

## Civilization 561

### Chapter 561 - The Alliance after the Battle, the Journey Eastward\_2

"May the spirit grant protection and smooth the path ahead!..."

The crowd burst into laughter as they gathered to drink, and soon everyone was a bit tipsy. Then, Tepeiter gestured, and a group of graceful girls clad in short clothes, holding fresh flowers, came forward to dance. Their clear singing and wonderful dance scattered petals in front of the flowers; as the night stretched on, it was dawn before anyone realized.

The next day at noon, Xiuxoke boarded the great boat again, now accompanied by two demure maidservants by his side.

"Ah! The High Priest was right. The sweeter the wine, the less one should drink! My wine-tasting skills are still lacking, I didn't notice the herbs hidden within..."

He glanced at the maidservants, sighed softly, and then strode to the bow, waving farewell to Izel who had come to see him off. The great boat moved on, staying another day near the Holy City. Most of the Holy City's samurai disembarked here, returning to their long-separated hometowns. The newly acquired maidservants were taken away by their family's samurai as well.

As the sun rose in the east, when the great boat sailed into the fertile Texcoco Lake Region, swathes of Chinampa floating farms appeared before him. Tropical warmth still lingered in the winter air, as farmers busied themselves on the Chinampas, occasionally docking small boats laden with manure and river mud to replenish the nutrients of the floating farms. Corn, beans, chili peppers, cocoa, herbs, zucchini, tomatoes... various different crops thrived on the fertile floating farms, telling the tale of a miracle agriculture that could yield up to seven harvests a year.

Sailing between the floating farms, the air was filled with the fresh scents of grass and flowers. A day later, the magnificent Lake Capital City appeared before Xiuxoke's eyes.

He disembarked at a village on the north coast of the Long Bridge, where an envoy of the Royal Family was already waiting for him. Under the envoy's lead, a party of a hundred headed south along the causeway towards the North City. The pines and cypresses transplanted in previous years had grown lush and dense, reflecting their forked shadows on the lake surface, like the souls of sprites.

"Like the sprites of the pine trees in the water, Aweit..."

Xiuxoke mused to himself. Military victories continuously drove the reforms of the Alliance, also centralizing the power of the Royal Family. Compared to two years ago, the Lake Capital City had been deeply marked by the King's presence.

The causeway connected north and south, and thousands of people walked on the refurbished road. They praised the supreme Chief Divine, and also lauded the greatness of the King. As the crowd passed through the large market of the North City, the shouting of tens of thousands of people struck like the rains of the rainy season, suddenly overwhelming them with a lively clamor.

The market now had many new tax officials. Holding pens and paper, and equipped with new wooden abacuses at their waists, a unified system of weights and measures had become common in the market. The distant merchants appeared submissive, bowing their heads to pay their trade duties. The essential regulated materials, such as copperware, war clubs, cotton armor, and bows, were all sold in fixed amounts by officially registered merchants. Each transaction had to be recorded and periodically inspected by the Government.

Xiuxoke glanced around, noticing many Tarasco-styled artifacts flowing into the marketplace, clearly war trophies from the western armies. He nodded slightly, then followed the envoy through the long canal and into the bustling main city. Though the New Year celebrations had not yet begun, the wild joy of the great victory was already permeating the main city.

The victory celebrations started ahead of schedule in the community's Temple, with bountiful war spoils and rewards already distributed. The Priests' singing echoed between the stone houses on either side, the air fragrant with wafting pine resin. Occasionally, samurai would sing resonant war songs and perform vigorous war dances. The common folk then gathered in a circle, praising the warriors returning from the campaign.

Xiuxoke saw a young samurai. Dressed in the Third-Level war clothes, having finished his war dance, he entered the crowd and took the hand of a beautiful young woman. Witnessed by the Chief Divine, the young samurai clenched his fist over his chest, boasting of his bravery on the battlefield while declaring his love for the maiden.

Admiration flashed in the maiden's eyes. She turned to look at a middle-aged man in rich garments not far away; that was her father, the master of her family, who managed her marriage. After a moment of consideration, he slowly nodded, and cheers erupted from the crowd. The samurai was overjoyed, promptly bowed deeply to the middle-aged man, then vigorously grasped the girl's hand. The two ran out of the crowd and disappeared in an instant.

Xiuxoke smiled knowingly. He observed the middle-aged man who was now shaking his head and sighing. The man's clothing was embroidered with a family crest, likely of minor nobility origin. With the victory in the western campaign, the samurai, laden with glory and spoils, had their social status elevated once again. This kind of marriage between an outstanding common samurai and a daughter of the minor nobility was becoming increasingly common.

Of course, in the Lake Fief of Mikenka, the traditional class hierarchy had been thoroughly dismantled. Centered around the Mexica rulers, a new order was being established, a grander blueprint already outlined.

The envoy's pace did not halt, and they quickly reached the northern city's armory. The Holy City samurai ascended the Temple, first praying to the newly sculpted image of the Chief Divine, then seeking blessings from the now second-ranking Fire God, before dispersing from there. A King's guard replaced the previous envoy, continuing to lead Xiuxoke towards the core temple and palace area of the main city.

Despite it being winter, the noble district along the way was still flush with blooming flowers, the air filled with delightful floral scents. At the front of various manors, garlands, jade artifacts, gold and silver, and colorful pottery were displayed... the Great Nobility flaunted their family's luxury, even including seashells and corals from the seacoast. Military nobles displayed the war trophies from the western campaign, Tarasco Kingdom's weapons and armor, some even featuring captured noble flags.

Chapter 562 - The Alliance after the Battle, the Journey Eastward\_3

In the Nobility district square, poets and musicians from various city-states were reciting poems and playing bamboo flutes. Hearing a familiar name, Xiuxoke paused and listened for a moment, looking bemused.

"My own son, whom I raised by hand, although a clever and valiant young man, certainly can't bellow like thunder, have eyes that emit Divine Light, or shatter a great tree with one punch..."

"The Alliance venerates heroes and values military achievements! The Northern Army had been blessed by the Divine on their western campaign, shining along the way. It's common for the citizens of the Capital City to deify your Highness."

The King's guard turned to Xiuxoke and gave him a faint smile.

Upon hearing this, Xiuxoke shivered a bit. He, too, smiled back, his manner just as gentle.

"In the lands around the lake, they also sing of the King's renown. The Supreme King, the true embodiment of the Sun God on earth..."

Both men laughed, then fell silent together. With hurried steps, the towering Great Temple came into view.

The Sacred Fire was burning eternally, the priest's song resonated magnificently. Hundreds of Temple Warriors looked stern, stationed at the base of the Great Temple, guarding a plethora of noble Sacrifices, and also watching over the surrounding temples. Countless laborers bent at the waist, carrying sealed barrels, from which drips of blue liquid occasionally fell.

"Is this... the Maya blue dye used for anointing the Sacrifices during rituals...this much?"

Xiuxoke appeared surprised. He looked towards the King's guard, who nodded faintly. Instantly, an intense smell of blood seemed to hit, making even the stalwart warrior tremble inside. As everyone knew, only nobles with Holy Blood flowing through their veins could ascend the sacrificial altar of the Great Temple...

Without a word, the two men continued southward. The expansion of the Great Temple was ongoing, and further south, an exceptionally broad building was under construction, currently at the foundation phase.

Xiuxoke, familiar with military logistics, estimated that at least three thousand laborers were working on the site. The King's guard seemed to have anticipated this, and with a smile, he turned and said in a deep voice.

"This is the new King's Palace. The first phase of construction will be half the height of the Great Temple, and also half its area..."

