

## Civilization 1201

Chapter 1201: New Uses for the New Gunpowder, Boom! Boom! Boom!

"What? Talaya personally led a team to the copper mining area in Zicao County to experiment with 'explosive mining'?"

As daylight descended, the wind stirred the great tent. Xiulote suddenly paused, his heart tensing. His steady face showed surprise, with a hint of worry hidden beneath. After a few moments, he threw down the feather pen in his hand and slapped the table in anger!

"Damn it! Using gunpowder for mining, and personally conducting on-site tests? That reckless woman! Who taught her such a dangerous method?!"

Hearing His Highness's question, Guard Commander Ecatl froze for a moment, unsure of what to say. He lowered his head, remaining silent, though his mind was racing.

He had served the High Priest for many years, knowing well that the Divine Revelation Director Talaya, was the pottery girl brought into the residence seven years ago by the High Priest under his discreet command. At that time, it seemed His Highness was merely momentarily interested, without any real engagement with her. But now, listening to His Highness's tone... indeed, since His Highness could trust the Divine Revelation Place to her, their relationship must be extraordinary!...

Ecatl's thoughts drifted far, seeming to understand something. Moments later, Xiulote's expression also froze, showing embarrassment.

He suddenly remembered that just over half a year ago, he received a report from Talaya, discovering a new type of granular gunpowder! The report brought him great joy, as he imagined the potential power of the granular gunpowder, writing a lengthy reply with enthusiasm. Naturally, in the reply, he also mentioned that with the increased power of gunpowder, new applications could be expanded, including mining, road construction, clearing river reefs, and building reservoirs...

"Cough! Cough!"

A few moments later, Xiulote lightly coughed twice. His expression softened slightly as he reached out to take Talaya's letter and began to read it directly.

"Honorable Your Highness! Over the past half-year, I experimented with several new uses for gunpowder that you had mentioned to me, and suddenly a whole new world unfolded before my eyes... In the mining area of Blackstone City, I tested the first copper mine explosion with 6,000 jin of new-style gunpowder, collapsing two tunnels! During that moment, even the entire mountain was shaking, causing panic and unrest among the miners, with thousands fleeing and shouting, almost inciting a riot..."

"Although this terrifying underground explosion did excavate some ores, the risk was indeed too high! After much consideration, I decided to conduct all future blasting in open-pit mining areas. Last month, when the rainy season was over, I led the priests of the Gunpowder Bureau to mine in the open-pit copper mine in Zicao County. After two large-scale blasts, 7,000 to 8,000 jin of gunpowder were consumed, and tens of thousands of jins of blasted copper ore replaced the digging volume of over 2,000 people in a single day!..."

"Your Highness, your Divine Guidance has led me! This truly is a mining method beyond everyone's imagination! However, the consumption of gunpowder is indeed too high. The granular gunpowder consumed in this round of mining, from saltpeter collection, saltpeter making, charcoal burning, sulfur gathering, gunpowder mixing, to water granulation, also required about one to two thousand people in a day... But I believe that with more reasonable calculations and more suitable explosion points, we can effectively reduce gunpowder consumption and enhance blasting power!..."

Seeing this, Xiulote rubbed his brow, pondering for a long time. It was clear that the Alliance's gunpowder production efficiency was still not high enough, and the cost of employing miners was very low. Such explosive mining, for the time being, could not demonstrate a significant cost advantage, though its potential was very high for the future.

"My only Your Highness, the application of the new gunpowder is truly as vast as the sky! And you, are the brightest sun in my sky... In recent months, I have also attempted blowing up small hills to make the road from Mall City to the Blackstone City mining area smoother. Together with Apa County Magistrate Ezpan, we agreed to bring professional Gunpowder Bureau priests to help him clear the mountain pass and build the 150-li county road from Flower Fruit City to Apa City..."

"As for Zicao County Magistrate Etalik, he hopes the Gunpowder Bureau can send people to study the 160-li river course from Aoto City to Raven Town. However, for river course explosions, I am not confident and plan to attempt blasting the reefs exposed during the dry season when the water level is lowest..."

Reading Talaya's letter, Xiulote's eyebrows twitched, feeling uneasy. But these new uses of gunpowder were closely related to the kingdom's major construction plans and were of great importance. Thinking of this, Xiulote could only sigh softly, whispering to himself.

"Over the years, you have done well, and I have always seen it. There is no need to go to such lengths for me! I cannot trust the affairs of the Divine Revelation Place to anyone else..."

Two steps away, Guard Commander Ecatl stood with his head bowed. He observed his nose, and his mind seemed oblivious as if hearing nothing.

"Blessings of the Chief Divine!"

Xiulote whispered a prayer and looked at the latter part of the letter. Here, Talaya narrated the latest progress in gunpowder production within the Gunpowder Bureau.

The kingdom lacked neither sulfur nor charcoal; the most critical component in gunpowder production was "saltpeter." Besides the traditional methods of salt land saltpeter collection, leaching, and boiling, the Divine Revelation Place also explored ways to concentrate urine in towns to produce urine saltpeter. However, this "odorous" method was still technically immature, inefficient, and of insufficient purity.

In the past year, the real increase in gunpowder production came from the mining of saltpeter soil inside the bat caves in the southwest mountains. The kingdom's influence expanded into the southwestern mountains, and a large-scale reclamation was underway in Apa County. Many bat caves in the mountains were discovered by the reclaimed villagers, reported to the preaching priests in the villages, and then conveyed to the Divine Revelation Place.

This huge accumulation of saltpeter soil in the tropical caves was vast and of relatively high purity, nearly doubling gunpowder production to 16,000 jin per month! And such increased production gave Gunpowder Bureau Director Talaya the confidence to conduct various explosive tests and various "boom! boom! boom!" experiments!

"Your Highness, I have personally visited the bat caves to observe the craftsmen excavating saltpeter soil... Some craftsmen even lived in the caves, capturing the bats inside as food..."

As the wind died down in the great tent and the sky darkened, Xiulote was suddenly startled upon reading this segment. He immediately picked up a pen to write a reply to Talaya.

"Talaya, you must ensure to stay away from the explosion site, commanding from a distance. For every explosive plan, you must designate an on-site person in charge. And you yourself must keep your distance from the site. I command you in the name of the sun, do not disobey!..."

"Furthermore, always remember! Carefully use smoke to drive out bats from the caves, minimize contact, and especially do not consume them. The Chief Divine once bestowed enlightenment upon me, indicating that bats are His favored creatures, harboring a tiny yet fearsome curse, prohibiting followers from killing or consuming them!..."

"Finally, I leave you with a research topic... that is to collaborate with the Blackstone City mining area to study how to excavate tunnels and demolish sturdy city walls... Remember, exercise caution in everything, maintain distance, and ensure no accidents occur!"

Chapter 1202: The Kingdom's Foundation: Migration of 150,000 Able-Bodied Men

"The new gunpowder, excavating and blasting walls, Cloud Serpent Mountain City..."

The sky darkened and campfires were lit. Xiulote ate fresh tender corn, his mind still pondering over the possibilities of using gunpowder in siege warfare.

In October, the southern Water Valley City's garrison had another bountiful harvest. This garrison of 150,000 acres of tilled land this October, yielding enough grain to supply the four northern legions for another year of campaigning!

It was this large new harvest that gave Xiulote the confidence to lead his legions eastwards to conquer Golden Bay City.

To be honest, the mountain range in the Tlaxcala Basin obstructs the rainfall, making it less prone to flooding than the Kingdom. This basin, like the Mexican Valley, is a fertile highland granary, a trait that continues to hold true in later generations. As for this tender corn, it was harvested early by Head Warrior Bertade, and sent as a favorite of the royal diet.

"Ecatl, have the Divine Revelation Priests completed the survey on Cloud Serpent Mountain City's position?"

"Family Head, the accompanying Divine Revelation Priests have conducted surveys... The terrain of this mountain city fortress is indeed very high! Even with the latest mortar cannons, it's difficult to hit Cloud Serpent Mountain City. Pushing the mortars to the foot of the mountain would likely be ineffective..."

Hearing such a response, Xiulote furrowed his brows, silently eating the corn. Cloud Serpent Mountain City stands on solid stone hills, making excavating and blasting walls equally difficult to execute. Calculations show that without an insider's cooperation, this impregnable fortress can only remain under siege.

"Then let's continue the siege! The supplies for the people of Tlaxcala are already running low. The fall of the fortress is only a matter of time. Under such circumstances, we can also attempt to contact the Tlaxcala defending army within the city..."

Xiulote spoke calmly, making the decision. He then arranged the besieging legion, while contemplating the forces needed for the upcoming eastern campaign.

"Ecatl! For this eastward expedition, I plan to take 4,000 Imperial Guard Legion, 8,000 Yu Yan Legion. Clan Leader Mixcoatl of Yu Yan has agreed to join me in heading east to subdue the rebellious Totonac!"

"The remaining 4,000 Imperial Guards will be handed over to Bertade to oversee, with him heading north to preside over the Tree Snake City garrison. The 8,000 Huashu Legion will cooperate with the 4,000 Imperial Guards to maintain the siege of Cloud Serpent Mountain City. As for the rear Water Valley City garrison, it will be guarded by 10,000 Coiled Python Legion and 2,000 Royal Warriors from the Alliance!"

"Family Head, the southern Water Valley City garrison has 150,000 able-bodied captive laborers. The 10,000 strong Coiled Python Legion comprises mostly militia... Isn't this suppressive force slightly inadequate?"

"No matter! The first batch of over 10,000 able-bodied men are already being transported by the Kingdom Fleet to the lower reaches of the Tarsas River and the two southern counties of the Kingdom. This batch being moved first are the most unruly Totonac warriors and able-bodied men from the

garrison camp. Upon reaching the Kingdom, they will be watched over by legions from the southern two counties, participating in major construction initiatives..."

