

Civilization 1271

Chapter 1271: Upward Political Aspirations, Totonac Elites

The spring rain fell in a downpour, and the storms by the seaside were always more urgent than those on the highland. The cultivated soil had become soft and unrecognizable, while the busy spring plowing continued for nearly a month. When the spring plowing in Golden Bay City ended in late May, 120,000 Totonac tribes had sown over 600,000 acres of farmland. Finally, Xiulote, who personally supervised the farming, could breathe a sigh of relief. The spring plowing had been completed well; once the autumn harvest arrived, the kingdom's food problem in the seaside lands would be easily resolved.

Spring blossomed gloriously by the vast coast. He stepped out of the tent with a woman who walked unsteadily, gazing at the endless coastline and the lush green fields on the plains. At this moment, the bright sunlight broke through the clouds, bringing with it a scorching sensation as if summer had suddenly arrived.

"Spring plowing is finished, and summer approaches... while the peak of the rainy season is also just around the corner!..."

Under the dazzling spring light, Miyava wrapped herself in a broad white robe, holding a roll of paper books. At first glance, she seemed like an assistant priest involved in garrison farming. Her lips curled up, her face radiant like grass bathed in spring rain, appearing nearly drenched.

"Your Highness... all the marriages between the noble ladies have been arranged... After the spring plowing, garrisoning assistant priests everywhere had some leisure, and many have made requests... They wish to proceed further, to approach the light of the Chief Divine, to go to the newly built temple academy in Snake City, and receive the teachings of the Chief Divine Church..."

Upon hearing this, Xiulote raised an eyebrow. He took the booklets from the woman's hand, glanced at them, then calmly closed them. As the western Holy City of the Totonac people, the new city of the slayed serpent always held significant religious status. After the Alliance conquered this Holy City, they rebuilt a brand-new temple of the Chief Divine on the ruins of the Feathered Serpent Temple and established a small temple academy to cultivate native priests in the Totonac land.

If the surrendered Totonac "assistant priests" wished to proceed further, accepting training in the temple academy and officially becoming a priest of the Chief Divine was undoubtedly a clear path to advancement.

"Miyava, the selection of Totonac priests is the responsibility of the coastal Chief Priest Etrius. Hand the rosters over to him; he will naturally make selections after testing the assistant priests on the list!"

Xiulote glanced at Miyava lightly, his eyes carrying a slight sternness. Miyava bowed her head in fear, inwardly cursing the man as cold-hearted before quietly advising.

"Merciful and majestic Your Highness... Chief Priest Etrius wishes to recruit a batch of young priest apprentices, slowly cultivating their devout faith over the traditional five-year education of the Alliance. However, the current situation in the seaside lands..."

"I believe, the kingdom always needs to embrace a group of former priests and sages, providing them a path of advancement... After all, their influence within the tribes still remains in the hearts of many tribespeople. Gaining their support can allow the kingdom's roots of governance to penetrate more deeply..."

Upon hearing this, Xiulote turned his head to look at the cautiously careful Miyava, pondering silently. He understood the intentions of Chief Priest Etrius, who came from the Inquisition, naturally setting high requirements for the devout faith of priests. Therefore, Chief Priest Etrius favored a blank slate, the young Totonac apprentices, to fully impart the faith of the Chief Divine.

The request put forth by Miyava represented the political demands of Totonac elites. Having gained garrisoning assistant priest status and joined the ruling class of the kingdom, these existing Totonac elites demonstrated astounding zeal.

The ability of the 120,000 Totonac tribes to form banner teams and the successful completion of garrison planting around Golden Bay City were inseparable from the dedicated contributions of these local "assistant priests." Having achieved merits, these elites naturally wanted to take further steps, moving upward from the lower echelons of the ruling class.

"The quota for recruiting Totonac priests... young apprentices and garrisoning assistant priests..."

Xiulote rubbed his chin, contemplating seriously. Before Miyava's appearance, he had never received requests from the priests and sages of various tribes. This was not to imply that the Totonac elites lacked political demands or desire for more political power. Rather, being from a conquered people, they had no channel for direct communication with the upper echelons of the kingdom.

Thus, when Miyava appeared by the ruler's side in an implicitly acknowledged position, participating in the politics of the seaside lands... in merely a month's time, a Totonac political faction quickly coalesced around her!

The priests, sages, and chieftains of the various Totonac tribes all flocked to her side. Finally, the native elites had a direct spokesperson within the upper echelons of the kingdom. Regardless of how this spokesperson voiced their concerns, whether in strange settings or joyful times, they ultimately allowed the conduct of the kingdom to be heard by the king.

Politics is the art of compromise. Hearing the voices of native elites, embracing them, and involving them in the governance of the seaside lands was undoubtedly something that could stabilize rule! As for selectively meeting their demands, while also presenting new requests in return, it was a reasonable political exchange...

"The priest quota in the city of the slayed serpent will be split fifty-fifty. Half will cultivate devout young apprentices, and half will cultivate loyal priests and sages. I will inform Chief Priest Etrius to handle it this way in the future..."

After pondering briefly, Xiulote made a decision. He locked eyes with the delighted woman beside him and spoke calmly.

"However, the original priests and sages of each tribe must prove their devoutness upon becoming preaching priests of the Chief Divine! They must venture deep into the jungle, guiding those who have not been incorporated into the banner teams, who only superficially submitted, or who are even detached from the kingdom's rule, the loose inland tribes... Making more Totonac people integrate into the kingdom's governance order!..."

"The kingdom's army has traveled two hundred miles into the southwest jungle, pressing seven to eight thousand tribes in Feather Bird City to surrender and conducting strict conversion blood oaths! However, although the tribes around Feather Bird City have converted to the Chief Divine, the kingdom cannot spare enough priests to manage them, establish banner teams in the jungle, or even organize garrison farming... not to mention the tribes at Soil River City three hundred miles southwest, who have only nominally submitted to the kingdom... These vast, intricate inland areas are where familiar with tribal culture, fluent in various tribal languages, and adapted to jungle climates, native priests can demonstrate their abilities and devout faith!"

"Of course, as long as they perform well, the kingdom will generously reward them. If they can convert medium-sized tribes of a thousand people or great tribes of ten thousand, they can gain promotion to become Second Level city-state priests managing tribes, or even become Third Level Diocese High Priests overseeing an area!"

"Ah? Venturing into the jungle, guiding inland tribes, integrating into kingdom rule?"

Upon hearing this, Miyava's smile froze, exclaiming in surprise. This arduous path of advancement was quite different from what she and the garrisoning "assistant priests" had imagined. She opened her sweet little mouth to say something, but the king pinched her face, letting out only a gentle moan.

"Your Highness!..."

"Miyava, pass on my instructions to them, just as I have expressed..."

Miyava, you've been speaking on behalf of the Totonac tribes a bit too often of late!... You're a smart woman, but you must understand that no matter how those tribal elites praise you, how they flatter or implore... you must always keep your hold over them, make them bow before you, let them become your subjects... I am your ultimate authority!"

Hearing this admonishment, Miyava stood motionless for a long time, her eyes rarely showing some bewilderment, before she finally looked up, her exquisite face visibly blushing, her eyes glistening, as if she had finally seen the view from the top like an ant climbing to a high place. Then, a noticeable blush crept across her beautiful face, her eyes twinkling as she said.

"My lord... you're saying, I should tell them that you...you are my ultimate authority?..."

"Yes."

"You, my lord, are my guardian... my master..."

"Mm..."

"My master... should I bow before you here?..."

"Hmm?! Here?"

Xiulote widened his eyes. The lakeside sparkled in the fields as the personal guard warriors moved away. In the distant expansive fields, the busy spring plowing had ended. The lush greenery spread over the fertile soil where spring birds would soon sing. The reflection on the lake blurred, dissolving in the melody of the bird songs.

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Chapter 1272: The Second Kingdom Expedition, the Struggling Fleet

In June, the seaside is the scorching sun, the sudden wind and rain, and the vibrant greenery. In the lush farmland, corn grows strong, standing like short spears. And in the flourishing jungle, tropical flowers bloom unabashedly, their spreading leaves shading the sunlight, even the coastal Luwei can grow taller than a person.

The tall reeds grow on the edge of the mangrove swamp. They extend from the seaside to the inland of the South, passing through a seven or eight-mile long river, and converge with a narrow lagoon. Here, the distant sea and sky are vaguely visible, and the nearby woods are lush and verdant. And on the riverbank, where the Luwei and the woods coexist, lies a low and inconspicuous encampment.

Redbirds hover over the camp, attracted by the smell of fresh food. Vultures also circle above, drawn by the scent of rotten food. From the height of the flying birds, only then can one see the scale of the campsite, which is quite large, accommodating a good one to two hundred people. On the dense reeds by the river, four old longships can be faintly seen. The moss clinging to their hulls indicates that these conspicuous vessels have not sailed along the coast for a very long time.

