

## Civilization 551

### Chapter 551 - Decision

The morning sun began to glow faintly, revealing itself from the distant East, illuminating the bright and winding path ahead. Soon, dense cooking smoke rose before my eyes, and the mining area once again filled with the clamor of human voices.

Xiulote stood on high ground, watching the busy mining area below, much like observing sprouting seedlings from the soil, imagining the appearance of a towering tree. After a long time, the king heaved a deep sigh.

Even though he possessed a vision that spanned eras, capable of drafting a technological tree of Divine Revelation and proposing grand blueprints for planning one hundred, or even two hundred years ahead. But at this moment, he still had to return to the reality that was bereft of scientific theory and lacked professional talent, starting from scratch with next to nothing.

The progress of technology required various foundational elements. Education required a decade to cultivate talent for each generation; technology needed decades of continuous accumulation of experience; society needed a century's development to foster the soil for new revolutions. All these required a lengthy passage of time.

Xiulote's expression remained calm as he once again glanced at the fiery morning sun before dispatching his trusted aide to summon Ezpan.

With the discovery of coal, the importance of the Qinganbate mining area had once again increased. For the present, coal could replace wood for burning, and coke could replace charcoal in metallurgy, thereby further freeing up manpower and increasing metallurgical efficiency. Moreover, the extraction of coal was far easier than that of copper ore, which warranted the immediate allocation of workforce.

Considering these factors, Xiulote decided to expand the numbers of miners and Samurai once again, to establish a mining town here, and to add bronze and gunpowder workshops. Qinganbate would serve as the Kingdom's first industrial zone, targeted for focused planning and development. In such a prospect, as the responsible person for the region, Necali, though loyal and diligent, still seemed somewhat lacking in experience, coming from an elite Scout background,

during these days of crude coking, Ezpan had been directly involved in production, performing rather well. He had mining experience, a deep understanding of the mining industry, agile thoughts, and a very flexible stance on mythological beliefs... In the heart of the king, this looked like a more suitable candidate.

As Xiulote was pondering, Ezpan, with a bright smile, approached briskly. He was still dressed as a Mexica legion commander, wearing the Chief God's Amulet of the Sun Hummingbird on his chest, and knelt respectfully four or five meters away to pay homage.

"Exalted Highness, your loyal Guard pays respects to the incarnation of the sun! The dawn is like your glory!"

Xiulote showed a faint smile on his face, but his heart was quite relieved. He waved his hand, signaling the loyal Guard to rise.

"Ezpan, you have been very efficient assisting me with coke production these past two days... Is there any reward you desire?"

"Your Highness, these past days, I have been filled with the joy of serving the divine spirits! To be able to dedicate myself to you is the greatest reward!"

Ezpan bowed his head again in respect. He had now risen to hereditary Nobility and also held the role of commanding ten thousand men as the Tarasco Legion Commander. With both status and power, wealth and beauties naturally did not elude him. At this moment, before His Highness, indeed, there wasn't much for him to ask for.

"Hmm. Ezpan, what do you think of this mining area?"

"The mining area?"

Ezpan was slightly startled, as troubled memories of his youth surged in his heart. However, he quickly composed himself, observing His Highness's demeanor, and considered his response carefully.

"Guided by the Divine Revelation given by Your Highness, the mining area is blessed by the spirits. Naturally, it will contribute to the Kingdom's prosperity with an unending stream of strength!"

"Very good!"

Xiulote nodded with a smile and then spoke in an offhanded manner.

"Ezpan, you have spent many years in the mining area and are very familiar with it. I value this place highly and am preparing to expand the mining area... Would you like to take charge of it all?"

The calm words exploded like thunder in Ezpan's heart. In an instant, he was struck with great alarm and fell to his knees, raising his left hand with only four fingers, as he earnestly swore an oath to the divine spirits.

"Your Highness! As witnessed by the Chief Divine, my loyalty to you has long since infused into my blood! I am willing to wield weapons and spill my last drop of blood for you; I am ready to hold a shield and defend your majesty with my life... Your Highness, I have no second thoughts!"

Xiulote was expressionless, with a torrent of thoughts rushing through his mind.

Although Ezpan originated from a miner's background, he seemed to have a great aversion to this place. Miners were always seen as the lowest social stratum, while Samurai were the backbone of society. No matter how much the king valued it, in people's hearts, the overall leader of the mining area was not considered a prestigious noble position, whereas the powerful legion commander was an enviable social apex. Ezpan was now the legion commander of a Fief, as well as a leading example of those from Prepetcha who had sworn allegiance early. If he were moved from the legion to manage the industrial and mining area, it would seem no different from a demotion in the eyes of many.

What's more important is that the industrial zone determines the Kingdom's future! On such a wild foundation, to develop the industrial and mining sectors, the overall leader must be willing and wholeheartedly invested. He needed to possess the strongest, most proactive execution power! Xiulote could not entrust this position to someone who did not value the industrial zone.

"This could be the industrial minister for the Empire's future..."

The king shook his head inwardly, silently watching Ezpan for a moment before speaking with a smile.

"Well then... Ezpan, I am well aware of your loyalty. I am at ease with the legion in your hands! You have followed me for many years, and it's about time you settled down. In the Holy City, there remain unwed Mexica noblewomen; I've already made inquiries. Prepare yourself, and before the year ends, you will take one of them as your lawful wife..."

At these words, Ezpan felt a sense of relief. But soon after, the king's casual words came again, sending him into a cold sweat, trembling from head to toe.

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"Ezpan, you know my ambition... As a loyal Legion Commander of the Alliance, accepting bribes is permissible, but do not get too close to the former nobility of Tarasco... Your future is destined for great purposes!"

"Ah, Your Highness! I... I will go back now, return the nobility's wealth, and dismiss the beauties from the south..."

"Very good! You need to have this understanding, but do not take action."

Xiulote watched for a moment and commanded in a faint tone.

Since taking control of the Lake Capital City, the former nobility of Tarasco had shown their most pliable posture, making efforts to forge ties with the upper echelons of the Kingdom and seeking opportunities for integration into the ruling class. Among them, the southern nobility, who retained their lands and wealth, were the most generous and proactive.

As a Surrendered General from Tarasco, and commanding a heavy troop, Ezpan naturally became a prime target for the southern nobility's active courtship. Luxurious clothes, precious gems, spices, and beauties, they spared no effort to cater to his tastes. All of this was observed by the Kingdom's intelligence officers, and some secretive information came from purposefully guided confessions by priests.

Though Ezpan had shown no signs of disloyalty, the King still felt the need to offer a slight admonition. This was a form of immediate reprimand and also long-term care, and an intelligent person, with just a little contemplation, could understand the implication.

The King gave a mild smile. He stepped forward, grasped the other's hair, and his tone became slightly gentler.

"Ezpan, my loyal guard, you are a smart man, keep a watchful eye on the surrendered generals under you! As for the old nobility of the south... do not startle the snake."

"Your Highness, I will follow your command!"

"You may leave!"

Under the calm gaze of the King, Ezpan walked backwards for several steps before turning to leave. The sun had risen to the middle of the sky, his body drenched in sweat, but his heart felt like a heavy stone had been lifted.

"The newborn sun has risen to the middle of the sky, its light ever more brilliant, yet burning intensely!"

Ezpan looked up at the sky, heaved a sigh, then continued with his head bowed, going back to the busy coke refining site. The second batch of coke was being urgently refined.

The golden October passed in harvest, and the tranquil November arrived in sunshine. The tribute of the autumn harvest had just been collected, usually starting to be transported in mid-November. This year's harvest was good, allowing the Kingdom's farmers to finally take a breather. They enjoyed the hard-won peace, the safety free from wars, and the satisfaction brought by plentiful food.

In the leisurely times, religious ceremonies became the most important solace. Prayers and chants echoed continuously around the Lake Region, and the faith in the Chief Divine began to take root.

In the Qinganbate mining area, the flag of the Black Wolf still flew high. The samurai, craftsmen, miners, and food supplies supported by the Capital City had arrived, and the expansion of the mining area immediately began. A full two thousand elite members of the personal army were stationed in the main copper mining area, including five hundred clad in bronze medium armor, capable of suppressing any uprisings of fewer than ten thousand people. A large number of scouts were also deployed, monitoring the movements of troops within fifty miles.

There was a minor incident as well. At the edge of the copper mining area, scattered scout teams captured several snooping Tlapanec traders.

Usually, foreign traders caught in such a place, with unknown origins, would be treated as spies and executed on the spot. However, the leading trader shouted loudly, claiming he had seen His Majesty! After some discussion, the scouts spared his life for the moment and escorted him to the center of the mining area to see the exalted King.