At this point, Xiulote paused briefly, then resumed his normal demeanor. In fact, aside from participating in the Kingdom's construction, thousands of these laborers will be redirected to various mines throughout the Kingdom. Many of their fates were sealed the moment they boarded the ship!

And the only way to alter their fate is to exhibit sincere faith while engaged in different labors. As long as their faith meets the standards of a sincere believer, as certified by the Preaching Priests, they can stand out, formally assimilate into the flag units of the garrison, and even be selected into local militia.

"For the 150,000 able-bodied, if they settle down, they can then supply a semi-detached legion of 8,000..."

Xiulote momentarily entertained the idea of expanding the army, but soon suppressed it.

The Long Snake Legion composed mainly of Tlaxcala warriors was formed not long ago and hasn't yet undergone the baptism of war. They haven't fought for the Kingdom, nor have they received land and titles for military merit, fully committing themselves. Establishing new legions now would introduce too many instability factors to the Kingdom!

"May the Chief Divine protect! No rush in this matter!"

Xiulote collected his thoughts and estimated the ratio of soldiers to civilians in the Kingdom, his brows twitching again. As a nation geared for war, the pace of external conflicts indeed cannot halt even for a moment. And the prerequisite for launching a war is sufficient intelligence and information.

"Ecatl, the exploration royal decree I personally issued two months ago... How's the preparation by the Southern Shipbuilding Department?"

"Family Head, the Kingdom's Southern Shipbuilding Department has prepared twelve longships for the first exploration fleet, forty canoes for the second reconnaissance fleet... And the selection of the Exploration Captain is arranged according to your plans! Hmm, by my calculations, the two Kingdom fleets are set to depart from Trout Town's port in the next few days!"

"In the next few days?... Excellent! May the Chief Divine protect them!"

Upon hearing this, Xiulote nodded slowly and refrained from further comment. He had already drawn up the "prophecy" sea chart, which was formally handed over to the Exploration Captain with the royal decree.

The upcoming voyage marks the beginning of this longstanding journey. As for how far this fleet can sail, how many years it will take, whether it can reach its destination, and if it can return upon arrival... all depends on the Chief Divine's protection!

After concluding the affairs of the Kingdom, the two transitioned their conversation to discuss the current state of the Alliance. The trusted aides lit the Divine Smoke, cleared away the food, and poured two cups of invigorating cocoa. Xiulote drank a few sips of hot cocoa, his thoughts active, and then he spoke with caution.

"After the autumn harvest, the large-scale reallocation and relocation within the Alliance will formally commence! The Southern Two States of Tlaxcala are the first regions to migrate. The familiar lands outside Water Valley City won't remain ours for long."

"Therefore, increasing the speed of population transfer is imperative! Otherwise, if more than ten thousand captured able-bodied men and women are relocated here and seen by the great nobles lacking in population, it'll undoubtedly cause trouble!... They will surely find ways to petition the Alliance and the High Priesthood, seeking to retain some of the population."

Hearing this, Guard Commander Ecatl also nodded in agreement. The Alliance's Great Nobility is typically bold and unscrupulous, inherently greedy. The Kingdom's response to them cannot directly resort to force, making matters rather complicated... The Guard Commander pondered and came up with another idea.

"Your Highness, the Kingdom's main issue in transporting the population lies in the insufficient capacity of vessels and the lengthy travel distance. Many reallocated noble families come from the Southern Three States, near the Tarsas River, and possess family fleets..."

"Hmm? Ecatl, are you suggesting?"

"If the Kingdom contacts them and promises the recently cultivated fertile lands in the Water Valley City area in exchange for their vessels... I believe many reallocated families will be willing to trade!"

Upon hearing this, Xiulote thought for a moment his eyes brightened. The area around Water Valley City is bound to be handed over. Using these cultivated lands as leverage to swap for small vessels from various city-states, enhancing the transport capacity of the Kingdom's southern naval forces, is indeed cost-effective!

"Good! Ecatl, that's an excellent proposal! Just right, Coiled Python Commander Moyahualo hails from the Southern High Mountain City. He's rather constrained and not wealthy... Let's enlist him as a middleman for the trade, and then offer him a commission for facilitating the transaction!"

"I obey, Family Head! If it's Commander Moyahualo, I believe he can sell the entire High Mountain City-State's fleet to the Kingdom!..."

"Haha!"

Xiulote laughed heartily, shaking his head. At the slowest pace, relocating over ten thousand able-bodied men from Water Valley City would take seven or eight months. But if expedited, catching up with next May's spring cultivation is achievable!

This large group of young and strong population, once they arrive in the Kingdom, only needs to undergo two cycles of spring planting to feel settled. And once absorbed by the counties, the strength of the Kingdom of the Lake will see another significant increase!

"The five counties of the Kingdom of the Lake already have a population of around 1.3 million. Most of them are involved in the operation of the military machine, providing constant forces for campaigns! If this batch of relocated captives is integrated, reaching 1.5 million, it accounts for almost half of the Alliance's population..."

At this point, Xiulote's thoughts fluctuated, his spirits soared. Intense ambitions, akin to sprawling vines, extended, continuously growing within his heart.



"Population, only population, is the foundation of the Kingdom! And faith is the bond that holds these foundations together, the cement that solidifies them!"

"Ecatl, dispatch an envoy!"

"Family Head?"

"Have the Kingdom's southern Divine Revelation Priests prepare! After every two waves of migrating captives arrive, hold a 'Divine Heart' hot air balloon ascent miracle event! Then, have the Preaching Priests hasten, converting these migrants who are shaken by the miracle!"

"Miracle evangelism?... I obey, Family Head!"

#### Chapter 1203: Rumors

October of harvest passed in the fragrance of corn. From the Kingdom of the Lake in the west to the central Mexico Alliance, the faces of millions of commoners showed joyful smiles. After a year of toil, they finally could relax a bit, not an easy feat!

Meanwhile, in the lands of Tlaxcala to the east, on the wild, grassy fields, the Warriors of the Alliance and Kingdom also showed excitement. They were eager, preparing for the coming battle, with hearts full of anticipation for the rewards after victory.

The mobilization for the eastward campaign had spread throughout the army. The horn of war arrived on schedule, and the wind of November was filled with the breath of slaughter as a new campaign was about to begin!

A flurry of activity buzzed around the encampment outside Tree Snake City, with all kinds of supplies prepared. The envoy from Black Wolf Torc had also visited several times to inquire about His Highness's marching arrangements.

In fact, according to Xiulote's original plan, they were to march eastward after reaping the new grain in mid-October. But three incidents delayed his plans. The first was Nashu's delayed childbirth, two weeks later than expected. The second was the arrival of a new batch of gunpowder at the end of October. As for the third...

"The decree from King Aweit has finally arrived!"

Xiulote opened a scroll and immediately saw the royal seal of Aweit. He then carefully read the content of the decree, pondering silently.

The centralization reforms of the Mexica Alliance were still underway, and the legal system was as crude as that of the grassland tribes. This nominal decree was more like a letter from Aweit, very short, with only two important sentences.

"The incarnation of the Sun God, Avit God King, grants Prince Xiulote's request to march east against the rebellious Totonac!"

"In the name of the Divine King! After quelling the rebels, the Totonac land will be granted as the fief of Prince Xiu Hua. Before the prince reaches the age of fifteen, the royal central authority will manage it..."

These two mandates, one agreeing to troops being sent and one promising enfeoffment, were all within Xiulote's expectations. Given the current situation, Aweit could not refuse his request to campaign east. The so-called Royal Central Authority management of the fief was actually an agreement secretly reached between Xiulote's side and Aweit's side. Several coastal ports belonged to the Kingdom of the Lake, retaining the sea route to the Eastern Sea. The vast majority of the inland areas belonged to the central Alliance, reappointed to the great nobility of the Alliance and members of the royal family.

"Only... the cold tone of this decree? Avit God King... Prince Xiulote?"

Xiulote fell into contemplation, silent. He thought for a while, then took out the first letter Aweit wrote to him after returning to the capital following a military siege last year. The opening of the letter was...

"Xiulote, I very much agree with your idea of centralizing the Alliance as the supreme King! The King should appear distinctly noble and gradually reclaim the powers of their territories from the leaders of the nations!"

Xiulote pursed his lips, read the reply again, feeling Aweit's ambition and zeal at that time. Then, he silently searched for a while and found the letter written nearly three years ago by Aweit urging him to come to the capital to marry Alisa.

"Haha! Xiulote, my student, my son-in-law! Hurry here and prepare for the grand ceremony. Alisa's wedding must dazzle the nations!"

After reading all three letters, Xiulote silently put them away, bowing his head in silent thought.

After ascending as the Divine King, King Aweit's emotions became increasingly restrained, and his intentions more inscrutable. Even as his once-closest and most understanding student, it became difficult to grasp the King's thoughts...

"King Aweit is slightly displeased with my request for a grant this time."

After contemplating for a long time, Xiulote finally raised his head and spoke calmly. His expression remained composed, but he felt a heaviness in his heart. Aweit was furthering centralization reforms, strengthening divine power and royal power, establishing the highest authority and majesty of the Divine King. Meanwhile, he continued his conquests, expanding the Kingdom's power, enhancing his own prestige... This conflict between King and King, though still reconcilable through various means and old goodwill, gradually became apparent and difficult to conceal.

Like this time, he had an unavoidable reason to request the coastal passage for Xiu Hua. But in King Aweit's eyes, and in the eyes of the great nobility of the Alliance, whether intentional or not, such actions signify a challenge to supreme royal power...

Xiulote lowered his gaze, pondered for a long time, and then lifted his head. He then looked at Guard Commander Ecatl and inquired.

