

Civilization 1351

Chapter 1351: The Prosperous Kingdom, The First Settlement of the Tribes

"Forget it! These barbarian children have shallow eyes... getting tangled with them isn't worth it. Let's just buy some!..."

With this thought, Woodpecker Aitz nodded.

"Hmm... alright then! I'll offer two large bags of cocoa beans, this half piece of Heritage Wooden Board, a dozen obsidian beads, and this bag of silverware, all for me!..."

"Ah?! Cocoa beans? Those brown beans you can eat, drink, and spend...?"

Hearing this, Camp Captain Babe Aitzol licked his lips, knowing these beans were useful. But having been accustomed to harsh days on the wilderness, he wasn't picky about food and drink. After thinking it over, cocoa beans still seemed impractical... What was really practical and urgently needed by the tribes...

"Praise the Chief Divine! Hmm... Chieftain, we don't want these beans... we want your bronze axes! Axes are good! Can chop trees, and chop people too!..."

"Uh..."

Woodpecker Aitz tried to pull his arm away, but Camp Captain Babe had a death grip on it, and he couldn't free himself. He sighed helplessly and said to his trusted aide behind him.

"Give him two, fine, three bronze axes!... Make sure to collect all these for me. Hmm, especially that Heritage Wooden Board! I want to take a good look and see if I can read some ancient epics from it..."

"Yes, Camp Commander!..."

Soon, both sides exchanged goods and axes, brisk and straightforward, without any nonsense. Camp Captain Babe Aitzol released his grip, clutching his precious axes, his face beaming with smiles.

"Hey! Don't just smile foolishly, remember! Next time you go out raiding, be sure to seize gold, silver, and transparent gemstones, and pure jade stones!..."

"Praise the Chief Divine! Got it!"

Seeing the simple and honest Camp Captain, Woodpecker Aitz shook his head and led the Archer Camp onward. On the road, he felt inexplicably worried.

"Chief Divine! If the Kingdom's tens of thousands of flag team barbarians are all this simple-minded, how long will it take to teach these earth wolves, who just bite, to farm properly, and establish villages capable of farming and paying taxes..."

As he marched, Woodpecker Aitz pondered over such national concerns for nearly half a day. Until the sun set in the west, a rest station appeared on the hill, and he came to his senses, sending people to notify the station.

"Chief Divine witness! Cuitzeo Lake is at the foot of the mountain, and Rivermouth County is still half a day's journey. We'll rest for the night around the station today. If we go to the surrounding tribal flag teams, it'll waste time, and they might even steal our paper armor..."

Woodpecker Aitz chuckled at the wilderness barbarians' expense and headed for the high station. But when he was still some distance away, he suddenly stopped, his expression changing.

"Ah, what's this? This! This is?..."

The resting station on the hill was quite large, occupying a big piece of the hilltop, surrounded by simple wooden fences, enough to squeeze in the entire Archer Camp. At a glance, there were rows of thatched cottages and sheds for storing things, and even an imposing large wooden house. Outside the station, by the river in the lowlands, a large area of fields had been opened up. These fields were of significant scale, estimated to cover several hundred acres. Although they looked a bit unkempt, at least they had been tended with effort, appearing somewhat cultivated.

However, at this moment, seeing the approaching tribal Archer Camp, over a hundred fierce Canine Descendant hunters charged out from the tribal settlement-like station. These hunters mostly had dyed red hair, wore sturdy leather armor, carried high greatbows, and had sharp bronze axes at their waists. As they spread out on the mountain path, they blocked the road entirely, and their fierce, indifferent expressions clearly signaled they were battle-hardened veterans.

"Chief Divine witness! Stop! Those at the station, can rest!..."

Soon, from among the hundred elite hunters, a red-haired, armored leader stepped forward. The intricate leather armor on him bore a wolf symbol, clearly identifying him as a Samurai of the Black Wolf Army. He squinted, scrutinizing the group of paper-armored bamboo bow-bearing units, finally resting his gaze on the most lavishly and conspicuously dressed Woodpecker Aitz.

"Banner bearer! Are you their Camp Captain?!"

"Chief Divine witness! I am a Military Merit Nobility of the Kingdom and the Camp Commander of this unit, Woodpecker Aitz!"

Woodpecker Aitz stared, hand on the bronze axe at his waist, eyeing the red-haired leader several dozen steps away.

"Who are you? The station master here? Why block the road?!"

"Oh, I'm not. I am the trusted aide of the Black Wolf Legion Commander! The station master is from our flag team... These resting houses were built by contributing men from our flag team... As for blocking the road, it's to invite you to rest at the station and have a warm meal!..."

The leading red-haired man smiled, gesturing behind him. Then, two hunters behind him skillfully carried an exceptionally large flag, planting it at the station's entrance. The mountain wind unfurled the flag, with a carefully drawn stone balance symbolizing trade on the left, resembling murals, and on the right, a crude depiction of fur, feathers, and beast teeth.

"Chief Divine! This! What is this? Again?..."

Seeing the familiar flag, Woodpecker Aitz's brow twitched, and his mouth twisted. Upon closer inspection, he realized this big flag was actually two flags sewn together. The left trade balance flag was very formal, its origin unknown but likely stolen or robbed from some market. The right flag was high-quality fine cloth, with the bottom color actually painted with a Divine long snake, the flag stained with indelible blood.

"Hmm? This is the main flag of a City-State in the East, right? Does it depict a Tlaxcala Cloud Serpent or a Totonac Feathered Serpent? Let me think, the Feathered Serpent's feathers are tricolored, the Cloud Serpent is solid-colored... Eh? Where are the feathers on the flag? The distinctive feathers? Oh right! The feathers were physical attachments, definitely lost by you guys..."

"Banner bearer! What are you talking about? Snakes and feathers? ... You mentioned 'again'? ... Have you encountered other trading tribes? Impossible? This is the only trading station! Which soil dogs copied us?!"

The red-haired leader scratched his head, looking puzzled. But quickly, he stopped dwelling on it, his face lighting up with a simple and bright smile, like a wolf retracting its claws to smile foolishly.

"Praise the Chief Divine! Since you know, I won't elaborate. Here, too, we trade for that... good stuff! The flag team's mountain goods!"

Chapter 1352: A Prosperous Kingdom, the "Mountain Goods" of the Red-haired Canine Descendants

"Chief Divine! The sunset, how beautiful! Just like... uh... blood-red cocoa?..."

As evening approached, the red sun set over the distant hills, as if casting a blood-red glow on the pyramid, with an inexplicable sense of sanctity and peculiarity. At this moment, Woodpecker Aitz wanted to recite a poem, but couldn't think of an opening line. Similarly, as he looked at the pile of 'mountain goods' in front of him, he wanted to curse, but didn't know what to curse.

"Damn it! You call these 'mountain goods'?"

"Yeah! Chief Divine bears witness! This is the mountain goods from our fifteen flag brigades, tens of thousands of people! Just say it, aren't they good stuff?!"

Red-haired leader Mique raised his head and vigorously pounded his chest. His face was filled with a simple and honest smile. These 'mountain goods' were brought back by the Black Wolf Army, not sparing a thousand or two thousand li, from the Trascal Land, even the Totonac land. And every time they transported 'mountain goods,' more than a hundred elite red-haired warriors had to be mobilized, along with hundreds of trained militia!

After all, these were the hope of thousands of Guajili warriors in the army and the driving force for the warriors' fierce battles, and they had to be transported back to each flag brigade!

"Uh... Chief Divine! These... This is indeed good stuff! It's far superior to the previous small tribes... My God! These are?..."

Woodpecker Aitz squatted on the ground, eyes wide open, sifting through the 'mountain goods' in the baskets. He closely examined the piles of gold items, silverware, jade artifacts, gemstones, jewelry, ritual artifacts, and flashing things that dazzled his eyes in the tattered baskets. Yet, he still strained to open his eyes wide, trying hard to recognize different divine runes and carvings... His expression shifted from greed to amazement, finally erupting in an uncontrollable exclamation!

"Is this a gilded Feathered Serpent statue? Such a thin layer of gold? What's shining inside?... Ah! It's Obsidian Stone! To sculpt such a simple yet delicate face from the fragile Obsidian and then coat it with a thin layer of gold for reinforcement... Chief Divine! This must be the masterpiece of a great stone mason from Tlaxcala and a great goldsmith from Mistec working together for several months!..."

"Huh? A silver-inlaid skull ritual artifact? Half a skull made into a bowl, with a pool of black silver for the base, seemingly adding mercury as well. Right in the center is a pure, pigeon egg-sized turquoise symbolizing eternal life! This is an ancient God of Death belief! This half skull must have belonged to a highly powerful and esteemed Priest, possibly even the most noble Divine Descendant!... And look at these blackened bone divine runes, it's estimated to have been sculpted three or four hundred years ago!"

"And this! What is this?... A high-level sacrificial Feathered Serpent mask? Such an ancient design, a heavy gold base, gray ancient silver, and two bird egg-sized blue gemstones inlaid... This... could this be from the Toltec people? Ah! The ancient pattern on the back symbolizes a revered ancient ruler... It must be! A Holy Ritual Artifact passed down from the Toltec people! Divine! This thing must be at least seven hundred years old, just like the Alliance's High Priesthood Tlaloc mask!!"

Upon seeing these impossibly appearing Holy Ritual Artifacts, Woodpecker Aitz could no longer contain himself, his whole body trembling. He grabbed the red-haired leader's collar, almost shouting his questions.

"Divine! Ancestor! Damn it! Damn it!... Don't tell me that such top-level Heritage Ritual Artifacts are what you casually plunder from a Tlaxcallan Temple?..."

"Tell me! Where did these come from? Did you rob the Temple of the Feathered Serpent in Four Snake City, or did you plunder Cholula's Great Pyramid in the Holy City of Nava?!"

"Huh?! You know Four Snake City and the Holy City?... Praise Chief Divine! We've secretly sold so many times, finally encountering someone who knows the value!"

Hearing this, red-haired leader Mique was shocked, then gleefully laughed.

"I told you, dressed like a colorful turkey, looking like you're not much of a fighter... you must know a lot!..."

"Oh!... Chief Divine bears witness! You're right! These are the most precious mountain goods!... As for where they came from, it's all there!"

"What? It's all... there?!"

"Yeah! We've got some from those snake cities and some plundered from that Holy City as well! We've fought for two to three years, lost many warriors, killed even more samurai, and that's how we got these treasures! These are our rewards, that... um... Black Wolf Leader... 'bestowed' upon us!"

"Chief Divine! Truly... truly the Heritage Ritual Artifacts from Cholula in the Holy City?!"

Upon hearing this, Woodpecker Aitz stood there stunned. His face trembled violently, his heart pounding heavily. To people of this era, these legendary ritual artifacts were not just valuable relics, but divine artifacts possessing divinity!

"Divine Artifacts... Divine Artifacts being sold by the basket?!... Damn it! Only these barbarian children from the wilderness would treat heritage divine artifacts so casually... just throwing them in grass baskets, selling them by the roadside... Damn it!..."

