmosphere. Crusaders have nothing to do, some gamble privately, others compete in combat, some boast grandiosely about how many heathens they've slain and how they were slain..."

Facing the young knight's questioning, the older knight remains unchanged, smiling at the corners of his mouth.

"Giovanni, staying in the camp is not beneficial for you, better to come out on patrol. The Moors have completely scaled back, and the chances of encountering a mass of Moors Cavalry are already very small."

"Lorenzo, on one hand, you say Baza fortress is about to fall, and on the other, you say the troops in the camp are demoralized..."

The young knight Giovanni furrows his brow, finding it hard to understand.

"It's really bewildering! If the besieging army is weak, how can they conquer Baza fortress?"

"Haha! Giovanni, besieging a fortress relies on the attacking side and equally on the defending side."

The older knight chuckles, indifferent to Giovanni's offensive words. After all, from a certain perspective, young knight Giovanni is expected to inherit his father's title and seat, potentially becoming his future Seigneur. He points to the Moors captive tied behind the knights, confidently speaking.

"Witness the Almighty! Ahead is a village with a well there. We've been galloping so long, so why not rest there for half a day. Water the horses and feed them beans, grab some food, and interrogate the captured Moorish nobility. Perhaps then, you might believe what I say!"

"Good! Then let's hurry up!"

Upon hearing this, the young knight Giovanni nods. Clenching his legs to the horse's sides, he rides towards the Moorish villages in the valley. Over a dozen knights and chamberlains follow closely, raising a cloud of dust in the desolate heart of Granada, riding far off in a moment.

Chapter 1183: The Autumn of 1489 AD, So-Called Holy War

The Moorish village was filled with the scent of deathly silence. Judging from the burnt orchard outside the village and the destroyed canal at the entrance, this was once quite a prosperous village. At least in the territory of the Kingdom of Castile, there weren't many villages that could build canals.

"Praise the Almighty! The Moors in the south of the Peninsula are indeed a laborious group!"

Old knight Lorenzo rode his horse, inspecting the plundered village with interest. He scrutinized an entire row of stone houses, the chicken coops fenced with wooden palisades beside the houses, and the large granaries faintly visible in the distance. As an old Venetian knight who owned and personally managed a manor, he was well aware of just how much wealth such a village could generate annually!

"Tsk ts! Letting the fanatical and coarse Castilians conquer such a fertile land and slaughter these industrious Moorish farmers is truly a waste! They'll only turn these wealth-creating orchards and farms into one poor pasture after another, then play with their 'beautiful' goats."

Old knight Lorenzo curled his lips, looking at the entire dead village, and mocked heartily.

"Of course, Castile is, after all, a pious and warlike Crusader kingdom. Although they are penniless, with an annual income not even matching that of little Granada, they excel at burning, killing, and looting. Before grazing sheep and horses on the farm, they'll certainly cleanse this land thoroughly, turning the compliant Moorish farmers into slaves to sell or nail them to the cross to burn!"

"Haha! Penniless Castilian paupers clinging to their sheep and praying desperately!"

Upon hearing old knight Lorenzo's mockery, a dozen Venetian cavalrymen echoed together, laughing joyfully. They came here as Crusaders, and in these hills, they fought for the Almighty, shedding both blood and sweat. However, King Fernando of Aragon couldn't even supply them with enough rations, and they had to spend their own money buying from the black market in the camp.

Thanks to the leader, young knight Giovanni Tran, whose family was affluent and generous. Otherwise, everyone might have ended up like those impoverished knights of the Peninsula, borrowing loans guaranteed by the Church from Jewish merchants and then going mad with poverty, searching everywhere to rob and kill Moors.

Everyone burst into laughter, except young knight Giovanni, who furrowed his brows. He felt that the Castilian knights, though poor, held a firm faith, even to the point of being fervent and fearless!

In a real battle between a squad of Castilian knights and an equal number of Venetian knights, even if the Venetians had better armor, it might not guarantee a victory. At present, all parties are allies in the Holy War, each with their own ambitions and secret disagreements, is this really good?

"Ahem! Giovanni, I recall there's a military market outside the camp in Basa city that sells Moorish slaves."

Old knight Lorenzo turned his head, looked at the young knight's expression, and laughed as he diverted the topic.

"Praise the Almighty! You are to inherit a vast enterprise. The Tran family has several large manors on the Italian Peninsula. When you return to the camp in Basa, you can buy a few skilled Moorish agricultural slaves or craftsmen cheaply. In Venice, the hiring price for such skilled hands is quite high! ... Of course, young Moorish slave girls have their own charm, perhaps even of noble birth, you could buy a few more..."

"Uh... buying a few Moorish slave girls? Of noble birth?..."

Thinking of the exquisite appearance of Moorish women, young Giovanni licked his lips, indeed somewhat tempted. He hesitated for a moment, looked at the old knight's smiling expression, and lowered his voice.

"This doesn't seem right, though? What if my father finds out..."

"What are you afraid of! Your revered great-grandfather, Governor Niccolo Tran, at the age of over fifty, witnessed the fall of Constantinople. He felt greatly distressed and lamented for a long time, even spending a hefty sum to 'rescue' a batch of young Byzantine noble ladies from the Ottomans..."

Old knight Lorenzo smiled like a sly old fox.

"You see, you're also rescuing! You're rescuing the ordinary knights selling slaves. When this Holy War is over, and there's nothing left to plunder, how many indebted Crusader knights will fall into poverty, bankruptcy, and wander the land? So, even for the sake of the Almighty, it's something that ought to be done!"

"Throughout this journey, you've seen it. The so-called noble Holy War in the south of the Peninsula is nothing more than the Church and the Great Nobility financing, with knights and militias providing the manpower, all together plundering the prosperous Moors, isn't it? In the end, those who manage to plunder enough enjoy success and fame, while those who don't end up in debt. And where do all these monies end up? They ultimately turn around and fall into the Church's pocket! The Jewish lenders are merely gloves, to be discarded at will..."

"...Oh Almighty, I'll go find a well! After running for so long, the warhorse needs to drink!..."

Hearing the old knight's words, young knight Giovanni broke out in a sweat on his forehead and hurriedly spurred his horse away. He knew what Lorenzo said was all true. He also knew that behind the loans given to the devout Crusader knights, there were the Great Nobility from Venice, including his own family.

The Crusader knights shed blood and fought fiercely, only for the lion's share to eventually fall into the hands of the Church and the Great Nobility. But such matters, he was unwilling to dwell on. Thinking too much about them might shake his faith.

"Ah! Such steadfast faith, but still too young!"

Watching Giovanni gallop away, old knight Lorenzo shook his head. He sighed lowly, rare for him to seem somewhat wistful.

"Old Sylvester had me bring you to the Peninsula to participate in the Holy War, not just to earn some credentials and bravery for you! You need to know, as the heir of the Tran family, you will inevitably assume a position as a Venetian senator, dealing with the Republic's secrets, and secretly trading with the Roman Church, Jewish merchants, the Ottomans, Arabs, Tatars of Crimea, even the Moors of the Southern Continent! ..."

