

Civilization 591

Chapter 591 - Life and Death

The scorching sun cast its rays, the bonfire sent up blue smoke, and the Priest blew the bone horn. The tribal chieftains' gazes were fervent as they looked toward the two captains by the fire pond, shouting out in excitement.

Jiowar and Nelpa each held a war club, standing opposite each other. According to tribal tradition, both were without shields, and victory or defeat would be determined in moments. Jiowar raised his war club in front, slightly retracting his right arm, adopting a defensive stance.

"Come on, Nelpa. Attack with all your might! Just like when you were a child and I trained you in martial arts!" At these words, Nelpa's gaze flashed. The two were eight years apart in age, both born in the mountain city from Divine Descendant lineage, having known each other since childhood, fighting side by side many times... Nelpa shook his head vigorously, saying in a deep voice,

"Jiowar, I thank you for your teachings back then. I have surpassed you in martial arts! You were once a brother I respected, but now, you are mistaken!"

Having said this, Nelpa's expression became resolute. He took small steps, raising his war club diagonally, slowly advancing toward Jiowar, then suddenly stepped forward and made a fierce diagonal chop!

Expecting this powerful strike, Jiowar was prepared. He agilely stepped back, then swung his war club up to block, emitting a "thud" from their clashing. The weapons touched and instantly separated; Nelpa immediately shifted his steps to the left, changing position, and furiously swung out his war club in another swift strike!

Jiowar slightly furrowed his brows, retreating and blocking again. Nelpa was in his early thirties, at the peak of his physical condition, very swift and powerful, his battle technique not lacking in the slightest, even more fierce! He was like a fluttering butterfly, constantly circling Jiowar, each approach a strike aimed at vital points!

As both rapidly exhausted their strength, Jiowar's brow furrowed deeper and deeper, his blocking movements becoming increasingly strenuous. He was forced to keep moving back, soon reaching the fire of the fire pond, with no room to retreat! Seeing this, a light flashed in Nelpa's eyes, his face revealing a victorious smile, then shifting to faint sadness.

"Jiowar, my brother. You have aged, you are mistaken. Allow me to send you on your way! Roar!"

Nelpa let out a dull growl, like the roar of a fierce beast. He strode forward, no longer holding back, rushing within two steps of Jiowar. Then, he made a swift vertical chop, drawing his opponent's war club upward, followed by a twist of his own club, both hands gripping, tracing a clever arc toward his opponent's exposed waist and abdomen, delivering a lethal horizontal slash!

"It's over!"

Jiowar's tightly furrowed brow suddenly loosened, turning into an indifferent smile. He murmured softly, similarly gripping the club with both hands, making the exact same move, powerfully slashing horizontally toward his opponent's chest and neck.

"Chief Divine!"

The tribal chieftains at the venue suddenly gasped. Both captains simultaneously slashing at each other's vital points, were they going to die together?

"Sss... clang!"

The swinging war club successfully cut through the cotton robe, breaking the surface of the cotton armor, then suddenly paused, emitting a sharp metallic clash!

"What? This!..."

Nelpa's confident expression instantly froze. He struck his opponent's vital point first, yet his slash hit solid metal, unable to penetrate his opponent's armor and inflict any real damage!

"Roar!"

Jiowar cried out in pain, yet his attacking movements were not deformed, remaining firm and forceful, striking the vital spot.

The war club arrived in an instant, with Nelpa too old to dodge. He exerted all his strength, slightly turning his body, then felt an intense pain in his chest.

"Ah!"

Jiowar penetrated the cotton armor with a successful strike, giving his opponent no chance for a turnaround. He advanced another step forward, pulling out the bronze axe from his waist with his left hand, mercilessly chopping toward Nelpa's neck!

"Ugh... spur..."

Blood instantly spurted, splattering all over Jiowar's face and head, turning his world a bloody red. Nelpa issued only a half-scream, suddenly losing all strength. Like a punctured swim bladder, he lay there bleeding out, collapsing limply to the ground.

Jiowar swiftly retreated two steps, quickly wiping the warm blood splattered into his eyes with his sleeve. Then, he stared at the motionless Nelpa, gripping his weapon, and slowly walked forward.

Nelpa's eyes were wide open, quietly lying on the ground, gazing at the profound sky. His mouth moved silently, but produced no sound, only the soft whisper of flowing blood. Jiowar looked on for a moment, then carefully crouched down, putting his ear close to Nelpa's mouth.

"...wa...you...wrong..."

The last brightness burst in Nelpa's eyes. He tried to speak, but could only utter faint whimpers. Jiowar had just managed to make out three words when the whimpers completely disappeared into the wind.

Jiowar lowered his gaze, extending his hand to close Nelpa's wide-open eyes. Memories surfaced in his mind, then he forcefully suppressed them. After a while, he finally spoke to his friend who could no longer hear,

"This tumultuous world, roiling like cloudy liquor, this mountain city so remote, merely the residue of brewing... Nelpa, our clinking glasses had no right or wrong, only to the death..."

Jiowar finished speaking softly, closed his eyes for a few moments as if in silent prayer. Soon, the tribal chieftains' shouts vigorously resounded, the swelling cries lifting him to the heights they craved!

"Leader of the mountain city!"

"Chieftain of the Otomi people!"

"Bird hunter, king of bird hunters!..."

Listening to the cheers of the crowd, Jiowar slowly stood up, his face alight with a joyous smile. In the myths passed down, the ancestors of the Otomi were hunters from the northern highlands, and the meaning of Otomi is "bird hunter." They settled in towering mountain cities and acquired a certain divinity from the divine birds of the sky.

"Ancestors bear witness! The chieftain of the mountain city ancestral lands, the inheritor of the ancestor's scepter, is the mountain city's Divine Descendant Nobility, Jiowar!"

An elderly woman's voice rang out high, declaring an end to the election. All eyes focused on the newly standing speaker, no longer paying attention to the blood-stained corpse lying down. Jiowar walked forward, taking the ancestral scepter from the former chieftain's wife, as cheers erupted once more.

Jiowar looked around, taking steps toward the east side of the assembly. He came before Xiulote, slowly knelt on one knee, and then lifted the scepter with both hands, respectfully bowing his head.

"Your Highness, I dedicate the glory of the Otomi to you, to the supreme King, to the Otomi's Sun!"

The assembly hall fell silent immediately; the chieftains exchanged glances—this was a sacred ritual of allegiance.

Under the Wolf Banner, Xiulote smiled with satisfaction. He took Jiowar's scepter, firmly grasped the other's hair, and then returned the scepter to Jiowar's hands. Then, he removed the Sun Amulet from his neck and, in front of everyone, placed it around Jiowar's neck.

"The highest Chief Divine blesses you! Jiowar, the great Alliance witnesses everything. From today, you are the City Lord of Otapan, the leader of the Otomi!"

Jiowar stood up, turning toward the people in the assembly. He stood beside the king, raising the ancestral scepter high with one hand and clasping the Sun Amulet around his neck with the other. Seeing this historic moment, the tribal leaders were momentarily speechless, then suddenly erupted into fervent cheers.

"The City Lord of the Mexica Alliance, the leader of the Otomi!..."

The eyes of the Saka Priest burned with fire. He stepped over Nelpa's cold corpse without a glance. Under everyone's gaze, the Chaos Priest approached Jiowar and shouted angrily.

"Jiowar, as the military leader of the tribe, you have converted to the War God of the Mexica!"

"Saka Priest, the War God is also our divinity, protecting the Otomi,"

Action had replied, narrowing his eyes calmly.

"This is outright betrayal! Under your and Olte's leadership, the Otomi are heading down a path of evil, forsaken by our Ancestor Divine!"