"...This damned weather! The pumpkin mud has gone bad... To remain hidden, even firing up during the day is hard..."

The lowly and simple campsite stretches out, encircling several large circles. Everywhere are the damp water vapor and the Samurai of the fleet, wearing only loincloths. In the circle's center, there is an unlit fire pit. Old Chiwaco, the militia, with his upper body exposed, sits by the moist fire pit, holding a terra cotta bowl. As he grumbles, he licks the smooth rim to find a trace of 'delicacy' left behind.

"It's too hot, the moisture is too much! Even dry and salty pumpkin mud can turn spoiled... Your Majesty said it's caused by some tiny bugs reproducing overly..."

MeKate, the Divine Revelation Priest, shows a sallow face. He grimaces while eating pumpkin mud from the bowl, feeling as if chewing mud from a swamp.

On the other side, Tikalo the Mayan merchants, eats the 'salty mud' quietly with his head lowered. Occasionally, he turns, glancing at the two children behind him, and shows a gentle smile.

The two kids, a boy and a girl, are quite young. The older boy is ten, named Tilan, possessing an elongated divine head and a cross-eyed gaze near the nose, always mute. The young girl is only five, named Tidan, apart from a slightly long forehead, lacking many Maya features.

In fact, in formal Maya language, the names of the two kids are very noble, being 'as heavenly sacred blue' and 'as blood divine red'.

At this moment, everyone in the camp is eating the hard and spoiled pumpkin mud. Only these two children hold soft and fragrant corncakes in their hands. The little girl, Tidan, with a small appetite, ate half a cake and handed the remaining half to Tikalo.

"Father, you eat! The cake is soft and tasty!"

Seeing the cake handed by the little girl, Tikalo the Mayan merchants swallowed hard. He hesitated for a moment, glanced at the few others watching, then shook his head with difficulty.

"I won't eat. Tidan, you eat!"

"Ah? I'm full."

The little girl Tidan blinked, confused, at Tikalo. Then, like the wind, she hopped in front of Chiwaco, stretching her hand to offer.

"Then, Little Father, you eat!"

"Gulp..."

Old Chiwaco also swallowed hard, trying to refuse with a shake of his head. Extending a hand, he tousled the little girl's hair, softly speaking in simple Maya language.

"Little Tidan, I'm also full. The two brothers haven't eaten enough. Give them, alright?"

The little girl Tidan blinked again, looking behind the old militia man. Dark Snake and Didi, shoulder to shoulder, squatted on the ground, watching the corncake in Tidan's hand while drooling, looking rather festive.

"They should be split into two parts, equal in size..."

Little girl Tidan stared at the irregular cake in her hand, thinking for a moment. Then, carefully folded it twice, aligning the sides, then used the fold line to split the cake, and handed it to the two.

"One cake, two pieces, equal size... you eat!"

"Ow! Woo woo..."

Like lightning, Dark Snake and Didi reached out together, stuffing the cake into their mouths, almost howling like wolves. Chiwaco covered his old face with his hand, unwilling to watch. MeKate, the Divine Revelation Priest, curiously observed the smart little girl and laughed in Maya language.

"Tidan, have you learned mathematics?"

"Mathematics? Well, I only memorized multiplication tables up to 20×20 , taught by the tribe's grand elder... Dot dot dot ($1 \times 1 = 1$)... Horizontal line dot horizontal ($5 \times 5 = 25$, horizontal as 5, dot horizontal as 25)..."

The little girl Tidan naively blinked, looking at MeKate, reciting Maya multiplication tables. Maya mathematics is base 20, and multiplication tables within 20×20 are the foundation for practicing sacred astronomy as a Maya Priest. Clearly, Tidan's original cultivation direction was to become a noble Maya Divine Descendant Priest, inheriting the most mysterious and noble ancient knowledge of the Mayapan Royalty.

"What? Within twenty? Multiplication?"

Upon hearing the little girl's words, old Chiwaco widened his eyes, dazed for a moment, listening to her start reciting the mnemonic verse. He paused, covering his old face again. After a moment, he seemed to remember something, and forcefully tapped his two comrades on the head.

"Listen well! Learn something!"

"Yes! Father!"

"... Dot zero dot zero dot zero zero ($20 \times 20 = 400$, dot zero as 20, dot zero zero as 400)... Alright! I'm done reciting!"

Little girl Tidan happily smiled, gazing around at the people present. At this moment, except for Tikalo, everyone slightly lowered their heads in shame, pondering the philosophical question of life's inherent differences.

"Uh... Praise the Chief Divine! Tidan, you recited wonderfully!"

MeKate, the Divine Revelation Priest, silently prayed for a moment, then took a look at the Maya little princess before him and said with a smile.

"Tidan, learning mathematics should be applied in life... Do you remember how many days we've been here?"

"Hmm..."

Little girl Tidan blinked, not counting on her fingers but mentally calculating. Soon, her eyes brightened, providing the answer.

"The ship bringing food comes every six days! It's come twelve times, so... 72 days. Hmm, today is the fifth day since the ship didn't arrive, which means... 77 days!... Alright, I figured it out!"

"Ah? 77 days? Damn! We've been hiding east of this Hidden Serpent City for this long?"

Old Chiwaco looked at MeKate with surprise. The latter praised the little girl a few times before nodding at the old militia.

"Indeed! Witnessed by the Chief Divine! We arrived here in mid-March, hearing news of the Kingdom fighting with various seaside tribes, stopped, and camped at this hidden spot... In a blink, now early June, almost three months have passed!"

MeKate, the Divine Revelation Priest, showed a bitter smile, sighing deeply. The fleet returned from Cuba, experienced perilous storms, narrowly escaping the Xi Wu family fleet's chase... Crossed ten thousand miles of waves, the fleet endured it all. He never anticipated being trapped here, truly unable to advance or retreat.

"Alas! Supreme Your Majesty! The Kingdom's legions!... When will you arrive here?... Hidden Serpent City's tribes are already engrossed in battle with the Kingdom... Phew! May the Chief Divine protect us!"

Chapter 1273: The Second Kingdom Expedition – Daily Life at the Camp

The camp is short on food, with only two meals a day, morning and evening. After the not-so-early breakfast, it's a long wait. The fleet's hiding spot is located between Hidden Serpent City and the second ancient city of La Venta, just over fifty miles from the bustling Holy City of the East. In reality, the nearest Totonac village is only about ten miles away.

In such a dangerous position, as the captain of the exploration fleet, the old Militia Chiwaco had to be extremely cautious, careful, careful, and more careful. According to his admonitions to the fleet, they were...

"You blockheads! Eat whatever you have and don't think about fighting! Like grass mice burrow into holes, like turtles retract your heads! Damn! I took you out, so I must try to bring you back..."

Hearing the reprimand, the Kingdom's Warriors and sailors in the camp could only place the weapons they had polished repeatedly and helplessly lower their heads. When the four longships returned from Cuba, they carried nearly two hundred people. But now in the camp, there are only a little over one hundred sixty.

Warriors and sailors of Prepetcha origin are now only half in the fleet. Another quarter of the warriors were supplemented by Putun tribe captives from Moqi Chieftain in the Great Prairie City of the Short Spear tribe. As for the last quarter of sailors, their sources are mixed, all converted to the Chief Divine. Among them are Vastek people, Taino people, and even Totonac people...

Fortunately, in this era, most American tribes have only tribal and faith identifications and do not have much national consciousness. Totonac people from different tribes do not feel any mental burden when fighting each other. And the fleet has been here for so long, apart from food shortages and difficult supplies, there haven't been too many instabilities.

"Food... things to eat..."

Thinking of this, the old Militia sighed deeply. With the fleet's strength, they could break through the Totonac village and grab enough food. However, that would mean completely exposing their tracks and facing thousands of tribal warriors and militia in Hidden Serpent City. Deep in the old Militia's heart, he also rejected such slaughter and plunder.

"Chief Divine! I must try to take you back..."

The old Militia Chiwaco muttered, carrying a simple fishing rod to the lagoon near the camp. Many kingdom's sailors were also spread along the lake shore, fishing or catching fish.

On the outer side, Putun tribe warriors, carrying Hunting Bow, are searching in the surrounding jungle, hunting Flying Birds, grass mice, and wild rabbits. They have another duty, which is to intimidate and expel passing Totonac hunters, preventing the kingdom's warriors from being exposed. Although the Maya Barbarian Tribe appearing here is strange, it's far better than the appearance of the Mexica people.

"...The fish in the lake are getting fewer..."

The old Militia Chiwaco squatted by the lagoon and fished all afternoon. Under the dull gaze of the Dark Snake and Didi, he only caught two small fish the size of a palm.