"Has the Kingdom's Secret Guard in the Lake Capital City any news about the King?"

"Family Head, in the past two years, Chief Intelligence Officer Gillim has reformed the palace guard. Many commoners, foreigners, and even warriors from different tribes have been promoted, gradually

replacing the great nobility and royal-born palace guards... Our Holy City's branch no longer guards within the palace. News of the King in the capital has also become increasingly scarce..."

Guard Commander Ecatl looked troubled. He thought for a moment and cautiously spoke, mentioning another matter.

"Although there's no news of the King, rumors have increased in the Lake Capital City. Seemingly, there are also some songs spreading among the nations of the Alliance..."

"Hmm, rumors?"

Hearing this, Xiulote's brows furrowed, his expression becoming serious.

"What kind of rumors? Speak in detail."

Guard Commander Ecatl nodded, took out two new letters from his pocket, and recited without missing a word.

"The rumor in the capital is that after receiving your request for a grant, the King was furious within the palace, even reportedly throwing down the inherited Divine Staff!"

"..."

Xiulote's brows knitted, he pondered for a while, then shook his head.

"Unbelievable! Even if Aweit were displeased, he would not throw down the inherited Divine Staff... The Divine Staff represents royal power, and he aims to establish supreme royal authority, making such a degrading act unthinkable!"

Hearing this, Guard Commander Ecatl nodded in agreement. Then he mentioned the rumors spreading among the nations of the Alliance.

"The rumor among the nations actually spread in the capital at first. But the Chief Intelligence Officer in the capital acted sternly, executed quite a few people, and suppressed the rumor..."

"Hmm, what was it?"

"...It's a song, much like a prophecy left by priests after communicating with the Divine."

"Recite it to me!"

Guard Commander Ecatl, with caution, glanced at the solemn His Highness, and then softly sang in the priestly manner.

"The night falls, the Morning Star falls. The immortal Sun sets, the high Sun rises! Citizens of the Chief Divine, raise your heads! Two Suns in the sky! Which one is brighter? Which one sets first? Two suns in the sky at the same time!..."

"Pa!"

A sudden slap echoed in the tent. Ecatl looked silently to see Xiulote had slapped the table forcefully, eyes full of murderous intent, face flushed pale.

Chapter 1204: Alliance Political Situation, the Successor's Oath

The grand tent was in utter silence, even the wind held its breath. Only the king's fury, like a suppressed thundercloud, revealed a deep and terrifying power. This stillness lasted for a while before Guard Commander Ecatl lowered his head and softly advised.

"Family Head, please quell your anger! These two rumors are likely someone... deliberately sowing discord between you and the King..."

"I know."

Xiulote remained expressionless, nodding slowly. The anger on his face somewhat subsided, but the murderous intent in his eyes intensified.

"The first rumor undermines the central royal authority, belittles King Aweit, and covertly sows discord between Aweit and me. The second rumor is even more sinister, aiming to create discord between Aweit and me, exposing the hidden contradictions between the Kingdom of the Lake and the central royal family through prophecy to everyone!..."

At this point, Xiulote gritted his teeth, burning with rage.

If the first rumor was still just catching shadows and creating some hearsay, then the second rumor was blatantly proclaiming that the sky has two suns. Such hidden conflicts should have been limited to the upper echelons of the Alliance and could have been reconciled through political means. But the spreader's aim now is to trigger conflict between him and Aweit, even intending to incite civil war within the Alliance!

"Their hearts deserve punishment! Spreading rumors, sowing discord... these damn great nobles of the Alliance!"

Xiulote restrained his fury, contemplated for a moment, and then traced the origin of the rumors back to the Alliance's great nobles. Guard Commander Ecatl, standing beside him, opened his mouth as if to say something but refrained when he saw His Highness's angry face.

"Witnessed by the Chief Divine! It seems the blood of reform has not flowed enough..."

Xiulote muttered to himself, exuding murderous intent. He clearly understood these rumors were damaging the King's authority and creating a divide between the Dual Kings. Even Chief Intelligence Officer Gillim, wanting to suppress the Kingdom, would never use such a self-harming method! Once these rumors take effect, those who benefit will inevitably be the great nobles of the Alliance!

King Aweit's vigorous centralization, demanding City-State Warriors, collecting fief tributes, and interfering in noble succession, was steadily weakening the military, financial, and judicial powers of the Alliance's great nobles! Simultaneously, the King undermined them further by massively reassigning powers, relocating influential nobles to newly seized fiefs, thus dividing the local City-State nobles and dismantling their resistance!

After this dual strategy, the Alliance's great nobles were left dizzy and spat blood. Their interests were severely weakened, and their power severely damaged during the wars.

In the Mexica Alliance that revered might, the strongest King Aweit had already unified the Texcoco Lake District, commanding fifty thousand loyal Royal Warriors! The second strongest, Prince Xiulote, also had seven legions, wielding the might of fifty thousand Kingdom's Warriors! As long as King Aweit and Prince Xiulote joined forces, their combined strength of a hundred thousand warriors would be enough to suppress any rebellion in the world!

As for the remaining Eleven States' great nobles of Mexica, even if they combined all their efforts, they could only muster fifty thousand City-State Warriors... But these nobles, each with their own agendas and varying loyalties, could never fully unite to fight the royal family to the death. Their only way to resist royal centralization and preserve their own interests was to sabotage the alliance between the King and the Prince, provoking the Dual Kings' opposition!

"Who could be this cunning fellow hiding in the shadows? Or who could these people be?"

Xiulote lowered his eyes and pondered for a long time. He carefully calculated the influential factions within each State of the Alliance in his mind and weighed them one by one.

"The traditional Seven States of Mexica, the Yuyan family of the southwestern Sun City, is a royal branch holding a succession dispute with Montezuma II. Yu Yan Clan Chief Mixcoatl is in the eastern expedition army, likely not causing mischief..."

"The Mountain Family of the western Gold Mountain City has already been interfered with regarding succession rights. The old Clan Leader Tepeiter supposedly died at the hands of the Holy City faction, and the new Clan Leader Izel is quite obedient to the King and me..."

"In the northwest Tzompantli City, the Acid Wood Clan Leader Xochitl died in the eastern expedition; the family split into four. The current Legion Commander is Yunshan Clan Chief Huitzilopochtli, whom I do not know much about. But for Aweit to have elevated him, there naturally is a biased reason..."

"In the northern Strait Gold City, the Strait Gold Clan Leader Carlo is brave and skilled in battle. But such cunning stratagems, with his temperament... at most, he could be a participant..."

"In the northeastern Reed Marsh City, the Reed Clan Chief Xintle has always been on friendly terms with the royal family. He has waged war with the Telascallan for many years and exhibits great courage and shrewdness..."

"The southeastern High Mountain City's Coiled Python Clan Leader Moyahualo, stationed in Water Valley City, is impatient and somewhat greedy, but should have no such grand ambition..."

"The southern Salt Lake City's Flower Tree Clan Leader Huochiku'a is also in the eastern expedition army. He is skilled in calculations, with significant insights into finance, unlike traditional Mexica nobles..."

Xiulote's thoughts wandered around the traditional Seven States' great nobles. He harbored some vague suspicions but could not confirm them.

After all, these great nobles of the Alliance had once shed blood in the West and East campaigns for the Divine and fought for the Alliance. Were it not for the King's push for centralization reform, they could all be praised as 'pious Divine Descendants of the Chief Divine, loyal Lords of the Alliance!'

"Besides the traditional Seven States, there are the Four States recently conquered. Over twenty years ago, the earliest to be conquered was the Metztitlan State, controlled by Prickly Pear City, led by Prickly Pear Clan Leader Metztitl. At over fifty, he has been stationed in the North, guarding against the Canine Descendants, and remains quite low-key. Prickly Pear City is over four hundred miles from the Capital City, not significantly affected by centralization reform..."

"Nine years ago, the Alliance captured the northern Xilotepec City, also known as Suiqiu City, guarded by the royal branch Jaguar Osellor. As a noble of royal descent, he has always been careful, staying in the North and not participating in kingdom affairs..."

"Six years ago, the western campaign conquered the Tlaxcalan region, where Akanbaro State granted Tepopolo a fief, with its administrative center at Longran Fortress. Although ambitious, Tepopolo lacks the means to exercise it. He aligns with the King, and his fief is also far, with little impact from reform..."

"Likewise, after the western campaign, Xitaqualo State granted Isshiki at Qixixai. Izel is a royal family member known for his loyalty to the King... In this eastern campaign, he exerted a tremendous effort, personally attacking Oak Tree City..."



Silence reigned in the tent, as daylight gradually dimmed. Guard Commander Ecatl lit a campfire and unfurled an Alliance map, laying it before His Highness.

Xiulote gazed at the map dotted with names of Alliance City-States and family names, his expression cold yet focused. Each of these independent local States was a target of Aweit's centralization, an objective for the King to eliminate. And this, too, was his target!

"Unify the world, annihilate each tribe. Abolish enfeoffment, establish counties. Achieve uniformity in vehicles, script, travel.. this is truly the legacy of the First Emperor's endeavors!..."

Xiulote murmured softly, his eyes filled with unwavering determination. Observing the rapidly evolving Mexica Alliance under centralization reform, transitioning from a loosely autonomous City-State alliance to a centralizing Kingdom of the royal family!

In this process, from the immortal and ruthless elders to the resolute High Priest, and then to the ambitious King, countless Divine Descendants and nobles had been killed, and much noble blood had been shed! And the entire world of Central America, after enduring nearly two thousand years of the City-State era, was finally inching forward, towards the path of a Theocratic Kingdom, or even a Theocracy Empire!

"Religious reform, external Divine War! Centralization reform, internal reduction of vassals!..."