Saka roared, turning to the tribal leaders present and loudly cursing.

"To ally with the greedy Mexica, how could you not pay a price? Standing in front of our ancestors' tombs, abandoning the faith of the Ancestor Divine, do you not feel ashamed?!"

Upon hearing this, many tribal leaders turned their heads away, unable to face Saka's eyes, their guilt evident. Seeing this, Xiulote slightly furrowed his brows, quietly tapping Jiowar on the shoulder.

"Saka, get out of the mountain city, you are the one betraying the tribe!"

Jiowar, holding the Divine Staff high, sternly reprimanded.

"Nelpa just confessed to me in his dying words!"

"He said, the reason you oppose the Mexica and reject the Alliance's military assistance is that you had already conspired with the northern Canine Descendants, made kneeling agreements, and forfeited the lands of Pamus State! Your actions now are all for power, not considering the future of the Otomi at all!"

Hearing this, the tribal leaders all showed a change in expression. Some kept silent, others showed doubt, all turning their esteemed gazes to Saka Priest.

"What? What did you say?!"

Shocked by the accusation, Saka's eyes turned red with anger.

"This is complete slander!"

"Saka, a new leader of the mountain city has been elected! Though you are the revered Chaos Priest, the Priesthood of the mountain city does not welcome you. Please leave immediately, return to your family's fief! A truly noble priest should lead warriors to the northern frontlines, to fight against the ferocious Canine Descendants, and not cause internal strife in the ancestral lands!"

Olte raised the scepter and stepped forward. He quietly watched Saka's reddened eyes, Saka staring back intensely. After a moment, Saka glanced at the expressions of the surrounding tribal leaders, gritted his teeth.

"Olte, you are wrong! Time of the Ancestor Divine will prove everything, we shall meet again!"

After speaking, Saka led dozens of his direct lineage Temple priests and hundreds of loyal family warriors, dejectedly heading out of the city.

Olte looked toward Xiulote, and the king nodded affirmatively. Five hundred barbarian mercenaries had already been ambushed in the forests outside of the city, and three hundred Jaguar Warriors were in charge of the cleanup. The old priest looked again at the backs of Saka and the priests, sighing heavily.

"Saka, we'll meet again... Divine Kingdom, see you again!"

Chapter 592 - Canine Descendants Scout, Guajili Tribe

The end of April carried the sound of the wind, and within the wind was hidden the roar of thunder. The thunder was disrupted by the rapid cries of battle, startling flocks of birds throughout the forest. The fighting on the northern border never ceased, as thousands of Canine Descendants continued to raid southward, constantly battling with the warriors of the Otapan State. Soon after, hundreds of Mexica scouts also joined the fray. The kingdom's elite warriors, fully armed and led by Otomi scouts, engaged in continuous combat with the Guajili people and gained a definitive upper hand.

After several battles, the invading Guajili Tribe sensed something different. Soon, a brutal ambush unfolded in the mountain forests, and two red-haired senior Guajili warriors, with solemn expressions, carefully examined the bodies of a few new enemies.

Due to low productivity, the Guajili people were still in the tribal era of wilderness, with a primitive tribal alliance just beginning to form. The populations of the large tribes were limited, the largest numbering only around ten thousand. There was no significant division of wealth within the tribes, and naturally, there were no nobles or samurai.

Within the Guajili tribe, apart from a very small number of priests, there were usually just four brutal levels: the first level comprised boys who could not fight and could be abandoned by the tribe at any time; the second level consisted of young men who could fight and procreate, considered the foundation of tribal survival; the third level included warriors skilled in combat, each a core of tribal strength; the last were senior warriors who had survived battles and truly held power within the tribe. These senior warriors often dyed their hair the sacred red, as a symbol of being blessed by the spirits. As for the old and weak who could neither fight nor labor hard, they were generally not treated as humans and did not live long.

"Damn it! Amoxtli, where did these enemies come from? They're as hard and prickly as highland cacti!"

Looking at the bodies of the fallen Canine Descendants around him, the young red-haired warrior growled in anger.

"I used a hundred-man team, yet couldn't surround even twenty of them! The tribe lost twenty-five warriors to leave less than ten bodies!"

"Ivican, in the wilderness, angry coyotes cannot catch vigilant gazelles. You need to suppress your anger, learn to observe and wait."

The older red-haired warrior, Amoxltli, shook his head. He carefully touched the bodies in front of him, then arranged what he found in a row.

"A short obsidian dagger, an obsidian club, five packages of replaceable obsidian blades. Hiss, this is a wealthy tribe indeed!"

Amoxltli exclaimed in surprise. He continued his inspection, a hint of confusion in his expression.

"A golden necklace with sun and hummingbirds, seems like a prayer tool. Huh, it's not wooden, but the city-state people's favorite gold?"

"A short-handled...axe? What is this made of? Really sharp and tough, good stuff!"

"Mmm, a sturdy vine hat, a shield of wooden vine, and a complete set of cotton armor, the vital parts strengthened with leather. Hmm, this smell, is it soaked in precious oils? No wonder the warriors' hunting bows couldn't penetrate!"

"Finally, a small cotton bag containing...dry leaves and fresh grass?"

Amoxltli examined it for a moment, but it revealed nothing. He turned and shouted loudly.

"Ivican, you are the scout captain of the 'Red Fox' tribe, with more inherited knowledge than me. Come and take a look, what are these?"

Ivican approached, frowning. He picked up the leaves, sniffed them hard, and then tasted a bit of the fresh grass.

"Hmm, feather-like leaves, special fragrance, ink tree leaves? A spicy taste and fresh juice, is it hot herb grass? Ah, these are expensive medicinal herbs carefully collected and treasured by tribal priests for healing and stopping blood, appearing on an ordinary scout! Damn it, damn it!"

Suddenly inflamed by something, Ivican's anger blazed like a flame. He furiously pulled a cactus fruit from his waist and threw it high into the sky. Then, the scout captain removed the small hunting bow from his back, fitted a reed shaft with a beast fang arrow, and "whoosh, whoosh, whoosh" shot into the sky!

His archery was so exquisite that each arrow hit the cactus fruit accurately, even aligning with the previous arrow! The fist-sized fruit stayed in the air for a good dozen breaths before turning into dozens of pieces, scattering onto the ground.

"Wow, praise the Wind God, truly the archery of a Divine Eagle shooter! Worthy of being the great tribe's scout captain!"

Amoxtli smiled broadly, his praise genuine. After the outburst, Ivican's emotions finally settled. He stamped his foot fiercely.

"Damn it! Good shooting, but what does it matter? These new enemies are well-equipped and formidable fighters, completely unlike the poor, battle-shy Otomi people! Each one of them is richer,

each has sturdy armor and a helmet, even thick shields! Our tribal archers, proud of their skill, cannot break their defense, causing effective damage!"

Ivican gritted his teeth. He had only a hunting bow, a stone long spear, tattered cotton armor, and an obsidian dagger. He had recently seized the cotton armor and dagger from the Otomi. Now, as the scout captain looked at the equipment laid out on the ground, his eyes reddened as he continued to angrily curse.

"Damn it! From where does this enormous tribe come? War clubs, short daggers, hand axes, shields... the weaponry of a single scout enough to arm three tribal warriors! Their fighting skills far surpass the Otomi, and their will to fight is much stronger. Even when surrounded by many times their number of enemies, no one wavered or surrendered. Truly dangerous Jaguars! With spring plowing imminent, how can the tribe move south and settle peacefully without understanding these people?"

"Ivican, I have asked the captured Otomi prisoners. These men are Aztec samurai, senior warriors of the Mexico Alliance. They were reinforcements invited by the Otomi, coming from the southern Mikenque Lake Region!"

