

Civilization 1281

Chapter 1281: Second Kingdom Expedition, the Vastek People's Small Village

The other shore flowers bloom, and early summer is a magnificent season. Blue wildflowers sway in the seaside grass. The continuous shrubs extend their green branches. Adding the red birds flying in the sky and the gray rabbits running on the grass together create a vibrant picture.

Such a splendid scenery, falling into the eyes of those who have survived drifting and adversity, is simply unforgettable. Old militia Chiwaco kneels on the beach, greedily watching everything before him, breathing in the comforting scent of the earth. And when he sees the beautiful pelicans stopping by, he drools with joy.

"Such a plump pelican... so wonderful!"

The fleet docks, and the archers on the ship finally have a chance to showcase their archery and hunt for game. By dusk, the longship is anchored on the beach, and the bonfire rises on the shore. The warm roasted meat carries a fragrance, accompanied by freshly cooked thick white fish soup and appetizing soft-boiled turtle eggs, as if one has instantly reached the Divine Kingdom.

After eating and drinking, everyone finally comes alive. Lying on the solid ground, they can at last have a good sleep. As the morning sunlight falls on their faces, new hope leaps in everyone's heart. Along with it comes another critical question.

"Where is this place?"

"Chief Divine bless us! Still around 23 degrees north latitude... it should be the land of the Vastec. We need to return to the kingdom's occupied area, and must follow the coast southward!"

Upon hearing this answer, the old militia nodded. He counted the crew, twenty-one people, one-third of whom were injured, along with two children. As for a few Mayan shipwrights and beekeeping slaves provided by the Kokom family...

"On Tawalu's ship, probably ended up in the hands of the Totonac people."

"Hmm."

The old militia was silent for a while, and then went to check the cabin. The cabin has weapons for forty people and more than a dozen sets of bronze cloth armor. As for the precious Cuban crops, there are two baskets of cassava stalks and a bag of seeds from the Malab tung oil tree. Fortunately, cassava stalks are inedible, and the oil tree seeds are poisonous, so they were all retained. As for the assets, there is a small bag of herbs, two bags of gemstones, over a dozen rolls of cotton cloth, and some mineral samples collected from Cuba. Originally there were also two bags of cocoa beans, but they were eaten clean during their drift.

"And the sea chart given by that Maya for traveling to the Southern Continent?"

"With me, I've always kept it, and have looked at it several times."

Priest Mekate touched the sea chart closely stored in his bosom and said softly.

"However, some annotations are not easy to understand."

Hearing this, the old militia shook his head. The Maya merchant Tikalo is gone, and no one can explain these unclear annotations. However, if Tikalo had fled with the fleet, the chances of survival might be even less than ending up in the hands of the Totonac people.

"Let's go! Heading south. Best to find a Vastec village, let the wounded rest for a while."

The longship follows the coast southward, neither catching the wind nor riding the current. The crew row reluctantly, with insufficient rowers, managing only thirty miles a day. Two days later, they finally arrive at a broad rivermouth. And following the rivermouth upstream, they row over ten miles and finally find a small village of the Vastec people.

"Can't go further! Must let the wounded rest for a few days, and seek some herbs..."

Old militia Chiwaco squinted his eyes, examining the small village by the river. The so-called village was merely a few huts, several semi-underground pit houses, and two lush green fields. The tribespeople of

Vastec in the village were bare-chested, only wearing a loincloth. They chatted, curiously observing the docked longship. And because there were few people from the fleet, the villagers were not fearful.

"Chief Divine bless us! The Vastec tribes are loyal subjects of the alliance... there are many gemstones and cloth on the ship, we can rest here for some time, replenishing some food... if we can recruit some sailors, that would be even better!..."

Priest Mekate held the sun amulet around his neck and piously prayed a few times. Then, he walked towards the village on the shore and patiently communicated with the only elder in the village who could speak Mexica Language.

"Rain Divine! Are you... warriors of the Great Alliance, surviving from the storm at sea?"

The elder of the village was surprised, looking at the two leaders of the crew. His old eyebrows twitched for a while, wanting to say something, but ultimately just sighed.

"Warriors of the Great Alliance... finally I see the warriors of the alliance!... twenty people, only twenty people... alas! Rain Divine!"

Listening to the village's vague Mexica Language, old militia Chiwaco and Divine Revelation Priest Mekate looked at each other, unclear about what the elder was lamenting. The old militia patiently waited for a while until the elder's emotions calmed down before asking.

"Respected elder of the village, we want to rest here for a few days, exchanging some food and herbs... we have gemstones and cloth that can be given in exchange..."

"Ah? Rest for a few days, in the village?"

"Yes! The wounded on the ship must lie down for healing. They have external injuries that haven't been properly treated..."

"Oh! Okay! That's fine, that's fine... you stay here!"

The elder of the village hesitated for a while, looking at the sincere and persistent old militia, finally nodded. His aged and wrinkled face was hard to read but showed a slight change in expression.

"You stay! There is food! I'll give you my hut..."

With the promise from the village elder, the old militia was full of gratitude. He led the remaining crew to settle down peacefully in the village.

This Vastec village was clearly not wealthy, but at least there was enough food. The style of the huts in the village was quite new, seemingly just built less than two years ago, possibly recently relocated from somewhere.

The old militia wanted to find someone to inquire about and chat, but he couldn't understand the tribe's Vastec Language. In the gestures between the two sides, he only vaguely guessed that this tribe came from a "war in the South," migrating from the south.

"War in the South? Canine Descendants and Vastec people?"

Upon hearing this, Priest Mekate was also puzzled. To the priests of the kingdom, the Vastec coast was too distant, and intelligence from here was rarely transmitted to the Kingdom of the Lake. During the years he spent at sea, he had not paid attention to the Vastec land.

"Chief Divine bless us! Why not ask the elder who speaks Mexica Language, then we'll know?"

"The elder is not here. Before he left, he said he was going to other villages to borrow some food and herbs..."

"Oh! Captain Chi, then let's wait for him to return and ask! Anyway, we need to rest for a while, not rushing southward."

"Hmm."

Old militia frowned, always feeling something was amiss. A sense of foreboding lingered in his heart, yet he couldn't quite pinpoint the reason. Until the morning of the second day, the village elder reappeared. And simultaneously appearing were more than eighty fierce-faced Canine Warriors, raiding everyone who was preparing breakfast!

"Ha! Truly a group of weak and fat prey!"

The red-haired leader of the Canine Warriors held a copper spear and, along with a team of warriors bearing bows and raised spears, surrounded those who couldn't don their armor in time. He looked at the weapons in everyone's hands and then at the longship by the shore, eyes gleaming with excitement.

"Capture them, and tie them up! Surrender your weapons, do not resist, so you can live! Otherwise, I'll shoot you dead!"

Chapter 1282: The Second Kingdom Expedition, The Canine Leader's Sinister Grin

The old Militia was captured. None of the twenty-one crew members escaped.

Everyone had their weapons confiscated, their gemstones taken, and their ship seized. A Canine Hunter tried to snatch the golden Sun Amulet from around Priest Mekate's neck. Mekate shouted in anger, fighting back to the death. As a result, the red-haired Canine Captain came out, scolded the hunter a few times, and surprisingly let it pass.

"What did he say?"

"I couldn't understand his words."

Priest Mekate shook his head, a look of puzzlement on his face.

"But I think I heard the Chief Divine's name... does he believe in the Chief Divine?"

No one knew the answer, and they were all herded like some kind of goods into the Elder's large thatched house in the village, becoming captive prisoners. However, surprisingly, this group of Canine

Warriors, who appeared out of nowhere, still provided them with food and treated the wounded after stripping them of all their possessions and weapons.

"Mekate, did you notice? The weapon their leader is holding seems like one from the Kingdom..."

"Of course, they robbed us..."

"No. I mean, he was holding it the first time we saw him."

"What?! The first time we saw him?"

In the pitch-black hut, Priest Mekate suddenly stood up. He pondered for a moment, a hesitant look on his face.

"You mean..."

"These are not the savage Canine from the Wilderness... they've had contact with the Kingdom!"

"Contact?... What kind of contact then?"

With that, both fell silent simultaneously. Considering the Kingdom's consistently strong-handed approach, it was unlikely to be a good contact. And now, any day might be their last.

"Ah! May the Chief Divine protect us! Sleep now..."

The days of captivity were dull and tedious, yet filled with anxious torment. The group was imprisoned in the small village for more than ten days without any communication. The guards were Canine warriors of the same number, fierce yet simple, stubbornly silent, and unable to communicate due to language barriers.

"Oh Chief Divine! Where on earth did these Canine come from? They can't even understand the language of the Guajili?"

Priest Mekate squinted his eyes, peering through the cracks of the hut at the warriors outside guarding them. He noticed their blue face paint, long hair, and the leather headbands they wore, all of which left no impression on him. It wasn't until he saw one of the warriors' horns that he seemed to realize something.

"A Bison horn from the North? Tribes from the farther northern plains?..."

