

## **Civilization 371**

### Chapter 371 - The Village by the Lake

The chilly sunlight fell on Lake Patzcuaro, reflecting the shallow surface of the lake during the dry season and the reflections of the reeds in the water. Along the lake's shores, the Tarasco villages lay desolate and forlorn, the fields overgrown with weeds. Even though the new year had just begun, there were no celebrating crowds to be seen, nor the scent of incense in prayers. Only at dawn and dusk did faint wisps of cooking smoke rise, accompanied occasionally by the bark of a dog, revealing a rare hint of life.

The old Militia member, Chiwaco, stood stiffly in front of a mud-brick hut, motionless, his eyes hollow and without light.

Since he had been drafted and left his warm home, half a year had passed. During this time, he had fought in watery battles where flames blazed and survived city sieges amidst showers of arrows. He had seen many Nobility snap like cornstalks, thousands of Samurai stomped into the mud like leaves, and countless commoners, like weeds in a slash-and-burn, turned to ash by war's fire and scattered into oblivion without a trace.

Having escaped from the battlefield's deadly grip, accustomed to the tears and blood of humanity, and weathered the hardships of life and death, he finally returned to his village. However, he never expected, nor wished to imagine, that in this cold, small home, only the simple mud hut remained.

The mud hut, which he had built brick by brick from mud, had taken years to gather the materials and a year to construct, was considered respectable in the village. These baked mud bricks were the product of labor during the agricultural off-season, crafted night and day with his wife. This hut had once been filled with his wife's bustling activity, his son's noise, his daughter's laughter, and everything he cherished.

At this moment, in front of the mud hut, the wooden door stood wide open, as if welcoming the long-absent homeowner. Outside the dwelling, the penned fire turkeys, the hairless domestic dogs in front of the house, and even the chili peppers hanging beneath the eaves were all gone. Inside, the few possessions were scattered about, seemingly narrating past events. The cooking pot was shattered on the ground, the water jar completely overturned. The painstakingly built straw bed was reduced to scattered straw; the corner where grain was stored was now utterly empty.

The old Militia's mind was equally blank. He trembled as he looked at everything before him. The familiar, the anticipated, the loved ones he cherished, all remained only in his memory, as if they had taken his soul and left behind a solitary shell.

Not far behind the old Militia, Weizti looked at the empty hut, his face a mask of confusion and helplessness. A group of seven Militia burst into this desolate and ruined village, and the home they remembered suddenly shattered. In this familiar yet strange place, they seemed to be the only signs of life.

The young Militia, Ayuli, glanced at the trembling figures, scratched his head, and then stooped down to dig earnestly in the soil. After returning to the village, he had merely glanced at the empty hut before busying himself without concern.

Ayuli was the youngest among them, just come of age. Although he usually engaged in chatter about women and children like the others, he was in fact a bachelor. His parents had died early, he was unmarried, and he was the only one left in his impoverished family, possessing not even a dagger. He felt little about death and separation. This time, when he left to serve in the army, he managed to get a long spear, snatch some clothes, and even grabbed a dagger, returning fully clad.

After a while, Ayuli finally tossed a worn-out sack from the ground, filled with completely dried old corn. He grinned, grabbed a clay pot from another deserted house, and scooped up a jar of water from the nearby lake. While scooping, Ayuli glanced at the lake, where he could vaguely see some small boats with the gleam of Copper Spears shining in the distance.

Ayuli paid no mind. He gathered a pile of straw from the rundown houses, then started a bonfire in the cold village center. He used his companions' Copper Spears to set up the clay pot over the fire, cooking the old corn, continuing to search the other houses for anything usable.

Wisps of cooking smoke rose, and the aroma of corn began to drift through the village. Ayuli found a bag of coarse salt, tasting its salty taste tinged with bitterness, unsure of what was mixed within, or perhaps that was just the natural taste of salt. Then, he walked over to the pot, poked the corn with his dagger, and nodded in satisfaction.

"Uncle, you blockhead, come and eat the corn!"

Ayuli shouted joyfully at the other Militia members, but no one paid him any attention. He scratched his head again, then grabbed an ear of corn himself, disregarding its heat and struggling to chew. Indeed, old corn was hard to chew. Occasionally, he would lick the salt grains in his palm, which was the most economical way to eat. During his half-year campaign, he had seen the Samurai masters eat soft corn cakes and smoked meats, and the Nobility had pure yellow honey and dark cocoa. He genuinely envied them but could hardly imagine what they tasted like.

The scent of food wafted far, and suddenly there was some movement in the village. An old man peeked out from a dilapidated house, carefully sized up the Copper Spears supporting the clay pot, then the man eating corn, and suddenly he relaxed. The old man quietly emerged, looked around at the other dazed people, and without caring about the hot water, abruptly reached into the pot for the corn.

Hearing the noise, Ayuli abruptly stopped. He turned his head and saw the old man stealing corn, recognized him after a moment, and became furious.

"Old Iyitong, how dare you steal my corn!"

Having said that, Ayuli reached out his hand to snatch the food from the old man's hands.

Old Iyitong, while hunching over to dodge, frantically stuffed the corn into his mouth, stuttering as he babbled.

"Young Ayuli, haven't you stolen enough corn from my family? Give me back just one cob, I haven't eaten in so long!... By the way, is the war over? Did only a few of you return? Where is my little Iyitong?"

At these words, Ayuli suddenly stopped his hand. He scratched his head, sighed, and took two steps back, crouching in front of the clay pot, muttering something.

Seeing this, Old Iyitong also stopped eating his corn. He looked at Ayuli, trembling as he asked.

"My little Iyitong?... He..."

Ayuli didn't make a sound and hesitated for a long while before nodding.

Old Iyitong took two steps back in disbelief. In that moment, it seemed like all his strength had been sapped from him. The next, he abruptly turned to look at the dazed old militiaman Chiwaco and staggered toward him. In his hand, he held onto the half-eaten corn cob as if clinging to his last hope.

"Chiwaco, where is my little lyitong? All of you have returned, where is he?!"

Hearing the loud questioning, the old militiaman slowly turned around, seeming to awaken from a deep sleep. He opened his eyes to see the old man rushing toward him, his expression gradually distorting and then bursting out with a shout.

"Old lyitong, why are you, this old immortal, still here! Where is my wife? Where is my son? Where is my daughter?! Where are they?!"

Old lyitong ignored the question. He approached the old militiaman, only to keep asking loudly.

"Where is my son?!"

"Your son is long dead! He was shot with an arrow and fell into the lake, leaving nothing behind, not even a body for the crocodiles!"

Old lyitong stood there as if struck by lightning. He stood motionless, muttering to himself.

"Crocodiles... Crocodiles..."

Chiwaco rushed forward, his eyes shining with a strange glow. He grabbed Old Iyitong by the collar and shook his withered body violently, growling fiercely as he demanded.

"Old man, where is my family? Where is my son? Where is my daughter? Where is my wife?!"

Old Iyitong, jolted by the violent shaking, looked at Chiwaco with a defeated expression and spoke bleakly.