"You say you've seen me?"

Xiulote looked expressionless, observing the pale-faced, slightly plump trader. He faintly felt the man looked familiar but could not remember him at once.

"Ah, yes, Your Highness... no, Your Majesty!"

The plump trader, looking nervous and sweaty, glanced fearfully at the guard Ezpan beside him, raised his left hand with only three fingers remaining, and responded carefully.

"Over half a year ago, in the eastern Ihuatzio City... I reported to you about the Mexica reinforcements!"

"Hmm?"

Xiulote then recalled. He glanced at Ezpan, who nodded affirmatively.

"Your Highness, this trader is quite cunning..."

"Hmm."



Xiulote looked expressionless, coldly watching the trader on the ground.

"The Kingdom has already issued an order, banning Tlapanec traders. Your presence here, who assigned you?"

As the King spoke, Ezpan drew out his obsidian short dagger and forcefully pinned the trader to the ground, then grabbed his right hand.

"Ah, ah! Your Majesty, I was not assigned by any power... ah, don't cut, don't cut! I confess! The Kingdom banned copper mining trade, I came to the mining area to see if I could get some copper ore through old channels to sell to the west!"

"Hmm?"

Xiulote waved his hand, and Ezpan stopped his actions. The sharp edge of the obsidian blade was already pressing on the trader's little finger, a faint line of blood seeping out from the tip, accompanied by the trader's terrified low moans.

"The west? You mean the Colima Mountain Region?"

"Yes, yes, Your Majesty! The Colima tribes are close to the Tlapanec tribes, and there are often trade interactions between the tribes... I once sailed in a small boat to the western side of the Colima Mountain Region..."

"Hmm?...Colima...a small boat?"

Xiulote asked with a touch of emotion, authoritatively.

"Trader, have you sailed on the western Great Lake?"

"Yes, Your Majesty... I set out from Xiwatelan, traveling along the lakeshore toward the northwest. After passing the mouth of the Balsas River, continue for another three to four hundred miles, and there lies the Colima Mountain Region."

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"Balsas Rivermouth, three to four hundred li by sea route..."

Xiulote's expression changed. Zicao County in the south was by the Balsas River, and about two hundred li southward was the rivermouth. This route was unexpectedly suitable! It was more convenient and easier than the southwest mountain road, and it spared the need to pacify Chapala compared to the northwest waterway... The King slowly nodded, his decision sealing the merchant's fate.

"Merchant, what is your name?"

"Ah, Your Majesty, my Mexica name is Telali, 'earth's soil'... I hail from the Tlapanec tribe of Xiwatelan, my father is the chieftain of a village on the plains, and I am the second son of my family..."

Hearing the King inquire, Telali breathed a sigh of relief, a dead man's name is of no concern. He confessed everything earnestly.

"Telali, I offer you a chance to serve the great Alliance, the sacred Royal Family."

The King spoke indifferently. Telali's eyes suddenly shone. The Tarasco Kingdom had perished, and the old backers had dramatically fallen. A merchant couldn't exist without powerful backers, and serving the King of the Alliance directly was a dream for an ordinary merchant like him. His only worry was being utterly consumed... No, in the current situation, he had already been caught in the maws of a fierce beast.

"Ah, Your Majesty! Witnessed by the Chief Divine, I am willing to serve you unto death!"

Telali called out forcefully, even squeezing out tears in his eyes.

Xiulote remained unmoved. The merchant's vows meant nothing; only interests and threats could truly be controlled. He looked towards the Scout Captain escorting the merchant.

"What about his companions?"

The Scout Captain paused, bowing respectfully as he replied.

"Your Highness, they have all been sent to the Divine Kingdom, as is customary."

"Hm, then return his and his companions' belongings to him."

"By your command, Your Highness!"

Xiulote turned to Telali. Hearing the Scout Captain's words, the merchant showed no sadness on his face, instead, a hint of joy peeked through, just as he had previously done in Ihuatzio City.

"Hm, very well, this one is a born guide. Colima, Tlapanec... there might even be unexpected gains."

Xiulote pondered calmly, then commanded in a deep voice.

"Telali, I will return all your belongings to you, and even add a hundred jin of bronze material!"

"Ah, this, thank you for your generosity, Your Majesty! I will surely serve you..."

Telali's eyes flickered, hastily prostrating in gratitude.

"I have an order for you!"

The King cut off the merchant's words, his voice carrying an undeniable authority.

"You are to take the water route to the west, to the Colima Mountain Region, and trade with the local Noble Chiefs. I will send a few Mexica Samurai to accompany you! Regarding the waterway markers and tribal conditions along the route, you must not conceal anything!"

"Ah, Your Majesty, this, this..."

Telali's face showed fear. This kind of reconnaissance mission, if caught by any power, meant certain death.

"If you complete this task, you will be able to establish yourself in the Alliance, become one of the merchants sanctioned by the Royal Family, able to legally trade some of the Alliance-controlled goods. Even, in the near future, with the support of the Alliance, you might have the chance to return to your hometown and become a titled Noble Chief with real authority!"

Telali's heartbeat sped up instantly. Then, the cold, commanding voice came from above once more.

"If you cannot complete this task... even if you flee to the ends of the earth, the Alliance's Scout Team will deliver you to the place you ought to go!"

"Ah, Your Majesty! I am willing to serve you unto death!"

Xiulote nodded, the other finally making the expected choice. He left his final words and then turned and left.

"Ezpan, the rest is up to you!"

"I follow your will, my supreme Sun!"

Ezpan bowed respectfully, keeping his head low until the King disappeared from sight. Only then did he raise his head, looking towards Telali, who wore an expression of fear. The pace of the eras marched relentlessly forward; everyone had to make choices, including himself.

Chapter 554 - Alliance Priesthood, The Separation of the Priest's Divine Authority!

The Black Wolf's Royal Banner fluttered in the mountain passes, with messengers heading out to the mining areas to report. Wherever the King set foot, the simple Main Copper Mine seemed to transform into a temporary palace, continuously gathering the commanding power of the fief.

Xiulote was in high spirits, lingering in the mining camp. He supervised the expansion of the mining area, choosing suitable locations for workshop towns, while guiding the improvements in the coke smelting process.

"Very good, the second batch of coke smelting has a coking rate of forty-five percent. It seems that the preliminary treatment of coal is of paramount importance."

In front of several new kilns, Xiulote inspected the latest production results. Upon receiving the new data, his face revealed a purely sincere smile, like that of a young, devoted craftsman. However, the King soon regained his authority, issuing decrees to the trusted aides crowding around him.

"The new workshop town should be situated by the river, centrally located amidst various mining sites... yes, right here!"

Xiulote's finger pressed decisively onto a wooden map, affirming his words.

"From here to the Lake Capital City is ninety li, including thirty li of mountain roads. This thirty-li stretch must have an easy dirt path for pushing small, single-wheel carts... yes, we can lay down the coal slag from mined-out areas to prevent the growth of grass and weeds!"

"Your Highness, what shall we call this town?"

Faced with such a question, the King looked around. Dark clouds rolled across the sky, plumes of black smoke rose from between the mountains, and thousands of miners carried ore as they walked. Observing this somber tableau, a thought struck him.

"Hmm, let's name it Blackstone City!"

Following that, Xiulote's expression grew serious as he turned to look at the mining area's management personnel. Under the current circumstances, the heavy responsibility of the industrial district could only be entrusted to this military-to-civilian officer.

"Necali, I entrust the mining area to you! I will allocate an additional two thousand surrendered troops and four hundred Samurai to your command. The surrendered troops will mine coal in the mountains, while the Samurai will garrison strategic fortifications. This way, you will have a full thousand-Samurai regiment under your command, managing five thousand miners!"

Overjoyed, Necali prostrated in gratitude. His Highness had only been here for a month, and he had been promoted twice, bypassing many years of struggle, with a bright future now readily within reach.

"Your Highness, I will definitely manage the mining area well, making the miners as docile as turkeys, bowing their heads and ears!"

Xiulote held Necali's hair, pondered for a while, and then gave detailed instructions.

"While focusing on production, also establish a promotion system among the miners. Reward mining leaders who are close to the Alliance and work hard! Consider absorbing miners as Militia and promoting surrendered soldiers as officers. Moreover, arrange for undercover informants among the miners and surrendered troops, communicate thoroughly with the Priests, and make sure to keep them under control!..."

Then, the King laid his hand on Necali's shoulder, speaking earnestly.

"Necali, as for yourself, you must take the time and effort to study diligently, to grasp the production in the industrial-mining area, and to become an insider here as soon as possible!... As I've said before, your responsibilities are heavy, and your future is bright. Do not disappoint me!"