The campfire flickered, shadows dancing in the changing light. Starlight descended, hinting at destinies. Xiulote gazed at the vast and twinkling sky, hoping to discern answers from Divine Revelation but found nothing. But a king's heart, at this moment, was utterly clear. He already had answers to all the issues.

"Witnessed by the Chief Divine and Ancestors! An upheaval unseen in two thousand years is unfolding within a few years. The unification of the world and great enterprise shall be established; no one can obstruct it!"

"As long as Aweit lives a day, I shall yield a step, following the vows I made! But should he unexpectedly perish, I shall step forward, inheriting the legacy!"

## Chapter 1205: The King's Concession, They Stand on the Shore

The bonfire reflected the night sky, and the myriad stars illuminated the earth. Ancient myths were as deep as the night sky, and new beliefs passed on like sparks. On this night, Xiulote was writing diligently, unable to sleep. He thought of many things far and wide, reminiscing about a long time ago.

He remembered the strategy before the decisive battle with Tizoc in the military camp. That night the starry river was splendid, and he laughed out loud with Aweit, imagining the future of the Empire.

He recalled his date with Alisa on the pyramid of the Feathered Serpent Divine. That night the stars bore witness, and he revealed his heart, telling for the first time the story of a wandering soul.

He also remembered the night he first met Nashu, discussing with his grandfather in the High Priest's Mansion. That night the starlight was dim, his grandfather entrusted him with much, and he witnessed the extinguishing of a candle in the wind.

"Ten years have passed!...How much have I changed? How much have they changed? And how much has the world changed?"

Xiulote silently gazed at the starry sky, watching the morning star rise, escorting the sun's arrival. As the morning sun descended, the sparks faded into the sunlight, and he, like a king, calmly orchestrated more arrangements.

"Ecatl, arrange reliable trusted aides to help me send two letters to the Lake Capital City."

The morning sunlight shone on the face of the young king, as if lighting up a deep sea. His expression was steady, his movements powerful, his words full of confident strength.

"The first letter is for my wife Alisa. Tell her, I will seize the thousand-mile Totonac coastline as a gift for my eldest son's second birthday!"

Upon hearing this, Guard Commander Ecatl paused slightly, calculating in his mind. Prince Xiu Hua was born last July; before his second birthday, that means by next July, the Tototanak people must be completely subdued, and he should return victoriously to the capital city...

"The second letter is for my granduncle Cacamatzin. Consult him on the rumors of the Alliance and ask him to involve himself in Xiu Hua's upbringing and education. Hmm...make sure to convey my attitude: the new sun will restrain its brightness, descend first, and avoid a considerable distance. Because the immortal sun points the way forward, and we all follow that path!"

Hearing this, Guard Commander Ecatl was stunned, showing surprise.

"Family Head, did you say 'descend? Avoid?'"

"Hm."

Xiulote nodded, not explaining much further. He just gave another reminder.

"In two months, it will be the tribute of the New Year's Grand Ceremony! This year's tribute, the gemstones, copper materials, copper armor, and copper soldiers presented to the king will be doubled! And the envoy sent must pay grand homage to the god before the great nobility of each state on behalf of the king! Then, in the name of the vassal king, request the king to send arbitrating priests to handle the internal noble succession within the kingdom!"

"Ah? This...doubling the tribute, arbitrating priests?"

Upon hearing this, Guard Commander Ecatl was somewhat incredulous. Doubling the tribute symbolizes the alliance influencing the kingdom's financial authority. The arbitrating priests represent the alliance influencing the kingdom's judicial authority. Such a stance is tantamount to opening up the kingdom's power and requesting the Alliance's participation.

"Hmm!"

Xiulote slightly nodded. He looked at the shocked Guard Commander, pondered a bit, and then gave a brief explanation.

"The kingdom's mining technology has made breakthroughs, causing a rapid increase in copper material production. Doubling gemstones and copper materials won't significantly impact the kingdom's production capacity! Most of the kingdom's nobles are newly promoted military merit nobility. Although they are numerous, their ranks are not high, and they don't own much land. They are relatively young and are still far from inheritance disputes. The arrival of the arbitrating priests in the kingdom can only resolve relatively insignificant small matters..."

"Therefore, these arrangements are more a political statement: the Kingdom of the Lake is loyal to the Alliance, loyal to the king, faithfully accepting the king's centralized reforms!"

As for the military authority not mentioned, it naturally needs to be tightly held and cannot be relaxed in the slightest. Xiulote knew very well where a regime's power truly comes from!

Hearing the explanation from his highness, Guard Commander Ecatl was thoughtful. He quickly noted down all the royal decrees and softly inquired.

"If the arbitrating priests sent by the king clash with the kingdom's nobles, what should we do?"

"Hmm...let Chief Priest Ugus and Chief Priest Mawilo mediate between them. Chief Priest Ugus is the son of the current High Priest Uguel, and the Alliance's arbitrating priests must give him some face. And Chief Priest Mawilo is in charge of the kingdom's religious affairs, and the military merit nobility also respect him."

"Yes! Family Head!"

Soon, Xiulote made all the arrangements. His wife, Alisa, and granduncle, Cacamatzin, were two strong communication links to ease opposing tensions and prevent misjudgments with King Aweit. The stance at the New Year's Grand Ceremony was a concession from the Kingdom of the Lake. The Kingdom of the Lake demonstrated submission to the king to enhance the king's prestige, as compensation for the request for a title.

"Whew! There must be no apparent rift between me and Aweit. If there's a crack on the bird's egg, it will attract flies. And those with intentions in the alliance will exploit it, just like these rumors have!"

Xiulote took a long breath and finally laughed as he concluded.

"Don't rush! Time is on our side; we need to be patient and wait!"

Upon hearing this, Guard Commander Ecatl nodded heavily, respectfully obeying. He felt that his highness had conceded much for the kingdom's greater good, but such a choice avoided a real outbreak of conflict. At the kingdom's development pace, time was indeed "on our side." He contemplated for a while, recalling words he hadn't spoken before and gently reminded.

"Family Head! Actually, the source of the rumors, the people with intentions in the alliance, may not necessarily be the alliance's great nobility!"

"Oh?"

Upon hearing this, Xiulote raised an eyebrow and asked in a deep voice.

"Ecatl, then who do you think it could be?"

"Family Head, I think it could be the priests of the Alliance..."

Upon hearing the Guard Commander's reply, Xiulote looked surprised. He examined Ecatl with interest.

"Oh? You're saying this because the rumors are a priest's ballad?"

"No, it's not."

The Guard Commander, Ecatl, thought for a moment, organized his words with effort, and made a comparison.

"Two fierce Jaguars were drinking water by the shore, and in the water was a vigilant Crocodile... and while a man stood far off on the shore, he saw this scene. He wanted to hunt some gains, so what should he do?"

"What should he do?"

"He threw a stone into the water, stirring up all three. Then, without showing himself, he just watched them contend, and the remaining flesh and blood would be his."

After hearing this analogy, Xiulote thought about it and then smiled, querying back.

"Haha! Ecatl, by what you say, do you mean the priests of the Alliance want to hunt the king, me, and the Great Nobility? Do they have such ambition and capability?"

"No, I don't mean that."

The Guard Commander Ecatl raised his head, looking into the prince's eyes, sincerely reminding.

"Family Head, what I mean is, they are standing on the shore! In this murky affair, we've all entered the water, while the High Priesthood of the Alliance stands on the shore!"

Upon hearing this, the smile on Xiulote's face gradually disappeared, and his expression grew solemn.

"The priests... on the shore?..."

"Family Head, with this round of disputes, haven't you also relaxed the boundaries to allow the arbitration priests of the Alliance to interfere in the Kingdom?"

"Hmm? This was an idea I just came up with... Do you mean they could foresee my response?"

"No, they don't need to foresee... They are standing on the shore! The power and flesh falling from the fight won't miss them..."

When the Guard Commander Ecatl reached this point, his voice became deep. Having served the High Priest for so many years, he had a keen sense of the intrigue and power struggles within the High Priesthood.

"Family Head! The Elder Priests of the High Priesthood, having experienced the Theocratic Era of Elders and High Priests... Perhaps some among them are unwilling to remain subordinated under the King forever. The methods of the High Priests are like daggers in the night, attacking silently, completely different from that of the Great Nobility..."

Saying this, the Guard Commander Ecatl bowed deeply on the ground, earnestly pleading.

"Family Head! You must be on your guard! ...After all, the High Priest has granted you the authority to interpret scriptures, and blessed with Divine Revelation, you have delivered many new scriptures... The Priesthood of the Kingdom of the Lake is already practically independent, outside the control of the Alliance High Priesthood. And the contradiction of Supreme Divine Authority lies hidden between you and the High Priesthood... Please, be cautious!"

In bright light, silence reigned. Xiulote lowered his gaze, holding the Sun Amulet around his neck, silent and pensive. When it comes to royal and divine power, the path to supreme authority is always fraught with blades and concealed dangers. For those who already wield power, how could they easily relinquish it? They only desire more!

"Be careful of the risks posed by the High Priesthood... I understand!"

After quite some time, Xiulote let out a deep sigh, burying everything within his heart. Then, focusing on the loyal Ecatl, he announced solemnly.

"Matters must be prioritized. The foremost task now is to quickly mobilize troops to punish the Totonac rebels!"

"Make all preparations! Five days hence, I will lead twelve thousand troops, with ten siege mortar cannons, to make a vow and depart for the Eastern Seaside!"

"May the Chief Divine protect us! This time, I aim to take the entire Eastern Coast!"

Hearing this, Guard Commander Ecatl bowed deeply, responding passionately.

"As you command, Family Head! May you rise from the Eastern Sea like the Sun! May the Chief Divine protect the Kingdom!"