"Chiwaco, your family is gone! Your son was taken away by the second round of conscription by the Great Nobility! Your daughter was offered to the samurai by the village chief! Your wife, in despair, drowned herself two months ago. Her body was never found, no one knows where it decayed, and nobody went to look for her."

Upon hearing this, Chiwaco's eyes widened, his body instantly froze, and tears streamed silently down his cheeks. Then he gasped violently, trembled violently, and then roared furiously.

"My wife is gone, she's gone, gone... Damn it! My son was only fifteen, my daughter only thirteen! I will kill them all!"

Next, the old militiaman's eyes filled with fierce killing intent as he aggressively throttled Old Iyitong's neck, asking harshly.

"You old immortal, where's the village chief?... I will kill him! Kill him!!!"

Old Iyitong, terrified, looked at the Chiwaco he'd never seen before. He opened his mouth, but no sound came out. Seeing this, Chiwaco slightly loosened his grip and continued staring fiercely.

"The village chief... he was taken away by the Great Nobility in the third round of conscription... Who knows where he is now, he might also be thoroughly dead."

The old militiaman froze once again. A look of confusion appeared in his eyes, and his hands lost their strength. After a while, he murmured to himself.

"They're all dead... why don't you die? Why don't you die?..."

Old Iyitong struggled to twist his neck free from Chiwaco's loosening grip. He gasped for air and, hearing the old militiaman's question, thought it was about himself.

"The Great Nobility doesn't care about these old bones of mine, that's why they spared my life. Besides, being conscripted doesn't mean certain death, your son and daughter might still be alive somewhere in the Capital City."

"They know nothing, how could they survive in these times!... No, no, you're right, they aren't dead, I have to find them and bring them back!"

At this, the old militiaman's dull eyes lit up again. He looked across the lake to the Capital City, his only hope, and his new target. Then, he lowered his head, wiped the tears from his eyes with his sleeve, and left Old Iyitong behind, heading to where the militiamen were gathered around the fire pit. He needed to discuss plans with the comrades who had fought and survived together.

Old Iyitong stood alone in the corner. He slowly finished the corn, slowly squatted down, and then slowly lay on the muddy ground, like an old yellow fish out of water. Next, he rolled over with difficulty, buried his head in the mud, and began to cry softly.

The old militiaman Chiwaco gathered six companions. His eyes burning with passion, he spoke loudly about something. Then Weizti was the first to nod. The other militiamen stood still for a moment, some nodding in agreement, some shaking their heads in refusal, and they began to argue. Young Ayuli didn't care where he went, he looked toward the nearby lake and suddenly spotted something.

"Look! There are two boats coming."

Two typical canoes approached the lakeside, with shields erected on board, clearly a warship. From the warship, a dozen or so Tarasco warriors jumped off, holding gleaming copper spears and sturdy wooden shields, they marched indifferently toward the smoky village.

"Which village are you militiamen from!"

The leading warrior wore the garb of the House of Hummingbird. Returning from battle, the militiamen had learned much, and clearly, this was a warrior of the Great Nobility.

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Everyone looked towards Chiwaco together. The old Militia lowered his head in silence for a moment, rubbed his face with his hand, then lifted his head, his face breaking into a smile. Then, with the accent he had learned from the north, he spoke respectfully.



"Great Master, we are Militia from the northern Akanbaro State! The Mexica arrived too quickly, the Masters from the north didn't have enough time to resist, and many people scattered and fled... We were originally following a Great Master with a turkey crest, headed to the Capital City to garrison. But the Great Master moved too quickly, we couldn't catch up, got scattered here, and have been looking everywhere for his tracks..."

The Hummingbird Samurai thought about the turkey crest, which indeed seemed to belong to a Fief up north. He looked at the militia's Copper Spears, then at the age of these men and slowly nodded.

"Don't go looking for your Great Master anymore! Now, on behalf of the Chief Minister, I declare that you have been conscripted by Qinchongcan City, to serve the holy trinity of gods and the most exalted Royal Family! Pack up, don't bring any miscellaneous items, and follow me immediately!"

The old Militia looked at the well-equipped Samurai in front of him and then at the other Militia. At that moment, everyone obediently nodded. They picked up their Long Spears and boarded the small boats with the Samurai, then headed for the "Land of the Hummingbird," the Capital City Qinchongcan. Before leaving, Ayuli took one last look at the bag of corn he had left behind, glanced at the shadow in the corner, scratched his head again, and followed the others away.

The desolate village quieted down again, the bonfire flickering dimly, with only the faint sound of crying in the wind. After a good while, the crying gradually stopped, and the ignored old Itong got up from the ground. He wiped the mud and tears from his face, hunched over, and shakily picked up the remaining bag of corn. Clutching the heavy bag of corn tightly, he slowly approached the fire, squatted down, and picked up the corn cobs that the Militia had just discarded. Then, gnawing on the muddy remnants of corn as if devouring the last vestiges of hope, until there was nothing left.

Chiwaco followed the Hummingbird Samurai, rowing across the silent lake. As he looked at the blurry bodies floating in the water, he couldn't find the face that had accompanied him throughout his life. He observed the deserted islands in the lake, and memories of the past flooded his mind. In the many New

Years he had lived through, the lake would be dotted with boats, villagers from all directions coming to trade local produce on the islands in the lake, singing and dancing. Town Priests would also occasionally come to preside over grand prayer ceremonies, extolling the three gods that protect the Tarasco people.

He had shared these moments of rare joy amidst hard work with his family, now turned into fleeting illusions. The remnants of laughter from the memories carried on the wind, as if they were still beside him...

The breeze dispersed the laughter and took away the figures, leaving only the desolate wind. On the lake, only a sparse number of patrolling warships remained, the Samurai and Militia gripping their weapons tightly, nervously watching the north. Mexica Scouts crossed the Huayamo Fortress, appearing on the edge of the Lake Region, and the fearsome army was already not far off.

It only took half a day of sailing for everyone to reach the lakeshore. Chiwaco awoke from his reverie, and before him now was the bustling Kingdom Capital, Qinchongcan City.

He watched the majestic city, the center of the world in the myths. He gazed at the high city walls, twice as strong as the Rivermouth stronghold. He observed the sacred "House of Wind," a cluster of pyramids standing for a century, the holy residence of the Priests. Lastly, he beheld the solemn "Palace of Wind," the supreme palace of the King, the heart of the Kingdom's rule.

The grand Copper Capital stood firm by the lakeshore, unchanged for hundreds of years. It was, in Chiwaco's mind, the most bustling place in the world, and the final quest of his life.

#### Chapter 374 - Wind Rises in the Capital City

The golden sunlight filtered through the swirling sacred smoke, falling upon the majestic "House of Wind" atop Akatla, as if it were a blessing from the gods. The sacred pyramid then flowed brightly, its brilliance dazzling and extraordinarily radiant. The Sacred Fire atop the pyramid burned ceaselessly and the grand sacrificial rites and dances never stopped.

However, as the war situation gradually deteriorated, simple sacrificial rites could no longer stabilize the hearts of the nobility. The Northern Army of Mexica swiftly marched southward, and the well-informed nobility reacted.

