

Civilization 1391

Chapter 1391: Walking the Edge of Death—The Fox and the Black Wolf

"Huh! Tikalo? So it's you!..."

The lit fire pit illuminated the Divine Descendant's Palace in Lake Sacrifice City; the orange glow of the flames reflected off the fierce faces of the Dog Descendant Warriors. The shadows of the warriors, elongated by the firelight, cast onto the surrounding walls, resembling the shapes of fierce beasts. The unwashed dark red on those walls clearly hinted at slaughter and death, as if they were the lairs of a wolf pack.

"Strange! You're not dead? The mutts in Hidden Serpent City didn't kill you, didn't offer you on the altar? You're so thin, how did you escape back?"

Black Wolf Torc donned leather armor, with two bronze axes at his side, boldly spreading his legs, leaning back on the stone seat at the top. His unruly and fierce posture resembled that of a Wolf King among a pack of wolves! At this moment, he squinted, carefully examining Tikalo's pale demeanor and emaciated figure, then grinned, revealing sharp teeth.

"Ha! His Highness previously sent someone with a message. He ordered me to find you well after conquering Hidden Serpent City. Alive or dead, I must see you! I was contemplating where to dig up your bones... I didn't expect you'd show up on your own, saving me some effort!..."

"Speak! What did you encounter and see after being captured by the eastern tribes? Hmm... You haven't... surrendered to the opposite City-States, have you? Oh right! Those Mayan large ships I encountered, such a nuisance, where exactly did they come from?!"

"Uh... Chief Divine bless! Esteemed Black Wolf Legion Commander, I truly escaped from the Hidden Serpent City in the east... and I've brought back extremely important and urgent information to report to His Highness and you!..."

Mayan merchant Tikalo, smiling, spoke in a perfect Lake Capital City accent, using standard Mexica Language. Then, he winked, pointed at the red-haired warriors around him, and said softly with a serious expression.

"Chief Divine witness! Black Wolf Commander, the information I bring back this time is critical!... The fewer who know, the better!..."

"Hmm?"

Upon hearing this, Black Wolf Torc stared at Tikalo's solemn expression, pondered for a moment, then waved at his trusted aides around him.

"You all, step back a bit!..."

"Yes, boss!..."

With Black Wolf's strength, even ten Tikalo could not withstand him alone. After letting his trusted aides retreat, he stood up and walked with big steps to stand in front of Tikalo. Then, with cold and stern eyes, he stared into the Mayan merchant's eyes, asking word by word.

"Speak! What exactly is the information? And the questions I asked earlier! Answer me!..."

"Chief Divine witness! Esteemed Black Wolf Legion Commander, the reason I was able to come back alive this time... is because of the Naval Commander of Hidden Serpent City, Papu Priest. He intended to let me go, and wanted to convey a message to the Kingdom and His Highness through me... as for those large ships, they are mostly under Papu Priest's command. Part of them are replicas from Hidden Serpent City, and most were conscripted from the Maya merchant fleets..."

Mayan merchant Tikalo answered honestly with a sincere face.

"Praise the Chief Divine! Naval Commander Papu fears your formidable military achievements and the strong force of the Kingdom, and he deeply respects the Divinely Revealed His Highness!... He yearns for the glory of the Chief Divine, willing to abandon his darkness and welcome the light, leading his naval forces to surrender to the esteemed His Highness!... He also promised to guide the Kingdom's legion into Hidden Serpent City and capture the Chief Priest and Divine Descendants within..."

"What! The Naval Commander of Hidden Serpent City! That damned commander of the fleet! It's him?!"

Upon hearing this, Black Wolf Torc's eyes flashed with sharpness, gritting his teeth, he shouted.

"He ambushed the Kingdom's exploration fleet, and also ambushed the Kingdom's East Sea Navy! He killed so many Kingdom warriors and continuously attacked the grain transport ships, causing me so much trouble!... And now, with my legion having conquered Lake Sacrifice City, the remaining Hidden Serpent Holy City won't hold out much longer... only now does he feel fear, thinking to surrender to the Kingdom to save his skin?!"

"Chief Divine witness! No way! How could it be that easy? I want to personally chop off his head as a trophy for my collection!..."

"Ahem! Esteemed Black Wolf Legion Commander, hear me out! Taking this Naval Commander prisoner can be greatly beneficial to you!..."

"No need to say more! I don't care who he is, or what benefits there are, blood debts must be repaid with blood!... Tikalo, when I first followed His Highness, I knew you speak well, like a cunning fox!..."

Black Wolf Torc's eyes widened fiercely, waving his hand, and shouted towards his trusted aides in the distance.

"Come! Take him away and detain him! Make sure he is well-fed and well-watered, but he's not allowed to leave the tent! Once I've conquered the Hidden Serpent Holy City and offered a sacrifice of that Naval Commander, then release him!..."

"Yes, boss!"

"Ah! Chief Divine witness! Chief Divine witness! Black Wolf Legion Commander, I'm doing this for your good!..."

Upon hearing this, a look of surprise and panic appeared on the face of Mayan merchant Tikalo. He struggled to speak, shouting at the top of his lungs, but Black Wolf turned and left. The two fierce Dog Descendant Warriors on either side immediately seized his arms, trying to drag him out of the tent. Until he shouted hoarsely, he was finally able to get a sentence out.

"Black Wolf Commander! Hear me out!... Chief Divine witness! If you personally attack the Hidden Serpent City and achieve such a major victory as destroying a kingdom... you'll no longer have any opportunity to lead armies on expeditions from now on!..."

"Hmm?!"

Hearing this, Black Wolf Torc raised an eyebrow, suddenly turning around. He squinted his eyes, looking at Tikalo, who was about to be dragged away, and suddenly said in a deep voice.

"Stop! Bring him back!..."

"Yes, boss!..."

The two red-haired trusted aides lowered their heads in salute. With ease, their strong arms lifted the frail Mayan merchant Tikalo back in front of Black Wolf Torc, like carrying a roll of fabric. The shiny, smooth head bobbed, looking like the common spotted dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico in Black Wolf's eyes.

"Tikalo, do you know what you were saying just now? You dare try to drive a wedge between me and His Highness?!"

Black Wolf Torc squinted his eyes, glaring sharply like a wolf. He reached out his hand, gently rubbing the smooth, hairless head of the Mayan merchant, coldly speaking.

"Chief Divine witness! I have many collectibles, but none of a Mayan Divine Descendant's head... Hmm! Your sleek form, Serpent Divine Descendant, seems quite worth adding to my collection!..."

"Ah! Ah this! Chief Divine witness! Ancestral witness! Esteemed Black Wolf Commander, I definitely have no intention of driving a wedge!"

Seeing Black Wolf's cold, murderous eyes, Mayan merchant Tikalo couldn't help but shiver. Sweat formed on his forehead as he shakily and softly advised.

"Black Wolf Commander, without a doubt, His Highness trusts you!... Look, the arrangements at the Seaside Alliance are all shown out of His Highness's care for you!... But there are many things, and various advice, that His Highness cannot openly address, nor ignore... Maybe you too should consider His Highness's deep intention and burden!... "

"Hmm?... The arrangements of the Seaside Alliance? His Highness's care for me?... His deep intentions and burdens?..."

Hearing this, Black Wolf Torc furrowed his brows, pondering in silence. He had been campaigning outside all these years, unable to stay by His Highness's side. The thoughts of the King had grown more profound and complex over the years, truly making it difficult for him to fully comprehend. As for the arrangements in the Seaside Lands, this Seaside Alliance, he had some dissatisfaction with them...

"You all withdraw! Leave the main tent! Remember! You heard nothing tonight!"

"Yes, boss!..."

Black Wolf Torc, after pondering for a while, ordered his trusted aides. Then, squinting his eyes, he drew out the bronze axe from his waist, silently watching Tikalo's neck, until Tikalo retracted his neck like an old turtle. Only when the trusted aides had withdrawn from the tent did he speak quietly, in a voice like a wolf's growl.

"Speak! Tikalo, you cunning fox! The dealings you conducted on the exploration fleet, His Majesty has already briefed me... Let me see what else can come from your foxy mouth!"

Chapter 1392: The Art of Communication and the Wisdom of the Black Wolf

"Hmm? By the witness of the Chief Divine! Are you saying... the system of the Seaside Alliance, with its mutually restraining Legion Commander, High Priest, and Civil Director, was not set up to limit me?... These three powers that are separate and independent — military, religious, and civil — are arranged for the power balance of the future Seaside Lands after His Highness and I leave the Totonac coast?..."

In the solemn hall, Black Wolf Torc caressed the cold Bronze Axe and sat back on the stone seat. With just a few words from Tikalo, he furrowed his brows and fell into deep contemplation. After a while, he glared at Tikalo and coldly inquired.

"Hmm? Tikalo, what do you think?!"

"Uh! My view... uh... is exactly the same as yours!..."

The Mayan merchant Tikalo scratched his head, quickly spinning his thoughts, pondering the art of conversation. He had just returned and his understanding of the Seaside Alliance was limited to brief inquiries made on the way back... In other words, he had no idea about His Highness's arrangements and intentions!

The reason he brought up this topic and offered ambiguous suggestions was simple: the situation in the Seaside Lands is extremely complex and too distant. To stably rule here, and even further expand to the East, the arrangements of His Highness Xiulote must be carefully weighed and deeply meaningful! From another perspective, Black Wolf Torc's military merits are indeed amassed very high!...

"Ahem! Respected Black Wolf Commander, you are the most trusted General cultivated by His Highness throughout the journey! Your legion is also the most formidable among many Kingdom Legions!... For a Legion Commander like you, it's the most reliable wing for His Highness, how could you be placed in the Seaside Lands in vain?..."

The Mayan merchant Tikalo cautiously continued along the lines of Black Wolf Torc's words, extending just a little. He was proficient in the art of communication, knowing there are two crucial techniques to persuade others!

The first, called "stroke the fur", means that what you say doesn't have to be particularly logical or eloquent, but it must align with the listener's intent! Because only what the listener can accept and hear will hold value in being said! Especially when dealing with someone as sharp, cold, and deadly as the Black Wolf General, if your words are too offensive, you might just lose your head to an axe.

The second, known as "leave a blank", or "leave a hole for the mouse to drill", is about leaving things unsaid rather than explaining everything in detail, allowing room for others to think and supplement for themselves. Because people believe conclusions they arrive at themselves. At this moment, with little

knowledge, saying too much risks error, making "leave a blank" particularly necessary to let Black Wolf General think for himself.

"By the witness of the Chief Divine! So, the arrangement of His Highness in the Seaside Lands, that... hmm, the establishing of three leaders to balance each other, should be prepared for Legion Commanders other than you..."