"Your Highness, the wings will follow the eagle's will. I will heed all your commands!"

Necali answered loudly, prostrating once again. The King then slowly nodded in approval.

In the following days, Xiulote revised the plans, once again increasing the number of villages designated to support the industrial-mining zone and sent trusted aides specifically to oversee the transfer of food here. With the construction of the new blast furnaces completed, a portion of the miners began to mine coal.

Several small coal mines were established. Mining coal was much easier than copper, and collapses were an issue only in deeper areas. Soon, Necali reported a satisfying figure: the coal mines' output was more than two hundred catties per miner per day. Since it did not require smelting, the proportion of mining laborers was about fifty percent of the coal mine's workers. With effective management, a thousand workers could maintain a production of at least ten thousand catties per day.

At this time in the Celestial Empire, the production of deep coal pits in Shanxi was only over three hundred catties per day. And the improvement in large-scale mining technology would have to wait until the modern industrial revolution. Then, rock mining could employ explosives, iron tracks and coal cars to improve efficiency, and water pumps and ventilators in place of human labor in the mines, transforming the old coal pits into modern coal mines.

Upon hearing Necali's report, Xiulote smiled. Harvesting the same caloric value of timber would require far more labor than coal mining. In places with coal, an Empire's future industrial centers could be established! The King, bubbling with enthusiasm, continued to participate in refining the third batch of coke until a Messenger from the Capital City arrived hurriedly.

"Your Highness, the Priesthood from the Alliance has already arrived at the Qinchongcan Capital! Accompanying them are the craftsmen from the Lake Capital City, as well as the families of the Mexica samurai."

Upon hearing this, Xiulote was invigorated. The support from the Alliance had finally arrived!

The banner of Black Wolf moved once again. Escorted by two thousand samurai, the King's formidable presence was felt as he returned to the capital a hundred miles to the northeast. A few days later, the grand blue stone walls of the capital city came into the King's view, and outside the city gates waited the welcoming officials of the kingdom, the legion commanders, and the newly arrived Alliance Priests!

Xiulote scanned the crowd at the city gates, pondering slightly. Even though everyone had changed into Mexica attire, there were still three distinct groups that could be identified.

In accordance with their rank, the Priesthood from the Alliance stood at the front. A large number of Chief God Priests wore Feather Crowns and Ceremonial Dress, and leading them were two Fourth Level High Priests.

The kingdom's legion commanders stood in the middle. With weapons and shields in hand and dressed in vibrant war clothes, they subtly divided into Mexica officers and Prepetcha officers, and they also kept their distance according to their noble or commoner origins.

Last were the numerable kingdom officials. Most were newly submitted Prepetcha who had surrendered; their demeanor was restrained, their heads slightly bowed. Only Jatili, dressed in the Chief Minister's regal garments, stood steadfastly at the forefront.

Xiulote took a moment to muse. These three groups represented the power distribution within the Fiefdom, as well as the political structure of the land.

There was no need to mention the legion commanders. They held the kingdom's military power and were close to the line of the loyal Marshal King, having been through countless battles. Soon, with the progress of reforms, the kingdom's troops would also divide into three parts: the tens of thousands of Militia stationed in villages and towns, the tens of thousands of surrendered troops being transformed through agricultural reforms, and the over ten thousand samurai assigned to the land.

The surrendered Army and the samurai would be reorganized respectively into ordinary standing forces and elite mobile forces to participate in constant external conflicts. Having inherited and maintained a large number of legions from the Tarasco Kingdom, the kingdom's military-civilian ratio was completely unbalanced. Constant expansionary warfare was both inevitable and the only choice!

The Chief God Priests held the greatest religious power and also participated in the kingdom's administration. They regulated the astronomical calendar, performed prayer ceremonies, dispatched priests to implement Alliance doctrines, and managed community affairs in towns and villages. Among the populace, regular confessions were being promoted, with priests of different ranks saving the souls of nobility and commoners alike. There were also military priests within the legions to soothe the minds of samurai and Militia.

As the supreme leader of the Fiefdom's theocracy, Xiulote knew well the depth of this class's influence. The priests' foothold in the hearts of the people was linked to the kingdom's stability, and their rapidly expanding power was inseparable from his long-term support and personally planned reforms.

In dealing with this powerful clerical class, Xiulote had already laid the groundwork by dividing the priests into different branches. Each branch was relatively independent and prohibited from interbranch promotions. Divine authority centralized power at the hub, controlled by the highest Divine King himself, while maintaining separation within the priesthood.

Among the priests, one branch was responsible for astronomy, doctrine, and ceremonies—the Scripture Priests. They held a revered status, did not engage in politics, and were akin to the Grand Historian in the Western Zhou bureaucratic system.

Another branch took charge of mythological epics and the recording of significant historical events—the History Priest. They were tasked with narrating the "truth" of history to the masses, integrating different cultural elements, uniting the hearts of various ethnic groups, comparable to the Grand Historian in the Western Zhou bureaucratic system.

Another branch centered around the Capital City, participating in central administration and managing community affairs in villages and towns, spreading faith, and holding confessions—the Preaching Priests. They were involved in governance, impacting far-flung areas and tribes, and represented the true bureaucratic face of theocracy, akin to the Ministry Officials in the Western Zhou bureaucratic system. Among them, the Village Priests were the governing tentacles of the kingdom's core in the localities, symbols of royal and divine authority stationed in distant lands.

Another branch comprised the War Priests who were directly subordinate to the Royal Family, wielding weapons, and entering the grassroots of the military. They were responsible for comforting and controlling the military spirit and symbolized the extension of royal and divine authority within the army. They also presided over large-scale sacrificial rites before and after wars, guiding spirits in funerals, and boosting the legion's morale.

The last branch belonged to the Divine Revelation Place, overseeing practical technological inventions and basic scientific research—the Divine Revelation Priests. They primarily came from young priests trained in schools and were supplemented by experienced craftsmen and older workers. Xiulote planned to settle down and write two popular science textbooks using semi-mythical language, detailing basic natural laws. Then, these textbooks would be distributed to schools and Divine Revelation Places, gradually cultivating seeds of new thought.

Inspired by the mature bureaucratic system of the Celestial Empire, Xiulote relied on the current era to diversify the priesthood into relatively independent Scripture Priests, History Priests, Preaching Priests, War Priests, and Divine Revelation Priests, while leaving room for future reforms. These five branches of the priesthood would each assume part of the government's functions, controlling all aspects of the nation, building a centralised and powerful theocratic state!

Reflecting upon this, the King's gaze shifted towards the last group of kingdom officials. Among these Prepetcha elites were the Village Elders who held cultural heritage, the Trinitarian Divine Priests who recently converted to the Chief Divine, the Chieftains who actually governed villages, the leaders responsible for forestry and fisheries, the nobles' sons handling trade and statistics, as well as the prominent Masters in various crafts industries—the kingdom's ruling body's most populous core.

In Xiulote's plan, these elites came from different groups, participating in all aspects of the kingdom as organizers and producers. They were akin to the Officials and Village Elders in traditional Celestial Empire society. The bureaucratic system of theocracy would be open to them, incorporating the most outstanding part, just like how Jatili, serving as Chief Minister and also appointed as the Fourth Level High Priest overseeing the History Priest, demonstrated.

"Establishing a bureaucratic system of theocracy is a pressing need of reality, but it's also essential to incorporate different sources of 'sand', to establish different branches and factions. There must always be room left for future reformers..."

With an indifferent smile, the political system of the kingdom passed through the King's mind, a plan contemplated over countless days and nights, fully considering the realities of the era.

Afterward, he nodded slightly and walked majestically down the already decided path. Ahead, the two High Priests from the Alliance Priesthood had long been waiting with bowed bodies. He also saw a face he hadn't seen in a long time, self-satisfied and "innocently" smiling.

Chapter 555 - Two Chief Priests

"Praise the Chief Divine, He is the supreme and the only!... Praise the King, He is the Divine Tree of the Alliance!... Praise Your Highness, He is the Winged Divine Eagle!..."

Bright sunlight bathed the land, and the vast breeze swept through the city. Led by the two Chief Priests, hundreds of ruling elites of the kingdom all bowed deeply before His Highness in salutation.

In the legal principles of the Alliance, the supreme deities awarded the world to the King of the Alliance, the Great Tlatoani Aweit. Aweit then bestowed the land amidst the lake to the Tlatoani of this place, Xiulote. Chief Divine, King, Your Highness, that was also the order of prayer and praise. No matter how they were addressed in private, it was necessary to follow the tradition of the Alliance on such formal occasions.