Five days later, a grand sacrificial ceremony was held in the large camp outside Tree Snake City. Subsequently, over ten thousand elite troops gradually set out, and the Royal Banner of the God of Death Black Wolf, which had been stationary for a year and a half, once more advanced.

Flags fluttered as the forces wound their way forward. A new conquest lay to the East!

Chapter 1206: Astonishing Preparations, an Unprecedented Expedition!

The long wind billows, flags flutter high. When Xiulote led the grand army, carrying heavy cannons, towards the coast of the Totonac in the East, in the Kingdom of the Lake two thousand miles away, a new long expedition was about to set sail!

By the Atoyac Lake, the Zicao port was bustling. Batches of immigrants from Water Valley City were boarding the foreign yet vibrant southern counties under the escort of Prepecha Warriors. Large groups of county warriors had already been waiting at the port for some time.

These transported captive immigrants would rest for a few days at the camp outside Zicao City before being sent to the garrison camps in the two counties. Everything was familiar and orderly. Among the team were Preaching Priests of the Chief Divine, as well as the True Believers from last year's Tlaxcala garrison, tasked with comforting the immigrants' hearts.

As the immigrating team moved northward, leaving the port, a wide secondary compacted road appeared in front of them. This road was recently constructed as part of the kingdom's major construction plan, connecting the Zicao port with the county town. On this compacted road, many militia carrying spears were transporting vast quantities of kingdom supplies with wheelbarrows.



Judging from the bamboo baskets visible on the wheelbarrows, they seemed to be transporting a large amount of dried cakes and cured meat, along with piles of cloth and copperware, all treasures desired by the immigrants!

In the distance, at the towering Pyramid Temple in Zicao County town, a large group of Divine Revelation Priests were also busy. They were meticulously inspecting and preparing the "Heart of the Divine" hot air balloon for its miraculous ascent! Dozens and even hundreds of Preaching Priests were also waiting for the miracle to strengthen faith and convert new arriving immigrants. Among these lower-level priests, appearances of the Telascallans were no longer uncommon.

The sun was shining, the calm lake mirrored. The militia pushed their loaded wheelbarrows, sweating profusely, heading into the bustling back area of the port. There, the Southern Shipbuilding Department was equally busy. A large group of shipbuilders busied themselves within the department, and twelve sturdy longships were lined up, undergoing final inspections before delivery!

At this moment, two Divine Revelation Priests in ritual robes were solemnly examining these sturdy seafaring longships. Both wore the emblem of the "Scholar" on their robes, and they were both Second Level Divine Revelation Priests! They watched as the wheelbarrow teams arrived, the militia unloaded heaps of food and treasures, and their expressions gradually changed.

"Chief Divine! So many dried cakes? So much cured meat?..."

Second Level Priest Zuvaro's eyes widened as he calculated in his mind, gradually feeling pressured.

"Scholar Mikki, tell me, how many people are we taking out to sea?"

"Zuvaro, I've already told you once!"

Scholar Mikki frowned, speaking in a deep voice.

"Twelve exploratory oar-sailed longships, each carrying seventy people. Thirty trade twin-hulled war canoes, each carrying twelve people. Together, how many is that?"

"Chief Divine! It's... it's twelve hundred people! So many people, are they really all entrusted to just the two of us?!"

"You could say so! We are the exploration captain and vice-captain. And the entire fleet consists of one-third warriors, one-third militia, and one-third sailors. Each longship must have a priest. Therefore, there will also be a Warrior Leader, two Militia Leaders, over twenty Preaching and Divine Revelation Priests, all sailing with us! Moreover, according to Your Majesty's decree, the fleet must carry two months' dry rations. At the highest standard of three pounds per person per day at sea, what does that translate to in tons of supplies?"

"Chief Divine! It's... it's 216,000 pounds, which equates to 108 tons of dry rations?!"

Calculating up to this point, Second Level Priest Zuvaro drew in a sharp breath. His forehead was already sweating, such a massive fleet and material preparation almost reached the limits of the kingdom's seafaring capability, unprecedented before...

"Scholar Mikki, do we have to bring so many supplies? I have traversed the northern trade route once. Along the way, there are many friendly tribes we can trade kingdom gemstones and cloth with for food and water..."

"Trading is certainly necessary, but with our fleet's magnitude, how much can those small tribes supply? Your Majesty decreed an exploratory royal decree, granting us 2 tons of Lake gemstones, 10 tons of cloth, and 10 tons of copperware, all for trade along the way. Additionally, the fleet also holds reserve longbows, arrows, copper weapons, and copper armor for two longships... furthermore, we even have the right to prioritize replenishing the fleet, crew, and materials every time the exploration returns!"

Scholar Mikki repeated the royal decree from His Majesty expressionlessly. He enjoyed observing Priest Zuvaro's dumbfounded expression, a smirk subtly forming at the corners of his mouth. Of course, when he first heard His Majesty's decree, he too was equally shocked and at a loss, no better off.

"Chief Divine bear witness! Look at the bows of those longships!"

Second Level Priest Zuvaro glanced over as instructed, his eyes tightening. At the bow of each of the twelve longships, a small copper Tiger Squat Cannon was placed, glittering brightly under the sun.

"Chief Divine! We also have twelve small Copper Beasts?"

"Zuvaro, those are twelve Tiger Squat Cannons, alongside 6,000 pounds of Gunpowder, and a ton of leaden stone bullets! These reserves are enough for each Tiger Squat Cannon to fire hundreds if not thousands of times..."

Upon saying this, Scholar Mikki finally sighed. At this point, the pressure in his heart was also as heavy as the mountains, unable to help but speak softly.

"For preparing our seaborne supplies, Divine Revelation Director Talaya apportioned Gunpowder and gemstones, County Magistrate Ezpan of Apa dispatched warriors and militia, County Magistrate Etalik of Zicao prepared cloth and copperware, and the warehouses of both counties were cleared out with large quantities of grain..."

"Director of the Shipyard, Pucuta, even personally came from Rivermouth County in the North to entrust me face-to-face: this voyage is absolutely extraordinary! His Majesty even vetoed County Magistrate Ezpan's plan to deploy a legion to raid the Northern Ticos, solely to provide stable diplomatic relations for our voyage, allowing smooth navigation past the coast occupied by the Northern Ticos..."

"Chief Divine bear witness! His Majesty's royal decree was officially delivered, and the maritime exploration plan was also entrusted to us. From this moment on, this long-term plan will continue unceasingly! No matter how much resources are spent, no matter how many warriors are drafted, no matter how many longships are depleted, no matter how many years it takes... our maritime exploration will not cease until success is achieved!"

"Ah! Chief Divine!!"

Upon hearing such an exploratory royal decree, Second Level Priest Zuvaro was shocked to the point of numbness. He pressed his lips tightly together, remaining silent for quite a while before asking somewhat laboriously.

"But we only submitted a plan to move southward to scout the Mistec and Zapotec tribes, and explore the Maya Coast..."

"Zuvaro, that plan was also approved by His Majesty. Only it was entrusted to the Trapani merchant Telali, who sailed with you, and another First Level Divine Revelation Priest Neri, a graduate of the Divine Might University! Although the kingdom maintained a ceasefire with the Mistec and Zapotec tribes, they were still practically at an adversarial stage. That scouting fleet only consisted of forty canoes, disguising themselves as Trapani traders, then secretly gathering intelligence on the City-States of the Cloud People along the coast..."

"Mikki, what about our objective? What is our actual goal? With such a massive fleet, surely we're not merely going to the islands in the Northern Continent to mine guano rock?"

"Chief Divine bear witness! Mining guano rock is indeed one of the supplementary tasks of the fleet. However, this task is primarily assigned to the thirty trade twin-hulled canoes. Once they finish mining guano rock, they'll be the first to return. And our destination is much farther, much, much farther..."

Scholar Mikki displayed solemnness, exhibiting a sense of reverence and fervor. He carefully took out a long scroll made of bison hide from his back, praying as he unfurled it.

"Chief Divine's blessing, Your Majesty's Divine Revelation, the sacred mission calls upon us! Look! Our destination is inscribed on this sea map, specially divine-revealed by the Chief Divine and personally drawn by His Majesty. We are to follow this divinely revealed sea route, heading three thousand miles to the west to the Great Island foretold in His Majesty's prophecy!"

Chapter 1207: The Divine Revelation Sea Chart, Your Majesty's Decree!

In front of the shipyard, craftsmen were busy, and the longship lay like a giant crocodile, with supplies piled like small hills. The Second Level Priest Zuvaro widened his eyes, carefully staring at the spread-out scroll before him, and asked in surprise.

"Chief Divine! Is this the Divine Revelation route? To a Great Island thirty thousand miles away in the Western Sea, as prophesied by Your Majesty?"

"Exactly! The red line drawn on this Sea Chart was sketched by Your Majesty himself. And the specific descriptions are all within Your Majesty's decree!"

Scholar Mikki nodded, and from the unfolded scroll, drew out a thick waterproof cotton cloth. He spread out the cotton cloth, and Your Majesty's intricate writing soon caught their eyes.

"...Under the protection of the Chief Divine! Explorers of the Kingdom! The northern route is fraught with fierce winds and towering waves, challenging waters. The Kingdom's exploration fleet, heading west this time, must navigate using the coast and island chains, staying close to shore without venturing too far into the open ocean! For positioning, the fleet relies on the Stargazing Technique taught at Divine Power University, to measure precise latitude..."

"The entire maritime exploration plan first involves scouting all around the Northern Continent's Western Sea coast, surveying geographical, hydrological features and tribes. Then, establishing amicable trade relations with local tribes, setting up small coastal settlements, stockpiling food and supplies, progressively extending northwards. Only when sufficient preparations are complete, and the long island chain leading west is found, will come the final and most arduous cross-sea journey..."