Several days of hard captivity passed again, and the smell in the hut became somewhat stifling. The fields outside the village were lush green, the corn being already half as tall as a person. It seemed already July, and even the seriously injured prisoners could now walk.

It wasn't until then that the red-haired Canine Captain gathered his men, preparing to escort the prisoners away. But just as the old Militia was led to the village entrance, they saw a red-haired Scout rushing in from the Northwest, speaking a few words to the Canine Captain.

"What? They're coming?"

The Canine Captain was visibly shocked, hesitated for a moment, then reordered the crew prisoners back into the house.

Another two days passed. Not until the morning of the third day did another group of over a hundred Canine warriors arrive swiftly from the Northwest. From the crack in the hut, the sharp-eyed scout Mountain Bird noticed these Canine were carrying long spears of two to three meters, many with dyed red hair, clearly more elite than the village's troops.

Under the anxious watch of everyone, the new Canine leader, wielding a Bronze Axe and accompanied by several trusted aides, came bounding towards the hut after asking just a few questions. Then, the red-haired captain from the village hurriedly arrived, blocking their path outside the hut.

"By the Chief Divine and Ancestors! Why are you here so quickly?"

"Ancestors witness! Of course, I came in a hurry! If I were late, you'd have sent the people to the South already!"

The newly arrived Canine leader, with menacing red face paint, projected an aura of aggression, clenching his teeth fiercely.

"Let me in!"

"What are you going to do?"

"What do you think I'm going to do?"

"The Great Chief said it! The Mexica are our allies now. You can't kill them!"

"Ha! Allies? If they're allies, why did you rob them?"

"That's another matter. Their weapons and armor were too numerous, and they were injured... Giving the weapons to us can truly utilize them! Besides, I haven't killed them; I even treated their wounds..."

"Ancestors witness! The Mexica are not our allies!"

The young painted leader roared, letting out a wolf-like howl.

"They're just using the tribes! They had the best armor but never gave us any... Have you forgotten? Who drove the tribes from the Highland to here?"

"Everything you said, the Great Chief knows! Alan Little Chieftain knows too! That's why we took the Otter City and didn't give it to them."

The red-haired Canine Captain gritted his teeth, suppressing his internal urge to kill, and answered angrily.

"They attacked the tribes, hunted us down, killed so many of our warriors from various tribes! Even the mighty Chichika Great Chief fell to their hands..."

"All these years, I've never forgotten! I remember their wooden beasts, their Fire Arrows, their Thunderbolt, and their heavily armored warriors... I wish to kill them too!..."

"But now is not the time to turn against them! The Great Chief is continuously relocating the subservient Vastec tribes to new nests in the North. There are also the armies of City Pamus at the outskirts of Otter City... The Silver Raven Tribe, loyal to the Mexica, is becoming increasingly active in the South... Therefore, the Great Chief said to treat them as allies, no killing allowed!"

"No killing allowed... ha!"

Upon hearing this, the young painted leader suddenly calmed down. He let out a sneer, paused for a moment, then softly said.

"Hand them over to me... let me kill them! No one will ever know..."

"But..." "

"You know of the blood feud I have with the Mexica! Our blood feud with the Mexica!... The people I brought are more than yours..."

The young painted leader squinted his eyes, exuding both killing intent and threats.

"Hand them over! I promise, no one will ever know!..."

"You!..."

"I also promise... all the weapons and armor you've seized, will remain with you, no one will take them!"

"..."

After hearing this last statement, the red-haired Canine Captain paused for a moment. After some time, he asked softly.

"You promise?"

"I promise!"

"You all promise?"

"We promise!"

"Alright then."

The red-haired Canine Captain stepped aside, pushed open the hut door, revealing the terrified crew members to the young leader's view.

"Chief Divine and Ancestors witness! They're yours... make it clean, don't let anyone know..."

"Ancestors witness! Don't worry!"

The young painted leader grinned, showing sharp teeth. He then strode into the hut with personal guard warriors, chuckling sinisterly with his Bronze Axe.

Chapter 1283: The Second Kingdom Expedition—Father!

In the dilapidated hut, the door was wide open, and the faces of those captured from the fleet were full of panic. The fierce Canine Warriors brandished their axes and spears, striding in with murderous intent. The tattooed leader at the forefront wore a vicious expression, his mouth twisting into a sinister smile.

"Blind heavens! This is? This is!..."

The old Militia Chiwaco was terrified, watching the Canine Warriors rush in. Although he couldn't understand the conversation outside the hut, he could feel the full malice and an ominous aura from their aggressive stance. He bit down hard, his nails digging into his flesh, standing at the front of the fleet's crowd, carefully speaking in Mexica Language.

"Respected Leader of the Wilderness... we are friends from the Kingdom of the Lake..."

"Everyone, kneel down!"

With a loud shout from the young tattooed leader, the rushing Canine Warriors swung their spear shafts, knocking everyone in the hut to the ground. The cries of pain from the crew and the howls of the Canine Warriors instantly echoed inside the hut. Watching this chaotic scene, the tattooed leader laughed heartily, feeling extremely pleased. After laughing for a while, he once again showed a vicious look, sternly asking in Guajili.

"Who among you is the leader?"

"Friends! Friends! We are friends!..."

The old Militia Chiwaco stood at the forefront, forcibly pressed to the ground by two Canines. He struggled desperately, shouting loudly.

"Chief Divine! This is a misunderstanding! We have come from far away as friends! We bear no malice!..."

"Ha! Friends? You Mexica people, nothing more than enemies!"

Upon hearing this, the young tattooed leader showed a look of hatred, sneering coldly. He understood Mexica Language but only replied in fluent Guajili.

"You are enemies! I've traveled hundreds of miles just to send my enemies to death!... Haha! I want to repay all my lost suffering onto you all!"

"Chief Divine! This must be a misunderstanding!... We are here for the first time..."

"Haha! Mexica leader, you've been abandoned by your Chief Divine, stop resisting!"

The young tattooed leader strode forward, squatting in front of the old militia. He grabbed his hair, looking at that dirty and sunburnt dark-red face, laughing sinisterly.

"Haha! You're fortunate as the leader! You'll stay till the end, to watch! Watch as I kill all of you, one by one, twisting off each head..."

"No! Please! Friends! We can negotiate, negotiate properly..."

The old Militia Chiwaco looked anxious. He didn't know what went wrong, why suddenly they ended up like this. But at this critical moment, he bent down again, displaying the humble demeanor of a village inhabitant.

"Master! Mighty Samurai Master! We can give you everything on the ship!... We are just small fish in the lake, harmless, not a threat... Please! Spare us!"

"Ha! Fish? I enjoy eating fish the most!... Haha! Hmm?"

As he spoke, the young tattooed leader suddenly paused. He inexplicably found that the words were quite familiar.

"Hmm? This voice, these words... I seem to have heard them somewhere..."

Thinking of this, he squinted his eyes, using a dangerous look, staring closely at the old militia's dirt-covered face.

"Lift your head up!"

"Respected Samurai Master! Spare us!"

The old militia stuttered, after many years, once again picking up his former survival instincts. That was during the Tarasco Kingdom era, the villagers' helpless yet only method.

"Master! We can farm for you! Yes, I'm good at farming, we all are..."

"..."

Seeing this inexplicably familiar timid look, the young tattooed leader froze, speechless. He stood dazed for a long time, seemingly encountering something absolutely unbelievable.

"Impossible... How could it be?... This is absolutely impossible!"

"Respected Samurai Master..."

The old militia looked timid and spoke meekly. He was still desperately struggling, trying to grasp the final hope.

"Please, spare our lives..."

The young tattooed leader was silent for a while, suddenly asking quickly in Prepetcha.

"You... are Tarasco people? Not Mexica?"

"Uh? Tarasco?"

Hearing this familiar dialect, the old Militia Chiwaco was startled. But he reacted quickly and cautiously answered.

"We... are Prepetcha people from the Kingdom of the Lake, serving the Mexica Alliance's Your Majesty... This is our first time here, we have never offended your Tribes!..."

"Prepetcha people..."

Hearing this, the young tattooed leader seemed to be caught in distant memories. However, his age wasn't much, and it was unclear just when these distant memories were from. After a long while, he asked in a trembling voice, lightly in Prepetcha.

"You... your hometown... is in a small village west of Lake Patzcuaro. At the village entrance are two ragged trees and a patch of red cicada flowers?"

"...Ah?! You!..."

Upon hearing this, the old militia suddenly looked up, staring blankly at the other. He cautiously looked at the tattooed leader before him, at the scarlet face paint covering his visage, at the strong physique, and the dyed red stand-up hair. Meanwhile, the young tattooed leader also widened his eyes, looking at his face weathered by exposure, filled with wrinkles and sunreddened.

"You are..."

The old militia hesitated for a moment, then looked into the excited eyes of the other, uncertainly asked.

"You... are also Prepetcha? Have you been to the side of Lake Patzcuaro, to my hometown?"

Upon hearing this, the young tattooed leader trembled all over. He reached out, wiped off the Huitu from the old militia's face, staring intently at his face. Then, his fingers trembling, filled with anticipation, yet with some fear, he asked.

