

Civilization 501

Chapter 501 - The Land Grant for Military Achievements (Vote Request)_3

Hearing this, Xiulote smiled and nodded, only answering the first question.

"The Spear Legion has been tempered by war, achieving countless combat achievements on this journey, even crushing the central army of the Tarasco Royal Army and capturing the Divine Eagle's Royal Banner! Their combat power is there for all to see. In group battles, they are no less inferior to the Samurai Legion, and their resilience is even stronger. They rightfully deserve to be rewarded!...

To grant them 20 acres of land, deducting fallow land, there would only be 8 acres to cultivate each season, thus needing one agricultural slave. According to the standard of 4 acres per adult, this is sufficient to support two people."

"As for the samurai's food consumption in training, one person can equate to three adults. Therefore, a samurai of this rank needs to often stay in the warrior camp, where the fief provides centralized support and military training. If they return to their own fields, they cannot fully dedicate themselves."

The young king pondered for a moment and added an explanation. A samurai of this rank is actually similar to the elite Ashigaru of the Japanese Warring States period. They are the backbone of the legion, as well as the most numerous force.

"Third-Level samurai are granted advanced War Clothes. They are bestowed 100 acres of land and 5 agricultural slaves/servants. Capturing alive or decapitating 12 Militia or 2 elite warriors, they are then promoted to Fourth-Level senior samurai. Altogether, 4,000 warriors have accumulated rewards, granted 40,000 acres of land, with 20,000 slaves."

This rank of samurai can be considered the lowest tier of military nobility, akin to the rank of common officer in the Qin and Han dynastic military hierarchy. By granting 100 acres, of which 40 are actually cultivated, requiring 5 people and producing enough food to support 10 adults. In theory, the agricultural slaves distributed come from the captives taken when the samurai are promoted. The non-productive consumption of a samurai is around 3 adults, and around 5 during times of war.

In other words, a Third-Level samurai is a fully professional soldier who can also be self-sufficient in food to a certain extent. They can also be considered the lowest rank of military landlords, and this is exactly the class that Xiulote hopes to foster.

Bertade took a deep breath. This military land-grant document, nominally following the Alliance's promotion system, has an inherently different substance and could even be described as a revolutionary reform. The Head Warrior shook his head and continued to look at the distribution of land for the Fourth-Level senior samurai.

"Fourth-Level samurai are granted exquisite Leather Armor, allowed to don feathers of various colors symbolizing honor. They are granted 240 acres of land, 12 servants. Comparable to a squad leader who leads 20-80 people in the army during war. They provide two samurai or one samurai plus one Auxiliary Troop. If they achieve a major accomplishment, they will be promoted to First-Level military nobility. In all, 1,600 people have been granted fiefs, 40,000 acres of land, and 20,000 servants."

Upon reaching the level of Fourth-Level senior samurai, one can establish their own family, becoming an independent samurai clan. Their status is similar to that of an intermediate officer in the Qin and Han military hierarchy, enjoying exemptions from labor. With 240 acres to grant, about 100 are actually cultivated, requiring 12 people and able to support 24 adults. Converted to military population, a Fourth-Level senior samurai can support two professional samurai and one semi-non-productive Auxiliary Troop. These individuals are usually family members.

The Head Warrior and the monkey exchanged glances, their minds filled with myriad thoughts, all converging into silence in the grand hall. After a long pause, they continued to read about the nobility land grants below.

"First-Level military nobility, endowed with Jaguar or Eagle Battle Garments, Exquisite Beast Helmets, equipped with Bronze Axes... granted 800 acres of land and 40 servants. Comparable to an army leader of 200 people or a Camp Commander. During war, they provide two to three samurai, plus one to two Auxiliary Troops. A total of 500 people have been promoted, along with 400 from the Jaguar Warrior Brigade being transferred to fiefs, totaling 900 people. They are granted 72,000 acres of land and 36,000 servants."

A First-Level military noble can be compared to the officer class within the twenty-rank nobility system, or viewed as a Noble Knight of Medieval Europe. With 800 acres granted and over 300 actually cultivated, they can sustain 80 adults. A First-Level military noble can thus support at least five full-time samurai and two to three Auxiliary Troops on their land. They already form the lower tier of the political members with a voice within the fief's military group.

Bertade nodded. Such rewards were superior to the Alliance's military nobility but were largely within an acceptable level. He continued reading, his brow furrowing unconsciously.

"Second-Level hereditary nobility, participate in the fief's council, with the fief being passed down through generations... granted 2,000 acres of land and 120 servants. Comparable to a Camp Commander of a thousand and a Legion Commander. In times of war, they provide eight samurai and four Auxiliary Troops. This time, 20 are promoted, granted 48,000 acres of land and 2,400 servants.

The specific list includes: Veteran Etalik, Monkey Kuluka, Black Wolf Toltec, Naval Commander Annatri, Eagle Warrior Balda, Tarasco Group Commander Ezpan, Huitu Puap, Crocodile Marshal Osta, and Head of the Sky Family Oorta..."

"My King! Thank you for your grace! The monkey swears to serve you unto death!"

Kuluka whispered emotionally upon reading this. Overwhelmed, he knelt to the ground, tears shining in his eyes.

As a Second-Level hereditary noble, as the name suggests hereditary land and titles, they represent the peak that most of the Alliance's families aspire to, the class of the Great Nobility... For an ordinary samurai, this was also the pinnacle of life he once longed for. He never imagined that merely following His Highness for a few years would allow him to achieve it today!

Xiulote smiled and nodded, reaching out to lift Kuluka. A hereditary noble granted 2,400 acres, of which 1,000 are actually cultivated, with 120 servants, can support 240 adults. Solely relying on the land's output, a noble family can maintain an affluent lifestyle, supporting at least 15 full-time warriors and half as many Auxiliary Troops. They will participate in the decisions on major affairs of the fief and lead the army when going to war.

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In this list, the civilians born Kuluka, Toltec, and Ezpan had been promoted two levels, while most of the nobly born other generals had mostly been promoted one level. The Surrendered General Oorta was granted a flat rank, and Ostpai, a noble who had lost his family's warrior's glory, had been demoted.

Jaguar Warrior Olosh and Divine Blessing Legion Legion Commander Natali should have also been on this list. However, after the autumn harvest, Olosh was leading the Holy City Legion and would return to the Holy City with his father, while Natali's Divine Blessing Legion would also return to Xilotepec City. Xiulote had temporarily noted down both of their achievements and would wait for a time when he had the authority to grant rewards.

Upon rising, Monkey bowed deeply again. It took a while before he managed to calm his excitement and finish reading the list, but he did not see the Head Warrior's name. His mind quickly turned as he looked further down, instantly experiencing a longing he had never considered before.

"Third-Level Noble, involved in national affairs, heritage passed down through generations... granted 8000 mu of land, 400 servants, ranked higher than a legion commander... deploying 30 warriors and 15 auxiliary troops in wartime. This time promoting one person, Holy Eagle Warrior Head Bertade!"

The Noble granted 8000 mu of land actually cultivated 3200 mu, 400 servants, enough to support 50 full-time warriors, and over 20 part-time auxiliary troops. This was already the highest level among the nobility within the fief, second only to the supreme divine Monarch.

On reading this, Bertade pursed his lips. He knelt on one knee, profoundly bowing to His Highness. Then, while still kneeling, he loudly suggested to Xiulote.

"Your Highness, please retract this grant! I come from a humble background as a common civilian warrior, have always been your Escort, and I have never led a legion nor achieved remarkable deeds. Now, to elevate my rank above the rest, I fear others might resent it..."