"The Chief Divine grants me wisdom! Let me think! If this system wasn't designed for me... where do I go after defeating the Totonacs?... Continue fighting the Mayans to the East? Or return to the Kingdom of the Lake with His Highness? Or perhaps..."

At this point, a sharp glint flashed in Black Wolf Torc's eyes, showing a trace of coldness. He glanced at the obedient Mayan merchant, rubbed his chin, set aside dangerous thoughts, and switched thinking directions.

"By the witness of the Chief Divine! Aside from me, other Legion Commanders? Hmm? That's it! The Totonac Legion that is about to be established is for guarding the Seaside... so who will be the next Legion Commander?..."

"Wood Lizard? He's the most reliable among Totonac Generals, but his qualifications are still too shallow... From His Highness's family warriors, or promoting one of the cultivated trusted aides? It's quite possible, though I don't know who it would be... Tikalo, what do you think? Hmm?!"

"Uh!... That... I... I think... hmm..."

The Mayan merchant Tikalo sweated down his back, struggling to respond equivocally.

"That... regardless of who His Highness selects, it is for the grand strategy of expansion to the East, for the management of Cuba Snake Island!... His Highness's prophecy is indeed remarkable! Therefore, the most outstanding and loyal person must be chosen..."

"Ah! The grand strategy to the East? I understand!... Yes! Tikalo, you are quite right!"

Upon hearing this, Black Wolf Torc's eyes lit up, a sudden flash of inspiration appeared in his mind, and thoughts flowed like a spring! He had long memorized the personnel within the Kingdom internally, and there weren't many he could respect. As for a significant matter like expansion to the Eastern Sea, amidst such a complex situation, the only fit leader was naturally the Head Warrior Bertade stationed below Cloud Serpent City, responsible for the siege!

"So, His Highness has delayed forming the official Coastal Legion because he's waiting for the Head Warrior! It seems the Head Warrior will first serve as the Legion Commander of the Coastal Legion, then be promoted to Marshal in the direction of the Eastern Sea! And the second Legion Commander of the Coastal Legion, to cooperate with the Head Warrior, must be his trusted and smoothly commanding deputy... Someone like me, coming from the Personal Guard, having meritorious achievements, specifically leading a camp as a Camp Captain!"

"And among those in the Personal Guard, besides me, who else has high meritorious achievements and leads a camp? Yes! Only the Camp Commander of the Artillery Camp, Tupa! He's fought in Totonac for so long and is familiar with the terrain here... Good lad! So His Highness has his eye on this boy! He's really struck it lucky! ... If this were in the Kingdom forming a legion, it wouldn't be his turn at all!..."

"Wait a minute! If Tupa stays here, does that mean the Artillery Camp will also stay, even be incorporated into the Coastal Legion? Tsk tsk! If the Maya city-states along the way try to block them, they will surely be blasted away one by one! ... Haha! I am truly wise!..."

Black Wolf Torc stroked his chin, a look of pride appeared on his face. At this moment, he felt like he had attained the wisdom bestowed by the finest turquoise, finally gaining clarity about His Highness's arrangements in the Seaside Lands! And when he turned his head to look at the dumbfounded Mayan merchant Tikalo, the cold and hard expression on his face softened somewhat.

"Tikalo, who would have thought, you actually have some insight! ... Hmm... I remember you just said, if I achieve another feat of destroying a country, His Highness wouldn't let me lead troops anymore?"

"Uh... well... wise and brave Black Wolf Commander! Chief Divine be witness! What I mean is... when a tree grows too tall, it attracts the wind and the lightning! ... And you, you're tall and mighty, but if someone whispers slander..."

"Ha! Tikalo, look at your sneaky mindset! You're just trying to say that my achievements are too great to be rewarded, His Highness will fear me, and then be unwilling to let me lead troops anymore, right? ... What nonsense! No matter how high my accomplishments, can they surpass His Highness? No matter

how high my prestige, it doesn't reach a third of His Highness! His Highness is such a great ruler, with ambitions spanning the seas, with endless battles to fight, how could he fear me?..."

At this point, Black Wolf Torc clearly showed some disdain. His face held a nonchalant smile until Tikalo licked his lips and carefully spoke a couple of words.

"Respected Black Wolf Commander! Even the sturdiest pyramid cannot withstand the long erosion of water! ... You've seen it with your own eyes, think about the past friendship between His Highness Xiulote and King Aweit, and think about the changes in recent years!..."

Ten years ago, could you imagine two inseparable suns developing so many rifts? ... In the end, isn't it because His Highness's prestige is too high, his achievements too significant, while there are too many scoundrels around the king? ...

With the situation between the King and His Highness, if the King were to bypass His Highness and, following the tradition of the Alliance, promote you to Prince... how would His Highness respond? Then, for the tradition of the Alliance, for the rewards of achievements, His Highness would have no choice but to carve out a piece of land and grant it to you!"

"And if you accept the fief, how could you support the Black Wolf Army, how could you continue to lead the army on expeditions? If you firmly refuse, the King could make a great show of it, spreading rumors that disturb the Kingdom... Moreover, far in the future, when His Highness inherits the Alliance... there might be petty men around him, whose thoughts slowly start to change as well..."

"Respected Black Wolf Commander! For consideration of the distant future, if you wish to continue leading troops in battle, then let the glory of capturing the Hidden Serpent Holy City, capturing the Chief Priest and the Divine Descendant... be given to other Generals, for His Highness to take full control!"

"Hmm?!... His Highness and the King, changes and future... This is your suggestion? You want me to yield my achievements, to suppress my prestige?"

For a moment, Black Wolf Torc's smile froze. His expression alternated rapidly between emotions, changing several times. After a while, he pursed his lips, glanced at the bowed Tikalo, and shouted angrily.

"Chief Divine be witness! My loyalty to the Kingdom has never wavered! I am His Highness's Black Wolf, loyal only to His Highness!... With the wisdom of His Highness's Divine Revelation, how could he, like a mortal, be swayed by petty men's lures?!"

"Bah! I'm furious, what utter nonsense! Tikalo, I see you as a petty man, just like the Female Snake beside the king! Major affairs of the Alliance are ruined by people like you! If it weren't for you petty men, the King wouldn't have sent people westward, ending up with the nonsense of crowning a monkey! And His Highness wouldn't be entangled between the two sides, repeatedly sending envoys to the Capital City, to assert his loyalty..."

"Uh! Yes! Yes! Respected Black Wolf Legion Commander, you are right... Hmm? Crowning a monkey, entangled between two sides?"

Black Wolf Torc chastised for a while, looking at the trembling, terrified Tikalo, then sighed heavily.

"Alas! Chief Divine bless the Alliance, bless the Kingdom, and bless His Highness as well!... Tikalo, tell me more carefully! Accepting the surrender of that Naval Commander, what benefit is it to the Kingdom and His Highness?..."

Chapter 1393: Moonlight Fades West, the King's Philosophical Reflections

"... Witnessed by the Chief Divine! Tikalo, so with everything you've said, it means accepting the surrender of the Naval Commander of Hidden Serpent City has three advantages! One is to cut off sea route support, striking a blow to the morale inside the city, hastening the fall of Hidden Serpent City. Another is that with the planning of an insider, we can try to round up the city's Priesthood and Divine Descendants all at once..."

The night was deep, the shadows flickered in the grand hall, and moonlight spilled from the ceiling. Black Wolf Toltec furrowed his brow, pondering over Tikalo's cautious suggestion. Regarding these two military advantages, he was somewhat dismissive. With his capability as the Black Wolf Toltec, under the current circumstances, wanting to breach the city and annihilate the tribe—what difficulty is there?!

"Hmm... The most crucial advantage is the third one. Acquiring a few ready-made large Maya ships, retrieving two of the kingdom's longships, and having a batch of ready Maya shipwrights... to support the conquest further to the East and the expansion in Cuba with transportational naval forces!"

Thinking of this, Black Wolf stroked his chin and pondered for a long time. He still had a letter from His Highness instructing him to gather shipwrights and carpenters from city-states along the way to be sent to Golden Bay City to serve the kingdom's Eastern Shipyard.

He knew that shipbuilding, unlike constructing siege machinery, is a real technical job; it's not about brute force creating miracles, nor do they get discarded after one use in battle. Building large ships requires a long time, from materials to the frame to the hull, all involving complex processes and specialized talent.

Summoning a tribal camp takes only a few months, or even days, to pull them out and send them into battle. But to build a coastal naval force and produce usable large ships takes years!

"Two years, almost two years! The kingdom's Eastern Shipyard has not yet produced a single longship... Hmm, His Highness said the first batch of longships is almost finished, but there are only ten... Oh Chief Divine! This naval warfare is truly troublesome!..."

Thinking of this, Black Wolf widened his eyes, reached out, grabbed Tikalo's collar, and harshly rebuked him.

"Tikalo! Tell it like it is! Were the Maya shipwrights of Hidden Serpent City captured along with you?! You old fox, why are you so careless in your affairs? Carelessly exposing the fleet's whereabouts is truly deserving of death! Deserving of execution!"

"Ahem! Ahem! Respected Black Wolf Legion Commander... indeed, there are a few leading backbones among the shipwrights of Hidden Serpent City, whom I planned to present to His Highness as Maya Pan master craftsmen... But the other shipwrights should have been seized from other Maya city-state fleets..."

Mayan merchant Tikalo shifted his posture, trying to break free, but he could not budge Black Wolf's grip. With a bitter smile on his face, he could only answer with difficulty.

"Black Wolf Commander, you know! ... Shipbuilding takes time, among the Hidden Serpent City fleet, only three Maya oar-sail ships were modeled by shipwrights under Papu Priest, and the rest were forcibly drafted..."

"Chief Divine bears witness! In a waterside camp east of Hidden Serpent City, there are over a hundred craftsmen constructing five oar-sail ships, with a large stockpile of well-dried timber! ... All of these are resources Hidden Serpent City's Chief Priest painstakingly gathered from various city-states and nobility... Now, as long as Papu Priest leads the naval forces to surrender, all of this will be yours, will be His Highness's!"

"Over a hundred craftsmen, five oar-sail ships under construction, and a batch of excellent timber?"

Upon hearing this, Black Wolf Toltec pursed his lips, his eyes flickered for a moment, and then he let go of his grip.

"Tikalo, witnessed by the Chief Divine! Did you see this with your own eyes, or did you hear it from that Papu?"

"Uh... Papu Priest said it! But I suppose he wouldn't dare lie to His Highness and you..."

"Hmm... I know!"