"You... you have a son, and a daughter. The son was taken away, sent to the front lines of the Mexica people..."

"Ah! You! How do you know, who are you?"

The old militia trembled all over, like a fish struck by lightning, suddenly straightening his spine. He grabbed the tattooed leader's arm, excitedly asked loudly.

"Could it be? Could it be!"

"...Hmm. Hmm!"

The young tattooed leader suppressed his excitement, nodding vigorously.

"Could it be... you've seen my son?! Is he... is he still alive?!"

"..."

The young tattooed leader was silent for a moment, reaching out to wipe his face forcefully. However, the frightening face paint symbolizing the courage of a Wilderness Warrior, having forsaken everything in adulthood, had long fused with his visage and could never be separated.

"He... he... I!... You..."

"Ah? Me?... You?... You?!"

The two trembled, looking at each other, unable to speak a complete sentence, yet somehow understanding each other's sentiments. The hut was suddenly silent, leaving only their trembling gazes, as if ignited by fire.

"Ah!"

The tattooed Canine leader trembled for a moment, finally unable to endure the surging emotions. He lunged forward desperately, kneeling heavily on the ground. Then, with tears in his eyes, he tightly embraced the old militia's face, gritted his teeth, and shouted loudly.

"Father!!!"

Chapter 1284: The Second Kingdom Exploration, Father and Son, Alive

The slanting sunlight fell silently among the people through the gaps in the thatched hut. There, the leaders of the two groups, were a father and son who had just recognized each other and embraced in tears.

The Canine Warriors looked stupefied, watching the young leader with snot and tears, crying out loud. Even the originally Canine team leader in the village ran over to watch this rare scene of recognition.

The crew of the fleet sat limply on the ground, happy for the old captain and also happy for themselves. Priest Mekate smiled quietly, thinking for a moment, then his smile became even more radiant. In the corner, Dark Snake and Didi watched the scene before them, with faces full of excitement and joy, yet mixed with indescribable melancholy and sorrow.

"Dad! Seven years! I've worked myself to death, yet never thought I'd see you again!"

The tattooed Chipawa was crying and laughing, shouting excitedly.

"You didn't die! You didn't die! Ah! Do you know? I erected a grave for you, dug on the mountain by Warrior Lake. I also dug a grave for mom and sister... All these years, I've been thinking day and night, dreaming of avenging you all!"

"...I...I didn't think so either!...I always thought, you were dead...eaten by the wild dogs on the battlefield, couldn't even find the body!..."

The old militiaman was in tears, speaking incoherently, even more overwhelmed than Chipawa. He was dizzy, like drunk, as if floating in the sky. At this moment, he tightly embraced Chipawa's face, pressing

his forehead against his son's, afraid that if he let go, the other would turn into smoke and suddenly disappear.

"Warm! Alive!...You're still alive! Alive!...Alive, that's great!"

"Ah! We are all still alive! How!!"

At this point, Chipawa shouted loudly, making a canine-like howl. Then, with a wave of his big hand, he shouted to his warriors.

"Why are you still dazing? Prepare wine and meat for me! I've found my dad! Slaughter all the village's turkeys, tonight we'll drink and eat meat, all toast to my dad!"

"Yes! Boss!"

A few Canine Warriors hesitated for a moment, then responded loudly. Soon, the small village by the river became busy, with shouts of chicken slaughtering and cooking everywhere. The Elder from the village looked bitterly as over a hundred ferocious Canine Warriors rampaged through the village. He saw the dizzy eyes of the old militiaman, wanted to say something but was intimidated by Chipawa's fierce gaze, and bowed his head reluctantly.

By dusk, bonfires were lit by the river. The old militiaman was still dizzy, as were the crew of the fleet. The Canine Warriors gobbled down meat, drank wine in large bowls, celebrating for once. Afterward, they came forward one by one to toast, singing and dancing, almost getting the old militiaman drunk.

"Great! So good!...All so good!"

The wine in the village was not much, after a few rounds, it was all drunk. The bonfire illuminated everyone's red faces, listening to the songs and laughter. During the day, they were at each other's throats wishing they could chop each other into pieces. By night, they became a true family, singing and dancing together. The unpredictable changes of fate are truly dizzying, bewildering.

"All go! Have fun yourselves! I want to talk to dad!"

After eating and drinking, the tattooed Chipawa waved his arms again, chasing away the seated Canine Warriors. Priest Mekate also wisely took the fleet's crew back to the hut. Only then did father and son truly have a chance to be alone for a while.

Old militiaman Chiwaco squatted by the river, washing his face vigorously with cold river water. The tattooed Chipawa also squatted by his side, washing for a while, just like he did in childhood. Then, father and son sat by the bonfire, facing each other, yet not knowing what to say for a moment.

"Chipawa...you...how did you become, this canine-like appearance?"

After a moment, old militiaman Chiwaco extended his hand to touch the terrifying tattoos on his son's face, asking softly.

"Is this...carved with a Stone Knife? Can't be washed off?"

"Yes! Carved with stone! Can't be washed off!"

Hearing his father's question, Chipawa puffed his chest, proudly pointing to his face, as if pointing to great glory.

"This was three years ago, when I was twenty years old...Sister Alan personally carved it for me! The Zuma High Priest of the tribe said, this is a Wilderness tattoo, a totem of divinity! It can grant me the courage of the Wilderness Warriors, bestow the protection of my Ancestors!...It was only after having it that I became a truly fearless Warrior step by step!"

"Ah?...The warrior totem of...the Wilderness?"

Hearing this, old militiaman Chiwaco opened his mouth, wanting to say something. But when he saw his son's proud and confident expression, he stayed silent for a moment, only murmuring.

"Three years ago...you were twenty...you...you've already turned twenty-three! In my impression, you were only fifteen or sixteen, still that not tall, skinny, timid boy..."

"Dad! I'm a warrior! A real man! I'm not the boy of the past! I was captured by the Samurai, left the village, went to the battlefield, it's been seven years already!"

Hearing the old militiaman's words, Chipawa raised his eyebrows, interrupting. He enlisted at sixteen...He has experienced so many changes, wandering all the way to the Wilderness, in the blink of an eye it's been seven years.

"Seven years! I've killed dozens of warriors! I've also slept with dozens of women, more than you ever did! I dare to charge at ten people alone! I will never be timid like before again!"

"Ah?...But, I remember, in the Lake Region...you..."

"Dad! Here is the Wilderness! A Wilderness of killing, eating, and sleeping with women! It's full of ferocious Wilderness tribes, I can only be harsher and fiercer than them, to make them fear me, listen to me!"

The tattooed Chipawa gritted his teeth, shouting like a wolf. Then his expression eased slightly, his voice became low.

"Moreover...Sister Alan, is so strong and brave, never timid!...How can I lag behind her so much?"

"Ah!...Little turtle grew up, actually incubated into a crocodile..."

Upon hearing this, old militiaman Chiwaco pursed his lips, looked at his familiar yet unfamiliar son, sighed lightly. Yes! Seven years! In this unprecedented era stirred by Mexica's conquest, filled with so much blood, fire, change, and death. Many high and mighty Divine Descendants, Priests, and Nobility fell to dust, becoming rotting corpses...

And having experienced so much, as long as one doesn't die, one can grow rapidly. He is like this, his son, why wouldn't he be the same? This is an era of heroes and legends, truly like a myth...

Old militiaman was silent, tightly grasping his son's arm. His heart was filled with genuine joy, yet lightly touched by sadness. Because, he knows, his son has found his own path, different from his, unable to walk together.

The evening breeze blew hard, bringing the breath of the sea, making one's spirits relaxed. The tattooed Chipawa slightly calmed, then raised his head again to look at his father. He vigorously rubbed his face, the tattoo that brought him courage, then cautiously, softly asked.

"Dad!...My mom and sister...are they still...alive?"

Chapter 1285: The Second Kingdom Expedition—Memories of the Past

The sea breeze blew fiercely, with hair flying messily. The two people in front of the bonfire remained silent.

The old militia Chiwaco bowed his head, lost in the memories that he thought he had forgotten. Tattooed Chipawa gritted his teeth, grasping the earth like a wolf. He had just learned of his mother's death and his sister's survival. He had anticipated many things, and the current outcome was far better than his worst estimations. Yet at this moment, he still growled lowly, shedding tears of pain.

"Ah!... Damn Tarasco Royal Family! Damn Mexica people!"

After a long while, tattooed Chipawa finally wiped away his tears with one swipe, and lowered his head silently. Then, he took out a sharp Obsidian Dagger, cut off a section of hair, and threw it into the fire. With the pungent smell of scorching burning, he murmured softly, like a warrior of the wilderness, calling out lowly.

"Divine heavens and earth! Please accept my request! I beseech you, great one, to guide my mother's spirit into the womb of the Earth Mother Goddess. She will be reborn there, start anew... and if she is unwilling, let her rest there..."

"Earth Mother Goddess's womb..."