"Bertade, what are you talking about?"

Xiulote interrupted with a laugh. Then, his expression became serious and he spoke earnestly.

"You were the first to follow me and have always protected me, saving my life numerous times! You led the Personal Guard, single-handedly trained numerous warriors and generals, and have always been utterly loyal! You are always calm and speak little, decisive and strategic in your actions. In terms of seniority, accomplishments, abilities, character, and even popularity... you are truly exceptional. How can you not accept this division of land and become the highest-ranking noble of honor?!"

On hearing this, Bertade appeared deeply moved. Facing the dignified His Highness, he opened his mouth, but for a moment, he could not speak. The Head Warrior had to prostrate himself fully and perform a solemn bow before he could continue speaking.

"Your Highness, the fief is newly established, it is not suitable to grant such generous rewards now. It might be better to wait for the future..."

"This grant to you is in part to set an example for the generals and is precisely for the future! I have a long-term plan, and I need you to train your own trusted aides to truly stand on their own!... In a few years, you will travel to the far Eastern Great Lake... to the serpentine island in the lake... to conquer the local natives... in the farthest east... to wait... to capture..."

On hearing His Excellency's prophetic speech, Bertade showed an astonished expression, which then turned solemn. He respectfully bowed again, resolutely saying.

"Your Highness, your will is my life, and even if I have to travel thousands of miles to the Endless Great Lake, I will capture the foreigners as foretold!... But..."

The Head Warrior paused for a moment, seeming hesitant.

"Speak freely!"

"Your Highness, I am not speaking for my own sake. It's just that this grant, though named by Alliance levels, is actually entirely different. The warrior hierarchy's rewards are extremely generous, and their status is quite high. Military noble ranks are roughly equivalent, but hereditary and honorary nobility,

compared to the Alliance, are much more stringent... Your Highness, do you intend to limit the top-tier Great Nobility and cultivate the middle warrior class?"

"Ha ha, you see right through it! Bertade, you are now the only one by my side whom I can trust with great responsibilities!"

The youthful King's face showed a genuine smile. The old nobilities of the fief's south had occupied the majority of the local villages and fields. Their land and servants vastly exceeded the standards in the military grant document... and this was the basis for the next step.

"Monkey, didn't you just ask me where all these lands and servants came from?"

Xiulote laughed heartily, his laughter filled with grandeur and killing intent.

"This time with the granting of lands, 11,000 people were rewarded, with nearly everyone in the Northern Route Army receiving promotions and grants. 220,000 mu of land to be granted, 110,000 servants... And all these lands and servants, they'll all come from here!"

The young King pointed forcefully at the large map, as if swinging the legion's flag. And the red flag's pointed location, the Mexica legion's advance, was just south of Apachigan, on the fertile lands by the river in the prosperous Kulamo City!

Chapter 503 - The Situation in All Directions, Intelligence and Diplomacy

The rains of July lingered over the boundless fields, as the scorching sun occasionally showered the land with the light of life. The young seedlings were lush, and the fruit trees were thriving, bringing vitality to the earth of the Lake Region. When the pumpkin seedlings took shape, more rains roared down,

obscuring the sky. The torrential rain transformed into creeks that merged into broader lakes, making Lake Patzcuaro all the more magnificent.

"This is the rainy season of August, which comes in with a drumbeat and devours mountains and rivers."

Xiulote stood on the top floor of the Palace of Wind, gazing at the northern waters. At the peak of the rainy season, the Great Lake's water level rose significantly, submerging the surrounding area. The endless reflection of water looked vast and bold from afar. The young king watched for a moment and then suddenly frowned.

"The Lake Patzcuaro in rainy season can expand this much! Although a lot of fertile land by the river has already been vacated, it's still flooded up to the edge of the farmlands. And this is just a normal year. If there were a big flood, the submerged area would probably... No wonder the villages by the lake are all built on highlands... Well, what needs to be done is flood control around the lake!... Lake Patzcuaro needs to be tamed, just like Lake Texcoco, surrounded and segmented by countless dams, fully managed and tamed!"

Xiulote reflected silently, with fiery passion resonating in his chest. A king's passion is sometimes similar to that of ordinary people, yet often immensely different. This difference lies in an added confidence and boldness to reshape the mountains and rivers!

The wind swayed the wind chimes, their crisp ringing overshadowing the sound of the rain. The weather, being stormy, was unsuitable for traveling. The young king quietly watched for a while, recorded his new plans in his mind, and turned to head towards the great hall.

In the magnificent hall, the guards had already prepared breakfast. A soft baked corn cake, a small bowl of tender roasted matsutake mushrooms, a grilled fish spread with chili sauce, two pieces of smoked deer meat with honey, and a cup of sweet hot cocoa.

Xiulote sat cross-legged at the table, eating his simple breakfast while reading the latest reports.

The tense period of spring plowing had ended, and the fief was tranquil. The garrisoned troops and the people alike enjoyed the rare leisure amidst the storm. In the meantime, numerous scouts had been dispatched to gather information about the southern nobles and to examine the movements of the surrounding tribes.

"News of the downfall of the Tarasco Kingdom has spread far and wide. All parts are shaken. From the southwest of the fief, nobles from the Tekos have already sent envoys expressing their willingness to submit and pay tribute. The latest envoys have also requested the redemption of the captured nobles and samurais."

Reading this, Xiulote pondered for a moment. Most of the samurai prisoners of war from the southern Tekos had already been sent to the Lake Capital City, and he had only kept some guides and tribe militiamen incorporated into the garrisoned troops.

"Since they were once enemies of the Alliance, they must pay a price! Sooner or later, I must personally conquer the Colima Mountain Region... Well, I might send back a few tribal nobles, but it's absolutely impossible to release the capable samurais and militiamen."

Xiulote shook his head, issued a brief directive, then set aside the report. He continued reading to understand the conditions of the surrounding city-states and to outline the diplomatic policies for the newly formed fief.

"After spring plowing, the fief's northern allies from Otapan City-State immediately sent congratulatory envoys to celebrate Your Highness' victory... and at the same time sought support regarding the ownership of the land on the north coast of the Lerma River?... Tepopolo has already demanded the land of the northern Wooden Fort, threatening with the massive army of the Alliance, while the Otomi people are garrisoned in the northern Wooden Fort and reluctant to hand it over..."

Reading this, Xiulote fell into deep thought.

The Otapan City-State is the ancestral city of the Otomi, holding a special place in the hearts of the Otomi. Under the influence of the old Priest Olte, the city-state's Commander Jiowar had sworn a blood oath to him, willingly becoming a vassal. The westward conquest was arduous; the 3,000 Otomi troops had fought hard, first plundering to lure the enemy, then suffering heavy losses while attacking the formidable Rivermouth fortress. The Otomi City-State also served as a sturdy barrier for the northern part of the fief against the Chichimeca Canine Descendants.

As for the Tepopolo fief in the northeastern part of the Lake Region... though they were of the same origins and had participated in the western conquest together, they couldn't be considered as belonging to his own line of force... there was no subordinate relationship between them, and there was even competition...

The young king pondered for a moment before turning to the Head Warrior standing by his side.

"Bertade, General Jiowar has sworn a blood oath to me, and Noble Chief Tepopolo fought alongside us... I really don't wish for them to fight each other over a fief. However, His Majesty delineated the boundaries of the Lake Region and personally informed me, so I find it difficult to openly take a stand on this matter."

"Your Highness, do you mean... there's a difference between close and distant relations?"

Bertade's expression remained calm, but his eyes flickered slightly.