Black Wolf Toltec stood up, expressionless like a ruthless alpha wolf. He surveyed the surroundings, his gaze falling upon the bloodstained palace walls, focusing on a wooden carving of the Feathered Serpent Divine, his eyes growing fierce. Then, he ignored Tikalo standing beside him and walked directly to the carving, instructing his trusted aides on either side.

"Someone! Bring my legion commander's bronze greatsword!"

"Yes! Sir!"

A moment later, Black Wolf Toltec held a bronze greatsword over a meter long, silently holding his breath for a few moments before letting out a booming roar!

"Papu! Die! ..."

The heavy greatsword swung swiftly, accompanied by the explosive rush of wind, slashing down hard on the wood carving!

"Bang! Crack! ..."

The force of this strike was immense, and the angle was so precise! It was an incredible blend of strength and skill, splitting the human-sized wood carving cleanly in half with a single blow! And such a terrifying strike, if it landed on a samurai in leather armor, would certainly cleave him in two just the same!

"Ah!"

The head of the Feathered Serpent Divine spun and rolled, landing not far in front of Tikalo. Faced with such an unparalleled display of martial prowess, this pure killing technique, cold sweat involuntarily beaded on Tikalo's smooth brow.

"Respected... Black Wolf Legion Commander..."

"Hmm?! Do you have anything else to say?"

Black Wolf Toltec's gaze pierced over, that undisguised, almost beastly intent to kill striking fear in Tikalo's heart. He had intended to mention Papu Priest's terms for surrender, but given the current situation, there was no way he could speak them aloud.

"Ah! I shall go plead directly with His Highness..."

With the words on the tip of his tongue, Mayan merchant Tikalo struggled to smile, respectfully lowering his head.

"Chief Divine bears witness! Respected Black Wolf Commander... I've disclosed everything, it's all up to your decision!..."

"Hmm."

Black Wolf Toltec lowered his eyes, his expression remaining sternly silent for a long time before speaking coldly.

"Wuta!"

"Chief!"

"How many days have the envoys been gone, reporting the victory over the Sacrificial Lake City to His Highness?"

"Chief, the first batch of envoys reporting the victory have probably already arrived at Golden Bay City. As for the second batch reporting detailed battle reports, they just left yesterday morning..."

"Can you catch up to them? Take this guy and get to Golden Bay City as soon as possible!..."

"Uh! Take him?"

Red-haired trusted aide Wuta turned around to look at the emaciated Tikalo, who trembled from standing too long. First, he widened his eyes, then shook his head vigorously like a rattle drum.

"Chief! How could such a skinny old fox possibly keep up with a wild wolf running in the woods?! Impossible, definitely impossible... unless..."

"Hmm? Speak!"

"Unless I take two brothers and tie him to a pole, carrying him like cargo!..."

"Ah! Ah this..."

Upon hearing this, Mayan merchant Tikalo broke out in sweat and began trembling again. If he were carried to Golden Bay City in such a manner by a few red-haired barbarians, his body, which had just emerged from a dungeon, might as well be buried along the road. Such an inglorious death would be a disgraceful affair for a Serpent Divine Descendant who had weathered countless storms, leaving him with no face to meet his ancestors...

"No! You're too rough-handed! He must arrive at Golden Bay City intact, to meet His Highness properly!..."

Black Wolf Tortoise shook his head and, glancing at the shaking Tikalo, ordered.

"Find some Totonac militia who are good walkers! Prepare one of those, oh, a small Maya shoulder sedan that can walk through the jungle for him!..."

"Let the Chief Divine witness! Wuta, you lead a team of scouts as escort, and you must personally deliver him to Golden Bay City, into the hands of His Highness's trusted aides!"

"Yes, Chief! I'll prepare immediately and depart at first light!"

"Hmm!"

Black Wolf Tortoise nodded and gave his final instructions before trusty aide Wuta left.

"Remember! Tie him on the sedan! During the journey, he must not contact anyone else!..."

"And! Muzzle him! Don't let this old fox talk!"

"Got it, Chief!"

The moonlight was cool as trusted aide Wuta quickly disappeared within a few steps. Behind him, Mayan merchant Tikalo, also under the escort of several trusted aides, exited the deep palace hall. His

trembling sweat-drenched appearance was like one who had walked away from a beast's den, on the edge of life and death, which indeed was the case...

"Heavenly Serpent Divine, bless me on this arduous journey... Finally, I can go to meet His Highness!..."

"I wonder, what could be the situation over there with His Highness at this moment?..."

His murmuring whispers, carrying Tikalo's questions, floated towards the Western horizon hundreds of miles away. The West, bathed in vast misty moonlight, was also where the lantern-lit patrols of Golden Bay City wandered beneath the moonlight.

In the palace at the center of Golden Bay City, a splendid and enchanting dream, like fleeting clouds and rain, had just begun to awaken. Those traces of mysterious exploration lingered on the king and engraved in his heart, allowing him a moment of clarity and enlightenment.

"Young woman Yilian... woman... the woman who belongs only to me, the proclamation from the Colima Mountain Region..."

Xiulote raised his head, gazing at the moon overhead as it moved westward, feeling a complex emotion that was both called responsibility and possessiveness, mixed with a lust for power. He then struggled to get up, gently set aside the entwined limbs of the girl, and silently stood beside the bed, watching the woman who had fallen asleep from exhaustion.

"Hmm... my woman, there is now another... a kitten from the Colima Mountain Region..."

Xiulote reached out, stroked the sleeping "kitten," ruffled her short hair, and pinched her slightly chubby cheeks. After pursing his lips, he glanced at the red marks on the bed, paused silently for a moment, then tenderly wiped away the girl's tear marks and covered her with a cotton quilt.

"Mmm... hmm?..."

Mountain lion... so fierce... don't bite me..."

"..."

Listening to the kitten's murmurs in her sleep, Xiulote remained silent for a while. He touched the painful marks on his body, gently shook his head. The kitten was obviously not very clever, remembering things differently from what happened... He smiled, donned his robe, and walked towards the window, watching the soft moonlight fall.

A moment later, a wisp of priest's divine smoke rose languidly from his hand, relaxing him entirely. The divine smoke communicated with ancient sages, transcending time and space, leading the king's profound gaze to the further Western direction. In the layered mountains he couldn't see, there were two hundred thousand Colima Mountain Region tribes, and even more, only nominally subjugated Southwestern Tecos Tribes...

Chapter 1394: From Stars to the Sun, the Emperor's Reflections

The wooden house is quiet, with only the breathing of the cat. The wooden window reveals the sky, and moonlight falls from the night sky. The faint divine smoke circles around Xiulote, evoking distant thoughts. He gazes at the jade incense burner before him, placing the divine smoke in his hand into it, like lighting an offering incense for distant gods.

"Awakening without knowing the bright moon above, full of flower shadows needing a hand to lean on..."

Recalling this long night, celebrating the fall of Stone Carved City, drinking with many generals and subjects, and finally, the pleasure after being drunk with Yilian... Xiulote's expression is complex as he looks up at the starry sky. He seems to see a pure, beautiful white cloud, imprinted in his deep eyes, as if watching him from afar with a cold gaze.

"Yesterday's stars and yesterday's me, today's blazing sun and today's change..."

Xiulote lowers his gaze, murmuring softly. This night's indulgence in pleasure is unlike any before. He seems to have drunk himself into a stupor, but in reality, his mind is clearly awake, even recalling every cry of the cat.

In fact, he has long been able to control his desires with ease, and tonight was not driven by lust, but by the desire for power within. The choice made tonight, the beginning of this final decision... also signifies

that he has finally embarked on a path of merciless emperorship, becoming a political creature chasing power!

"To counter the pressure from Aweit, to quickly subdue the tribes under heaven, I must set the dark moves... political marriage and childbirth, claiming inheritance, unifying the tribes... so-called 'spreading seeds across the world', the so-called 'Golden Family'! I will be accountable to everyone, except you..."

Xiulote remains silent, watching the divine smoke burn out. He gazes at the dissipating smoke, looking at the unseen slim figure, softly murmuring the last inaudible words. Then, everything quietly and silently disperses into dust and smoke.

"You have not betrayed me, but I have betrayed you; longing for you at the end of the world cannot be forgotten... I will not be the pure star, nor the hidden moon... I am the one and only radiant sun!..."

The divine smoke extinguishes, the beauty sleeps in spring. Moonlight is like water, and the window is already empty. Xiulote dons a robe and strides out of the wooden house. Guard Commander Ecatl bows his head respectfully, having awaited him for a long time.

"Family Head! You're awake!"

"Hmm."

Xiulote nods slightly, glancing back at the courtyard where the wooden house stands, softly instructing.

"Ecatl, from now on, let Yilian reside in this courtyard. Select some reliable maids, and warriors from the Tecos Tribes to care for Yilian and ensure her safety!"

"Yes! Family Head!"

"I will often come here recently... Yilian's living expenses should match my daily standard."

"Yes! Family Head!"

"For the time being, Yilian will handle the daily paperwork, but find a suitable successor for this role..."

Xiulote muses for a moment, looking at Ecatl.

"Ecatl, do you have any recommendations?"

"Hmm... Family Head, the tribes of Nianshui City have once again offered several noble ladies..."

"The tribes of Nianshui City?"

Upon hearing this, Xiulote ponders slightly, shaking his head.

"Refuse! The situation in the Seaside Alliance is stable, and the tribes of Nianshui City need to be reorganized and formally structured into banners again! This is not the right time... Additionally, as Miyava's delivery is imminent, if she gives birth to a son, I will not take any more noble ladies from the Seaside Lands who are Divine Descendants..."

"Hmm... Family Head, the success of the expedition fleet's return is largely due to the assistance of the Vastec Silver Raven Great Tribe... Over the past two years, with the support of the Alliance and the Kingdom, the Chieftain Papata of the Silver Raven Great Tribe has consolidated half of the Vastec Alliance. In essence, the Silver Raven Great Tribe controls the southern Vastec Lands, ruling over hundreds of thousands of Vastec tribes..."

Guard Commander Ecatl cautiously hints.

"Calculating the time, the two daughters he sent to your side, Liuyu, Liuyao... have just completed two years of clerical training in Divine Power University, mastering the Alliance's characters. If they do not pursue further studies in mathematics, astronomy, and geography, they can already graduate!..."

"The daughters of the Silver Raven Chieftain? Liuyu, Liuyao? The sisters close in age?..."

Xiulote pauses slightly, recalling the sisters from memory. The elder sister Liuyu is quite composed, splendid like a Michelia in summer; the younger sister Liuyao is somewhat shy, exquisite like a daisy in early autumn. Both possess extraordinary, graceful figures cultivated from a young age through dance, leaving a deep impression that's hard to forget upon seeing.

"Michelia and daisy, twin sisters... Silver Raven Great Tribe..."