Old militia Chiwaco pursed his lips, watching his son's prayer. He had never seen or heard of such a ceremony or prayer in the Patzcuaro Lake region. Undoubtedly, this is a legacy from the wilderness. And his son, from body to soul, was deeply marked by the imprint of the wilderness.

"The faith of the northern wilderness..."

The old militia watched all this quietly until his son finished praying and looked at him again, asking.

"Dad! Why did you come here? And sail a Mexica people's ship?"

"I... I will talk about it later..."

The old militia opened his mouth to speak but did not know where to start. In the end, he could only tug his hair and ask back.

"You tell me about yourself first!..."

"Me? Let me think... Back then, I was drafted to the southern front, facing the sky full of flames and stone throws in those dim fortresses, along with endless Mexica warriors... I thought I was doomed, dying like most of the militia, in a burning, stone-filled corner, piled together with countless corpses..."

Recalling the southern battlefield of years ago, even as a warrior of the wilderness now, Chipawa couldn't help but shiver. Such brutal battles, even thinking of them now, still haunted him like a nightmare, even more unforgettable than the great fire in the Pamus Valley.

"Tarasco's army collapsed... I was captured by fleeing soldiers... They treated me as reserve food, the kind that could walk by itself... Then, I met the formidable Zucata Camp Commander... He scattered the fleeing soldiers, took me and a few others on a run north, joining the familiar Guajili Tribe... Red Monkey Tribe..."

"Zucata? Wooden stick?"

Hearing this name, old militia Chiwaco's eyes moved, showing doubt.

"Is he... a member of the Tarasco Royal Family?"

"The Camp Commander, he is..."

Wilderness warrior Chipawa hesitated for a moment, but thinking that everything had changed and past plans had lost meaning, he sighed and spoke.

"Oh! The Camp Commander was the Commander-in-Chief of the Southern Army, a trusted guard of Prince Quiyus, possibly even the Guard Commander. Before the Royal Army collapsed, the Prince entrusted the Prince to him, letting him flee north... In the end, he made it to the north, but the Prince died along the way. The reason he saved me... is said, it's because I resemble the deceased Prince..."

"Ah? This! You... you survived... it's truly fate..."

The old militia remained silent for a moment, gently nodded.

"And then?"

"Then..."

Wilderness warrior Chipawa squinted, recalling another unforgettable battle, speaking low and trembling.

"We first joined the Red Monkey Tribe... then various tribes escaped... joined the Red Dog Tribe of Chichika Great Chief... then escaped again... gathered by Red Crow Chief... fleeing east all the way... until this prophesied fertile soil, the land of Vastec in the East!..."

"The Red Crow Great Tribe established here, conquering south and north, growing stronger day by day! I also followed Sister Alan, conquering tribes everywhere. The Great Chief sits in the south, plundering various Vastec tribes. Sister Alan conquers the north, subduing all canine descendants on the

wilderness, establishing a new nest for the Red Crow Great Tribe! She tattooed the faces of all loyal followers, including me!..."

"And I, within a series of tribal battles, became a leader of an elite hundred-man team... There are a total of twenty teams like mine under Sister Alan! And other ordinary hundred-man teams, even more than twenty..."

Tattooed Chipawa rambled on about many things from the wilderness. Old militia Chiwaco listened patiently, though not understanding much, he never interrupted. Until the night deepened, and the bonfire almost burned out, tattooed Chipawa licked his dry lips and asked again.

"Dad, what about you? Why are you here?"

"Me? Oh... that's a long story..."

Old militia Chiwaco rubbed his face and remained silent for a while before lowly narrating. His narration was understated, as if past life and death were like clouds in the sky, quickly dispersed by a light wind.

"Back then I was drafted north, first guarding the River Mouth Fortress, then participated in a naval battle, escaping back to the fortress... The fortress fell, we fled all the way, only seven out of the conscripted militia survived... We returned to the village, but the village was empty... Your mother died, you were conscripted, your sister was taken to the Royal City by the warriors... We returned to the Royal City..."

"I found your sister, she was still alive, just barely... I left the city, helped the King's Royal Army. Then watched as the Royal Banner fell, the King captured by Mexica people, the Royal City reinforcements routed... We fled back to the Royal City, encountered a Mexica scout... Mexica army arrived, we defended the city. When the city couldn't hold... we opened the gates, led the Mexica people to the Royal Palace, avenged for the family!..."

"After that... life settled down... settled for about two years... stationed in the Lake Region... Your sister married, to the village's Weizti... Yes! The one with the head wrap. He lost his wife and child, couldn't find them. He seemed like a decent man, good to live with, so I betrothed your sister to him... When I return this time, they should have a child by now?"

When saying this, old militia Chiwaco finally showed some smile. He rubbed his hands, rubbed his face, and sincerely prayed.

"Chief Divine bless!..."

"Damn it! Cheap Weizti that guy! So old and so ugly, yet marrying my sister! If he dares to treat her badly, I will run back from here and kill him myself!"

In front of the bonfire, the wilderness warrior Chipawa cursed lowly a few times, but a smile appeared on his face. He added some wood to the bonfire, making the fire brighter. As a result, the reflected light in their eyes became gradually more moving.

"Dad, what else?"

"What else..."

The old militia reached out, tugging his hair. He had many things to talk about, many stories to tell about his upcoming explorations and sailings. But in the end, these turbulent, unpredictable exploratory voyages spoken by him were only brief.

"In recent years, somehow, I was chosen by Your Majesty of the Kingdom. He had me lead a fleet out to sea. I made a trip to the Western Sea, spending more than a year... Stayed home for less than a year, then sent to the Eastern Sea, searching for the Snake Island where the Feathered Serpent Divine transformed..."

"The Snake Island in the Eastern Sea, transformed by the Feathered Serpent Divine?"

Hearing this, wilderness warrior Chipawa also scratched his hair. He had only traveled on land; the vast sea was entirely unknown to him. He had no concept of the difficulty of sailing or the distances on the sea. In fact, most of the canine descendants of the wilderness were like him, close to the earth beneath their feet but keeping a respectful distance from the sea.

"Dad, is this Snake Island far away?"

"Hmm. A bit far."

"Did you find it?"

"Hmm. With some effort, finally found it."

"So, you returned from that Snake Island, passing through here?"

"Hmm... probably! We encountered a storm and drifted here... it wasn't on the route."

"I see!..."

Wilderness warrior Chipawa thought for a while, not understanding much, but it didn't matter, his father was here, and that was good. Thinking of this, he pounded his chest confidently, looking at his father who had been separated for seven years, and confidently persuaded.

"Dad! You should stay here, don't go back! I have people under me now, a lot of people, they can take care of you! You like farming, right? I'll get this village from Sister Alan for you! There are so many fields here; they will all be yours to manage! In the future, you can stay with me and live a good life here!..."

Chapter 1286: The Second Kingdom Expedition—Reunion and Parting, Going Down to Farm the Fields

"Stay here, manage a village, and farm in peace..."

The old Militia Chiwaco widened his clouded old eyes, looking at the scene before him. In the bright firelight was his confident son, and further in the background were the night fields and village. This moment's scene was like a dream he had while dozing off, warm yet somewhat unreal.

"Stay here..."

The old Militia pressed his lips together, falling into a dream, allowing his heart to be moved for a moment. But soon, he remembered his duties, recalling one after another of the people during voyages, the living and the dead...

"Tomato Priest, Priest Mekate, Huitu Puapu, Merchant Tikalo, Warrior Tawalu... Dark Snake, Didi, Tilan, Tidan..."

The old Militia was silent for a while, gently shaking his head in the face of Chipawa's expectant gaze.

"No. I can't stay here... I still have to go back, take the fleet's people home, bring back news from the Eastern Sea's Snake Island!... I must report back to the blind... Your Majesty..."

Hearing this, the confident expression on the face of the Wilderness Warrior Chipawa instantly froze. He stared blankly at his father, looking at those determined eyes, and suddenly a fury arose.

"Dad! Why do you have to go back? Why do you serve the Mexica king? Don't forget, it was the Mexica who invaded us! They're the ones who destroyed the Kingdom!"

"...The old Kingdom was destroyed, but a new Kingdom was established. Just like an old tree cut down, new trees have grown... taller, bigger, with deeper roots..."

The old Militia shook his head. Although his eyes were wet, his words were calm.

"Now the Kingdom's king is the Mexica prince but also the king of the Purpecha. After all, he gave the Purpecha stability, increased the food production in the fields, and improved the lives of the villagers... In the Lake Region's civilian settlements, registered farmers no longer worry about famine and seeds and won't go hungry or be unable to raise newborns..."

"Not to mention, the Purpecha warriors, sages, and priests have long been loyal to him, following him, fighting everywhere..."

"So... he sent me across the sea... I went. And what's encountered this time at sea... is very important! I must return alive to report to him..."

"Ah! How could... this be? The king of the Purpecha?..."

Upon hearing this, the Wilderness Warrior Chipawa gritted his teeth, his chest burning with anger, yet he didn't know whom to speak to. After all, in the words of Camp Commander Zucata, in his long-held understanding, the Purpecha should deeply hate the Mexica conquerors, longing for Tarasco's royal family to return...