Chiwaco stood outside the towering city gates, watching refugees from all directions streaming towards the Capital City, seeking the strongest shelter in the city. The refugees formed long lines, but the lines to enter the city were constantly interrupted. Occasionally, nobles dressed in luxurious clothes and adorned with gold and jade, protected by dozens of Guardian Warriors with family crests, hurriedly left the city for their fiefs outside the Capital City. Every time a troop left the city, it meant that the city's defensive strength was reduced.

Encountering a noble lord in a rush to leave the city, the leading Hummingbird Warrior looked angry but could only stand helplessly outside the city gates waiting. The old Militiaman glanced at the expressions of these nobles and then at the Warrior of the leading family, understanding something in his heart.

"Once the noble lords leave the city, they probably won't come back. The lords are fleeing! Could it be that even the sturdy Capital City cannot be defended?"

As Chiwaco was looking around, suddenly he heard a commotion. A majestic and tall elderly man in splendid clothing, vigorously walked towards the city gate, escorted by dozens of Copper-axe Guards.

The war had lasted only half a year, but Chief Minister Jinjinni seemed to have aged ten years. His face was full of wrinkles, and his hair had completely turned white. Yet, his gaze was still firm, now with an added icy chill. As the Chief Minister approached the city gate, he glanced around, and his face grew angrier. Then, he recognized a hereditary noble who was just at the gate bowing, a perfect scapegoat for the situation.

Thus, the elderly man in splendid clothing pointed with his hand and shouted sternly,

"Leaving the city without a Royal Decree is a betrayal to the gods and the King! Arrest him, execute the noble descendant on the spot, and recruit the family warriors into the military!"

At the city gate, faced with the Chief Minister's command, the hereditary noble looked horrified. He began to explain frantically,

"Chief Minister, before me, there were many other nobles..."

Next to the old Militiaman, the leading Hummingbird Warrior had been closely observing the Chief Minister's intentions. Standing closest to the noble, as soon as he heard the command, he abruptly pounced from behind. Without letting the noble finish speaking, he thrust his long spear forcefully, piercing the noble's heart from the back, with the spear tip protruding from the chest, instantly splashing blood everywhere. The hereditary noble only managed to utter "ah, ah" twice before he fell dead, like a red petal. Then, the surrounding guards surged forward, disarmed the noble's family warriors, and took them away.

Watching this sudden scene unfold, the old Militiaman Chiwaco shuddered. As he saw the high and mighty nobles being executed as if they were mere weeds, a strange thought suddenly struck him.

"So, even noble lords can be easily killed..."

Inside and outside the city gate, there was a chilling moment. Jinjinni looked at everyone's faces, nodded slightly, and again ordered sternly,

"Cut off the head and hang it on the southern gate to show the public! Anyone who leaves the city without permission will be executed, nobles included! Close all gates, leaving only the southern gate open for refugees to enter. Enlist able-bodied refugees on the spot into the military, and the strong women will be arranged by the logistics camp. Disperse the remaining elderly, women, and children away, not allowing them to linger near the Capital City!"

Hearing the Chief Minister's decree, the surrounding Guardian Warriors quickly took their orders. Then, Jinjinni looked toward the family warrior who had acted first, his face faintly familiar. Not bothering to recall his memory, he spoke directly,

"You did well! State your name, there will be a reward!"

"Respected Family Head, I am Puap from the 'Huitu' family, ready to die for you!"

The Hummingbird Warrior, Puap, knelt down on both knees, respectfully saluting.

The Chief Minister nodded slightly. "Huitu" was a name passed down among commoner warriors and also a family of warriors serving the Hummingbird family. He pondered for a moment and then spoke,

"So you are the son of old Huitu. Puap, from today onwards, you are a noble of military merit, commanding a hundred warriors as their captain! However, I have no warriors to give you; you must recruit them yourself. I grant you the authority to promote Militia to become warriors!"

As he spoke, Jinjinni glanced at the following Militia. His authoritative gaze made the Militia bow their heads all at once. Chiwaco too felt a chill in his heart and lowered his head.

"Puap, you are a generational warrior of the Hummingbird family. I have a task for you! Lead the newly recruited squad of warriors to intimidate and pacify the thousands of Tekos Militia scattered throughout the city. Of course, other warrior squads will coordinate with you. Remember, these tribal warriors are unruly and often harass around; if necessary, demonstrate your decisive action just now!"

Hearing about the reward, Puap was first overjoyed and bowed down to the ground five times. Then, he raised his bruised forehead, his expression fierce as he accepted the order,

"Family Head, I will follow your command! If the Tekos people dare disobey, I will take their heads and build them in front of the Moon Goddess's pyramid!"

The Chief Minister watched the fierce Hummingbird Warrior for a moment, pondered, and continued,

"Good! Puap, I trust your bravery! However, we still need these Tekos tribes to defend the city. Go and take a batch of food, wine, and country women to console them first. To make hunting dogs obey, you must both whip them and reward them with a couple of bones!"

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Hearing this, Puap respectfully bowed deeply. The Chief Minister glanced one last time at the vague throng of commoners outside the city and then strode away, returning to the sublime "Palace of Wind."

Only when the Chief's figure had vanished in the distance did Puap rise to his feet and fiercely sweep his gaze around. Then, he proudly lifted his head, looking towards the militia behind him.

"The exalted Chief has just appointed me as a noble of military merit, Warrior Captain! Consider yourselves lucky, there are only a handful of samurai in the squad now. Considering you have all seen battle, I offer you a chance to become samurai: pledge loyalty to me, and henceforth, you too can claim the title of Samurai Lord!"

The militia looked towards Chiwaco together, and Puap was somewhat surprised to follow their gaze. The old militiaman was slightly lost in thought, his mind fixated on the Chief's last words, "reward with rural women." It wasn't until Puap called out impatiently that the old man reacted. After a moment's thought, he bowed down to the ground.

"O great noble lord, Chiwaco pledges loyalty to you! From now on, you are the highest stalk of corn, and we are but pumpkins at your feet, destined to die before you!"

Seeing their elder kneel, many other militiamen gradually bowed before Puap, addressing him as "noble lord."

Hearing these common flatteries, Hummingbird warrior Puap laughed heartily. He extended a hand, mimicking the gestures of the nobility, and gripped the scant hair left on Chiwaco's head. Then, filled with pride, he looked around and proclaimed loudly.

"Come, to the quartermaster's camp! First, I'll assign each of you a rural woman, then a feast of meat and drink, have a good time! And after that, join me in dealing with those Tekos Barbarians. Once we repel the Mexica, the good days ahead will be long!"

Puap's laughter scattered under the winter sunlight. He was like the corn at the base of the mountain, only feeling glorious and warm. Meanwhile, the Chief Minister at the peak resembled a green pine, experiencing a boundless chill and desolation.

In the majestic and magnificent "Palace of Wind," Jinjinni stood gazing at Royal Family murals, his fingers hidden in his sleeves, silently counting the troops at hand. The inept "Crocodile" had lost the Rivermouth Fortress, and the rapid southward advance of the Mexica troops had cut off reinforcements from the Chapala Lake Region that were still on their way.