"So, this maritime exploration will last many years! Like the Prepetcha proverb says, you can never catch the flying bird in the trees with a single leap. Your exploration will progress northward in segments! Based on latitude division, the entire exploration journey will be divided into at least six segments..."

Upon reading this, the two Divine Revelation Priests from Prepetcha exchanged glances, both deep in thought.

"Scholar Mikki, the proverb spoken by Your Majesty, why haven't I heard it before?"

"Hmm... this proverb... ha! Your Majesty is our Prepetcha King, whatever he says naturally becomes our proverb!"

"Uh? This..."

"Let's not speak too much, let's carefully examine this Sea Chart!"

With that said, Scholar Mikki folded the cotton cloth and placed it beside the Sea Chart. The two of them then examined the decree line by line, against the chart.

"The first segment of the journey is the Northern Continent already explored by the Kingdom. From the Tarsas Rivermouth, heading north from Trout Town, along the coast for three to four thousand miles,

reaching the Yomei Great Tribe rich in coal, gold, and copper. This segment's latitudes have been mapped clearly, ranging from 18 degrees north latitude to 28 degrees north latitude."

"Along this journey, the Kingdom focuses on two mid-point supply spots: The Torpan Tribes at the Torpan Rivermouth, and the Yaolem Great Tribe rich in gold and copper. The distance between these two tribes is over a thousand miles, making it a suitable supply distance. The Kingdom has stationed personnel at both places, setting up small outposts and sentry stations. Next, the Kingdom will continually send merchant fleets northward to expand the scale and population of these supply spots, and to win over and assimilate the local tribes!"

The Second Level Priest Zuvaro extended his hand, pointing on this clear Sea Chart. He personally traveled the four thousand miles of waves, and the Kingdom sentry spot at the Torpan Rivermouth is his legacy. He allied with the Torpan Tribe leader and previously proposed to Your Majesty about assimilating the local Huichols. Now, seeing his suggestion adopted by Your Majesty, Zuvaro's heart is filled with excitement and exhilaration!

"The second segment of the journey, circling around the peninsula in the west of the bay, continues north along the coastline... From the previously mapped southernmost point of the peninsula at approximately 23 degrees north latitude, all the way to 40 degrees north latitude... In the last 5 degrees of this segment, you should find a particularly fine lagoon bay. The climate around the bay is very warm, with northern mountains blocking cold snaps, so there's no worry of sudden temperature drops and blizzards... Likewise, this warm bay area also offers very fertile land suitable for cultivation into farmland!..."

Reading such a clear prophecy, Scholar Mikki showed excitement, his eyes filled with anticipation.

"An excellent lagoon port, warm and favorable climate, fertile land along the river... Zuvaro, this place must be an outstanding settlement point!"

"Ha! Witness the Chief Divine! If the environment around the bay is really so suitable for settlement, then there surely will be many local tribes around!"

The Second Level Priest Zuvaro raised his eyebrows but was not so optimistic. According to the Kingdom's maritime records, the linear distance for one degree of latitude is roughly between 200 and 240 miles. The second segment's 17 degrees of latitude amounts to at least 3000 miles! And within the latter 5 degrees, over a thousand miles, to find the warm bay prophesied by Your Majesty...

"Ah! Under the protection of the Chief Divine! Finding the warm bay in such a vast range, establishing a settlement... Your Majesty's prophecy, if it could be a bit more precise, would be ideal!"

"Zuwaro! When the Kingdom's settlement begins, it doesn't need much land at the start. Enough to support one or two hundred people is sufficient. If there are many local tribes, it's actually beneficial. We can use the Kingdom's gemstones, cloth, and copper goods to exchange for their surplus food!"

Scholar Mikki reached out, tracing his hand over Your Majesty's wobbly coastal map. He thought deeply as he continued to read further.

"...Oh, that's right, I remember now! This warm bay should have abundant gold mine reserves. There should be a Gold Mountain there!... You need to establish a Kingdom settlement here, station a group of Samurai and Militia, and attract surrounding tribes. And during the first part of searching for the warm bay, if there's a suitable location, it's best to establish at least one settlement... The main task of these settlements is cultivation and planting, food storage, trading with surrounding tribes, food storage... Amassing enough food! Remember, the most crucial aspect of exploring along the coastline is food!"

The Second Level Priest Zuwaro agreed deeply. The Northern Continent is generally barren, with not much tribe population, and little surplus food. Acquiring food isn't such an easy task. Establishing Kingdom settlements and farming to stockpile grain is the foundation for advancing further on maritime journeys.

"The third segment of the journey, continue north along the coastline from 40 degrees north latitude to 50 degrees north latitude, in other words, another 2000 to 3000 miles north... If I remember correctly, in the latter half of this segment, or perhaps the first half... No, it's still the second half! In the final 1000 miles of the second half, there will also be an exceptionally fine bay, and it's the last warm climate harbor before continuing north! Its local tribe name might be 'Seattle'? Or 'Xias'?..."

Reading to this point, the Second Level Priest Zuwaro held his forehead, feeling a headache. Again, needing to find a warm bay within over a thousand miles of the coastline... the Divine Revelation Sea Chart's precision is quite fluctuating! As per Your Majesty's earlier descriptions, establishing a settlement at this warm bay port is definitely necessary...

"Under the protection of the Chief Divine! Regardless of the name, this is a climate-warm port! It is approximately the last cultivatable settlement point before proceeding further north. Hence, the

Kingdom needs to set up a village here, cultivating corn and hardy potatoes!... Surely there are local tribes here as well, but their food reserves are likely not abundant. Perhaps tribes and settlements in the second segment can provide additional food supplies!..."

"In the third segment, it's best to set up two or more replenishment settlement points for food storage. But these settlements on this segment must consider cold weather protection! You must build low and sturdy wooden houses and learn from the local tribes. When autumn approaches, stockpiling enough firewood and food is necessary... Ah, the Yomei Tribe from the first segment produces large quantities of high-quality bituminous coal. You can trade and mine more of it, transporting it to northern settlements as winter fuel..."

"Praise the Chief Divine, praise Your Majesty! May He grant us the strength to continue forward without wavering!"

Scholar Mikki lowly prayed for a moment, allowing the shine of faith to bestow him with courage. Combining these three segments equals nearly ten thousand miles of an arduous journey. Judging by Your Majesty's letter, this is merely halfway, perhaps even a relatively easy half of the journey...

"Under the protection of the Chief Divine! Starting from the fourth segment, the coast will certainly start to steer northwest! Continuing along the coastline, you will encounter terrifying cold, snowstorms, cold snaps, giant waves... and begin witnessing increasingly longer coastal freeze!..."

"In my view, further along, the number of people per ship must be reduced, while stored food and fuel need to be increased. This exploration voyage is dedicated to the divine and is the true test of the glory of the Kingdom's warriors... However! The Chief Divine's radiance envelops you, protecting you as you head west, reaching new shores... A more prosperous New Continent!"

Chapter 1208: Voyage to the Far North, the Chief Divine's Sixfold Trials!

The sunlight was gentle and warm, the lake glimmered calmly. Under the warm, bright sky, two young Divine Revelation Priests imagined the cold waves and surges, their expressions turning solemn.

"Oh Chief Divine! North of the 50th parallel, ten thousand miles North! ...Is that the world's end? What terrifying sight would it be?!"



"Zuwaro, stop speculating. Look, the Far North's appearance is all written in the prophecy from the Divine Revelation, Your Majesty wrote it down!"

Saying this, Scholar Mikki showed respect and reverently recited.

"...After the fourth segment of the voyage, the explorative sailing is largely north of the 50th parallel. You will face extremely low temperatures, polar waves, icy fog in the channels, polar days and nights, cyclical freezes, cold storms and blizzards... roughly six cosmic tests of the Chief Divine's weather patterns!..."

Upon hearing these unfathomable and terrifying terms, Second Level Priest Zuwaro shuddered completely. His sensitive perception had already foreseen the ominous... yet at this point, the weight on his shoulders left no room for retreat, only to forge ahead earnestly!

"Witness of the Chief Divine! The first trial is extremely low temperatures! The farther north you go, the colder it becomes. Before departing from the 'Seattle' ice-free port, you'll need to prepare thick fur clothing, bring multiple stored fire sources, and sufficient wood and coal fuel... Uh, multiple pieces of full-body cotton armor from the fleet, that can make do in emergencies! As for more details... consult and learn from the local tribespeople..."

"Of course, the best way is still to spread the faith of the Chief Divine, forming alliances with the local tribes... then bring the local fishermen aboard. These local tribes are familiar with the far northern climate and coastal hydrology and will be your best helpers!"

"Hmm? Extremely low temperatures? Just how low?"

Seeing this, Zuwaro's eyes showed doubt, contemplating. For them, the Purpecha people from these tropical highlands, the lowest temperature they could imagine was the ice and snow on Smoke Peak Divine Mountain and Star Mountain. Unless personally experienced, they couldn't imagine the true terror of the Far North's severe cold!

"However, under the protection of the Chief Divine! Bringing the local tribes onboard... in this regard, I have plenty of experience..."

"Praise the Chief Divine! I'm willing to endure Your trials, never regret until death!"

The thoughts of Scholar Mikki were simpler. No matter what difficulties he faced, as long as he followed the Divine Revelation of His Majesty, trusting in the protection of the Chief Divine, he'd face the challenges bravely! Thinking this, Mikki's eyes shone as he continued reading.

"The second trial is the polar waves. These waves are enormous, towering even above the walls of Qinchongcan City! ...The cause of them, hmm, should be the collision of cold and warm ocean currents! As for the exact cause... you need to learn to think about it yourself, see through the world's mysteries!"