"Damn it! How could this be?"

Chipawa bowed his head, fiercely grabbing a handful of earth, throwing it into the fire once more. The firelight flickered violently before calming down, like the unchanging reality.

"Dad... then go back! Hand things over... and then return!"

Hearing this, the old Militia smiled in relief. Then, he looked down at the calm firelight and, for the first time, called his son's name.

"Chipawa! I'm old... the old Purpecha tortoises should die in the lake they were born in. Together with your mom..."

"What's more, there's your sister..."

"Damn it! Then bring my sister over too!"

The Wilderness Warrior Chipawa gritted his teeth, hissing low like a repressed wolf.

"You're old... I'll take care of you! If you die... I'll bury you!..."

"Oh wow! That's wonderful!..."

The old Militia widened his eyes, looking at his excited son with a happy smile. He kept smiling like this, watching Chipawa calm down before speaking softly.

"Your sister... married a stable husband. Finally, she has a stable life. I'm only at ease thinking of her being safe and sound..."

"The Patzcuaro Lake Region in the Kingdom is very peaceful now, more stable than anywhere else. While here, you're still at war, still migrating... What's more, the journey is so chaotic on this thousand-mile trek..."

Saying this, the old Militia shook his head again. He rubbed his hands, massaged his old face, and wiped away old tears from the corners of his eyes. Although he knew the hope was slim, he still asked softly.

"I was thinking, how about... you... come back to the Kingdom with me?"

"What? Back to the Kingdom?! What's there? ...Is there fish to eat? Haha!"

Upon hearing this, the Wilderness Warrior Chipawa was momentarily stunned, then suddenly burst into laughter. Laughing, tears flowed from his eyes.

"Dad! The Kingdom has my past. But in the past, I was just a farm boy in the village! Timid, weak, bullied, powerless... And here? I'm a follower of Sister Alan, a brave tribal warrior, the captain of an elite Hundred-man Team!... I'm even the assistant to Camp Commander Zucata, participating in the training and management of the Long Spear Camp!..."

The Wilderness Warrior Chipawa raised his head, looking at the endless flat wilderness and the vast sky above it. After a while, he rubbed his cheeks, pointed to the tattoos on his face, and said solemnly.

"Dad. I can't go back. I've etched the mark of the wilderness, I belong here! Here, there is the land and sky I desire..."

The old Militia Chiwaco remained silent, nodding. At this moment, the emotions in his heart were both sorrowful and comforting, like a bittersweet fruit wine. However, his tolerance has always been poor, and just this one newly brewed glass made him want to be drunk.

"Mm... Chipawa, my child... you've grown, I'm happy. You have your own path to walk, unlike mine... I only ask one thing of you..."

Saying this, the old Militia raised his head, looking into Chipawa's eyes. The two of them quietly stared at each other until the tattoo-faced son slowly nodded.

"Dad, just tell me! I promise you..."

"Good!... From now on, no matter what you encounter... you must strive to live, to survive. Likewise, if you can, you should also let others live, give others a chance to live..."

"Me? Others?... Survive?..."

The Wilderness Warrior Chipawa's expression changed, thoughtfully chewing on this weighty word. Although he didn't quite understand at the moment, he still nodded forcefully.

"Alright! Dad, I promise you!"

"Great! Great! Truly great!"

The old militia laughed once more. Laughing, he covered his old face and turned around. Likewise, the Chipawa turned around, their backs facing each other, just like when they were children.

At this moment, they couldn't see each other's faces but could feel the person behind them. This made the heaviness in their hearts a little lighter and much more at ease.

Life's river will meet, yet it's destined to part. Whether they tightly connect or blend their bloodlines, they will walk their own paths and encounter different shores... until the final death, quiet or singing, merges into the boundless deep sea, regardless of who goes first...

"Father, when will you leave?"

"As soon as possible! I want to head to the southern coast, further south than the Silver Raven Tribe..."

"Heading to the southern coast?"

Hearing this, the Wilderness warrior Chipawa pondered for a moment and said gravely.

"There's still war on the southern coast! Tribes are campaigning against various Vastecs tribes... If you're going, I have to notify Sister Alan first. Then, inform the Great Chief stationed in the south. This back and forth will take quite some time, you can't rush it!..."

"Sister Alan?"

Listening to this repeatedly mentioned name, the old militia pondered for a bit before asking out loud.

"Who is she?"

"Her? She's the daughter of the Great Chief, a small chief in the north, and the successor of the Great Red Crow Tribe..."

Speaking of this, a yearning smile appeared on the Wilderness warrior Chipawa's face.

"Father! To me, she's our leader, my Sister Alan! She's a fierce female hunter, a fierce female warrior, a fierce female chief! Also... the moon in the sky."

"Oh... fierce!... moon..."

The old militia bowed his head, leaning against his son's back, seemingly sensing those complex emotions. He pursed his lips, not knowing what to say. After all, he knew nothing about the Red Crow Tribe.

"Hmm... a deer must follow the head deer, a wolf must bite with the head wolf... You just follow her, work hard! And also... live well."

"Don't worry, Father! Sister Alan treats me very well!"

The Wilderness warrior Chipawa nodded vigorously, smiling brightly. The old militia scratched his hair and asked again.

"So... what are you doing here now?"

"Oh! I'm leading the warriors, with Sister Alan, campaigning over the Northern Grassland. She gave me a new task, leading newly subdued tribal warriors, migrating Vastec immigrants to the south, then going to the Warrior Lake area to cultivate and build villages... There are already eighty to ninety thousand tribes there, all our people, very prosperous. But there isn't enough food..."

"Father! From Water Otter City to the north, between the highland and the sea, a plain seven to eight hundred miles long... is now all ours! Such a large piece of land, such large mountains, rivers, and sea, all ours!... Our Red Crow Tribe, with more than two hundred thousand people, is the most powerful tribe in the Northern Land!..."

The Wilderness warrior Chipawa raised his head, proudly proclaiming. The old militia's eyes flickered, not minding his son's boast but paying attention to the first few sentences.

"You said... you're migrating... farming... not enough food?"

"Yeah! Like this Vastec small village, it's only in recent years, just migrated from the south and established. There's no surplus grain in the village, or more people could be migrated..."

"Farming... food..."

The old militia pondered for a while, suddenly turned around and grabbed his son's hand.

"Chipawa!..."

"Huh?"

"Father can't do much... but can help you farm..."

The old militia's expression was unprecedentedly serious. Seeing his father like this, Chipawa also became serious.

"Father?"

"This time... I brought some cassava cuttings back from Feathered Serpent's Snake Island... It's easy to plant, easy to survive, resistant to pests, yields frighteningly high. But its skin is poisonous, very potent poison. So when eating, peel it and soak it in water, can't store it for too long..."

"What? Cas...sava? Father! What's that?"

"Uh... it's good stuff, edible, high-yield food! It's not picky about the ground at all, just needs to be planted in warmer places. But I feel it's quite warm here, should grow... even if slightly cold, though yields less, but certainly more than corn and pumpkin, much more!..."

The old militia showed a joyful expression, speaking extensively. However, Chipawa's face was puzzling. Seeing this, the old militia slapped his thigh heavily, then pinched his son's arm with force.

"Are you listening? Did you understand?"

"Huh? Father? What did you say?"

"I said..."

The old militia extended his hand, after many years, and grabbed his son's ear, shouting.

"Tomorrow! Tomorrow you come with me..."

"To the field to farm!..."

Chapter 1287: The Second Kingdom Expedition—Cassava and Dark Snake

"For this cassava, first, we have to choose a plot of land... We don't compete for good land by the river. Cassava isn't picky about the land, just find a slightly higher one, where the soil is loose, slightly sandy when you grip it... Hmm? This patch of land looks good, the soil is quite alright..."

In July, the summer sun is high. Even in the early morning, it makes one sweat all over. Nearby, the river flows quietly, with shimmering reflections on the small pools formed during the rainy season.

The old militia, Chiwaco, tied a sun-shading scarf, leaned on a digging stick, and carried a basket full of cassava stems on his back. He searched for the highlands while probing the soil. Behind him were three children with similar scarves and digging sticks: Chipawa, Dark Snake, and Didi. Following them was the Divine Revelation Priest, MeKate, who also came to help.

"Hmm... The soil is loose, and the roots of these weeds are shallow, easy to pull out..."

The old militia searched all the way until he reached a small flat slope and stabbed the soil three inches deep. Then, he squatted down, pulled out two weeds, grabbed a handful of sandy soil, and said with satisfaction.

"Let's do it here! For planting cassava, the soil needs to be deep, thick, and loose! Its roots go really deep!... Come, from here to here, forty steps around, pull out all the weeds!"

"Uh?... Okay, Dad!"

Wilderness Samurai Chipawa looked perplexed, staring at the soil beneath his feet. He couldn't distinguish the quality of soil, but he was quite strong. Everyone worked together for half the day to roughly clear this small patch of sandy loam soil. Then, the old militia, full of enthusiasm and smiling, squatted down and began teaching Chipawa how to plant cassava.