"Yes, Bertade, the Alliance has its own rules, but it depends on the execution... Otapan City had contributed greatly during the western conquest and has always been close to me, I will remain fair... Tepopolo was only recently enfeoffed, with an unstable foundation. He has little reliable force in hand, and his authority isn't yet established. It's impossible for him to send troops north this year... The main southern forces have already returned to the eastern border, currently engaging with the Tlaxcalan troops. His Majesty, overlooking the world, wouldn't consider this small strip of north coast wasteland... Head Warrior, discreetly send envoys to inform the old Priest Olte of these realities. He will know what to do."

The Head Warrior nodded, took out paper and pen, and recorded His Highness' words.

Chapter 504 - The Situation in All Directions, Intelligence and Diplomacy - Part 2

Tepopolo had relocated his old quarters, held a grand assembly of the nobility, appealed to the samurai, and hurried the spring plowing ever since he arrived in his fief. These series of actions indicated that the transferred noble was eager to make his mark. The population of Akanbaro State had been sparse due to the ravages of war, and even with the addition of the transferred noble families, it remained under a hundred thousand, with no shortage of land for cultivation. His threats this time to demand lands in the north seemed more about establishing his credibility among the local nobility.

"The young Jaguar commands the surrounding mountains and forests. The land in the lakes does not need another strong and greedy wolf."

Bertade's gaze deepened. Xiulote, unaffected, continued perusing the report.

"In the northwest of the fief, in the Chapala Lake Region, the Feather Prince led the samurai legions to defeat several powerful Guamal Canine Descendants Tribes repeatedly. Upon hearing about the rampage in the Lake Region, most of the other plundering tribes, carrying their looted goods, food, and captives, began to retreat to the Tlacaelel state in the northern highlands. This large-scale invasion by the Canine Descendants should now have ceased."

"Congratulations to His Highness on his magnificent victory, you are like an eagle soaring through the sky, dominating the vast and magnificent mountains and rivers... The chieftains of the Guamal Tribes have asked the traders if they would like to purchase the captured Prepetcha slaves. The Canine Descendants aren't interested in gold or silver, they only ask for food, wine, salt, or weapons in exchange. An adult captive can be traded for about three hundred pounds of food, or a hundred pounds of rice wine, or over ten pounds of salt, or two sets of cotton armor, which can also be replaced by an equivalent amount of cocoa beans. Young women are half price, and children can be added as a side deal..."

"The trader's estimates of the number of captives range from 10-20 thousand to 20-30 thousand, mainly vigorous men and women. With bulk purchasing, the price can be greatly reduced. Please, gracious Highness, respond as soon as possible... Those innocent lives, like flowers in the summer rain, tremble, ready to fall at any moment, buried in the soil of the rainy season... Besides from valuable craftsmen and doctors, the Canine Descendants have limited food and will not keep many captives who consume it... The traders have already purchased a group of slaves in advance with the merchandise at hand. Just follow the Lerma River, and it won't take a week to bring them back to the fief."

Xiulote frowned again. He examined the letter in his hand, which mixed common pictographs with neatly written Chinese characters, even verses that rhymed. The young king asked in confusion.

"Who wrote this report? It doesn't seem like the work of samurai."

Upon hearing this, Bertade smiled faintly, his expression amused.

"Highness, you forgot. The supervisor for the northern caravan is Balamo. He has been blown by a year's worth of sand on the northern plateau and even saw the white snow. Every month, the report he sends back always includes some poetry."

"Ah. Haha."

Recalling this, Xiulote couldn't help but laugh. Not long after the western campaign began, when the Divine Blessing Legion arrived, he assigned Balamo, the Poet Commander of the legion, to take full responsibility for managing the caravans and scouts in the north.

There were many considerations. To trade in the barbarian regions, one must first excel in martial arts and have both courage and insight. Additionally, one must be adaptable, articulate, skilled at social interaction, and having some cultural knowledge was even better. Lastly, it was about using the northern wind, sand, and cold waves to temper the temperament of the Poet Commander further.

"How is Balamo faring in the north? Looking at this report, it seems he is still quite free-spirited," Xiulote asked with a smile.

"Balamo makes a very good caravan supervisor. He is eloquent, skilled in martial arts, and has recently learned some songs and dances, making him quite popular on the northern plateau. Well, he also maintains very good relationships with many Noble Chiefs' wives. The customs are different on the plateau and in the Alliance, and the people in the Canine Descendants Tribes often do not know who their fathers are... Often, it's the noble women who have the final say... Although Balamo has it tough, he also enjoys it," replied Bertade.

At this, both men laughed heartily. After a while, the young king composed himself and said earnestly.

"Our fief lacks population. The proposal to purchase captives is feasible; we need men and women of working age and children as well! Among the materials for the purchase, start with salt, then liquor, followed by grain, and finally the damaged weapons and equipment from the western campaign. Have Balamo press down the prices, and try to trade along the Lerma River as much as possible. I will have Anna's Naval Forces transport them. Also, send additional priests to the northern caravans to spread the glory of the Chief Divine as quickly as possible!"

The Head Warrior quickly noted this down, then bowed to Xiulote.

"Highness, your kindness is boundless!"

Xiulote nodded. In the aftermath of war, the fief's population was much scarcer than materials and needed to be replenished in any possible way. As for the future arrangements of the Poet Commander... some new ideas emerged in his mind, which he quickly suppressed... The young king continued to examine the movements in all directions.

"From the south of the fief, envoys from the Tlapanec Tribal Alliance have arrived. They expressed their submission to the Alliance and are willing to tribute the rainforest's specialty products, including feathers, spices, gemstones, and salt from the south. They request to continue the copper trading that had existed previously with the Tarasco Kingdom and are equally eager for the obsidian mostly monopolized by the Alliance,"

Reading this, Xiulote shook his head.

The Tlapanec tribal groups formed a loose alliance located south of the Weytamo mountains. They are scattered between the east-west mountain ranges and the sea to the west, residing in the lowland rainforests and coastal plains. The Tlapanec tribes have a small population and limited farmland, but they excel in trading, mostly engaging in wholesale trade. To their east are the Mistec and Zapotecs Alliance.

Chapter 505 - The Situation in All Directions, Intelligence and Diplomacy - 3

"You must not! The Alliance prohibits luxury. Bronze and Obsidian are strategic materials, controlled centrally by the Kingdom, lords or merchants are not allowed to sell them abroad..."

Xiulote issued his directive without mercy. The formal subordination of the Tlapanec people offered no benefits to the Alliance. Their remote location, settled among the complex terrains of the lowland rainforest, made their land of little value and difficult to be threatened by the military power of the Alliance.

"...send out a squad of Samurai, ban Tlapanec merchants, and monitor the private trade of the southern nobility. If anything is discovered, just collect evidence and hold on to it for a little while."

The young monarch thought for a moment, then added specific handling methods.

He stamped the document with a jade badge in red ink, and then handed the document and the token over to the Head Warrior, keeping a concise backup record for himself. The Head Warrior immediately summoned several trusted aides, chose a responsible one, and handed over the document and token. Subsequently, the responsible aide securely kept the document and immediately took the token to mobilize troops in the camp, enforcing His Highness's commands directly.

Although the execution process of this series of policies was somewhat rough, it worked as smoothly as moving one's own arm, simple and efficient, only following the commands of the authority.

As Xiulote's authority increased, a multitude of information from both inside and outside the Fief and all powers were now fully converging to him. Normally, he was the reviewer of information and the ultimate decision-maker; his generals and trusted aides formed the circle involved in policy discussion; his trained guards, department heads, and officers at various levels of the legion were the specific executors. Belonging to the execution group were thousands of craftsmen serving, tens of thousands of Mexica legionnaires, and hundreds of thousands of community civilians who had been effectively integrated.