"... I'm telling you! Us Guajili warriors always break the city first! The Black Wolf Leader is generous indeed; as long as we win battles, he's not overly concerned with us! The entire Black Wolf Army's fifteen large flag brigades and sixty small flag brigades' mountain goods are handed over to me for transport... so I can tell at a glance whether it's a good product! These few items are the absolute finest!"

Red-haired leader Mique smiled honestly, patting his chest warmly, then also warmly patted Woodpecker Aitz's arm, muttering all the while.

"I'm telling you! This station was newly built not long ago; each flag brigade's most difficult-to-sell treasures are placed here, hardly been picked over! When we encounter elite warriors of large groups that we can't beat, we don't even bother selling..."

"Friend, brother! You're one lucky guy, even bird droppings could land right in the middle of your forehead! Being able to come here, encounter us selling mountain goods, that's Chief Divine's blessing for you! Not to mention you're knowledgeable, missing this place means you'd never find another like it!"

"Ha?!... Another place? This kind of Heritage Ritual Artifact... meeting your group here, I bet I'll never forget it for my entire life!... Furthermore, such divine artifacts could never be identical..."

Woodpecker Aitz held his forehead, emotion fluctuating violently, unable to even squat properly. He simply sat on the ground, amidst the baskets full of ancient ritual artifacts, with a face of disbelief and vacant, scattered greed in his eyes.

"Chief Divine's blessing, Chief Divine's blessing! Let me recover, let me recover!..."

"Uh!... Chief Divine, this surely is someone who cannot fight... It's hardly a big deal, and he's already out of it!..."

Red-haired leader Mique helplessly scratched his neck, just standing there waiting for a while. During the wait, he pondered over the other's words, feeling that this person seemed quite knowledgeable about these treasures and seemingly came from a significant background... Hmm?!...

Actually, these mountain goods from various flag brigades naturally originated from the canine descendant warriors of the army who, after conquering City-States, secretly hoarded the spoils and transported them back from afar. Such clandestine hoarding of spoils in an army constantly at war could hardly be stopped.

Typically, accompanying War Priests would turn a blind eye. Especially in desperate siege battles, it has become an implicit rule for vanguard warriors to stash away a few spoils. But if things get too out of hand, if they hoard real treasures, and word gets out all over... Hmm...

"Eh! I'm still too simple, shouldn't have shown him the finest mountain goods immediately... But without his input, we wouldn't know the origins of these things!"

Red-haired leader Mique thought it over, then squinted, signaling to the surrounding Hunters. A group of simple red-haired Hunters exchanged knowing glances, like a wolf pack about to hunt, nodding slightly. If this Camp Commander who saw the real treasures ended up buying nothing, refusing to pull out forbidden military goods to bind them together... then they would have to sneakily shoot him with an arrow, kill him in the night!...

"Praise Chief Divine! So, friends, brothers! Have you recovered? Did anything or any mountain goods catch your eye?"

Red-haired leader grinned, holding Woodpecker Aitz by the arm, looking at the gradually focusing eyes, asking sincerely.

"Brother from the south! Chief Divine bears witness! We Guajili people hail from the simple wilderness; the goods are good, prices low, no more sincere than this! See anything you like, I'll wrap it up for you right away! If these few baskets aren't enough, we have plenty more in the cellar! Though those goods might be a bit inferior..."

Chapter 1353: The Prosperous Kingdom, Good Stuff, and a Big Deal!

"Chief Divine! This item of yours is truly... a splendid piece!..."

The setting sun casts its light, the flock of birds flies far away. The camp is cooking at the station, rising wisp of smoke. And at a corner around the station, Woodpecker Aitz rubs his forehead, revealing a wry smile on his face.

"It's just..."

"Just what?"

"It's just a bit too good... I'm afraid I can't quite handle it..."

Upon hearing this, the Red Hair leader Mique's eyes flickered. He squints again, grinning like a wolf and says.

"How strange! Who dislikes things for being too good... If you don't buy them, we'll sell them to someone else! Don't say we didn't give you a chance!!"

"Ah! Selling to others... ah! No!"

Upon hearing this, Woodpecker Aitz trembles inside, feeling as if he's about to lose something crucial. He didn't even catch the veiled threat in the Red Hair leader's words and quickly shouts.

"No! I want them! They're mine! Mine! I will buy!!"

"Haha! Should've said so earlier! No need to go the roundabout way... you Southern Tribes are just not as straightforward as us Wilderness Tribes!..."

Once hearing Aitz agreed, Red Hair leader Mique also breathes a sigh of relief. If they could trade happily, he didn't want to cause trouble within the Kingdom's borders. Not to mention the fact that there are so many Tribal Flag Teams around here! If some Military Merit Nobility's camp commander gets killed here, and the Kingdom seriously investigates, leading to thorough scrutiny... Can't flee with the flag team, right? No one wants to, and they won't make it anyway!

"Praise the Chief Divine! These years, it's all thanks to following the powerful God of Death Great Chief and the fierce Black Wolf Great Chief that everyone has had days unlike any before!... Being able to eat full meals, having food stored at home, not worrying about cold waves or spring famines... Living in wooden houses, everyone has a wife, and has had a bunch of kids... After the war, there were so many mountain goods to sell, good days are just beginning!"

Thinking of this, the Red Hair leader Mique surveyed Woodpecker Aitz, smiled earnestly, and asked warmly.

"Alright! Willing to buy mountain goods, then you are a brother to the tribes!... Brother, these premium goods, how many pieces do you want to buy? And those ordinary gold items, silverware, ritual artifacts, how many baskets do you want?!"

"Ah! Holy Ritual Artifacts, selling them by the basket..."

Woodpecker Aitz pursed his lips, feeling somewhat parched. He took a deep breath, his eyes still gleaming with inevitable greed. Among all the people here, perhaps only he knew the true value of these Holy Ritual Artifacts from the City State Temple!

"To those who understand, they are priceless treasures! Ah! I can't believe I've come to a day where I can own these heritage treasures!"

Woodpecker Aitz gritted his teeth, first stretching out a palm, then couldn't help but clench it into a fist.

"These premium goods, I want five pieces! No, that's wrong! I want them all!... As for ordinary mountain goods, I want to inspect them personally! Choose a few baskets one by one!"

"Whew! What did you say? You want them all?!"

Upon hearing this, Red Hair leader Mique showed surprise. He examined the brightly dressed 'Turkey' again, his eyes also exuding a simple yet greedy glow.

"Chief Divine as witness! Brother, you know these are quality items, priced fairly but not cheap! Especially so many, can you afford them? We don't do credit!"

"Uh... Just tell me how to trade, what do you accept?"

"Accept? We accept many things! So many flag teams, tens of thousands of people! Need plenty of stuff..."

Speaking of this, Red Hair leader Mique cleared his throat vigorously and recited loudly.

"Big items, used in the village, various pottery for holding water and things, stone tools for handling grains, wooden tools for home placement, farming implements for planting and cultivating, metal axes for cutting trees and timber, stone, bronze, and iron tools for making things... We need these kinds, pay extra for them!"

"Mid-sized items, for eating, wearing, and using, such as cloth, clothes, cocoa beans, smoked meat, smoked fish, grains, oil, salt... all priced according to market rates, needed in large quantities. Actually, we dislike going to the market to trade, they know we are simple, always trying to buy at low prices and sell high, even selling defective items... This gets us riled up! We have dealt with several heartless merchants!"

"Oh, a bit off-topic! Also, small items, exchanging goods of value. We're uncertain of these items' value, generally, we don't accept them. But Lake Gems can be accepted, these can be sold everywhere and also used in military areas! However, prices we pay aren't high, because for the past two years, Lake Gem prices have been dropping. Some say it's because of the Great Chief's use of mana, turning stones into gems..."

"Oh right! I remembered again! The tribes on the wilderness only know how to handle fur, make smoked meat, put up shelters and such. As for farming now, priests have come to teach us, and we're also learning. But as for making things, weaving, building houses and such, we're really not very good at it!... If you can get craftsmen to teach us, that would be even better!"

Red-haired leader Mique rambled on, saying a lot. Judging by how familiar he was with it, it was clear he had thought about this for a long time and had carefully remembered it. It's unclear if anyone taught him.

"Oh Chief Divine! These tribal flag teams have so many things they need? Hmm... It seems like our Capital Region's military merit manors can provide most of it... Many manors also have carpenters, stone masons, they make things themselves..."

Woodpecker Aitz sat on the ground, eyes flickering constantly, thinking rapidly. Perhaps sitting among the "divine artifacts" gave him an added boost of wisdom. He suddenly sharply realized that the huge demand of these tribal flag teams, the bulk need for tools, grain, cloth, can perfectly align with the output of the Capital Region's military merit manors! The biggest shortage originally was the lack of currency for the flag teams, but now it just so happens those "expensive" "mountain goods" can fill the gap!

"Oh Chief Divine! I also saw that newly settled tribal flag team yesterday. That village was so poor, it was lacking almost everything. And those Guajili flag teams that have fought wars for a few years, even though their village looked much better, the things they need to add, they're only going to need more!"

"Because, with wooden houses, stored grain, new children... these Canine Descendants tribes not only need to eat and survive anymore, but they're thinking about living a better life!... Ah! Isn't this the question I was thinking about before, how can the tribal flag teams become villages for civilian settlers? Turns out, the solution is here, we have to let them live well!..."

"Chief Divine witnesses! I truly am a born sage! Why didn't I go to become a priest back then? It was truly such a waste! Wasting my wisdom, and wasting these precious heritage ritual artifacts... my sacred artifact..."

Thinking of this, Woodpecker Aitz felt a slight pang of regret for himself for a moment. Subsequently, he regained his spirits and his face revealed a hopeful expression.

"Tsk ts! These Canine Descendants tribes, they don't understand the value of these mountain goods, but I do, and the military merit nobility from the Capital Region will certainly know too! Each family has just been promoted, many emerged from commoner samurais, they have no heritage artifacts at all. But even though they don't have them in their hands, they've seen with their eyes, seen those behaviors of the Great Nobility, seen all kinds of ancient ritual artifacts, and they don't know how much they've always envied..."

"And now, isn't the opportunity here? Compared to these old ritual artifacts coming from the Holy City of Cholula, from the four Snake Cities, what are the ordinary Great Nobility's in possession of? Even the Great Nobility of the League Lake Capital City would be envious and want them! Haha!..."

"In that case! I'll collect mountain goods from here, and sell them to the Capital Region; then from the Capital Region, collect grain, cloth, tools and sell them here... the reward, the profits, the status and reputation! My Chief Divine!"

Woodpecker Aitz was lost in thought for a long time, his face going through various expressions. Only today did he discover that between the plundering tribal flag teams and the farming military merit nobility, there was such a huge and complementary demand! And as long as he grasped this channel of trade, connecting both sides together...

"Who should be tasked with this big matter?... Ah! It won't do! I must return from my western expedition early and personally handle this major matter! As to right now..."

Woodpecker Aitz looked up and saw red-haired leader Mique squinting his eyes, observing him intently. Around him, the red-haired hunters were also gathered, like a pack of wild dogs eyeing their prey.

"Friend, were you listening seriously to what I said? Are you genuinely sincere about wanting to trade?"

"Chief Divine as my witness! Certainly! Absolutely!!"