Now, he only had the last fifteen hundred Royal Warriors willing to follow the Royal Palace's commands. The Priests had a thousand Temple Guards, stationed immovably near the "House of Wind" pyramid. As for the private troops of the various nobility in the capital, there was barely more than a thousand left. These nobility's private troops were also hard to command, merely forcibly confined within the city for defense.

"That being calculated, the total number of warriors in the capital adds up to less than four thousand. Royal Warriors need to suppress the city internally, Temple Guards and nobility's private troops are immovable, the capital has completely lost the capability to fight field battles outside the city... Damn, Ospanan deserves death! His corpse should be divided in five, a sacrificial rite to the gods!"

A faint redness appeared in the Chief's eyes. Soon after, he reminded himself about the militia situation in the capital and slightly relaxed.

After urgent promises and drafts, the southern Tecos Tribe had again dispatched fifteen thousand militia, arriving at the Lake Region last month. He dispatched five thousand Tecos militia and five hundred Royal Warriors to the northern hundred-mile outpost at Huayamo Fortress, serving as the outermost defense line of the Capital City. He then drafted the remaining ten thousand Tecos militia into the Capital City for garrisoning. Moreover, after pooling resources from east and west, the Lake



Region managed to muster another ten thousand militiamen capable of defending the city, inclusive of both elders and youths.

"At this moment, the Capital City has twenty thousand militia strengthening its defense, along with grain and fodder gathered from around the Lake Region. Relying on the tall city walls and ample food supplies, it should hold out for several years!"

With the situation swiftly deteriorating, faced with the crisis of the Kingdom's collapse, Jinjinni no longer considered any further development. He had already dispatched warriors to completely scour the nearby villages and towns within three to five days around the Lake Region. All grain was fully requisitioned, and able-bodied men and women were conscripted into the military. The once-prosperous villages and towns were turned into scorched earth, leaving nothing usable for the Mexica people!

Reflecting on this, Jinjinni closed his eyes again, his thoughts swirling, his heart stirring painfully. Outside the Capital City, village communes were already deserted, decades of hard work gone in an instant. And within the Capital City, Tecos chieftains were marrying into the Royal Family, and the tribal civilians were causing chaos everywhere, turning the thriving Capital City into a mess... The Chief Minister's eyes reddened once more, a surge of murderous intent filling his heart.

"Ospatan deserves death!... Damn, the Rivermouth Fortress was lost too quickly! The Mexica people are rapidly moving south, cutting off the northern passage, rendering all arrangements effectively useless!"

Jinjinni silently counted, pondering the Kingdom's situation day and night, which was crystal clear in his mind.

The thousand warriors stationed at fortresses in Akanbaro State hadn't managed to play their disruptive role when they were cut off from the Capital City. At this time, Akanbaro State likely still had around

three thousand warriors and over ten thousand militia, but they could not safely be recalled to the Capital City. These remnants in the north were definitely under the surveillance of the Mexica, and once they left the fortresses, they simply couldn't withstand an assault from five thousand Mexica warriors.

And at the Huayamo Fortress in the northern Lake Region, the stationed five hundred Royal Warriors and five thousand Tecos militia could only barely hold off for a while. His original plan was to amass reinforcements from the Chapala Lake Region here and then move the army northward to relieve the Rivermouth Fortress.

Persuaded by the Royal Elder, under the condition of crowning sovereignty, the Chapala Lake Region, with a population of six hundred thousand, finally mobilized on a large scale. The various nobility assembled ten thousand warriors and twenty thousand militia, a grand total of thirty thousand troops marching southward along the interior of Saka State. Just two weeks away, the reinforcements would have reached Huayamo Fortress and merged with the Capital City's troops, but the Mexica had taken the Rivermouth Fortress, blocking ahead of Huayamo.

Chapter 376 - Winds Rising Over the Capital City\_3

"The 'Crocodile' must be killed!... The 'Feathers' must be killed as well!"

Without needing a Scout report, Jinjinni could calculate everything clearly. 'Feathers', Pengguari, seemed brave and resolute, but in reality, he was indecisive and only focused on immediate benefits. The Chapala Legion he led must be stationed at some location in Saka at this moment, watching the development of the situation. Once the Guamal Canine Descendants moved south from the north, and the Chapala Lake Region was threatened, the Chapala Legion might retreat north directly, completely fleeing from the decisive battle that would decide the fate of the world.

"Send an Envoy with my seal to the northern Chapala Legion! Urge 'Feathers' to come to our aid quickly. Additionally, promise Pengguari that if he arrives in the Lake Region on time to contain the Mexica Northern Army, I will betroth the direct-line princess from the Predecessor Monarch to him! He should understand what these words mean!"

Hearing this command, the trusted aide from the family opened his eyes in shock.

"Chief, this... for the King... it's absolutely impermissible!"

A gentle smile suddenly appeared on Jinjinni's cold face.

"No matter. This promise can only be fulfilled after the war has ended. By that time, all the chaos will be shouldered by me alone!"

The family's trusted aide was silent for a moment, tears in his eyes. Then he bowed his head solemnly, rendered a salute, and left with dignity.

Jinjinni looked at the murals of the Divine Eagle and the Hummingbird, smiled slightly, and his expression turned cold once more. A new batch of orders was issued, his voice growing increasingly louder.

"Send an Envoy to the East, discreetly inform the King of the latest military situation in the north! Additionally, relay my suggestion, word for word: Your Majesty, when a great fire starts, the wind should stay far away. Let the wildfire sweep through, burning all the weeds, corn, and even cocoa outside the city. As long as the sacred wind persists, it will sow new seeds!"

"Again, send an Envoy to Weytamo in the south, pleading for them to harass the Mexica's rear lines, similarly promising a Prince's fief and betrothal of a princess from the Royal Family!"

"Send a Divine Descendant Envoy to Tlaxcala, informing the four Alliance leaders: the Tarasco Kingdom may not hold out much longer, and once the Kingdom falls, they can only resist the Mexica alone. The Kingdom earnestly requests that the allied nations that have agreed to marital ties mobilize their armies and come to our aid quickly! Besides, inform the Elder Priests of Cholula that the Tarasco Kingdom is willing to convert and revere the Cholula Holy City, serving the Nava gods!"

"Lastly, send a Divine Descendant Envoy to the south to Mistec, southeast to the Zapotecs, northeast to Vastec, to the east to the Totonacs, and even to the weak Tlapanec! Tell them, if the Tarasco Kingdom perishes, the Mexica will inevitably unite the world under their control! If they do not wish to forever be submerged under the Samurai's War Club, enduring endless tribute and sacrifices, they must resist now!"

"The Tarasco does not expect them to bravely take up arms and attack, but at the very least, they should halt their tributes to the Mexica Alliance! In such intense warfare of a hundred thousand scale, even the Mexica's national power won't last two years! After this battle, regardless of national size, all will be treated as brothers!"

Jinjinni was almost roaring out the last orders, his face, the Chief Minister's, flushed with an odd redness. He took deep breaths, waved away the surrounding trusted aides, no longer maintaining his dignified posture. After a long while, staring at the last mural, he suddenly smiled radiantly.

"After this battle, regardless of whether we win or lose, the Hummingbird will cease to exist!... If the Divine Eagle survives, I will fulfill the trust placed in me by three generations of Predecessor Monarchs, henceforth falling with a smile, my soul eternally descending into the Abyss!"