This governance system relied not on a mature system of legalism but rather on the monarch's personal authoritarian control. Compared to the mature civil official system of the Celestial Empire, the Alliance's form of governance was more akin to the nomadic tribes on the northern plains, led by a strong "Khan" or "Great Chieftain" who made major decisions.

"To the southeast of the Fief, the Mistec people sent envoys to pay tribute, offering dyes, gold, silver, gemstones, pearls, and young girls. Your Highness, they seek trade relations with the new kingdom and also wish to form a closer partnership with you. Meanwhile, the monitoring scouts have discovered that they are continuously inquiring into the details of the western expedition war and are very interested in the newly appeared weapons of the Heavenly Divine... Additionally, according to uncertain news from long-distance traders, the Southern Route Commander of the Tarasco Kingdom, Prince Quiyus, might have already escaped along the Tarsus River to the Mistec..."

"Craftsmen with exquisite skills in precious metals, the cloud people, the Mistec... the secret of gunpowder... Quiyus..."

Xiulote fell into thought. The Fief had nominally controlled Apachigan, capable of moving along the Tarsus River upwards through the subjugated Qontal tribe, facilitating large-scale exchanges with the southeastern Mistec people.

Unlike the politically loose, sparsely populated Tlapanec tribes, the Mistec Alliance had the rudiments of a state, with a population of about eight or nine hundred thousand, and under the pressure of the Alliance, they advanced and retreated together with the Zapotecs. They thrived with a population of at least twenty thousand Samurai, occupying the fertile southern lands, producing many luxury goods, and possessing a large number of skilled craftsmen... Thinking of this, the young monarch picked up his pen again.

"Accept the Mistec's request for trade but restrict the exchange of strategic materials. Do not accept the Mistec's proposals for marriage, and allocate the tribute girls to the soldiers of the Mexica legion. Keep control of the gunpowder craftsmen, and maintain strict secrecy of the gunpowder formula. Sweep the battlefield of the great war again, strictly prohibiting the outflow of new weapons! Additionally, test the Mistec envoys to see if they are willing to exchange Tarasco nobles for a batch of weapons and leather armor..."

After a pause, Xiulote wrote again.

"If the Mistec are willing to sell slaves on a large scale, the Alliance is willing to sell a sufficient amount of bronze, grain, salt, and military supplies."

The young King handed the document to the Head Warrior and then picked up the last piece of correspondence on the table. He scrutinized the text of the letter, and a smile finally appeared on his face.

"The esteemed King Aweit, leading the southern legion, battled the Tlaxcala people multiple times in the southeastern Xochipeople state of the Alliance. Relying on the range superiority of their longbows and powerful crossbows, the Mexica legion suppressed the Tlaxcalans' archers and achieved victory in two field battles! Including the Militia, the Tlaxcalan forces suffered close to ten thousand casualties and retreated to the eastern Xochipeople state, where they now hold several border fortresses. It is now the peak of the rainy season, and the combat between the two parties has temporarily ceased, holding position half a state apart..."

"Besides the two states harassed by the Tlaxcalans, this year's spring farming went smoothly for the Alliance. After applying well-ripened manure, the crops in the Texcoco Lake District are flourishing, and the grain output is expected to increase significantly..."

"When the news of the magnificent victory in the west reached the Capital City, the High Priest personally led a twelve-member Priesthood to hold a grand sacrificial ceremony in front of the Great Temple, celebrating the victory of the western campaign! The Elder personally presided, making offerings to the Chief Divine and the ancestors. The sounds of celebration in the capital city were like thunder in the rainy season, everywhere filled with all-night uproarious shouts!

The names of the King and Your Highness, just like the great predecessor monarch Montezuma, were prayed for by the warriors of the Alliance during the sacrificial rites! Now, the citizens of the Lake Capital are merely awaiting the King's victorious return to hold a grand victory sacrifice! The post-war victory offering is likely to be scheduled on New Year's celebration day... by then, it will be an unmatched grand ceremony, possessing the most numerous and holiest Divine Descendant sacrifices!"

Xiulote was slightly distracted, with the image of King Su'angua in his slumber arising in his mind.

In the past three months, the Alliance's searching teams had successively captured several fleeing princes of the Tarasco Kingdom. And the King of Tarasco, the Royal Family, and many from the Great Nobility, had already been handed over to the returning troops of Aweit. Their fate, like a high piled pyre, had already been selected by the Divine flame, destined to turn into ash scattered by the wind amidst the excited cheers of hundreds of thousands.

The young King's heart was already like iron. He merely gazed for a moment before turning to the final words.

"The High Priest along with the Elder Priests have resolved to establish a total ecclesiastical district in Tarasco. His Highness has been promoted as the youngest Fifth Level Supreme High Priest, fully in charge of all matters within the Tarasco ecclesiastical district! Meanwhile, a large contingent of priests will be drawn by the capital city Priesthood, led by the newly promoted Fourth Level Supreme High Priest Ugus, to arrive at the Mikenque Lake Fief before the autumn harvest to assist the new district's affairs...

At His Highness's request, a large number of senior craftsmen from the Divine Revelation Place in the capital will also be dispatched to Qinchongcan City, to establish the second Divine Revelation Place. As His Highness has been granted land in the lake, following discussions between the Elder and the High Priest, the capital city's Divine Revelation Place is now managed by the Elder Priests. And the newly built second Divine Revelation Place is fully managed by His Highness..."

"Hmm... newly promoted Fourth Level Supreme High Priest, son of Elder Uguel... Ugus... the Tarasco ecclesiastical district... the youngest Fifth Level Supreme High Priest... large group of supporting priests... newly established Divine Revelation Place... in exchange for the old Divine Revelation Place... hmm, it's only fitting, I'm in need of capable hands, it's a fair deal..."

Xiulote stood up and paced thoughtfully. Behind the simple few lines of text were a series of political trades and struggles for power. Fortunately, with his grandfather serving as the High Priest at the apex of central power, the results of the trade were satisfactory.

Time faded gently alongside the ticking of the rain, as the King mused. It was a while before a trusted aide stepped into the great hall. He knelt respectfully on the floor, and his loud report startled the reflective king.

"Your Highness! Responding to your invitation, the original epic custodian of the Palace of Wind, the learned Elder Sage Jatili from the Prepetcha people, has arrived. He is outside the hall, requesting an audience with the respected King!"

Chapter 506 - The Knowledgeable Elder

"Oh! Has the learned elder Jatili already arrived? Summon him at once! No, I myself shall go to the entrance!"

Xiulote suddenly awakened and turned around. A trace of joy appeared on his face as he quickly made his way towards the great hall's entrance. Then, the young king suddenly remembered something. He glanced at his plain robe, paused briefly, and gestured for the Head Warrior to drape him in a formal ceremonial dress before he strode eagerly to the entrance to look carefully.

The mighty wind blew along the corridor, entering through the doors of the Palace of Wind; a curtain depicting the Chief Divine stood in the corridor with the Hummingbird Sun emblem fluttering in the wind. Two lines of silent Mexica samurai stood guard, with only the sound of wind chimes gently ringing in the palace.

Between the lowered war clubs of the samurai, an old man with white hair, leaning on a rustic wooden staff, quietly gazed at the ancient frescoes in the corridor as well as at the freshly painted marks on them. His figure was thin and his face rosy; he wore a flat, dark round hat and the traditional blue robe of Prepetcha. The back of the blue robe trailed with a few black and white ribbons embedded with various mysterious symbols.