Indeed, so many people have been stuck here for nearly three months. The fishing resource in the water and the hunt in the forest have almost been entirely caught. And the only stable food source is the secret grain supply from the Maya oar-sail ship coming from Hidden Serpent City every six days. That's the merchant ship of the Mayan merchants Tikalo, somehow running even faster than the longship.

"Today is the fifth day... a ship should come tomorrow, though not sure how much food it can bring... Hm... anyhow, at least let everyone have a good meal and cheer up a bit..."

Thinking of this, old Militia Chiwaco licked his dry lips, handing the basket with small fish to Dark Snake.

During the spring planting season, food from each tribe was very tight. The Totonac people have been constantly fighting, transporting food westward. There are fewer and fewer food supplies in the markets outside the city. He really didn't expect much, just to buy some pumpkin mush and kidney beans for a nice meal.

The sun leaned west, and the lake was so clear that not a fish feather was visible. Even for the Taino people who are skilled at fishing, there was nothing they could do about this situation. Chiwaco had to pack up his fishing rod and accompany the farming-savvy Didi to a flat spot by the little river. There, some soil had been dug out, and a large expanse of thriving cassava had been planted, all results of his diligent work over two or three months.

"Great! Really great! Just plant these cassava and they'll survive, they've grown so many new shoots, truly good crops!"

Old Militia Chiwaco looked around, patted the new shoots of cassava, pulled out some weeds, his old face blossomed with delight. The fleet stayed here longer than he anticipated. The first batch of cassava taken from the Water Chief of the Great Tribe Mayali has sprouted and couldn't be stored anymore.

He had to plant these cassava plants on a fertile piece of land by the river, piling up the soil to plant them. Unexpectedly, this high-yield crop is so easy to cultivate, even weeds can't outgrow them.

"Good, so good! Just as good as Chief Divine!"

The old Militia murmured again with satisfaction, pondering how much longer they had to stay here. Looking at the growth momentum of the cassava field, in a little more than half a year, this batch of cassava could be stably harvested. If it doesn't work out, then plant the last batch of cassava taken from the Forest Ridge Tribe before leaving Cuba here... as long as the fields are cultivated, endure patiently for a year, the blind-eyed Majesty should be able to break through right?

After checking on the cassava field, the old Militia returned to the camp with a smile. The sky had gradually darkened, and the smoke from the cooking fires could no longer be seen. Only then did the camp stir up bonfires, set up large clay pots, began cooking fish soup with wild greens, and roasting various small beasts and insects. The evening breeze wafted with curious aromas everywhere, making the old Militia's stomach growl.

Everyone gathered, drank several bowls of warm wild green fish soup, ate some soaked pumpkin mush, and felt entirely comfortable. As for the hardly caught fish, Chiwaco only ate a small piece, letting Tilan, Tidan, Dark Snake, and Didi, the four children eat the rest.

Night fell gently, the moonlight bright, clouds floating on the horizon. The seaside wind from the east carried a salty fishy scent. The strong wind blowing on the leaders of the fleet made their disheveled hair even messier.

"The peak of the rainy season is coming! Another rainy season... it's been a year and a half since we set sail from Crow City!"

Divine Revelation Priest MeKate exclaimed sitting by the fire. Then he tasted his fingers and stretched them into the wind to feel the breeze, his eyebrow raised.

"A strong wind from the sea, afraid there's going to be a storm!... Tomorrow morning, have the warriors cut some wood and fortify the camp..."

"A storm is coming... in a day or two at most..."

Old Militia Chiwaco squinted at the eastern clouds. After drifting on the sea for so long, the Caribbean's climate had become like a temperamental friend, familiar to everyone.

"Strong wind and heavy rain... Tomorrow's grain delivery needs to be stored well, covered with that waterproof rubber..."

"We must find a way to store more food... We don't know how much longer we'll be stuck here!..."

Chapter 1274: The Second Kingdom Expedition – This Blind...

"Make sure to store the grain properly, don't let it get damp!"

"Chief Divine bless us! The kingdom's army has already conquered Golden Bay City..."

"Yes! Your Majesty is invincible and will soon reach here!..."

Everyone nodded and whispered among themselves for a while, then fell silent again. Priest Mekate pondered for a moment, grasped the amulet around his neck, and prayed devoutly.

"Chief Divine bless us! Through terrible storms, across enemy blockades, through boundless waves, may we reach the shores of the Kingdom..."

Upon hearing Priest Mekate's words, the old militia member Chiwaco raised an eyebrow. He gazed at the night sky to the East, and the difficulties of the return journey vividly played in his mind.

Last October, four longships carrying two hundred people set sail for the return journey from the vicinity of the Mayali Region, departing from Iron Bay Town established by the Kingdom. He led the fleet along the northern coast, heading west all the way.

The fleet passed through the coastal regions of the Taino Tribe, including the Brown Hill Tribe by the palm forest, the Fish Bay Tribe rich in fish catches, the Gabie Tribe full of Divine Smoke, the Salt Coast

Tribe that produces sea salt, the Jing River Tribe with natural wells, the Havana Tribe with a large population, and the Lizard Tribe that breeds spiny lizards, until reaching the Forest Ridge Tribe below the Snake Tail West Mountain.

These Taino Tribes were very friendly, providing food and lodging, and even accompanying them to sleep. The morale of the fleet remained high, and at the Forest Ridge Tribe on the westernmost part of Cuba Snake Island, they survived the ominous day of the year's end and received another supply of grain. Then, they directly crossed the sea, heading towards the Maya Lands over six hundred miles away!

"Terrible storms..."

The old militia member Chiwaco lifted his head, recalling the capricious sea storms while crossing the sea and the sailors taken by the storms. He shuddered involuntarily, took a deep breath, and angrily cursed at the sky.

"Damn, this blind old sky!"

After crossing the sea and reaching the Maya, the fleet stayed at Ekab Port in the southwest of the Maya for more than half a month. They repaired the longships and celebrated the Chief Divine Festival at the beginning of the new year.

Most of the sailors and samurai who stayed there to recuperate had already recovered and rejoined the Kingdom fleet. As for the rest, the old militia member found a village to settle the ten or so injured and left enough wealth.

Afterwards, the fleet cautiously stopped at Fire Salt Village of the Qi Jin Tribe for more than half a month. They reconnected with the remaining forces of Mayapan, led by the Kekum Family from Tikalo.

Kokom Clan Leader, Divine Descendant leader Ti'aj Kin, with the Chief Divine's emblem engraved on his forehead, appeared before the fleet, weary and travel-worn. He brought the promised Southern Sea Map, a shipwright of the bee slaves, and most importantly, the royal descendants, his two children, Tilan and Tidan.

"Chief Divine bless us! Without a groomed heir, Xiu Clan Leader Xiupan has gone mad!..."

Divine Descendant leader Ti'aj Kin looked haggard with bandaged wounds on his body.

"The weak Canul Lineage has already made peace with Xiu. The legion of the Xiu Clan has left the western mountain forest, with eight thousand warriors recklessly invading the territory of the Kapoor Clan!"

"I led the tribe migrating all the way to the Northeast, only to be intercepted by the vanguard warriors of the Xiu Clan and engaged in a fierce battle! Fortunately, with the weapons you left behind and the armor gifted by the Lord Priest... but the tribe's casualties... we lost a third in the retreat..."

"On the westward journey ahead, you must be careful! The Chel Divine Authority Tribe is our ally and can be trusted. But further west along the coast, the Wei Yu and Luchong Clans are vassals of the Xiu Clan. They follow Xiu Clan Leader Xiupan's strict orders, launching a fleet madly searching for you..."

Ti'aj Kin left behind guides and envoys, praying in the name of the Chief Divine as he watched the fleet head west. The journey that followed was like a chase between life and death. Everyone summoned their strength, day and night relentlessly, directly charging through the coasts of the Wei Yu and Luchong Clans, engaging in battles with the intercepting Maya fleet several times!

They didn't even dare to linger along the coast of the Canul Lineage until they finally relaxed upon reaching Grassfield City of the Putun Tribe. When Chiwaco counted the headcount of the fleet, he found that from the initial two hundred people, nearly half had been lost, leaving only about one hundred twenty!

"Across enemy blockades..."

The old militia member Chiwaco gritted his teeth, recalling the fallen samurai and sailors, many of whom couldn't even retrieve their bodies. He closed his eyes and after a long silence, sighed deeply. Then he reopened his eyes, glaring at the Mayan merchant Tikalo, and cursed bitterly.

"Damn, this blind Puap!"

Upon hearing this, the Mayan merchant Tikalo touched his nose and lowered his head, silent and unspoken. Now, he and the exploration fleet were like locusts tied to the same rope. He was even more concerned about the safety of the fleet than Chiwaco, because the last heir of Mayapan Royalty, the sacred bloodline of the Kekum Family, was now within the fleet!

Thinking this, Tikalo turned around and looked at the two weary children. He gently rubbed their heads and comforted them softly.