"Aztecs? Ah, the revered Cactus Tribe of the Rock who worship the sun? I have indeed heard of their prowess in battle... Mikenque Lake Region? Isn't that the territory of the Divine Eagle Tribe? How come there are Aztecs there?"

"A year ago, the powerful Divine Eagle Tribe was annihilated by the even more powerful Aztecs. On the land of the Divine Eagle Tribe, the Great Chief of the Aztecs appointed a new Great Chief, Xiulote. It is said that he is a descendant of the God of Death and possesses the spells of spirits, equally formidable..."

Amoxтли spoke earnestly, relaying a message that had been passed down several times.

"Right, he is also the sworn elder brother of the new leader of the Otomi. At the request of the Otomi, he has led troops north to provide support this time, bringing with him a full ten thousand warriors!"

"What? There are ten thousand such warriors?"

Ivican took a sharp breath. He looked skeptical and turned to Amoxtli.

"I don't believe it! Is this information accurate? Can the captured prisoners even count that many people?"

"I don't know, I don't believe it either. There are a few new Otomi captives in the tribe's camp, one of whom seems to be some nobility. You can go ask them yourself."

Amoxtli shook his head. Such a huge number, he was definitely uncertain, thus equally skeptical.

"Hmm! When the coyote hunts the antelope, where can it expose its back to the risky watch of the golden eagle? Amoxtli, the matter is urgent, let's head north, back to your tribe's camp now!"

Amoxtli nodded in agreement. He took a few steps forward, then suddenly remembered something and quickly turned back. Following that, he grabbed a short dagger from the ground, clasp it in his hand; picked up a bronze axe, tucking it by his waist; and finally, collected the cloth bag of herbs, carefully tucking it into his chest.

Ivican turned his head, seeing Amoxtli still reluctant and yelled loudly in frustration.

"Dammit! Amoxtli, hurry up, important matters first! I will have the warriors save you a set of equipment!"

"Ah, alright then! Ivican, my friend, make sure your words count!"

Amoxtli reluctantly glanced at the worn cotton armor on the ground, then finally turned and began to run swiftly.

The run of a canine descendant is always swift. The group hurried north, and within a day, they returned to the camp. Ivican promptly called the Otomi prisoners. After thoroughly questioning them for half a day, his expression became solemn, and he immediately took the prisoners northward.

The scout team journeyed long distances, first crossing the southern borders of Pamus State, then running for two more days, and finally arrived at a warm valley. Towering mountains blocked the northern cold waves, isolating the dangerous cold outside. Babbling streams flowed down from the mountains, gathering in a shallow lake at the lower end of the valley.

Thousands of Guajili canine descendants had settled by the lakeside of the valley. A red fox flag, a simple wooden fence, and hundreds of thatched huts formed the new campsite of the "Red Fox" tribe.

Around the campsite, two hundred scout warriors patrolled. Seeing the distant arrival of Ivican's squad, they respectfully saluted the red-haired leader. Inside the camp, even more tribal warriors shouted, waving their weapons, maintaining the order of the tribe.

Thousands of Otomi civilians, along with an equal number of Guajili tribals, busied themselves in the fertile soil by the lake. Most of these people were pale and thin, staggering as they engaged in extremely laborious work, yet they had very little food; every day, people fell and did not rise again. Under the strict orders of their leader, they burned the trees by the lake, cleared stones from the soil, pulled weeds from the fields, and worked hard to level the land, preparing it for spring plowing.

Ivican stopped walking and looked towards the tribe in front of him. He was unconcerned about the piles of corpses in the corners, only seeing a bustling sign of life. The tribe struggled out from the cold snap, much like the grass that grows from the crevices of rocks, filled with new hope!

The air by the lake was slightly moist, refreshing the spirits. The scout captain took several deep breaths to stabilize his emotions before taking the Otomi prisoners to the longhouse in the center of the tribe.

Night fell and the moon rose, and the campfire in the longhouse burned all night until dawn. The next morning, several teams of envoys hurriedly departed, heading towards the surrounding large tribes. After that, as day and night changed, the envoys hurried back and forth, and scouts darted about like shot feathers.

As the center of the envoys' exchanges, the chieftain's longhouse was always brightly lit day and night. Senior warriors continuously held meetings, and the noisy disputes emanated from the center of the tribe. Ten days quickly passed before the disputes subsided and the assembly barely reached a consensus.

That day, the canine descendant's camp was abuzz. The tribe's horns sounded high and the exhilarating war drums roared like sudden rain. Soon, a hundred skilled red-haired warriors, each carrying a hunting bow, along with five hundred veteran tribal warriors, quickly left the camp. They ran like a pack of rampaging coyotes, emitting low roars, and soon blended into the southern woods, completely vanishing from sight.

Chapter 593 - Two Hundred Ninety-One: The May Cicadas Singing

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The Canine Descendants' warriors headed south, while the Allied Forces' scouts went north. As both approached each other for reconnaissance, they were destined to meet among the mountain forests of the Highland. From Otapan State to Pamus State, skirmishes between scout squads were unending, with hundreds of warriors falling. Blood, warm as it flowed, stained the lush green grass, nourishing the yellow soil of the Highland and soaking the wild forests outside the mountain city.

The situation in Otapan State became increasingly tense, with the presence of Canine Descendants being more and more common. Soon, a shocking piece of news reached the mountain city.

The Chaos Priest Saka and his retinue were ambushed on the return to their fief. The treacherous wilderness swallowed everything, and all of Saka's line of priests were slain in battle, with none spared. The few surviving samurai fled into the mountain city, providing a description of their attackers' faces, attire and weapons. The knowledgeable old priest Olte, with a sorrowful expression, personally inquired and confirmed the assailants were without a doubt the Canine Barbarians.

Upon hearing this tragic news, the tribal leaders in the mountain city responded with emotions ranging from righteous indignation to sorrow and fear, shock and dismay, and some even traveled to the chieftain's longhouse overnight, swearing allegiance to Jiowar.

Afterward, Jiowar himself led samurai to the site of the attack. He collected the bodies of the priests, held a funeral prayer, and then cremated them with his own hands in the wind. The wisps of blue smoke from the pyre twirled into the air, carrying away the departed spirits and also the disputes of the past. After the funeral, the prestige of the new leader rose again, and the old priest's authority returned to its peak. Because in life, the king is victorious, and in death, paths diverge, everything became inevitable.

Days later, the Kingdom's Wolf Banner was raised high upon the city walls, alongside the new leader's Black Bird Banner. In the central Temple, the flags of the War God and the Ancestral God were successively erected, waving high above. These changes happened quietly yet were also expected. The once scattered hearts of the mountain city's people were thus united as one.

The night left with the wind, and the day brought clouds and rain, the Ancestral God sighing thunderstorms. The smoke from the burning fields rose in the countryside, and the melodious songs lightly echoed through the sky. Thus May descended in songs wrapped in curling smoke, entwined with the first rain of spring.

Xiulote stood atop the walls of Otapan City, gazing at the birds in flight among the mountains. Large flocks of migrating sparrows lingered around the mountain city, long refraining from heading north. They seemed to consider this place their new home, even beginning to build nests.

"Spring plowing is imminent, yet the cold wave from the north has not yet dissipated. It seems the Guajili Canine Descendants are determined not to retreat."

"Your Highness is wise. Scouts have reported back that the Guajili Canine Descendants have already built camps, taken over the fertile soil by the river, and started to settle in Pamus State one after another. Eight large Tribes have spread out, each occupying a warm valley. They have kidnapped mountaineers adept at farming and stolen enough grain to replant the northern fields, hurrying to prepare for the upcoming spring plowing. Meanwhile, tribes of a thousand members are spreading out to loot, with five or six of them having infiltrated the northern borders of Otapan State, and even squads of Canine Descendants approaching the outskirts of the mountain city."