After a moment, Xiulote rubs his brow and nods slightly.

"Ecatl, let it be them! Hurry, as my time in the Seaside Lands might be short! Over in Cloud Serpent Mountain City, new developments have emerged... Once the Eastern Expedition is completely over, King Aweit will certainly summon me back to Lake Capital City!..."

"Ah! Family Head! You, you intend to?... Please, think about it! Think about the High Priest's final letter! You must consider carefully!..."

At these words, Guard Commander Ecatl stands stunned for several moments, his expression changed dramatically. He appears anxious, wishing to persuade further. Yet, Xiulote waves his hand to stop the guard commander from speaking, calmly deciding.

"Ecatl, stop talking! I see things clearly, and I know my choices!... Hmm, how is Snake Woman Miyava recently?"

"..."

Guard Commander Ecatl remains speechless for a while. After a long pause, he bites his lips and bows his head, responding solemnly.

"Family Head, as your guard commander, my only advice is still to keep yourself safe..."

"Since you placed her under house arrest, Snake Woman Miyava has been very obedient... She stays in the courtyard nursing her pregnancy, following the doctor's advice in diet and activity to protect the

fetus... According to the doctor's diagnosis two days ago, the delivery is estimated to be only half a month away..."

"Hmm, pregnant since last June, and now it's late March... counting the days, it indeed approaches!..."

Thinking of the Snake Woman under house arrest, Xiulote rubs his chin, with his eyes showing a flicker. During the New Year's grand ceremony, the Snake Woman and Yilian somehow came together, nearly causing some unforeseen tantalizing and absurd incident.

However, he always had people placed by the Snake Woman's side, monitoring her actions, therefore knowing everything in advance. He was repeatedly tempted by the two bold women throughout the night, yet never drank the "entertaining" Deer Blood Wine until the end...

Yilian's admiration was sincere and simple, and Xiulote didn't blame her. But towards the pregnant Snake Woman, with her hidden probing intentions, Xiulote responded explicitly, stating his stance.

"House arrest for three months to nurture the pregnancy! All Seaside Alliance affairs to be handled by others!..."

Thus, the Snake Woman once again lost her power, clarifying the king's attitude and the reality of being under constant surveillance. Fortunately, she knew this was all temporary. After testing the king's bottom line, she secretly cursed "the heartless man" for a long time, then returned once again to obedient compliance.

"Snake Woman Miyava..."

Moonlight pours, and Xiulote turns around, looking towards the small courtyard where Miyava resides. After pondering for a long time, he lowers his gaze, sighing deeply within his heart.

"Among my women, only you have the most ambition, the most talent... and you alone bring me joy, allowing me to cherish and admire you!..."

"But even though you are exceptionally intelligent, able to recite the entire 'Book of Ama Colley' by heart, you only know the epics of the Seaside Tribes and Highland Tribes, yet unaware of the history of the Celestial Empire..."

"In the future, if I become the Martial Emperor, then you shall be Lady Gouyi!..."

Chapter 1395: The Only Concession

In early April, light drizzle fell over the Seaside Lands. Outside the villages surrounding Golden Bay City were vast expanses of lush and already harvested mixed bean fields.

In the name of the Chief Divine's guidance, under the direction of the Kingdom Priests, new agricultural innovations, accompanied by higher food production, were being systematically introduced to the villages around Golden Bay City. Meanwhile, the hearts of the tribes and flags at the Seaside grew more secure with the divine-like bounty!

"The priests have already checked the recent harvest... According to the water and heat conditions of the Seaside Lands, it is indeed possible to plant two seasons a year... A summer-autumn season with the 'Three Sisters' as the staple crops, and an autumn-spring season with beans to enrich the fields. When cassava is fully propagated, it can also fill the barren mountain fields as regular food for the tribespeople..."

After breakfast, Xiulote, draped in a short robe, sat cross-legged in the grand hall, reviewing the latest reports from various places. His recent life was very routine: he would rise at dawn and practice martial arts with the Guard Commander. Then, after breakfast, he would begin reviewing kingdom documents, overseeing the affairs of the Seaside Alliance. Once seated for work, he would have a simple lunch at noon and stay busy until dusk.

Later, after an elaborate dinner, he would go to see 'Kitten' Yilian, to savor some fresh, tender desserts. Then he would play around with the kitten, enjoying a blissful dream. Colima's 'Kitten', although a bit wild and likes to bite, is actually very cuddly and would contentedly hold on and 'purr'. When satisfied, 'Kitten' would not fuss or cause trouble, just wide-eyed like a lynx, lying on him and looking at him naively.

Frankly speaking, the simple 'Kitten' doesn't have as many seductive tricks as the alluring Snake Woman, capable of turning one into a beast. However, she provides great comfort and can make one laugh out

loud in relaxation. Xiulote could see through her at a glance, thus making the interaction notably easy, allowing him to sleep very soundly every night.

"Ah, leisurely days, they truly are a luxury!..."

Xiulote reminisced with a smile and began to flip through the documents on the desk. Occasionally, trusted aides would arrive in haste, delivering the latest verbal and written messages. Guard Commander Ecatl would organize and slightly rewrite these according to importance and respectfully place them on Xiulote's desk for review.

"Hmm, Cloud Serpent Mountain City, Black Serpent Teuctli's request? His garrisoned fortress in the rear mountain lacks salt and grain, and he wants to smuggle some from the kingdom's besieging army?"

Upon seeing this report, Xiulote pondered for a long time, suddenly asking the Guard Commander.

"Ecatl! When did MeKate, Chiwaco, and the Dark Snake's party first connect with Black Serpent Teuctli?"

"Family Head! At the Grand Festival of the New Year, the Head Warrior received the first document, indicating that Black Serpent had connected with Dark Snake... It's early April now, exactly three months!"

"Three months? Black Serpent Teuctli hesitated for three months before sending a probing reply for the first time... It seems, in his heart, he doesn't value this son, the Dark Snake, very much!... Indeed, if he valued him, he wouldn't have abandoned his son and fled after the city fell... Regardless, a private communication has been established, which is a rare opportunity!..."

Xiulote contemplated for a moment longer and asked again.

"How long has Cloud Serpent Fortress been besieged? How long have they been without salt?"

"Family Head, in the Monkey Month of the Nine Flint Year (April 1488), King Aweit led a grand army to begin the siege of the three snake cities. At present, in the House Month of the Twelve Reed Year (April 1491), Cloud Serpent Mountain City has been under siege for three full years! A strict prohibition on salt

has been in place for over two years. The salt within Cloud Serpent Fortress must have been depleted long ago, and they've probably been without it for at least a year!"

Guard Commander Ecatl thought for a moment and found an old military report.

"Your Highness, by the end of last year, civilians from Cloud Serpent Fortress were being driven down the mountain by the defending army. They appeared swollen and pallid, like walking corpses... According to their accounts, even salty stones and soil on the mountain were collected by the defending army, reserved for the stationed Divine Descendants and warriors to lick... As for ordinary city dwellers, even small nobility family members haven't tasted salt for months..."

"Hmm, it's been besieged for three years!... Even if there are still food supplies in Cloud Serpent Mountain City, the morale of the ordinary defending army is likely at rock bottom!... According to Black Serpent, Cloud Serpent Mountain City and the surrounding mountain camps initially had over ten thousand people! After three years of siege, only two fortresses on the front and rear mountains remain... Excluding those who died from illness, starvation, battle, or were driven down the mountains, there are now only two thousand warrior militias on the front mountain, and a thousand defending milites on the rear mountain, all relying on the mountain fields and springs of the front and rear mountains for sustenance..."

Upon reading this, Xiulote slightly lowered his eyes. From over ten thousand people in Cloud Serpent Mountain City to just three thousand now, the atrocities were imaginable. But surprisingly, the morale of the noble warriors suppressing Front Mountain was still relatively stable. Since the city constantly drove tribespeople down the mountain without large-scale cannibalism, it indicated that the city still had stable food production. Under such circumstances, continuing the siege to breach the city might take another year!

"Such resilient Cloud Serpent Tribes, such stubborn Cloud Serpent Divine Descendants!... Also, what a terrain like a heavenly barrier!..."

"After breaking Cloud Serpent Mountain City, should this impregnable fortress be utterly destroyed?.. Perhaps, I can leave a Priesthood and several hundred Temple Warriors there, occupying this absolute fortress... Yes, under the pretense of building a temple to suppress the Cloud Serpent Divine!..."

Xiulote pondered for quite a while, then looked at the Guard Commander prepared with paper and ink and gave his order solemnly.

"Royal Decree! The surrender negotiations for Cloud Serpent Fortress will be fully entrusted to the Head Warrior to decide with discretion! Additionally, smuggle the requested salt to Black Serpent Teuctli from the besieging legion! Besides that, provide him with a month's supply of food for eight hundred people!"

"Ah? Family Head! To give Black Serpent at Cloud Serpent Fortress salt, and to provide him with food?...
O Chief Divine! Why is this?..."

Upon hearing this, Guard Commander Ecatl's face showed surprise. He looked puzzled, gazing at Xiuluo, waiting for the wise Family Head to guide him through the maze.

"Ha! Ecatl, you fellow!..."

Seeing this, Xiuluo laughed heartily and shook his head. Regardless of whether the Guard Commander truly didn't understand or pretended not to, he thoroughly enjoyed the process of providing direction and naturally proceeded to do so.

"The Black Serpent was once the Lord of Water Valley City and a Divine Descendant of the Telascallan. Although he fled to Cloud Serpent Mountain City, maintaining his identity, he had lost his foundation and could not command many warriors in the city. Therefore, if he truly wishes to surrender, he indeed needs a batch of grain and salt, from which he can prove to some of the city's Defending Army his connection with the outside! Yes, to convince those people to follow him and surrender!..."

"Of course, requesting grain and salt from the besieging Kingdom Legion is also a way of testing! If we don't even give him these things, how can he trust my promises to him? Ultimately, he doesn't trust me! He has been hesitating about whether or not to surrender..."

"However, if he really accepts the Kingdom's grain and salt... then whether or not to surrender is not up to him! After all, this kind of collaboration with arch-enemies is very deadly! As long as it is leaked to the Cloud Serpent Divine Descendants in the city, even if the common warriors can accept it, Cloud Snake City Lord Tepectl will absolutely not accept any explanation! He will only immediately kill the Black Serpent!..."

At this point, Xiuluo's expression turned poignant, with an indescribable sense of melancholy.

"Regardless of whether Black Serpent Teuctli is truly surrendering or deceptively doing so... as long as he can obtain supplies from the foot of the mountain, it will undermine Cloud Snake City Lord Tepectl's control over the whole fortress... and at this juncture of life and death, anyone who threatens to weaken the city lord's authority becomes a mortal enemy!... If the Cloud Snake City Lord lacked such awareness, he could not have held out until today!..."