"You will have to navigate a complex world; how can you be like an ordinary knight, becoming merely a pious and brave believer? ...You must realize that the age has changed, it's no longer like during the times of the Crusades! ..."

"...Well, it's alright, time is on your side! Anyway, this is how we all came through..."

Old knight Lorenzo trotted on his horse, following far behind young knight Giovanni, as his thoughts drifted back to his own youth. It wasn't until Giovanni stopped by a well and uttered an angry curse that Lorenzo's expression changed, and he galloped over.

"Giovanni, what's wrong?"

"Vaffanculo! Damn it! Damn it! Ugh! These reckless knights, damned paupers!"

Giovanni angrily spewed several curses, then pointed to the darkened well.

"Cazzo! Damn it! The well is filthy, unusable!"

Chapter 1184: The Old Knight's Abilities in the Autumn of 1489 AD

The desolate village of the Moors was eerily silent, all the houses were broken open, and dark red bloodstains were visible everywhere, hinting at the slaughter that had taken place.

The well in the middle of the village was pitch black. Old Knight Lorenzo stood on his horse, unable to see clearly for a moment. He deftly jumped off the horse and approached the wellhead for a look. A stench of rotting corpses wafted up from the bottom of the well, invading his nostrils.

"Damn it! Those reckless murderers! Even such a deep mountain well is filled with corpses..."

Old Knight Lorenzo frowned, glanced briefly at the heap of naked, swollen corpses in the deep well, and sighed helplessly.

"This water is full of corpse poison, don't touch it!"

Saying this, the old knight thought for a moment and then called an experienced chamberlain to give instructions.

"Blessed by the Lord! Carlo, follow the abandoned canals of the Moors, go upstream and have a look. There should be a spring or stream there. Be careful, check if there are any bodies near the water source!"

"Okay! Esteemed Knight Lorenzo, at your command!"

Chamberlain Carlo nodded, blew a whistle with his hand, and nimbly leapt onto his warhorse. The chain armor on his body remained intact, with a blood-stained longsword at his waist, and off he went.

"Vaffanculo! We've journeyed so far, finally resting a bit, and we can't even replenish our water!..."

Young Knight Giovanni, still seething with anger, cursed bitterly.

"Which wandering Holy War Army was it? Killing even unarmed women, not an ounce of chivalry!"

Hearing the outdated term "chivalry," Old Knight Lorenzo raised an eyebrow, looked at Giovanni with surprise for a moment, not knowing what to say. In the Republic of Venice, it was rare to hear nobility spouting such ridiculous words.

However, Old Knight Lorenzo soon remembered that in his youth, Giovanni had received traditional knightly education in the Netherlands and even served as the knight's attendant to the then regent of the Netherlands, the "Model of Chivalry" Maximilian I. The origins of this "chivalry" were, of course, quite obvious.

"Ah, the Model of Chivalry, Maximilian I, was elected Holy Roman Emperor three years ago. Old Silvester's planning for his son early on, making this investment, certainly wasn't in vain!..."

With this in mind, Old Knight Lorenzo's gaze toward Giovanni became more fervent.

Giovanni was somewhat naïve, and overly devout, with little experience in worldly affairs, but he had a high starting point and a well-paved path! The experience of being a chamberlain to the Holy Roman Emperor was something many commoner knights couldn't dream of achieving, not to mention his family's status and the legacy of a vast estate he was to inherit...

Old Knight Lorenzo stroked his goatee, pondered for a moment, and decided to showcase his abilities. He pointed confidently at the wellhead, smiling as he spoke.

"Actually, Giovanni, it's not that hard to find out which troop massacred this village!"

"Hmm? Lorenzo, how so?"

"Look, the bodies in these wells have all been stripped of clothing. Only the impoverished Castilian Knights, the impoverished English Knights, the impoverished Germanic Knights, the impoverished Swiss mercenaries, and the impoverished Holy War militia would be poor enough to steal even clothes..."

"Uh... You've named so many, how do you know which one it is?"

"No rush! Swiss mercenaries and the Holy War militia don't have horses. It's difficult for them to travel this far to plunder here. Moreover, the impoverished Castilian Knights are all held by King Fernando, besieging the Baza fortress. At this time, the only ones truly capable of such recklessness are the impoverished English and Germanic Knights."

"Hmm... Lorenzo, you seem to make sense."

Young Knight Giovanni thought for a while, then nodded in agreement. He then curiously asked.

"So is it the English knights participating in the Holy War, or the Germanic knights?"

"Haha! Witnessed by the Almighty!"

Old Knight Lorenzo chuckled confidently, reaching out to break off a stray arrow shot into a nearby house. He laid the broken arrow in his hand and confidently explained.

"Look at this three-feathered heavy arrow, the cedar wood material, and the fine string wound around the shaft; this is definitely from the English Holy War troops! Only their knights would carry greatbows for foot combat. And if it were Germanic knights, they would generally use armor-piercing crossbows!"

And with that, Old Knight Lorenzo brought the broken arrow to his nose, sniffed it briefly, and asserted.

"This is Castilian purple cedar, purchased by us Venetians in bulk at low prices, slightly processed and then sold at a premium to English merchants as material for bows and arrows! It might even be that this batch of wood for the bows and arrows was shipped from your Tetran family's coastal warehouse!..."

"Ah! The English? My family's lumber business!"

Upon hearing this insightful analysis, the young Giovanni, though not fully understanding, was deeply impressed. He looked admiringly at Old Knight Lorenzo and, after a slight hesitation, still asked.

"Is selling timber like this... profitable?"

"Well, it's average! For this Southern Holy War, the Kingdom of Castile assembled sixty thousand troops and fought for so many years... For military supplies, they've long owed a huge debt to the Republic. The

war continues, and they must repay with whatever they have, with no bargaining power. The timber business mainly relies on stable volume, but we profit a modest two to three times..."

"Ah? Only two to three times the profit?..."

"Haha! Two to three times is quite substantial. Only we Venetians, with control over fleets, resources, and markets, can earn such wealth. In the Catholic World, the only real threats to us are the trade groups from the Republic of Genoa and the rising Portuguese merchants..."

"Oh!..."

Hearing this, young Knight Giovanni blinked, slightly disappointed. Clearly, he didn't understand what stable volume meant for large trading groups.

In his limited worldview, the most sought-after goods in the Republic market were the ivory, spices, and gemstones brought back by the Portuguese from voyages to the Southern Continent. These precious goods, once resold, commanded tens, even hundreds, of times the profit! Along with these goods came tales of adventure from the mysterious Southern Continent! For a young knight, the dual allure of adventure and wealth was simply irresistible.

"Witnessed by the Almighty! Once I inherit the family's fleet... I must set sail myself, go to the mysterious and wild continent, spread the Lord's glory, and return with treasures beyond price!"