At this point, Bertade glanced at the Otomi Warriors guarding in the distance and cautiously lowered his voice.

"Accompanying these common Tribes, there have also been two parties of red-haired scouts from the large Tribes. They encountered our scouts without conflict, and instead, they brought verbal messages."

"Oh? Messages from the Guajili Canine Descendants?"

Xiulote's eyebrows rose.

"What did they say?"

"The eight large Tribes have formed a preliminary Tribal Alliance. The Alliance's leader is Chichika of the 'Red Dog' Tribe, and the deputy leader is Otuwa of the 'Red Fox' Tribe. Otuwa is also an elder Tribal Priest. Hearing of the Imperial Guard Legion's northern march, he sent out scouts as envoys, expressing respect to the Great Chiefs of the Mexica from the 'brothers' of 'Aztec'."

"Chichika, chichi hunting dogs? Otuwa, oztohua foxes?"

Xiulote muttered these two names, easily finding similar meanings within the Mexica language. He furrowed his brows.

"They refer to us as 'brothers' from 'Aztec'?"

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"Yes, Your Highness. The language of the Guajili people is similar to that of the Otomi people, and it also has some similarities to ours... Of course, we Mexica people have no blood relation with them. Those who truly share our lineage are the sworn enemies of the Alliance in the East, the Tlaxcala people."

Xiulote nodded. This linguistic lineage concealed the true history of tribal migrations thousands of years ago, which was meaningless at this moment.

"What did the Guajili envoy say?"

"Hearing of the Alliance's fame, and knowing of Your Highness's divinity, the Guajili people wish to coexist peacefully with us. They are willing to submit to the Alliance in name, using the current territory of the Pamus State as the border and guaranteeing the stability of the northern border, no longer pillaging to the south. Moreover, they have received information from the Guamal Canine Descendants and request trade with the Alliance. They want to exchange captives, gold, and silver obtained from pillaging for food, salt, cotton, and sacred red furs and dyes necessary for survival. Lastly, Otuwa has another proposition..."

Bertade paused, casting a cautious glance around.

"What proposition?"

Xiulote showed some interest. The words of the envoy indicated the Guajili people were not mere barbarians who fought like wild beasts, utterly incapable of communication—at least the leaders of the tribe weren't.

"Otuwa sends his regards to the Great Chief of the Mexica. The Guajili Tribe is willing to send troops to cooperate with the Alliance to eliminate the Otomi forces in the remaining two states! After the eradication of the Otomi people, they only ask for food and living supplies to sustain their tribe; they have no desire for land or captives, all of which would belong to the Alliance!"

"Ha ha, such a simplistic ploy of sowing discord..."

Hearing this, Xiulote laughed heartily. Naturally, there was no basis for trust between the Alliance and the Guajili people, thus no possibility of cooperation. Yet the Guajili's proposal struck at the heart of greed. Land and captives were exactly what a king desired, making him somewhat emotional.

"Such a cunning fox! Should the Alliance show even a hint of indecision and reply to the Canine envoy, it's likely that divisive rumors would spread everywhere, undermining our mutual trust with the Otomi people."

The King shook his head. His eyes shone brightly as he spoke with certainty.

"The Otomi people are friends of the Alliance, the future citizens of the Kingdom. The Guajili Canine Descendants are our enemies, the target of our current military campaign. The Kingdom's strategy has already been decided, not to be swayed in the slightest! Order the Scouts, from now on, to treat any Guajili envoys as enemy warriors—to be killed on sight without discussion!"

Bertade immediately took out paper and pen, recording the Prince's Royal Decree. After pondering for a moment, he spoke thoughtfully.

"Your Highness, should your Royal Decree also be communicated to the Otapan Legion? On one hand, it will inform General Jiowar and settle the Otomi people's minds; on the other hand, it will also consolidate command of the Mountain City's army under the Kingdom."

Xiulote contemplated for a while and then nodded in agreement. He smiled as he gave the orders.

"A fine suggestion, do just that! Ha ha, Bertade, since Jiowar has independently become the leader of the Otomi people, it's not appropriate to continue using his old title—he deserves due respect. From today, inform all military leaders that Jiowar is now a Prince of the Kingdom, and his place is right by my side! Hmm, dispatch an Envoy to the Lake Capital City to report the latest news of the Otomi people to King Aweit. Also, send a trusted aide to invite Prince Jiowar to dine with me this evening."

"In recent days, Jiowar has been quite busy, continuously summoning tribal leaders and arousing warriors from all over. The most important matters in the world are nothing but sacrifice, agriculture, and warfare. Now that spring plowing is upon us and people's hearts are focused on their fields, while Canine raids become more frequent, it's time to sit down and seriously discuss matters of farming and deploying troops!"

The King's voice dissipated into the wind, blending with the soft chirping of cicadas. In May, cicadas chirp, and in July, meteors fly. The scorching summer was just around the corner, like the thunder of the rainy season, heralding the prelude to war.

Chapter 594 - The Generals Deliberate on Deploying Troops

The night breeze was warm, and the bonfire shone brightly. Everyone sat around the fire pit in Tribe Square, under the open sky and on the ground, eating steaming food and discussing important military and state affairs.

The Mountain City's food supply was not plentiful, so the feast was naturally simple. The main dishes were fragrant corn tortillas and soft black bean paste; side dishes included roasted cactus, boiled green beans, and pumpkin soup, with the rare treat of spicy roasted turkey. Finally, there were some seasonal fruits and lightly sweet rice wine.

Jiowar personally took on the task of roasting a turkey leg. He carefully rubbed it with salt and spices, brushed it with some honey, and respectfully handed it to the King sitting beside him. The King took it, took a bite, and his eyebrows relaxed at once, a smile appearing on his face.

"Sweet and salty blend together, crispy on the outside, tender on the inside, flavorful and rich on the palate, it is indeed cooked to perfection!"

Xiulote, wearing a loose robe, sat at the chief seat at the head. On his left were generals from the Kingdom's lineage, Legion Commander Bertade, Black Wolf Torc, and the Hawk Balda. To his right were the leaders of the Otomi lineage, with the newly appointed Prince Jiowar in the front, followed by the old Priest Olte, and the two great Chieftains Mespa and Chalki.

Clearly, the people present were the true rulers of the Otomi Tri-state. Tonight's feast was also, in fact, a military meeting of the Tribe. Soon, everyone had some main dishes and drank some rice wine, then relaxed their restraint and started discussing the upcoming military and government arrangements.

"The current situation is with the Canine Descendants harassing us from the south, while Mountain City's spring sowing is imminent. How many troops can each state mobilize? Do you wish to march north swiftly, or wait until after the spring sowing? Everyone speak freely and let me hear your thoughts!"

Xiulote took a sip of rice wine, looked up at the dazzling expanse of stars in the sky for a while, then set down his cup, his face beaming with a smile as he looked towards the people.

"Your Highness! Pamus State has three thousand warriors here, ready for battle at any time! There are many City-States in the north that are still holding on. With the large army pressing northward, and by assailing them from within and without, it will take just half a month to break the Guajili people!"

The great Chieftain Mespa was the first to stand, saluting the King and stating his support for a rapid northern campaign.

With the states fallen and Tribes scattered, the lead figures of Pamus State retreated with their family's warriors to ancestral lands, depending on others for survival. With spring sowing around the corner, they gathered in Mountain City, without even a plot of land to call their own, naturally filled with the desire to drive out the Canine Descendants and reclaim their old fiefs.

"Three thousand warriors, ready for battle at any time."