"Ah! So that's how it is! Wise Family Head!"

Guard Commander Ecatl knelt respectfully, his face showing admiration. A few moments later, his genuine admiration turned into sincere joy.

"May the Chief Divine bless! It seems that at last, the impenetrable Cloud Serpent Fortress is about to fall into your hands!..."

"Haha! May the Chief Divine bless! Once we breach Cloud Serpent Fortress, and the Hidden Serpent Holy City falls... this over-three-year-long eastward campaign will finally come to full fruition!..."

"Indeed! Family Head! You have consecutively conquered cities and destroyed countries, accomplishing feats never before seen in the history of the Alliance!..."

At this point, Guard Commander Ecatl pursed his lips, nonchalantly, he again naturally advised.

"Praise the Chief Divine! Your guidance just now truly left me filled with both reverence and deep unease!... As long as a threat weakens authority, it creates mortal enemies... Family Head! Regarding the envoys recently sent by the Alliance... and the King's demands, you cannot always concede..."

"May the Chief Divine bear witness! Ecatl, say no more!... I'm fully aware of my choices... going forward, I will only concede this once more..."

Xiuluo glanced at the prostrate Ecatl, rubbed his aching brow, and lightly sighed.

"The King has sent several waves of envoys, and I am very clear about the meaning between the lines of what they say, as well as his intentions! The Alliance must not erupt into a civil war at this time... So, I have promised the King's envoys that once the eastward campaign is concluded, I will return to Lake Capital City to attend the sacred Grand Festival!..."

"Lake Capital City will be a splendid cage, a cage Aweit has prepared for me. I will enter the cage myself, but I will not stay there for long. As long as my prophecy comes true, and the large ships of the White-skinned Demons arrive... Aweit will face a greater threat and enemy and will avert his attention from me. He will believe my previous promises, understand my reasons for requesting the Seaside Lands..."

At this point, Xiuluo paused, his face showing rare hesitation. In truth, after experiencing all of this, his trust in King Aweit had become very thin. What truly made him willing to take the risk of returning to Lake Capital City, aside from the grand endeavor of the Alliance, the future of the Kingdom, his father, and his son... was only his wife, Alisa!

"Alisa, I trust her!... My cloud sprite, she has never let me down... I will entrust my life to her once... as if it's..."

Xiuluo pursed his lips, recalling that lovely silhouette in white, recalling the letter from the golden eagle, took a deep breath. He closed his eyes, waved his hand, and kept the final quiet murmur deep in his heart.

"As if it's... my debt to you... my wife, Alisa..."

"As long as you are there, I will never engage in a power-struggled civil war with Aweit!... I will endure and wait... and this, too, is a promise I made to you! Written in the hand-drawn letter where you held onto me, and also onto your father, from the story's beginning, will reach the story's end..."

Chapter 1396: The Fall of Sea Woman City, the Departure of the Royal Legion

In the seaside lands of April, it was already late spring. The sprawling grass and trees, the harvested bean fields, the migrating flocks of wild geese—all symbolized a vibrant vitality. Meanwhile, the Mexica Plateau presented a scene of mid-spring lushness. The fields being burned along the lake, the tribes migrating eastward, and the large groups of militia transporting grain were continuously expanding the Mexica Alliance's control over the Tlaxcala lands!

Tens of thousands of royal legions, after two years of silence, finally marched out from the Texcoco Lake District. Under the unfathomable will of the Divine King, the tide, woven with dark green and platinum, spread towards strategic places in all directions. They suppressed the nobles of the various states, paid attention to the changing times, and awaited the kingdom's promise... Would it be the passionate welcome of victory, or the merciless icy killing intent? Everything depended on the thoughts of the two kings.

"Family Head, may the Chief Divine bless us! The latest victory report from Zicao County! Etalik, the county magistrate of Zicao, led the Purple Grass Army and a month ago, broke through the Sea Woman City of the Southeastern Tecos Tribes! The Purple Grass Army killed three thousand samurai and captured nearly forty thousand members of the Tecos Tribe... The over two hundred miles of the southeastern Tecos coast has been completely brought under the kingdom's control!"

"Oh?! The veteran Etalik broke through Sea Woman City?"

Upon hearing such great news, Xiulote's spirit was lifted. He eagerly took the document transported from afar and hastily perused it.

The Sea Woman City of the Southeastern Tecos Tribes is located at the mouth of the Tarsas River and over two hundred miles further southeast. During the first Southern Expedition, the kingdom's scouts had already spied on the details of the tribes there. The Black Wolf Torc once considered sending troops for conquest. However, at that time, the kingdom's foundation on the southern seaside was not yet solidified, which led to the temporary abandonment of the plan.

Several years passed in a blink. The Kingdom of the Lake had relocated and garrisoned twenty to thirty thousand Tlaxcala banners at the mouth of the Tarsas River, established dozens of villagers' settlements to provide food for the military expedition. Trout Town, located on the west side of the river's mouth, developed into a crucial heavy smelting town where three thousand warriors were stationed, guarding the vital Black Rock Mountain iron ore area. The smelting workshops around the iron mines consistently supplied affordable ironware, propelling the kingdom's colonization and development...

Divine Revelation Priest Neri and Tlapanec merchant Telali, disguised as long-distance traders, set out from the mouth of the Tarsas River in early last year to secretly gather maritime intelligence of the Coastal Mistek and Sapotek tribes. They passed through the Sea Woman City of the Southeastern Tecos, the Wind Origin City of the Tlapanec, the River Bean City, and Black Altar City of the Mistek, reaching the Deer Mountain City of the Zapotec, and only after encountering trading fleets from the Highland Maya City-State from the south did they smoothly return by the end of last year!

The banners were well settled, and food was harvested abundantly. The newly subordinated Tlaxcala Tribes eagerly anticipated the opportunity to join the military campaign, earn military merits, and receive the award of nobility and land! With all the necessary intelligence gathered along the way, County Magistrate Etalik unhesitatingly led the five thousand strong Purple Grass Army, and also summoned five thousand Tlaxcala banners, launching an expedition against the Southeastern Tecos!

"My lord! Within just three months, under the bombardment of ten newly manufactured Royal City Thunder God mortar cannons, more than ten wooden fort cities of the Southeastern Tecos Tribes were completely swept away. Tens of thousands of tribesmen were either killed or surrendered, and the robust Sea Woman City also fell!"

"Under the presiding of the Chief God Priest, over forty thousand captured Tecos Tribes people pledged a blood oath of conversion, becoming followers of the Chief Divine. According to my plan, fifteen thousand of them will be awarded as agricultural slaves to commend the three thousand victorious Tlaxcala warriors! Subsequently, these awarded Tlaxcala warriors will be elevated to third-level warriors, granted land and settled around the Sea Woman City as a reliable foundation of the kingdom's rule, managing the newly subdued Southeastern Tecos Tribes..."

"As for the remaining thirty thousand, they will be organized into seven large banners of over four thousand, and seventy small banners of over four hundred, distributed across the three hundred miles of mountain forests and seaside between Sea Woman City and Trout Town. They will be managed jointly by the kingdom's preaching priests and warrior banner leaders, incorporated into the kingdom's direct governance!... And as for the Tecos Divine Descendants and priests who originally managed the tribes, I have sacrificed them all, eliminating them completely..."

Seeing veteran Etalik's plan, Xiulote slightly nodded. Etalik had been stationed in Zicao County, arranging immigrants and integrating various tribes for eight or nine years. Now, in order to open a sea route to the Southern Continent, he finally got the chance to go on a military expedition and display his skills. And with this move, he revealed the old veteran's ferocity.

"My lord! Three thousand Tlaxcala warriors have been awarded land. The more than a hundred thousand immigrants from the east who were relocated into Zicao County have finally fully integrated into the kingdom's order, and the people's hearts have completely stabilized! The more tribes surrender, and the bigger the army grows, the more indispensable external conquests become! If a war can be fought, the pensions for those who die, the rewards for meritorious warriors, and the attribution of captive tribes as slaves will save years of integration and consolidation..."

"According to your instructions last year, I originally intended to march along the coast, pacify the Wind Origin City of the Tlapanec, then raid the cities of the Coastal Mistek, continuing to open the southeastern maritime route... it's just... the movements of the Alliance Royal Legion in the mid-upper reaches of the Tarsas River make me quite concerned, and I worry about your safety..."

"Hmm?"

Seeing this, Xiulote was slightly taken aback. He took a deep breath and continued to read on, his brows furrowed tightly.

"After this year's New Year grand sacrifice, the alliance's royal legions set out from the Texcoco Lake District, to garrison across the states. And by the end of February, three elite legions of eight thousand royal warriors each have already been stationed in the mid-upper reaches of the Tarsas River, suppressing the three southern states of the alliance respectively..."

"The three royal legions are stationed at the Sun City in Raziko State, the Salt Lake City in Sarco State, and the High Mountain City in Vats teppek State... These fully manned legions of the alliance are only two hundred miles away from the Talas River! Nominally, they are garrisoning the Southern Three States to deter the disloyal Mistek Tribes. But in fact, they can cut off the river transportation at any time, severing your connection with the kingdom, cutting off your retreat path to the kingdom... even going downstream westward, directly entering the southern part of the kingdom!"

"With the central alliance's control over various local states, this twenty-four-thousand-strong royal warrior legion can easily muster a similar number or even more city-state armies! And the 'Yu Yan,' 'Huashu,' and 'Coiled Python' city-state legions currently under your command... at this moment, their hometown and city-states are all in the hands of the royal legions. They inevitably can only pledge allegiance to the Avit God King of the alliance. If the Divine King issues a decree... every time I think about this, it truly makes me anxious day and night, causing me sleepless nights!"

Chapter 1397: Teacher and Student, the Final Lesson About Power

"Sun City, Salt Lake City, High Mountain City... three Royal Legions, twenty-four thousand Samurai... stationed in the Southern Three States, ostensibly to deter the unfaithful Mistek Tribes..."

The map of the Talas River spread out on the table. Xiulote pressed his lips together, gazing at the three Royal Legions, those who could head south at any moment, cutting off the critical positions along the Long River. He was silent for a long time, suddenly turning to Ecatl, asking sternly.

"Ecatl, where are the Royal Legions of the Alliance currently stationed? I need the latest information!"