"Ah, what did the elders say..."

"The elders naturally agreed. During the foundation construction, not only will corn mortar and volcanic ash be used to strengthen it, but also the blood of Tarasco Divine Descendant... The Chief Divine will ascend the Throne of the Gods atop the bones of other divines!"

"Chief Divine is supreme, praise the Chief Divine!"

Xiuxoke nodded, praying devoutly. Since the elders had agreed, all else was a minor detail.

Soon, they arrived at the ornate administrative palace. The King's guard showed the Jade Talisman to the guards of the Royal Family, and Xiuxoke set down his War Club and Long Dagger. Then, the two walked down the garden path toward the King's Palace, a legacy of half a century.

Many nobles and officials were waiting in front of the palace, the area rather noisy. But as they drew closer to the palace, the noise level dropped, and finally, there was a solemn silence as if no one were present.

Xiuxoke took a deep breath and followed the King's guard towards the grand entrance. The moment the doors opened, he quickly looked up, then lowered his head and stepped forward.

The Supreme King sat expressionless on an increasingly elevated throne. He wore a gemstone-studded royal gown, held the centuries-old Divine Staff in his hand, and his gaze was indifferent and calm, like the embodiment of a deity. In the shadow of the King, a silent Intelligence Officer cast a glance his way.

"Chief Divine is supreme! Xiuxoke of Teotihuacan, of the glorious nobility, pays respects to the embodiment of the Sun God, the Great Tlatoani of the Alliance, the Supreme King!"

Xiuxoke steeled himself, bowing deeply. His booming voice echoed in the vast Stone Hall, gradually fading into nothing. The hall returned to silence, and even the dozens of guards stationed there stood solemnly like statues.

It seemed like half a century passed before a cold voice floated down from above, carrying a chilling sternness.

"Xiuxoke, I hear you got along quite well with Tepeiter in Tlalocan?"

Chapter 563 - Throne in the Shadows

The Stone Hall of politics was somber and solemn, shrouded in overlapping shadows. Only a few slender beams of light seeped through the thick Divine Curtain, outlining shapes of the sun in the cold corners of the floor.

The King sat enthroned among the shadows, his faint gaze descending from on high like a beast of prey perched on its throne. His voice was distant and icy, as if to freeze the very air, sending chills down one's spine.

Xiuxoke took a deep breath, vaguely detecting the scent of blood. His expression remained resolute and composed. As a battle-hardened noble samurai, his fierce willpower would never easily cower. He bowed his head, offering an unashamed answer.

"Your Majesty, the Yue family has been closely allied with the Royal Family for generations. I received Tlalocan's warm hospitality during my visit, so it was difficult to decline. At the banquet, we merely spoke of landscapes and customs, drinking until intoxicated. The next morning, I left without even seeing him."

"Ah, friendships spanning generations."

Aweit smiled faintly, neither confirming nor denying, his voice devoid of any emotion.

"Xiuxoke, I hear Tepeiter is dissatisfied with the new policies and intends to support the Royal faction to replace me as the king of the Alliance?"

Upon hearing this, Xiuxoke's expression turned stern. He hurriedly lifted his head, looking earnestly at Aweit.

"Tepeiter was just venting momentarily, and would never dare to betray the Alliance. I have already sternly warned him... Black Wolf as the harbinger for the jaguar and leopard, Red Hawk flying high with



the eagle. Your Majesty, the Royal faction is unwavering in its loyalty to you, always regarding you as the supreme sun!"

"Oh, unwavering loyalty."

Aweit smiled once again. Then, his demeanor abruptly turned grave as he inquired with a deep voice.

"Xiuxoke, if Tepeiter has intentions of rebelling against the Royal Family and he contacts you, what will you do?!"

"...Chief Divine be my witness! Your Majesty, I am loyal to you. If Tepeiter dares to betray the Alliance, I am willing to lead the Royal Legion to eradicate my kin in the name of justice and quell him for Your Majesty!"

Perspiration faintly appeared on Xiuxoke's forehead. His fists clenched in secret, yet his expression remained composed and firm.

"Oh, eradicating one's kin for justice."

Aweit curled his lips into a smile that was more mocking than amused as he looked at his relative before him.

"Not bad, Xiuxoke, I believe you."

The king's voice finally carried a hint of mirth, yet the words grew ever more chilling.

"Because, that's exactly what Tepeiter said."

As the last word fell, Aweit raised the Divine Staff and gently tapped the throne with its silver end. Symbols of divine and royal authority simultaneously erupted with an intermingling clink.

"Gillim."

"Your Majesty."

"Show it to him."

"At once."

Gillim nodded silently, finally stepping out from the shadows of the throne. Unbeknownst to all, he now held a wooden box a foot in height. Approaching silently, the Intelligence Officer solemnly bowed and placed the wooden box before the kneeling Xiuxoke.

As the Intelligence Officer neared, the faint odor of blood grew stronger. Xiuxoke fixated on the red at the bottom of the box, a strong premonition welling up inside him. He took a deep breath, allowing the taste of rust to invade his lungs, as if standing on a battlefield, and slowly opened the wooden box. Then, with just a glance, his pupils shrank sharply, and his hands trembled violently.

Inside the wooden box lay the head of Tepeiter, his eyes wide with the resentment of his final moments, his mouth agape as if roaring in protest.

"Ah, this... this!"

Seeing the face of a familiar old friend, Xiuxoke's maintained composure finally shattered! Three days ago, they were still merrily drinking together, intoxicated. But now, just three days later, Tepeiter had arrived in this royal hall before him!

Overwhelmed with intense emotions, it took several breaths for Xiuxoke to regain the ability to speak. He looked at the king in disbelief, his face a mask of shock.

"Your Majesty, this, this, who did this?!"

Aweit's smile remained neutral, silent. Gillim bowed low, answering solemnly.

"Naturally, it was you, Deputy Head of the Eagle Warrior Battalion, Lord Xiuxoke."

"Ah! Me?!..."

"Yes, indeed you. Tepeiter caused discord within the Royal Family, opposing the king's new policies. Your loyalty to the king was unquestionable, and you went with a royal decree to execute him, purposely intoxicating him at the banquet. Later that night, after leaving the feast, you ordered Jaguar Warriors from the Holy City Legion to carry out the fratricidal act. With the complicity of an insider from the Yue family, you executed Tepeiter, who had been a longtime friend yet harbored thoughts of treason. Subsequently, you supported the celebrated Izel from the western campaign to inherit the position of Family Head of the Yue family. And after the act, you departed with a smile amidst their farewells!"

"What's more admirable is that on the very night of this great deed, you lay with two women and slept undisturbed! Such a loyal samurai's creed, such a warrior's fearless act is truly awe-inspiring. Your deeds will soon be sung throughout the Alliance, revered by all!"

Smiling, Gillim finished speaking and once more bowed deeply, his gaze filled with sincere admiration.

"Your Majesty!..."

Xiuxoke clenched his fist to his chest, refusing to look at the bowing Intelligence Officer. He was only filled with turmoil as he stared blankly at the king on his throne. Aweit smiled indifferently, slowly and confidently concluding.

"Xiuxoke, this is what the world knows as 'the truth.' Remember, you are Xiulote's father, the son of the High Priest, a representative of the Royal faction! The two Royal lines must be closely united, leaving no gap for the nobility to exploit!... Besides, you, of a humble background, still need a meritorious deed to secure your position as Deputy Head of the Eagle Warrior Battalion."