Xiulote nodded slightly. The Pamus State had succumbed quickly, retreating with just over three thousand. Although not numerous, these Pamus warriors' willingness to fight could be trusted. They would fight to the death to reclaim their homes, and their familiarity with the terrain could make them the vanguard or the surprise force for the large army.

"Respected Your Highness, Guamare State, too, is being harassed by the Canine Descendants in the north. Spring sowing is at hand, and even if the leaders do everything in their power, we can only mobilize three thousand warriors..."

Hearing this number, Xiulote's brows furrowed slightly, and Mespa's face was filled with anger. Chalki quickly continued to explain.

"However, if we can wait until the spring sowing is over, as early as the end of June, Guamare State can mobilize five thousand warriors to go to war!"

Xiulote nodded. The figures here were Soldiers and did not include the Militia responsible for transporting supplies and guarding the roads. From what Chalki said, it seemed Guamare State hoped to go to war after the spring sowing.

The King reflected for a moment, then looked towards Jiowar.

"Brother, the Ototpan Mountain City will follow your decree to the letter, and we are ready for battle anytime before or after the spring sowing! Excluding the troops that must be kept for defense, Mountain City can mobilize eight thousand warriors and twelve thousand Militia!"

Upon hearing Jiowar's words, the King was somewhat surprised. Although after two years of growth, the population of the Otapan State was estimated to be only about two hundred thousand. The number of troops mentioned was almost the limit that the Mountain City could marshal, signifying that Jiowar had complete control of the ancestral land.

"Excellent!"

Xiulote showed a smile, patting Jiowar on the shoulder. This way, between one and two thousand Otomi Warriors and an equal number of Militia could be assembled. He looked to the generals on his left; Bertade was calm, Balda was eager, and Torc stood up directly, boldly requesting the assignment.

"Why mobilize a large army and affect this year's spring sowing? The Canine Descendants are but scurrying porcupines, not worth one blow! Your Highness, I, Black Wolf Torc, am willing to lead an army into battle! Just give me five thousand elite troops, and I promise to directly storm their den and crush them all!"

Upon hearing this, the King nodded in approval. He looked at his confident officer and laughed out loud.

"Haha! Black Wolf, I trust in your bravery! I will give you five thousand..."

"Your Highness, I have some suggestions to make!"

The old Priest Olte had been silent until now, but suddenly he spoke up.

Xiulote paused, glancing at the solemn old Priest, and nodded with a smile.

"Priest Olte, as the elder here, please feel free to speak your mind!"

Hearing this, the old Priest straightened up, his expression resolute and his voice booming.

"Your Highness, we Otomi people have established ourselves in the north and have battled the Canine Descendants for a hundred years. The Priesthood has always been collecting their data, and we are more than familiar with their habits. The wilderness Canine Descendants are usually undisciplined and impulsive, Tribal Warriors are often ill-disciplined and bad at formation battles. While their Archery is exceedingly exquisite, they lack good arrows and bows. In a direct confrontation, the more troops the Canine Descendants amass, the poorer their average combat effectiveness will become!"

"Oh? The more troops they amass, the poorer their average combat effectiveness will become..."

Hearing this, Xiulote's expression shifted. He thought of some familiar stories.

"However, Your Highness, you must not underestimate the Canine Descendants! The Canine Descendants excel at swift raids, capable of running fifty or even a hundred miles in a day, making them the world's best light infantry! They are naturally brutal and accustomed to abandoning their weak or injured kin. They can eat anything, which means their logistical needs are low..."

Olte stopped there, but the generals understood what he implied. The old Priest looked at the frowning crowd and continued in a deep voice.

"The Guajili Canine Descendants invading the south belong to dozens of different tribes. Their tactics are flexible, easily broken but difficult to inflict casualties on! If the battle turns adverse, the Canine Descendants will scatter and flee by tribe. But even when their tribes are scattered, they regroup quickly after retreating and resume raiding a region."

"And when the Canine Descendants operate by tribe, avoiding large-scale frontal combat, their flexibility in battle will be maximally displayed! Raids, guerrilla warfare, plundering, sneak attacks... The Guajili are masters of small-scale combat, born hunters!"

At this point, Olte widened his eyes, locking gaze with the proudly standing Black Wolf.

"General Black Wolf, your bravery is famed throughout the world, and I have always held you in high esteem. But even if you lead thousands of elites and crush the Canine Descendants' tribal alliance in one battle, how much harm can you truly inflict? If dozens of Guajili tribes avoid combat and scatter in different directions, retreating day and night for nearly a hundred miles, how will you pursue and kill them? You must remember, the former leader of the Mountain City, Aquili, died from an ambush of hidden arrows while personally pursuing fleeing soldiers..."

"Aquili? How can he compare to me?! I, Black Wolf..."

Toltec's eyes bulged with rage. Just as he was about to retort loudly, he saw the Prince gesture for him to stop, and he obediently fell silent.

Xiulote shifted his gaze, looking towards the white-haired old Priest.

"Priest Olte, do you suggest we fight after spring plowing?"

"Precisely, Your Highness. To expel the invading Canine Descendants, merely defeating them is of no use. We must either mobilize heavy forces and surround them, inflicting massive casualties and capturing their able-bodied men; or starve them of food, so they have no choice but to turn on each other and die of hunger!"

The Priest's eyes deepened, and his voice carried a hint of chill that made everyone shiver.

"Heavy forces for a mass killing, no food supplies?..."

Xiulote pondered. He glanced at Bertade.

"Head Warrior, how much food do the Guajili people have?"

"According to the Scouts' reports, the large Guajili tribes have been plundering for months and are not short on food for the moment. They have enslaved thousands of Otomi and Pamus people and are clearing fields, preparing for spring plowing. Meanwhile, many ordinary tribes are still lacking food and continue to plunder."

Hearing about the thousands of enslaved Otomi people, the old Priest's expression dimmed slightly, then turned resolute again.

"Your Highness, if the major Guajili tribes can cultivate the land, they must have sufficient grain seeds, and their food stores should last until the October harvest. However, the northern frontier has always been harsh and poor, and they have come from a cold wave where everything withers. Those food stores must already be at their limits!"

"If we gather the army and head north now, the Guajili people might give up spring plowing and temporarily retreat to the northern wilderness, avoiding battle and engaging us in guerrilla warfare. If

the conflict drags on, it will completely disrupt the Mountain City's spring plowing, and the supply lines could become long and dangerous."

"Avoid battle, long supply lines?"

Xiulote's eyebrows raised. If the war turned out this way, it would be troublesome. The Spanish in later ages suffered under the guerrilla tactics of the Guajili Tribe, even with a one or two-era advantage in weapons and organization, they still suffered heavy losses and frustration in guerrilla warfare.

"Yes, Your Highness. The eagle in the sky does not pounce lightly; when it strikes, it must hit! Now, we should concentrate our forces, defend against the Canine Descendants' plundering, and then evacuate the villages along the border, bringing in the peasants from the fields, ensuring the spring plowing around the Mountain City proceeds! If the Guajili people cannot plunder food and are not threatened, they will also settle down. Once they plant their seeds, putting all their hope in this year's spring plowing, they will be bound by the land they till!"

The King slowly nodded. The common Milpa farming practice of broadcasting seeds for a meager yield would usually yield only "tenfold" at best, even with high-yield crops. Given the Canine Descendants' farming skills, they probably could achieve only "eightfold." To ensure a sufficient harvest, they would need to cultivate a large area and invest a significant amount of seeds.

"As the seeds slowly grow into green shoots and the stored food gradually depletes, the Canine Descendants will become increasingly bound to the land, finding it difficult to leave. Therefore, August and September, the months before the harvest, are when the Canine Descendants are most short on food, when they can least afford to abandon their fields, and when we should launch the decisive battle! They will have no choice but to face us!"