"Family Head, the Alliance has more than fifty thousand Samurai under direct command. Among them, there are six standing legions of eight thousand Samurai each, including one Copper Armor Battle Group and one Longbow Battle Group. A Noble Battle Group of over two thousand, composed of the glorious Jaguars and Eagle Warriors. A Tonsured Guard of four thousand, drawn from the elite of various City-States and defectors, newly established for less than two years. Lastly, a Temple Legion of four thousand, primarily formed by the most elite Elder Guards and Temple Guards, commanded by the God of War Priest..."

Guard Commander Ecatl looked grave. He took out nine Jade Talismans, placing them one by one on the Alliance's map as representations of the nine Royal Legions.

"After the New Year Grand Sacrifice, three Royal Legions moved south, including the Copper Armor and Longbow Battle Groups, stationed in the Southern Three States. One Royal Legion went west, stationed in Tzompantli City in the west, also controlling the upstream passage of the Lerma River. One Royal Legion moved north, suppressing Strait Gold City, overseeing the division and migration of the Strait Gold Clan, 'persuading' the last stubborn nobles. Another Royal Legion is stationed at Oak Tree City in the Tlaxcala Land in the East, maintaining the Alliance's important route to Four Snake City, and ensuring the crucial transport and supply of food... In summary, there is one standing legion stationed in the East, North, and West each, and three in the South, marking the positions of the six standing legions!"

"As for the Noble Battle Group, Tonsured Guard, and Temple Legion, these over ten thousand elite veteran warriors of the Alliance, they constantly guard the Lake Capital City. Unless faced with special circumstances or if the King personally leads an expedition, they generally will not leave the Capital City."

"The six standing corps stationed outside, three elite guarding the Capital City, such an arrangement..."

The Jade Talismans filled the map of the Alliance, representing the most powerful force in Central America. After two years of reorganization and reform, this vast military force was once again ready for deployment. And with Aweit's ambitions, he would certainly not delay the conquering steps of the world!

"Ecatl, has the City-State Army of the Northern Four States been mobilized?"

"Family Head! No such news has been received... Since the Divine King's centralization reforms, the Four States' armies have been disbanded. The Strait Gold Clan Leader has just died, and the transferral and reform of the nobles of each state are still vigorously advancing, not yet completely finished..."

"As the Chief Divine witnesses! So this is it... Your current primary goal remains the centralization reform, particularly the reform and transfer of the Southern Three States' great nobles..."

Looking at the map of the world, observing the disposition of each Royal Legion, Xiulote pondered for a moment, quickly understanding Aweit's plan. Being a student personally trained by Aweit, he clearly saw his teacher's ambitions and strategies.

"Among the real power great nobles of the Northern Four States, Gold Mountain City, Tzompantli City, Strait Gold City—three states have already changed City Lords, dividing the Glory family's power. The last Reed Clan Chief Xintle of Reed Marsh City has always been the most compliant, actively cooperating with the central government's reforms... The centralization of the Northern Four States is basically complete! As for the Southern Three States, it's time for the decisive reform..."

"The Legion Commanders of the Southern Three States are all in the East Expedition army, under my command. At this moment, the nobles and warriors without a mainstay cannot resist the power of the Royal central government. Once the Three States are controlled, the three City-State armies will naturally comply and accept the reform obediently..."

Thinking of this, Xiulote lowered his eyes, filled with emotion. The southward movement of three legions to the Three States was indeed an exceptionally shrewd move, fully grasping the human heart!

To the nobles of the Three States, the Kingdom sacrificed the Strait Gold Clan Leader and remained united with the Alliance. The Kingdom's East Expedition army was presently holding three City-State armies, making it impossible for them to show any resistance. And for the Kingdom of the Lake, these three City-State armies were the Alliance's hidden hands. For when faced with the choice between the Kingdom and the Alliance, they would inevitably side with the stronger, more legitimate, and Three States-controlling Alliance in the end.

"If I show any signs... these three main legions can immediately compromise with the City-State nobles, recruiting the City-State armies, heading south to cut off the Long River, and even launching attacks along the river east and west!... Whereas if I obediently return to the Lake Capital City, these three Royal Legions can, after completing the centralization reform, become the vanguard of the Southern Expedition against the Mistek people!..."

"In short, all six Royal Legions are oppressing various states. Aweit's current foremost task remains the centralization reform! His second objective is, just as I once mentioned, to launch an expedition against the unfaithful southern Mistek people!... However, he is also prepared to compromise with the local great nobles at any time. Should I not go to the Capital City, the great target of the centralization reform—both the Royal central government and the local great nobles would make me their target! ...at this moment, when my forces are the most scattered, my position the most dangerous..."

Xiulote contemplated for a long time, a slight wry smile appearing on his face, along with a faint sadness. He sighed deeply, murmuring softly.

"Aweit, my father-in-law, my teacher... centralization and the pacification of all states were initially my suggestion to you, along with the plans of my grandfather! You asked whether I support it or not? Of course, I support it...After all, concentrating the Alliance's power is also my political pursuit!"

"But given this arrangement at present, the four legions of the Southern Three States and Oak Tree City... do you not trust my promise to you? To be so wary of me, worrying that I might retreat along the Long River back to the Kingdom? ... But how could I do such a thing? At this critical moment, when the great enterprise is unaccomplished, and change is imminent!..."

"Indeed, power changes everything... In the contest of power, there is only absolute balance, only foresighted planning... Whether you trust me or not, you will block all other choices for me, leaving me only this arranged path..."

"And this plan of yours likely began taking shape when you handed me the East Expedition, besieging the two Snake Cities... yet separately dividing the military authority of Oak Tree City in Weisoqinke territory!..."

Remembering the last farewell with Aweit two years ago, Xiulote closed his eyes, remaining silent for a long time before suddenly opening them wide. At this moment, in his deep eyes, there was no hesitation, no sadness, no reluctance, only resolute courage!

"My teacher, thank you for teaching me the final lesson on the struggle for power... Then let us meet in the Capital City! I will still be your best student, and you will always need me, as the Chief Divine witnesses!..."

Chapter 1398: Loosening the Beast's Leash, the Monkey's Loyal Request

"With the protection of the Chief Divine! Etalik, my loyal Family General... You need not worry about the situation of the Alliance. Continue with the original plan to open up the southeastern maritime route! The immediate goal is to quell the city of Wind Origin of the Tlapanec people, occupy the six hundred-mile coastline from Sea Woman City to Wind Origin City, and force the city of Bees in the mountains to surrender..."

Xiulote sat cross-legged in front of the desk, looking at the spread map of the South while writing a reply to the old General Etalik.

"The city of Bees of the Tlapanec people is located in the mountains south of the Tarsas River, with very treacherous terrain and unclear roads... However, according to the Scout's intelligence, there is a tributary of the Tarsas long river that runs into the sea, providing a route from the midstream of the Tarsas River, through the city of Bees to Wind Origin City, which can serve as a thoroughfare for the army... This is also the route used by the Tlapanec merchants for trading, connecting the long river with the sea..."

"There are approximately two to three hundred thousand people in the Tlapanec Tribes; to conquer them... Etalik, my loyal Family General, I permit you to supplement the equipment from the Capital City and the Black Rock Mountain's smelting and forging place according to Zicao County's food supply, and expand the Purple Grass Army as much as possible! Whether they are Tlaxcala warriors, Tecos warriors, or even Tlapanec warriors... all can be recruited into the army to fight for the Kingdom!"

At this point, Xiulote paused, thought for a moment, and clearly wrote out the next arrangements.

"Once the Eastern Expedition is completely finished, I will return to the Lake Capital City to participate in the victorious Grand Festival... According to the Avit God King's wishes, I may stay in the Lake Capital City for two years, or even longer... Therefore, I grant you full authority over the Southern conquest, you must let your momentum unfold! The better you fight, the more the army expands, the happier and safer I will be in the Lake Capital City..."

Xiulote picked up the letter paper, then read it carefully under the sunlight once again. He then personally copied it twice, each sealed with a jade seal, and handed it to the solemn Guard Commander.

"Chief Divine witness! Three copies of this Royal Decree should be expedited by trusted aide transmission! One copy goes to the Chief Minister in the Capital City, Kingdom Priest High Jatili, to coordinate the distribution of food from various counties and the deployment of priests. One copy goes to the director of the Divine Revelation Place, Talaya, to provide military supplies to each county. The last copy, is handed to the old General Etalik, telling him..."

Xiulote paused for a moment, his gaze became fierce, then he spoke with a deep voice.

"From the day the Royal Decree arrives, he is not only the County Magistrate of Zicao County but also the Purple Grass Military Governor of the Kingdom! He will hold all military and political powers, autonomously deciding on conquests as the Great Chief of Purple Grass..."

"Ah!"

Upon hearing this, Guard Commander Ecatl's expression suddenly changed drastically. He widened his eyes and looked at Xiulote, but saw only his unmistakable determined demeanor.

"Family Head, Chief Divine witness!... Once this kind of power is granted, wanting to reclaim it may not be so easy..."

"..."

Hearing this, Xiulote remained silent and unresponsive. The political system of the Kingdom originally stemmed from a loose tribal alliance with significant local autonomy. The relationship between the Kingdom's central government and each county is more akin to the Great Khan and various Great Chiefs of the prairie tribes, or the early system of the Spring and Autumn, Warring States era, rather than the centralized governance formed in the Celestial Empire after the Qin Han.

Xiulote also has a very clear understanding of his position. Although he harbors ambitions akin to the First Emperor, within the realms of Central America, on the political foundation of city-state tribal alliances, he commands a series of subordinate tribes with delegated powers and control... The role he

is getting closer to is actually that of the Xiongnu's Modu Chanyu, Mongolia's Genghis Khan, Khitan Emperor Abaoji...

"Ecatl, after going to the Lake Capital City, my Royal Decree might not be smoothly conveyed. Before that, I have to untie the ropes around my ferocious underlings and let them freely pursue their prey and empower themselves!..."

"As for the old General Etalik, he is advanced in age... and has always lacked ambition, in fact, he is the one I trust the most!"

Xiulote smiled and shook his head, quickly going through the faces of several Legion Commanders in his mind.

"Teacher Olosh, Head Warrior Bertade, Black Wolf Toltec, Monkey Kuluka, Miner Ezpan, Wolf Head Elvi, and trusted aide Papu... Hmm, monkey, monkey..."

Thinking of Monkey Kuluka, the matter of the War God Priesthood elder being sent by Avit God King to confer the monkey surfaced in his mind once again. For this matter, he sent envoys to the Alliance, once more expressing his loyalty. However, within the Kingdom, he issued no severe Royal Decree, only promoted Sage Jatili to Kingdom Priest High, fully responsible for the Kingdom Priesthood, positioned above the two Chief Priests.

"Ecatl, the recent letter from Monkey Kuluka, which I have not yet replied to... bring it to me! I've decided to respond to his request and issue him a formal Royal Decree, also in three copies!..."