Xiuxoke remained silent. He stared at the blood-soaked severed head of an old friend as if it still possessed some semblance of lifelike vibrancy. Scenes from days past flashed before his eyes, finally freezing on the image of Izel, with his head bowed and a smile on his face as he poured wine.

"The herbs in the wine... fallen petals in front of the flowers... so that's how it is!"

Xiuxoke muttered to himself. After a while, he lowered his head and bowed deeply again.

"Your Majesty, I follow your will."

"Good, very good!"

Aweit watched with a smile, speaking gently for the first time to the Deputy Head who had just shown his submission.

"Xiuxoke, you have once waged war against Tizoc for me and achieved great merits. During this western campaign, you also handled the logistics of the Northern Army well.

You are a distant relative of the royal line, and Xiulote is your son. By that account, our relationship is fairly close. If you have any needs while you're in the Capital City, feel free to bring them to me or to Gillim."

"The Eagle Warrior Battalion is the most prestigious guard of the Sun God and a powerful battle group protecting the King. I feel reassured assigning the position of Deputy Head to you. The current Eagle Battalion Head is my family's trusted Great General, Stanley. You must cooperate like loyal wolves. The numbers of the Eagle Warriors will be expanding soon, with many offspring of the Nobility joining. Perform well, and any promising noble scions you deem worthy can be nominated!"

"...Thank you, Your Majesty!"

Xiuxoke clenched his fist and bowed once more in gratitude. His hand relaxed and then clenched again, and after a while, he quietly asked,

"Your Majesty, about Tepeiter's head..."

"Oh, Gillim, what is your opinion?"

"Tepeiter harbored insidious thoughts and planned a rebellion. This end is a punishment from the Chief Divine! His severed head will be displayed to the Great Nobility from all City-States of the Alliance during the victory festival three days from now. At that time, as the Deputy Head who has earned great merits, you, Xiuxoke, will also stand atop the Great Temple to receive everyone's homage!"

Gillim gave a formal bow, smiling at Xiuxoke.

"Lord Xiuxoke, please calmly accept this honor! Without you, it would not have been so easy to punish the heavily-guarded Tepeiter!"

Hearing this, Xiuxoke once again glanced at the severed head of his old friend and then silently bowed his head, saying nothing.

"Well then, that's settled!"

Aweit tapped his Divine Staff again, and its clear thud resonated within the heart.

"The hundreds of warriors from the Holy City Legion will all join the direct command of the Royal Legion. The courageous Jaguar Warriors who beheaded Tepeiter from the Holy City have had their names noted; they will be promoted into the Royal Jaguar Warrior Brigade as centurions. Hmm, Xiuxoke, the Royal Jaguar Warrior Brigade is also expanding. You may nominate any outstanding commoner warriors from the Holy City Legion as well!"

"Thank you, Your Majesty!"

"Hmm, you may leave now. Rest well for a couple of days in preparation for the sacrificial ceremony."

"I will obey Your Majesty's will."

Xiuxoke's expression had returned to calm. He bowed respectfully, then turned and strode towards the bright exit of the hall. Soon, he walked out of the Stone Hall, and the warm sunlight fell on his face as the noise of the crowd reached his ears again. It was then that the resolute warrior finally lifted his head and squinted at the sun, taking a deep sigh.

"A reunion with an old friend, truly a bright and good day!"

Xiuxoke murmured to himself. Before he left, he turned his head for one final, deep look at the King's Great Hall. The heavy stone doors had closed, fluttering curtains blocked the sunlight. And within those shadows, the throne stood aloof, like the lair of the most dangerous beast.

The Stone Hall lay quiet. Aweit looked upon the painting of the Almighty on the curtain, with eyes as deep as the bottom of a lake. After a while, he finally asked deeply.

"What does the High Priest say?"

"The High Priest only learned of it this morning. Faced with the King's Envoy and in front of many Elder Priests, he loudly declared, 'Well killed! Such is how Eagle Warriors ought to be.'"

"Ha, that old fox."

Aweit chuckled lightly, his expression a mixture of amusement and contemplation.

"The High Priest has deep and calculated plans, Xiulote has the wisdom of Divine Revelation. Even Xiuxoke can be praised for bravery and loyalty. A single family with three generations of heroes, I must admit I'm a bit envious!"



"Your Majesty, after the new year, Prince Chimalpahin will be five years old. With his innate wit, he can already recite the poems of the former kings with skill and wield a small war club with dexterity. The future prince is sure to be a brilliant example of wisdom and valor!"

The words of the Intelligence Officer came from the shadows around the throne, a rare hint of mirth in his tone.

"Hmm, little Chimalpahin, that little tiger cub, haha!"

Aweit chuckled and shook his head, then returned to the matter at hand.

"Has the new policy been enacted without disturbances in the city-states?"

"Your Highness, with the Alliance having pacified the Tarasco Kingdom and defeated the Tlaxcalans, your prestige is at its zenith! As for centralization reforms, the city-states in the northeast have not raised much objection, and Commander-in-Chief Osellor from the north has expressed submission. The city-states of the southwest participated in the Southern Army's campaign. In the fierce battles between the two armies, the most defiant of the Great Nobility were arranged to die in combat. City-states in the southeast suffered from the invasion of the Tlaxcalans, and many of the Great Nobility met with misfortune. Now, Tepeiter, the leader of the northwestern city-states from the Mountains family, has also been executed. Coupled with the redistribution of nobles in the central region of the Lake District, the Royal Family's centralization reforms over the Texcoco Lake District will no longer face much resistance!"

"Very good!"

Aweit nodded in satisfaction. Then, he pondered before asking,

"Is the new Family Head of the Mountains family Izel? He is young, can he consolidate the hearts of the city-state people?"

"Your Majesty, as long as Izel relies closely on the Royal Family's core, he will be able to control the situation in the city-state. The new High Priest of the Tlalocan city-state will also lend him support. Furthermore, although he is young, he is already a qualified warrior. On the night three days ago when action was taken, he personally led the Jaguar Warriors into his father's dwelling..."

"Oh? He is indeed a qualified warrior! If he also possesses courage in battle, he can indeed be deployed to significant use."

Aweit praised with appreciation. The succession laws among the Mexica were like the jungle, always cruel and bloody—only the victor is admired.

"Gillim, the sacrificial ceremony is about to begin. Ensure that the offerings' segment is grand and solemn! Have the important Divine Descendant sacrifices been taken care of?"

"Your Majesty, everything has been properly arranged. Starting tonight, the dosage of anesthetics for the members of the Tarasco Royal Family will be reduced. On the day of the Sacrificial Rite, a suitable amount of hallucinogenic potion will be added to ensure their calm demeanor as they go to their deaths willingly."

When it came to the Divine Descendant sacrifices, the Intelligence Officer's expression remained calm, showing not a ripple of emotion. In his eyes, there was no such thing as noble blood.

"Excellent. As per tradition, Su'angua is the most prized sacrifices, a gift to the Chief Divine. Let him live comfortably these days and arrange for a few beautiful female Priestesses!"

Speaking thusly, Aweit's eyes showed the pride of a victor and then, that pride turned to pity, a gift to the fallen king at his feet.

"I will follow Your Highness's command."

The Intelligence Officer smiled and bowed. After a moment, he asked softly,

"Your Majesty, Su'angua is willing to prostrate himself before you during the festival, in the presence of envoys from all nations and tribes. First to humbly bow as a gesture of submission, then to present his neck for execution!"

"Oh, indeed? What are his conditions?"

Upon hearing this, Aweit was quite moved. An old adversary willing to kneel in submission before his death was more satisfying than fine wine.

"He requests that you spare those of the Divine Eagle Bloodline."