Chapter 377 - Reconnaissance, Fall of the City, and the New Legion

The wind of January came from the north, bearing the sorrow of frost. It sobbed as it flew low, carrying the unique freshness of the highlands, gently lifting into a dirge over the lake of Patzcuaro.

Amid the weeping of the wind, the Mexica scout Necali crouched low, hidden among the reeds at the lakeside, scrutinizing the enemy capital city along the shore. As a warrior directly under the royal family, his vision was excellent; he was adept at small-unit combat, agile as a leopard, and even had a basic understanding of numerical measurements... He was almost the perfect candidate for a scout! If there was one flaw, it was that his swimming skills were average at best.

At that thought, Necali spat hatefully toward the lake. During the last water battle on Lake Yuriria, he was first forced into the water by several militia, then someone kicked him viciously in the midsection, causing him to choke on water, and he nearly drowned dishonorably in the lake. Now, just the sight of the deep Great Lake made him tremble with fear.

"Tch, damn Tarasco Kingdom, nothing but lakes everywhere! Once His Highness Xiulote conquers this place, sooner or later he will turn these lakes into chinampas and grant them to valiant warriors!"

Coming from the direct service of the royal family, Necali had been following His Highness for less than a year. But at that moment, like thousands of other royal warriors, his heart was filled with admiration and obedience to His Highness.

"Since the campaign began last May, our army has now surrounded the Huayamo Fortress and is approaching the enemy capital. His Highness is invincible in combat, like the incarnation of a god, and has even invented many strange weapons, truly a great commander-in-chief!... What's more, His Highness always values common-born warriors and has promoted many commoners to nobility... If I perform a great service, I might also receive the reward of a chinampa and be ennobled as a respected military noble!"

A radiant smile emerged on Necali's face, his eyes sparkling with bright desire. After a moment, he vigorously shook his head, his expression turning resolute and murderous as he looked toward the lakeside capital city.

"In the past few days, many fancy nobles left the city; it's a pity there were no hands to seize one to interrogate about military intelligence... The north and east gates are closed, and the west gate near the lake is too. There's dust rising behind the gates, potentially they're filling them with earth and stone... There are many barbarians on the city walls, constantly making a racket... Eh? It seems I can understand what they're saying, something about 'corn,' 'liquor,' 'women'?..."

Necali listened closely for a while and found that these barbarians' language was actually quite similar to the Mexica language, even more understandable than the Tarasco people's speech. He didn't ponder the reasons behind this nor knew the history buried in the wind. He just sniffed the air, faintly catching the scent of food, which made him somewhat hungry. Hmm, they even have a midday meal; it seems the Tarasco people are not short on food.

Then, Necali furrowed his brow, gesturing with his hands in front of his eyes.

"One man high, two men high... five men high, six men high... Pah, the Tarasco people built the city wall so high—it's like an old turtle in the river! The people on the walls look so tiny from here... Ah, that man... that man looks familiar?"

With eyes like an eagle, Necali stared intently at the Weizti on the city wall, recognizing his ever-unchanging headband, his memory suddenly crystallized. Then, the young scout erupted with fury, spitting once more.

"It's you, cunning Black Fish! When I catch you, I'll press you to death under the water! Hmph, the city even harbors old veterans who've been in naval battles, which means they'll be cautious about new weapons."

Necali frowned again, counting off on his fingers.

"Escaped nobles, stationed barbarians, sealed gates, towering walls, plentiful food, experienced veterans... Ah, this capital city seems quite difficult to take!"

With that thought, Necali looked around the Great Lake again. In his line of sight were the trees that had been nearly all chopped down, enemy ships patrolling and weaving, the stray floating corpses, emaciated elders and children, alongside the desolate and silent villages... After a long pause, he shook his head and once again bent two fingers.

"Hmm, inside the city all are soldiers, outside are but ghosts!"

After counting on his fingers again, Necali swiftly stood up. Lastly, he took one final, lingering look at Weizti on the city wall, then turned and headed north, back to the encampment surrounding Huayamo.

Traveling alone is always quick and hurried. Necali moved by day and night, silently, only killing a few wild dogs with blood-red eyes. These wild dogs, having tasted human flesh, attacked lone travelers, leaving bones full of bite marks in the wilderness. Unlike the weak refugees, an elite warrior with a few precise slashes would easily chop them into pieces, adding new fertilizer to this desolate yet fertile land.

It took only three days of travel before the Mexica camp appeared once again before scout Necali's eyes. Inside the camp, the flag of the Black Wolf Marshal flew high, guarded by thousands of stern warriors. Outside, spread out for ten miles, were patrolling squads and the Huayamo Fortress, which was nearly encircled.

Necali rubbed his eyes and took a closer look, then burst out with a deep cheer. The Huayamo Fortress was now covered with Mexica flags, patterns of hummingbirds and sun waving in the wind—the fortress had been captured!

"Praise the Chief Divine! He has granted us victory in war, and we spread the glory of the divine for Him!"

Necali bowed his head, praying devoutly for a moment. Then, he took out the scout's token and passed through the patrolling warriors, directly into the Commander-in-Chief's tent. Inside the tent, the august presence of His Highness was holding a novel quill pen, writing in heavenly script and symbols.

Chapter 378 - Reconnaissance, City Fall, and New Legion\_2

Necali dared not disturb and waited for a moment. It was not until His Highness was done that he replied in a deep voice.

A gentle breeze passed by, carrying away the drifting voices. Xiulote patiently listened to the military report and asked a few questions before he smiled faintly and spoke in praise.

"To see the large in the small, discerning the whole through the details. Necali, you've done well! This journey has not been easy; go now to the logistics camp and take some food and drinks."

Upon hearing this, joy filled Necali's heart. He respectfully knelt on both knees, seizing this rare opportunity to praise loudly and earnestly.

"The Husco Volcano pierces the clouds, with Divine Eagles soaring above! Your Highness, you are the supreme Divine Eagle in the sky, and we follow you on the earth, to the ends of heaven and earth!"



Xiulote was taken aback. He looked at Necali's rugged and sincere face, gazed at him for a moment, and slowly nodded.

"Very well! Necali, rest well; there will be more opportunities for you to distinguish yourself!"

Only then did Necali rise, respectfully retreating. Watching the tent close again, the Young Commander chuckled to himself.

"Good, the morale is high, the military heart is reliable!"

With this in mind, Xiulote rose to his full height and walked to the curtained window, gazing at the distant fortress. The fortress still bore the clear marks of smoke and fire, and the bodies of the defending army were not yet fully cleared. Dark red blood congealed on the battlements and broken ladders lay scattered below the walls, revealing traces of the brutal battle.

In fact, Huayamo Fortress had only just been captured by the army the day before. Five hundred Tarasco warriors had all died in battle, and a majority of the five thousand Tekos militia had surrendered. This fortress, entirely constructed from granite and blue bricks, had a very solid structure. It was not large, only half the size of the Rivermouth Fortress, but its walls stood seven to eight meters high. If the fortress had sufficient defenders, it would have been very difficult to conquer in a short period of time.