"Chief Priest Ugus, greetings to you! It has been quite some time since we last met."

"Your Highness, greetings to you, and cheers for your illustrious martial prowess!"

Dressed in his ornate feather crown and robes, Ugus chuckled, nodding his head and clenching his fist in greeting.

"Over the past year, tales of Your Highness's valiant fights spread continuously throughout the Lake Capital City. The Priests say that Your Highness is the reincarnation of the martial Black Wolf, guardian of the supreme sun! The Samurai also believe that you are a true Divine Descendant, adept at war, a Marshal who achieves the greatest military exploits with the least casualties!..."

Hearing the familiar phrase "guardian of the sun," Xiulote's expression shifted. Recalling his grandfather's smile, he nodded. Then, looking toward the charming Ugus, he pondered in his heart.

"Ugus seems much more composed than two years ago..."

"Haha, Your Highness, the ignorant citizens of the Capital City worship you, saying you have a voice like thunder, eyes that emit Divine Light, and a mighty stature that could shatter a tree with a single blow... But it's only I who remembers seeing you for the first time, with a face as refined as the tiger-striped wild iris... Hmm? Now, your demeanor is serene, your face like cold jade, with an overflowing elegance, still as beautiful as a flower, but now more like the stately dahlia!"

Ugus widened his eyes and looked over His Highness, clapping his hands in genuine admiration.

Xiulote's smile faltered, and he nodded slightly, deciding to retract his earlier assessment.

"It seems there's no change... But, as a Chief Priest of the Alliance, this is also quite good."

Then, the King turned toward the other Chief Priest, with a much more sincere smile.

"Chief Priest Mawilo, greetings to you! I have always kept the teachings you gave me in my youth in my heart."

"Your Highness, greetings to you! From a young age, you were naturally gifted with Divine Revelation, wisdom beyond your years. The Elder Priests of the Holy City regarded you as a blessing from the deities, the hope of the Alliance! Seeing you today, our expectations at that time were perhaps a bit modest."

Mawilo, in his fifties, dressed impeccably, with a lean face and extremely sharp eyes, now smiled warmly, earnestly bowing his head in a gesture reserved for divine beings.

"The gaze of the Chief Divine watches over the Alliance, and the deities of the City of the Gods have never left. They have merely concealed themselves, leaving their Divinity to flow in their descendants, just as Your Highness's Divine Revelation!"

Hearing this, Xiulote's face showed realization; these were probably his grandfather's words.

Mawilo was a Chief Priest born into the Priesthood of the Holy City, who had taught Xiulote priestly knowledge since childhood, and whose ancestors were part of the honored Nobility of the Lake Capital City. His coming here with Ugus, the Priest of the city lines, clearly represented a kind of considered balance. Compared with Ugus, he was obviously closer and more trustworthy.

After exchanging formalities, Xiulote then asked with a smile.

"Chief Priests, how was your journey here?"

"The Lerma River flows westward, while water birds rest on the banks, and the red hawks glide through the mountains and forests. Traveling southward on this road is like a painting penned by the prince of flowers, with life and wilderness filling the land!"



Ugus exclaimed in admiration. He then turned to look back at the magnificent Qinchongcan City, praising it from the bottom of his heart.

"The Earth Mother Goddess gathers Divine Power, Qinchongcan City is encircled by high walls, and the House of Wind lies coiled like sleeping Mountains, truly spectacular! Compared to the Lake Capital City, though this place is less populated and less flourishing, it is still a place where one could stay for a long duration. The states we passed, such as Akanbaro, were far less impressive. Although Prince Tepopolo tried hard to make us stay, as soon as the weather cleared, I could not bear to stay a day longer..."

Hearing this, Xiulote's gaze flickered. He looked toward Mawilo.

"Is the High Priest in good health? I waited for the Priesthood for quite some time before setting out on an inspection tour in October before the autumn harvest. It seems you've had quite the hardships on your travels."

"Yes. Your Highness, the High Priest is in good health. Upon hearing Your Highness's good news, he even drank with us on several occasions... The Priesthood originally planned to arrive before the autumn harvest, but the families of the Northern Army Samurai were journeying with us. Their gathering took time, and the journey was quite slow..."

"Excellent! The Mexica Samurai have been looking forward to it, waiting for a long time! How was the journey for the families? Have they all entered the city now?"

"There are nearly ten thousand family members of the Legion, and the food supply along the way was plentiful, with Samurai guards. The first half have all entered the city to rest. The other half are still in Huayamo Fortress up north and will take a few days to arrive."

Mawilo nodded, answering meticulously. He had always been in charge of the miscellaneous affairs accompanying the army, while Ugus had leisurely enjoyed the scenery, admired the landscapes, and appreciated the beauty of the women.

"Your Highness, we traveled west along the Lerma River and encountered torrential rains during the rainy season, causing us to stay in the western city-states for half a month. The homebound legions from the western city-states were very enthusiastic and full of praise for Your Highness... Afterward, we landed on the southern bank of the Lerma River, encountered heavy rains again in Akanbaro State. Prince Tepopolo was very hospitable, and the priesthood stayed there for several days before continuing southward,"

"The legions from the western city-states..."

Xiulote smiled, for these legions had once served in the Northern Army. Although the campaign to the west had ended, the influence of the Commander-in-Chief remained in people's hearts, awaiting the day it would come into play. After pondering for a while, he directly asked,

"Hmm, did Prince Tepopolo say anything?"

"Prince Tepopolo mentioned the dispute over the territories on the North Coast of the Lerma River with the Otomi people. He sought the support of the Alliance, expressed his goodwill towards the priesthood, and was also concerned about the war situation between the eastern king and the Tlaxcala people. It's likely he will contact the king as well," Mawilo recounted everything candidly. Xiulote observed Ugus beside him, catching the changes in his expression. The Chief Priest, not yet thirty, was leaning to the side, seemingly still admiring the grandeur of Qinchongcan City. It was only after a moment that he turned his head back and offered the king a "simple" smile.

"Your Highness, the House of Wind of the Prepetcha people had been passed down for a thousand years, primitive and magnificent, famous throughout the world! The Sacred Fire in front of the temple is filled with divinity, also a spectacular sight... To be able to drink the Holy Water in such an ancient temple and communicate with the noble deities is the lifelong wish of every priest! Please provide me with the support in manpower and resources to rebuild the Chief Divine's Temple atop the pyramid..." Ugus laughed heartily, with a somewhat unruly and carefree attitude.

"Your Highness, life is short, and the Chief Divine promises us joy! The tediousness of worldly matters is far less interesting than Holy Water, Divine Smoke, fine clothes, and beautiful women... I've heard that the lake beauties of Prepetcha are very intriguing, with the agility of fish, skilled in underwater pleasures... Ah, the deities have blessed me with a curious spirit for exploration, so please do not blame me, Your Highness..."

"Building a temple and taking charge of it... not interfering with the affairs of the kingdom... asking for luxurious pleasures and women, while also proactively handing over the handle of indulgences..."

Xiulote's expression turned serious, his gaze fixed intently on the old acquaintance before him, a faint sense of unfamiliarity arising. After a long pause, he responded with a gentle smile,

"May the Chief Divine bless us! Chief Priest Ugus, constructing a temple is indeed what should be done. The planting season is over, and I will assign people to start preparations. However, the Great Temple in Lake Capital City took decades of careful construction, and the Temple of Qinchongcan City is already founded on the Akatla Pyramids; the rest needs only to be built slowly..."

Constructing temples is time-consuming and labor-intensive, and Xiulote was not prepared to undertake massive building projects until the fief's resources were plentiful. For now, minor repairs on Akatla would suffice, just completing the construction of the main shrine.

"As for exploring the mysteries of pleasure, it is naturally the grace promised by the Chief Divine! If it weren't for the busyness of state affairs, I too would like to join the Chief Priest in appreciating the Holy Water and the Divine Smoke... Hm, Ugus, the Land of the Lake in the east also has the Royal Family's mountain hot springs, a mere ten days' journey back and forth. You may take the women there..."

Xiulote patted Ugus on the shoulder with a smile, and the latter also bowed his head with a laugh, expressing gratitude.

"Thank you for the King's gracious gift!"

Mawilo had been quietly waiting until the two finished speaking before he spoke up again.

"Your Highness, the latest news from ten days ago indicates a breakthrough in the eastern war situation! During the autumn harvest in October, the Tlaxcala legions were unstable, with the conscripted militia clamoring to return home. The king then mobilized a large army, assembling thirty thousand samurai and thirty thousand militia, to besiege the besieged fortresses on the east of Xochipeople State.