Gillim bowed his head solemnly. He knew his king's preferences.

"Your Majesty, there is a young prince of the Tarasco Royal Family named Shatini. He has the blood of the Noble Chiefs, not of the legitimate line of succession. As a fledgling of the Divine Eagle and with the Alliance's exquisite potions, he can also be tamed to some extent."

"Hmm... the Elders..."

"The Elder grows ever more aged. He has been in seclusion lately, conserving energy for the New Year's grand Sacrificial Rite. The immortal Sun God high above does not shine upon such hidden corners... Moreover, there are still plenty of bloodlines of the Tarasco Royal Family who have escaped."

"Hmm..."

After pondering for a long while, Aweit slowly nodded, his cold smile emerging.

"So be it. The Great Sacrifice is about to commence, and the anticipation is truly thrilling!"

The king's word echoed in the great hall, encircling the towering throne within the shadows. Then, a clear chime rang out, praising the supreme, sublime power and the icy heart of a monarch.

Chapter 565 - New Year Grand Ceremony, A Splendid Alliance Scene!

The winter sun rose from the Great Lake in the East, its shimmering rays dancing across the vast lake surface, also bathing the city of Tenochtitlan, built of white stone, in a golden hue. A gentle cool breeze from the highlands in the north swept through, lifting the vivid Divine Curtains adorning the buildings and caressing the elegant, feather-trimmed corners of people's garments. As the first light of dawn emerged, hundreds of Priests simultaneously lit ceremonial incense, and the air was soon permeated with the faint scent of pine.

Today was the auspicious day of the New Year's Grand Celebration. The skies were barely lit, yet the Lake Capital City had awakened from its slumber. The deafening noise of hundreds of thousands of people was so loud it could scatter the clouds! Shortly thereafter, morning prayers began in the various community Temples throughout the districts, signaling the beginning of the sacrificial ceremonies. The chanting of the community Priests was loud and clear, accompanied by the mournful sounds of bone flutes, soaring bamboo flutes, and heavy leather drums, which then merged into waves of cheering!

The thunderous sounds drifted far from the city's eighty districts, all the way to the lake above Texcoco. Migratory waterfowl, startled from their slumber, cried out loudly as they unfolded their colorful wings and soared in circles through the skies above the Lake Region!

With the help of his concubines, Xiuxoke had already donned his attire, standing in the courtyard of his home and looking up at the endless blue sky. He was accustomed to being in charge of his own household; after returning to the Capital City, he did not reside in the High Priest's Mansion but visited regularly on a set schedule.

At this moment, he was dressed in tight Leather Armor, with an overcoat of Eagle Warrior's high-ranking War Clothes, his head adorned with a towering, magnificent Eagle Helmet, making him look extremely imposing. After observing for a moment, the determined Samurai took out his Longbow, aimed at the white wings flying overhead, and fiercely drew the bowstring.

"Hum..."

The half-drawn bowstring resonated with a deep vibration, emitting a low hum, but no Feathered Arrow was released. It turned out to be a feigned shot.

"The white bird freely soars in the sky, the Longbow sits alone inside. On this auspicious New Year's day, at the Sacrificial Grand Ceremony, the weather is truly splendid!"

Xiuxoke muttered a couple of lines of a short poem, then shook his head with a smile. He slung the Longbow over his back, clasped a War Club at his waist, and after feeling the Short Dagger strapped to his thigh, he strode out of the door.

As the Deputy Head of the Eagle Warrior Battalion, his duty today was to lead his troops in armed formation beneath the Great Temple, which essentially meant remaining fully armed throughout the day. For the resolute Samurai, such a duty was hardly strenuous, especially with the spectacle of the festival to enjoy.

Stepping out of the courtyard, he was immediately met with a roiling hubbub. Tens of thousands of people were gathered on either side of the streets, crowding into many circles. Both Nobility and commoners, dressed in their most vivid and colorful outfits, laughed and sang and danced, praising the glory of the Chief Divine and celebrating the victory of the western expedition. This was where the boundaries of the Nobility and Civilian District met, and also where the parade in honor of the divine spirits was about to pass through.

Before long, the parade procession approached from the Temple District. A hundred Samurai cleared the way at the forefront. Led by the chanting of the High Priests, two hundred laborers, bent under the weight, carried a wide and magnificent wooden Divine Stage, moving forward slowly and steadily.

The cheers of the crowd grew louder, shouts of praise beating like drums! From time to time, members of the Nobility bowed their heads to come forward, placing offerings for the deities—fruit, flowers, Gold Ornaments, silver, and Gemstones—on the edges of the Divine Stage. Inside the boundary of the stage, a circle of sacred Cactus flowers symbolized holiness, followed by a circle of Turquoise representing immortality, and in the center stood the symbol of the highest Chief Divine: the Golden Sun, more than one meter in diameter and weighing over a ton.

In the Europe of this era, a ton of Gold was a stupendous Wealth that made all Monarchs drool. But for the Central American civilization situated atop gold and silver mines, a ton of Gold was merely an artifact for offering to the gods. The Lake Capital City of Tenochtitlan was the heart of Central America, gathering the world's greatest Wealth! Not counting Silver and Gemstones, the reserves of Gold alone amounted to hundreds of tons, scattered across every Noble's Manor, courtyard, and tomb.

Xiuxoke paused, bowing respectfully to the Third Level High Priest leading the procession. The Priest sat solemnly and majestically on a palanquin carried by eight men, only relaxing into a warm smile upon recognizing Xiuxoke's face.

"Praise the Chief Divine! High Priest Xiuxoke, the New Year's festival has begun, may the Chief Divine bestow blessings upon you!"

"Praise the Chief Divine! Esteemed High Priest, may I offer prayers and blessings under the Chief Divine's Sun?"

"Certainly! The blank area beneath the Golden Sun is reserved for eminent individuals like you."

With a wave of his hand, the Third Level High Priest motioned for the procession to halt. Xiuxoke expressed his sincere thanks, then stepped forward, took out two Pearls from Mikenque Lake Region, and delicately placed them beneath the Golden Sun before bowing his head in silent prayer.

"Blessing of the Chief Divine! My father, may you enjoy good health... My son, may you spread your wings and soar..."

Moments later, Xiuxoke finished his prayer and smiled as he nodded to the High Priest.

"Esteemed High Priest, thank you for your kindness. May I have the honor of knowing your name?"

"Ha-ha, I am Aureli from the glorious Priestly Family of the Capital City. My father Azar is a colleague of the High Priest and one of the twelve Elder Priests too..."

At this, Xiuxoke's eyes flashed. The root word "Azar" was associated with war. This Priestly Family must be an ancient lineage dedicated to the War God, deeply ingrained in the Capital City.

"May the War God bless you! High Priest Aureli, I must head to the Great Temple for my guard duty, so I shall take my leave now!"

"War God bless us! High Priest Xiuxoke, the Elder Priests are already in place within the Chief Temple. The immortal Elder should appear after the sun rises... You might want to hurry a bit!"

Chapter 566 - New Year's Grand Ceremony, A Grand Scene for the Alliance!\_2

"Thank you for reminding me! Praise the Chief Divine!"



"Praise the Chief Divine!"

Both men bowed their heads and bid each other farewell with a salute as the procession continued on its way.

Xiuxoke walked briskly as the wind and soon arrived at the entrance to the Temple District, where a thousand-strong Eagle Warrior Battalion had already gathered, fully armed and standing in solemn wait for the two battalion leaders. He looked around, Stanley was not there yet; only the camp captains saluted him.