"Sleep, sleep peacefully!... Grandpa will tell you the story of the Lake Capital City... That is the end of our journey, a giant White Stone city built on the lake..."

Seeing this, the old militia member Chiwaco pursed his lips and sighed. He shook his head and stared at the campfire in front of him. The flickering fire illuminated his eyes, making the dark path ahead seem much gentler.

The Kingdom fleet rested at the Grassfield City of the Short Spear Tribe for half a month before they met Chieftain Moqi, who had returned from a campaign. Chieftain Moqi returned victorious, annexing two thousand-strong branches of the Putun Tribe and capturing many war prisoners. He was very satisfied with the bronze weapons provided by the fleet and conducted another exchange.

The fleet supplemented their numbers with forty Putun warriors before continuing westward. In reality, Chieftain Moqi still had many prisoners, but Chiwaco, for the sake of the fleet's safety, chose only forty compliant warriors. He thought that in the ensuing journey, there would be no need for battle. However, when the fleet reached Red Lake Town and met the Maya merchant vessels under Tikalo's command, which had long awaited them, they learned a piece of thunderous news!

"The God of Death of the Lake Kingdom has launched an eastern expedition against the Totonac tribes, destroying the Holy Land of the Feathered Serpent Ancient City! The Priesthood of the Hidden Serpent Holy City has mobilized the tribes, declaring a Divine War of all the gods! The Totonac tribes are determined to fight the invading Mexica legion to the death!"

"Through boundless waves..."

The old militia member Chiwaco, with reddened eyes, recalled the shock and despair upon hearing the news. If the returning Kingdom fleet encounters the fleets of the Totonac city-states, a battle is

inevitable! And the hostile city-states are not one or two; they encompass the entire coast of East Totonac!

Thinking this, Chiwaco gritted his teeth and cast a glance at the equally disheartened Priest Mekate, cursing fiercely.

"Damn, this blind Your Majesty!..."

Chapter 1275: Second Kingdom Expedition, Awaiting Fate

"The beautiful causeway stretches across the lake, the towering Great Temple pierces the clouds... that is the land of prickly pears and stones in the lake, the eternal Tenochtitlan..."

The night settles deeply, and the camp gradually quiets down. The Mayan merchant Tikalo gently whispers, coaxing the children of the two Royal Families to sleep. Then, he comes to the flickering fire pit, rummages in his arms for a while, and takes out the last roll of Mayan Divine Smoke, handing it to the old militia Chiwaco.

"Captain Chi, would you like a roll?"

"Hmm."

The old militia Chiwaco reaches out to take the Divine Smoke, lighting it at the edge of the fire pit. Then, he places the smoke roll among those seated around. Several leaders of the fleet gather forward, their brows relaxed, breathing in the calming aroma.

"Captain Chi, I have a suggestion to discuss with you..."

"Hmm?"

The Mayan merchant Tikalo lowers his head, deeply inhales the smoke, and then sincerely appeals to the old militia.

"Tilan and Tidan are still young... enduring hardships and soon facing a storm... I'm afraid they won't withstand it..."

"They are the last hope of the Mayapan Royalty and the hostages entrusted by the Kokom Family to the Alliance... When the fleet's ship arrives tomorrow, let them leave with the crew..."

"Captain Chi, please believe me... I'll arrange personnel to secretly send them to the kingdom-occupied coast, boarding the fleet's merchant ship..."

Upon hearing Tikalo's words, the old militia Chiwaco raises his head, looking deeply into the other's eyes as if trying to understand his intentions. He then purses his lips, not responding immediately, but asks deeply.

"Tikalo, are you sure you can pass through the Tototanak people's blockade on the coast, evade the vigilant patrol boat groups, and connect with the kingdom's legion?"

At this, the Mayan merchant Tikalo falls silent. He understands the old militia's meaning and knows that the other has seen through him. His proposal was actually about sending the young children to the vicinity of Hidden Serpent City under the fleet's care. There would at least be shelter, clean well water, plenty of food, and fruit, much better than here.

After a moment of silence, Tikalo raises his head and still answers.

"If it's just one or two people... we can try... there's a chance..."

"Praise the Chief Divine! If we can connect with the kingdom's legion and receive support, we can attempt to break through the Tototanak people's blockade!"

Upon hearing their conversation, the Prepecha Warrior Captain Tawalu perks up, speaking excitedly. Since Huitu Puapu stayed on the Cuba Snake Island, he took over as the leader of the kingdom's warriors.

"The storm is coming, and the rainfall will be heavy; visibility won't extend far! We can brave the rain and sail west at dusk and night! Perhaps, the Tototanak patrol fleet won't notice us!..."

"Sailing in the rain at night..."

The old militia Chiwaco thinks for a while and gently shakes his head.

"Too dangerous... if the Tototanak people can't see us, we can't see them either... And once we encounter them closely, there will be no escaping, it will be not to die..."

"Captain Chi, I truly mean it, let the two children go first..."

The Mayan merchant Tikalo grits his teeth and speaks again.

"The fleet's manager is all part of the family. They will protect the two children and connect with the kingdom, even if it costs them their lives!..."

"Actually, there's another way! No need to fight the Tototanak people, though we might face the storm..."

The Divine Revelation Priest Mekate suddenly speaks. He glances at Tikalo indifferently, his eyes are full of obvious distrust. For the kingdom's interest, he did not want the two children of the Mayapan Royalty, such important hostages, to leave the fleet's control.

"Witness the Chief Divine! We're currently at around 18 degrees latitude. The Feathered Serpent Ancient City's latitude is around 20 degrees..."

"The strong wind comes from the sea, blowing from east to west. The fleet can sail into the deep sea, go straight, towards the west coast of the kingdom! This way, we won't be troubled by the complex coastal hydrology, winding coastlines, and the Tototanak patrol fleet. Raise the full sails and use the full wind force to speed westward!"

Saying this, Priest Mekate grips the Sun Amulet on his neck, his eyes are fearless and firm.

"The Chief Divine will protect us! Raise the full sails, head northwest, accelerate into the sea, the ship's speed will be two or three times that of now! If everything goes well, it would take six or seven days, maybe even five or six days to reach the coast!"

"That's too dangerous! Sailing into the deep sea, we may encounter stronger storms and unbearable waves!..."

Upon hearing Mekate's proposal, Tikalo widens his eyes, quickly rebutting.

"What if we veered off course... No, we would certainly veer off course, it's impossible to precisely reach the Feathered Serpent Ancient City!..."

"The west is an extended coastline, not an endless sea! Even if we veer off course, as long as we head west, we will definitely reach the coast!"

Priest Mekate's expression is serious, his tone is certain.

"Even if slightly northward, blown to the Vastec people's coast, there's no problem! It's still an affiliate of the Alliance, a place where we can resupply!"

"But... what if... on our ship... there's still..."

"Praise the Chief Divine! Captain Chiwaco, what do you think?"

Everyone's gaze converges on the old militia, weighing his shoulders down. With Priest Tome's departure, he has become the fleet's sole leader and the one to make the final decision.

The old militia lowers his head, hunching over, watching the flames before him, not speaking for a long time. The scales of fate repeatedly sway in his heart. The current path is to choose between waiting and taking risks. Either wait, or wait for the opportunity to risk, or take the risk immediately...

"Hoo..."

After a while, Chiwaco takes a deep breath and speaks firmly.

"Wait a little longer!..."

"Tikalo, send out envoys from the fleet to try and connect with the kingdom..."

"Mekate, command the sailors to build a rain-proof hut for the two children to stay..."

"Tawalu, organize the warriors, ready weapons and armor, preparing for battle and adventure..."

"Then the rest is up to fate to decide..."

The old militia made a decision, and everyone accepted the choice. But this time, the unpredictable fate did not seem to favor them. Or perhaps, no matter what they chose, fate had been waiting for a long time!

When the pitch-black night passed, and a new dawn arose, a new day arrived from the coastline. Today was another day for the Mayan merchant ship to deliver food. Everyone eagerly waited all morning but never saw the ship. Not until the sun passed zenith, did the familiar Mayan oar-sail ship appear at the northern river estuary, slowly sailing towards the lagoon upstream.

"After waiting so long, it finally came!..."

Warrior Captain Tawalu beamed with joy, looking at the swaying oar-sail ship, impatiently hopeful.

"Hey! It looks like it's heavily laden... the food this time must be more than last..."

"Chief Divine! What is that?"

At this moment, the scout with the best sight, Mountain Bird, changes his expression. He gazes towards the north, his mouth wide open in surprise, pointing beyond the oar-sail ship. Then his startled voice abruptly turns into a scream of terror.

"Ah! It's ships... canoes! Many canoes!"

"It's the enemy, the Tototanak people!"

Chapter 1276: The Second Kingdom Expedition – Maya Merchants Facing Death

"What? Totonac fleet?!"