Young Knight Giovanni secretly vowed, his eyes revealing a never-before-seen sparkle. After over a year of battles, he was genuinely losing his reverence for the noble Holy War, and a longing for maritime adventures was gradually rising in his heart.

"Blessed by the Lord! What the Portuguese can do, we Venetians can certainly achieve too!"

Seeing the aspiration in Giovanni's eyes, Old Knight Lorenzo's lips curled up, clearly guessing what the other was thinking.

"Almighty! Daydreaming so much, he's still too young!"

Old Knight Lorenzo chuckled, shaking his head, then from his saddlebag, he took out a sharp dagger blade and a few armor-piercing spikes. With a smile on his lips, he walked towards the Moor noble captive, who had been tied by the riders, looking defiant.

Chapter 1185: The Moorish Civil War in the Autumn of 1489 AD

"Ah!..."

October's autumn harvest, yet the fields outside the Moors' desolate village were full of tall wild grass, exuding a sense of bleak desolation. Blue tits boldly landed to rest on the eaves, only to be startled into flight by a sudden, chilling scream. It circled above the village, scanning, seeing only the Cross cavalry laughing around, and in the center, a Moorish captive collapsed on the ground, his voice hoarse.

"Haha! Che coglione! What a useless fool! Seeing this guy's expression just now, I thought we might encounter a defiant heathen!..."

The young Cross cavalry laughed heartily, watching the Moorish noble writhe on the ground, face covered with blood, as if they were seeing an amusing monkey show. There was no pity in their eyes, for in their traditional understanding, tormenting and killing a heathen was not just devoid of crime but a pious virtue.

"Ha! Truly dull!..."

The older Cross knights appeared indifferent. They've seen many such scenes of torturing heathens. For them, at present, the most important thing was to feed their horses with sustaining beans.

At this moment, they were on the front lines of the battlefield, possibly encountering enemies at any time. Hence, feeding the horses quickly to maintain their stamina for galloping and charging was a knight's primary duty! Letting the horses graze wastes too much time and isn't sustaining, something only to be done in safety and relaxation.

Old Knight Lorenzo smiled, cutting off one ear and a pinky finger from the Moorish captive. Then, using a sharp armor-piercing awl, he strung the bloody organs together, casually swaying them before the captive's eyes. When the almost fainted Moorish captive came to his senses, he saw parts of his own

body appearing in his sight in a terrifying way. After a few breaths of silence, there was another startled, hoarse scream.

"Ah! No!..."

After the scream faded, Old Knight Lorenzo spoke for the first time, beginning the interrogation in fluent Moorish with the terrified and frightened Moorish captive. Despite the evident fear on his face, there was still resistance.

The old knight smiled, waving the sharp, bleeding dagger blade, and lowly promised something. Only then did the Moorish captive, half-believing, hesitantly begin to confess.

After a while, the old knight asked him similar questions repeatedly, receiving answers without contradictions. He thus confirmed that the captive was not lying.

Younger Knight Giovanni stood aside, watching with great interest, learning the old knight's interrogation techniques. The captive's speech was fast; his Moorish was just beginning, so he didn't quite understand. After the interrogation, he asked in confusion.

"Lorenzo, you just promised that captive. That he'll be allowed to leave after meeting King Fernando at the camp? Were you serious?"

"Haha! Giovanni, can a promise to a heathen be counted on?"

Old Knight Lorenzo's lips curled up, answering with a smile.

"If he can really bring a substantial ransom out of Basa City, letting him go isn't an issue. But should King Fernando decide otherwise, it's not our concern. Everything depends on the will of the Almighty!"

"Uh..."

Young Knight Giovanni pursed his lips, momentarily speechless. After a pause, he slowly nodded. Indeed, promises to vile heathens weren't the same as those to his Christian brothers, requiring no obligation to uphold. Thinking this, he put aside his thoughts and pursued the more pressing issue.

"Lorenzo, he mentioned some Uncle King, Nephew King, reinforcements, what surrender?"

"Well, explaining it is a bit troublesome. However, the message he brought back was as I expected."

Old Knight Lorenzo, confident and proud, smiled.

"Giovanni, didn't you ask before, if the besieging army isn't effective, how to conquer Baza fortress? Haha! This captive's answer is my answer!"

"Ah! Conquer Baza fortress? What exactly did he say?"

"By the Almighty! He is the Moorish lord Mohamed Ben Hassan of Baza fortress, sent to Granada's capital to request reinforcements from Granada's King, Abu Abdallah. He brought back the King Abu's reply!"

"What? Granada's King is sending troops to support Baza fortress?"

Upon hearing this, Young Knight Giovanni looked surprised and a bit tense.

"We're right between Granada's capital and Baza fortress now. If hordes of Moors cavalry are coming, we must retreat immediately!"

"No, don't worry! We don't need to retreat."

Old Knight Lorenzo shook his head, smiling. He stroked his goatee, his expression leisurely, tinged with sentiment.

"Granada's King Abu told Baza's Lord Hassan: No troops will be dispatched from the capital to Baza fortress! If reinforcements are needed, ask for them from his sworn uncle az-Zaghal!..."

"If the uncle has no reinforcements either, then Baza fortress might as well surrender! Remember, surrender directly to the merciful and respectable, brave and steadfast Queen Isabella, not to the inscrutable and cunning King Fernando..."

Young Knight Giovanni was shocked upon hearing this response. Looking at the old knight in disbelief, he asked with a trembling voice.

"How could this be! Lorenzo, did you hear it wrong?! Baza fortress is the last and most formidable barrier northeast of Granada! How could the Granada King easily abandon this mountain stronghold? Even have its defenders surrender to Queen Isabella?..."

"Well, Giovanni, you see... This actually relates to the internal conflict within the Granada Kingdom! Such internal strife was orchestrated and fostered by the two Iberian kings! It is also due to Granada Kingdom's internal turmoil that I boldly claim the Moors can't hold on much longer..."

Old Knight Lorenzo glanced at the collapsed Moorish captive, pulling young Giovanni aside to a deserted corner. His expression turned solemn, lowering his voice as he detailed the critical turning point in this Holy War.

"Although Granada Kingdom is small, its terrain is rugged, it has a large population, and the country is wealthy. It has the support of many Moors kingdoms from the Southern Continent, making it originally quite a challenge to conquer..."

"However, six years ago, not even two years into this round of Holy War, Granada King Abu Abdallah, let's call him the Nephew King, boldly led an army northward, attacking the Castilians... Then he was defeated, not perishing in battle but disgracefully captured by the Castilians."

At this point, Old Knight Lorenzo's face bore a mocking smile. He looked deeply at the brave young knight, intentionally teaching.

"Giovanni, sometimes, ill-timed bravery is a sin that harms others and oneself! After Nephew King Abu was captured, the Granada royal family underwent numerous struggles, with the throne passing hands twice, finally ending with the uncle, az-Zaghal. And it was at this time that the seeds of Moorish internal strife and destruction were sown..."