Xiuxoke returned the greetings with a gentle smile and then took his place at the front of the line. The towering Great Pyramid Temple loomed before him, the priests had already lit the roaring Sacred Fire, and the blue Sacrifices were being escorted out from the holding cells of the various temples. He gazed at the gradually brightening sky, at the endless line of Sacrifices, and thought of his aging father preparing for the Sacrificial Rite in the Great Temple, heaving a soft sigh.

"The New Year's Grand Sacrifice will last three full days, the High Priest will personally wield the blade... My father's health..."

As he pondered, the bear-like Stanley appeared at the end of the street, his eyes brimming with exuberant spirits. He roared a greeting to all and then threw an arm around Xiuxoke's shoulder.

"Haha, praise the Chief Divine! Xiuxoke, my old friend, we meet again!"

"Praise the Chief Divine! Greetings to you, Battalion Leader Stanley!"

"Haha, the sun is dazzling, the clouds are dispersing, the sacred Grand Sacrifice is today! A fine day for flowers and blood, I've been looking forward to this for a long time!"

Stanley, though young, held a high rank and exuded an unrestrained confidence. In the presence of Xiuxoke, who was of similar standing, he behaved quite affably.

"Just now on the way here, I watched the human sacrifice ballgame. There were some brilliant strikes, splashing blood and breaking the bones of the opponents... You know, the Tekos warriors might be barbarians from the mountains, but they play ball with a fierce bravery, far better than the Tarasco warriors! I watched two games; the Tarasco teams lost both matches, sentenced to sacrifice the whole team. When they were brought up to the altar, there were even some who wet their pants! Haha!"

Excited by the talk of a great ballgame, Xiuxoke nodded with a smile. Then, with a touch of puzzlement, he asked.

"Stanley, isn't the human sacrifice ball court inside the Temple District? Where did you watch it just now?"

"Oh, Xiuxoke, you've only been in the Capital City for two or three days, probably not clear about many arrangements. With the return from the western expedition, among the captives brought to the Capital City, there were four thousand Tekos warriors and four thousand Tarasco warriors, and more than two thousand men from the Nobility..."

"The captives involved in the Sacrificial Rites are simply too numerous! The Elder Priests, with their illustrious statuses, are only responsible for sacrificing nobles from Tarasco. The remaining warriors from the two groups are all thrown into the human sacrifice ball courts. The generous and compassionate King, in both the Nobility and Civilian Districts, has added four new ball courts, allowing all the citizens of the Capital City to join in the revelry!"

"Ah, what? This Grand Sacrifice will sacrifice a total of ten thousand people?"

Hearing this number, Xiuxoke gasped. Even though he was hardened by battlefield slaughter and accustomed to heaps of corpses and seas of blood, he was still profoundly shocked. After all, the total population of an ordinary City-State would be around ten thousand.

"Haha, Xiuxoke, it turns out your mathematics isn't as good as mine!"

Stanley laughed heartily. In his eyes, the lives of enemies were no more than weeds by the roadside; only the brave deserved admiration.

"Eight thousand warriors enter the human sacrifice ball courts, competing for three days. The losing half becomes Sacrifices on the small pyramids, while the winning half becomes slaves for the construction of the King's Palace. Oh, and you need to add the injured from the ball games, the nobles sacrificed by the elders... This festival will probably sacrifice exactly a Xiquipilli, eight thousand people! Haha!"

Stanley slapped Xiuxoke on the back, laughing. Then, his expression became serious and his eyes gleamed, showing a rare sign of wisdom.

"Xiuxoke, compared to the feat of annihilating the Tarasco Kingdom, what does this number amount to! The Tekos barbarians are stubborn and always resist and flee, too troublesome to manage, it's better to send them to the ball court to please the people!

And those brought to the Capital City are the die-hard loyalists of the Tarasco Kingdom, senior warriors and hereditary Nobility who held power and wealth. We Mexica have destroyed their Kingdom, taken their Fief, killed their kin, stolen their wives and daughters, and divided their Wealth. Can we really expect gratitude and sincere allegiance from them?

... Haha, only the low-ranking warriors and Nobility are worth recruiting because the Alliance can offer them more! As for the rest, whether seasoned warriors, Divine Descendant Nobility or the Divine Eagle Royal Family, let's send them all to the altar to be offered to the highest Chief Divine!"

Xiuxoke considered for a moment and nodded in agreement. After a brief pause, he looked doubtfully at Stanley, assessing the wide forehead and bear-like stature of the other.

"Stanley, who said that? It doesn't sound like something you could come up with."

"Of course, I did!..."

Under Xiuxoke's scrutinizing gaze, Stanley bellowed out the first half of the sentence. Then, somewhat embarrassed, he paused and finished the sentence in a lower voice.

"... I heard it from the respected King Aweit."

Xiuxoke laughed softly, with an 'I knew it' expression. Stanley's face turned a bit red, and he turned and bellowed.

"All Eagle Warriors, get your gear ready! March to the Temple District, and stand guard around the Great Temple! The immortal Elder is about to arrive. If any suspicious foreign envoys approach, kill on sight without question!"

"Roar!"

The thousand-strong Eagle Warrior Battalion roared like wild beasts, and they filed by Battle Group to arrange defense around the Great Temple in the Temple District. As the Sun God's guard, their only duty was to ensure the safety of the Great Temple. Inside the Temple District, there were already stationed three thousand Royal Warriors and a thousand Jaguar Warrior Brigade. These five thousand elite warriors of the Alliance were more than enough to suppress any threat!

Chapter 567 - New Year Grand Ceremony, Alliance Spectacular!\_3

Xiuxoke advanced, and the towering Great Temple loomed ever more majestic. The sixty-meter-high twin pyramids, like the Chief Divine's Snake Mountain in myths, cast grand shadows on the ground, evoking a profound reverence within. At the summit of the Great Temple, a dozen dots with high feather crowns, dressed in solemn ceremonial robes, stood like messengers of the gods, gazing down upon the entire Lake Capital City.

Xiuxoke squinted, looking toward the figure at the lead, solemn and aged. That figure also cast his gaze over. After a moment, the resolved samurai voluntarily bowed his head, shifting his eyes away.

He scanned the corner's ball court where the Nobility, relaxed, ate sweets made from maple and honey, drank cocoa enriched with herbs and chili, and boisterously discussed the thrilling game. Occasionally,

defeated teams were escorted to the surrounding small pyramids and rolled down amid cheers, adding dashes of bright red and foul sweetness to the Temple District.

In this brutal age, such bloodshed was invisible, so commonplace as to be unremarkable to everyone. The Nobility continued to laugh and talk loudly, relishing the dried fruits of all seasons, including the sweet and sour cactus fruit, pineapple, Qilin fruit, mamey, lychee, tortoiseshell bamboo fruits, and the highly popular, deliciously flavored black persimmons.

Deeper into the court was the plaza of the Temple District. Graceful dancers swirled, focused musicians played divine music, and solemn singers praised the spirits. Occasionally, inspired Poets would step onto the platform, reciting a new poem, eliciting cheers or head-shakes. Occasionally, the Great Nobility from the capital also stepped forward, displaying their erudition and grandeur in front of the crowd.

The poems describing the western campaigns were the most popular, attracting even the foreign Envoys' earnest attention, who occasionally asked in hushed tones, then emitted quiet exclamations of awe.

Xiuxoke listened briefly, overhearing something about ""The Divine Revelation's prince transformed into a running Black Wolf, casting out lightning like thunderbolts, causing even the sturdiest fortresses to collapse"" and ""The Priests prayed for the Chief Divine to descend, turning the Divine Tree into a roaring treeman, hurling invincible rocks""... At this, the resolved samurai smiled reassuringly.