Hearing this, the old Priest stood up straight, his gaze proud. He suddenly swung his arms downwards, roaring like a groundhog.

"Your Highness, after the spring plowing, mobilize in July, march out in August; it's the best opportunity! Let the invading Canine Descendants die before the fields they're about to harvest!"

Xiulote watched the old Priest, his eyes reddening, and his white hair gleaming.

Marching in August meant that in order to completely eliminate the Canine Descendants, they had to give up on the captured Otomi civilians in the north, as well as most of the nobility still holding out. Was this choice worth it?

"As long as the cacao thrives, no matter if the grass turns to ash..."

The King sighed internally but outwardly nodded solemnly, issuing his command with a heavy voice.

"Olte, we shall do as you suggested! By the Royal Decree, Samurai prepare for war: Guard strategic points, defend against the Canine Descendants' raids; clear the fields, pull back from the border villages. Concentrate on spring plowing in May and June, begin mobilization in July, and march north in August to strike down the Canine Descendants once and for all!"

Chapter 595 - The Mountain Farmers in Spring Plowing, the Observing Canine Descendants

The cool breeze swept through the treetops, the pines and cypresses sprouted new branches, and the grass grew lush, thick enough to conceal one's figure. In early June, the seasonal rains arrived on schedule, causing the smoke from slash-and-burn clearing to rise and then extinguish, leaving only a blackened residue of ashes behind.

On a field of ashes, thousands of Otomi mountain people were engrossed in tilling the soil. Large swathes of farmland had already been sown. To guard against raids by the Canine Descendants, the able-bodied all carried stone-tipped Long Spears on their backs, and some had long slings at their waists. On a nearby small hill, there was a small unit, 20 Otomi Warriors. The warriors wore grey-blue Cotton Armor, carried War Clubs on their backs, and around their necks hung Bone Whistles for sounding alarms. They looked to the north with caution, glancing occasionally at the mountain people hard at work and then at the vibrant fields.

The Otomi mountain folk bent over busily, breaking the soil with wooden and stone tools, carefully sowing their hopes for the year. And when they took a short rest, the majestic Ototpan Mountain City came into view at the end of their line of sight, standing tall on the distant southern horizon. The ancestral land of the mountain city, enduring through the ages like a Holy Mountain where deities dwelt, held the hearts of all the mountain people.

Behind the mountain people, several babbling streams flowed down from the mountains, moisturizing the farmland along their paths. By the small lake where the streams converged, there was a large Otomi Village. This place was sixty miles north of Ototpan Mountain City, and it was also a northern key point that the warriors guarded.

Now, fifty Mexica warriors holding Longbows, and two hundred Otomi warriors with shields and clubs, were stationed in the village's longhouses, with sturdy granaries nearby. In the village center, by the fire pit, there was also a pile of specially gathered firewood. When the number of approaching Canine Descendants neared a thousand, the warriors would ignite the firewood to call for reinforcements from the mountain city. Three battalions of a thousand men each were stationed a dozen miles to the south, ready to strike at any moment.

A rustle of movement in the distant woods, and the warriors on the hill immediately stood and peered out, placing the Bone Whistle to their lips. Soon, a small team of Otomi Scouts emerged from the forest, followed by hundreds of mountain people carrying food and agricultural tools. The warriors of both sides exchanged fist salutes, relieved. The scouts looked over the cultivated fields and then continued to guide the newly arrived mountain people to the village for settlement.

Not long ago, the Priesthood of the mountain city issued a divine decree: to evacuate the mountain people from the northern border, take all the food, and concentrate on farming in the large villages surrounding the mountain city. Then, with thousands of Otomi Warriors as escorts, the Priests who commanded allegiance went north to lead the people. They quickly evacuated villages of more than three hundred inhabitants. As for the smaller villages, they were left for the Scout Warriors to guide.

The border evacuation had been going on for a month, and this batch of folk today was likely the last. The remaining tiny villages of just a few dozen people were hidden in the mountains and nearly impossible to find. They wouldn't have much food stored, so they weren't a concern.

Ototpan Mountain City was more than two hundred miles away from the Pamus State. After the Canine Descendants' looting and a large-scale contraction, the northernmost hundred miles of land were deserted. Within a hundred miles of the mountain city, there were patrols of Scouts, stationed warriors, and legions ready to attack at any moment.

Spring plowing was laborious and busy. When they bent down, the morning sun had just risen; when they looked up, the setting sun had fallen. After a long night's sleep, another day of monotony began. The new day seemed no different. Songbirds circled in the sky, only seeing the farmland that had been plowed. Oh, and the hidden eyes in the woods.

Amoxtli crouched in the underbrush, narrowing his eyes, watching the mountain people hunched over the fields from afar, as well as the bustling village not far off. He wore the Cotton Armor of the Mexica, with a vine hat in yellow-green atop his head, concealing his conspicuously red hair. His gaze lingered for a while until another voice came from the bushes.

"Amoxtli, did you get a clear view of the Otomi Warriors on the small hill? How many are there?"

"Two palms and two soles, exactly twenty. The lead one's hand is on his neck, must be a whistle that would go 'tinkle' at one blow."

"Ah, this bunch of squeaking mongrels! They're not much in a fight, but they sure know how to call out."

Ivican spat out disdainfully and popped his head out too. His eyes greedily scanned the distant village, looked at the thousands of toiling mountain people, then fixed fiercely on the scantily clad young women, swallowing a mouthful of saliva.

...

"The women of the Otomi are far better looking than the skinny poles in our tribe. With bodies like turkeys, they're great for bearing children! Amoxtli, with such a big village, there's plenty of food and women. Do we attack or not?"

"Ivican, don't rush it, let me take another look. We've been following the Otomi scouts all the way here; we need to see where they have hidden the food. Women are plenty, but food is the lifeblood of a tribe!"

Amoxtli carefully observed, his gaze pausing on the long spears carried by the villagers, then he gestured towards the direction of the village.

"Let's go have a look around the edge of the village."

Two red-haired warriors rose from the undergrowth, agile as mountain cats, without making a sound. Behind them, some twenty-odd tribal warriors also rose, each bending at the waist like hunting dogs. They carefully skirted the cultivated fields and came to the back of the village to continue spying.

Not far away, a simple wooden fence encircled the village, leaving only two exits to the south and the north. In the center of the village stood a tall stone house, into and out of which some villagers were coming and going, preparing a special lunch for their samurai masters. The ordinary mountain folk weren't so fortunate; they only had two meals a day, morning and evening.

Soon, faint wisps of smoke rose and the clear scent of corn drifted afar. A large group of samurai emerged from the long house, each carrying a weapon, chatting and laughing as they sat around the fire pit to eat.

"Gray-blue cotton armor, one palm, two palms... Hmm, eight 'hand palms' of Otomi dogs."

Amoxтли used both hands, even borrowing Ivican's palms, to finally, with difficulty, count two hundred. Then, he shifted his gaze toward the central Mexica warriors, his pupils suddenly constricting.

"Damn, white gold cotton armor studded with spikes, wicker helmets, and greatbows! Those are the Mexica 'Thick-skin' warriors, a full ten 'hand palms'!"

"What? Mexica 'Thick-skin' warriors?! Where?... Ow!"

Startled, Ivican turned in the direction of Amoxltli's pointing finger and couldn't help letting out a low canine growl. The warriors in the center of the village instantly became alert and stood looking in their direction. The canine descendant scouts crouched low in the bushes, not moving an inch. After a long while, the warriors resumed their noisy chatter and continued eating.