Chapter 1186: The Threads of the Peninsula Holy War in the Autumn of 1489 AD

In the desolate village, the seasoned cavalymen were each busy, working in an orderly fashion. Meanwhile, an older and a younger knight stood in the corner, discussing the secret plots and plans of the Southern Holy War, known only to the elite of the Holy War Army.

"Actually, talking about this uncle King, he fought quite well, relying on the mountainous fortresses to resist firmly. The Castilians had been attacking with full force for two years and found it quite tricky. At that time, they remembered the captured nephew King..."

Upon hearing this, Giovanni widened his eyes in confusion and asked.

"Huh? Lorenzo, hasn't this nephew King died yet after being captured for so long?"

"Haha! Not only is he not dead, but he has also been treated quite well!"

The old knight Lorenzo stroked his beard and said with a smile.

"Rumor has it that Queen Isabella often talks privately with this captured nephew King and, with irresistible charm, successfully brings him under her wing... Ahem! Don't look at me like that. Of course, this is just a rumor, a rumor! The actual situation is likely based on mutual trust or perhaps coercion and bribery..."

"Anyway, in the end, the nephew King Abu reached a deal with the Dual Kings of Iberia. The Dual Kings promised to return him to the Granada Kingdom and support him in ascending to the throne. In return, he agreed that, while retaining its original territory, the Granada Kingdom would become a vassal of Castile and pay tribute on time!"

"What? The Granada Kingdom retains its territory but becomes a vassal of Castile?"

Hearing this, Giovanni frowned in confusion.

"Then wouldn't this Holy War have ended long ago? But Castile's attacks have never stopped, and there's no sign of sparing the Moors!"

"Haha! Giovanni, you're still too young! How can promises to heathens be taken seriously?"

The old knight Lorenzo shook his head with a smile, repeating what he said before. Then, he spoke with a meaningful tone.

"The ambition of the Dual Kings is to unify the Iberian Peninsula! This agreement was never intended to be executed from the start! The Dual Kings released the captured nephew King to create two Kings within the Granada Kingdom, causing division. The nephew King released may well be aware of this reasoning, but he coveted the Moorish throne and did not want to remain a captive who could be executed at any moment..."

"... Ha! What a cowardly and greedy heathen king!"

Upon hearing this, the young knight Giovanni showed undisguised disdain on his face. He then stroked his chin, curiously inquiring further.

"So, in that case, did the plotting of the Dual Kings of Iberia succeed? Have the Moors fallen into internal strife?"

"That's right. Almighty be praised! With the support of the Dual Kings, the nephew King unexpectedly and secretly returned to the capital of Granada and gained control over the central capital area. Meanwhile, the army of the uncle King, initially resisting at the two border areas, was suddenly split in two!"

"As a result, the once united and resistant Granada Kingdom quickly divided into opposing factions centered around the uncle and nephew Kings. The nephew King controlled the central valley of Granada, while the uncle King controlled the eastern Baza fortress area and the western Malaga port area."

The old knight Lorenzo sighed deeply, seemingly with some regret. It was unclear for whom he lamented.

"The power of the Moors was thus divided, each independent. And the army of the Dual Kings could focus on attacking the uncle King who resisted to the end! Two years ago, King Fernando personally led his army to attack the western Malaga port. The nephew King of Granada surprisingly did not dispatch any reinforcements in accordance with the agreement with the Dual Kings! You must know that this is the key channel through which the Granada Kingdom receives military and material support from the countries of the Southern Continent Moors!"

"The Malaga port was besieged for five months, ultimately falling under the bombardment of dozens of heavy guns and the siege of Aragon's navy! Tens of thousands of Moors in the city, regardless of gender or age, were captured and sold into slavery, openly traded on the market to fill the financial debts of the Kingdom of Castile... Yes, many were sold to our Republic of Venice. Your father also bought quite a few, including several beautiful Moorish noble ladies..."

"Henceforth, the western part of Granada fell entirely, and the support from the Moors' countries of the Southern Continent was completely cut off. Faced with the continuously advancing Holy War Army, the tragic fate of the Moors on the peninsula was thus sealed! And what remains is only a matter of time..."

Hearing the old knight's narrative, the young knight Giovanni widened his eyes, lost in thought. The ongoing peninsula Holy War never became so clear in his mind, like the leaves in the hand of Divine Son Jesus.

In the desolate village, the war passed like drifting smoke. The young knight pondered for a long time, and the old knight patiently waited until the other spoke in a deep voice.

"Lorenzo, so, this nephew King of the capital refuses to send even a single soldier to aid Baza fortress because it pledged allegiance to his uncle?"

"Yes, that should be the main reason. Another reason might be that the number of Crusaders besieging the city is over twenty thousand infantry and cavalry. While there are only a few thousand troops in the capital of Granada, unable to dispatch many reinforcements. Moreover, there is a neutrality agreement between the nephew King and the Dual Kings..."

"How foolish! Absurd!... The Baza fortress is the last barrier northeast of the capital of Granada! If Baza fortress falls, Granada would be completely exposed before the Holy War Army..."

As he spoke, Giovanni became somewhat agitated. Perhaps he himself did not realize that under the old knight's subtle guidance, his stance quietly shifted from that of the Holy War Army to neutrality.

"By then, this nephew King will be trapped in an isolated city! Could he really count on the Dual Kings to honor the agreement, sparing the magnificent city of Granada and the splendid Alhambra Palace, and merely make him a vassal?!"

"Haha! Who knows what goes on in the mind of the Moorish nephew King? Perhaps he clings to a final hope! After all, after the fall of Malaga port, whatever he does only prolongs the inevitable. Rather, adhere to the agreement with the Dual Kings and beg for their mercy. Sometimes, you can never wake up a person pretending to be asleep..."

Reaching this point, the old knight Lorenzo felt a bit emotional. He extended his hand, gently patted Giovanni's shoulder, and said with a smile.

"Giovanni, regardless. Bringing this captive messenger back to the camp and handing him over to King Fernando is a notable achievement! The neutral stance of the Granada King is quite evident. There are likely more than one messenger dispatched by Baza fortress for aid. Once the news brought back by this captive reaches Baza fortress, the defending army's will to hold out will certainly be greatly shaken..."

"Hmm, praise the Almighty! Chamberlain Carlo has returned. He found a clean water source upstream. Let's go water the horses, fill the water bags, and then head back!"

"... Praise the Almighty! Let's go."

The young knight Giovanni pondered for a moment and nodded. Since the fall of Baza fortress seemed hopeful, returning to the camp might earn him some spoils of war, and possibly leave more laurels.

At this moment, after experiencing so much, the Crusade on the peninsula was no longer his goal but just a ladder to promotion. Perhaps this is a transformation every young knight must undergo, from idealism to the mundane...

Chapter 1187: Autumn of 1489 AD, Shocking News! A New Black Death!