Xiuxoke smiled, leading his large group of Eagle Warriors through the bustling crowd. Soon, he arrived at the steps of the Great Temple. A squad of Temple Warriors in Black Wolf attire bowed, saluting the two captains before passing them two vertically held Long Spears. These special Long Spears were five meters long, each featuring a large banner of the Chief Divine in the middle, with a wildly-haired head at the top.

Xiuxoke sighed softly, his expression instantaneously solemn. He took his Long Spear, holding it upright with both hands. Then, the resolute samurai looked up to see Tepeiter's fresh head atop. He glanced at Stanley's Long Spear, whose top carried a dried, indistinct head, yet both grotesquely wide-eyed.

"Who is that?"

Xiuxoke identified for a moment, certain he had never seen it before.

"Haha, that's the head of Quyu, the Southern Route Commander, the Prince of Tarasco!"

Stanley looked at the head, bursting out laughing, then grew somewhat contemplative.

"This guy was a formidable fighter! He kept the highest fortress on the southern route impenetrable, holding us off for almost a year! I personally led several charges, and each time we were driven back, dusty and disgraced, even taking an arrow to the knee. After Su'angua fled, he still held us off for over a week, truly one of the most capable Marshals in the Tarasco Kingdom!"

"Southern Route Commander Quyu?"

Hearing the familiar name, Xiuxoke was a bit surprised.

"Didn't he escape?"

"Haha, he ran off to the Mistec. If one could trust the cloud-dwellers as steadfast, domestic turkeys might fly up trees!"

Stanley glanced at the distant Mistec Envoys, scoffing disdainfully. Their nobility carried themselves with restrained movements, never exhibiting grand gestures, even speaking slowly. They wore robes inlaid with Gold and Silver, and their wrists and ankles bore glittering openwork gold bracelets, seemingly inept at fighting.

"Here you have it, the cloud-dwellers treated Quylus thoroughly well for months. But as soon as news arrived of the King crushing the Tlaxcala legions, they promptly turned on him, drugged him, and chopped off his head to send here, confessing and pledging loyalty to the Alliance. Tsk tsk, look at the expression of his wide eyes before death, such a great hero must have had so much regret!"

As Stanley continued speaking, even Xiuxoke felt somewhat moved. He suddenly recalled a poem his son had mentioned, fitting with the Mexica concept of fate and the current scene, and recited it softly.

"When the God of Destiny favors you, the divine sky and earth both grant you the force of victory! But the moment the God of Destiny departs, even a hero of unparalleled grandeur can only sigh helplessly at his downfall!"

"Eh? Xiuxoke, that's a fine poem! Who said it? It surely doesn't sound like something you could come up with."

Stanley exclaimed admiringly, then suspiciously eyed Xiuxoke.



Xiusoke's face suddenly turned red. Yet his son's poem, if copied, was just that, and no harsh words about the father would suffice.

"Of course, it's mine!..."

Both men, holding their Long Spears, stood with their backs to the Great Pyramid Temple, laughing and talking as such. Soon, the sun rose high into the sky, brightening the day.

Suddenly, a frenzied roar of cheers erupted from the plaza of the Temple District. In an instant, it rose like thunder, shaking the heavens and the earth! Everyone present, whether Nobility, Priest, warrior, or even foreign Envoy, all showed their heartfelt reverence, bowing like bent maize stalks!

The two captains instantly turned solemn. They grasped their Long Spears, bowed their heads, and knelt on one knee. Such a display of universal submission, both domestic and foreign, could only mean one thing! Soon, hundreds of Priests together cried out in praise. The acclaim cascaded from the heights, profoundly stirring everyone's heart.

"Praise the Chief Divine! The great Xiwakowatle, the Mexica's immortal sun, the embodiment of the Chief Divine, the supreme elder, descended among us!"

Chapter 568 - New Year's Grand Ceremony, Elder's Heart

The Priest's praise sounded like the first thunder of winter, emanating powerfully to reach the earth, penetrating directly into the ears of the prostrate masses. In an instant, there was silence all around. The Temple Plaza in front of the Great Temple suddenly fell quiet, save for the deep, short breaths and the crackling of the Sacred Fire.

The elder, expressionless, rose from the stone chair in front of the Temple and walked toward the edge of the Great Temple's pyramid.

He was clad in a black Ceremonial Dress robe, which hid his gaunt figure; on his head, he wore an ancient, elongated Feather Crown, covering his completely white hair. In his right hand, he still held the Scepter of the Chief Minister, his companion for over fifty years.

He moved with slow and firm steps, gradually appearing before the eyes of the multitude, just as his old and majestic visage slowly impressed itself upon the hearts of the people. A step behind him followed the High Priest, also in a Feather Crown Ceremonial Dress, slightly shorter in stature. Two steps further behind, the statue-like Guard Captain, carrying a pottery jar, followed with equally precise steps, closely shadowing behind.

At the edge of the Temple, in front of the Sacred Fire, the elder stopped, the firelight illuminating his profound eyes. His tall figure finally came fully into view of the masses at the highest point of the pyramid, receiving their adoration! Then, the elder slowly raised his right arm, lifting the Chief's Scepter above his head, just as he had done fifty years ago!

"We-we! Elder! ... Immortal Sun! Sun! ..."

The second clap of thunder exploded at this moment! Led by the Priest, from the central Temple to the edges of the Temple District, everyone frantically cheered together. At this moment, even the usually stoic Xiuxoke and the flamboyantly proud Stanley were excitedly red-eyed, fist-pumping and shouting aloud!

As the Chief Minister of the Alliance, Elder Trakel Er was now eighty-eight years old! Having lived through five monarchs, he had effectively controlled the Alliance from behind the scenes for half a

century, the true immortal sun of the Mexica! Three generations of Mexica grew up listening to his legends, filled with boundless reverence, and fearfully followed his reformatory decrees.

Faced with this living legend, envoys from all countries bowed simultaneously, their hearts filled with both deep fear and sincere lamentation. The Mexica elder was indeed still alive!

In an era where the average lifespan barely exceeded twenty years, such a long-lived elder was like an immortal nightmare, constantly looming over the hearts of all factions under heaven. It could be said that as long as the suppressive elder of the Alliance lived another day, all the Great Nobility with different dreams could only remain concealed and endure. The whole Mexica Alliance was a closely connected entity! Even if the centralization reforms of religion and politics stirred up raging storms, the united rock of the Alliance remained intact and unbreachable!

The hysterical cheers continued for dozens of breaths until the elder slowly retracted his scepter, and the clamor gradually subsided. Then, the High Priest took a deep breath, stepped forward, and, looking up at the sky, roared with all his might.

"The sun rises, Chief Divine Huitzilopochtli ascends to the highest! The Chief Divine blesses the Alliance, the divine war on the west achieved perfect victory! The Chief Divine has devoured the Tarasco three gods, reigning over the sun, the moon, and the earth! He is omnipotent!"

"Praise the Chief Divine! God protects the Alliance!"

The High Priest raised the Divine Staff and roared loudly.

"Praise the Chief Divine! God protects the Alliance!"

Hundreds of Priests prayed simultaneously, their voices loud and fervent, reaching the skies.

"Praise the Chief Divine! God protects the Alliance!"

Tens of thousands of Capital City citizens shouted fanatically, like the third thunderbolt, scattering birds across the sky.

Below the Great Temple, Xiuxoke was fervent and also shouted loudly. This declaration after the victory was especially exhilarating.