The Alliance built more than a dozen trebuchets for the bombardment, dispatched three thousand Longbow Warriors for strong shots, and launched hundreds of exploding Divine Fires, ultimately recapturing the border fortresses! More than two thousand Tlaxcala samurai died in battle, and the number of captured enemy militia also ran into the thousands. The Tlaxcala's main legions tried to rescue at one point, confronting the Royal Legion of the Alliance by a tributary of the Tarsas River upstream, but in the end, no decisive battle erupted.

After the fall of the fortresses, the Tlaxcala people retreated to the east, sending envoys to sue for peace. After two years of campaigning, even with continuous victories, the Alliance's treasury was depleted, and the samurai suffered significant losses and were very weary. The king thus accepted the Tlaxcala's agreement, led the legions back to the Capital City, and dismissed the conscripted militia.

May the Chief Divine bless the Alliance! This vast and prolonged war finally ended with our victory!..."

"May the Chief Divine bless us, the Alliance invincible in battle!"

Xiulote prayed aloud, invigorated. Both Chief Priests then echoed in a chanting tone,

"Praise be to You, the highest Chief Divine Huitzilopochtli! He who holds lightning in His hands, standing atop the holy Snake Mountain, with a voice like thunder, proclaims His will: 'Faithful Mexica, serve Me, and I shall bestow upon you the leadership of ten thousand, promising you the whole world!...'"

The prayer of praise rose high, the priests behind joining in the chant, their devout voices echoing in the sky and resounding in everyone's hearts, causing Jatili to also bow his head. After a while, Xiulote ceased the prayer and asked in a deep voice,

"Now that the coronation war has ended, the sacrifice of gratitude to the Chief Divine will soon begin. When is the Great Sacrifice to the Chief Divine scheduled?"

"Next January, combined with the New Year's Grand Sacrifice."

A smile appeared on Mawilo's serious face.

"At that time, it will be an unprecedented Great Sacrifice!"

Chapter 556 - Priest University, Majestic Lake Light

December's long winds came from the north, bringing the chill from the highlands. The fields far and wide had already been harvested, leaving only large swathes of half-cut corn stalks and the weeds that finally sprouted in the fields. The majestic Qinchongcan City also emerged from its solemn silence and began to bustle and clamor.

The New Year was approaching, and prayer rituals were held continuously throughout the city, with the scent of burning pine resin wafting between neighborhoods. Merchants brought celebratory goods from all around—spices from the forests, agricultural produce from the fields, wild goods from the mountains, fish and shellfish from the lake, and various practical handicrafts.

The most popular among these were the curtains depicting the mythology of the Chief Divine. Following tradition, the Mexica nobility hung these divine curtains from the tops of their houses. Beneath these curtains, they hung two bunches of fresh flowers in homage to the gods and burned incense at scheduled times each day for prayer. The Prepetcha nobility imitated them, filled both with awe of the Supreme Chief Divine and submission to the Divine Church King.

As the Priesthood from the Alliance came from the west, Xiulote suddenly had an abundance of literate talents. He urgently needed to assign these culturally adept priests. The King then gathered the Priesthood within the Palace of Wind, reviewed the several hundred priests who had come from the west, and discussed carefully with Mawilo who led them. Ugus had already taken up temporary residence in the Temple at the House of Wind. True to the agreement, he did not intervene in the management of the priests.

Xiulote, holding the Divine Staff, sat on his high throne. He looked at the group of young people in Feather Crown Ceremonial Dress and then caught sight of another familiar, weathered face. The King smiled and nodded; the other party bowed respectfully and cautiously. Then the King turned his gaze to Mawilo in front of him.

"Supreme High Priest Mawilo, the priest delegation supported by the Alliance is much younger than I anticipated..."

"Yes, Your Highness. At least 60% of the priests sent to the Lake Capital City district are junior priests fresh from priest school for just two years, not even past their early twenties. Moreover, over 90% of them are of commoner background... All the young commoner priests from the Capital City are here."

Mawilo nodded solemnly and then smiled slightly.

"Your Highness, in the two years of religious reform, many commoner children were admitted into priest schools, and many commoner priests emerged prominently. Gradually, there arose some dissatisfaction and disputes among the upper and lower ranks... The establishment of new districts was a significant matter, and the Elder Priests discussed for a long time who should be transferred. Travelling thousands of miles to the unfamiliar towns and villages of Prepetcha's Lake Capital City to oversee the religious affairs of the new districts is neither stable nor easy..."

"So, the final decision of the discussion was to prioritize sending young, junior, commonly-born priests?"

Xiulote pondered for a moment, not quite displeased. Young commoner priests were more energetic and easier to control, making them suitable grassroot managers. They had high potential for molding, merely requiring time to develop. In fact, such a choice was beneficial for both parties. The King thought for a moment and then asked in a low voice.

"Religious reform... within the Priesthood... commoner and noble priests, Holy City and Capital City priests... what is the current situation?"

Mawilo's expression turned serious. He withheld nothing, replying in an equally low voice.

"With the further implementation of religious reform, the powers of various levels within the Priesthood are expanding. To vie for important positions, there has been some accumulation of dissatisfaction among the factions... But as long as the elders live another day, as long as the High Priest can still manage affairs, as long as the external expansion continues... the Divine Church Priesthood remains a united and strong entity, standing firm like the Chief Divine's Snake Mountain!"

Xiulote nodded. He thought for a moment, then instructed Mawilo.

"Supreme High Priest Mawilo, you are my trusted and loyal elder, and only you can bear the most critical positions within the Priesthood! I plan to divide the priestly duties of the fief into different departments...

The High Priest of Scriptures is responsible for astronomy, religious law, and rituals, holding the highest status, which I plan to entrust to Supreme High Priest Ugus... The Director of History speaks of history, integrates various parts, requires the influence among the people of Prepetcha, which I have already entrusted to Supreme High Priest Jatili... The Director of Preaching engages in central administration, overseeing national faith dissemination and local community management. This position is the most important, bearing the heaviest responsibility... I intend to entrust it to you!"

At this, Mawilo was invigorated. Over these days, he had already gained a preliminary understanding of the ecclesiastical authority in the fief. The Director of Preaching held the most significant administrative authority, essentially being the head of all departments! Without hesitation, he knelt on one knee, devoutly chanting.



"The light of the Chief Divine bathes the earth, and the sky of blood bears the Divine Eagle soaring!... Your Highness, you carry the Divinity left by the Sun God on earth; I am willing to die for you!"

"Very good! I entrust you with the lower levels of the Palace of Wind as the administrative center for the Preaching Priests!"

Xiulote solemnly nodded, reached out to touch Mawilo's hair, and then helped him stand with both hands. As for the remaining War Priests and Divine Revelation Priests, he would temporarily lead and command them personally, selecting assistants to help manage. The conversation between the two became even more cordial, the King continued to ask.

"Mawilo, have the new priests completed their studies of scripture and religious laws?"NN

"After two years of study, all priests can proficiently master the fundamental scriptures from the Book of Ama Colley, recite important chapters, write simplified pseudonyms, and understand basic arithmetic. They all qualify as village priests. About 30% can proficiently use proper and pseudonyms for documentation, understanding simple arithmetic calculations. These priests can take on more important town management roles, responsible for tax collection and business records..."

"Very good! Then dispatch them to various military and civilian settlements, filling the gaps in the governance roots of the Kingdom. It's necessary to supplement the central hub of the Kingdom with a batch of middle to low-level clerks... How well have they learned the Prepetcha language?"

Xiulote nodded in satisfaction, the Alliance Priests were able to fill the gaps of low-level officials and enhance the propagation of faith among the Prepetcha people.

"After training, they were able to speak some simple Prepetcha and conduct everyday conversations. After staying in the Land of the Lake for a while, their language skills improved naturally."

"Hmm, I will arrange manpower to train them on their monthly days off... you see, who is more suitable to be sent to the northern highland to spread the faith among the Canine Descendants?"

"The highland is harsh, we need to choose those with the best health..."

The two discussed the missionary matters of the Fief and surrounding areas, and identified the leader of the missionaries going to the northern Canine Descendants. Their conversation gradually ceased.

The King shifted his gaze and gestured to the Priests standing quietly not far away. An old acquaintance cautiously approached and knelt down to salute.

"Respected Supreme High Priest, the exalted King Priest of Tlacopan, Bravo salutes you! Your radiance is like the sunshine after rain, breathing life into the earth and bringing warmth to all people!"