The autumn wind of October blew through the valley, carrying a hint of chill and a silent, murderous air. The two knights, one old and one young, exchanged a few more words, then took their men and captives to the upstream water source. Once everything was settled, the Venetian cavalry squad set off on their return journey to the northeast.

The return path lay through valleys and streams in the mountains, and dry land far from the streams. Along the way, abandoned farmlands and burnt Moorish villages were everywhere to be seen.

The towering Sierra de Baza undulated in everyone's line of sight. The peak at the highest point of the mountain range is the Calar de Santa Barbara, over two thousand meters high. The name originates from one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers of Christianity, "Babara" from the Roman Era, Saint Barbara. In fact, veneration of her is more common in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

As for the Moorish name of this peak, no one in the squad knows it, and it is not passed down through later generations. Because the Spaniards' Inquisition would thoroughly erase the Moorish traces on the peninsula and the Moors on the peninsula after hundreds of years of brutal trials.

The sky was bright, and the mountain valleys were clearly visible. The Venetian cavalry squad, with captives in tow, hadn't traveled long before they saw several cross-clad cavalry riders kicking up a cloud of dust in the distant sky, rushing towards them.

"Everyone be careful! Take out your weapons, prepare for battle!"

The old knight Lorenzo's expression changed, and he ordered sharply. He remained vigilant, holding a shield in one hand and drawing his knight's sword with the other, ready to charge at any moment. He knew even if they were Crusaders in cross-clad robes, meeting them in the wild without witnesses wasn't trustworthy. Because the infighting and battles over spoils of war were not uncommon in the Crusades. Many ordinary knights died not because of the Moors.

"Almighty protect us! Honorable Knight Giovanni, Honorable Knight Lorenzo, we finally found you!"

Not until the cavalry got close did the old knight lower his weapon, recognizing them as a few knight's attendants left in the camp before the squad's departure.

"Marino, is that you? What brings you here? Hmm? All the attendants left in the camp came with you?! Who's guarding the supplies back at the camp now?"

"Honorable Knight Lorenzo, we took all the valuables. As for the remaining odds and ends, we left them in the besieged camp, couldn't manage them... Something big happened in the camp; we can't stay any longer!... Huff! Huff!..."

Saying this, Marino was panting heavily, finding it a bit hard to breathe. He was already not young, and running outside for two days had exhausted his strength. Now finding old Knight Lorenzo, the tension in his heart eased, and he felt slightly dizzy.

"Almighty protect us! What exactly happened in the Crusader camp?"

Seeing this scene, old Knight Lorenzo frowned, a trace of unease welling up in his heart. Marino was a trusted leader of attendants, never making such rash moves, unless...

"Marino, don't rush! Rest for a while, speak slowly!"

"Huff! Huff!..."

After catching his breath, Marino slowly calmed down. Talking about the events in the camp, his face involuntarily showed fear.

"Almighty! A new plague broke out in the besieged camp, a new Black Death! Many people, hundreds, thousands, have already been infected and died!..."

"Ah! Black Death?!"

"What?!"

Hearing this, old Knight Lorenzo could no longer maintain his usual calm expression, and for the first time, deep fear appeared on the fearless face of young Knight Giovanni.

For the Europeans of this era, the recurrent Black Death was the symbol of the God of Death, even more frightening than death itself! Because, according to the Church, it was a disease spread by the Demon. To die under the power of the Demon meant even the soul might be defiled, unable to reach the Lord's kingdom after death!

All the knights present, as well as most of the soldiers in the camp, had experienced the trials of the Black Death. Logically, they shouldn't catch it again. But according to Marino's words...

"Almighty bear witness! Marino, are you certain it's a new form of the Black Death?!"

At this moment, old Knight Lorenzo's expression was more serious than ever before. He locked eyes with the attendant Marino, waiting for a definite answer.

"I... I haven't seen it with my own eyes, I don't know what it is!"

Attendant Marino painfully tugged at his hair. Then, with an extremely uneasy expression yet with firm certainty, he said.

"Almighty bear witness! But I am certain that a plague broke out! The two Castile Thousand-man Camps at the rear have been completely sealed off. The accompanying priests have all left, no one knows where they've gone... Black smoke from burning bodies was also seen in the rear camp. That smell, I've smelled it, just like the witch trials, they're definitely burning people!"

"I quickly asked fellow attendants, only to find out the Crusader knights from England, just got wind of it and fled in advance! They said, only four years ago, when Henry VII was crowned King of England, a mysterious 'Sweating Sickness' swept across all of England! Everyone, regardless of status, would suddenly fever, vomit, and then suffer severe pain in the neck, back, and abdomen, sweating profusely, and die within a day! In just two months, hundreds of nobles died, thousands of knights, and tens of

thousands of commoners... It is said, that's because witches opposed the king and summoned an evil Demon..."

Speaking of this, Marino was full of horror, sweat trickling down his back. His attendants were also in a state of fright. In these days, they heard too many terrifying stories, rendering them unable to stay in the camp any longer.

"Later, after a few months, England's 'Sweating Sickness' suddenly disappeared. The Church burned over two hundred witches, said to have burnt the mastermind summoning the Demon... This time, as soon as the plague appeared in the camp, the English Crusader knights, like startled sparrows, left their supplies and retreated to the northeastern hinterland overnight. It's said that even King Fernando himself couldn't bring them back... When we left, the Germanic knights and Swiss mercenaries in the camp were also clamoring to leave..."

Old Knight Lorenzo furrowed his brow tightly, listening closely to every word Marino said. The expression on his face grew heavier, the same thought arising within him.

"Almighty protect us! Marino, are the symptoms of the plague in the camp this time similar to the 'Sweating Sickness' that appeared in England?"

Upon hearing the inquiry, Marino was momentarily stunned, then sunk into his memories. Subsequently, a profound terror appeared on his weather-beaten face, even causing his voice to tremble.

"No... it's not! This time, the new plague seems to be unprecedented! It is, it is..."

Chapter 1188: Autumn of 1489 AD—Shocking! A Prisoner Worth 300,000 Ducats

"Marino, don't be afraid! The Almighty protects us!"

The mountain wind blew, and the old knight Lorenzo's expression was solemn, his beard and hair bristling. He reached out, firmly grasped the hand of his chamberlain Marino, giving him courage as he asked in a deep voice.

"Tell me, what are the symptoms of the Plague exactly?!"

"Ah! It's the Demon possessing them!!"

Marino finally mustered his courage, crying out in fear. After a while, he struggled to calm his emotions before carefully describing in some trepidation.

"I heard some people say... the symptoms of this Plague start with a high fever all over the body, and a large number of red spots emerging on the arms, back, and chest. But after one or two days of falling ill, the afflicted, as if possessed by a Demon, will start screaming and scratching frantically! In the end, they will all suffer gangrene, their flesh rotting away to death..."

"Yes! Yes! I was near the quarantined camp at night and heard all kinds of terrifying screams, just like Demons!"

Hearing this, another chamberlain Marco couldn't help but speak, his voice even trembling a little.

"Almighty! Those painful and mad sounds were just like coming straight from Hell!"