Woodpecker Aitz extended his hand and grabbed the red-haired leader's arm tightly. He grasped with such force that Mique's eyebrow twitched.

"I not only want to trade with you once, but many times! Since Chief Divine blesses me to have met you, then we must go big!..."

"Huh? Go big?"

Upon hearing this, red-haired leader Mique paused, his face showing a simple smile of understanding.

"Good! Really good! Brother, you are truly smart! I hadn't even mentioned it, and you've already guessed it!..."

"That's right! Today, you want these top goods. We'll give them to you, take them all! And we also want some useful goods from you... This way, what's it called? Oh! Dung beetle rolling dung balls, we stink together... oh no, but that's the idea!... Just let everyone be at ease!..."

"Chief Divine! What? Rolling dung balls together? Stink together?"

Hearing this, Woodpecker Aitz blinked his eyes, suddenly having a bad premonition. He looked around, and his trusted aides seemed a bit far away. Within three steps of him, seven or eight fierce red-haired hunters had surrounded him, all wearing leather armor, their hands resting on bronze axes.

"Uh? You... the big deal you're talking about... what do you want to exchange for these ritual artifacts? Be clear..."

"Ah! Didn't I make it clear just now? I thought you understood?"

Red-haired leader Mique scratched his head in confusion, instinctively patting down the sharp bronze axe at his waist with a forceful hand.

"Of course, it's the official military supplies of your camp that you have with you, carried by the civilians under your command..."

Chapter 1354: The Prosperous Kingdom, the Blood of War, and the Vast Craftsman Camp

"The kingdom's official military goods?... Great Chief Divine! You want me to smuggle military supplies?!"

"Shh! Chief Divine bless us! Keep it down, it's not smuggling. If it's sent down to your camp, isn't it yours? You give me your things, and I'll give you ours. That's called, oh, cooperation! Military cooperation!... We all understand, according to military rules, every camp has two or three tenths of weapons in reserve. These losses were originally normal..."

"Reserve weapons... hmm... the equipment we just received does indeed have a four-tenths reserve..."

"Great! Four-tenths? Wow, the new army from the Capital City sure is generous! When we formed the army back then, we didn't have so much... A thousand-man camp has five companies, a four-tenths reserve means there's two more companies... That will help us a lot!"

Red-haired leader Mique counted on his fingers and showed a sincere smile on his face. He forcefully patted the other's shoulder, affectionately and with a hint of threat, said.

"Brother! You are going to the Chapala Lake Region in the west for war, and we are in a hurry to exchange weapons for the thousands of able-bodied men in the tribal flag teams who are following the 'Divine Monkey' Great Chief to fight in the west. They are conscripted tribal soldiers, and need to bring their own weapons, which are always somewhat lacking and certainly not as good as those made by the Capital City craftsmen. If you exchange your weapons with us, these flag teams will remember your favor. Even if people find out, just don't mention this mountain business, it's simply normal... oh, support! Supporting allied forces!"

"It's all for fighting for the God of Death Great Chief, whoever gets the equipment uses it. Our Guajili Tribe has shed much blood for the kingdom, everyone sends men to war... We all know that in war, anything can happen, and you always need help, right? That Feather Prince has quite an army, and now they have the Greatbow, their archery is formidable! When the time comes, with our flag team's able-bodied men backing you up, it'll be easier for you to earn merits and seize good things!..."

The sun set into the west, where the rolling mountains lie and the distant Lerma River stretches. The tribal flag team's villages are hidden in the shadows of the mountains, extending with the rivers in the mountains.

At this moment, Woodpecker Aitz stood atop the hill, able to clearly see the fields, forests, and Cuitzeo Lake under the setting sun. He observed the distant cooking smoke, paler, thicker, and whiter on the plains. That's from the village using corn stalks left over from the autumn harvest for cooking, which produces white smoke. The smoke among the mountains is darker, finer, and blacker. Because the flag team villages in the mountains use wooden branches for cooking, the smoke is much denser but less in quantity, as firewood is hard to come by.

This subtle difference in cooking smoke is hard for ordinary people to distinguish, but to seasoned warriors experienced in battles, it's extremely distinct. They can usually gauge the scale of the enemy

from the amount of smoke. And in this Rivermouth County's forest valleys, the amount of smoke indicates that the settled tribes are indeed numerous, even numbering in the tens of thousands!

"Just the Guajili Tribe alone has more than ten large flag teams, tens of thousands of people, all settled in this area, connected through kinship... And now this group of one to two hundred red-haired elites, all veterans well accustomed to battles... I'm afraid it's not something my archer camp could manage to fight off!... Moreover... these sacred ritual artifacts... I really do want them!!..."

Thinking this, Woodpecker Aitz looked around at the circle of onlookers, their simple and nervous smiles, with faintly threatening actions... He gritted his teeth heavily and spoke in a low voice.

"Chief Divine as witness! What exactly do you want? I can... spare some, to... support our allies!"

"Praise Chief Divine! Great! Brother! Good brother!..."

Red-haired leader Mique excitedly rubbed his hands. He glanced around again, the post station was cooking, and the Tlaxcalan bowmen were obediently gathered in the post station, waiting for dinner to be ready, none dared approach to watch the leaders' discussion. Their longbows had their strings removed and were stored in twenty-man squads, their paper armor also taken off.

Meanwhile, the roughly two hundred red-haired hunters were fully armed, vaguely surrounding the bowmen. This cautious vigilance, the tribal bowmen had grown accustomed to throughout their journey here. However, what they didn't know was that the red-haired hunters here were truly willing to make a move.

"Divine Chief witness! You are the archer camp of the tribe, and this is also the reason we decided to stop you after our discussion!"

The red-haired leader, Mique, scratched his head and gave a simple-hearted smile.

"Your items are just perfect for our flag team's able-bodied men to use for archery practice! And these things, unlike Copper Armor, large crossbows, or even Hardwood Great Bows, are not conspicuous at all... Oh! It doesn't matter about the others, mainly it's the bow, arrows, and spear! If there are extra

Leather Armors, we also want them. Especially the ones with a coating, not those Paper Armors that only last half a year and are useless in the rainy season..."

"Divine Chief witness! The bamboo longbows from the Capital City's craftsman camp have the Priest's divine power blessing, and they work wonderfully! But the ones we make ourselves are less forceful and tend to break easily. We've looked closely, and besides excellent craftsmanship and materials, it seems that those made by the craftsman camp are also coated with some sort of stuff, oily... like resin, also like paint, and feels a bit like wax, presumably a mixed coating, something we've never seen before!..."

"Besides these, the best is the Hardwood Long Copper Arrow from the craftsman camp! We all call it the 'Murderous Arrow'! Making such good arrows is labor-intensive. The old hardwood needs to be processed and carefully carved uniformly, and it needs to have excellent arrow fletching... It requires specialized craftsmen and tools to produce them in large quantities, which makes it convenient. Doing it individually is too laborious... When we fought in the East, to save resources, we rarely used these large arrows unless we encountered hardened Warriors... They're too wasteful and there's no need to shoot that fiercely... We usually used Bone Arrows with luwei stalks or softwood shafts, half draw is enough!..."

"As for the final Copper Spear, it's mainly about the wooden shaft! Those made by the craftsman camp are generally top-notch with oak, walnut, and heartwood, far sturdier and durable; they probably soaked it in oil. If tribal archers reach a point where they use spears in combat, it's life or death with a single strike, it must not break!... We actually save quite a few copper spearheads from each battle... Now, each village at Rivermouth can assemble a few dozen Copper Spears. But the wood is actually not good; if you stab someone with force, it snaps easily if it gets stuck on bone..."

"Divine Chief bless! You're right! The arms coming from the Capital City's craftsman camp are indeed the best!..."

Listening to the tales of this seasoned veteran, Woodpecker Aitz wholeheartedly agreed. In fact, since he had always been in the Capital City and was a military merit nobility from the Holy City, he knew far more than the red-haired leader standing before him.

Everything in the Kingdom is for the sake of war, and as the producer of weaponry, the craftsman camp naturally becomes one of the most important institutions of the Kingdom. Nominally under the direct management of Xiulote, Your Majesty, it is actually grasped by the Divine Revelation Director Talaya, who can prioritize all resources to produce the finest weaponry with the best technology and materials!

In recent years, the craftsman camp has expanded into a massive organization with one or two thousand official craftsmen, thousands of apprentices, and tens of thousands of civilian laborers! It can produce bronze Cloth Armor, bronze cannons, and various bow and crossbow, arrows, axe and spear, and Cotton Armor in large quantities, supporting and maintaining the Kingdom's eight armies! It's safe to say, half of the citizens of the Qinchongcan Capital directly or indirectly serve the craftsman camp. And the large smelting sites around the Capital City, with their endless rise of black smoke day and night, are a true reflection of the Divine Revelation branch's real power!

"The Kingdom is founded on agriculture and warfare, and military equipment is the lifeblood of war. The Capital City's craftsman camp is thus extremely rewarded, and penalized harshly! The status of craftsmen is second only to Samurai, and far above merchants and farmers. Military equipment craftsmen in the craftsman camp are directly under the Kingdom, a level higher!"

"The Kingdom's craftsman levels are divided into four levels: apprentice, ordinary, senior, and Master, each with upper and lower ranks. The core senior craftsmen are equivalent to the veteran warriors of the Kingdom. As for the rare Craftsman Masters, they are akin to military merit nobility! They might even be inducted by the Divine Revelation Place, becoming an honored Divine Revelation Priest..."

Thinking of this, Woodpecker Aitz licked his lips, his face showing anticipation. Although he was a military merit nobility, he did not let his young brother serve in the military and carve a path on the battlefield... Instead, he sent him to the craftsman camp, where he is now a Second Level ordinary craftsman. He never expected the other to become a Craftsman Master; as long as he endured another ten years without error and smoothly became a senior craftsman, it would be enough to support the family to live a decent life!

"Of course, the Divine Revelation Place values creativity and new technology, always providing substantial rewards!... If favored with divine grace, and can invent or improve any craft... the promotion time will be greatly shortened! Just like the ordinary craftsman who researched the bow and arrow coating a year or two ago, she suddenly became a Craftsman Master! It's said that he was personally rewarded with estates and fields by Director Talaya on behalf of His Highness, and was allowed to independently form a dedicated craftsman group for researching and manufacturing coatings, able to recruit apprentices... even the young brother was envious..."

"Earlier this year, my young brother mentioned that this coating can not only strengthen bows and crossbows but also Leather Armor, making the Leather Armor several times tougher! Although the specific formula and procedure are top secrets, it should involve resin, paint, wax, some difficult hot and cold processes... and most especially, rubber!... Coincidentally, rubber forests have been planted around the Capital City..."

"And the name of this coating was personally named by the esteemed Director Talaya, calling it Olmec Coating!... It's the name of the Jiao people's ancestors, and it's truly an honor!... Under the attention of the ancestors of various tribes, we are destined to unify all tribes under heaven and reshape the descendants of the Jiao people!..."

Chapter 1355: The Prosperous Kingdom, Memories of the Wilderness, and the Future of the Tribal Flag Team!

"Brother, two hundred bamboo longbows, two thousand hardwood arrows, three hundred copper spears... Is this really all you can muster? Didn't you have some... 40% reserve?"