Upon hearing scout Mountain Bird's shout, the old militia Chiwaco was taken aback, his heart racing as if suddenly gripped by the enormous hand of fate. Without hesitation, he immediately issued an order.

"Tawalu, have the warriors don their armor! Sailors, board the longships, prepare to fight! Hurry!"

"Yes! Captain!"

Tawalu promptly picked up the horn, blowing "Didi" as he ran towards the camp. Soon, the tranquil camp became lively, filled with the hurried figures of bustling people.

Next, Chiwaco rushed over to Mountain Bird in two steps. He gazed at the northern rivermouth, where small indistinct dots were gradually approaching, but he couldn't see them clearly.

"Mountain Bird, your eyesight is good. Quick! Count them for me, how many ships are coming?"

"Large canoes... twenty, twenty, twenty, twenty, twenty... and some small boats..."

Scout Mountain Bird squinted, counting one hundred large canoes in one breath. Hearing this, the old militia's heart pounded loudly, a strong sense of crisis overwhelming him.

"One hundred big canoes? Each big canoe can carry six people, that means at least..."

"At least six hundred Totonac warriors! Counting those on merchant ships, there will be even more! They are well-prepared... they must know the details of the fleet!"

Divine Revelation Priest McKate's expression became solemn, his eyes turning dangerous. The entire fleet amounted to only one hundred sixty people. While those reliable for combat among the kingdom's warriors were just over forty. Six hundred against one hundred sixty, such a staggering disparity, this battle... He suddenly turned around to face the worried and anxious Mayan merchant Tikalo and loudly questioned.

"Tikalo, your merchant ship brought enemies! How dare you betray the kingdom and inform the Totonac?"

"No! I didn't! That's impossible!!"

Mayan merchant Tikalo clenched his fists, his face showing both unmistakable fear and uncontrollable anger.

"The family's descendants are here! How could I, disregarding their safety, invite the Totonac's army?"

"Then that means the merchant fleet's route was leaked, a traitor appeared!"

"This... I... they..."

Mayan merchant Tikalo was at a loss, sweat forming on his forehead in anxiety. His usual cunning failed him when faced with such a crisis, leaving him unable to speak. Only able to mumble, he murmured.

"Impossible... they couldn't betray... how could it be?..."

"Tikalo! The kingdom's warriors are preparing for battle, the sailors are boarding the ships, they need time!"

Divine Revelation Priest MeKate strode forward, grabbing Tikalo by the collar. His eyes were sharp, and he spoke urgently.

"Take two Putun warriors and go ahead in the small boat! I don't care what means you use, delay that fleet for a moment!"

"Ah? Go... to the fleet?... Delay time?"

Upon hearing this, Tikalo began to tremble all over. He knew what this meant. However, the words of refusal stuck in his throat, unable to be spoken.

"Yes! Delay as much as you can, prove your innocence! For the fleet and... them."

As he spoke, Divine Revelation Priest MeKate tilted his head slightly, glancing at the two children of the Maya royal family. Ten-year-old Tilan pressed his lips together, gripping a stone spear taller than himself. Meanwhile, five-year-old Tidan looked confused, clutching his brother's clothes, still unaware of the unfolding events.

"Father? Are bad people coming?..."

"I..."

Mayan merchant Tikalo shook violently, his face turning pale instantly. Just a moment ago, he'd been full of hope, gazing at his merchant ship. But now, the shadow of death loomed over him. That same ship had, in one quarter-hour, transformed into a demon's maw, grinning wickedly as it swallowed its once proud owner.

"No time left!"

"I... will go!"

Tikalo turned around, a bitter smile on his face, and glanced at the two children behind him. In his smile, there was a moment of warmth. Then, he bit his teeth hard, boarded a small boat without saying a word, and headed towards the incoming Totonac fleet.

The old militia Chiwaco stood silently, watching everything unfold. He did not stop Tikalo from leaving; instead, he quickly donned his leather armor, picked up the familiar copper spear, and watched the small boat drift away. Countless thoughts flashed through his mind, but he had no time to ponder each one, relying only on his keen instincts to make a swift decision!

A moment later, Chiwaco's voice was low, like a dog ready to pounce, roaring orders from within his chest.

"Everyone! Pick up your weapons! Board the longship, defend on the deck!... Get ready in a quarter of an hour, break through towards the rivermouth!... Remember, do not stop! Once out of the rivermouth, raise the sail and head into the depths of the Northwest sea until you shake off the Totonac people!"

"Yes! Yes, boss!"

The riverside camp was in chaos, all supplies discarded. Sailors dragged the longship from the reeds, set up the long oars. Warriors donned armor and took bows, and boarded along the sides of the longship. The old militia personally took several children, boarding the flagship first. Then, he straightened his spine and shouted to Dark Snake and Didi.

"You two older ones, take those two younger ones, go down into the hold! No matter what happens, without my command, you are not allowed to come out!"

"Father! We are all warriors, we can come out and fight..."

"Get down there! That's an order!"

The Kingdom's people hurried on board, shields were erected along the sides of the longship. At the front, Mayan merchant Tikalo was already in front of the fleet with his small boat. Here, the Totonac boats were clearly visible.

Hundreds of Totonac warriors holding long spears and carrying throwing spear hunting bows stood densely on the small boats. Like a swarm of man-eating fish, they blocked the narrow exit to the sea, their target clear, heading towards the nearby camp.

"Hoo!..."

Mayan merchant Tikalo took a deep breath and then slowly exhaled. Then he looked at the surrounding Totonac war boats, towards the familiar Mayan oar-sail ship, and the unfamiliar warriors on it, and shouted. His voice was loud, slightly trembling, yet extremely clear in Totonac language.

"I am the owner of this merchant ship! I am the leader of the Mayan trading group! I am acquainted with Tezozomoc, Elder Priest of the Holy City! I am under the protection of the great chieftain Quetzal Coatl of Hidden Serpent City!... I want to meet your leader!..."

"City-State protects merchants, this is the will of All Gods, and also the doctrine of the Priesthood!... Devout Totonac warriors, why have you occupied my ship and come to the trading group's camp?"

Hearing Tikalo's shout, hearing the noble names "Tezozomoc" and "Quetzal Coatl," the Totonac warriors paused, and the advancing fleet also stopped. Facing the confident Mayan merchant, the warriors were momentarily indecisive. After all, their orders were to annihilate a hidden Mexica enemy, not to plunder the Mayan trading group.

"Hmm?"

On the Mayan oar-sail ship, Feathered Serpent Priest Papu frowned. He looked at the unarmed Mayan merchant in front of him and spoke deeply.

"The great chieftain Quetzal Coatl has already died at the base of Golden Bay City. Elder Priest Tezozomoc is overseeing the battle at the front lines of Stone Spear City... Sun God witnesses! Daring

Mayans, your crew has confessed everything! Which gave you the courage to harbor the evil Mexica fleet?"

"I am the leader of the Maya trading group protected by the City-State! As for the Mexica fleet? I've never heard of it..."

Mayan merchant Tikalo raised his head, still loudly responding. Feathered Serpent Priest Papu already narrowed his eyes, raised his priest's scepter. Because he clearly saw, behind the bustling camp, four Mexica-styled longships vaguely emerging from the reeds.

"In the name of the Sun God! Capture him! He is a pawn of the Mexica people!"

With the command of the priest, the Totonac warriors no longer hesitated. They surged forward, stabbing down the accompanying Putun warriors, directly slitting their throats. Then, a nimble tribal warrior brandished a stone hammer, striking down Mayan merchant Tikalo, who rolled and screamed on the small boat.

"Bind this Mayan man! I want to take him back for solitary interrogation!"

Papu Priest ordered softly, the chieftain Chuchute nodded in understanding. The Feathered Serpent Priest had long advised him to quietly discern the situation in the Maya Lands, to find a way out for everyone. Then, the Feathered Serpent Priest, now back in a high position, waved his scepter, and pointed forcefully at the four longships by the camp.

"The holy Sun God is watching us! Brave warriors of the Hidden Snake tribe! It's time to show your courage in front of the evil and brutal Aztecs!"

"Go! Destroy these hidden enemies that threaten our homes! Seize their longships, and avenge the Aztecs!"

"Praise the Sun God! Avenge the Aztecs!"

The Totonac warriors roared and shouted, fierce murderous intent on their faces. They had occupied the only escape at the rivermouth, using four times the strength to outnumber the enemy. In such a favorable downwind battle, the tribal warriors' courage was maximized.

"Ow! Kill! Kill them!"

More than six hundred tribal warriors howled, like hunting dogs on the sea, ferociously assaulting southward. Meanwhile, four of the Kingdom's longships rowed full speed, rushing towards the rivermouth to the north. In less than a quarter of an hour, the fleets of both sides kept at maximum speed, wildly crashed into each other!