This sage's attire, though simple, was not something ordinary people could wear. It symbolized a rare and noble status, representing those in the tribes who possessed knowledge and traditions. Wearing this outfit in public naturally earned the reverence of various Prepetcha tribes.

Upon hearing the sound, Sage Jatili finally shifted his gaze from the ancient and fresh frescoes. He turned his head, revealing a pair of deep eyes like lake waters, and an aged yet sharp face. He looked at Xiulote, observing the young king's delicate and resilient features, his gentle eyes like jade, and then assessed the king's formal and dignified posture, eventually showing a hint of surprise on his face.

"The decayed wood of Prepetcha, the remnant people of the Tarasco Kingdom, Jatili, pay respects to your Highness of Mexica, the conqueror of the kingdom, the great new king!"

Jatili, caught off guard for a moment, lowered his wooden staff and bowed deeply.

The king before him was so young, merely a fifteen or sixteen-year-old youth! The young king's appearance was handsome, his demeanor grave and his gaze wise and firm, starkly different from the cruel and tyrannical image of the Mexica conqueror he had imagined... With this thought, a slight movement stirred in the sage's heart, a divine light flashing in his eyes.

"Respected learned elder, revered by our kingdom's citizens for your seniority, I admire you immensely. Please, dispense with the formalities!"

Xiulote quickly moved forward two steps, carefully lifting the elder by his arms. In the Prepetcha language, the name "Jatili" itself means an old sage.

The elder naturally stood up straight, without much fuss, and a calm smile appeared on his face. However, this smile was soon replaced by surprise once again.

The young king released his hands, stepped back, then clenched his right fist to his chest and bowed deeply, performing a solemn ritual.

"Sage Jatili, you are the keeper of history for the Tarasco Kingdom, the bearer of the Kingdom Epic. Today, there are no distinctions of sovereign and subject, only teacher and student. This gesture is in honor of your wisdom! As a newcomer to this land, I sincerely seek your instruction on the Tarasco epics and ask for guidance from a wise man!"

Jatili shifted his thin frame to sidestep the king's gesture, then returned the formal gesture with equal solemnity.

"A man from a vanquished nation dares not accept a gesture from his Highness... What skills does a turtle, coiled in a mud pond, have to teach an eagle soaring in the sky?"

Saying this, Jatili paused. Observing the young king's sincere expression, he continued.

"A turtle living long in a mud pond might have glimpsed some forgotten skies. If the eagle does not mind, I am willing to slowly share what I know."

Upon hearing this, a genuine smile appeared on Xiulote's face.

The cultural heritage of Tarasco was largely concentrated in two places. One was the Temple of the House of Wind, guarded and handed down by the priests of the three divinities. But this inheritance, along with the knowledgeable high priests, had turned into ethereal blue flames on the night of Qinchongcan's downfall.

The other heritage was preserved in the Palace of Wind, managed by generations of tribal sages. Thanks to the sudden uprising of the old militia, the Tarasco chief died too abruptly to light the prepared fire. Thus, the codices, books, and frescoes in the Palace of Wind were preserved intact.

In these days, Xiulote was both drafting laws for the fief and studying the ancient codices.

In his reading, Xiulote realized that although the Tarasco Kingdom had lasted only two hundred years, the Prepetcha civilization of the Lake Region had been handed down for nearly two thousand years! The upper echelons of the Tarasco Kingdom were originally from a tribe of Chichimeca Canine Descendants from the northwestern highlands. More than two hundred years ago, they had moved south, conquered the Lake Region, and then integrated into the ancient civilization of the Lake Region, becoming members of the Prepetcha people. In the Lake Region, the overwhelmingly predominant Prepetcha people possessed a mature and unique cultural system.

Xiulote wished to understand the spiritual world of the Prepetcha people and explore the cultural origins of the civilization to better formulate strategies for tribal assimilation. However, these ancient records, abstract and mysterious, profound and difficult to interpret, and not written in text, required an oral tradition from inheritance bearers for proper understanding.

Chapter 507 - The Knowledgeable Elder_2

The young king had searched for a long time before finding that the epic keeper of the Palace of Wind had survived the war and was hiding in a civilian community, being well taken care of by the residents of the Capital City. He then sent a large group of trusted Samurai to formally invite the other party to come and explain the epic of the Prepetcha people.

Many thoughts flashed through Xiulote's mind, quickly sinking into the depths of his heart. He wore a gentle smile, personally supporting Jatili's left arm with his right, guiding the old man toward the center of the grand hall. Jatili tried to pull away his arm but could not break free from the young king's strong embrace. The old man had no choice but to smile helplessly and let himself be assisted with sprightly steps.

"Guard, bring two cups of fresh hot cocoa! Add honey and herbs, just as I usually like it."

The two reached a wooden table in the hall. Xiulote helped the old man sit down on the floor before releasing his arm and sitting cross-legged opposite him. Then, he commanded the guard loudly. The guard brought the hot drinks that had already been prepared. The young king grasped the clay cups with both hands and passed one to Jatili with affection and certainty.

"Respected sage teacher, please try this cup of hot cocoa! It refreshes the mind and revitalizes the spirit, a sacred beverage of the Mexica Alliance!"

Jatili took the hot cocoa, gently sipped it, and savored the flavor, praising it.

"Excellent! Unlike the cold cocoa of the Mexica Alliance, this must be your majesty's innovation... Fermented fine cocoa beans, finely ground to separate into a light brown cocoa liquor. Wild honey from the southern Rainforest, originating from the vibrant flowers of spring, still carrying a delicate floral fragrance. The vanilla from Texcoco Lake Region's Chinampa, harvested from the lake in the late autumn. From the blooming of flowers in spring, pollinated by skilled old farmers, taking eight months to yield mature vanilla pods, only the Mexica Alliance can produce them in large quantities... Once these fine ingredients are mixed and boiled with the slightly sweet well water of the Royal Palace, it results in this wonderfully aromatic taste!"

At this, Jatili paused, then again observed every nuance of Xiulote's expression with penetrating eyes.

"Your Highness, the effort required for these two cups of hot cocoa needs a strong young farmer to labor in the fields for an entire year!"

Listening to the sage's praise, Xiulote's face began to show a self-satisfied smile.

In this era, there weren't many beverages that could please him. Yet the honey-herb hot cocoa was the perfect drink he had concocted based on memories from a past life, connecting him to bygone recollections. These all-natural, top-quality ingredients blended together offered a taste far superior to the cheap products of the industrial age.

However, with Jatili's emphatic final statement, the young king's smile instantly froze on his face. He forced a smile, a hint of shame flashing across his face.

"Respected learned elder, I do not favor luxury, but merely prefer fine foods... The people's strength is precious and should not be wasted; the citizens are like water, they carry the vessel but also capsize it. A monarch must always remember... Hmm, Sage Jatili, when you were at the door just now, you were looking at the new mural in the hallway, do you have any insights?"

"The citizens are like water, they carry the vessel but also capsize it..."

Jatili chewed on these words, a mysterious gleam flashing in his eyes. He gave Xiulote a profound look, then spoke with a smile.

"Rumors say that Your Highness is blessed with divine wisdom, is adept at embracing advice, generously kind and merciful, valiant in battle, a natural-born king... Seeing you today, I now understand that the wind and light entering the tent are due to the holes at the top! As for the views on the murals..."