"Dig a small pit, about half an arm's length deep is about right. Then, insert one end of the cassava stalk downwards, straight into the soil, cover it with soil... Yes, just like that, don't press too hard... This soil is a bit dry, later we'll fetch some water and pour it on..."

"Planting cassava by inserting it..."

Wilderness Samurai Chipawa squatted on the ground, carefully maneuvering soil with both hands, cautiously planting the cassava stalk. At this moment, he stared at his mud-covered hands, inexplicably dazed, a surreal dream-like feeling. The last time he went to the fields with his father was over seven years ago. Until yesterday, he had never thought that these hands, accustomed to gripping long spears and bronze axes, these hands used to killing and hunting, would once again plant crops...

"You rascal! What are you thinking about!"

The old militia, Chiwaco, habitually reached out, pinching his son's ear, finding it satisfying.

"Have you been listening to what I say? You need to memorize it! When I'm gone, you'll have to rely on yourself to plant! In seven or eight months, cassava will grow, and by then, you'll be able to divide the stalks and double the planting area..."

"Ah? Dad! It hurts, it hurts!..."

Wilderness Samurai Chipawa instinctively dodged but stopped abruptly, allowing his father to pinch him tightly. He scratched his hair, casually making up a question.

"Dad... I was just thinking... Why is cassava planted vertically? Can't it be planted obliquely? Can't it be buried horizontally in the soil? Why must it be planted vertically?..."

Hearing such a soul-searching question, the old militia paused, releasing his hand.

"Hey! You rascal! That's a good question... Let me think about it..."

"On Cuba Snake Island, most Taino People plant cassava vertically... But I remember a tribe named Jing River Tribe that plants cassava obliquely. I curiously asked them why. They said vertical planting makes the roots deep, resistant to strong winds, requires more water, and isn't afraid of drought... But there's a downside, the root grows too deep, making it troublesome to dig up!..."

"Later, they experimented with oblique planting... Then they discovered the cassava roots grew diagonally to one side and were much shallower, making it easier to dig..."

"As for planting it flat...? I feel it might work too! Just not sure how the cassava would turn out? Would it grow at one end or form roots at both ends?"

The old militia squatted on the ground, seriously pondering, muttering to himself. Chipawa leaned closely beside him, watching his thinking father with a face full of reverence and confusion, just like in his childhood.

Behind them, everyone seeing this heartwarming scene showed understanding smiles. Dark Snake was happy for old Chiwaco for a brief moment but suddenly lowered his head, showing a gloom.

"Old Chiwaco... found his son..."

Beside him, Priest Mekate squinted, acutely noticing the young Dark Snake's expression. He pondered for a moment before silently walking to Dark Snake's side, patting the boy's shoulder.

"Chief Divine blesses! Truly wonderful!"

"Yes... Chief Divine blesses!"

Dark Snake lowered his head, responding softly. His face was evidently downcast, as if recalling something, exhibiting an uncontainable sadness.

"Dark Snake, this time, surviving the storm was due to Chief Divine's blessing! Captain Chiwaco, us, and you are all cherished and blessed by Chief Divine!..."

Priest MeKate smiled kindly, his words enticingly persuasive, like his preaching, silently sinking into the heart.

"Chief Divine blesses you!... Dark Snake, I remember you were born around Water Valley City, right? Telascallan, have you considered your father... maybe he's still alive somewhere!" Hearing this, Dark Snake trembled, still silent with his head down. Priest MeKate stepped forward again, gently rubbing Dark Snake's head, reminiscent of old militia Chiwaco's fond habit, a familiar intimate action made the boy tremble again.

"Ah, Dark Snake!... This journey eastward has faced so many obstacles and storms... Of the four returning longships, over two hundred people, only twenty of us remain..."

Priest MeKate's voice was low, his eyes tender, his words full of sincerity.

"You're the youngest member of the fleet; we regard you as a child... Regardless of where your father went, and whether old Chiwaco found his son... you're the child of our fleet!... From now on, follow us! With us, you have a home..."

"Home?..."

Hearing these words, Dark Snake's mind was shaken. He lifted his head, staring blankly at the kind and gentle Priest MeKate, tears suddenly streaming down.

"Woo!... MeKate Old Father... Woo!... I don't have a father... The day Water Valley City fell, my father abandoned me, ran north... He didn't want me... Old Chiwaco found his son... Wah wah!..."

Upon hearing this, Priest MeKate raised his eyebrows, a flash of insight in his eyes. He lowered his head, hugged Dark Snake's shoulders, stepping lightly, firmly leading him to another side of the field.

"Hey! Dark Snake... don't cry anymore... your father... that was during the war! But now, things are different! Your Majesty said, Telascallan are also citizens of the Kingdom! In the Kingdom of the Lake, they even formed the Telascallan Long Snake Corps, recruited several thousand Telascallan Samurais!... Whether it's you, or your father, now both are pardoned by Your Majesty, part of the Kingdom!"

"Ah?... Truly... truly?"

Dark Snake's voice trembled. After a long sea exploration, experiencing so many life-or-death situations, he had a deep sense of belonging to the fleet. Toward the always kind Priest MeKate, he held a share of trust. At this moment, with hope, he widened his eyes, looking at Priest MeKate.

"Has Your Majesty truly pardoned us? Even... the Divine Descendants of Telascala..."

"Divine Descendants? Indeed!"

Hearing this, Priest MeKate's heart trembled. His eyes remained warm, actions kind, his tone full of sincerity.

"Of course! Even the Divine Descendants of Telascala are accepted by the Kingdom..."

"Dark Snake, believe me... if you're willing, tell me your father's name, I can inquire for you! Maybe, from the migrating Telascala Tribes counting hundreds of thousands, we might find him for you..."

This time, Dark Snake was silent for a long, long time without speaking. Priest MeKate's eyes flickered, secretly sighed, seemed it was still not the time. But he still smiled kindly, gave Dark Snake a warm hug.

"Forget it! Dark Snake, what's past is past!... In the future, you're our child, we're all your fathers..."

"He is called Black Serpent..."

"Hmm?"

Dark Snake lowered his head, embraced Priest MeKate, his body trembled slightly. His voice was small, yet clear enough for MeKate to hear.

"My father, he's called Black Serpent... he was the City Lord of Water Valley... 'Black Serpent' Teuctli..."

"City Lord of Water Valley? 'Black Serpent' Teuctli?!..."

Embracing from the other side, Priest MeKate suddenly lifted his head, his mouth breaking into a smile.

"Good child, I will remember..."

Chapter 1288: The Second Kingdom Expedition—By the Egret River

The July downpour came from the Caribbean Sea with a roar, pouring onto the Northern Land coast. Outside the Vastec people's small village, the water level of the long river surged up. And the small lakes near the seaside gathered together, forming a Great Lake stretching dozens of hundreds of miles.

"What is this rainy season lake called?"

The old militia squatted by the door of the village chief's thatched cottage, watching the endless rain outside and chatting with the wrinkled village elder. The village elder looked timid, carefully lowering his head to respond.

"Master... This is the Mangrove Lake."

"Don't call me master... call me... never mind, don't be afraid, call me what you like! You say, Mangrove Lake?"

"Yes! Because there is a large mangrove forest around it, that's why it's called that."

"Oh!"

The old militia smiled kindly. He didn't hold resentment against the village elder for his previous accusations. On the contrary, he was somewhat grateful. If it weren't for the village elder bringing the Canine Warriors, he wouldn't have had the chance to meet his son.

"Then, what about this long river? What's its name?"

"Master, this long river is called Egret River. Lots of egrets stay by the river, from the upper reaches to the sea mouth, all these large white birds... so it's called Egret River."

"Did you give it this name?"

"No, it's not. The original tribes in this area, the Jananbury people, called it that. Some people also call it the 'Flower River'. Because there are many flowers by the river, in spring and summer, flowers everywhere..."

"Egret River... Flower River... Such a beautiful river!..."

Upon hearing this, the old militia Chiwaco nodded. He recalled the scenes by the river, the large wetlands, flower clusters, and bird flocks, smiling merrily.

"How long is this river? Where does its upper stream lead to?"

Upon hearing this, the village elder frowned, thought for a long while, then replied softly.

"Master, this river is very very long... Sailing upstream to the west for many days leads to Warrior Lake. And as some say, it flows down from the further western wilderness... As for the specifics, I don't know!"

"Warrior Lake..."

The old militia pondered for a moment and nodded again. He didn't make things difficult for the village elder, just quietly watched the heavy rain outside and the long river in the rain.

Actually, this long river is known in later generations as the Rio Soto La Marina, a thousand-mile-long river in northeastern Mexico, originating from the western highlands wilderness. Close to the river's estuary where they now stood is the famous Soto La Marina Wetlands Delta, known for its beautiful scenery and abundant birdlife. The thriving bird population has long spread natural fertilizers over the land, making it extremely fertile.

In other words, this is a place suitable for farming, stretching several hundred miles along the Egret River!

The old militia watched the wide long river for a while, his eyes shifting towards a nearby highland. There, two acres of cassava fields had been cleared, sprouting new branches. And the vibrant life, with crops that could nourish the entire land, was taking root and growing.