"Yes, yes! Almighty bears witness, after that night, they started burning people the next day! They burned a lot, and there was so much smoke!..."

"This is the Demon's Curse, a new Black Death!"

Fearful and chaotic affirmations came from the other chamberlains, casting an additional layer of mysterious terror over this unknown Plague. These chamberlains present were all battle-hardened; even when facing several times more heathen, under the bombardment of Firearms, they could still maintain their fighting courage!

However, when encountering powers related to the Demon, facing such an invisible horror, all the courage and will to fight seemed to be instantly crushed. This is the Middle Ages' knight, who, while believing in the Almighty, also fears the Demon.

"Damn, the new Black Death! This is truly a big incident now!..."

The old knight Lorenzo had a somber face, pondering for quite a while before taking a deep breath. Then, he looked at the young knight Giovanni who was bewildered and showing a fearful face, making a decision.

"Giovanni, we are not going back to the camp!"

"Ah? Not going back?"

"Yes! With the Almighty's protection, we have received information in advance, avoiding the dangerous new Plague! This Plague has already erupted in the siege camp, even though the specifics are unknown, surely, many will die! If we go back now, it's like playing chess with the God of Death, a path to suicide!"

"Ah! Yes, Lorenzo, you're right! Then, where do we go?"

"We head directly north, first withdrawing into the Kingdom of Castile, find a safe village to restock some food. Then, we continue without delay, heading northeast all the way to the Valencia port a thousand miles away!

"What? Traveling a thousand miles to the Valencia port?!"

Hearing this, Giovanni showed surprise, with hesitation flashing across his face.

"Are we going to just withdraw from the Holy War?"

"Giovanni! At such a time, you are still thinking about the Holy War? Since old Sylvester entrusted you to me to bring you here, it's my duty to take you back whole and alive...not to take back a corpse or a pile of burnt ashes!"

The old knight Lorenzo's expression was severe, with an unprecedented severity in his words.

"Since we decided to stay away from the Plague, we must avoid it at all costs! When we reach the Valencia port, we will find a ship heading to Venice. Then, immediately sail back to the Republic. The Holy War on the Peninsula will no longer concern you or me!"

"This! This?... Just like that, leave the Holy War?..."

Upon hearing this, the young knight Giovanni's face showed disappointment and frustration. Yet, under his reluctant expression, his body relaxed a bit. The old knight Lorenzo's eyes gleamed as he perceived the choice in Giovanni's heart. This young man's body was being honest. He just needed a way out.

"Giovanni, it's decided then! Your father, old Sylvester, once said before joining. If facing a big decision, you are to follow my lead! This is my decision and your father's decision!...Let us depart!"

"Uh?... Your decision, and father's decision... father's command..."

The young Giovanni was momentarily dazed, sighed, and with some reluctance, turned his horse's head, about to follow the old knight Lorenzo away, but suddenly noticed the Moorish prisoner tied to the packhorse.

"Lorenzo! If we are leaving, what then about this Moorish Messenger?"

"Hmm...the Moorish Messenger..."

The old knight Lorenzo pondered for a moment, then a smile gradually formed on his lips. Before leaving the Peninsula's Holy War Battlefield, maybe he still had time to give the young Giovanni the last and most crucial lesson.

"Giovanni, if it weren't for this sudden Plague, the Baza fortress would surely have fallen soon... But with this Plague, the course of the coming war is uncertain..."

"Ah? Lorenzo, why do you say that?"

"The Almighty bears witness! Think about it, the morale of the Holy War Army in the siege camp was already lacking. Now, the outbreak of the Plague will cause many Crusader Knights from various countries to leave... The morale of the Castilian troops will naturally decline even further..."

The old knight Lorenzo smiled slightly, analyzing the Holy War battle as if he had everything under control.

"King Fernando of Aragon, although adept in strategy, cunning and wise, is not someone who can inspire others! In contrast, Queen Isabella of Castile, brave, devout, decisive, and fearless, is a commander like Saint Joan who can rally people in desperate situations!"

"At present, the siege camp is experiencing an unprecedented Plague outbreak. Once the Plague spreads, the morale of the camp will hit rock bottom. King Fernando in the camp does not have the capability to stabilize the military's morale. At most, he can delay for a little more than half a month, one month at most, and withdrawal will be inevitable!"

"Lorenzo, are you saying... the Moor Defending Army in the Baza fortress only needs to hold out for one more month to withstand this round of siege?"

Hearing this, the young knight Giovanni blinked. He looked at the Moorish prisoner on the packhorse and suddenly realized that the Moorish Messenger he captured might become the key to altering the course of the Holy War!

"Ah! Then, what about the message this Messenger carries?..."

"Exactly! He is crucial."

The old knight Lorenzo smoothed his beard, lowered his voice, and asked with a smile.

"Giovanni, if the Baza fortress can hold, and King Fernando returns without success... Then our retreat at this time, in the eyes of others, will become a wise choice. And if the Moors withstand this round of siege and the entire Castilian army withdraws, it will take at least until spring next year to reorganize an attack. With this six-month gap, the Moors might sort out their internal affairs and manage to resist for another two years..."

"And the Holy War has been going on for full eight years now. The Castilians have spent at least 30-40 million Maravedi coins, which is 700,000 to 1 million Ducats, to supply the 60,000 strong army. They owe our Republic of Venice a debt between 300,000 and 500,000 Ducats... Since the Church offered a guarantee, the interest rate for this Holy War debt is only around 10% per annum, but the interest is still added to the principal..."

At this point, the old knight Lorenzo smiled broadly, resembling not so much an honorable knight but a greedy merchant.

"Giovanni, calculate. If the war drags on for another two years, how much more will the Castilians owe us?"

"Ah! If the Holy War continues for another two years, the interest on the existing debt to the Republic alone will increase by 70,000 to 110,000 Ducats! And counting the new debt, at least 200,000 additional debts! Including the interest on the new debt of 20,000... it amounts to 300,000 Ducats!"

As the heir of a Venetian senator, Giovanni's ability to calculate accounts was indisputable. He flexed his fingers, quickly calculating twice, with his fingers trembling slightly.

"Almighty! So, the value of this Moorish prisoner could be... 300,000 Ducats?!"

Chapter 1189: Autumn of 1489 AD, the Unstoppable Holy War, the Promised Land of Canaan

The sky between the mountains was as clear and blue as the deep sea, reflecting the myriad aspects of the world. Under the sky of Granada, the young knight Giovanni trembled all over, pointing at the bewildered Moorish noble captive, his face full of disbelief.

"Three hundred thousand, three hundred thousand gold ducats!"

"Exactly! Giovanni, you calculated quickly and accurately. You will be an excellent heir to old Silvestre and will become an outstanding Venetian senator. Perhaps, with the connections of the Holy Roman Emperor, you even have a chance at the Republic's Council of Ten..."

Old knight Lorenzo's lips curled up, his voice softly persuasive. Then, with a "clang," he drew the knight's longsword from his waist and placed it into Giovanni's hand.