"...No matter what, when you encounter polar waves, do not be afraid! Do not stray far from the coast and island chains, do not venture deep into the ocean! You need to establish more havens along the navigation route, using insulating wood or stone, or dig semi-underground dwellings, then store as much food and fuel as possible in the havens... As for constructing havens, again, learn from the local tribes, or directly bring them on board..."

"Building havens for docking? Storing food and fuel?..."

Second Level Priest Zuvaro pondered. If the environment truly proved so harsh, the fleet might need to scale down in the later stages of the journey. Perhaps, having two or three ships would mark the limit of supplies. The rest would need to transport supplies back and forth from behind.

"The third trial, icy fog in channels. In the latter part westward, you might encounter floating ice on the sea and pervasive fog. The cause of these should also... hmm, be related to the cold and warm currents... Right, I remembered! As you go west, there should be a favorable warm current, speeding up the ship. However, on the return, it'll be slower... hmm, most likely this is the case!"

"...Under the protection of the Chief Divine! Our ships are relatively agile, with a shallow draft, avoiding floating ice swiftly, stopping promptly in dense fog... So remember! Never leave guiding sea coasts and island chains, build numerous havens along the route, and bring local people familiar with the environment on board!"

Seeing your majesty's instructions, Zuvaro mulled over and asked.

"Scholar Mikki, in the entire world, are there ships with a deeper draft than our kingdom's longships?"

"Huh? Our longships, when fully loaded, can have a draft as deep as two meters... in the entire world, it should be the deepest draft!"

Scholar Mikki thought for a moment, then added a sentence.

"However, under His Majesty's divine revelation, surely larger ships with deeper drafts have been seen! What His Majesty says is naturally true!"

"Uh... praise His Majesty, praise the Divine Revelation!"

Second Level Priest Zuvaro lowered his head, praying for a moment. Then, impatiently, he continued reading.

"The fourth trial, polar days and nights. This is a peculiar celestial phenomenon! You have all learned the Alliance's calendar, knowing that from spring to autumn, the days grow longer, peaking in the extreme summer; while from autumn to spring, the nights lengthen, peaking in the extreme winter... And the farther north you go, the larger this difference between day and night grows! Even, reaching around the 60th parallel, you might see perpetual daylight during 'extreme summer', with not a hint of darkness. While during 'extreme winter', there will be unending darkness, devoid of light..."

"Do not be alarmed or fearful! Witness of the Chief Divine, polar days and nights are mere unusual celestial phenomena, recurring annually in the Far North! Their cause is... hmm, the Sun God's cyclical trail, from the northern heavens to the southern... Oh, if you're lucky at night, you might even see colorful auroras! They're like ink scattered in the sky, very beautiful..."

"What I must emphasize is, attempt the toughest westward voyages from spring to fall, roughly March to October! For you need visibility to advance along the island chains... Equally, a crucial reason is the cyclical freezes I will discuss next..."

At this point, Scholar Mikki and Second Level Priest Zuvaro exchanged glances, showing awe in their expressions. In the Alliance's myths, celestial phenomena always correspond with mortal fate, predicting the destiny of the Revered! But what do polar days and nights, colorful auroras signify?

"These are the tests of the Chief Divine, and His gaze awaits His divine revelation at the world's end for exploration!"

Scholar Mikki succinctly concluded. Regardless of what these phenomena signify, they should not be uttered from their mouths.

"Praise the Chief Divine! His Divine Might is boundless, even ten thousand miles away, in the Nine Heavens!"

Second Level Priest Zuvaro also prayed aloud. Then, as the two nodded, reading further revealed a deeper reverence and caution for legends.

"The fifth trial is cyclical freezes. The Sun brings warmth, while darkness brings cold. In the latter part of the route along the coast, cyclical freezes similar to the day and night changes appear, roughly from autumn to spring... As for the specific timing, inquire from the local tribes. Your exploration should be completed from spring to autumn, when daylight is longer, temperatures warm, and no freeze occurs! Building havens is precisely to allow you a place to take shelter, stay warm, and resupply during freezes... Remember, take it slow, prepare thoroughly!..."

"Regarding the final trial, cold storms and blizzards. This is due to the sudden southward cold air of the Far North... uh, it's like the Northern Continent experiencing a terrifying divine calamity! Overnight, snow can accumulate to a person's height, rendering vegetation into icy statues, while those exposed outside would perish from the cold... The timing of this climate also roughly parallels freezes. Therefore, storing sufficient fuel and food to endure the long harsh winter relates to your survival!"

At this point, both took a deep breath simultaneously. Second Level Priest Zuvaro closed his eyes, sincerely praying for a moment, then gathered courage again. Scholar Mikki gritted his teeth, holding sincere faith, and looked towards the final warning from your majesty.

"...Remember! In the latter part of the extreme northern navigation, you will face many unprecedented, unimaginable dreadful climates! These tests from the Chief Divine may surpass my divine revelation, beyond anyone's expectations. And your best response... is to convert the local tribes, save their souls, and have them join the fleet! ...""Witness of the Chief Divine! The far northern tribes are our earliest scattered brothers, having already endured a millennium of trials under the Chief Divine's gaze! Their

experience, passed down through generations, will surely save your lives, giving this extraordinarily difficult divine revelation exploration a chance for success!"

#### Chapter 1209: The Arrow Loosed, the Fleet Sets Sail!

In November, the shores of Atoyac Lake were bathed in the tropical highland's sunshine. The sky was vast and clear, and the earth was a mix of green with a hint of yellow. The craftsmen and militia, wearing convenient short robes, bustled in front of the longships. Sweat from their labor rolled down their foreheads and backs. In this warm southern part of the Kingdom, winter was replaced by deep autumn, with no cold snowfalls nor freezing cold snaps. The temperature was around sixteen or seventeen degrees, comfortably like early spring.

Two Divine Revelation Priests stood silently, gazing at this early spring-like scene, imagining the polar ice and extreme cold. After a while, Scholar Mikki lowered his head, carefully rolled up the first scroll of the royal directive, and pulled out a second, cotton cloth filled with writings, asking in a deep voice.

"Zuvaro, this is the second scroll of Your Majesty's directive! It contains the specifics of the latter part of our journey, the prophecy after crossing the ocean, the tasks we must complete, and the potential tribal forces we may encounter... do you still wish to see it?"

"...the latter part of the journey, the prophecy after crossing the ocean?..."

Second Level Priest Zuvaro was silent for a moment before shaking his head.

"No need to see it! We'll open the prophecy for the latter part once we find the warm 'Seattle' Bay! I'm afraid that seeing too much will make me lose the courage to move forward without hesitation! May the Chief Divine bless us!"

"Alright! May the Chief Divine bless us!"

Upon hearing this, Scholar Mikki nodded, re-securing the second scroll of the directive. He had previously skimmed through it, although shocked and unable to imagine such a land... he still had no doubts about His Majesty's prophecy.

"Let's go, Mikki! All these supplies and personnel are gathered at the shipyard, we need to check them in person and arrange everything properly!"

"Alright! Let's inventory the supplies, arrange the personnel, and depart as soon as possible!"

The next half-month was unprecedentedly busy. Twelve twenty-meter longships and thirty ten-meter twin-hulled boats were checked thoroughly. The ships were loaded with various supplies and goods, and the long-distance crew boarded. Finally, two Divine Revelation Priests personally escorted, watching eight Kingdom's Warriors carefully place two heavy copper boxes into the flagship's lower compartment.

"By the Chief Divine's witness! What is inside here?"

Second Level Priest Zuvaro frowned, looking at the two ballast copper boxes, questioning in confusion.

"They don't seem that big? Just about the size of two large water buckets, yet it takes eight men to lift them?..."

"Praise the Chief Divine! These are the special supplies granted by His Majesty, sent along with the divine sea chart and the prophetic directive from Trascal Land. According to His Majesty's prophecy, once we successfully cross the ocean, these two boxes will be of great use!"

Scholar Mikki hesitated slightly, gestured for the transporting warriors to step back, and then explained in a low voice.

"Inside is one thousand jin of gold ingots! Melted from the gold statue of the God of the Hunt in Snake City..."

"Hmm? Half a ton of gold? What use is it? The tribes of the Northern Continent... shouldn't lack gold, right?"

Upon hearing this, Second Level Priest Zuvaro was taken aback. He scratched his head, a bit puzzled.

"When I traded with the Yoreim, one jin of gold dust was about as valuable as one jin of red copper, sometimes even less... and in the Kingdom of the Lake, the output of copper mines has greatly increased, one jin of gold is worth about two jinas of copper. When copper material is mixed with tin to make bronze tools, its value in the Northern Continent doubles. If made into weapons, it doubles again..."

"By the Chief Divine's witness! When the fleet trades with the Northern tribes, it should transport more bronze tools! They are worth much more than these gold ingots..."

Upon hearing Zuvaro's words, Scholar Mikki pursed his lips and nodded in agreement.

In gold and silver-rich Central America, the value of gold was only moderate. Its primary uses were for sacrificial rites, constructing divine statues, and turning into glittering nobiliary adornments, equivalent to luxurious feather costumes. Along the Western Sea coast of the Northern Continent, large and small gold mines were equally abundant, making copper tools far more valuable...

"Zuvaro, this is His Majesty's directive! This half-ton of gold is to be used once we cross the sea to the west. Reportedly, it can drive the tribal alliance on the ocean's far side crazy!..."

"Ha! Would there be a tribal alliance that goes crazy over this?"

Second Level Priest Zuvaro grinned, shaking his head with disbelief.

"... how could that be? Just one thousand jin of gold, the Yoreim Tribe has more than that..."

"Hmm, His Majesty's words must be correct! I think these are melted from a divine statue, which is different, probably containing some divinity..."

"It's very possible!"

The two discussed for a while, then proceeded to the upper deck. More than ten accompanying Divine Revelation Priests were already waiting there.