Amoxltli breathed a sigh of relief before lowering his voice and cursing.

"Damn it, Ivican, keep your dog mouth shut!"

"What's there to be afraid of, Amoxltli? No one can outrun us! From this distance, even the greatbows can't hit us."

...

Ivican returned the smile with a low voice, not too concerned about the danger.

"Blind as bats, all fifty thick-skinned warriors! How did the Cactus Tribe from the south get so many thick-skinned? Last time we fought them, I shot a thick-skinned one with more than a dozen arrows, making him look like a porcupine, and yet he bounced around without a scratch!"

"Ivican, the cotton armor of the thick-skinned warriors can't be shot through, no matter how close you are! You need to aim for that small exposed part of their neck, shoot their lower legs and feet, or bludgeon their heads in close combat. Of course, these thick-skinned ones are elite, and they'll consciously cover their vital spots. They're also formidable in close combat, truly a tough nut to crack!"

Amoxltli shook his head and frowned as he continued to observe.

Soon, Ivican's eyes widened as he looked towards the granary where the laborers were coming and going.

"Food, lots of food! Amoxltli, behind me there are a hundred veteran redheads, five hundred tribal warriors! How many do you have back there?"

"I have fifty redheads and three hundred warriors behind me; can't compare with your 'Red Fox' tribe."

"One hundred and fifty redheads, eight hundred warriors, the enemy only has two hundred fifty... Ah, that's enough! Shall we attack?"

"Attack my ass!"

Amoxltli spat angrily and turned to glare at his friend.

"The Otomi dogs are tough to attack when they are on the defense. Now with the Cactus Tribe warriors here, they're like dogs with a master, extremely stubborn, and they won't surrender even in death!"

"Have you looked at the layout of this village? Houses block the way, paths are narrow, and our warriors can't spread out to use their numerical advantage. Plus, the enemy has greatbows for defense, and getting hit is a death sentence! By the time we reach the palisade, the thick-skinned ones will have shot three volleys of greatbows; break through and rush in, and it's another two volleys of arrows. After two more volleys, our warriors will start to collapse. This village can't be taken!"

"Hmm, it seems logical. Amoxtli, your head really is sharp, almost like you're from our Red Fox tribe."

Ivican thought for a while before he turned his gaze toward the mountain people working in the fields.

"So, how about we have our warriors charge at these mountain people? We could scatter them, draw out the defending army, or maybe snatch a few robust women to bring back?"

"Snatch my ass!"

Amoxtli extended his arm and hammered Ivican's shoulder hard.

"What good is killing a bunch of grass-like mountain people? All the food is in the granary. Without taking down the village, it's all in vain. If we stick out too long here, the large force of warriors from the south will latch onto us. First, the Otomi dogs, then the dark green cotton-armored Mexica warriors, and finally the unmovable thick-skinned."

"Right, my last deep incursion into the south, I encountered a few ferocious tiger-heads, probably the Great Chief's trusted aides, the veteran redheads of the Cactus Tribe. They were clad in thick-skinned armor, wore tiger-heads, and were very good at tracking, chasing me for fifty miles! No matter how the

scout team changed directions, we couldn't shake them off. I lost many brothers and only when we retreated to the northern border and set up an ambush with other tribes, did they quietly disappear."

"Ferocious tiger-heads?"

Ivican furrowed his brows and muttered to himself.

"I think I've heard the Chieftain mention something about Eagle Warriors, Jaguar warriors... Are they also thick-skinned?"

"As thick-skinned as bears. Stop thinking about it, Ivican. All of my tribe's warriors are gathered here. If we suffer a reckless loss and don't seize any food, the Chieftain and Priesthood will surely sacrifice me alive! This village is impregnable; we should..."

"Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh!"

Three sharp feathered arrows whistled through the air, shooting from afar and slashing past the heads of the Canine Descendant scouts. Two redhead warriors were taken aback and looked around, only to see that, without their knowledge, a few thick-skinned warriors accompanied by dozens of Otomi dogs had quietly closed in from the side.

"Damn it, Ivican, it's all because of that dog barking of yours!"

"Ow! Amoxtli, stop cursing. Since we can't fight, let's save our energy and run north! We still need to warn the troops behind us!"

"Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh!"

Another dog bark came, followed by loud curses and the hissing of feathered arrows. The two redhead warriors crouched low and dashed out of the arrow's range like fleeing hounds. The dozen Canine Descendant scouts followed without hesitation.

Chased by over a hundred Allied Force warriors, the Canine Descendants ran without pause. Amid the tense and fierce pursuit, there were more howling barks, and blood spilled into the mountains and fields, soaking the soil of hope.

Chapter 596 - Latest News from North and South

The tender green sprouts peeked out from the fields, and the grey sparrows finally headed north. The end of June brought continuous wind and rain, the completion of spring plowing amidst tempests, and the gradual tranquility of the northern lands after spring.

Xiulote climbed the city walls once again. He gazed down at the farmlands at the foot of the mountain city, where the earth was lush with budding life; he looked towards the horizon where dark clouds gathered, the sky rumbling with thunder, bringing down precious spring rains.

"The rainy season has finally arrived! Spring water is always more precious than oil. Hmm, the rains in Otapan arrive later than in Qinchongcan."

Bertade, clad in copper armor, gazed towards the distant thunder and calmly agreed.

"Yes, Your Highness, after a spring rain, the seedlings will shoot up. The rainy season in the northern highlands always comes later than in the south. The farther north you go, the less rainfall there is. The rainfall in Otapan Mountain City is only about half of that in the Lake Patzcuaro region; and as you get to the borders of Pamus State, the rainfall is half of that in Otapan; and again it halves in the wilderness where the Canine Descendants emerge."

"Bertade, are the gunpowder stores secured? We march in August, amid the rainy season. I'm somewhat concerned that the rain might affect the use of the wooden cannons!"

"Your Highness, as per your command, the gunpowder has been sealed in wooden barrels and stored in underground stone chambers, covered with water-absorbing, damp-proof charcoal. The rains in August are heavy in the mountain city, but they will diminish significantly by the time we reach Pamus State. The sealed gunpowder, covered with rubber rain sheets, will be transported to the north and can be used at least once before exposure to moisture! And given the Canine Descendants' equipment and organization, if they face our allied forces in battle, even without the wooden cannons, we will still hold a decisive advantage!"

"Hmm, even a Jaguar must use full strength to capture a domestic dog! Using the wooden cannons at critical moments will indeed reduce many casualties."

Xiulote smiled. He watched the drizzling raindrops, gazing over the vast expanse of the highlands, and said emotionally.

"Bertade, look, water sources are life, gathering spots for populations, and the origins of civilization! The North is endlessly vast — the farther north, the sparser the population and the more barbaric the tribes. From Rivermouth Fortress going north to Otapan Mountain City is three hundred li; from Otapan Mountain City north to Pamus City is a full four hundred li. This seven hundred li journey is the limit for the kingdom's army to march and for the influence of the alliance!"

"Your Highness, Pamus City is located on an upper tributary of the Tampen River, near a rare water source in the highlands, surrounded by large tracts of arable land. To its north is an arid wilderness, a thousand li hunting ground of the Guajili people, Coahuila State. To its west, the similarly barren northern border of Guamare State, where the Otomi Tribe and Guamal Canine Descendants live together without any significant towns. To its east are towering mountain ranges, and downstream along the Tampen River leads to Vastec territory. To the southeast is the stronghold of the Northern General in Xilotepec State..."

Bertade meticulously explained, reflecting the mountainous terrain of the north in his mind.

"Indeed. Pamus City, surrounded by rivers and mountains, located upstream, controls the endless wilderness to the north, and has the river for transport to the east, is truly a strategic location!"