Jatili turned his head and looked at the murals in the great hall. The Divine Eagle and Hummingbird had vanished. Under the majestic light of the Chief Divine, Lake Patzcuaro shimmered with waves. To the west, the people of Prepetcha and, from the East, the Mexica were together building the magnificent

and beautiful Qinchongcan City, stacking high pyramids that seemed to connect the Divine Kingdom with the human world. Beside the bustling city, flowers encircled, butterflies danced among the flora, and laborers transported exquisite objects of gold, silver, and copper, a sight of wealth and beauty everywhere.

Seeing this, Jatili once again revealed a faint smile. He first praised,

"Your Highness took over the Palace of Wind just a few months ago, not only fully engaged in spring farming, organizing the people directly, removing obstructive nobility, but also renovated the murals, spreading the faith of the Chief Divine, making poetry sung across the fields... It is evident that Your Highness's sight is indeed as far-reaching as the Divine Eagle, looking over the world and into the future!"

Listening to the elder's praise, Xiulote's pupils slightly constricted. He pondered for a moment, then took out a wooden spoon and stirred it in a clay cup filled with cocoa. Then, he handed the same wooden spoon to Jatili. The other took the spoon, stirred the layered cocoa, gazed at the mixed cocoa for a while, then took a light sip.

Jatili, with a profound look in his eyes, continued to speak to the young monarch.

"Your Highness, I know not much, nor do I intend to comment on your new policies in front of others... Just from this mural alone, Lake Patzcuaro and the people of Prepetcha are blended together, the strokes ancient and antiquated, the environment harmonious and natural, also containing the vitality of when the Kingdom was initially flourishing, certainly the Royal Palace's old paintings.

The Mexica's image is simple and robust, with a square and archaic face shape, movements simple yet vivid. This method of painting is equally ancient, filled with simplicity and boldness from ancient times.

The painter must have come from the Holy City of Teotihuacan, imitating the mural art of the Teotihuacan civilization.

The Mexica Chief Divine Huitzilopochtli's image is vague yet grand, descending upon the pyramid, radiating a brilliant aura. Feathers behind the Chief Divine are lively and flowing, the pyramid under the feet of the Chief Divine robust and massive, this strong contrast in techniques originates from the craftsman spirit of the Toltec civilization, also embodying the Tepanec people's ambition and inclusiveness. The legacy of the Toltec civilization was carried on by the Tepanec and then fell into the hands of the Alliance. The painter must have come from Askapozhaleike on the western shore of the Texcoco Lake.

As for the city's surrounding flowers and butterflies, laborers carrying gold, silver, and copper objects, the brushwork is intricate and splendid, maximizing details and colors. This opulent style, appearing entwined and dizzyingly captivating, is characteristic of southern City-States. The painter might come from Mistec, or perhaps even further south from the Zapotecs..."

Jatili, smiling, commented one by one, and then summarized with another smile.

"In my view, the three styles each have their features and strengths. However, the essence of painting demands unity. Compared to the original murals, the ancient technique of Teotihuacan is the most natural and closest. The two origins merge seamlessly, like ink blending into water, without any gap. Toltec Chief Divine's style is the most inclusive and broad, blessing the world, with all people prostrating, like a queen bee commanding the swarm, ordinary bees although distinctive, still toil and follow. Whereas the southern City-States' style, though seemingly opulent and prosperous, clearly demarcates layers from the original, distinct in high and low. While aesthetic for a time, viewed long enough might start feeling unbalanced, likely not enduring."

Having said this, Jatili looked at the young monarch with a meaningful inquiry.

"Your Highness, I was invited by your Samurai, merely wishing to be a turtle closing its eyes. Yet, seeing Your Highness, I suddenly became confused, opened my blind eyes, and spoke all this nonsense. I wonder if Your Highness is satisfied with my commentary? And also, in the governance of your Fief, which style of painting do you prefer?"

Chapter 508 - Discussion on Governance

A gentle breeze swept through, like a darting cat, caressing the murals in the grand hall. It tinkled the wind chimes in the corner of the room, stirring the King's thoughts. The chimes rang softly, and the sage's words were aged but forceful. The echo resonated in the vacant Royal Palace, gradually dissipating in the wind and sinking into the depths of the King's heart.

Hearing Jatili comment on the technique of the murals, Xiulote paused for a moment and looked inquiringly at the Head Warrior, whom he trusted the most.

Bertade was always composed, yet now, his eyes were unusually fixed. Born a commoner, he had spent half his life in the army. He was genuinely proficient in all but one aspect of the so-called painting and art. Xiulote, who had not attended Priest school, received an incomplete Priestly education, which was hardly any better. The two seasoned Samurai exchanged glances for a moment before the Head Warrior finally spoke in a complex tone.

"Your Highness, I have recorded that the painters indeed came from three places... as the Sage said, the first two batches came from the Holy City in the Alliance and the west side of the lake. The third batch of painters came from the Mistec."

The young King slightly furrowed his brows. He stood up from his seat, turned halfway, and looked at the mural in front of him while masking his changing expressions.

In the Alliance's political system, the Holy City, Teotihuacan, had been headed by a branch of the Mexican Royal Family for three to four generations now. This lineage from the Holy City was closely knit

and culturally integrated, serving as the most trusted direct descendants of the Alliance and the Lake Capital City. The City-State of Askapozhaleike in the west of Lake Texcoco was an old capital of the Tepanec people. The Tepanec and the Mexica are both of Nava descent, intermarried for generations, and shared beliefs. Under the directive of the Chief Divine, they had merged for half a century and were now fully integrated into the Mexica group. Both City-States were loyal members of the Alliance, responding to calls to arms and obeying commands, considered as "one of their own" within the Alliance.

The southern Mistec was different. Although subjugated under Montezuma I's campaigns, the Mistec people had been vassals of the Mexica Alliance for nearly twenty years, paying regular tributes annually. However, the control the Alliance had over the Mistec was still limited to military deterrence and collecting tributes. The Mistec retained a completely independent political system, semi-autonomous foreign powers, and a unique cloud-centered belief system. They were allied with the Zapotecs, subtly resisting the influence and integration by the Alliance.

"The Mistec people... They are far away, with a long history and a culture and belief system uniquely their own. Indeed, they differ artistically from the various parts of the Alliance."

Xiulote pondered for a moment, regained control of his expressions, and then resumed his seat. He looked at Jatili, not answering the latter's question but instead asking with a smile,

"In the presence of a Sage, I ought to seek frank advice. The direct descendants of the Holy City, the backbone in the west of the lake, and the southern vassals, their governance indeed differs across these three. What could the Sage teach me? And how does it relate to the different factions of the Prepetcha?"

Facing the young King's inquiry, Jatili smiled slightly. His wrinkles relaxed like waves, his eyes shimmered like lake water, and he spoke loudly as if the wave crests,

"Your Highness, would you like to hear the truth, or falsehoods?"

"Naturally, the truth! I seek knowledge from the Sage, and whatever is spoken, I only seek the beneficial aspects. Should it prove advantageous for governance, I shall certainly reward you!"

"Your Highness's magnanimity is truly as vast as a bear's!"

At this, Jatili loudly expressed his admiration, then continued with a smile,

"Your Highness, at my age, I no longer seek rewards. I merely hope to do things beneficial for our tribe and citizens... This governance, on the one hand, depends on how the ruler views the Citizens. It involves classifying people into various ranks, the number of people in each rank, their privileges, the Tribute they owe, and how lower-tier individuals can rise up. Then, there are handling famines and disasters; how to react during wars and unrest... These matters are all decided by Your Highness, testing the level of governance, and also depending on the enforcer's practices."

Xiulote reflected for a moment and then nodded affirmatively.