Second Level Priest Zuvaro straightened his back, gazing at the young and excited faces before him, and their First Level 'Explorer' badges on their chests, feeling a surge of emotions!

These young Divine Revelation Priests, excellent Assistant Priests who graduated a year and a half ago from Divine Power University, were familiar with astronomy, mathematics, and surveying, and studied for a year in the Southern Naval Forces, advancing to First Level Priests, then served as the captains of the longships.

Their selection into the Divine Revelation exploration fleet leaves no doubt to their devotion to faith! Before joining, they were all informed that this exploration would last a long time, experiencing countless trials, possibly costing them their lives!

And at this moment, more than ten Divine Revelation Priests stood with firm expressions before Exploration Captain Zuvaro, awaiting his command to set sail.

"By the Chief Divine's witness! Have all the supplies been inventoried?"

"By the Chief Divine's witness! They have all been inventoried!"

"Are the fleet's warriors, militia, and sailors all in position?"

"By the Chief Divine's witness! They're all in position!"

"Very well! Today is 10 Wu Year 1 Water Month 10 Flint Day (November 22, 1489)! Take note of today's date!"

Exploration Captain Zuvaro's eyes shone as he looked at each devoted captain, memorizing every young face. He did not know what the fleet would encounter on the long journey ahead. He also did not know how many would survive to complete the exploration. But he knew that everyone here was prepared to die for their faith!

"The Chief Divine says, 'Once an arrow is shot, it cannot return! It will either hit its target, or break...' "



Exploration Captain Zuwaro raised his head, resolute and fearless. In the golden sunlight of deep autumn, he finally gazed around at everyone, proudly proclaiming.

"We are His Majesty's arrows! We were shot forth by his own hand! Our path ahead is either the glory of hitting the target or the death of breaking!"

"We head north without leaving any retreat for ourselves! And such a significant mission can only be borne by us!"

"Go, everyone return to your own ships! Follow my flagship to set sail, begin this voyage facing death!... Praise the Chief Divine, I will head towards Him, even if it means disappearing into the ocean!"

For a moment, the flagship was silent, as if a heavy emotion was flowing silently. Then, a deep and orderly declaration echoed, a vow dedicated to their faith.

"Praise the Chief Divine, we will head towards Him, even if it means disappearing into the ocean!... "

"Depart!!"

Chapter 1210: Third Year of Chōkyō, Envoys from the Capital City, Victory Mountain Manor

In December 1489, the third year of Chōkyō, South Ezo land, Victory Mountain Manor.

In the Tsugaru Strait in December, there were still no signs of freezing. Vast birch forests covered the mountains on the north coast of the strait, with a light dusting of snow over the forests and mountains. In the valley between the mountains, a long river quietly flowed westward, merging into the vast sea.

The valley in the mountains was long and flat, and the continuous mountain forests cleared away here. On the thin layer of snow, stood a village of Wa People style, along with two Japanese-style castles in the mountain, commonly called "Castles." Of course, in this barren and cold Ezo land, the two small castles had no tenshu, their structure was quite low, and thus could also be called "Halls."

The north wind stirred slight waves, and the near-sea waters were clear. Two deeply laden customs ships slowly docked at the harbor. The harbor was very small, a natural fishing port, with only four

Samurai guarding it. Their main job was not to guard the harbor, but to collect fish catches as tribute from the small fishing boats coming back from the sea.

Seeing the two customs ships arriving, the four Samurai were surprised. They discerned the small flag on the ship and recognized the familiar leader on the ship's bow, which made them slightly relax.

"Huh? Kono Group Leader, why have the rice house's ships arrived so early this year? And why are there two customs ships?"

"I don't know. Sukezaburou, ride at once and report to the Manor. The people from the rice house have arrived, it seems there might be some important matters."

"Yes!"

The four briefly exchanged a few words, and one of them immediately rode the only small horse, rushing to report to the Victory Mountain Manor miles away. The remaining three carried their swords and went to the harbor, directing the shipworkers to assist in docking.

Soon, the two customs ships docked at the shore, and from the ship disembarked an old and a young pair. Both were dressed in thick cotton long coats, wearing ear-covering cotton hats. They carried no swords, clearly both were merchants.

Kono Kenichi, the group leader, squinted his eyes and examined closely. The elder merchant was about forty or fifty, with a weathered expression and gentle eyes, looking not like a typical merchant but rather with a hint of a monk's demeanor. He did not recognize this man's origin, but he noticed the silk small sleeves peeking between the deep blue cotton coat, and he slightly bowed his waist.

As for the young merchant, the others did recognize him, named Matsushita Zou Jirou, who was the headman from the rice house who came for trade with the Manor every year, and could also be called the shopkeeper.

As the customs ship docked, the ship workers busied themselves, unloading the rice bags from the ship. Matsushita Zou Jirou stepped forward and smilingly took out a small paper packet, slipping it into the hand of Kono Kenichi.

"Kono Group Leader, thank you for your trouble!"

Kono Kenichi orderly commanded the shipworkers in their tasks. He accepted the paper packet, gave it a slight weigh, and then smiled.

"Ha! It's necessary. With these two ships of grain, the Manor's New Year this year will be much more prosperous."

Following that, Kono Kenichi waited for a moment and glanced at the elder merchant nearby, yet saw that Matsushita Zou Jirou showed no sign of introducing him. His waist bent again, and he smilingly asked.

"Why have the grain ships arrived so early this year? Is there some important matter?"

Upon hearing this, Matsushita Zou Jirou bowed, smiled politely, and still did not respond. Seeing this, Kono Kenichi understood. He no longer inquired and stepped aside, sharing the proceeds with the Samurai.

"Snowy plains and forest seas, the mountains layer upon layer. And a long river flows, clearly reflected."

Soon, the surroundings quieted down. The elder merchant, with a wandering expression, watched the clear river merging into the pale blue sea, softly admiring.

"Still water can reflect the heavens and earth, a calm mind can communicate with spirits... The scenery by the Amano River, seeing it again after more than ten years, is still equally calming!"

Hearing this, Matsushita Zou Jirou bowed and laughed in response.

"Indeed! Among all the rivers in the world named Amano, only this place is truly the 'Northern Heavens Field'..."

The elder merchant nodded, his gaze following the Amano River extending towards the East. On both sides of the river, under the thin white snow, appeared patches of grey-yellow, which were the rice stalks left after the harvest. The patches of rice stalks extended deep into the valley, and around the rice fields, were the thatched houses of the He Ren Farmers.

Matsushita Zou Jirou, noticing the other's gaze, timely smiled and said.

"Master, the rice from this Ezo land, compared to the Capital City, has a distinct serene taste, which is unforgettable!"

"Hmm, Ezo land's rice..."

The elder merchant reminisced for a moment, smiled faintly, and replied.

"Where there are rice fields, there are Wa-jin Land. Unfortunately, in this vast Ezo land, the only part where rice can be cultivated is this circle on the Southern Island..."

The two chatted for a while, then saw two riders rushing from afar from the mountain "Manor." The elder merchant gazed at the mountain manor and smilingly said.

"It's been so many years, and the Upper Country Manor's scale has only grown larger!"

Hearing this, Matsushita Zou Jirou lowered his head, carefully reminded him.

"Indeed! Master, the scale of the Upper Country Manor has continuously expanded, and now it is the largest among the Twelve Halls. And it also has a new name, called Victory Mountain Manor..."

"Hmm? Victory Mountain Manor?"

"Yes! This name was given specifically by the former Guardian of the Upper Country, Nobuhiro, over ten years ago, to commemorate the victory of the Koshama In battle..."

"Ah!"

The elder merchant understood. He smiled again, glanced at Zou Jirou beside him, and nodded.

Soon, the two riders from the Victory Mountain Manor arrived nearby. The leading middle-aged Samurai wore a black feather weave coat, with a warm fur lining inside. He had deep-colored long hakama on his legs, and a Samurai's Tachi was inserted into his waist.

Looking closely at the front of his long hakama, there were neat five folds, representing the Samurai's moral doctrine, the Five Ethics and Five Constants, namely ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, brothers, friends, and benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, faith. On the back of the long hakama, there were also two folds, representing heaven and earth, yin and yang, loyalty and filial piety.

The elder merchant's first glance was at the other's face, the second began examining the attire. Seeing the well-defined folds, he smiled. The middle-aged Samurai, ten paces away, reined in his horse, dismounted, and walked on foot. Seeing the elder merchant, he first appeared surprised, then delighted.

"Mori no Kiyoshi Master, why have you come in person?!"

"Ha! Mitsuhiro, after more than ten years, you've become as steady as mountains, a Samurai as strong as a ghost!"

"Haha!"

Upon hearing this, the middle-aged Samurai laughed heartily, quite pleased. Yes, in Wa people's tradition, "Ghost Warrior" is undoubtedly a compliment.

The elder merchant Mori no Kiyoshi stepped forward with a smile and warmly conversed with the middle-aged Samurai Kaozaki Mitsuhiro.

The two were acquaintances of over twenty years, Kaozaki Mitsuhiro having met this fellow from his father's hometown on the west bank of Lake Biwa even when he was a child. And in the monotonous and dull Ezo land, meeting someone from the Capital City and discussing the customs and features of the Kansai region was an exceedingly rare pleasure.

After a brief conversation, Kaozaki Mitsuhiro looked at Mori no Kiyoshi and also asked a similar question.

"Mori no Kiyoshi Master, did you come in person because of some important matter?"

"It is an important matter."

Mori no Kiyoshi nodded, glanced around, and Kaozaki Mitsuhiro asked a few Samurai to disperse. Then, Mori no Kiyoshi's expression grew solemn, and he whispered something, causing Kaozaki Mitsuhiro's face to change dramatically!

"It's an important matter from the Capital City, concerning a significant issue..."