"Very good, Bravo. Long time no see, and you have been doing well these past two years, with a rapid promotion," said Xiulote, looking at the other's new Third Level Priest attire, expressing a touch of emotion with a smile. When he first met Bravo, he was just an ordinary village priest. Now, just two years later, he had broken through the ceiling of common priesthood and ascended as a central pillar of Third Level High Priest.

"Your Highness, I am but a humble corn stalk. I always remember that it is the High Priest who provides me with dew, but it is you who provide me with sunlight!"

Bravo bowed his head in praise. Before coming to the Land of the Lake, he had just been promoted to Third Level High Priest by the High Priest. The stagnation of his early life and these soaring two years made him realize the source of his fortunes.

Xiulote touched the other's hair. He had a favorable impression of this middle-aged Priest. Bravo was down-to-earth, good at learning, and adept at communication. The King pondered for a moment and then made a decision.

"Bravo, I heard from the commander of the Divine Blessing Legion, Natali, that you did very well in Xilotepec City. The Otomi Warriors are very fond of you... I plan to establish an advanced Priest school, the Calmecac, in the Capital City, located in a former manor of a Tarasco Prince. The school will be responsible for teaching common priest knowledge, battle formations, literature and poetry, herbs and plants, mineral smelting, mathematical calculations... and some mythology and natural laws that I have personally compiled and summarized."

"I will personally serve as the headmaster of this advanced school, providing guidance on the outline. However, the specific teaching affairs need a practical vice-principal... Bravo, would you like to be the vice-principal of Calmecac?"

"Ah! Your Highness, I am willing to give my all for you, to expend my last drop of blood to spread the light of the Chief Divine!"

Bravo was overjoyed. He immediately prostrated himself again, deeply bowing in acceptance of the command. Such a managerial position in a high school represented an accumulation of influence and also embodied a bright and promising future.

"Very well!"

Xiulote smiled. He chose such a versatile commoner Priest to manage the school, with many comprehensive considerations.

Unlike the Calmecac in the Capital City, this new Priest school in Qinchongcan would follow the will of the King, teach many innovative subjects, and nurture seeds of science. Some knowledge and ideas would inevitably conflict with traditional beliefs, so there was no need for a traditional Priest with legacy to manage it.

Similarly, the King valued talent and only promoted the worthy. As the Kingdom expanded, the talents cultivated by the school would gradually fill bureaucratic positions with more cultural and professional skills. The school's manager would gradually amass prestige and wield greater influence. To balance power, there was no need here for a profoundly respected High Priest.

In a moment, a myriad of thoughts flashed through his mind. The King smiled gently and carefully advised,

"Bravo, the school will be open to most citizens of the Fief, selecting excellent students from age-appropriate youths. You must focus on guiding the thoughts of the Prepetcha students... maintaining balance between commoner and nobility offspring... treating students from all backgrounds equally, maintaining their unity... and you yourself must also diligently learn new knowledge and continually progress!"

Bravo nodded repeatedly, memorizing each word of the King. Only after the King finished speaking did he cautiously raise his head to ask.

"Your Highness, what should the newly established Calmecac in the Capital City be named?"

Xiulote fell silent. Countless memories flashed through his mind, and after a while, he smiled with profound meaning.

"On the shores of the Great Lake, spreading the faith of the Chief Divine, seeking the truths of the world, also exploring the broader things of the Great Lake... Let's call it the Majestic University, the Majestic Lake Light!"

Chapter 557 - Father's Long Journey, Meetings and Partings

The bright moon rose high from the East, as the red sun gently set in the west. With the moonrise and sunset, the sky was half crisp and cool, and half filled with rosy clouds. The transitions of darkness and light between dawn and dusk in the mountains lingered in the heart, leaving behind enchanting scenery. Such moments, akin to life's journey, kept revolving in a cycle of repeated encounters and farewells.

Xiulote, dressed lightly and simply, stood on the boundary between the plains and the hills, gazing towards the wild fields of the north. Behind him were the sturdy walls of Huayamo Fortress and the boundless farmlands replete with harvests. Since setting out at the start of December, more than ten days had passed. He had traveled from the East to the North, inspecting farms along the way and checking on the military settlements in the Lake Region, until finally he paused here, waiting for his father coming from the south.

As the daylight gradually faded, a row of torches appeared to the north. The torches undulated between the hills and the open fields, resembling stars slowly drifting closer. At last, familiar silhouettes became faintly visible beneath the stars, and Xiulote could no longer contain his excitement, striding forward to meet them.

The leading figure revealed a broad smile and stretched out his arms to give the young man a tight embrace.

"Father, you must have had a hard journey!"

"Haha, Xiulote, my son. You seem to have grown taller in the more than half a year we haven't seen each other!"

Xiuxoke released his son and looked him over carefully, measuring Xiulote against his own height, which seemed to mirror his own, and laughed heartily.

"Olosh, look at him, straight and tall as a pine, noble in appearance as a golden eagle, almost exactly as I was in my youth!"

"Come on, you were rough and stout in your youth, resembling a cactus more than anything, certainly not this handsome... Those delicate features, eyebrows, and eyes, however, do resemble his mother..."

Olosh teased Xiuxoke with a smile. He then stepped forward and affectionately patted Xiulote on the shoulder.

"Teacher Olosh!"

Xiulote, brimming with happiness, also gave Olosh a hug.

"How was the journey here?"

"The settlements are doing quite well, with harvested fields all over the Lake Region. Didn't come across any thieves on the road, the farmers all stayed honestly in their villages, filled with a peaceful joy... Deers are feeding in the fields after the harvest. I hunted one with a javelin yesterday, I'll roast a deer leg for you, so you can taste my cooking skills!..."

"Ah, roasted deer leg, my favorite! Good, add a bit more chili powder and herb leaves..."

At this moment, all the majesty and stratagems of royalty disappeared. In the rare warmth, he could finally relax, shedding his armor to once again become a carefree youth. Although this time would not last long, like the moon's rise and fall, vanishing in the glory of the starlit night like the fleeting life of an epiphyllum, these memories would preserve a rare softness and warmth in his heart, which was gradually becoming harder and colder.

So the group chatted merrily as they made their way to Huayamo Fortress. The evening banquet was already prepared, the food abundant, and the atmosphere relaxed. It wasn't until everyone drank a cup of steaming cocoa, with the scent of herbs lingering at their noses, that Xiuxoke took a satisfied breath and spoke seriously.

"Xiulote, everything is in constant change and reiteration. After the Jaguar grows, it becomes the king of the jungle. It occupies the forest alone and faces all challenges..."

"Father?... You're returning to the Holy City?"

Hearing his father's words, Xiulote paused. He looked into his father's profound eyes, tasting the unspoken reluctance within, and a vague premonition began to form.

"Yes, I'll be leaving soon... My son, you've become a brave Samurai, an outstanding Commander-in-Chief, and are becoming a great King... You're surrounded by many people, and you have their allegiance... I'm reassured."

Xiuxoke smiled, squeezing the young king's hand. He then sincerely nodded in acknowledgment to Bertade.

"Thank you for your protection!"

"That is my duty."

Bertade replied with a calm face and a nod.

Xiuxoke smiled without further words, continuing to look warmly at Xiulote.

"The war in the East has ended. The King has commanded me to set out as soon as possible to return for the sacrificial rites in mid-January..."



"I too have received the report and was about to dispatch an Envoy with this year's tribute."

Xiulote nodded. Since he was unable to go personally, he planned to have Eagle Warrior Balda lead the envoy group, presenting the newest bronze helmets, bronze short swords, exquisite copperware, and some precious collections from the former Royal Family.

"Your grandfather has already sent word in advance."

Xiuxoke reached out, gently touching his son's cheek.

"After the Sacrificial Rite, I will join the fully reconstituted Alliance Royal Army, and become Vice Legion Commander of the Eagle Warrior Battalion... from then on stationed long-term in the Lake Capital City, serving beside the King."

"Ah! Vice Legion Commander of the Eagle Warrior Battalion, serving beside the King?"

Xiulote looked surprised. After a moment's thought, he gestured emphatically with his hand. The warriors around them drew back. The flames in the great hall flickered briefly before stabilizing again, highlighting the four people remaining in the center.

"Father, the Eagle Warrior Battalion is the most esteemed battle group of the Sun God's Divine Guards, comprising mostly the sons of the Capital City's Nobility. Only a King of great renown can effectively command them... Are you the only one from the Great Nobility being reassigned?"

"King Aweit certainly regards you highly. But his ambitions are vast, and they don't simply focus on our lineage."

Xiuxoke said, smiling calmly, having anticipated these events. Once he entered the Capital City, treatment should be favorable, but leaving would be challenging. As for Xiulote, who had been granted a vast expanse of the Lake Region, he would be overseeing the western tribes, away from the core of the Alliance. His presence, as the direct heir, would serve as a kind of assurance.