Chapter 1277: The Second Kingdom Expedition – Desperate Assault

"Boom! Bang bang! Crack!..."

On the not-so-wide river, the fleets of both sides collided with a "boom", like wolves charging at bison, suddenly crashing together. The Kingdom's four longships surged forward at full speed, carrying about twenty tons of weight, with sharp bronze rams at the front, like the pointed horns of a charging bison. Almost in an instant, the Tototanak war boat in the front row cracked open with a "bang" and then snapped with a "crack"!

"Chief Divine protects us! Charge! Keep charging!"

"For All Gods! Charge forward! We outnumber them!"

After one round of collision, the speed of the four longships clearly slowed down. Surrounding Totonac Warriors rowed their war boats, yelling chaotically as they gathered from both sides. The sailors on the longships puffed up their cheeks, rowing fiercely. Meanwhile, the Samurai held longbows, standing behind shields on both sides of the ships, shooting into the dense group of boats, causing splashes of blood.

"Boom! Bang!"

Amid the intense shouts, a second round of collisions came again. Several dugout war boats were overturned in the river, and a dozen Totonac warriors fell into the water with a "crackle", like palm fruits, splashing large patches of light red water.

However, seeing the unbroken longships, the Papu Priest at the rear brightened up. He clearly saw that, on such a narrow and crowded river, the longships had no room for acceleration, making it difficult for them to charge wildly and unleash their beast-like unparalleled power.

"Quick! Sun God bless us! Surround them! Surround from all sides! Attack close!"

"Aim! The one with the feather crown on that Oar-sail Ship is their leader! Shoot him dead!"

After two rounds of collision, the four longships had already penetrated deep into the boat cluster, like four long ears of corn inserted into a long basket full of green beans. And bean after bean attacked from all directions, frantically closing in on the edges of the "corn", striking out sharp scraping sounds.

Among the dozens to hundreds of "green beans", the Maya merchants' Oar-sail Ship stood out conspicuously. The archers on the longships sought angles, and through the rocking collisions on the deck, they shot deathly copper arrows at the feather-crowned leader on the merchant ship!

"Damn! They're shooting at the leader! These dishonorable, despicable Mexica!"

The Feathered Serpent Priest, Papu, stayed extremely cautious; seeing the bows raised on the opposite side, he immediately ducked behind his escort's wooden shield. He understood the Mexica Language and, hearing the shouts from the other side, resolutely tore off his feather crown and tossed it away.

"Chucuchuc! Quick! Give the order for me! Throw the darts! Board and kill!"

Chucuchuc, the Snake Lake chieftain, was startled, subconsciously waving his long spear, shouting sternly.

"Close in, all of you! Throw darts and javelins, get everybody ready to board and kill!..."

"Yes, Leader!!..."

"Whizz whizz!"

Before the encircling war boats could throw, the archers on the longships had already shot out feathered arrows first! Four copper arrows shot at the exposed Chieftain Chucuchuc. The Warrior Captain, Tawalu himself, released an arrow that hit Chucuchuc's arm. The other three arrows grazed the leader's chest and shoulder, leaving blood marks and almost hitting the neck.

"Ah!"

Chieftain Chucuchuc let out a miserable cry, fell on his back on the deck, and only then reacted. As he cried out in pain, he cursed through gritted teeth in his tribal dialect.

"Papu! You sly rabbit, I'll impale you with corn...."

"Whiz whiz whiz!"

"Swoosh swoosh swoosh!"

The fleets of both sides clung to the river, unable to avoid, only able to face off in combat! After two rounds of arrow rain and javelins, it came down to brutal melee combat. The Warriors of the Kingdom in heavy armor swung long axes like chopping through vegetables, taking on many. The sailors on the longships also thrust long spears, piercing into the enemy's waist and abdomen, while occasionally getting shot down by darts and feathered arrows. Meanwhile, the Putun warriors, clad in leather armor, shouted wildly as they fought, even jumping onto the opponent's ships.

The urgently fought engagement lasted a quarter of an hour, with the bodies of both sides falling into the river like dumplings—"plop plop"—soon sticking together like dumplings in a pot. Meanwhile, the blood flowing all around hung in the air like overdone vinegar, with the thick scent clogging up the nasal passages.

At the start of the battle, the vanguard Totonac warriors suffered heavy casualties. They were shot by volleys of feathered arrows, hacked back and forth by sharp bronze weapons, losing forty to fifty men, showing signs of collapse at one point.

But soon, as more and more tribal warriors came to support from all sides, they comprehensively pinned down the warriors on the longships, thinning the arrow storm. The Kingdom's Warriors, clad in heavy armor, also quickly exhausted their strength. Gradually, the Totonac fleet started to utilize their numerical advantage. Like dense piranhas, they gnawed from the sides and rear of the longships, biting chunks off the not-so-sturdy Putun warriors.

"Damn! Damn Totonac dogs! So many of them!"

The Warrior Captain, Tawalu, clad in heavy armor, severed half a neck with an axe, kicking the body off the ship's side. He wiped the blood from his face, gasping heavily, feeling his strength rapidly depleting. Looking around anxiously, he found the newly joined Putun warriors seemed to be holding on no longer, even starting to jump ship to flee!

"Damn! These cowardly Putun people! Always boasting of valor but can't endure a tough fight..."

These Putun warriors were new captives, never having a sense of belonging to the Kingdom fleet. Though they had converted to the Chief Divine, their faith was shallow, and they were unlikely to sacrifice for the deity. To hold on this long in such a grueling deadly fight, only now beginning to jump ship and flee, was already worthy of the fleet's usual treatment.

"Damn!..."

The Warrior Captain Tawalu gritted his teeth, spitting a mouthful of bloody spit. Then, he looked at the Deputy Captain on the ship, harshly commanding.

"Raise the Blood Flag, signal to the flagship, tell them to leave quickly! Beat the battle drums for charge, let the remaining oarsmen row, and charge towards the opponents' flagship!"

"What? What did you say?"

The Deputy Captain's eyes widened, looking at the gritted-teeth Warrior Captain, seemingly not hearing clearly.

"What flag to raise?"

"Raise the Blood Flag! The Blood Flag! The blood-red flag signaling no retreat!"

Warrior Captain Tawalu waved his axe, using his armor to withstand enemy bites, then chopped down another tribal warrior who had jumped onto the ship. Subsequently, he looked at the blood-stained Kingdom warriors and sailors around him, shouting loudly.

"Praise the Chief Divine! It's time to devote ourselves to Him!"

The fierce battlefield allowed no room for the slightest hesitation; the choice between life and death happened in an instant. Soon, the determined Blood Flag was hoisted up the mast, and this scarred longship, like a maddened bull dragging over a dozen wolves, erupted with its final frenzy! It frantically closed in, heading towards the largest flagship of the Tototanak people, the Oar-sail Ship of the Maya fleet.

"Devote yourselves for the Chief Divine!"

Seeing this scene, another longship also raised the same Blood Flag, bursting out with the same yell. Two longships, from left and right, charged at the Maya Oar-sail Ship in the center of the river. And dozens of Totonac warboats, like iron chips drawn to a magnet, surged towards the flagship all at once.

"Bang! Bang bang!"

A multitude of crashing boat sounds rose up in the center of the river. Dozens of small boats, along with the big boat, collided fully together, tightly clamping in a bunch, unable to move an inch.

"For the God, strike! Attack!"

The Warrior Captain Tawalu, seeing this, along with seven other sailors, directly abandoned the longship and launched an unyielding assault. He relentlessly swung his bronze axe, climbing over the Totonac boats, stepping over their bodies. With blood rushing to his face, he wildly sought the head of the enemy leader, straining to seize it in his grip!

Chapter 1278: The Second Kingdom Expedition, Breakthrough and Sacrifice

"All Gods! These raving lunatics!"

On the oar-sail ship, facing the charge of the Kingdom's Armored Warriors, the Papu Priest's mind was trembling. He decisively took off the cumbersome ritual robe and threw it on the ground. Then, he leapt, "Splash" into the water. He was like a swift fish, slipping between the ships, quickly swimming towards the war boat at the back, faster than anyone else.

"For God's sacrifice!"

The deadly shouts echoed through the narrow channel. The brutal battle was also approaching its final end. On the flagship, old militia Chiwaco was covered in blood, piercing with clever long spears, bringing down enemy after enemy. Then, the pressure of the battle suddenly eased, and the front of the flagship also opened up widely. He gasped for breath, looking towards the fierce shouts and saw the cruel battle in the center of the channel and the Kingdom's warriors making a desperate assault, sacrificing their lives!

"Chief Divine!..."

Old militia Chiwaco froze on the spot. Moments later, two drops of turbid old tears flowed from his painful eyes. He fiercely bit open his lip, tasting the blood and bitterness in his mouth. After a few moments, he hunched over like an injured old dog, shouting fiercely.