Thus, after capturing Rivermouth Fortress, Xiulote had almost not paused before he gathered his forces and rushed southward, encircling Huayamo Fortress in a swift assault. He moved so hurriedly after the major victory that he did not even have time to reward his troops, as he was concerned that the Tarasco army might gather at Huayamo and subject him to months of siege with heavy casualties.

Luckily, Akanbaro's northern remnant forces had not wisely retreated immediately, and the enemy reinforcements from the Chapala Lake Region had not hastened their march decisively. When tens of thousands of Mexica legionnaires arrived at Huayamo Fortress and cut off the northern passage, the fortress held only a mere five hundred warriors and five thousand unruly tribal militia. Between these warriors and militia, there was a clear divide, lacking strong leadership and mutual trust.

Afterward, the Mexica army besieged the city for two weeks, building siege ladders. Surprisingly, the Tekos tribe militia bravely exited the city, screaming wildly, and launched a risky sortie. The initial phase of the assault was tremendously successful, quickly crushing the Otomi militia who were building the ladders, killing three to four hundred. However, when the Longbow Warriors gathered and shot in unison, with the War Club warriors closing in from both flanks, the Tekos militia could no longer hold their ground. They retreated in panic, and many were shot dead at the city gates, leaving nearly a thousand bodies.

The attack turned swiftly from victory to defeat, and the morale inside the city plummeted. Without hesitation, Xiulote pressed two thousand Crossbowmen forward the next day to shoot from sixty steps away from the battlements. The Mexica legion, leveraging the range advantage of the crossbows, gradually suppressed the defenders of Huayamo. Then, the remaining over two thousand Canine Descendants were driven forward again. They set up ladders and launched Clay Tribulus that could explode at any moment, blowing the morale of both the defenders and their own forces into the valley.

The Tekos militia hailed from the western mountains, were fierce in battle but superstitious in belief. Living in a region of frequent volcanoes, they were familiar with the smell of burning sulfur but had never experienced the booming sounds of this new type of weapon. In their hearts, these new weapons were bestowed with divinity, considered either "the roar of the Fire God", "the Envoy of the God of Death", or "the Evil Demon from beneath the volcano", all seen as irresistible forces.

After the explosion, five thousand Royal Warriors surged forth, storming the city from all sides and killing the resolute Tarasco warriors. Soon after, various factions of the Tekos gradually surrendered. By the end of the siege, Xiulote had captured an additional three thousand able-bodied prisoners, while the

casualties were only over four hundred Royal Warriors and a similar number of Chichimeca Canine Descendants.

The Young Commander once again gazed at the mottled battlements, and scenes of the war flashed continuously in his mind.

He saw again the fierce combat of the warriors, bodies falling from the towering battlements, blood flowing everywhere; he heard the booming explosions of the Clay Tribulus, the high-pitched cries from both sides, accompanied by the dying screams. Until the last defending warrior died, a throng of Tekos people prostrated and begged for mercy. They cried out the name of the Fire God, abandoning their last resistance, handing over their lives to the enemies endowed with Divine Power.

Thinking of the large number of prisoners, Xiulote felt a slight headache. After the battle at Rivermouth Fortress, he had acquired five thousand Tarasco militia, and now he had an additional three thousand from the Tekos tribe. These prisoners required nearly ten thousand pounds of food daily, plus warriors had to be assigned to guard them, which was indeed quite troublesome!

The Young Commander's gaze shifted, occasionally flashing a cold, murderous intent. After a long while, he shook his head and seriously said to himself.

"Xiulote, killing prisoners brings no good fortune. Human heads aren't like chives that regrow after being cut. You can face all the ruthless killing during battle, but you shouldn't get lost in the senseless slaughter that follows after..."

Xiulote's gaze gradually calmed. He stood silently for a moment, then instructed his guard to summon the surrendered General Ezpan from Tarasco.

The tent flap opened and fresh air surged in. As soon as Ezpan entered the grand tent, he respectfully knelt and bowed.

"Honored Highness, your loyal watchdog Ezpan is here. You are my only master, and I will pounce at your enemies whenever needed!"

Xiulote's eyes were profound for a moment. Then, with an expressionless face, he slightly nodded and calmly stared at Ezpan.

Ezpan appeared composed, his left hand's four fingers together, fist placed on his chest in salute. He wore the bright war clothes of Mexica nobility, and around his neck hung a silver Sun Amulet, showing no hint of his Tarascan heritage.

After a while, the Young Commander slowly began to speak.

"Ezpan, the Alliance will inevitably conquer the Tarasco Kingdom. Being one of the first Tarascans to surrender, you will have more opportunities than others. You know, I never care about your commoner background, only your abilities and the efficacy of your actions!"

Hearing this, a surge of emotions welled up in Ezpan. He vaguely sensed something, bowing even more respectfully.

Xiulote paused for a moment, then looked down at Ezpan again before calmly speaking.

"Last month, the Northern Route Army captured the Rivermouth Fortress, taking five thousand Tarascan militia prisoners. This month, the legion has taken over a significant portion of Tarasco Territory, bringing many villages under control. Yesterday, we conquered the Huayamo Fortress, the capital city is now in sight!... Ezpan, the Tarascans are destined to become part of the Alliance, and they should serve the Alliance!"

Upon hearing this, Ezpan, without hesitation, bowed forcefully. Suppressing his excitement, he cried out hoarsely.

"Highness, the Tarascans are willing to become your loyal minions. I am willing to be the forefront canine tooth for you, to bite at your enemies first, no matter who they are!"

Xiulote nodded, finally revealing a gentle smile.

"Good! Ezpan, remember your vows. I have high expectations for you, do not let me down. I will entrust you with the five thousand surrendered Tarasco soldiers, along with several dozen warriors who previously surrendered. They have already converted to the worship of the great Chief Divine. Going forward, there will be more and more Tarascan defectors.

You need to filter useful personnel from these defectors to form a legion loyal to the Alliance! You will be the Legion Commander of this force!"

Ezpan was overwhelmed with emotion. He bowed again, tears sliding down his cheeks, and when he spoke again his voice was choked.

"Thank... Your Highness... to die for you!"

Xiulote smiled again, patting his shoulder.

"This new legion's equipment will temporarily use the spoils from the two fortresses. However, the design of the war clothes needs to be altered, and the faith in the Chief Divine must be affirmed!"

"Currently, I do not expect your newly formed legion to participate in open battles. Your initial goal is to organize the Tarascan defectors, making them usable as labor for the large army. And when their loyalty reaches a certain level, they can serve as the local garrison legions. Additionally, lead them to inspect and judge the crimes of the nobility at various manors. As for a brighter future... Ezpan, that is up to you!"

Ezpan bowed his head again. His forehead pressed against the cold ground, but his heart blazed with fervor.

"I obey your command! Highness, you are my only sun!"

Chapter 379 - Discussing Battle and Organizing the Army Part One

Outside the Commander-in-Chief's grand tent, the northern wind howled across the highland and swept down toward the south with irresistible force. Inside the grand tent, frangipani beans burned quietly in the Jade Furnace, releasing a distant and rich fragrance that stimulated thoughts and cleared the mind.