#### Chapter 558 - The Long Road of a Father, Meetings and Farewells\_2

""The King's western conquest to annihilate nations and eastern campaign against his arch-enemy has yielded remarkable prestige, with his fame sung throughout the land. With prestige and military achievements, he can inherit the great Montezuma's unfinished endeavors... The Eagle Warrior Battalion is soon to be expanded, and the elite and hereditary nobility from each core city-state are being stringently required to send important members to join."

Xiulote fell silent for a moment before slowly nodding. When the Monarch's authority was sufficient, he could summon the nobility of all ranks and the honored progeny to form a guard around him, thereby strengthening his control over every faction. Such measures were often accompanied by corresponding measures of centralization... Thinking of this, the young King spoke in a grave voice.

"Father, does the King intend to integrate the Alliance, centralizing military power? If you go to the Capital City, what will happen to the Holy City of Teotihuacan?"

"Hmm. According to your grandfather's message, the Priesthood and the Royal Family will send representatives to stay within two hundred li of each core state around the Capital City. The central core of the Alliance will further reduce the private forces of the Great Nobility in the Texcoco Lake District and take control of some military power of the city-states, as well as important financial rights."

Xiuxoke laughed heartily.

"As a condition for your being granted lands in the lake, I will take the initiative to hand over control of the Holy City back to the central core of the Alliance. And the Fiefs of Tepopolo and Iskali, which were granted to me, will also be surrendered... This measure is also supported by the elders and the High Priesthood and is key for further reforms. Your grandfather says that now is the perfect time!"

Xiulote looked at his father's smile, his heart filled with myriad emotions, which were expressed only through a soft nod.

After the western campaign, the King's prestige reached its zenith, establishing authority in the hearts of the Samurai. The military forces of the states had suffered greatly, and the transfer of the powerful Great Nobility outwards presented an opportunity for further centralization!

The powers of the Alliance were roughly divided into three parts: the monarch's power, the clan's power, and the divine power. The current direction of reforms was the combination of monarch's power with divine power, suppressing the scattered clan power of the city-states, and establishing a strong and sacred Royal Family central authority. Herein, the elders oversaw the big picture, the King pushed forward with specifics, the High Priesthood reduced resistance in different regions, and everything progressed according to the plan for centralization.

"After receiving your grandfather's message, I thought for a long time and convened with the camp captains of the legion. There have been some changes to the subsequent arrangements."

Xiuxoke's expression became solemn. He looked at the calm young King and spoke earnestly.

"The Holy City Legion lost nearly half of its warriors during the western campaign. Even with the restored wounded, there are now just over two thousand two hundred Samurai. Most of them are the most loyal direct followers of our faction, and I do not wish to treat them unfairly. I am about to transfer to the Capital City, and a hundred will come with me... As for the remaining warriors, I hear you are assigning lands and titles according to military merits..."

"Excellent! Let them come, I will not treat them unfairly!"

Xiulote showed a sincere smile. The Kingdom of the Lake had vast territories and significant room for expansion. He was in need of reliable direct line Samurai.

"Father, how many Holy City warriors are willing to stay here?"

"One thousand five hundred warriors, among them over fifty are Jaguar Warriors of commoner origin."

"Good! Grant every Jaguar Warrior of the Holy City lands according to the standards of nobility through military merit, 800 mu each!"

Xiulote agreed without hesitation. Jaguar Warriors were rare elites anywhere, owning their own land and families. The Holy City Legion still had more than one hundred and fifty Jaguar Warriors left, with only a third choosing to stay.

"Promote fifty from among the seasoned warriors, totaling one hundred military nobility to be enfeoffed. From the remaining warriors, enfeoff four hundred seasoned warriors, granting each 240 mu; enfeoff one thousand third-level warriors, granting each 100 mu. As for the second-level hereditary nobility, promote all three Warrior Camp Chiefs, granting each 2400 mu!"

The young King promised generously. This enfeoffment was nearly 300,000 mu of land, and the gap for servitude increased by another 15,000 people. Afterwards, he thought for a moment and looked towards the robust Jaguar Warrior Olosh.

"Olosh, Teacher, where do you plan to go?"

"Ah!"

Olosh was always hearty, yet now he sighed, a rare occurrence.

"I originally planned to accompany your father. We've been old comrades for over twenty years! But your father insisted on persuading me to stay behind... Yet on his own, his martial arts are not that great, and once, someone broke his ribs with a single blow, and he was laid flat for several months..."

Xiuxoke's complexion became embarrassed, and he coughed softly.

"Cough, that was years ago... A formidable general like Tepake, within the fifty or sixty years since the Alliance was established, he was the only one. Besides, my trip to the Capital City this time is probably just to enjoy the good life. Even if I wanted to go into battle or encounter danger, it would be difficult!...

Olosh, with your martial skills, what's the use of staying by my side? It would be better to stay with Xiulote. Then, I could also be at ease. Haven't we already agreed on this?..."

Olosh sighed again, nodding helplessly.

"Right... you are correct... as you say!"

Xiulote lowered his eyes slightly, filled with emotion.

What is a real father? This is a real father! Handling logistics throughout the western campaign, arranging supply lines, caring for the wounded. Unobtrusive and unassuming, he managed everything perfectly; leading a legion of four thousand into the harshest battles, with half dying in battle. Then persuading the remaining warriors to stay behind and entrusting them to his most trusted Great General; willing to give up his own rights for his son's nation-building endeavor, going to the Capital City of the Lake to assume a sinecure, acting as a hostage... Such treatment is rare even for one's own children!

Chapter 559 - The Long Road of a Father, Meetings and Farewells\_3

Thinking of this, the King opened his eyes. He first grasped Olosh's arm, affirming with a promise.

"Olosh, the fief needs you. You will be the Kingdom's second honored nobility!"

Then, Xiulote firmly took hold of his father's hands and asked sincerely.

"Father, do you have any other requests? I will listen to you..."

Hearing this, Xiuxoke's eyes brightened. He clasped his son's hands in return, advising earnestly.

"Xiulote, my son! You are my eldest and possess inherent wisdom, naturally mature... Ahem, you have three half-brothers and one sister. I know you didn't play with them much since you were little and rarely communicated, not being close. But after all, you are a family!..."

The great Predecessor Monarch Montezuma and the elders were brothers; the elders assisted the Predecessor Monarch for decades and also supported the Predecessor Monarch's son. Your siblings can also assist you in the future!... Hmm, your youngest brother is only five years old and still needs to be nurtured by his mother at home. I'll leave the other three to you. As the eldest brother, you can represent me and discipline them freely!..."

"Ah? Two brothers in their teens and a sister younger than ten, all left to me?"

Xiulote's expression froze. After a moment, he looked at his father's expectant eyes and nodded solemnly.

"Then leave it to me!..."

The topic then became lighter. They chatted about family matters and discussed arrangements for the Rivermouth County in the north.

"The population trade along the Lerma River has been completed. After the Guamal Canine Descendants plundered the Chapala Lake Region, a total of 20,000 young men and women, 10,000 children were

traded. Most of them are Prepetcha people, with some Otomi as well. There are 20,000 people from the forest tribes originally longbow militia, all relocated from the Holy City. I've arranged these 50,000 people in various civilian settlements in Rivermouth County. There are still about 2,000 families of Holy City samurai... You need at least a hundred more priests..."

"The Alliance-supported Priesthood has arrived at Qinchongcan City; Prepetcha priests have also trained some. I will fill the northern priest gap as soon as possible."

Xiulote nodded affirmatively.

"Father, how many people do you estimate are now in Rivermouth County, and how many are able-bodied?"

"Based on estimates from various settlements, there are about fifteen thousand people, roughly thirty thousand able-bodied. The north now only has Holy City Legion samurai and Prepetcha militia. There are Otomi and Canine Descendants in the north, remnants of the Tarascan soldiers in the west; it's best to send another squad of the Legion here for defense. Olosh is familiar with the northern situation, after I leave, he can take charge of Rivermouth County."

"Good. I will soon revise the deployment of legions across the territories and reallocate their stations."

Xiulote reflected for a while, then added.

"The Capital Region is of the utmost importance. I trust Olosh the most, so he will stay in Qinchongcan City, responsible for the military command of the core Lake Region at Patzcuaro. I will hand over Rivermouth County in the north to the Monkey Kuluka, and also have him take half of the Spearmen



Legion. Holy City samurai will be enfeoffed on site in the north. As for the south, Zicao County, I have already dispatched the veteran Etalik to operate there, preparing for subsequent actions. He is experienced in dealing with nobility. That way, when I lead the troops southward..."