"Go on! Child! For the interests of the Republic of Venice, go kill him, kill this heathen messenger!"

"Ah! Kill him!"

The young knight Giovanni instinctively took the longsword and walked to the front of the Moorish noble captive. He slowly placed the blade on the captive's neck, watching the terrified expression, listening to the anxious pleas, and his body trembled all over.

His hand shook slightly, and the balance in his heart swayed back and forth. On one side was the faith in the Almighty, the honor of the Holy War, the knight's spirit. On the other side were the interests of the Republic, the interests of his family, and his own interests...

"Almighty! Three hundred thousand gold ducats..."

The young knight Giovanni murmured, his eyes gradually changing. Old knight Lorenzo seemed composed, having long known the answer in his heart.

After a moment of dead silence, a heart-wrenching scream, the Moor's pleas halted abruptly. Silence reigned once more, with only the sound of blood flowing.

"Very good! Very good! Giovanni, you did very well!"

Seeing the splattered crimson, old knight Lorenzo's spirit lifted, a smile on his face. He observed the young knight's bloodstained longsword and the downcast eyes, feeling quite satisfied. Although he couldn't see the other's eyes, he could definitely feel: at this moment, in this young knight, something long-held, with a "snap," finally broke...

"Praise the Almighty! Haha!... God said, 'Repent then, and turn to Him, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus.'"

With a laughing face, old knight Lorenzo recited a passage of scripture for atoning, like a priest, in front of Giovanni. Then he took the longsword from the young knight, wiping the blood from his hands and face, gently comforting him.

"Giovanni, good child! The Almighty has forgiven you! From today on, you are a qualified, true Venetian noble!"

The young Giovanni pursed his lips, remained silent for a moment, then lightly nodded. He said nothing, silently mounted his horse, and completely turned its head. Before departing, the former knight raised his head for one last look at the Granada sky. Then he wanted to say something but the words turned into another question.

"Lorenzo, if the Holy War ends, and the Kingdom of Castile still can't repay our debt, what then?"

"Giovanni, you don't need to worry. The city of Granada has been the capital city of the Moors on the Peninsula for over seven hundred years! Within it, treasures and wealth fill the Alhambra Palace, numerous beyond count. As long as Granada is captured, the Castilians will have a great deal of spoils of war to sell to us!"

"Lorenzo, what if these spoils of war still aren't enough? You know many knights joining the Holy War are bankrupt, burdened with debt to gather warhorses, armor, travel expenses, and supplies to join the Holy War on the Peninsula. They'll also need a share of these spoils to try to repay their debts..."

At this moment, the subject of Giovanni's discussion seemed to have shifted, becoming like that of a true Venetian.

"...Moreover, the majority of spoils should belong to the various Castilian lords who sent troops. The spoils for the Dual Kings to distribute might not be sufficient, I fear!"

"Ha! There are plenty of Moors in the city of Granada. Even more Moors inhabit this land! If the spoils aren't enough, then just confiscate all the Moors' property and sell them as slaves, won't that work! Don't worry, the Castilians won't have any qualms about doing such things!..."

"..."

The young Giovanni sat silently on horseback for a while, but persisted in asking.

"What if, and I mean if, if the Castilians still have no money? If these thousands of Crusader knights can't get enough spoils to pay off their debts?... By then, the church that guarantees the debt, being the actual creditor... will they drive them to desperation?"

"Huh?!"

At these words, old knight Lorenzo's eyes moved. He somewhat understood, understood what Giovanni was worried about, and inwardly sneered.

"Ha! Even having made a choice, still a trace of conscience remains... Ah, still too young!"

Old knight Lorenzo dismissed it with a laugh, shaking his head. But seeing Giovanni's seriously determined expression, he deliberated for a moment before answering.

"Expecting the Church to give up debts, to let greedy high priests relinquish wealth clutched in their hands, is impossible! They might at most reduce some interest, while the indebted Crusader knights can sell their manors, sell their lands to repay debts..."

"If these debt-ridden paupers have nothing left to sell, then sell their lives! The Church will always find a way, as will the Kingdom of Castile. They can find a new target for looting... Oh no, I mean a new Holy War target! Like the Wattasid Dynasty in Morocco, across the strait on the Southern Continent, which is also a wealthy Moorish kingdom. There's also the Kingdom of Tlemcen in Algeria, the Hafsid Kingdom in Tunisia... they're all targets to be fought!"

At this point, old knight Lorenzo smiled, looking toward the distant South, as if foreseeing an impending future.

"Giovanni, you must know, Castile, a country established by war, is a Crusader nation through and through! They don't manage lands, never had the tradition, and won't have the patience for agriculture.

They spend lavishly, squander the easy money they plunder quickly without restraint... they are, entirely different from us Venetians!"

"Now, maintaining an army of five to six thousand Crusaders, battle-hardened and with the support of the Kingdom of Aragon's navy, they can't stop the war, nor can they! The Vatican will support them to continue the fight, and our Republic of Venice will also support them to continue, bringing us more wealth... Haha!"

"So that's the way it is..."

The young Giovanni was wordless for long. The real world struck suddenly, and imagined faith and glory turned out to be just bubbles hovering lightly on the surface, dissipating with a breath... After a long while, Giovanni sighed, shaking his head.

"Ah! Crossing the strait, heading to the Southern Continent shrouded by heathens... such slaughter, leaves no retreat! It might even attract the intervention of the Ottoman legion..."

"Hiss! The Ottoman legion..."

These words made old knight Lorenzo lower his gaze, fear rising in his heart. No one understands the power of the Ottoman people better than the Venetians. After a while, he took a deep breath and laughed, saying.

"Who knows? Almighty protect us! Perhaps, the Castilians will find a new Holy War target... who knows, they may be affluent, yet weak, dispersed like scattered sand!..."

"Ha! Affluent, yet weak, and scattered like sand?..."

Hearing this, Giovanni also laughed. He shook his head again, longingly.

"Almighty protect! If such a country exists, it would be the 'land flowing with milk and honey,' the promised Heaven of the Almighty! By then, let alone the Castilians, the Aragonese, the Portuguese... even we Venetians would pounce and never let it slip by!..."

"Haha! Giovanni, you've forgotten, there's also the most greedy, the Vatican!"

Old knight Lorenzo laughed heartily, added. Then he squeezed the horse's sides, gave a whistle, and rode forward.

"Young man, stop dreaming! Hurry, the road awaits! Almighty protect, may this new plague not spread to the Republic of Venice!"

"Hmm, the Almighty will protect us! Amen!"

The rising prayers and the sound of trotting hooves echoed and drifted among the mountains and valleys of Granada. The dry earth was covered with withered yellow long grass, only a headless corpse leaking gradually darkening red streams. It was the life-or-death slaughter beneath faith and wealth, also akin to an unrecognized omen.