In this pleasant atmosphere, Xiulote watched Ezpan, who was swearing allegiance on the ground, with a faint smile on his lips. Smiling, he helped the newly appointed Tarasco Legion commander to his feet and encouraged him again.

"Ezpan, accomplish everything I have entrusted to you, further prove your capabilities! After victory in the west, the land of Miken will be reallocated, and a vassal king will be stationed... The Alliance also intends to conquer Colima and control the western Tekos people, and you are familiar with the terrain there... By then, you will also have a place among the Great Nobility of the Alliance!"

Upon hearing this, Ezpan raised his head and looked at Xiulote with a somewhat bewildered gaze. After all, he came from a foreign commoner background, not clearly understanding the Mexica Alliance's system, nor could he grasp the implications of His Highness's words. He simply bowed again, his face alight with joy.

"Your Highness, I will always follow your will! I am willing to conquer the Tekos Barbarians for you!"

Xiulote nodded slightly, saying no more. He pondered for a moment then slowly asked.

"Ezpan, what do you know about the Capital City of the Tarasco Kingdom, 'Qinchongcan City' in the Land of the Hummingbird? What are its defenses like, are there any weaknesses?"

Ezpan thought for a moment, cautiously offering suggestions.

"Your Highness, the capital, Qinchongcan, is majestic and spacious, housing nearly a hundred thousand people at its peak, a first-class grand city! According to the Alliance's new measures, the city walls are about nine meters high, and wide enough for seven or eight people to walk abreast. The walls are entirely made of granite, volcanic rock, and green bricks, using a large amount of corn ash mortar for binding, virtually indestructible! On the city walls, many wooden watchtowers and guard towers are

erected, where archers can be stationed... Attacking the majestic capital is like scaling a volcano in the clouds, by no means an easy task..."

Hearing this, Xiulote's brows gradually furrowed. Ezpan's description and the Scout's report were similar, reflecting each other; the image of Qinchongcan City became clearer in his mind and made him feel increasingly troubled.

"... and the capital itself is built on the shores of Lake Patzcuaro, with a complex underground water system that, however, does not connect to the lake surface directly. There are many deep wells in the capital that can provide water for a hundred thousand people. Outside the city lies the thriving Lake Patzcuaro region, densely populated, dotted with rich villages and manors..."

Xiulote thought for a moment, then asked in a deep voice.

"Ezpan, tell me the truth. If I asked you to dig a tunnel right up to the walls of Qinchongcan City, are you confident you could do it?"

Upon hearing the question from His Highness, Ezpan felt a heavy pressure. He tried to speak several times but swallowed his words again. After a while, he shook his head with a serious expression.

"Your Highness, I am not confident. The area beneath the Lake Region is filled with waterlogged soil, a saturated water zone; digging a tunnel there is truly a technical job! Only the most experienced veteran miners can have some certainty, and these veterans are all under the control of the Tarasco Royal Family. On normal days, these senior miners are mostly gathered a few dozen miles southwest of the capital, mining at several semi-open-air copper mines directly owned by the Royal Family. That is a high-yield copper mining area near Ihuatzio City!"



Xiulote's eyebrows lifted slightly. He heard about the copper mines again; they were quite close, right under the army's blades! He carefully memorized this information, then asked again.

"Have you personally visited Patzcuaro and Ihuatzio Cities to the south of the capital?"

Ezpan reminisced for a long time, then nodded earnestly.

"Yes, Your Highness. Patzcuaro City is located a few dozen miles to the southeast of the capital, with a long history, having been established for over a hundred years. Similar to Huayamo Fortress, the south-east of Patzcuaro is not large but has strong defenses. Additionally, there is a huge granary there, supplying the Kingdom Legions that march to the East or the South. Currently, on the southern front, the state of Apachigan requires a large amount of food, and the logistics line should start from here!"

"As for Ihuatzio City, it is a large city that has prospered due to copper mining trade. Located at the southernmost point of Lake Patzcuaro, the city has expanded to the lake's edge where water access is convenient. There is a spacious market, large pyramids, merchants from various regions, and nearby numerous copper and silver mines, as well as opulent and luxurious manors of the Nobility. More importantly, the rich Ihuatzio City is unguarded by walls! Only in the center, in the Temple area, is there something like a fortress formed by groups of pyramids."

Ezpan's eyes sparkled with desire. A city that almost monopolizes copper mining and trade, a city also rich in silver, its wealth is imaginable! He spoke with slight excitement.

"Your Highness, Ihuatzio City is unprotected by walls! Before the formidable forces of the Alliance, this prosperous city will be like a delicate and beautiful maiden, unable to resist and will only be ravaged at will!"

Hearing Ezpan's implication, Xiulote nodded slightly, noncommittally. Although Ihuatzio City was affluent, it didn't have a substantial impact on the strategic grand scheme and was not a priority target.

In fact, Lake Patzcuaro did not connect with Cuitzeo Lake to the north, and the Alliance's fleet could not enter; the lake was always tightly controlled by the Tarasco people. Protected by Qinchongcan and Patzcuaro cities on the lakeshore, it was also difficult to reach Ihuatzio City for the time being.

#### Chapter 380 - Discussion of Battle and Army Reorganization (Part 2)

The young commander's gaze fell once more upon the map inside the grand tent, landing on the mark for the city of Patzcuaro.

He watched the southern front, where the main legions of both sides were locked in battle. Armies of a hundred thousand had been slaughtering each other for months, star warriors falling like rain, nobility withering like flowers! More importantly, the Akanbaro State was situated in the mountainous forest area, naturally defensible but not affluent, completely reliant on the supply lines from the rear. At this very moment, the supply route starting from the city of Patzcuaro was the southern enemy's lifeline!

Xiulote pondered for a moment; many thoughts flickered vaguely, yet they were disordered and difficult to resolve. He shook his head gently and looked again at the respectful and obedient Ezpan, gesturing him away.

"Ezpan, you may leave now. Drill those surrendered Tarasco troops well; form the second spear legion!"

The tent flaps opened and then closed, the crisp wind sweeping in, uplifting the spirits. Then, the young commander summoned a few trusted aides and instructed.

"Summon Legion Commander Olosh, Monkey Kuluka, the veteran Etalik, Black Wolf Torc, Royal Family Vice Legion Commander Balda, and Divine Blessing Legion Commander Natali. Tell them I wish to hold a small military deliberation, please have them come discreetly!"

The natural order of these names reflected the young commander's subconscious order of trust and confidence.

The trusted aides hurriedly took their leave to carry out the orders. Xiulote turned and gazed at the quietly burning red sandalwood. Unaware, a stick of incense was nearly burnt out, much like the Tarasco Kingdom rocked by storms, and the Mexica Northern Army whose momentum was waning.

After only a short while, the teacher Olosh arrived first. He first looked around inside the tent, seeing no one else, he then embraced Xiulote, saying softly.

"Xiulote, you've been looking pale lately. Don't overthink things, make sure you rest on time! Otherwise, I will find you a couple of personal maids to look after you properly."

In the presence of his teacher, who had accompanied him since childhood, Xiulote seemed much more relaxed. He sighed slightly, shedding his commander's authority, and said with a laugh and shake of his head.