"...Yes! I obey, Family Head!..."

Guard Commander Ecatl solemnly nodded, took out a carefully kept letter. The content of the letter had already been read by the King, but it was only today that he made up his mind.

"...King, you have saved my life, elevated me from obscurity, entrusted me with great responsibilities... My loyalty to you will never change! Even though I am a Mexica, even in front of the Mexica King..."

"But I am often anxious, not for my own loyalty, but for the loyalty of my army under me... You know, my Spear Legion is entirely composed of warriors of Mexica origin... The influence of the Mexica God King is deeply imprinted in their minds, just like a stone with crevices will let the water flow through... I think this is also the reason why the God King chose to confer my title. I am aware of potential choices in the future; I can guarantee my loyalty, but cannot vouch for the entire army..."

"The Western Expedition of Chapala Lake Region is progressing smoothly! Chapala Lake Region is like a ripe fruit, which I, the greedy monkey, picked and presented to you... At the end of February, as I write this letter... the fortified city of Chapala by the lake, the central city-state of the whole lake region, the Feather Prince's Capital City has just had its east side wall collapsed by the thunderbolt of the Mortar Cannon!"

"At this moment, over ten thousand Kingdom's Warriors have already stormed into the city! They will crush the last resisting Feathered Warriors, blood-sacrifice all the Old Nobles in the city... Especially the Telascallan Warriors of the Long Snake Legion, and the Prepecha Warriors of the Sky Family, are the most brave and fearless, the most self-sacrificing!... In front of my eyes, the whole ancient city-state is engulfing in flames, the green-black city walls are covered in dark red blood stains... And the last of the Tarasco Nobility and Three God's Priests are all atop the circular Akatla Pyramid, igniting the Stone of the Dead, walking towards blazing death!..."

"With the protection of the Chief Divine! I did not go to see the siege of the city, which Commander of the Long Snake Legion Elvi is in charge of. After the autumn harvest, during half a year's expedition, through the three-pronged attack of the Spear Legion, Long Snake Legion, and Guamar Tribes... Until today, all twenty thousand Prepecha Tribes in the Chapala Lake Region have already or will soon all submit to your feet! The tribal disposition of this lake region has also followed your guidance, largely established farm camps or flag teams, smaller part granted feudal lordship..."

"Given that most of the Lake Region comprises Prepecha Tribes, I prioritized conferring a batch of veteran Prepecha Warriors and sent a batch of Prepecha Chief God Priests. When you first made the Western Expedition against Tarasco, the surrendered captives that converted have long sown the seeds of the Chief Divine faith... Chief Divine bless! After the military achievements of land grants with serfdom, establishing farm camps flag teams, and spreading of Chief Divine faith, the situation over the whole lake region should settle quickly!..."

"Chief Divine witness! The nimble Feather Prince once again fled west with two or three thousand tribal warriors and able-bodied men, three hundred miles away to the Ameca Valley, seeking refuge under his father-in-law, Divine Descendant City Lord of Ameca City, Great Chief of Eagle Mountain Quij-eagle's protection... I demanded from Great Chief of Eagle Mountain, but he stubbornly refused! The next

disposition can only be to continue the conquest, pacifying the Western Ameca Valley, and even further west to Tecos Tribes, fighting all the way to the seaside Three Rivers City..."

Monkey's letter is very long and written with great detail, with dozens of pages! He fully explained the Chapala Western campaign of the past half-year, including considerations of the conferment of every General and the disposition and management of every city-state... Who knows how long it took monkey to write it all, but every page truly reflects his seriousness and loyalty.

Xiulote had already read it once, and reading it a second time still touched him in the heart, a slight smile gradually spreading on his face. It wasn't until he saw the last page that his expression turned solemn, deep in thought, just like he was when reading it the first time.

"King! Chapala Lake Region has been subdued, but the subsequent settlement and disposition are quite complex. To the North are the Wilderness Guamar Tribes, to the West are the unyielding Northern Tecos Tribes, Feather Prince is still constantly fleeing West. And the whole lake region is composed of freshly surrendered Prepecha Tribes, Wilderness Tribes, Tecos Tribes, especially lacking the backbone and intermarriage of Mexica Warriors..."

"The situation in Rivermouth County, the matters of God King's conferment, I have already once confessed to you. You did not impose punishment, but your monkey remains anxious... I have thought over and over again, contemplating the situation of Rivermouth County and Chapala Lake Region, the Mexica Spear Legion, and the Telascallan Long Snake Legion, a clever idea of a 'spirit monkey' gradually formed in me!..."

"Honored Chief Divine, witness my loyalty! King, I boldly request of you!..."

Chapter 1399: The Second Military Governor—Monkey, "Monkey"!

"Chief Divine as my witness! The Chapala Lake Region lies in the northwest of the world, 600 li from the Qinchongcan Capital and a full 1,200 li from the Lake Capital City! Here, the influence of the Mexica Alliance will become negligible. No matter how the God King reaches out, he cannot grasp the mirror-like waters of Lake Chapala... In contrast, Rivermouth County is 600 li from the Lake Capital City, connected to the western part of the alliance by the Lerma River and neighboring Longran Fortress. Envoys from the Texcoco Lake District can easily travel back and forth, liaising with the Mexica warriors in the county..."

Xiulote sat cross-legged in front of the desk, looking at this letter that had traveled from Chapala City, nearly 2,000 li, before reaching Golden Bay City, and fell into deep contemplation.

This letter was rushed day and night by fleet-footed Canine Descendant scouts, taking over a month to reach the seaside. He had read the final contents of this letter many times, committing them to memory such that he could recite them. Initially, he was noncommittal about the Monkey's request and did not reply, but over these days, he gradually changed his mind.

"The Chapala Lake Region is fertile and lush, and its area is especially vast! Just along the Great Lake, it stretches more than 300 li east to west and over 200 li north to south. Around the Great Lake, there are desolate farmlands, the ruins of villages, and many broken townships. It is said that twenty years ago during the Tarasco Era, there were as many as 400,000 tribes here! And the Tarasco Kingdom's legion also set out from here to campaign against the more western Northern Ticos tribes..."

"Chief Divine as my witness! Your Highness, I have patrolled over half of the Chapala Great Lake and carefully examined the situation along the way. Currently, although according to the priests' estimates along the way, the population of the whole lake region is about over 200,000, with the development potential of this lake region combined with agricultural techniques inspired by the Chief Divine... the entire lake region could support a population of at least three times that, up to 600,000 people!"

"The terrain north of the Great Lake is flatter, with two Great Rivers flowing from the wilderness, connecting to Lake Chapala. Four to five hundred li upstream of the rivers are the camps of the Guamar tribes. Further north, over 200 li, is the Sakatekas Desert depth where the remnants of the Guajili tribe are entrenched... According to the Guajili flag team that went on expedition, there is an enormous silver vein in their former wilderness homeland, resembling an open-air mountain range in its gray-white expanse, with reserves exceeding the world's total silver!..."

Upon reading this, Xiulote nodded slightly, recalling the situation in later generations. The area north of the Chapala Lake Region would later develop into the Greater Guadalajara metropolitan area and become the second-largest metropolitan area in all of Mexico, with nearly six million people! Its terrain and transportation are very convenient, with a natural advantage for rising. Aside from being too far west geographically, its development potential far surpasses the Prepecha Lake District...

Moreover, on the Sakatekas Desert north of Chapala, there is also the Sakatekas-Fresnillo open-air great silver mine area, where the silver reserves are more than one-tenth of the entire world's! Over a hundred years later, Zhang Juzheng's "Single Whip Law" tax reform could be implemented precisely because of the tens of millions, or even billions, of taels of Sakatekas silver traded by the Spaniards...

"Chief Divine's blessing! The Chapala Lake Region is vast, fertile, and abundant, a divinely promised land granted by the Chief Divine to the kingdom! The Feather Prince cannot keep this place. He cannot develop the north, nor can he subdue the Guamar people, turning fertile lands into barren hills, wasting this fertile land in vain..."

"In my view, as long as stone fortresses are built upstream on the Great Rivers to the north, and the Guamar tribes who are wanderers are dealt with, the peace of the whole lake region can be established! After that, settle tribal immigrants, establish flag team villages, restore farmland villages, rebuild ancient towns... then dispatch a great army to the west, campaign against the western city-states and tribes, forcibly relocate mountain tribes to settle in the lake region, thoroughly open up the Lerma River estuary to connect with the kingdom's northern trade routes..."

"Building forts in the north, stationing the army, accepting surrenders; establishing flag teams, villages, townships in the central lake region; campaigns west, relocating people, trade routes, plus the conversion preached by the Chief God Priest!... Chief Divine's blessing! With all these efforts, the entire Chapala Lake Region will become another foundational land for the kingdom in the northwest, a central stronghold for the northern continent's development, and become Your Highness's true rear and retreat!"

Upon seeing this, the thick letter was down to the last two paragraphs, and the purpose of the Monkey's request had already become apparent.

"Monkey Kuluka thoroughly investigated the situation in the Chapala Lake Region. His multiple campaigns there have given him a far deeper understanding of the surrounding tribes than any Legion Commander! This entire letter, though without a word of boasting, is actually Monkey's development plan for Chapala sent to me!... His request... his ambition... and his wisdom... can they truly be accommodated by his future loyalty?"

Xiulote lowered his eyes, remaining motionless for a long time. From any perspective, Monkey Kuluka is more suitable than Wolf Head Elvi to oversee the Chapala Lake Region! As Monkey said, the handling of the Guamar tribes, the campaigns against the Northern Ticos tribes, the settlement of the flag team and civilian settlements in the lake region... he understands them all well and can execute them effectively! Besides...

"My supreme, sole monarch! Your loyal Monkey requests you! Please transfer and grant land to my Spear Legion and their families in the Chapala Lake Region! Let the legion's 8,000 Mexica warriors

become the kingdom's Divine Tree, a reliable root system to control the lands of Chapala! As for the Guajili flag team accompanying the campaign, they can also move ten thousand people to settle north of the Great Lake to assimilate and accept the Guamar tribes of the wilderness!..."

"As for Rivermouth County, with a population of nearly 300,000, this land that has already fused into the roots of the Divine Tree... perhaps it would be more beneficial for the kingdom to be managed by the Legion Commander Elvi from your family of Samurai, stationed with his Long Snake Legion from Tlaxcala. After all, the influence of the God King cannot possibly penetrate deeply into the Tlaxcala Warriors! These foreign warriors who have submitted to you and worship you like a deity may be more reliable than the Mexica Warriors at certain critical moments..."