"Red-haired tribal brother, this truly is my utmost sincerity! Heading west this time, no telling how long the battles will last; I must keep half the weapons in reserve, right?"

Woodpecker Aitz wore a wry smile, clutching the Chief God's Amulet at his neck, solemnly taking an oath.

"Witnessed by the Chief Divine! I truly can only spare this much weaponry! I can also provide ten sets of leather armor, all personal assets from my manor. I think these should be enough to exchange for those top-grade mountain goods, plus a few baskets of common goods."

"Well... our Wilderness Tribes never mistreat brothers, we're quite fair in our deals!"

Red-haired leader Mique rubbed his chin, pondering. Remembering Aitz's previous emotional expression, he decided to double the price of the initially agreed top-tier mountain goods.

"Ten top-tier mountain goods, all acquired from that Holy City Temple, will be exchanged for your two hundred bows, two thousand arrows! As for three hundred copper spears, you yourself can go to the cellar and pick ordinary mountain goods, gold, silver, jade, any will do, fill up three baskets... oh, take four baskets away!"

Saying this, red-haired leader Mique tilted his head, guiltily glancing at Woodpecker Aitz. The flamboyant "Turkey" instantly breathed heavily, his voice even trembled slightly.

"Ten pieces? Exchange for ten divine artifacts? Are you sure?!"

"Uh..."

Red-haired leader Mique touched his nose, suddenly a bit regretful. If he had known, he would have doubled the price again. But credit to this guy for recognizing quality and having money. Previously ten bows and a hundred arrows were considered expensive by passing squads of guards...

"Witnessed by the Chief Divine! We red-haired warriors are true to their word!... The best goods, these ten prime items, will be yours tonight!"

"Great! Great! Just like that, just like that! No need to wait until night... As soon as it gets dark, I'll send someone to deliver the weapons, right in your cellar for the trade!"

Woodpecker Aitz scratched his hand excitedly, his heart burning with urgency. He greedily gazed at the precious ritual artifacts in front, especially the "Feathered Serpent Mask" from the Toltec era, his face almost breaking into a grin.

"Haha! You are mine... mine!"

Witnessing Aitz's unsettling silly grin, red-haired leader Mique smirked, subtly stepping back a pace. Why this guy was overjoyed was unclear; shouldn't this be a win for himself? Clearly a sure-fire victory!...

"Haha!"

The win-win trade accomplished, the two shared a hearty laugh, then looked at each other more amicably. Red-haired leader Mique gestured invitingly, asking Woodpecker Aitz to dine at the inn; Aitz joyfully agreed. Before moving, he pondered and solemnly extended his own invitation.

"Red-haired tribal brother, such trade can be done more often in the future! We've exchanged military goods, and now we're like ants on a snail's back!... Actually, I have many friends in the Capital Region, all military merit nobility of the Kingdom, owning large estates and numerous agricultural slaves, while I

myself have a manor... your tribal flag team needs large and medium goods, food, and supplies... we produce them all!"

"Once tonight's trade completes, I'll arrange a few trusted aides to take these mountain goods back to my manor... But I don't have many reliable men, must reserve them to lead this camp! If you trust me, send a few people to help transport goods, and visit my manor! I have a clan brother guarding at home; henceforth, don't set up stalls at the inn, too conspicuous!... Leave it to me, I'll help you sell! The price will surely surpass your expectations, much higher!"

Upon hearing Aitz's words, red-haired leader Mique blinked uncertainly at his intentions. Was this guy planning to lure his brothers to his territory and then betray them? But soon, he agreed cheerfully, for if any flag team people perished, they'd demand life for life...

"Powerful Chief Divine as witness! Okay, brother! We will send some to help you transport the goods home! As for that estate you mentioned, we'll take a look... If the prices are good, future mountain goods from the army can all be entrusted to you!"

"Then it's settled! By the way, according to your wilderness tradition, shouldn't we seal it with a blood oath?"

"Uh? You want to swear a blood oath with me? Are you sure?"

Red-haired leader Mique was surprised, looking at the knowledgeable but not formidable Aitz, showing seriousness for the first time.

"Brother! Ancestors bear witness! If the blood oath is broken... there'll be no rest till death..."

"Of course! Since we're doing something major, trust is paramount! Come, I'll swear a blood-bond with you, becoming true brothers! Betrayers will have their souls fall into the abyss, devoured by wolves after death!"

"Great! Truly great! Bring the stone knife! While there's still sunlight, let's do it here!"

The setting sun falls into the mountains and rivers, taking away the last of the brightness and light. A solemn and brief blood oath ceremony is quietly completed in the corner of the station. Woodpecker Aitz has his palm wrapped in white cloth, vaguely revealing some blood-red. Beside him, the red-haired leader Mique is the same. Afterwards, the two intimately walk shoulder to shoulder into the central longhouse of the station, calling upon tribesmen and trusted aides, gathering together to talk, laugh, eat, and drink.

"Come! Brother Woodpecker, this is the stationmaster, also known as Samurai from our retired Black Wolf Army, Ancestor Sand!"

The red-haired leader Mique is holding a bowl of wine, dragging a tall red-haired hunter over with force. This red-haired hunter is quite strong, covered in scars on his face and body, but he has a limp and cannot walk quickly.

"What? Stationmaster? What's his name? Ancestor Sand?"

Woodpecker Aitz gulps down fruit wine and eats stewed goose meat in large chunks. He cannot hold his liquor; even after drinking a little, his face turns red, and his tongue gets heavier.

"Hic! There's someone actually named Sand?"

"Of course! It's such a common name, the wilderness is full of sand... When he was a few years old, he encountered a severe cold wave. The entire tribe migrated during the cold wave, but ran into a sandfield without food and firewood, and all froze to death... Our tribe had no food either, but survived a bit longer, so we had something to eat..."

The red-haired leader Mique is drunkenly babbling on, revealing everything without a filter.

"The elders of the tribe said that when the able-bodied went to collect corpses, they found this child, tough and still breathing... They fed him meat broth, and hey! He survived!... Because he was found in the sandfield, he's called Ancestor Sand, the Ancestor's Sand..."

"Later on, he was indeed tough! When we headed south, fought so many battles, he charged ahead every time and never died. The tribal priest said that he had a tribal ancestor spirit protecting him, and

whenever he was about to die, an ancestor would replace him to die. But when his leg failed, it meant the ancestor was telling him, you're not protected anymore, cannot charge anymore, if you charge again, you're just going to die!..."

"Sure enough, after surrendering to the Great Chief, we fought the Tekos people in the south, the Tlaxcala people in the east, the Mistec people in the southeast, and even further east the Totonac people... So many battles and never injured. But at Five Mountains City, during the campaign against the rebellious Seaside Tribes in the rear, he was hit in the ankle and became lame!... Nothing to say, the leg failed, couldn't keep up with the army march, so he could only retire!... But guarding this station, not worrying about food and drink, I think it's quite nice..."

"Get out of here! Nice? What's nice about it!"

Hearing this, Ancestor Sand, who had been sulking, couldn't hold back anymore. He stamped his lame leg hard, cursing irritably.

"The ancestors watch over me, yet I can't face them! I ran my whole life, fought so many battles, yet didn't die on the battlefield, but instead returned lame?! This land wolf can't run anymore, nor can hunt, every day just guarding a room, even going to a forest is tough... I've never seen such a cripple in the wilderness! What's the point of living like this?"

"Hey! Sand, you're not happy to be alive? So many brothers died in battle, only you survived, that's all arranged by the ancestors! The tribal priest prophesied it for you long ago..."

The red-haired leader Mique is drunk, shouting laughingly with a loud voice.

"Don't complain! If it were on the wilderness, you wouldn't survive even if you wanted to! But here, everyone settled down, nothing lacking, you can't die even if you want to... Just stay peaceably in this station! Maybe you'll live longer than us... Oh! Remember to teach your archery skills to those new flag team youngsters... Now these little guys, life is better, they even have specialized hunting bows, but their archery is poor... So close to the target, not moving, and they still can't hit it!..."

"Think back to our childhood, with broken bows and broken arrows, not knowing why but could hit it! Throw a cactus fruit into the sky, could hit it three times before it fell!... I see that these new useless kids might just have to carry farm tools and become farmers..."

Hearing this, the lame Ancestor Sand let out a long sigh, the scars on his face trembling. He downed a cup of wine and took several gulps of goose broth, shaking his head vigorously.

"Isn't that so! With more food, everyone is like in the wilderness, desperately having children. More and more flag team kids, just in a few years, a bunch born! On the wilderness it was four born, three died, only the strongest survived... Here it's a good place, most can survive, but their courage and skills are evidently lacking... At least they learn to farm faster than we did..."

"Back then, when we were eight or nine, a few of us with broken bows and stone knives would go find an old wolf separated from the pack... following for days, then hunting and killing, skinning them, eating half-raw meat! Sizzling, eating with faces full of blood..."

"Hey! When you mention wolf hunting, I remember too! That time, I was starved for four days before I got meat, not even cooked, but tasted so good!... Now the tribe isn't short of food, but never tasted anything so savory again..."

The two middle-aged red-haired hunters drank wine, drunkenly recalling the wilderness memories. Their expressions were sometimes wistful, sometimes laughing, just no tears. Woodpecker Aitz sat beside, warming by the campfire, quietly listening.

He listened to the tribe's past, hardships he never imagined even in dreams. He also listened to the tribe's present, which the two red-haired hunters never imagined in childhood, this abundance.

As for the tribe's future? No one can say for certain right now. But Woodpecker Aitz feels, one day these wilderness tribes full of wildness will fully settle down, like those lively Prepetcha civilian settlements, never to distinguish between each other again.

"Thorough vitality, things competing to emerge... The first generation of settled tribal flag teams are like wolves roaming the wilderness for decades, not possible to be tame and obedient... But the newborn pups will grow up in the village, under the guidance of village priests... In a few generations, they will assimilate with the citizens of the kingdom, wholeheartedly converting to the Chief Divine!... And the descendants of Jiao people will also thrive under constant expansion..."

"Perhaps, that is the future of the tribal flag teams!..."

Chapter 1356: A Prosperous Kingdom, a Prosperous Poem, the Realm of Taixia!

"Burp! Brothers of the... tribes, this... this wilderness life is too... too tough!..."

As night deepened, everyone drank heavily and was somewhat woozy. Zusa, with his limp leg, gulped down his drink and was the first to lay down, snoring beside the fire pit. Woodpecker Aitz's stuttering speech showed he was not far from being drunk either.

"Isn't it just that! Thinking back now, I don't know how I lived through those twenty years. The tribe was like a pack of wolves, running around the wilderness, chasing after food..."

Red-haired leader Mique downed another bowl of wine. He shook his head, savoring the sweet yet tart flavor of the fruit wine, with an indescribable feeling on his face.

"Brother! Do you know what my name, Mique, means?"

"What... what is it?"

"It's Mesquite, Mesquite! You don't know? It's a type of tree in the wilderness that bears a bean pod. That thing is very bitter, eating too much of it hurts your stomach, but it's edible, and one tree bears many! We used to gather these pods as summer rations. Haha! This stuff had to be fought over, many tribes would compete for it, even using long spears and stone axes..."