"Teacher, commanding armies and waging war is truly not easy! I feel as if I'm walking along the edge of a steep cliff, anxious and uneasy, constantly looking ahead and to the sides, for fear of a misstep. I'm like a monkey king, carrying a mountain on my back, bearing endless pressure on my shoulders, hardly able to sleep a moment. And with the myriad daily affairs, there's not a moment of peace.

My father has already taken control of the rear for me, guarding the fortress, maintaining contact with the allied forces behind us. He is also managing the distribution of the supplies, comforting the wounded, and awarding military honors. But some matters cannot be left to others; I always have to deal with various generals, examine the army's situation. And with the uncertain state of the enemy, I need to guess at all times, wary and cautious... It truly gives me a headache!"

Hearing the young commander's complaints, a relieved smile surfaced on Olosh's concerned face. He quickly composed himself, solemnly praising him.

"Your Highness, commanding large armies is exactly like that! In the half year of campaigning and victories, you have grown into an excellent marshal! After this ordeal, when you manage your fief later, it will come much more easily! Xiulote, no matter what, your father and I will always stand by your side!"

Upon uttering the last sentence, the mighty Jaguar warrior for the first time knelt on one knee, placing the young commander's hand on his head.

Xiulote was taken aback briefly, then skillfully patted Olosh's hair. He then hurriedly bent down to help the teacher up from the ground.

"Teacher..."

"Your Highness, the generals are not far behind, you should maintain your authority during the military deliberation."

Upon hearing this, Xiulote was silent for a moment, then nodded his head. He regained his composure and asked in a deep voice.

"Olosh, what is the current situation of the Holy City Legion?"

"The Holy City Legion currently has three thousand five hundred warriors, all absolutely loyal to you!"

The young commander nodded slightly, this was his absolute core lineage.

Then "Monkey" Kuluka was the second to arrive; as soon as he entered the tent, he respectfully prostrated himself on the ground. He was dressed in formal war clothes, his demeanor becoming resolute and calm, with only his eyes still sparkling with an agile light.

"Honored sovereign, congratulations on yet another victory! I am ready to lay down my life for you at any time!"

Xiulote smiled gently, speaking warmly.

"Rise, Monkey, no need for excessive formality. How is the Spear Legion faring?"

"The Spear Legion, eight thousand strong, has been conserving strength and biding time, solely participating in sieges and blockades. The warriors frequently request to be deployed, eager to slay the enemy and gain merit!"

Xiulote nodded again. The carefully trained Spear Legion would test its actual combat effectiveness in open field battles; they were also his trusted loyalists. Thinking of this, he reassured in a soft voice.

"There is no need to be anxious; the opportunity to join battle will come very soon!"

Soon after, the grizzled Etalik, with a fierce expression, stepped firmly into the tent and knelt to pay his respects.

"Honored Your Highness, your radiance shines upon us like the rising sun in the sky! Your wisdom guides us like the sparkling, brilliant emerald! I am your cobblestone, paving the way for you!"

Xiulote smiled gently. He asked.

"Etalik, your work has always been reliable. How are things at the Rivermouth Fortress? How many are left in the Temple Guards?"

"The Temple Guards still have fifteen hundred warriors, among them five hundred Stirrup Crossbowmen, ready for battle at any time!"

Xiulote smiled with satisfaction. In several sieges, the elite Temple Guards had performed exceedingly well. The Stirrup Crossbowmen could shoot from great ranges, effectively suppressing the defenders on the battlements, while the Temple Warriors excelled in fierce combat, often being the first to breach the

Rivermouth Fortress. These zealous Religious Knights were adept at ferocious attacks, often fighting to the death, which resulted in significant losses to their own.

Then, the young commander pondered for a moment before asking slowly.

"How are the Chichimeca Canine Descendants faring?"

The old warrior Etalik's expression remained unchanged, but his tone was much softer.

"Your Highness, after two sieges and multiple vanguard assaults, the Chichimeca Canine Descendants, who have always been at the very front of the assault, utilizing the unpredictably powerful Clay Tribulus... now, of the four thousand Canine Descendants, only fifteen hundred remain, their morale has plummeted. Even with my best efforts to console them, providing food, water, and Priest's potions, the chieftains are full of complaints. The casualties among the lower ranks of the Tribal Warriors are also grave and hard to contain... The Canine Descendants can no longer be used in the tough battles, only as a Defending Army at the fortresses!"

Hearing this, Xiulote nodded slowly. Even if Canine Descendants were fearless in battle and in awe of the gods, they were still ordinary Tribal Warriors. Given such casualties, they indeed could not be relied upon anymore. He thought for a moment and then issued a loud order.

"Then let the Canine Descendants stay and help defend the Huayamo Fortress! Etalik, I appreciate your hard work. Continue to coax the chieftains and soothe the hearts of the Canine Warriors."

Etalik bowed respectfully and then stood by Xiulote's side.

Xiulote fell into contemplation. He was calculating the defensive situations of several fortresses. After the capture of the Rivermouth Fortress, the wooden forts on the north bank of the Lerma River seemed insignificant and were no longer pivotal points on the supply route. Thus, he reassigned the resting Royal Warriors, taking away all the new weapons with him. Then, he handed these wooden forts, along with the land on the north bank of the Lerma River, over to the Ottopan Warriors led by Jiowar.

The three thousand Ottopan Warriors, after going through campaigns, were reduced to fifteen hundred, and they too were unfit for further use. Handing the northern wooden forts over to Jiowar to garrison was a consolation to the Otomi people. The territory on the North Coast was inconsequential for the larger strategy, and it was temporarily returned to Otapan City-State to solidify the alliance between them. These apparent concessions in the alliance could also help Jiowar establish prestige within the City-States.

Now, the Rivermouth Fortress had become the new core stronghold, the storage center for all provisions. Xiulote once again requested his father to step in, have him garrison there, and command the Western City-State Legions, as well as the Royal Warriors led by Tepopolo.

The Western City-States had dispatched five thousand City-State Warriors, and about four thousand were left. These private troops of the nobility from various states could not be relied upon for large-scale field battles or sieges, but they were more than capable of defending and excelling in plundering. Stationed at the Rivermouth Fortress, the City-State Warriors would occasionally raid the hinterlands of the Akanbaro State in the East, flattening the noble manors in the area. They also kept up continuous pressure on the remnants of the Tarasco forces to the north, looking for their weaknesses, ready to coordinate with the main forces of Huayamo and crush the enemy at once!

In the naval battle at Lake Yuriria, the three thousand Royal Warriors led by Tepopolo were assigned to the front line, suffering the most casualties. Even after rest and recovery at the wooden forts, this legion was now left with only fifteen hundred warriors. The young commander thus continued to have him stationed at the Rivermouth Fortress as one of the garrison forces.



As Xiulote pondered, he lit some new red sandalwood incense. The rich aroma entered his nostrils, bringing layers of sensation, just like his fluctuating moods. In the heart of the young commander, each troop had a clear assessment. Loyalty, closeness, combat effectiveness, equipment, numbers, fighting style, characteristics... even the strategy of deployment, all were crystal clear!