"The people of Prepetcha are my Citizens. They are the foundation of the Kingdom, the green leaves on the lofty Divine Tree. I will hold them in benevolent regard, treating them equally as the Mexica! As for the distinctions among nobility, Samurai, and commoners, and the proportion of taxes, I have my plans, and I shall not oppress the commoners of the Prepetcha."

"Your Highness, you soar like a mighty eagle, embracing the whole land. The Prepetcha people wish to be your wings!"

Jatili bowed his head respectfully. Then, with a solemn expression, he earnestly said,

"Relying on the Akatla Pyramids, heaven and earth are interlinked. The sky watches over the earth, bestowing thunder and nourishing dew; the earth also watches the sky, rising clouds and high mountains in response. The interaction between heaven and earth, another aspect of governance, is how the Citizens view the ruler. The most direct response is how they react to the ruler's attitude."

Hearing this, a familiar saying surfaced in Xiulote's mind. He pondered for a moment, and suddenly recalled the Tarasco chief and the old Militia. He spoke somewhat emotionally,

"Heaven and earth interact, the Monarch and his subjects correspond. If the Monarch regards them as beloved kin, they see the Monarch as dependable parents; if the Monarch regards them as mere weeds, they can naturally treat the Monarch as an adversary."

At this, Jatili paused, his deep eyes widening as he closely evaluated the young King again before solemnly saying,

"Your Highness, your compassion is rare, yet it must be judiciously applied, only used where appropriate. The phrase you just said could be spoken by a Poet, could be spoken by the Nobility, but it should not be uttered by a Monarch."

"Citizens view their rulers just as weeds view the Divine Tree. They observe the colors of the trees, find similarities with themselves, and thus, a closeness is born. This represents the external appearance, customs, and habits of a people."

"They hear the rustling of the wind through the tree leaves, just like the rustling of blades of grass. This is a similar language, words that can be exchanged, symbols that connect."

"They follow the natural order, born in spring, flourishing in summer, withering in fall, but only the Divine Tree is evergreen throughout the seasons. This is the law that the people follow, where only the will of the King stands above all."

"They look up at the towering height of the Divine Tree, finding it reaching into the clouds, a resting place for the Heavenly Divine. This is a common belief, respect for the King, and worship of the divine..."

"Customs, language, law, belief—all these, your highness, had already been schemed out. From the rumors of the past two years of reform within the Mexica Alliance and the traces laid out by your highness in recent months, I have perceived, your highness, in your heart, a great and clear Divine Tree already exists."

Upon saying this, the learned elder bore a meaningful smile, and smiled once more.

"However, when the weeds grow taller and more numerous, they need a new bond. This bond is not visible on the surface but hidden deep within the hearts of people, beneath the gathering of weeds. There must be sprawling roots underground, connecting everyone! They feel the roots of the Divine Tree, trace back to the source of life, thereby realizing that they are the offsprings, naturally detached from the Divine Tree, borne of the same essence. Together they gestate through time, should be considered an entity with the Divine Tree, meant to live and die together!..."

"Ancient myths will be sealed by the lengthy passage of time, barren hearts will be obscured by blurred history, someone must step forward to tell the heritage to all... In this regard, perhaps this old man can be of some assistance."

"Roots of connection... an entity... mythology and history... to tell... good, very good! This is exactly the future I hope for!"

Xiulote paused for a moment, then his spirits lifted. He leaned forward, grasping the aged hands of Jatili, looking earnestly into his eyes.

"Please, Sage, aid me!"

In face of the Monarch's sincere plea for help, a smile finally spread across Jatili's face. His eyes twinkled with laughter as he once again spoke deeply.

"The entity your highness hopes for, is it the exquisite mushrooms between the pine trees, or the towering pine trees themselves? Is it for a moment or for generations unchanging?"

"What I seek is for all eternity and all citizens!"

The young Monarch answered resoundingly, without hesitation.

"Good! Then let us talk from ages past, begin the narrative from ancient times, telling a long and credible story. Your highness, do you still remember why you invited this old man here today?"

"The epic of the Prepetcha people?"

Xiulote paused, mused aloud.

"Old books and murals are well preserved, in the stone forts surrounding the palace."

"Your highness, since this is the case, shall we talk while we walk?"

Upon hearing this, the young Monarch nodded. He rose steadily, and once again took Jatili's arm. This time, the learned elder bore a calm smile, quietly allowing the Monarch to assist him. Side by side, they walked towards the back of the hall, where a stone pathway led to the stone forts.

Bertade, accompanied by several escorts, followed silently behind. Watching the Monarch converse with the Sage, both laughing heartily from time to time, a remarkably harmonious vibe of belated meeting filled the air. The Head Warrior paused briefly, a strange feeling surged through him, then transformed into his silent murmur.

"The eagle soars high in the sky, drawing the mountain's gaze and attracting hidden eyes... creatures flock around the jungle's King. From today on, beside the Monarch will not only stand loyal and brave tigers but also sly and strategic foxes..."

The group slowly moved further, disappearing at the end of the pathway. A breeze blew through the Palace of Wind, the crisp sound of wind chimes echoing once more within the great hall. The guarding

Samurais stood silent and somber, only the brand-new murals on either side remained ancient and solemn.

Chapter 509 - Heritage Slab, Common Origin Myth!

The sound of quiet footsteps echoed in the ancient stone fort. They crossed the long-standing stone steps, pushed open the dusty stone doors, entered the expansive stone hall, and stopped before an aged slab of stone.

Xiulote halted his steps. He glanced at the stone slab in the hall that had withstood the test of time, the wooden-panel murals, and the artifacts of gold, silver, and jade, and spoke with solemnity.

"Sage Jatili, we have arrived. This is the place in the Royal Palace where the sacred texts are kept."

Jatili nodded gravely. He moved forward eagerly, extending a trembling hand to gently touch these precious relics as if caressing delicately breakable pottery.

"The river turtle lives under the pines in the water. As the river turtle grows old, the Divine Tree looms ever taller... since accepting the heritage at the age of twenty-four, I have spent a full thirty-six years in their company! On the night when the Capital City fell, I fled the Royal Palace in haste, thinking I would never see them again..."

The well-versed elder, rarely losing poise, revealed a tumult of emotions. After careful examination, he turned around and offered an apologetic bow to the lord below with a wry smile.

"Your Highness, I apologize for the display..."

Xiulote shook his head gently and returned the bow earnestly.

"Seeing this, I can only hold you in the highest respect."

The two exchanged bows, then shared a smile. Jatili then straightened his demeanor. With a composed smile, he led Xiulote to the front of an ancient stone slab.

"Your Highness, please allow us to start here! You must have heard of the legend of the five Sun Eras. The world was conceived from nothingness, and the gods became the supreme Suns in turn. The world was destroyed by the hands of the gods, the Sun set, and life withered. These cycles of events have, to this day, reached the fifth Sun Era. This first stone slab tells of the four past Eras."

Xiulote looked at the huge stone slab. It was engraved with four simple and archaic panel drawings, each centering around a sun radiating light.

"Your Highness, the sun being at the center of the stone slab is an entity revered by all tribes under the heavens. To unify all the people under the heavens for all eternity, we must begin with the myth of the Sun, weaving a complete and credible story."

Hearing this, Xiulote's expression turned serious, and he nodded slowly.

"For all the people, for thousands of eternal seasons... Sage, you understand my intentions! The great undertaking I wish to accomplish can only be aided by you within this Fief!"

The myth of the five Sun Eras had been circulating for a long time, even among the various Maya tribes in the East, although different tribes had different mythological expressions. For the vastly different tribes of the world, this shared mythological origin might be one of the few places where a consensus could form.