"Did you remember how to plant cassava?"

"I've remembered, Master."

The village elder answered softly with a bitter look.

"The villagers in the village have also remembered."

Upon hearing this, the old militia smiled contentedly. He had spent two days farming with his son. This young lad quickly got impatient and directly called the villagers to follow his father to plant together. The old militia wanted to hit his son, but Chipawa ran while arguing.

"Dad! I'm a distinguished Hundred-man Team captain; you want me to farm, which makes the Tribal Warriors look down on me! Besides, I'm not suited for this; even if I learned it, it'd be easy to forget. If I remembered wrongly, it would be a waste of teaching!... I'll bring out fifty men in the village to learn with you! If you teach them well, it's equivalent to me knowing it!..."

"Ah, right!... I'm going to take the warriors for a trip to Warrior Lake! I need to personally tell Sister Alan about you and bring your longship back. She doesn't like the Mexica people, but for my sake, she'll definitely help you!"

"You brat!..."

The old militia chased for a while, but his old arms and legs couldn't catch up. He could only helplessly let his son off the hook, putting his thoughts onto the villagers. And the villagers' performance was indeed much better than the wilderness warrior Chipawa, putting his mind at ease.

Thinking of this, he looked to the side at the squatting village elder again, and asked solemnly.

"How to harvest cassava? How to eat? Recite it once."

"Um... dig out those... roots... then soak in water for one or two days... clean it... peel it... cut into pieces... cook them to eat..."

"What else?"

"Um... can also grind into flour, like corn flour, make it into cakes..."

"What must not be forgotten?"

"Uh..."

"Hmm?"

"Oh, oh! It's soaking in water. Must soak in water and peel, otherwise it's poisonous. Eating it can be deadly..."

The village elder appeared bitter, sighing in his heart. Everything seems to be poisonous, yet they are to plant it, to eat it, isn't this wishing for death? But the master's words, he dared not disobey, and had to memorize them...

"Hmm!"

After listening, the old militia smiled contentedly. He smiled fondly, putting his arm around the village elder's shoulder, and gently said.

"Old brother!... That young lad brought people and ate all your turkeys and grain... I plant this cassava field... consider it, my gift to you all!..."

"Yes...Yes! Master... Whatever you say, I listen to you!..."

The rain poured down, irrigating the new cassava field, on this warm and humid Northern Coast. The two old farmers squatted by the thatched cottage entrance, watching this green-filled land, gazing at the long river, much like a poetic pastoral painting.

After three or four days of seaside rain, it cleared up again. Several dugout canoes followed the rushing river from upstream. At the canoe's bow, the wilderness warrior Chipawa held his head high, looking ostentatious. He brought back a command from the young chieftain Alan, telling the village's Canine Descendant Captain Ebony Deer.

"Ebony Deer! Sister Alan said! You have to return the longship you took to the Mexica people! And give them all a weapon to defend themselves on the road! By the way, the rest of the armor, weapons, and gemstone, half for each of us!"

"What? Half for each?! Damn it! Chipawa, I'll beat you until you spill!"

The Canine Descendant Captain Ebony Deer jumped madly, yelling loudly.

"You promised! You promised! I gave you the men, everything belongs to me!"

"Bull! I said then to kill them, that's when I give you the things, to shut you up. But now, I did nothing; Sister Alan even praised me for being reasonable, not impulsive... So why should I benefit you? These are my dad's things, giving you half is good enough... Hurry up! Get the stuff out, don't dawdle!..."

"Chief Divine! Ancestor! I wanna kill you! Kill you!..."

The Canine Descendant Captain Ebony Deer swore and rushed forward, fists flying flesh, having a fight with the wilderness warrior Chipawa. After the fight, nose bruised and face swollen, he grudgingly took out half of the goods from the fleet and left angrily.

"Dad! Come with me! Sister Alan is waiting for you all at Warrior Lake's Crow City!"

The wilderness warrior Chipawa similarly had a bruised nose and swollen face, yet his expression was smug. He jumped onto the longship's prow, fumbled around for a while. Then, seeing his slightly worried father, he laughed and shouted.

"Let's go! Everyone come up to row!... Let me sit a bit on Dad's large ship! I haven't seen such a big ship before!..."

Chapter 1289: The Second Kingdom Exploration, the Red Crow Great Tribe, and the Expanding Alliance of Tribes

The Egret Long River winds eastward, resembling a jade belt on the Northern Land, encircling the vibrant plains. A kingdom's longship is rowing against the river, moving upstream towards the vast west.

"River... Plain... Village... Camp..."

Old Militia Chiwaco stood on the bow, looking at the open scenery along the shore, quite different from the Totonac people's jungle. On both sides of the Egret River are plains with sparse tall grass, where herds of deer and wild rabbits can be seen running.

And in the greenish woods, every few dozen miles, one can see villages built with thatched cottages, or camps with dug-out pit houses. The former belong to the migrating Vastec Tribe, while the latter are semi-settled camps of the Jananbure Tribe. They all submit tribute to the Great Red Crow Tribe, providing manpower and food.

"What do these villages plant... What do they usually eat?"

"Uh..."

Upon hearing the farming query from his father, Wilderness Warrior Chipawa helplessly tugged at his hair. He thought for a while, then grabbed a rowing Tribal Warrior and asked a few questions in Guajili language, finally giving a confident answer.

"Dad, the Vastek people in the villages do farming, and they grow a variety of crops. Mainly, it's corn, squash, and beans, just like we used to have! They also plant peppers, tomatoes, as well as mango trees and papaya trees..."

"As for what they eat, ordinary villagers eat squash and beans! Corn is made into cakes to tribute to the Great Red Crow Tribe... Oh! They also fish, dig for wild vegetables, and dig for berries... However, the fertile woods and fish-filled lakes are mostly occupied by the tribal camps of the Jananbure people. They are more fierce, and the gentle Vastek villagers generally cannot compete with them."

"As for these Jananbure people's camps and the ones further north belonging to the Bosalos people, they're semi-settled, semi-hunting, a trait of the wilderness. Their archery is good, can shoot many birds; their fishing skills are good too, catching fish from the lake; sometimes, if luck favors, they can come across herds of deer and Northern Wild Bull, which is a lot of meat!..."

"These Wilderness Tribes do plant a bit of corn and beans, but their farming is very crude! They just scatter seeds during spring and don't care much, and after harvesting in autumn, they migrate around, like rabbits that don't settle into their burrows..."

Talking about this, Wilderness Warrior Chipawa glanced at the warrior beside him, with a smile asked.

"Isn't it, Jia Ka? Every autumn when you return, you can't find your tribe, like wolves unable to find their den..."

Jananbure Warrior Jia Ka had a blue tattooed face, not tall but very robust. Listening to the question, he widened his eyes, seriously rebutted something, and shouted. The Tribal Warriors rowing started laughing loudly, shouting excitedly.

"Haha!..."

"Uh... What did he just say?"

"Dad, Jia Ka just said, how can the wolves of the grassland not find their den? It's the foolish, smelly pigs that can't find a den! Haha! He's scolding himself..."

"Oh! This year their tribe won't migrate, they're building a village east of Warrior Lake. Last year they followed the Great Chief south for plundering, capturing hundreds of obedient Vastec agricultural slaves; this year they followed the Chieftain north for conquest, seizing a batch of strong Coahuiltecan women... Now with people to farm and women who can give birth, they're planning to settle down..."

Saying this, Wilderness Warrior Chipawa paused, somewhat uncertainly.

"Jia Ka also said Sister Alan is planning to establish a new Tribal Hundred-man Team in their tribe. In the future, there won't be a need to pay grain, just provide manpower to fight for the Great and Small Chiefs... Eh! How come I didn't hear about this news? We already have fifty Hundred-man Teams, are we still forming new ones? Could it be they're planning to continue fighting north?..."

On the longship, Priest Mekate was listening to the father and son's conversation, seemingly deep in thought.

The expansion of the Great Red Crow Tribe was very rapid, extremely rapid. In merely a few years, they had transformed from an exile tribe that had experienced northern expeditions and warfare into a tribal alliance in the Northern Land. The Great Red Crow Tribe was the leader of this tribal alliance. And other tribes, either forced to submit or willingly join, accepted the leadership of the Great Red Crow Tribe, even merging into it.

Under the governance of this Great Tribe, there were both tributary, farming-settled Vastec villages and manpower-providing, semi-hunting-settled wilderness tribe camps. And the latter were gradually transforming into settled villages, establishing a stable Tribal Army through prolonged warfare...

"The Red Crow Chief is quite methodical in his actions... Not like a typical Canine Descendant Leader!..."

Thinking of this, Priest Mekate felt somewhat worried. Such a belligerent tribal alliance rising in the northeastern corner of the world, it is hard to know what impacts it would have on the alliance's future.

And at such a distant location, neither the Alliance nor the Kingdom could easily send troops to intervene or interrupt their rise.

"Chief Divine! The Great Red Crow Tribe is nominally submissive to the alliance. Are they truly a threat to the kingdom or a potential ally?..."