"And I, your monkey... am willing to garrison the northwest frontier for you, expanding the kingdom's territory, conquering all that do not submit!... Even if I travel between the wilderness and the Great River, starting anew from the desolate Lake Region, and venture beyond the thousand-mile Long River... I will be your most loyal subject, the monkey that you personally promoted!... Chief Divine bears witness! I am willing to die for you, my only king!..."

The long letter finally came to an end. The monkey's sincere request, like his simple face, emerged in Xiulote's mind. Facing this request, the political instinct of being a king kept him hesitant. It was not until he faced the immense pressure from the God King and decided to return to the Lake Capital City, unleashing the leashes on his wild beasts, that he finally made a determination!

"Chief Divine bears witness! The monkey's request to reassign the Spear Legion to garrison the Chapala Lake Region... to relinquish the affluent neighboring Rivermouth County and start anew from the newly conquered and distant Chapala Lake Region!... Monkey, oh monkey, your request is truly filled with boldness!..."

"I can unleash the Black Wolf, allowing him to bite and fight all over the place, because he only excels in conquest, not in managing places... I can let go of the veteran Etalik, not only because of his loyalty but also due to his age, which can no longer support long-standing ambitions..."

"But as for you, monkey! You are adept at managing places and at handling the relationships among various tribes. Although you do not have illustrious military achievements, you are indeed a Great General talent. Your strategic vision is second only to Head Warrior Bertade among my generals!... And you are quite young, always able to win the hearts of the warriors..."

Xiulote recalled his first encounter with the monkey, when he was pushed forward by the warriors under him after the death of the camp's general. The reason he named him "monkey" was not merely due to his appearance but also due to certain vague thoughts from future generations. At present, if he were to loosen the leash on the monkey, allowing him to stay in the promising Chapala Lake Region... then the monkey's future might...

"Oh monkey! If it weren't for the pressure from God King Avit, I would never let you out of the cage! I would not doubt your loyalty at this moment! But people, they always change quickly with the rise of circumstances... Moreover, if I were no longer here, even dead in the Capital City... Would your loyalty remain with my sons?..."

The gentle breeze blew, taking away the long deliberation of the king. Xiulote snapped back to reality, gently shook his head.

The situation is always changing, and people's hearts are always changing, one cannot envision too far ahead. From the current circumstances, to counter God King Avit, the Long Spear Legion composed of Mexica indeed needs to be relocated! As for Monkey Kuluka, after all, he is the kingdom's Western Expedition Marshal, the loyal "Divine Monkey" Legion Commander, not some "monkey" from another dimension...

After contemplating for a long time, Xiulote finally put down his pen, dipped in blue ink, and wrote a brief and indisputable royal decree on a roll of blank document.

"Royal Decree: Western Expedition Marshal Kuluka, to be stationed at Chapala Lake Region, garrison the Long Spear Legion, and relocate their families! Long Snake Legion to move and be stationed in Rivermouth County after the westward expedition. Additionally, voluntarily relocate two main flag teams, eight thousand Guajili tribe, to be stationed in Chapala..."

"Monkey, my loyal Great General, I grant you full authority over the Western campaign, and the management of Chapala area! You must diligently manage the distant Chapala area for me, subdue and incorporate the nomadic tribes of Guamar, and further open the entire Lerma River!"

"This is a long-term task, also full of vast future opportunities! For this purpose, a Great Lake County will be established at Chapala Lake Region, and you will not only be the County Magistrate but also the Great Lake Commissioner! You will have the complete military and political authority as the Great Chief of the Great Lake, independently deciding matters of war!"

Chapter 1400: Colima Iron Ore Mining, The Third Military Governor

"Ecatl, prepare the royal decree for Monkey, in four identical copies, and arrange for trusted aides to deliver it urgently! One copy for Monkey, one for the Chief Minister, one for the Divine Revelation Director, and the last for Wolf Head Elvi!"

"As you command, Family Head!"

The royal decree was issued, and the trusted aides began to shuttle back and forth, quickly becoming busy. These aides had been educated in writing and possessed a certain level of cultural literacy. They were not just officers-in-training, but also retainers and messengers responsible for conveying the royal decree, directly loyal to Xiulote himself. Among them were young progeny sent by the chieftains and nobility of various tribes, but the majority were elite commoner Samurai selected and groomed. In fact, being chosen for the Personal Guard essentially provided a shortcut to success!

"Fetch me several more rolls of durable parchment! I need to continue sending royal decrees to the Legion Commanders across various regions!"

"Yes, Family Head!"

Before the sun had set, oil lamps were lit in the hall, casting bright rays of light. Xiulote dipped a quill into ink and carefully began writing the royal decrees and letters, which were a mix of text and diagrams.

"Under the witness of the Chief Divine! Wolf Head Elvi, your Long Snake Legion has fought well in the westward expedition! After the capture of Chapala City, the subsequent battles will gradually slow down, and May's spring plowing will become the top priority... You will station the Long Snake Legion in the Chapala Lake Region, accompanying Monkey Kuluka to partake in land cultivation, establishment and management of civilian settlements and flag teams..."

"Elvi, you must learn well, study Monkey's experience in local governance! And after the autumn harvest in October, the Spear Legion will continue to be stationed in the Lake Region, while the Long Snake Legion returns to garrison in Rivermouth County... At the end of the year, I will appoint you to the position of Rivermouth County Governor! The county, with a population of over thirty thousand,

hundreds of villages and dozens of flag teams, will all be under your management!... Monkey will also hand over to you the situation and arrangements in the county..."

"May the Chief Divine protect! After your return to Rivermouth County, your first task is to organize the migration of the Spear Legion families westward and arrange the relocation of the Guajili flag team... The second task is to guard against the influence of the Longran Fortress to the east and the upper reaches of the Lerma River..."

"Elvi, you are of the Holy City's family Samurai origin, having served my grandfather since youth. As for your loyalty, I have never harbored doubts. Thus, assigning Rivermouth County to you makes me feel reassured! You must safeguard Rivermouth County for me, manage the Tlaxcala Samurai under you... Especially when facing the Alliance and the Divine King, while I will soon head to the Lake Capital City..."

At the end of the letter, Xiulote clearly pointed out two sentences and disclosed his upcoming arrangements. Then, he continued writing, unfurling another piece of parchment, addressing it to Ezpan, the second Spear Legion Commander stationed in Apa County.

"Ezpan, my loyal Great General... Apa County has been stabilized, the tribes that have been migrated are settling in, managing nearly three hundred thousand in population, you've done excellently!... And about the plan you mentioned last year, to conquer the Northern Tekos Tribes along the coast, the timing is now ripe!..."

"Regarding the conquest plan, I have four instructions! First, restore Hand Snake City in the southwestern mountains and establish a town at Palm Bay on the seaside as the departure point for coastal conquests. Second, collaborate with the Colima Tribes in the mountains, heed the advice of the priests and craftsmen at the Divine Revelation Place, to establish outposts around Palm Town, and mine volcanic ash from the Colima Mountain Region and the newly discovered small open-pit iron ore..."

After nearly two years of exploration, the Kingdom's exploration teams finally located a small open-pit iron ore near the seaside deep within the Colima Mountain Region. The outdoor scale of this iron ore was actually very small, even less than one-third of the Black Rock Mountain's small iron ore, which initially disappointed the exploration team.

Yet Xiulote, aware of future details, firmly confirmed that as long as they followed the surface iron ore and dug deeper underground, they would inevitably unearth the Colima deep iron ore belt with remarkable reserves! The latest discovery of this small iron ore in Colima served as the final push in his decision to "consume" the pure and lively mountain lynx Yilian.

"Third, the purpose of Apa County's conquest of the Northern Tekos Tribes is to thoroughly open the northern sea route, establishing a reliable large-scale supply point! Thus, your main target of attack should be the coastal tribes and city-states, particularly Three Rivers City at the Lerma River estuary... Avoid wasting too much effort on tribes deep in the mountains. As long as they are willing to submit and pay tribute, they can maintain their current autonomy. But for the coastal city-states and fertile lands, ensure solid control in hand! And for those Divine Descendants, nobility, and priests unwilling to relinquish power, deal with them harshly..."

"Fourth, the Kingdom's conquest of the Northern Tekos Tribes will have dual armies of land and sea! Monkey Kuluka will be transferred to the Chapala Lake Region. Then, he will lead the legion to conquer along the Lerma River all the way to the downstream estuary. Meanwhile, you will conquer along the coast northwestward... Hopefully, you will reunite at Three Rivers City at the Lerma River estuary! By then, the conquered Northern Tekos Territories, those along the coast, will belong to you; those along the Long River, to Monkey... The mountain ones will maintain autonomy, allowing you both to consult and gradually subjugate..."

"Ezpan, cooperate well with Monkey! Three Rivers City at the estuary will be allocated to you, ensuring the sea route to the Northern Continent! The Kingdom's exploration team has reached the distant Arctic Sea, moving far faster than I anticipated. The task upon their shoulders relates to the future of the entire Kingdom! And the Kingdom will spare no effort, providing them ample support..."

"Thus, ensuring the advancement of the exploration fleet is your most important mission! In reality, the conquest of Northern Ticos is mainly undertaken for this mission... I value the exploration northward greatly, remember that!..."

At this point, Xiulote paused slightly. The Kingdom's second batch of support fleet, ten longships, nearly seven hundred Samurai and sailors, had already set off north in early December last year. Considering the time, it is already early April, and a full four months have passed. If all goes smoothly, this support fleet should have reached the core West Mountain Port of the Western Sea Coast. If they moved faster, they might have reached South Port or even North Port...

"The bustling Northern Land with its tribes teeming with vitality!... From the northernmost Whale Harbor to the Kingdom of the Lake, communication takes over half a year. And from the Kingdom back to me takes another month... I don't know when I can personally board a large ship, head to the infinite Western Sea Coast, and take a good look at the mountains and sea, tribes and camps there... Take a look at San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Vancouver belonging to the indigenous people and the Kingdom!..."

Xiulote gazed northward, envisioning for a long time before reeling in his long thoughts. He composed a royal decree, unleashing this fierce and decisive four-fingered "beast".

"Under the witness of the Chief Divine! The Sun's rays will shine upon you! Ezpan, for the aforementioned plans and objectives, I grant you full authority for the coastal conquests! Upon the day this royal decree arrives, you shall be promoted to the Great Chieftain of Apa in charge of military and political affairs, the Kingdom's Military Governor of Apa!"

"Go forth! Make a path to the Northwest Coast for me, ensure the Northern Tekos Tribes all submit to the Kingdom's rule! And the iron ore in the Colima Mountain Region, along with the Iron Smelting center soon to be established by the Divine Revelation Place, will become your most reliable support!"