In the heart of the young King, there was always an ambition as grand as that of the First Emperor. He intended to not only personally craft a vast Empire and drive the transformation of eras but also to meld the various tribes of the Wilderness into an inseparable national whole. This immense process was much like the Han, Zhao, Wei, Chu, Yan, Qi, and Qin during the Celestial Empire's Warring States period eventually merging together as one Han people.

To achieve this grand vision, Xiulote had ample ambition, patience, and time. The tribes of the world were physically similar and intermarried with one another. The various tribal cultures had been barbaric for a long time, with no established linguistics and the concept of ethnicity not yet emerged, and even their written language was still in its rudimentary stages. This was the last and best opportunity for integration on this vast, isolated continent, to build a truly unified nation!

To lay the foundation of this unification, aside from having uniform writing, gauge, religion, and law, it was necessary to start from the source of culture and weave a connecting bond.

The bond for all the Xia was the lineage of the descendants of Yan and Huang, the Dragon's progeny, the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, the rituals of Zhou and historical records. Similarly, the Mexica Alliance that conquered the tribes of the world also needed a tall Divine Tree with interconnected roots, a myth of a common origin, to form a solid cultural bond. This myth needed to be inclusive enough, credible enough to be accepted by all tribes and align as closely as possible with known history to withstand scrutiny from future generations.

It was with such a vision that the young King repeatedly searched in Qinchongcan City, inviting the knowledgeable elder from Prepetcha to come and recount the epics of the lake dwellers' heritage. After some probing in the great hall, both parties implicitly understood and tacitly agreed with each other.

Xiulote glanced at the elder's calm smile and once again carefully observed the stone slab, noting the differences between the Aztec Sun mythology and the Prepetcha Sun mythology.

The Aztec mythology was inherited from the Toltec people, each Era marked by different symbols of civilization and different deities as the Sun.

The first four Eras were: the first Era, the era of the four Jaguars, with the primeval Sun God Tezcatlipoca as the deity; the second Era, the era of the four Winds, with the Feathered Serpent Quetzalcoatl; the third Era, the era of the four Rains, with the Rain Divine Tlaloc; the fourth Era, the era of the four Waters, with the river and lake Goddess Xalchiuhtlicue.

On the stone slab of the Prepetcha heritage, the first Era displays a Jaguar alongside a human holding aloft a torch and Long Spears; the second Era has sweeping winds with a crying rubber tree; the third Era shows vast rains with towering pyramids; the fourth Era has spreading floods with canoes traversing between islands.

Chapter 510 - Heritage Slab, Common Origin Myth!_2

And around these murals, many intricate symbols were engraved, faintly depicting the sun, the moon, statues, masks, gold and jade, pottery, corn, turkeys, long spears, shields, flames... and even the dead.

Xiulote looked intently for a long time and, aside from identifying common elements like the Jaguar, wind, rain, and water, he didn't gain much. He turned his head and sincerely asked Jatili for guidance.

"Please, Sage, interpret this and tell me the truth."

Jatili looked at the ancient murals and smiled leisurely.

"Your Highness, the Heritage Slab holds only images, the meanings are vague, and interpretations depend solely on one's mind, adapting to the times. Once mastery over heritage is achieved, priests and sages wield the power of speech. This is how it mostly is across the world... Since Your Highness asks today, this old man will share the true secrets that are passed down orally within our tribe but never outwards."

"Regarding the four passed Eras, each tribe across the world has its interpretations and distinct durations. In these Eras, following divine beings and symbols, they actually represent the states of our deceased ancestors and ancient sealed civilizations. The further back the Era, the more abstract and vague becomes the mural epics of the tribes, and the symbols bear more similarities. The remote Ages, hard to verify, thus can be corroborated through the commonality in these epics, serving as proof of common origins among the tribes."

The learned elder, his words loaded with complexity, then stretched out his withered palms, caressing the images from the four Eras.

"The first Sun Era marks the rise of our forefathers from the jungles. They kindled flame, crafted stone weapons, drove away and tamed beasts, established settlements, and became rulers of the jungle, just like the Jaguar. The specific details of that process are now unknown, and the origins of our forefathers remain elusive. The first Era, akin to the Mexica myth of the original Sun God Tezcatlipoca, represents the world's impermanence and the night's wind, elusive and unknowable."

Xiulote pondered for a long time. His eyes gazed toward the distant northwest, toward the end of the world. Moments later, he solemnly nodded.

"What the Sage speaks is logical. The first Era is elusive, without historical records, and encompasses all people."

Jatili's face showed a smile. He moved his palm, pausing on a rubber tree swaying in the wind.

"The second Sun Era belongs to the earliest ancestors that all tribes can trace back to—Olmec. 'Olm' meaning rubber, 'ec' being the tribe - Olmec, the rubber people's civilization. Their era dates back two thousand years. Located at the heart of the world, the Olmecs were the first to discover and use rubber, the first to construct grand step pyramids, the first to build towering monolithic palaces, the first to carve sacred sacrifice jade artifacts, and the first to worship the Jaguar and Feathered Serpent Divine."

"During that era, there might have been many wild tribes, many small settlements, many loose powers. But the most civilized and famous were the Olmec people. Now, all tribes worldwide trace their roots back to the Olmecs. The second Era's deity was the Feathered Serpent Divine Quetzalcoatl, and wherever the Feathered Serpent faith is found, Olmec influence had reached."

Be it the Teotihuacan people of the Highlands, the ancient Zapotec people in the jungles, or the Maya people from the distant East, all originated more or less from the Olmec civilization, bathed in the glory of the second Era!"

"Two or three thousand years ago, that was the era of Ancient Greece and the Western and Eastern Zhou dynasties... Rubber people's civilization, using rubber tree."

Xiulote concentrated in thought, murmuring. His grandfather had once told him stories of the Olmec people. The Totonac people from the eastern sea where the Olmec civilization's ruins lay had also sent ancient Olmec masks during Aweit's coronation ceremony.

"The Olmec people were the brilliant Ancient Greece of Central America, like Luoyi or Chengzhou spreading clan laws, descendants of the Yellow Emperor... descendants of the rubber people..."

The young king pondered for a moment, his eyes growing brighter. He looked toward Jatili, who also smiled meaningfully.

"Your Highness, from the Great Lake in the west to the Maya in the East, from the Rainforest in the south to the Highlands in the north, all under heaven originated from the rubber people. This is the primary root unifying all people!"

Jatili spoke deeply and resonantly, his words carrying the satisfaction of defining ages. Then, he continued moving his fingers, pointing toward the third Era pyramid.

"The second Era is the origin of all tribes. All parts of the world were originally one entity. It was only at the ending of the Era, after the downfall of the Olmec nation, that they scattered far and wide, forming different branches. The similar yet distinct pyramids found everywhere stand as a testament to the development of these branches!"

"In the legends of various tribes, differences start appearing in the third Era. A thousand years ago, the Maya from the far East established the Feathered Serpent pyramid in Tikal City; the Teotihuacan people of the northern Highlands built the Sun and Moon pyramids; the ancient Zapotecs of the southern jungles erected the Mount Alban pyramid; and the Western lakeside Loma Alta people constructed the lakeside pyramid. These interconnected pyramids of shared origins, they are the second root system uniting all people!"

Hearing this, the young king's pupils sharply contracted. He had come from the Sun and Moon pyramids and always held these ancient sites in awe. In this era, both commoners and nobility revered and worshipped these ancient majestic wonders, finding in their breathtaking sights a spiritual home.