Speaking of this, red-haired leader Mique shook his head and laughed.

"Hey! Don't laugh, before we went south to the Otomi people's place, I hadn't even eaten corn, didn't know what corn was... I first went at Old Corn raw, and my teeth hurt... Burp!"

"Chief Divine! Eating raw Old Corn! You're... you're something! Brothers of the... tribe, I... drink a bowl to you!"

Woodpecker Aitz shouted in surprise, laughing and toasting two more bowls. His face was flushed, but he just wouldn't fall. Red-haired leader Mique, on the other hand, was swaying, high on interest, and downed another bowl, shouting loudly.

"Praise the mighty Chief Divine! Praise the God of Death Great Chief! Praise the Black Wolf Great Chief! We follow the chieftains, defeating one enemy tribe after another, living days we never dared to imagine! Haha!"

"Yes! Praise the Chief Divine! Praise His Highness!... The Kingdom is invincible, prosperity belongs to us! Haha!..."

The two drunkards, fully into their cups, shouted with joy. Other red-haired hunters and the Kingdom's Warriors also joined in, loudly praising the Chief Divine, His Highness, and victorious warfare!...

"Ho ho ho!..."

After a while, red-haired leader Mique finally stopped. He fumbled around in his pouch and pulled out a piece of green jade, generously handing it to Woodpecker Aitz.

"Brother, for you! We are kindred spirits, it's... my gift to you!"

"Uh? What... what is this?"

"This is from the eastern coast, Totonac people's, from the Maya's fine jade! Before we brought back mountain goods, we slaughtered a few eastern something Snake Priests... I thought the serpent carvings were beautiful, so I pocketed them and kept them all this time!... This piece is for you!"

"Maya's... fine jade? Wow! The feel of this jade seems... aged, it's an antique... an ancient artifact!"

Woodpecker Aitz touched his head, picking up the green jade by the firelight, his drunken eyes wide open to admire it. Indeed, the clarity of this piece of jade was excellent, transparent and beautiful, with lifelike designs carved into it. Such a hard jade could only be carved bit by bit using jade sand and primitive tools, requiring tremendous effort and a skilled jade craftsman master!

"A coiling serpent around a pillar reaching up to the heavens, surrounded by worshipers... uh? What's this mark? A city-state? An ancient Maya city-state?..."

Woodpecker Aitz held the ancient jade from Totonac land, scrutinizing it for a long time but couldn't discern anything.

He didn't know that this jade came from Quiriguá, an ancient city of the Maya. Nor did he know that this Honduran city-state was more than three thousand li from the Kingdom of the Lake, an important ancient city-state in the southern Maya highlands, as well as the trade limit of Hidden Serpent Holy City...

He simply played with the ancient jade for a while, casually tucking it into his pocket. At the moment, his thoughts were focused on the Feathered Serpent mask from Cholula Holy City!

"Brother... it's about time... no more drinking!... Let's... trade!"

"Burp! What? Now?"

"Yes! I can't wait... I want that mask..."

"Then go get it yourself! I'm going to sleep for a bit... let's trade in the morning..."

"Fine!..."

Soon, Woodpecker Aitz staggered out. By the time he hugged the Feathered Serpent mask tight and returned, the longhouse was filled with calls. He found a warm corner, leaned lazily against the wall, and kept examining the ancient Feathered Serpent mask, unable to get enough of it.

"Haha! A Supreme High Priest-level inherited divine artifact!... Now it's mine! Mine! Ahaha!..."

Woodpecker Aitz laughed heartily, staring at the ancient divine object in his hands, a sudden surge of unspeakable inspiration!

He recalled the sights of his journey, the impoverished tribal flag teams just settled and those affluent ones settled for years... He thought of these wilderness tribes settling from hardships of the wilderness to the kingdom's stable mountain forest; from the warriors marching yearly to the descendants turning to the fields...

"Thus, tribal flag teams participate in warfare, sell prisoners and spoils of war, exchanging for weapons armor and goods needed for village settlements... They plunder through warfare seeking better settled lives, gradually transforming into rural village communities... This is the kingdom's prosperous tribal trade arising from the prosperity of warfare!..."

"And this tribal prosperity resembles what? Like... like fertilizer! They fight for the kingdom, expanding for the kingdom with their lives! They nourish everything and can grow into leaves, even beautiful flowers... But if the fertilizer isn't well-managed, lacks room for plunder and trade, doesn't advance into steady settlement, it may bring danger, even burn out the kingdom's flowers and leaves... Only a wise and mighty Divine King can solidly rule them!"

"Then, this poem of prosperity should be..."

Woodpecker Aitz's thoughts surged, an unexplainable sense of nostalgia flowing into his heart, transforming into verses he recited!

"A Warrior's manor blooms like flowers upon the Capital Region's Lake Patzcuaro, just like the finest Chinampa!... Praise the Chief Divine and the King!"

"The barns of the villagers span like green leaves across vast fields. They are filled with bountiful harvests, just like incense burners filled with pine resin!... Praise the Chief Divine and the King!"

"The tribal camps flow like fertilizer, from the mountain forests to the farmlands. They run with blood, expanding life, letting leaves and flowers flourish! They must be spread over new lands, continuously nurturing new vitality, only a true King can rule them!... Praise the Chief Divine and the King!"

Woodpecker Aitz recited this prosperous poem generously while resting in the tribe's longhouse. He savored this creation meant for His Highness, the more he thought, the more he felt he wrote it superbly!

"Hmm... The kingdom poem still needs a name... what should it be called?"

Woodpecker Aitz looked up, through the longhouse's opening, gazing at the high-hanging moon in the night sky. He slowly extended his hand, placing the ancient sacred mask on his face. At that moment, he seemed possessed by the dignified Supreme High Priest, even his voice became profound and solemn.

"This poem will be called... Realm of the Divine King!..."

"No, no, that's not right! Divine King is how King Aweit calls himself! But I'm speaking of His Highness..."

"Hmm... The meaning of 'King' is 'Summer'! His Highness has a sword called 'Divine Summer', so it will be... Realm of Divine Summer!..."

"No, still not good! The King used the word 'Divine', His Highness can't use it, especially at this time... 'Divine', it means supreme, immensely powerful... Got it! It will be 'Tai'! 'Tai Summer'!"

"Good! This term is good! I've decided! His Highness's honorific will be 'Tai Summer'! Haha!"

Woodpecker Aitz, wearing the ancient sacred mask, thought like a true Supreme High Priest. He came up with this brilliant title, excitedly gazing at the river of stars, shouting loudly.

"Chief Divine bears witness! This poem of prosperity tells of the great Kingdom of the Lake, which is His Highness's fief, also known as the 'Tai Summer's Realm'!"

"Ahaha! Tai Summer's Realm! His Highness will definitely like it!... I am truly a born poet and sage!"

Chapter 1357: Blood Sacrifice of the Divine Descendant, Dedicated to the Chief Divine!

The morning light rises from the eastern hills, much like it emerges from the distant Great River. The song of various birds fills the surrounding mountain forests, searching for early-rising insects.

At this time, the tribal post station is both quiet and full of vitality. An open-air kitchen has a fire pit burning, and dozens of tribal teams are carrying baskets of food, preparing breakfast for over a thousand people. The food they are making is the simplest yet most filling: corn cakes, pumpkin porridge, and bean paste.

Among the transporting and busy tribespeople, a group of Red Hair Hunters and several Samurai from the Capital Region are also discreetly moving items, coming and going in a secret cellar. When all the covert transactions are complete, the leaders of both sides, Woodpecker Aitz and Red Hair Leader Mique, warmly bump shoulders. At this moment, they look at each other like true brothers.

"Brother Woodpecker! This westward expedition is meant to completely take down that Feather Great Chief! And that Great Chief, the tribal teams have fought with him several times... He's a Divinely Descended of some bird god, faster than anyone else!"

Red Hair Leader Mique grins as he reminds his newly acquainted good brother.

"So, I reckon you guys won't have a particularly tough battle this time, but you should expect to travel a long way! If you want to finish and return, it'll take quite a while!"

"Ha! No matter what kind of Divine Eagle Descendant the Feather Prince is, with the kingdom's two armies pressing, he will only face the outcome of obediently offering sacrifices!"

Hearing the reminder from the Red Hair leader, Woodpecker Aitz isn't too concerned. He is aware of the power of the kingdom's God of Thunder's mortar cannons, and this time, there are a full eight cannons on the northward march! He reckons that in the Chapala Lake Region in the northwest, there is simply no City-State that can resist!

"Right! That... hmm... brother of the tribe's pasture bean tree! Remember to send someone, together with my trusted aides, to meet the steward brother at my manor in the Capital Region! Chief Divine's blessing! Our future business will be big and expansive!"

"Good! Rest assured, I understand! Chief Divine's blessing! Feel at ease on your journey!"

The morning sun rises gradually, and the archers' camp of Tlaxcala sets off once more. As the group marches on the hills, they can already see the Rivermouth County town distantly at the skyline, but once they descend the hills, it disappears from view.

"Quick! Quick! Hurry up! By noon today, the Grand Festival will start!"

Woodpecker Aitz urges, personally carrying the great banner at the forefront. Fortunately, after descending the primary earthen road of the hills to the plain, there's a paved secondary county road, allowing for a light jog. After running for several quarters, the Red Hair scouts dispatched by Rivermouth County encounter the marching camp. Then, under the scouts' guidance, the archers' camp finally arrives at the field outside the county town before noon, where the Grand Festival is held!

Outside the field, a seven or eight-meter-high wooden ceremonial platform already stands, with the Sacred Fire blazing. And the eight-thousand-strong army of Long Spears, four-thousand conscripted Canine Descendants Tribes soldiers, three-thousand village militia transporting grain, and these one-thousand tribal archers from Tlaxcala... together form a force of two corps, a large army of sixteen thousand!

"Eh! For this westward expedition, the northern main force only conscripted three-thousand village militia for transporting grain? It seems with the downstream grain transport along the Lerma River, sustaining the logistics has indeed become much more convenient..."

Woodpecker Aitz ponders this while also observing two other thousand-man camps from the Alliance around the platform.

The first camp wears leather armor, thin and lean, with a compact build. There are many strong female warriors in the camp, and even the leading chieftain is a female warrior wielding a long spear. Woodpecker Aitz thinks for a moment and deduces that this must be the Alliance Naval Forces' fleet. With the addition of the Alliance Naval Forces, they now have an overwhelming advantage against the Naval Forces in the Chapala Lake Region!

"The Alliance's Naval Forces control the convenient waterways, sustaining the main army's logistics..."

Woodpecker Aitz muses while glancing at another grim camp. The warriors in this camp wear the garb of Alliance Warriors, with imposing beast helmets on their heads and black capes on their bodies. Looking closely, underneath the deep capes of the warriors are platinum-bronze cloth armors!

"Ah? A thousand heavy armored elites?... This attire, this is... the temple guards of the High Priesthood?!"

Seeing this batch of elite heavy armored warriors, Woodpecker Aitz feels a shiver in his heart. Temple Guards are elite warriors devoted to the Chief Divine, possessing extraordinary morale and combat prowess. Adorned in heavy armor, such elites would likely be the most formidable opponents on the battlefield!