"The Chief Divine maintains the world's rotation, needing Holy Blood to perfect the sun! The evil three gods are dead, and their Divine Descendants must offer Holy Blood, to make the Chief Divine smile contentedly! The Divine says, His mercy is like the sun, shining on every pure heart, sowing into every clean soul! ...The world has the same origin, coming from the Olmecs. Prepetcha and Mexica are descendants of the Olmecs, brothers from the previous Era. The sun will shine on them equally, and the Chief Divine will lead them on the right path! ...Thus, commoners may convert, but Divine Descendants must be sacrificed!"

The vast plaza was quiet and solemn, with only the Priests repeating the divine decree. Soon, low murmurs began to arise among the nobles and Samurai of the Alliance. They were not doubting but slightly puzzled.

"Prepetcha are our brothers?"

Hearing this, the towering Stanley grimaced, then asked, puzzled,

"What are the Olmecs?"

"The Olmecs are Olmec people, the common ancestors of all factions under heaven."

Xiuxoke responded calmly and confidently. He knew this was a recently circulated statement from Qinchongcan City, also quite popular among the Prepetcha. A fief in the middle of the lake had sent envoys to the elder and the High Priest, reporting the newly compiled doctrine. It seemed, this doctrine had been adapted and accepted by the High Priests as a tool for conquering the world.

"Eh? Aren't our ancestors the Aztecs? The legendary origin Divine Mountain is in the far northwest of the world!"

Stanley scratched his head, looked toward the northwest sky, and then back at Xiuxoke.

"Uh, the Aztecs are also descendants of the Olmecs... Trust me, the world has the same origin, coming from the Olmecs!"

Xiuxoke responded confidently. Stanley grimaced again but did not ask further. He was somewhat unsure, but since the High Priest had spoken on behalf of the elder, it probably was so!

Chapter 569 - New Year's Grand Ceremony, Elder's Heart\_2

...

"Even if we share the same ancestors, it's definitely us Mexica people who fight the best!"

In a corner of the plaza, envoys from all over the world exchanged glances with each other. A vague premonition arose in their hearts. Such a declaration could change the pattern of the world... but they couldn't ponder it deeply at the moment because the announcement was followed by a sacrifice!

"The Sun awakens, opening its red eyes! The Chief Divine descends, witnessing the blood-red future! We offer Holy Blood to the Chief Divine, blessing the world with devout hearts!... Grateful to the Chief Divine, we offer Holy Blood!"

"Grateful to the Chief Divine, we offer Holy Blood!"

Amidst the priests' shouts, the murmurs ceased instantly. The multitude in the plaza fell silent for a moment. Then, the fourth thunderous roar of astonishment exploded, terrifying all the foreign envoys.

"Sacrifice, sacrifice, sacrifice!"

Atop the towering pyramid, the multitudes bowed and rose like a swarm of ants. The waves of their cries rose from the foot and dispersed into the far sky with the long winds. The High Priest slightly tilted his head, caught the godlike expression of the Elder, and understandingly waved the Divine Staff in his hand, commanding loudly.

"Begin the sacrifice!"

Hundreds of Temple Guards obeyed the command. Fully armed Religious Knights escorted the numb-faced Tarasco nobility towards their destined fate. The Great Sacrifice would last three days, with 800 nobility offered each day. It was a number endowed with Divinity, symbolizing the cycle of Eras.

Xiuxoke gazed intently as two rows of the blue procession, like serpents, wound for miles, slowly flowing toward the peak of the Twin Pyramids, to the two Sacrificial Stones in front of the Temple. There, twelve Elder Priests had already split into two groups, daggers of Obsidian in hand, ready to proceed. Soon, a familiar and aged cry echoed in the up and down of the Great Temple.

"Descendant of the Rubber People, Akanbaro State's nobility, Kukuna II, goes to the Sun God's domain! His soul, following its own will, shall meet with his father who went to the Divine Kingdom, and find eternal peace!"

"Thud, thud... boom..."

A fresh corpse rolled down from the top of the Great Temple, then stopped before Xiuxoke, blocked by the statue of the Moon Goddess. The resolute samurai glanced at the young face and the terror in the eyes just before death, and shook his head lightly.

Stanley stood upright next to him and laughed heartily.

"Haha, someone is named Kukuna? In our Mexica language, Keke Lou means a foolish turkey, right?"

"In the Prepetcha language, Kukuna also means turkey. I remember this family; encountered them at the North Coast Wooden Fort and the Rivermouth Fort."

"Tsk tsk, what a name! Kukuna II, haha, so his father was also a Kukuna turkey? A turkey-like, weak Prepetcha!"

"Actually not. His father died in battle, was quite the warrior! But this fellow, seems like he was captured by the Militia..."

The two men, accustomed to bloodshed, gazed at the fresh red on the ground and chatted indifferently. Suddenly, another roar of cheers went up like thunder, resounding under the gradually reddening Great Temple.

"We-we! Elder!! Sun!!!"

The Elder, expressionless, slowly raised the Divine Staff in his right hand. Then, he stretched out his left hand and took from the reverent High Priest a throbbing, living heart. The boiling cheers reached their peak! Under the watchful eyes of the multitude, the Elder raised his left hand and threw the living heart forcefully into the blazing Sacred Fire.

The blue smoke rose gently, the blood turned into char, and a soul was thus offered to the Chief Divine. The Elder calmly watched the Sacred Fire for a moment, then slowly turned and walked toward the Temple behind him. There was a special priest's passage leading to the adjacent Chief Palace.



"Praise to the Chief Divine! The great Xiwakowatle, the undying sun of the Mexica people, the incarnation of the lofty Chief Divine, the supreme Elder, returns to the Throne of the Gods!"

With the High Priests' laudation, tens of thousands of Mexica Citizens bowed again, reverently seeing off the departing deity among men.

The Elder's demeanor was calm, his steps were steady. He exuded no sign of fatigue or decline. He seemed like the sun and moon of the heavens, as though he would eternally last. Behind him, the Guard Captain still held the clay pot, remaining close at all times.

As the light dimmed and the shadows slowly engulfed, the Elder stepped into the towering Temple, leaving behind the increasingly fervent ceremony. The noises of life faded in a moment, leaving only death-like silence. The Elder walked into the downward sloping passage, now with no one else around. Finally, he stopped, his body suddenly slumped, leaning against the cold stone wall.

"Venerable!"

...

The Guard Commander let out a low call and hurried forward, just in time to support the Elder's arm. "Thump," the long Feather Crown fell from the elder's head, his completely white hair becoming disheveled. The swaying shadow brought a breeze that revealed the frail body beneath the voluminous black robe, already thin and bony. Underneath the rich scent of spices was an unmistakable old man's smell!

"Venerable One... Your Potion!"

The Guard Commander carefully supported the Elder, allowing the latter to lean on his shoulder. Then, he opened a clay jar and took out a jar of pale yellow potion.

"No need, Cevali."

In the Nava language, Cevali means "shadow." The indistinctly present shadow was always loyally attached to the mountain, never leaving for a moment.

The Elder closed his eyes, resting for a good while before he calmly opened them again, emitting a rare sigh.

"Stimulating potions borrow from life yet to come. And I don't have much life left... The Alliance can't survive without me. I must try to live a little longer."

It took another good while before the Elder regained his strength. He slowly got up, steadied himself, and reached out to take the Feather Crown and put it on again. A strong, sweet, and bloody smell assaulted his nose as the Elder shifted his gaze to his left hand, now covered in fresh red.

"Cevali."

"Respected Elder."