"Row with all your might! Break through to the rivermouth!"

"Row with all your might! Break through to the rivermouth!"

With the new orders, the sailors on the flagship erupted with their last strength. The two assaulting longships, in the center of the channel, were holding back the main force of the Totonac fleet. The sides

of the entire channel finally revealed space to pass through. And the remaining two oar-sail longships began to speed up, rowing through the blood-tinted river!

"For God's sacrifice!..."

In just a moment, the accelerating longships rushed through sparse obstacles and came to the back of the Totonaq fleet. The shouting in the center of the channel gradually became distant and seemed to grow smaller. And when the two longships charged to the rivermouth and burst into the vast sea, the sounds of battle were finally difficult to hear.

"Tawalu..."

The old militia pursed his lips tightly, turned around and saw the Totonaq warriors encircling the battle site and a heavily fallen figure. After a while, a Totonaq warrior raised a head high, shouting some phrases as the tribal warriors, like a boiling pack of dogs, let out excited howls.

"All Gods protect! This is the bravest Mexica Warrior! I, Nyuka, Warrior of Hidden Serpent City, cut off his head with my own hands!..."

The Papu Priest, bare-chested, put his feather crown back on. He frowned as he watched Nyuka, the warrior boasting his valor, holding Tawalu's head aloft on the deck. He pursed his lips slightly but said nothing.

"Chuchute, is he dead?"

"Priest, he's not dead, just lost a lot of blood and fainted."

"Bandage him up well!"

"Yes!"

Just as the Papu Priest finished instructing his trusted aide, another aide came to inquire.

"Priest, with All Gods' protection, we've defeated the evil Aztecs! Two Mexica longships escaped, should we pursue them?"

"The escaping longships..."

The Papu Priest stroked his chin, gazing at the rivermouth not far away. The two Mexica longships, full of scars, had already hoisted their sails at the rivermouth. Their prows pointed northwest, sailing straight ahead into the vast sea. It seemed they were trying to escape into the deep sea!

"...Don't pursue them! Can't catch them... Damn, these lunatics who don't value their lives!..."

The Papu Priest cursed softly. He felt the vast sea breeze, looking towards the eastern horizon, and saw only the dark clouds gradually approaching.

"A storm at the seaside is coming... Going to sea at this time..."

The Papu Priest shook his head. He looked around at the bodies floating on the river, counting at least two hundred fallen Totonac warriors! Until this moment, a fright surged from deep within his heart.

"Fortunately... I brought seven hundred Totonac warriors based on the memory of a seven-ship fleet... If I had only brought four hundred as the interrogation revealed... The outcome of this battle would have been different..."

After thinking for a moment, a sudden doubt arose in the Papu Priest's mind.

"Huh? Where did the other three longships hide? When this battle is over, I must thoroughly interrogate the captured Mayan merchant!..."

"Praise All Gods! We've captured the longships, vanquished the evil Aztecs!"

Half a quarter later, a large group of Totonaq warriors completely took over the two longships. The last resistance on the ships finally fell under numerous stabs. The dense bodies piled together, intertwining and falling into the water, dispersing an endless blood crimson.

Then, the uncontrollable tribal warriors began to argue, even fighting among themselves. They were snatching the heads of the Kingdom's warriors, especially the helmeted ones, as the most outstanding and praiseworthy battle trophies.

The captured fleet sailors were firmly bound, becoming invigorating sacrifices at the City-State's celebration ceremony. And the fleeing warriors of the Putun tribe had small boats spread out searching, carefully following the pursuit. In this jungle covered with Totonaq tribes, a lone warrior hoping to escape must only pray for fate's favor.

"Gemstones! Gemstones! There are gemstones on the longship!"

Suddenly, an excited shout came from the longship. The Papu Priest looked over and saw a foolish tribal warrior, hands raised with a heavy bag of gemstones, dancing with delight. Afterwards, dozens of hands reached for the sound's source, fiercely competing for the bag of gemstones, even stripping the foolish warrior down to his loincloth.

"Ha! What an idiot!"

The Papu Priest's mouth curled up in disdain. Then, he turned to his trusted aide and commanded firmly.

"Go! In the name of All Gods, tell all the warriors to check carefully, submit the found gemstones, everyone will have a share, no hiding allowed!..."

"Of course, as the most esteemed priest... I shall take half!"

"Right! Send two reliable ones to search the camp ashore! As for the gemstones found... you know how to handle it!"

"Yes, Lord Priest!..."

The sun fell towards the west, reflecting a red glow on the sea surface. The two captured Mexica longships were scarred and moored on the riverbanks with floating bodies. As for the other two longships, they broke through the encirclement, set their sails high, and completely vanished into the golden-red sea and sky depths.

The clouds from the east gradually rolled in, finally reaching the seaside before the sun fully set. And the torrential rain suddenly fell from the sky, splashing blood-colored water droplets.

Blood flowed everywhere, gradually fading. In the last glimmer of light, it finally reached the edge of the lagoon, amidst lush, yet unnoticed cassava fields. In the rushing rain, the thriving cassava gently swayed, bursting with resilient vitality. And the flowing blood water seeped into the soil, drop by drop, all entering the roots of the cassava.

Chapter 1279: The Second Kingdom Expedition—Light, Shadow, and Storm

The setting sun has completely vanished, and the night devours the twilight. The sea stretches endlessly, and the distant contours of the South disappear into the rising darkness. From evening to night, the sounds of battle and cries have faded away, leaving only the relentless and unchanging sea wind, blowing tirelessly from east to west.

"Hoo!... Hoo hoo!..."

The eastern wind fills the sails, making them creak and sway. Two longships, scarred by battle, sway and sail swiftly towards the Western horizon.

The wind is strong, and the torch at the ship's bow, lit and sheltered by several people, struggles to keep its flame. Shadows on the ship move, bandaging each other's wounds, then silently collapse on the deck. Everyone seems like jellyfish drained of strength, quietly releasing bubbles, not even their breathing can be heard.

Old militia Chiwaco stands silently at the bow, motionless, like an aged wooden carving. He gazes at the pitch-black night, shrouding the lightless sea. The torchlight behind him moves from the deck to the depths of the cabin, then reappears, returning to his side.

"Captain Chi..."

Hearing this call, the old militia trembles slightly, a bit of life returning to his face. He stretches out a bloodstained palm, shielding his eyes as if blocking the glaring torchlight. He always preferred the light, but now, the darkness shows him more mercy.

"How's it going?"

The old militia's voice is somewhat hoarse, possibly from exhaustion or from shouting too much, damaging his throat. There is a tremor in his voice, as though fearing something.

"There are still twenty-nine people on the flagship. Fourteen lightly injured, seven severely injured, all bandaged as best we could..."

At these words, the old militia presses his lips but says nothing, his fingers trembling uncontrollably. Before the breakout in the afternoon, there were forty-two people on his ship. The entire fleet had over one hundred and sixty. But now...

The old militia lifts his head, glancing once more at the sea behind him. There, another longship that broke through also raises its sail, trying hard to follow the flagship.

"How are they?"

"Probably about the same as us. As for specific numbers... we'll have to wait until daybreak and use flags to signal. Or, we could stop now..."

"We can't stop! Keep going."

The old militia shakes his head. He gazes at the somber sea, feels the steadily increasing wind, and grits his teeth.

"The storm is right behind us, chasing us... and the food on board... there isn't much left..."

"Yes. I checked, there's enough for three days... The good news is, at the current speed, three days is enough for us to bypass the enemy Totonac coast!"

Hearing this, the old militia lifts his head, for the first time looking at the torch. Under its flickering, dim light, his eyes appear somewhat clouded and reddish. He slowly watches it for a while, observes the flickering flame, and slowly nods.

"You're right, Mekate... I should have made the decision earlier to head the fleet into the deep sea..."

"May the Chief Divine protect us!..."

Priest Mekate holds the torch carefully, shielding it from the wind. He mutters a low prayer, then sighs.

"Captain Chiwaco, you've done very well! Before this afternoon, no one could have expected... the Tototanak people to amass such a fleet, bringing so many samurais. They gave no warning, didn't even hesitate, directly lunging at us... like... like a snake that's been waiting, already aiming for a long time..."

"A snake..."

The old militia presses his lips, lowering his head, chewing on the word. After a while, he speaks again.

"Those in the cabin... how are they?"

"Yes. The four children are unharmed. Earlier, I went down, and Tidan is still in a daze, asking where grandpa went..."

"What did you tell them?"

"I told them not to worry. Little grandpa will take good care of them... always take good care..."

Hearing this, the old militia stretches out his hand, pressing it slowly against his chest, taking deep breaths for a while. His eyes gradually clear, becoming deep like the sea at this moment. He silently watches the Mekate priest in front of him, who returns his gaze. And the flickering torch between them lights up half of each face, casting the other half in shadow.

"Mekate..."