"Hmm... so many heavy-armored Temple Guards!... Then today, it should be the Elder Priest Azar in charge of the High Priesthood's military strength, the War God Elder, who has come?"

Thinking of this, Woodpecker Aitz stands on tiptoe and gazes at the high ceremonial platform.

At this moment, an Elder Priest wearing an Obsidian Feather Crown and elaborate ceremonial dress stands at the highest point of the platform, looking down on the assembled Rivermouth corps with majesty. His ceremonial dress bears thunderbolt patterns, definitely marking him as the War God Elder.

To the War God Elder's left is a High Priest wearing a similarly dark ceremonial dress, likely the kingdom's Priesthood's Fourth-Level Chief Priest, Mawilo. To his right stands Kuluka, holding the Marshal's Scepter and wearing the Marshal's robe. All three stand straight and expressionless, with no visible conversation.

"Ah! The Elder Priest from the Alliance is presiding over the main seat of the festival? Indeed! Since His Highness Xiulote isn't here, by sacred duty, it's really the highest-ranking Elder Priest who should preside over this grand festival!"

Woodpecker Aitz strokes his chin, pondering the standing positions of the three. As a Mexica-born warrior from the Holy City, he vaguely feels something is amiss but can't articulate it...

"The sun reaches its zenith, descending with fierce rays! The Chief Divine's gaze observes, heralding the sacred festival's commencement!"

By noon, divine smoke rises. The priests play ancient and solemn clay ocarinas and beat resonant drums. The grand sacrificial rite is also officially initiated! This type of war festival usually includes two phases: one is offering sacrifices to the Chief Divine, requesting divine guidance for the expedition; the other is the divination of the campaign, declaring omens of victory! Overall, such a grand festival must achieve the effect of boosting morale and inspiring the people. And after the festival concludes, capitalizing on heightened morale, the army will set out, officially entering the battlefield!

"Praise our god Huitzilopochtli! His power is boundless, supreme and great. He is the sacred Sun and the Thunderbolt of war! He governs everything, from the past to the future, from life to death!"

War God Elder Azar has a solemn expression, his voice loud and passionate. He chants earnestly under the sincere gaze of tens of thousands, extolling the majesty of the Chief Divine! And when the opening sacrificial text is completed, War God Elder Azar lifts high both hands, facing the sun, and commands sternly!

"The sun shines at its peak, the god arrives! He observes us, awaiting the sacrificial rite!... He yearns for crimson blood and the bloodline of the Divine Descendants! Come!... Offer the most sacred sacrifice, the Divine Descendant of the Sun Bloodline!"

"Roar! Roar!... Offer up the Divine Descendant sacrifice! Blood sacrifice to the Supreme Chief Divine!"

Hearing this, the tens of thousands of warriors and militia present reveal excitement and fervor. Among the fervent troops, Woodpecker Aitz pauses for a moment, then shows confusion.

"Huh?!... His Highness has already decreed replacing human sacrifices with animal sacrifices of wolf, deer, and fish, hasn't he? Why is this expedition's grand festival still a blood sacrifice?"

Then, as Woodpecker Aitz recalls the words of War God Elder, he feels a sudden chill!

"Just now, they said... a Divine Descendant of the Sun Bloodline? Ah! What?!... Which Great Nobility of the Alliance is being sacrificed?!"

Chapter 1358: Ruthless Centralization Reforms, Bloody Political Struggles

"Praise the Chief Divine! Your devout citizens offer you the most sacred sacrifices! From the Sun Bloodline, the Divine Descendant, the holy branch of the initial predecessor monarchs, the honorable nobility who voluntarily sacrifice for the Divine War, the revered Great Gold Clan Leader, Pachjo!..."

The Sun God stands high in the sky, hanging on the pinnacle of the solemn altar, watching with majesty and silence. Elder Azar of the War God looks up to the sun, calling out devoutly and urgently. Then, two robust Temple Guards support the equally strong and robust Great Gold Clan Leader, Pachjo, step by step, as he ascends to the top of the altar. There, a sacrificial table of heartwood, like the sacrificial stone on the Great Temple, silently awaits warmth and scarlet!

"Ah? It's him, it's actually him?!... Offered as a sacrifice to the divine, it turns out to be the honorable nobility with real power in the Alliance, the spokesperson of the Weyophethlan State, the Great Gold Clan Leader Pachjo?"

Upon hearing the War God Elder's declaration, Woodpecker Aitz stood dumbfounded in disbelief, his voice trembling. It must be known, the Great Gold Clan Leader Pachjo is the true Great Nobility of the Alliance, the Legion Commander of the Great Gold City-State Army!... And among the seven traditional local states of the Alliance, there are only seven Legion Commanders, who actually command the army!...

"No, that's not right! The Mountain Range Legion Commander Tepeiter was judged and executed by Commander Xiuxoke, succeeded by his son, Izel. The Tzompantli Legion Commander Xochitl fell during the Eastern expedition, succeeded by the Yunshan Clan Chief Huitzilihuatl. These two newly appointed Legion Commanders are not comparable to their predecessors, with limited control over the legions, even allowing the central Alliance to dispatch War Priests..."

"Thus! The Great Gold Legion Commander Pachjo is one of the five key spokespersons who wield the local military and political power among the states of the Alliance! And such a prestigious Great Nobility, one of the five in power, would 'voluntarily' become a sacrifice for the Grand Festival of War?... Voluntarily?! Chief Divine!..."

Thinking of this, Woodpecker Aitz's heart tightened, his hair stood on end, and he couldn't help but shiver. Under the warm big sun, he felt as though he was in the pitch-black dungeon of the Temple, a wave of coldness sweeping over him. At this moment, he widened his eyes intensely, staring at the

Great Gold Clan Leader supported by the Temple Guards, looking at that once lofty figure, wishing it were only his eyes failing, his ears playing tricks...

"Ah! The warrior who voluntarily sacrifices!"

"Truly the most devout Divine Descendant Nobility!"

"Praise the Chief Divine! Praise the Great Gold Clan Leader Pachjo!..."

Deafening cheers issued from the mouths of the Samurai and Militia watching, like the prelude to a thunderbolt, surrounding the center altar. The Great Gold Clan Leader who truly endured the Temple's dungeon, now trembling all over, step by step was supported by the guards, moving towards sacred death.

At this moment, his strong and robust physique, capable of one fighting ten, dissipated like Divine Smoke. He could only let the guards handle him, like a soft cloth. For he had already been drugged, unable to speak, numb and stiff in his limbs. Only a pair of eyes, filled with deep-seated hate, stared at War God Elder Azar with a gaze as if to shoot fire!

"The Chief Divine hangs high like the sun, and the Divine King is the embodiment of the sun on earth!"

Seeing the gaze of the Great Gold Clan Leader, War God Elder Azar pursed his lips, a hint of sorrow flashed in his eyes. Then he spoke in a deep voice, as if explaining something, yet it seemed he was just offering praise.

"Therefore, the Divine King rules the Alliance, and no one can defy the will of the divine! Pachjo of the Great Gold, your devout faith in the Chief Divine and your noble virtue of bravery in sacrifice will be remembered by the entire Alliance! And at this moment, your calm composure facing sacred death will become the most brilliant Chapter in epics, sung by poets for millennia!"

Hearing this, Great Gold Clan Leader Pachjo widened his eyes, clenching his teeth tightly. He used all his strength, laboriously opening his mouth, struggling to roll out a vague sound from his throat.

"I... am not... guilty... I... curse... him... die... die... die..."

"Praise the Chief Divine! Praise the devoutly sacrificing Alliance warrior, praise the fearless Great Gold Clan Leader Pachjo!..."

War God Elder Azar immediately raised the Divine Staff, chanting loudly, signaling with his eyes to either side. Since the Great Gold Clan Leader could not maintain decorum himself, let the priests help him maintain it!

Seeing the signal, the five accompanying Alliance Priests immediately stepped forward. They skillfully grabbed the limbs of the Great Gold Clan Leader, muffling his mouth, lying him flat on the wooden sacrificial table. Then, one priest took out a small ceramic jar, removed the rubber-sealed lid, and dripped two drops of the potion inside into the mouth of the Great Gold Clan Leader.

"Uh!... Hmm?... Ah..."

The potion entered, and a calming sensation quickly spread. In no time, a joyous smile appeared on the face of the Great Gold Clan Leader Pachjo. He lay flat on the sacrificial table, his pupils spreading as he stared directly at the sun in the sky. The noon sun shone so brightly that he was quickly dazzled, tears involuntarily streaming from his eyes. Yet, even so, he continued to gaze with a smile, entranced, longing, and joyfully awaiting something.

"..."

Watching the Great Gold Clan Leader, War God Elder Azar lowered his gaze, sighing silently in his heart. He naturally knew that the other's sacrifice was forcibly 'volunteered.' He also knew that the other remained strong-willed, cursing incessantly in the Temple's dungeon, proclaiming innocence, unwilling to confess anything.

However, all this was in vain! His fate, from the moment of the Royal Decree, had long been decided by the supreme Divine King... "Sacrifice to the Divine!"

"Ah! Pachjo!... You shouldn't have, above all you shouldn't have plotted against the King, involving yourself in those deadly rumors! You even more shouldn't have persistently resisted the King's reappointment demands, even becoming the leader for local nobility's insincere compliance..."

"Why don't you understand? King Aweit's centralization reform is like a surging flood, accompanied by unstoppable loud thunder! And standing at the forefront, you should have had the realization of being submerged by the flood and shattered by the thunder!..."

Thinking back to the intensifying and increasingly brutal political struggles in the Alliance over these years, War God Elder Azar sighed silently. He lastly looked deeply at the Great Gold Clan Leader Pachjo, then turned around, looking at today's Grand Festival's main figure, also his most significant target on this journey.

"Praise the Chief Divine, praise the King, praise Your Highness!... The sacred festival has begun, the Chief Divine's gaze is upon us! This is the most holy sacrifice, also the divine will to tolerate no mistake!..."

War God Elder Azar appeared gentle, looking at the equally silent Monkey Kuluka, his face full of an amicable smile. However, when he smiled and spoke, the calm words were like thunderbolts, causing Kuluka to tremble slightly.

"Honorable Marshal Kuluka! You are the Marshal of the Western Expedition to the Chapala Lake Region, the Commander of so many valiant warriors, also the honorable nobility in charge of Rivermouth County, the representative of His Highness Xiulote here!..."

"So! Please represent His Highness, take up the Obsidian Dagger of sacrifice, in front of tens of thousands of warriors!... Send the devout, fearless, and voluntarily sacrificing Great Gold Clan Leader Pachjo yourself to the beautiful and serene Red Kingdom!..."

Chapter 1359: The Astute Divine Monkey, The Plot Revealed!

"Sacrificial, Strait Gold Clan Leader, send to the Red Kingdom..."

On the sacrificial platform, a noble Divine Descendant sacrifice lay flat. War God Elder Azar smiled with concentration on Kuluka's expression. Monkey Kuluka wore a luxurious marshal's robe, though his simple face was full of bitterness.