Hearing this, Xiuxoke nodded affirmatively.

"Your thoughts are indeed thorough!... However, my son, you probably need to address the problem in the north first. Before I came, Otapan City had sent an envoy. They said the Chichimeca Canine Descendants from the northeast were preparing to head south in large numbers, hoping you could support a legion to fight together in the north... The old Priest also had a private message, saying there was a matter concerning both tribes that needed discussion. Please make time to go north and meet with him, no matter what," he declared.

"Canine Descendants heading south, requesting support for a legion? The old Priest has a matter to discuss with me in person?"

Xiulote pondered for a moment and vaguely guessed something.

"Alright, I will send another envoy to communicate further!"

The conversation among the four continued throughout the night, planning the future of the kingdom and discussing the situation of the Alliance. From time to time, there were warm greetings. Not until the bright moon sank into the mountains in the west and the sun rose at the peaks in the east did they cease their talk.

Xiuxoke lay down in his son's living quarters and soon fell into a peaceful sleep, snoring from exhaustion. Xiulote listened to his father's snores, quietly staying by his side. He carefully observed his father's resolute face, memorably imprinting it in his mind. Then, he reached out and gently plucked a prominent white hair. His father turned over, mumbled hazily, and continued to sleep deeply.

"This journey has truly tired father out... I should leave," he thought.

Xiulote smiled and shook his head, then silently turned and left the room. Behind him, unbeknownst to when, Xiuxoke turned over again, facing the direction his son had departed. A long while later, a soft sigh echoed in the stone house.

Parting is an eternal melody, and meeting is but a brief high note. When the sun was slightly setting, Xiuxoke, accompanied by a dozen trusted aides, prepared for the journey back north.

"... Father, I won't say much else. Take care of yourself, and be careful on your journey!"

Xiulote gripped his father's arm tightly and only after a long moment did he slowly let go. Then, he quietly gave a command to those behind him. The aides behind him then presented a few sets of brand-new bronze medium armor to the aides across from them.

"Such fine armor!"

Xiuxoke touched the sturdy bronze plates beneath the cloth, admiring it with a compliment. Then, he handed the armor to his aide with a gentle smile.

"Son, don't worry! Father is off to enjoy life in the Capital City; there won't be much chance for battle anymore... I will speak to your grandfather about your greetings. And your letters, I will deliver them to Princess Alisa. Don't worry, I won't peek at them on the way."

Xiulote nodded firmly. He slightly lowered his eyes, concealing the faint moisture in them. Olosh stepped forward and finally sighed.

"Ah, Xiuxoke. After today's farewell, who knows when I'll see you again... I don't have much to say. Just enjoy your life in the Capital City, sleep with a few more women, and give Xiulote a few more brothers and sisters!"

"... You too."

"Haha!"

"Haha!"

Xiuxoke laughed heartily, gave the two a strong hug, and then turned and left without looking back. Behind him, the warm sunset slowly descended, and the cool bright moon rose again. The road ahead was long and distant, all fading with time.

Chapter 560 - The Alliance after the Battle, the Journey Eastward

Time is a long road, and life is a relentless journey. We always walk through it in a daze, listening to the passage of time, looking at the vast expanse of the years, never knowing when we'll arrive at the end, and what's gone never looks back.

Xiuxoke never looked back. Under the stars and the moon, he traveled day and night with his handful of trusted aides, taking just two days to reach the Lerma River. He climbed a small hill on the river's edge and looked out. At that moment, another sun was setting, and the rivermouth fortress stood majestic amid the evening glow. The Lerma River flowed mightily to the west, its surface undulating with shimmering waves, like the dazzling ribbons of the Earth Mother Goddess.

"Truly a boon from the spirits! A great river that connects the east and west of the Alliance!"

Xiuxoke gazed quietly at the shining Long River, and each day of the past flickered before his eyes. Vaguely, he seemed to hear the hearty laughter from a decade ago, to see the tiny hands carefully holding a baby. Thus, for the first time, he turned his head and gazed deeply toward the south. After a moment, all that remained was a gentle sigh.

"Flowing all the way from the Capital City to here... What a great river indeed!"

After a moment of contemplation, Xiuxoke's samurai determination surged in his heart once more. He opened his mouth, about to call out Olosh's name, but then he paused. After a few breaths, he ordered his men in a low voice,

"Send an envoy, pass the message to the fortress. Prepare the boats quickly; we depart for the east first thing tomorrow!"

The sun set and rose again, and the long night was silent but for the flow of thoughts. The next day, twenty large boats carried six or seven hundred samurai upriver to the east, moving slowly. The journey was indeed long, with hills undulating on both banks and streams converging from the mountains. It

wasn't until vast fields, harvested and exposed, came into view before them that they entered the border of the Alliance's western city-states.

Xiuxoke stayed here for two days, feasting with nobles who had been friendly with his clan for generations while exchanging the latest intelligence.

In the western expedition, the armies of the western city-states had plundered much, so the banquets of these two days were extremely lavish. Incense burned in the great hall, food was laden with spices, and even the mead had rare herbs added. In contrast, the young kings who took part in the hard work themselves and practiced thrift had much more modest nobility in the Lake Capital City's fief.

During the night banquet, Xiuxoke ate a piece of roasted venison and drank a sip of mead. He savored it carefully and praised it.

"Good wine! This wine has rich layers and an endless aftertaste... Apart from fruit, did you also add flowers and herbs when brewing it?"

"Haha, the Deputy Marshal is not only brave but also has an exceptional discernment!"

Tepeiter laughed heartily. Sitting in the seat of honor as the night's host, he was the glorious noble who wielded great power over Tlalocan and the clan leader of the Mountain family. The meaning of his name was "peak." Tepeiter smiled as he stood up, holding his wine cup and approaching, then extended his burly arm and warmly placed it on Xiuxoke's shoulder.

"Haha, Deputy Marshal, the Mountain family and the Holy City lineage have been friends for generations, our ties spanning decades! Since we are of the same generation, I will call you 'brother'...

Brother, in this western campaign, our western city-states exerted all their force. Even my legitimate son died on the battlefield!"

"Chief Divine's blessing! A warrior who dies in battle for the divine will surely ascend to the Divine Kingdom, to eternal happiness and peace!"

"Yes, the Chief Divine's blessing! Come, Izel, why aren't you coming forward to offer your uncle a toast?"

Tepeiter called out loud, beckoning his illegitimate son like he would a servant.

A flash crossed Izel's eyes before fading away. He stepped forward respectfully, smiled, and offered toasts to his father and "uncle." After the three drank, Tepeiter casually waved his son away and continued speaking to Xiuxoke in a lowered voice.

"Brother, the Holy City lineage has fiefs in the middle of the lake, making many green with envy! What's even more enviable is that Qinchongcan is a full seven hundred miles from the Lake Capital City! No Royal Decree can reach that far!"

"Hmm? The latest Royal Decree..."

Xiuxoke's expression shifted, as if in deep thought.

"Yes, the latest Royal Decree!... The priests collecting tribute from the villages is one thing, for paying more to the Royal Family, we could just spend less. But the Royal Family dispatching officials to meddle with core city-states, dividing village communal fields, and reducing the nobility's private troops, absorbing the direct warriors... This kind of action disrupts the tradition of autonomy in the Alliance!"

Tepeiter's gaze flickered as he watched Xiuxoke's expression, his voice filled with indignant whispers.

"The Sun God's light brings warmth! Only the cold light of the Moon Goddess could bring such a chill... Nobles have fought on battlefields for the Chief Divine, spilling their warm blood. As the war ends victoriously, there are those in the Capital City who blind the King... Brother, now that the Holy City lineage has its fiefs remote, it holds significant actual power as the Prince! With the High Priest in charge internally, all nobles follow willingly. With high hopes, as you make your way to the Capital City, everyone is counting on you to speak just words before the King..."

"Ah!..."

Xiuxoke's expression changed. Though not keen on politics, he understood the essence of the King's reforms and was aware of the sensitive position of the Holy City lineage. He patted Tepeiter on the shoulder and said with calm assurance,

"Don't worry! Tepeiter, we have known each other for many years. I will certainly speak well of you before the King!"

"Haha, good!"

At those words, a flash of disappointment crossed Tepeiter's eyes, but in an instant, he was laughing and raising his cup high, exclaiming,

"Chief Divine's blessing, let's not return until we are drunk tonight! Come, let's drink together again, to honor the respected Deputy Marshal! May the divine spirits bless you with a smooth journey ahead!"