"Captain Chi?"

"I want to ask you a question."

"Please, ask."

"This afternoon, before the breakout... why did you force Tikalo to his death? Did you really... not trust him?"

The old militia's voice is very soft, yet hoarse. Priest Mekate raises his eyebrows, glancing at the dark sky, finding no stars to navigate by. He gazes silently for a while, then answers softly.

"For the kingdom..."

"For the kingdom?"

"Yes. Tikalo, he's uncontrollable."

"Uncontrollable?"

"Yes."

Mekate nods, explains calmly, with a rare, faint hint of malice in his voice.

"He knows King Aweit, always wanting to send the hostages of the Mayapan Royalty to the Lake Capital City... But these children, the place they truly should go... is the Qinchongcan Capital... They belong to the kingdom! Not the Alliance."

"..."

Hearing this cold answer, old militia Chiwaco presses his lips, silent for a long time. His eyes deep, he stares at the Mekate priest, examining him closely for a long time, as if seeing him for the first time.

Finally, the old militia Chiwaco shakes his head, looks at the shadowed Mekate priest, and sighs lightly.

"Perhaps, you're right... His Majesty should have entrusted the fleet to you..."

"No."

Mekate priest also shakes his head. He lifts the torch, looking at Chiwaco in the firelight, responding sincerely.

"The Chief Divine bear witness! Captain Chi, you're the best fleet captain!..."

The wind picks up again. Just a few breaths, and the torch held high is extinguished by the howling east wind, ending their conversation. The two stand at the bow, side by side in the darkness, watching the unlit sea, observing the unknown path ahead.

Behind them, the deep storm churns across the sea, pursuing with speed faster than the longships!

"Oh Chief Divine! May you protect us, let us survive the storm!..."

The storm is swift, and the next dawn brings no sunlight, only gusting winds whipping the waves, and raindrops pelting down. All aboard barely utter their fervent prayers before being engulfed by the sweeping wind and rain. The two battered longships, like toys in the hands of the Sea God, roll and sway, entirely at its mercy in the tumultuous waves.

Yet the Sea God's whims are unpredictable, like those of a capricious child. It tosses the waves, plays with its wooden toys for a while, then casually throws them westward. After half a day, its interest returns; it picks up the wooden boats again, spinning and shaking them around haphazardly, then tosses them once more.

"Oh Chief Divine! No! Don't!..."

This casual play continues unabated for three days! Until the crew of the flagship cries out in alarm, watching the other longship disintegrate completely in the storm, turning into splintered wood and individuals sinking into the sea. Then, mighty waves come crashing down, erasing every trace in an instant!

At this point, the Sea God seems to have grown tired. It shifts the storm's direction, and the clouds turn, taking a full day to roar away.

"The sun?... The sun! The sun is out!..."

"Ah! The Chief Divine bestows sunlight upon us!"

"Where... Where are we?"

Famished, the crew of the flagship binds themselves tightly to the longship at various points. Bright sunshine falls from the blue sky, illuminating the sparkling sea, like a scene from a dream.

And the only thing unchanged is the fierce wind blowing westward. It is far more patient than the storm, endlessly driving the longship further west, further west, deeper into the sea!

Chapter 1280: The Second Kingdom Expedition, Red Roses on the Far Shore

The east wind howled endlessly, pushing the tattered longship towards the unknown West. In this early summer of June, the Azores high pressure from the North Atlantic created a strong pressure difference around the American Continent. Hurricanes rose on the sea, spinning with pressure, throwing strong winds and rain towards the land.

The longship headed west, spotting flying seabirds but rarely fish. The sea was a blue desert, the deeper the sea, the further from the continent and currents. Fortunately, the Kingdom's last exploratory longship only tested the edge of the desert cautiously before quickly sailing towards the fertile near waters.

"Four days of storms... six days of drifting... it's been ten whole days! The ship hasn't stopped... why haven't we reached land yet..."

Old Militia Chiwaco lay at the bow, too hungry even to stand. The food on the ship was only enough for three days. After surviving the storm, everyone faced the torment of hunger. The Samurais cut the leather armor into small strips and shared them among the crew. The sailors cast sisal fishing nets off the stern, trying to catch something.

Old Chiwaco gnawed on the leather for three days, hard and astringent, nearly breaking his teeth. Until the fourth day, the net caught two fish, and a pot of fish soup was cooked. The twenty-one people shared it, each only sipped twice, at least soothing their stomachs slightly.

"There are more flying birds in the sky, and the net can catch fish... this is a good sign, the great Chief Divine is protecting us on the sea!"

Priest Mekate leaned against the gunwale, his lips dry and cracked.

There were now only twenty-one people left on the ship, eight fewer than when they first broke out. Among them, five severely wounded succumbed to their injuries, and the remaining three were swept away by the storm. He ordered the bodies to be piled in the cabin for emergencies... Luckily, four days ago, the sailors finally caught fish.

"Mekate, how are those two children doing?"

"They... are weak. The little boy Tilan is seasick and can't eat anything. Of course, there's not much to eat... The little girl Tidan is fine but so scared she can't speak..."

"The two children are too small... if we keep drifting... they won't survive..."

"Hmm..."

Priest Mekate nodded, saying nothing. How long they would drift was not for those on the ship to decide. And if they drifted much longer, sooner or later, they would all die.

"The problem now is we're running out of water... If only we had collected more rainwater during those stormy days... Chief Divine, protect us! Let it rain again!"

"Chief Divine, protect us!..."

The old Militia licked his lips, sincerely praying. He watched the equally tattered sails at the front and back, feeling the ship's constant swaying, and quietly asked.

"Mekate, the wind hasn't stopped and the ship keeps moving, all around is sea and nothing to see. Drifting for a day and night at least equals traveling for six or seven days... We've drifted for ten days, how far have we actually gone, where are we?"

"Who knows..."

Mekate shook his head, also lost in confusion.

"The sea wind doesn't tire, where it takes us, we have to go... After all, everyone has lost their strength, they can't row the boat anymore..."

"So where are we heading?"

"Westward. Sometimes veering north, sometimes south these days. But I think it's mostly northwards... As for those stormy days, I can't tell..."

"Mekate, don't you know that star thing? Look carefully, have we reached anywhere..."

"Captain Qi, I looked last night... We're around north latitude 23 degrees, maybe 22, maybe 24..."

"North latitude? 23? Degrees?... Speak plainly! Have we passed the Tototanak coast yet?..."

"Uh... a while ago! I estimate we've even passed the Feathered Serpent Ancient City's coast long ago. We must be in the Vastek people's territory now, past Crow City too... If we keep drifting... I don't know then..."

"The Vastek people..."

Old Militia Chiwaco squinted, staring at the sky and sea, both eerily blue. There's nothing in the deep sea, like the mythical fearsome Black Abyss. Navigating the deep sea felt like treading on a cliff edge, with a hollow feeling inside, as if falling off any moment. This grueling feeling was entirely different from nearshore sailing. And being the fleet captain, the responsibility bore heavily, with only twenty-one people left...

"Damn! This blind! Spit!..."

After a long silence, the old militia spat fiercely. But he was so thirsty, he couldn't even spit out saliva.

"Witness, Chief Divine! If I get ashore this time, I'll return to the village... even if you beat me to death, I won't venture to sea again! Even in death, I won't die at sea!..."

Hearing this, Mekate looked up at the old militia cursing. Then, he turned his head, a silent smile appeared for no reason.

"This blind!... Don't worry! Chief Divine's protection, we'll be back soon!..."

The sun rose and set, the sea remained vast. The beautiful, tranquil blue sea sparkled. As the longship sailed, hints of light green emerged on the blue surface, along with floating seaweed.

The old militia had a premonition, that land was approaching. Not because of Priest Mekate's repeated "Chief Divine protection", but because the seabirds had directly dropped their thin water on his head.

"Damn! This blind bird!..."

The old militia cursed weakly, wiping off the bird water from his forehead. He looked at the flying red shadows in bewilderment.

"These pink birds... what are they?"

"Hmm... with that long neck, they should be egrets? But with red wings, like roses, truly beautiful..."

Priest Mekate raised his head, watching the beautiful red birds, smiling as he spoke.

"Such beautiful birds must be messengers of the Chief Divine! They are here to tell us that land is near!"

In fact, this was the beautiful Roseate Spoonbill, like roses blooming in the sky, always feeding in shallow water and near shores. Its appearance truly signified that land was near.

The sunset that day was golden, bathed in sky-full twilight. The golden sea extended into the distance, like a cloud river lying in the world, towards the soul's desired other shore. And the beautiful rose flew and bloomed in the sky. Then, a faint black line appeared at the end of the West. The scout on the ship, Flying Bird, after a moment of shock, joyfully shouted its name.

"Land! Land! Land has appeared!"

Land appeared. After thirteen days of drifting, the other shore was finally reached.