War God Elder Azar, with two thousand Temple Guards and Naval Forces, came along the Lerma River, from the Lake Capital City of the Alliance. He had only arrived at the county town of Rivermouth for a few days. Before the Grand Festival, he informed Kuluka of the sacrificial process and specified that it was a "noble of the Alliance who had made a grave mistake and needed the sacrifice from His Highness's side!"

Monkey Kuluka felt uneasy at the time. Who would have thought that on the day of the Grand Festival, the noble brought to the sacrificial platform would be one of the most powerful five City-State Legion Commanders!

"Honorable Marshal Kuluka, this is the Sacrificial Dagger passed down by the Alliance, please take it!... When you make the cut, aim for the heart, the faster, the better!... This way, the Strait Gold Clan Leader can pass quickly, without much pain..."

War God Elder Azar took out an ancient Sacrificial Dagger and handed it to Monkey Kuluka without giving any chance to refuse. Then, he stepped aside, leaving the main sacrificial position. The other five Assistant Priests each held the limbs and head of the sacrifice, waiting patiently.

"..."

Monkey Kuluka tightly gripped the Sacrificial Dagger, his fingers trembling slightly.

He knew clearly that once this dagger was thrust, not only would His Highness's lineage in the Kingdom of the Lake become mortal enemies with the local nobles of Northern Strait Gold City. But even he himself would become a common enemy of the local nobles of the Alliance and even all the Great Nobility!

After all, he was of commoner samurai origin, yet he personally sacrificed such a great noble, something unprecedented in the Alliance's history!... The great nobles dare not hate the King, dare not openly hate His Highness, so would they not dare to openly hate him?

"No, they will only double their hatred for me! They will put everything on my head... Oh Chief Divine! This is to make me sever ties with the nobles of the Alliance!..."

Seeing Kuluka's hesitation, War God Elder Azar raised an eyebrow. He glanced at the Lake Chief Priest Mawilo, who was pursing his lips tightly but did not voice any objection, then smiled and spoke to Kuluka.

"Honorable Marshal Kuluka, I am here with the decree of the God King and the High Priesthood to hold a grand western expedition festival!... This festival is not only for your command of the Chapala western expedition but also for the divine will of the Sun God..."

"Recently, there was a rumor in the Capital City about the discord between two suns, which was the chaos wrought by underground demons!... After the Strait Gold Clan Leader made his decision to voluntarily sacrifice, the rumors of the demons were silenced by devout faith..."

"Throughout the Alliance, naturally, only the supreme God King Avit is the embodiment of the Sun God! And today's festival is to declare to the Chief Divine and to announce to the world! The high and mighty Sun reigning overhead, the new dawn closely follows. The twin suns, one leading and one following, shine together for a century, and the future of the Alliance will be unprecedentedly bright and blazing!..."

"Honorable Marshal Kuluka, do you understand?..."

"...Hmm!... I understand..."

High on the sacrificial platform, Monkey Kuluka stood silently for a moment before finally nodding. War God Elder Azar came with the decree of the King and the High Priesthood, His Highness, who held such esteemed status, was absent from the kingdom, making it difficult to refuse on his part. Moreover, the sacrifice of the Strait Gold Clan Leader was to reaffirm the dominance of the Dual Kings' Alliance, quelling the rumors in the Capital City, and deterring all the great nobles who opposed centralization!...

All this, Kuluka could think clearly, and naturally, the Lake Chief Priest Mawilo, representing the kingdom's divine authority, could also think clearly. Mawilo did not speak, naturally consenting to the King's decree. This series of political considerations and the grand momentum all forced him, leaving him no choice but to bear this suddenly descending, heavy black cauldron!...

"..."

Monkey Kuluka took a deep breath, walked to the front of the sacrificial platform, facing the flat chest. He reached out, under the guidance of the Assistant Priests, pressed against the heart of the Strait Gold Clan Leader, feeling the strong and powerful heartbeat. Then, he looked at the delighted face of the Strait Gold Clan Leader, who was gazing directly at the sun, tears streaming down, his gaze flickering slightly.

"Praise the Chief Divine! Praise the devout Strait Gold Clan Leader!... Honorable War God Elder, what will happen to the Strait Gold Clan Leader's fief in Strait Gold City after he goes to the Divine Kingdom?"

"Hmm?"

Hearing this question, War God Elder Azar raised an eyebrow, slightly surprised. He looked at the calm Monkey Kuluka, pondered for a moment, and still answered truthfully.

"The devout Strait Gold Clan Leader voluntarily sacrificed to the Chief Divine... For such a fearless and noble act, the Alliance will naturally let his legitimate wife's sons and daughters inherit his fief together... The Strait Gold Glory family will be fairly divided into five. Every succeeding descendant will receive the generous title from the God King and will all become honorable esteemed nobility!"

"In addition, the five esteemed nobles have all gladly agreed to contribute to the expansion of the Alliance! They will relinquish their family's fief in Strait Gold City and be reallocated to the vast land of Totonac, pioneering the seaside for the Alliance!..."

"Divided into five, God King's conferment. Relocate to the Eastern Sea, pioneer the seaside..."

Upon hearing this, the Lake Chief Priest Mawilo took a deep breath, lowered his eyes without speaking. Monkey Kuluka's eyes flickered again, then suddenly leaned down, placing his ear close to the smiling mouth of the Strait Gold Clan Leader, seemingly listening to something.

"Hmm?..."

Seeing this scene, War God Elder Azar showed a puzzled look. But soon, he understood with realization. His lips curled into a smile, and he did not stop it.

"Praise the Chief Divine! May the Chief Divine bless! The fearless Strait Gold Clan Leader left an immortal poem of farewell before going to the Divine Kingdom!"

On Monkey Kuluka's face, there was first surprise, followed by excited joy, and finally solemnity and dignity. After listening for a moment, he stood upright and loudly proclaimed, announcing to the entire sacrificial platform, and even to the tens of thousands of watching warriors!

"Strait Gold Clan Leader Pachjo, is a truly devout warrior! He declared!"

...

"...The Chief Divine is eternal Heavenly Divine; I shall personally go to worship Him, offer everything to Him, and proclaim the praises of the mortal world!... The King is the supreme Sun; I praise the Sun! His Highness is the lofty Divine Tree; I praise the Divine Tree!... And the devotee presiding over my sacrifice will also be the guide of my soul!..."

"He has guided my soul, and I trust him; I will entrust my descendants to him!... My immature children, you may seek him out and establish my family temple on the fertile land of the Kingdom of the Lake!... In the place where I fearlessly go to the Divine Kingdom, enjoy the protection and peace of my soul!... Praise the Chief Divine!..."

Upon hearing these words, Azar, the War God Elder's smile froze. He displayed evident surprise on his face, sizing up Monkey Kuluka's devoted expression before gradually shifting to admiration.

"Good!... Through Pachjo's words... turning oneself into the guide of souls... still planning to establish family temples, promising protection to the other party's immature descendants, thus resolving the hatred from Alliance nobles... Haha! This Marshal Kuluka is indeed a clever Divine Monkey! Excellent! Excellent!..."

"Praise the Chief Divine! Praise the fearless warriors!... Sacrifice! Sacrifice! Sacrifice!..."

After listening to the death poem of the Strait Gold Clan Leader, tens of thousands of samurai and militia erupted in cheers. They raised their weapons high, fiercely beating their shields, producing a "Boom

Boom!" sound! They shouted loudly toward the Divine Platform, calling for the most thrilling moment, the climax of bloodshed!

"Praise the Chief Divine!... And praise you! Strait Gold Clan Leader Pachjo..."

Monkey Kuluka with a face full of devotion loudly completed his proclamation. Then, he deeply glanced at the smiling Pachjo Clan Leader, raised the obsidian dagger in his hand, and decisively brought it down heavily!

"Ugh!..."

A fierce pain surged through, even under the anesthetic effect of drugs, Strait Gold Clan Leader Pachjo sharply raised his head, his eyes wide like copper bells. However, the five professional assistant priests pressed firmly, maintaining the stability of the sacrificial posture and the steadiness of the High Priest's knife.

"Ugh..."

Monkey Kuluka wore a solemn expression, under the dying glare of Strait Gold Clan Leader Pachjo, retrieving his crimson hands from the warm chest. His motion was steady and swift, swift enough that Pachjo was still alive. The freshness in his hand reflected in Pachjo's eyes, transforming into the deepest horror.

"My...heart... heh heh..."

Strait Gold Clan Leader Pachjo opened his mouth, murmuring some unheard words. Then, under the dazzling sunlight at noon, his head tilted, and he was motionless.

"Descendants of the Sun God, bloodline of the Predecessor Monarch, honorable nobility of Weyoplhethlan City-State, Strait Gold Clan Leader Pachjo, he goes to the Chief Divine's Divine Kingdom! His soul will awaken in the Red Kingdom, eternally enjoying beauty and peace like a warrior who perished in the Divine War! Praise the Chief Divine!..."

"Eternally enjoying beauty and peace! Praise the Chief Divine!!..."

With the sacrifice of the Divine Descendant, the Grand Festival's ceremony reached its climax! Amid deafening and fervent cheers, War God Elder Azar prayed to the Chief Divine, obtaining the divine mandate to campaign against the Chapala Lake Region!

"The Divine says! Chapala Lake Region, the Feather Prince, disrespects the Chief Divine! The army shall march west, to conquer his territory! Then capture him to blood sacrifice our Divine on the pyramid of the Great Temple!..."

"The Divine says! Capture the Feather Prince in the western expedition, blood sacrifice our Divine!..."

Dozens of Chief God Priests simultaneously relayed the Divine Mandate, their voices high and resounding.

"Western expedition to the Feather, blood sacrifice our Divine!... Roar roar roar!..."

Tens of thousands of legions shouted fervently, the deafening waves of sound and the fiery expressions already boosting morale to the highest.

"Go forth, warriors of the Alliance!... You shall achieve another victory of conquest for the God King and His Highness!... And under the Chief Divine's protection, divination is auspicious; this battle will surely win!..."

On the Divine Platform, War God Elder Azar also roared, proclaiming the auspicious prophecy, foretelling the victory of the war! And as all this concluded, the principal segment of the Grand Festival was declared complete. As for the final step...

War God Elder Azar licked his lips, his expression solemn. He looked at Monkey Kuluka, silent and calm, with blood-stained hands, and suddenly received from the assistant priests a Feather Crown of the honorable nobility, a Marshal's Scepter of the Alliance, and a banner adorned with a skull!

"Uh?..."

Witnessing this scene, Monkey Kuluka's whole body trembled. With his intelligence, he guessed the other's intent in an instant. Then, fine beads of sweat appeared on his forehead and spine, even more tense and trembling than before the sacrifice!

"Respected War God Elder! This...what is it?..."

"Indeed! Respected Marshal Kuluka! Your devoted sacrifice has also satisfied the Chief Divine! And the all-knowing God King foresaw all this already..."

At this moment, War God Elder Azar did not smile. His demeanor was more solemn than ever, even somewhat severe. For this moment, he had laid the groundwork long ago. And this investiture, this was his true purpose for coming!

"Praise the Chief Divine! Praise the King!... Marshal Kuluka, this is the Feather Crown, Marshal's Scepter personally bestowed by God King Avit, and the royal army banner!... According to Alliance custom, the marshal presiding over a Divine War must have an investiture from the Alliance King and High Priesthood, marking his official attainment of solar divinity!..."