"Tell me honestly, who do you think can stabilise the hearts of the Alliance after I die?"

"Ah, this... Venerable One, you are the immortal Sun..."

"Speak."

His calm words carried a gentle tone yet held an irresistible force. Cevali was silent for a moment before he succinctly replied.

"The High Priest and the King. Together, they are enough."

"The High Priest..."

The Elder gazed at his bloodied left hand, his eyes as deep and dark as the ocean floor. After a long moment, he began to speak emotionlessly.

"What if, the High Priest departs before me?"

At these words, Cevali's expression changed subtly. He thought carefully for a moment, then gently shook his head, remaining silent.

"Hmm. The Holy City line..."

The Elder closed his eyes and slowly withdrew his left hand. In his weathered heart, the image of a young and handsome face suddenly flashed.

"The vibrancy of youth, truly enviable..."

After a lengthy silence, the Elder sighed deeply. He had come all the way from the past century, his spirit as mighty as the mountains and seas. In this world, the only thing that could make him sigh was the merciless passage of time.

"Let's go."

The old Elder took his steps, slowly descending underground. Cevali, clutching the clay jar tight like a silent sculpture, followed closely behind. The New Year's grand celebration was reaching its climax behind them!

Name after name, one fresh life after another, and soul after soul! The citizens of the Capital were engulfed in sheer fervor. The boiling cheers penetrated the stone walls, crossing past and present, and moving towards a brand new future!

Chapter 570 - New Year's Grand Ceremony, King's Will

The blazing Sun rose higher, unleashing endless light and heat, showering the grand Great Pyramid Temple with its glow. The shadow of the pyramid gradually retracted, leaving only the profound

darkness within the Temple. The elders vanished into the darkness, while the High Priest's arms lifted in the light, the ritual climbed toward its climax!

One after another, the blue Sacrifices ascended the platform amid fervent cheers that pierced the heavens. The Sun God opened His eyes indifferently. He watched the brilliant colors, admired the scroll of life; He inhaled the wafting divine smoke, demanding the tribute of souls; He licked the burning flames, devouring the flesh and blood of the Sacrifices. Finally, with the priests' impassioned chanting, He let out a contented sigh, thunderous like Thunderbolt, shaking heaven and earth, dispatching His avatar to the world of men!

"Boom, boom, boom!"

On the pure gold gun mounts, three massive new wooden cannons aimed at the sky were fired, suddenly bursting forth with a shocking roar! The cannon wind swept through, and the banners of the trinity of deities fluttered behind the gun mounts. Sequentially depicted on the banners were the three images of Huitzilopochtli: the Chief Divine seated upon the Throne of the Gods, the Sun God donning the Golden Crown, and the War God with Lightning in his grasp. This signified that the wooden cannons before them were indeed Divine Artifacts granted by the deities!

The intense roar of the cannon conveyed a chilling Divine Might, causing the sky to shake and the earth to tremble, bringing silence all around! Instantly, the multitudes on the plaza prostrated themselves, bowing in awe beneath the Divine Might, and envoys from various states also knelt in frightened veneration. The High Priest then loudly proclaimed.

"Praise the Chief Divine! The avatar of the Sun God, Great Tlatoani of the Alliance, the supreme King, graced the ritual!"

With a cold expression, Aweit gripped the Divine Staff in his hand and walked to the edge of the Great Pyramid Temple. He was clad in the king's attire adorned with the image of the sun, topped with an exquisite Feather Crown of Obsidian, and wore on his back a magnificent cape inlaid with gemstones. For today's ritual, he had arrived early at the side chamber next to the Great Temple to prepare. Only after the immortal elders left did he appear as the sole King.

At this moment, the King ascended the pinnacle, overlooking the crowd like ants, reveling in the prostration and reverence of his Citizens. A faint smile curved his lips. His gaze swept over the area around the pyramid, the still-smoking massive wooden cannons, and the busy royal cannoneers loading them, inwardly nodding.

"Such roaring wooden cannons can awe the heart! They are indeed fitting for use in rituals, to declare the Divine Might of the Royal Family!"

Ever since he first witnessed the power of the wooden cannons, Aweit had completely taken a liking to this new type of weaponry. More precisely, he appreciated the tremendous boom of the explosions.

In the eyes of the King, who reigned supreme over the hearts of people, the raw power of the wooden cannons was actually not astonishing. However, in this era of blind faith in the deities, if one were to cloak the wooden cannons in a veil of Divinity, presenting them as Divine Artifacts bestowed by the deities, they could strike directly at the heart on the battlefield, achieving what thousands of Samurai could not! During the battle with the Tlaxcala legion, the roar of the wooden cannon had successfully demoralized the enemy. Similarly, the mock cannons in the ritual could also intimidate the Citizens and states!

With a commanding presence, Aweit oversaw the scene for nearly a Quarter, while the crowd on the plaza remained motionless, crawling in reverence for a long time. Only when he saw the cannoneers had finished loading did the King lift the Divine Staff high, and bellow with a stern voice.

"Under the Chief Divine's protection, a great victory in battle! To the Chief Divine, I offer the most precious Sacrifice! He is the King of the Tarasco Kingdom, the Cazonci of the Prepetcha people, the Divine Descendant King Su'angua!"

"Sacrifice the King of Tarasco, Su'angua!... Boom, boom, boom...!"

Hundreds of priests chanted together, followed by three more roars of the deities. The community priests shouted the will of the gods, and the citizens of the twenty-five thousand Capital City gradually quieted down.

Then, the distant sound of a Bamboo Flute erupted at the end of the main road. Encircled by nearly a hundred Samurai, a group of forty strong men shouldering a wide wooden platform approached slowly from miles away. They passed in front of the dwellings of common folk, through the gardens of the Nobility, beyond the Temple Pyramid of the priests, and under the gaze of countless eyes amidst the frenzied shouts of the populace, they finally arrived at the Temple Plaza!

Xiuxoke gripped his Long Spears tightly, his eyes widened as he watched the wooden platform draw nearer.

Atop the splendid wooden platform sat a silent young man surrounded by four lovely young Priestesses. He was dressed in the Divine Eagle warrior attire of Tarasco, wearing the forked Kingdom Crown on his head. Although his face was pale, it still bore a trace of his long-held authority. Led by the priests, the platform made a deliberate detour around the area where the envoys gathered, evoking gasps of shock.

"It really is, it really is... the King of Tarasco... Su'angua!"

"He was captured alive and brought here as a Sacrifice for the Alliance!"

"The Tarasco Kingdom, mighty for two hundred years, has met such an end!..."

"Ah, your Majesty!..."

The wooden platform slowly moved past, and Su'angua kept his head bowed motionless as if asleep. It wasn't until he passed the lineup of blue Sacrifices and heard the suppressed, familiar shouts that he opened his eyes again. Figures of familiar and unfamiliar Tarascan Great Nobility appeared and disappeared before the King's eyes, stirring ripples in his deathly still eyes.

"The Divine Descendant of the Kingdom, the Divine Eagle King, journey together to the Divine Kingdom, facing the ancient ancestors... Ah, how splendid!"

The wooden platform slowly came to rest in front of the Great Temple, then thudded heavily onto the ground. With a rueful smile, Su'angua stood up from the platform, calmly welcoming his fated destiny. He ascended the sixty-meter Great Pyramid Temple one step at a time, walking past the hundreds of priests and warriors, until he reached the last step where the raging Sacred Fire reflected on his pale and tranquil face. Not far away, Aweit lifted his Feather Crown, his lips bursting into a smile, as if he were the jubilant Sun God welcoming him.