Chapter 1190: The Judgment of Fire in the Autumn of 1489 AD

The white cloth army camp was shrouded in fog by the burning smoke and dust. The chill of autumn entangled the edge of dawn. In the air, there was a strange and pungent smell, inexplicably evoking feelings of familiarity and fear. The mountain wind faintly brought the sound of desperate sobbing and hoarse shouting.

"Almighty! Please! Save us... from the demon's hand! Save us!..."

The cries came from the army camp but were blocked by guards in armor. Leaves fell, brushing past their solemn and cold faces, the burning torches held high, and their grayish cloaks marked with crosses. Amidst these guards were two figures—one old, one strong—the highest-ranking individuals in the entire Crusader camp.

The elder wore a cold black robe, adorned with a simple black hat, showing no trace of bright colors. His gaze was even colder and more solemn than the black he wore, resembling the glaciers atop Mont Blanc in the Alps. The only slightly shiny part was the gold Bishop's cross on his neck, symbolizing the exalted status of a high Divine Servant.

As for his name, it was known and feared throughout the Peninsula, able to make even the Great Nobility of Castile tremble. He was Thomas de Torquemada, the first Chief Inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition and a black-robed monk of the Dominican Order.

In the six years since Thomas became the Chief Inquisitor, he had issued 28 verdict decrees, expanding the charges for religious trials to more than twenty. He personally sentenced over five thousand to burning, forty thousand to punishment, confiscation, and lifetime imprisonment... on average, burning a thousand people a year, with eight thousand imprisoned! The prosecuted were mostly "Jewish converts" and "Moorish converts."

In other words, in the Spanish dioceses, if you were a Jew or a Moor, even if you converted to the Almighty, your faith's authenticity would be questioned, subjected to the scrutiny of the Inquisition. Over the past six years, almost none could pass the scrutiny. This frenzied religious trial was a reflection of Castile's religious zealotry and the fundamental characteristic of its Crusader nation.

Thomas's other role was as Queen Isabella's confessor and mentor, arguably her most intimate supporter and ally.

The marriage of Queen Isabella and King Fernando was initially his suggestion and plan. After the union of the Dual Kings, he served as the third most influential figure after them, representing the Divine Authority of the Spanish diocese, closely supporting their regime. In truth, the smooth commencement of this crusade against Granada could not happen without his full support and rallying!

Listening to the cries from the army camp, Chief Inquisitor Thomas's expression remained calm. His eyes held neither cruelty nor compassion, only unwavering certainty.

"Fernando, are they all here?"

"Respected black-robed monk... Almighty forgive! The sixteen hundred who were corrupted by the demon are all present."

King Fernando slightly lowered his eyes, showing a hint of reluctance. He sighed deeply, evident compassion surfacing on his face, visible to the surrounding guards. This king of Aragon was in his prime, with a long face, wide forehead, and deep eyes, conforming to the era's aesthetics, making him rather dignified.

He was dressed in agile chain armor, covered by a vibrant cloak marked with a cross, with gilt plate armor boots on his feet. This bright attire sharply contrasted with the nearby gray priest's robe. The distinctive red-yellow stripes on the cloak were the symbol of Aragon, representing the King of Aragon.

"Merciful Almighty! May you cast your gaze and save the souls of the unfortunate from the flames about to burn!"

Before the ensuing "salvation" occurred, King Fernando lowered his head, sincerely praying for the Crusader Knights detained in the camp. Witnessing the king's devotion, surrounding Castilian lords and accompanying priests also lowered their heads in sincere prayer.

"..."

Thomas the Inquisitor turned his head, his expression unchanging, deeply looking at Fernando. Upon receiving the news of the plague outbreak, he rushed from Seville's court at Fernando's invitation, day and night, disregarding danger. His first request upon meeting him was to preside over "salvation from demonic corruption!"

The method of 'salvation' was to gather all the sick guards together, bind them with ropes, detain them in the army camp, and pile up flammable kindling. Then, under the command of the Inquisition priests, the flames of judgment would be ignited!

Chief Inquisitor Thomas calmly waited for a moment, neither urging nor praying. It was only after King Fernando finished praying and wiped the tears from his eyes that Thomas solemnly recited the Revelation, loudly proclaiming.

"God said, 'I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne. The books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.'"

"Judgment begins! Ignite!"

The Inquisitor's voice was firm and powerful, like a mountain advancing. The king's guards, holding torches, followed the priests' instructions to ignite the kindling at the camp's periphery. They then threw the burning torches into the depths of the camp. Soon, fierce flames erupted from all around the camp, rising two or three meters high before gradually merging into a sea of fire!

"Ah! Merciful Almighty! Please! Please!"

"Ah! Ah! Don't! Don't burn me! Ah ah!"

Within moments, the burning camp erupted with piercing screams, sharp as though throat-slashed, like rising from a dreadful hell. Hearing such terrible cries, several guards couldn't help but show emotion, displaying expressions of terror or compassion.

Among everyone present, only Chief Inquisitor Thomas remained emotionless, with King Fernando's eyes brimming with tears. Throughout, their expressions never changed.

The fire grew larger, the flames burning higher, even emitting continuous black smoke. The sharp and haunting screams quickly became hoarse and low before gradually fading away. The entire camp burned in bright flames yet seemed as silent as the deepest darkness.

Chief Inquisitor Thomas patiently waited for a moment, again neither urging nor praying. It wasn't until the fierce flames consumed the entire camp, with no chance of survival for the sick guards, that he lowered his gaze and once more loudly declared!

"God said, 'They were judged according to what each had done. Then death and the underworld were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, they were thrown into the lake of fire.'"

"Judgment complete! They will go to their deserved places according to each one's deeds! And the demon's power will be burned away by the flames of judgment!"

Upon hearing the revered Chief Inquisitor Thomas, representing the Almighty, proclaiming, the guards' expressions gradually settled. For most of the Holy War Army, this "salvation" ritual wasn't seen as brutal slaughter, but indeed a salvation!

Only under the Chief Inquisitor's presiding, representing the Almighty, could the sacred judgment burn away the demonic power infesting the sick guards' bodies, thereby saving their souls!

After such a brutal "salvation," the morale of the surviving Holy War Army in the camp not only wouldn't decline but could slightly recover. How long this morale might last depended on how long the next massive plague outbreak could be delayed.

The black smoke gradually dissipated, with a burnt protein smell and grilling fragrance filling the air. Amid this peculiar aroma, King Fernando quickly furrowed his brow. He turned sideways, bowed to Chief Inquisitor Thomas before preparing to leave. With the camp's troops' morale unsteady, he had many matters to handle. He also needed to find ways to capitalize on the effects of this "salvation" ceremony to stabilize morale.

"Fernando, don't rush off. Before coming here, Isabella entrusted me with a message for you."

Chief Inquisitor Thomas, unchanged in demeanor, sniffed the fragrance in the air, looking into King Fernando's eyes. He solemnly posed a critical question.

"Isabella asks you, outside the Baza fortress, how much longer can the siege camp hold out?"