"Therefore, please kneel down and accept the investiture of the God King and High Priesthood!"

Chapter 1360: Resolute Refusal, the Real Threat

"With the Supreme God as witness! I am the County Magistrate of Rivermouth in the Kingdom of the Lake, the Legion Commander personally appointed by His Highness!... The Avit God King is held in the highest esteem, and as a Mexica, I too prostrate and offer praise... But this time, please forgive me for not being able to accept the coronation..."

The sacrificial Divine Platform was a full seven or eight meters high. The cheers and shouts below the platform were like surging tides! And the confrontation and response on the platform resembled a large canoe afloat on the churning waves of a storm, facing fierce winds and lightning, always at risk of capsizing...

Monkey Kuluca bowed his head, clutching the scepter bestowed by His Highness, calmly and resolutely refusing. He responded in a deep voice, then glanced once more at Mawilo, the Chief Priest beside him, clearly indicating his intentions with his eyes.

This time, even Mawilo, the Chief Priest of the Lake, could not remain silent. He furrowed his brows deeply and looked towards the War God Elder at the top, opposing with a resisting voice.

"Respected War God Elder! Kuluca is a Great General of the Lake Sealed Country. If he accepts the coronation from the God King, I'm afraid it wouldn't be appropriate, would it? The God King and the High Priest Xutel have had agreements with His Highness Xiulote, and oaths have been made... West of the old Tarasco territory is entirely self-determined by the Holy City faction, and the Alliance central does not interfere!... Are you here this time to break the oath between the God King and His Highness?!"

"Haha! The God King indeed said that west of the old Tarasco territory is entirely self-determined by the Holy City faction. But the God King also mentioned that another part of the agreement stipulates that east of the old Tarasco territory, including the Totonac Coast, is to be decided by the God King!..."

War God Elder Azar smiled slightly and spoke softly, without spelling it out. Then, his gaze turned stern, reprimanding Chief Priest Mawilo and stating the legitimate reason.

"According to Alliance tradition, the Marshal of a Divine War must be blessed with the Sun God's divinity! This has been the case in previous westward and eastward expeditions, and several campaigns—that's the law set by our predecessors. Even His Highness Xiulote received the coronation from the God King before going into battle! And the Black Wolf Royal Banner raised by His Highness was also awarded by the Avit God King!..."

"Therefore! I am here this time to follow the law of the elders, to adhere to the God King's will, and to bring the High Priesthood's approval for the sacred westward expedition! Chief Priest Mawilo! You, as the esteemed Chief Priest of the Alliance, do you really intend to defy the elders, defy the God King, defy the High Priesthood's decision?!"

After hearing such harsh reprimands and accusations, a stiffness settled on Chief Priest Mawilo's face. He clenched his fists, opened his mouth wanting to respond sharply, but gradually lost his courage and silently lowered his head.

Monkey Kuluca looked on with anticipation at the most revered Chief Priest of the Kingdom of the Lake. However, this expectation was ultimately replaced by disappointment as the other slowly bowed his head.

Under the mandate of the God King and the High Priesthood, Chief Priest Mawilo chose to step back. He pursed his lips, stood aside, and remained silent.

"His Highness is not in the Kingdom of the Lake, and Chief Priest Mawilo, as the foremost figure in the priesthood, cannot stand up as a true mainstay to resist the divine authority pressure from the Alliance!..."

"Alas! After the High Priest passed away, the God King subdued the High Priesthood; such supreme authority of both God and King is indeed something he cannot endure... unfortunately, the truly responsible Chief Minister, Sage Jatili, is too old now. He's infirm, ailing, and maintaining state affairs in the capital; he cannot travel this far..."

Monkey Kuluca pursed his lips, closed his eyes, and sighed inwardly. This outcome did not surprise him.

Without His Highness present, could Chief Priest Mawilo from the Holy City of the Alliance truly have enough resolve to oppose the supreme divine authority from the Alliance central? Clearly not! Otherwise, during the sacrificial rite earlier, he merely needed to stand firmly, representing the Kingdom of the Lake, to assume the duties of the sacrificing Strait Gold Clan Leader Pachjo, offending the Alliance's great nobility, and Kuluca wouldn't have been left in a dilemma.

"Chief Priest Mawilo, being of the Alliance, holds the divine and royal authority of the Alliance in high esteem... After the High Priest passed away, he did not dare to take up the kingdom's religious interpretative authority, nor organize an independent Lake Priest Group to face directly the Alliance's High Priesthood and the God King... He has grown old! Esteemed in wealth and honor, he lacks the courage of 'advance or die'!..."

"Of course! He would never betray His Highness; he even grew up watching His Highness from the priesthood of the Holy City, holding a very close relationship! But precisely because of this, he does not see His Highness as the sovereign monarch to whom he is a loyal minister. He has never been prepared or determined to sacrifice himself completely for His Highness, or sacrifice the preparations and determination of his own family within the Alliance!"

"Alas! ...When contending against the Mexica Alliance, the Mexica people, especially those of the Alliance-born Mexica nobility, are far less reliable than the Purpecha, Tekos, Otomi, Guajili people, or even the Totonac people!"

All these chaotic thoughts raced through Monkey Kuluca's mind. He suddenly realized why the Avit King had come to coronate him. Because he was also an officer of Mexica Alliance origin, who had once kneeled at the feet of the Avit King! The Mexica King's majesty, like a deep brand, had also left an imprint on his heart! And his First Spear Legion was largely composed of Mexica people...

"Respected Marshal Kuluca, please kneel to receive the God King's Glorious Feathered Helm, Marshal's Scepter, and the most esteemed Divine Banner!"

War God Elder Azar's gaze was like a torch, urging again. After severely reprimanding Chief Priest Mawilo, he turned to look at Kuluca, his tone instead softened.

"Marshal Kuluca, this is in the grand ceremony before the expedition—tens of thousands of warriors are watching! ...At this moment, I represent the God King in granting you the token; how can you not accept it and publicly defy the God King's majesty? This is merely an honorary coronation; the God King will not interfere in your command of the legion, nor will it affect the military governance of the Kingdom of the Lake!... And you, are still the loyal Legion Commander of His Highness!"

"I assure you, aside from accepting these tokens, the Divine King has no other conditions... Nothing else will change!... If it doesn't work out, after accepting them, just tuck away everything but the traditional Divine Banner and not use them!"

"Ha! Nothing will change? Tuck them away and not use them? Are you taking advantage of my lack of noble heritage, thinking I understand nothing?..."

Upon hearing this, Monkey Kuluka opened his eyes and cast a deep look at the persuasive Elder of the War God. He silently mocked in his heart, but his face remained calm and unbothered.

"If nothing will change, then why insist on enfeoffing me? If I accept the King's enfeoffment, people's hearts will change! His Highness regards me as a confidant; knowing this matter, how will he see me? The kingdom's nobility and priests, standing on the sidelines, how will they view me drowning? As for

the Samurai, Militia, and the banner team of Rivermouth County, who have always followed my orders, regarding me as Legion Commander, Great Chief, how will they think?..."

"Over time, people's hearts change. If I accept the enfeoffment and cannot fit among the kingdom's nobility and His Highness, and if I sacrifice to Pachjo, I won't be accepted by the local nobility of the Alliance... In the end, I'll only lean toward the supreme Divine King, shelter under the king's authority, with life and death hanging by a thread... This is forcing me to jump into an endless Black Abyss!..."

Thinking of this, Monkey Kuluka took a deep breath, lowered his gaze, and firmly refused again.

"Honorable Elder of the War God! The Glorious Feathered Helm, the Marshal's Scepter, and the Divine Banner bestowed by the Divine King... I must decline to accept them!..."

"Hmm?! Witness the Chief Divine! Marshal Kuluka, are you going to defy the will of the Divine King and the High Priesthood?!"

Elder Azar of the War God glared sharply, his face revealing cold dignity. He didn't know how many noble Divine Descendants he had personally sacrificed, and his eyes carried a chilling murderous intent.

"You must understand! The Divine King sent me to enfeoff and preside over the Grand Festival, to tighten the bond between the Alliance and the Kingdom, making them inseparable!..."

"Enfeoffing you as the Marshal of the Western Expedition and awarding the Divine Banner is not only a tradition of the Alliance, but also the goodwill and expectation of the Divine King!"

"This is the brilliance of the Sun, bright and warm! But if you persistently refuse to accept, unwilling to praise the Sun, then I can only leave with the tokens, letting this Grand Festival for the Western Expedition happen in vain..."

At this point, Elder Azar of the War God shifted his tone, his expression turning pensive. He didn't want things to get too stiff, after all, he was just a messenger and had no need to overly offend the kingdom's side. But before coming, King Aweit had given orders not to let the authority of the Divine King be damaged. Hence, he had to say words he was unwilling to say, showing his true threat.

"Marshal Kuluka, according to the traditions of the Alliance, if a Marshal presiding over the Divine War doesn't have the Divine Banner granted by the King, they cannot command!... Therefore, if I return to the Alliance, the High Priesthood will have to hold another Grand Festival to select a new Marshal for the Western Expedition to take over leadership and campaign against the Feathered Prince!..."

"The new Marshal of the Western Expedition will be chosen from the central Legion Commanders of the Alliance! Subsequently, five legions of eight thousand men, along with a naval force of four thousand strong, altogether forty to fifty thousand troops, will descend from the Lerma River to campaign in the Chapala Lake Region in the west! The two Kingdom Legions of Rivermouth County will serve as auxiliaries of the Alliance..."

"By then, the Western Expedition's Grand Army will requisition the Dragon-Lan Fortress of Prince Tepopolo, setting up a military camp there... The army will also pass through Rivermouth County of the Kingdom, requisitioning the River Mouth Fortress as a second camp..."

"With the Chief Divine's blessing! After subduing the Feathered Prince, the vast and prosperous Chapala Lake Region can enfeoff a few royal princes... Hm, the eldest son of the Predecessor Monarch, Montezuma II, is already of age and resides in the Capital City. The second son, Quetzalcoatl, is just fifteen... Both suitable candidates!... After all, even the three-year-old Prince Xiu Hua has been granted the Totonac land..."

Upon hearing such threats, Monkey Kuluka's heart contracted violently. He was drenched in sweat, his back completely soaked, and his knees started trembling.

Although he didn't believe King Aweit would, at this crucial moment of centralized reform, really send five legions to intimidate along the Lerma River, forcefully intervening in the Kingdom's military and political affairs, even falling out with His Highness Xiulote...

But! The Alliance indeed likely could deploy two or three powerful Royal Legions to seize control over the Western Expedition in the Chapala Lake Region! After the Western Expedition, the Alliance could rightfully claim the ripe Chapala land, then enfeoff a few royal princes, transferring some local nobility of the Alliance to ease internal conflicts!

"Chief Divine!... This... This... Divine King... I..."

Seeing the panic on Kuluka's face, Elder Azar of the War God finally smiled. He stepped forward two steps, lowered his voice, and gently advised.

"Respected Marshal Kuluka, I know you are loyal to His Highness and naturally would not want to see such a thing happen, right?... Actually, I'm the same!"