The longship continued westward, the long oars moving through the waves, taking five days to travel over two hundred miles, reaching the broad and expansive Warrior Great Lake. Here, large and small tribal camps and agrarian villages were spread across the plains surrounding the lake, like chili seeds scattered on corncakes.

Old Militia Chiwaco looked towards the shore of the Great Lake, spotting teams of tribal warriors, carrying long spears, moving from west to east. Confusion showing on his face, he asked puzzledly.

"Chipawa, why during such a busy farming season, are there so many tribespeople preparing to go to war?"

"Dad! They aren't preparing for war, they're just returning from battles in the north! They're members of a just-dissolved Tribal Hundred-man Team, heading back to their respective tribes. As for their tribe's fields, captured slaves and remaining women and elders are tending them. The wealth and captives seized from this war far outweigh the harvest of farming!..."

Wilderness Warrior Chipawa spoke with a smile, proudly.

"After last autumn's harvest, Sister Alan took forty Hundred-man Teams, departed from Red Crow City, headed north to conquer wilderness tribes that refused to submit! We swept through various tribes in

the wilderness, until six hundred miles away at Flint Lake. There we fought a major battle, defeated several allied forces of large Coahuiltecan tribes! Haha! What a thrill!..."

"Then, we moved two hundred miles northeast, arrived at the Northern Great River, and seized a lot before gradually returning! Haha! It's exhilarating!"

"What? Northern Great River? Where's that? What's its name?"

"Yes! It's a very long river! It's about seven hundred miles north... It's very wide and difficult to cross without a boat. There are quite a few Coahuiltecan tribes around, and some scattered tribes from the more northern grasslands... Oh! I also encountered a group of prairie people chasing Northern Wild Bull there, they seemed to be called Lipan. The tribal warriors on both sides glared across the river for a long time, shouted a lot, then left..."

Wilderness Warrior Chipawa thought for a bit, somewhat uncertainly speaking.

"As for the river's name... it seems the Coahuiltecan people call it the Bravo River?"

"Northern Wild Bull... Lipan people... Bravo River..."

Hearing this, the old militia thought for a while without any memory. He guessed it's still the extending Northern Continent, with countless Northern Tribes, just like what he heard during his first exploratory voyage. Thinking this, he couldn't help bowing down, offering a sincere prayer.

"Ah! May the Chief Divine protect! I implore you..."

"Make sure not! Don't let the blind Your Majesty know about that place... Otherwise, he might send me there again!"

Chapter 1290: Second Exploration of the Kingdom, the Spread of Bronze Technology

Warrior Lake stretches eighty li north to south and over forty li east to west; it is a Great Lake capable of irrigating hundreds of li of fertile land. The blazing summer sun radiates growth-enabling rays, making both the fields and farmland lush and verdant, with weeds and crops growing haphazardly together.

"What a pity!... Such good land, yet not carefully tended... The weeds are as tall as the crops!..."

The longship anchored by Warrior Lake, finding a camp of the Bosalos, and rested there for a night. The old militia couldn't stay idle, wandering outside the camp to the fields, examining the land that had been planted two months prior, and couldn't help but shake his head and sigh.

"Fools! Fools! Truly a bunch of wooden-headed fools..."

Priest MeKate, however, did not go down to the land, instead wandering around the camp observing everything. Watching the tribal warriors who had returned from disbandment, each lean and showing signs of long travel, he asked Chipawa in Purepecha dialect.

"Brave Chipawa Warrior Captain, with so many tribal warriors marching on such long military expeditions, who provides the food supply?"

"What? Food for the expedition? Ordinary conscript tribes, just like migrating, bring their own provisions! Of course, the Red Crow Great Tribe provides food for elite teams like our Hundred-man Team. We are direct warriors of the Red Crow Great Tribe, unlike those conscripted tribal warriors!..."

Hearing Priest MeKate's appellation, Chipawa grinned with satisfaction. He lightly patted his fellow's shoulder and replied in a straightforward manner.

"Certainly, some tribes are poor, bringing insufficient food during expeditions, so they can only hunt, fish, and plunder enemies on the way. Thus, they often march for a few days, then stop for a couple of days, slowly as if moving along a migration path... Only our elite Hundred-man Team can travel a hundred li in a day, reaching the north Great River in nearly ten days!..."

"Oh! I see! You all are truly impressive!..."

Priest MeKate's eyes flickered, as if contemplating.

The food carried by the tribal army for expeditions indicates two things. One is that Red Crow Great Tribe's food supply is insufficient to sustain so many direct elite Hundred-man Teams. Another is that various tribes have independent tribal armies, obeying summons but not directly controlled. These two things are essentially one: insufficient food production and loose tribal traditions limit the centralized power of the two Red Crow Chieftains.

"The cassava left by Captain Chi ... can double the food production..."

With this thought, Priest MeKate pursed his lips, feeling emotionally conflicted and hard to express. His gaze moved within the Bosalos camp, observing the hastily constructed grass huts, pit dwellings, and the tribespeople accustomed to migration and wandering, his thoughts drifting far.

"Chief Divine! I wonder, if uniting these migrating Wilderness Barbarian Tribes under one banner and gradually settling them down, would be good or bad for the Kingdom..."

Priest MeKate observed for a moment, suddenly seeing something yellow flashing in the hands of a camp warrior. He squinted, inspecting closely, discovering it to be a bronze axe. Scanning the camp, he realized there were actually more than just one of these bronze axes.

"Brave Chipawa Warrior Captain, this tribal camp is so wealthy, they actually have so many bronze axes?"

"What? Wealthy? This ramshackle camp, even rats find it poor... Haha!"

Wilderness Warrior Chipawa scanned around, viewing the shabby, impoverished tribal camp missing even a turkey, and burst into laughter.

"Priest MeKate, the axes in their hands were gifts from the generous Great Chief after pledging allegiance! And such weapons, the craftsmen in Crow City forge a hundred pieces a day!"

"Forging? You possess copper mines?"

"Yes! Right up north, there's a large copper mine one or two hundred li away, with hundreds of mining slaves digging now! Sister Alan claimed the Great Chief chose Crow City due to this copper mine!"

Wilderness Warrior Chipawa scratched his head uncertainly, continuing.

"Seems there's something unique about the northern copper mine, not only yielding copper but also some pigment ores. The Wilderness Tribes up north have been digging for years, always applying the shiny ore dust to their tattoos... but I dislike that color, too flashy; red is still the most sacred! Yes, Sister Alan agrees with that...."

"Early last year, Uncle Kuitong, in charge of forging, discovered that integrating the pigment ore with copper during casting made the newly forged bronze axes and copper spears far more resilient!... Yet Uncle Kuitong always claimed it was incorrect, not hard enough, suggesting adding a silvery soft stone?... Commander Zucata had us search the mountains for months without finding a trace..."

"Chief Divine! How can it be? Damn it! The Red Crow Great Tribe, actually capable of bronze casting?"

Hearing this, Priest MeKate was utterly shocked inside. He maintained a composed demeanor, face still smiling, gently probing.

"Chipawa, who is this Uncle Kuitong? Is he also one of our Purepecha folks?"

"Eh! Haven't I mentioned? When Commander Zucata led us few escape to the Wilderness..."

Wilderness Warrior Chipawa, puzzled, scratched his head, carelessly revealing the background.

"Uncle Kuitong was one of them! He was a royal family craftsman slave of Prince Quiyus, responsible for creating bronze tools, hence named Kuitong. Commander said their warrior squad included those who trained Long Spear Camps, crafted Leather Armor, and forged bronze...all carefully chosen by the Prince, left for the Prince to rise again in the north! Yet unexpectedly, the Prince died en route, while they managed to survive..."

"Damn! Tarasco Royal Family's Prince Quiyus... actually had such preparations?..."

Upon hearing this name long forgotten by the Purepecha people, Priest MeKate squinted, biting his lip subtly. Then, his smile grew even brighter, softly asking.

"Chipawa, you Red Crow Great Tribe are truly remarkable! May I see the bronze axe you've forged?"

"Haha! Of course! Jia Ka, bring the axe!"

Wilderness Warrior Chipawa called out, laughingly gesturing to his axe.

"This one came from Desolate Valley City—an actual bronze axe, so much sharper! Uh... seems you crafted it..."

Priest MeKate examined intently, caressing, scrutinizing the yellow bronze axe in his hand. Upon trying to carve the axe surface twice with his obsidian dagger and testing the blade's sharp edge, he even licked the axe, tasting its flavor.

"Adequately resilient, not sharp enough... slightly soft, slightly astringent... eh? Even a bit sweet?..."

"It was mentioned in Divine Revelation Place... this is... this is..."

Priest MeKate blinked, a shimmer in his eyes before suddenly sparking.

"This is lead!"

"Chief Divine! The northern Copper Mountain yields the shiny pigment ores the Wilderness Tribes smear on their tattoos; could it be galena?"

"Then, the Red Crow Great Tribe forging their weaponry with copper and lead together... are lead bronze weapons?"