Xiulote pondered for a moment and then nodded vigorously. Pamus City, adjacent to the Eastern Madre Mountains and located upstream on the Tampen River, is nearly seven hundred li from the sea outlet in the Gulf of Mexico. Flowing eastward from here, it would take just a few days to reach the capital of the Vastec Alliance, Cukuxicapan. Thus, this city-state is not only a strategic town in the north but also controls the east.

"Your Highness, by holding Pamus City, we can deter the Canine Descendants, enlist tribes, station troops. And relying on the river, we can also demand sufficient provisions from the subordinate regions of Vastec in the east."

Next, the Head Warrior, with a solemn face, bowed deeply.

"In this northern campaign, the kingdom must take it and hold it in our hands!"

"Oh, 'we'? Bertade, are you referring to the kingdom?..."

"Precisely the kingdom."

Xiulote contemplated for a moment, then slowly nodded.

"A fine suggestion, very fine! Do you have a suitable candidate?"

"Your Highness, there is one who is extremely familiar with the Canine Descendants, and also adept at dealing with tribal chieftains."

Bertade smiled faintly. Xiulote thought for a while, then also smiled.

"Indeed, after so many years of refinement, it's time to promote him. Send an envoy, and summon him back here; I want to meet him in person. Hmm, what's the situation in Pamus City now?"

"Your Highness, as the core of Pamus State, Pamus City has already fallen into the hands of the Guajili people. Currently entrenched there, occupying the fertile land by the river, is the leader of the Guajili Tribe Alliance, the Chieftain of the 'Red Dog' tribe, Chichika. Among the numerous tribes, the 'Red Dog' tribe is the strongest, with a tribe population of ten thousand. They are all warriors, with more than

three thousand combatants, and are the most defiant! A few days ago, Chichika even sent an envoy with a verbal message..."

"Oh, that message! 'The great chieftain of a hundred thousand Guajili people, master of the northern wilderness, the divine dog king Chichika, greets the great chieftain of the Aztec people, master of the southern Lake Region'... Ha ha, so it's him!"

Xiulote burst into laughter. Then, his expression turned cold, resolute.

"The Canine Descendants respect power but not virtue, have a narrow view, and are blindly arrogant. This allied northern campaign will not cease until Pamus City falls and Chichika is sacrificed!"

"By your command!"

Bertade bowed deeply. Amid the sparse wind and rain, the two continued discussing the situation in the north. As they interacted with the Guajili people, the allied forces had captured many Canine Warriors and also clearly understood the details of various tribes.

Chapter 597 - Latest News from North and South_2

The Guajili Canine Descendants invading from the south comprised eight large tribes, each possessing thousands of warriors. The large tribes acted as the dominant forces, often with several smaller tribes as vassals that would follow their lead. The eight great tribes were the "Red Dog," "Red Fox," "Red Stork," "Red Deer," "Red Monkey," "Red Salamander," "Red Frog," and "Red Cat."

In Guajili culture, red symbolizes the sacred, and the names of the tribes are the animals they worship as totems. The Highland Canine Descendants only had ancestor worship and totem beliefs, without a

unified deity to worship. Their spiritual world remained in obscurity, a blank slate ripe for religious propagation.

After the Otomi people had fully retreated, the pillaging Canine Tribes could no longer take advantage. The mountain dwellers gathered in large villages, guarded by hundreds of Samurai. Two or three regular tribes could not take down a village garrisoned with troops. And if a large number of Canine Descendants lingered too long, they would be targeted by patrolling Allied Forces.

The Imperial Guards' Personal Army of Xiulote had launched several strikes, pursuing and killing over a hundred red-haired warriors. Seeing no profit in plunder, the northern border quieted down completely.

"Your Highness, while the eight large tribes are settling down to cultivate the land, they are also sending envoys to the Alliance. Their union is not stable, and their interests are not aligned. There are many opportunities for us to exploit..."

Upon hearing this, Xiulote gently shook his head and said with a smile.

"Bertade, The Kingdom will absorb the Canine Descendants, but there's no need to hurry. Look at the clouds on the horizon, first comes the rumbling thunder, then the drizzling rain. To confront the haughty Canine Descendants, we inevitably need to fight a few battles, driving them to a dead end to make negotiation and subjugation easier! Without shedding enough blood, how can there be a deep-set fear and loyalty? Besides, this time the Canine Descendants moved southward, slaughtering heavily all along their path. We must give an explanation to our Otomi allies."

The King's casual tone had just determined the fate of tens of thousands of Canine Descendants. His smile was calm and indifferent, yet it seemed as if boundless blood was flowing through it.

Bertade was startled. He looked at the mature young Monarch, remembered the naive past, and slowly revealed a smile. After a moment, the Head Warrior pulled out a scroll and continued his report.

"Your Highness, I've had many feasts with the Otomi leaders and, coupled with the Scouts' reconnaissance, have roughly figured out the situation of the three Otomi States. After the turmoil of war, the Otapan State has about 200,000 people, with around 30,000 able-bodied men that can be mobilized. Despite the Guamare State's large size, it only has a population of over 100,000, with about 20,000 able-bodied men. In the pillaging by the Canine Descendants, they have lost at least over 10,000 people. As for the Pamus State, its population was originally comparable to that of the Guamare, but now it has fallen into Canine Descendants' hands, and it is estimated that half will be lost."

"Ah? So in just five years, the once million-strong Otomi people are now reduced to just over four hundred thousand?"

Xiulote silently calculated for a moment, looking surprised. He thought of the solemnity that often flashed across the face of the old Priest Olte, and he vaguely felt some empathy.

"Your Highness, there are also the additional hundred thousand Otomi people from Xilotepec which should bring the total to over half a million."

"Oh, over half a million..."

The King shook his head and murmured to himself softly.

"War is waged over land, everywhere men die like weeds; in these chaotic times, it is but a struggle to survive..."

"Your Highness, that's the state of affairs in the north. This month, many Messengers have come to Rivermouth Fort, reporting details of the Kingdom's spring ploughing."

"Hmm, go on."

"The spring ploughing in both the Capital Region and Rivermouth County has been completed on schedule. The new step plows are being used in the military and civilian farmlands, and heaps of manure have been spread in the fields. The villagers in various places still hold doubts about these new farming improvements, yet they have been appeased by the Priests as the will of the gods."

"Bertade, don't worry. Come autumn harvest when they see the actual increase in crop yields, the villagers will fully accept the new method of cultivation and be grateful to the Priests. The harvest season will be an excellent opportunity for proselytizing!"

Xiulote was full of confidence. Manure and step plows had been used in the Celestial Empire for a thousand years, and he had also practiced them in the Alliance. It was just hard for him to explain the principles to the Priests, necessitating the use of divine will to implement them.

"In another two years, once the labor forces have recovered, we can consider building levees to completely control Lake Patzcuaro. Only after the levees are completed, and we fully control the flooding from the rainy season and brine from the mountains, can we invest a lot of manpower to build the truly high-yielding Chinampa!"

Hearing about the floating gardens of Chinampa, Bertade's eyes sparkled. Chinampa was a name that all Mexica people yearned for, signifying abundant harvests, prosperity, and wealth. He mused for a moment and then pulled out another scroll that was filled with delicate handwriting.

"Your Highness, this is a report from Talaya. According to your instructions, every bureau of the Divine Revelation Place is in the midst of expanding. The Mining and Metallurgy Bureau and the Gunpowder Bureau have once again elevated their outputs. The Military Arsenal has accumulated over a thousand copper armors, and the first Sun Divine Eagle Cannon has been successfully trialed..."

"Ah, the bronze Eagle Cannon has finally been successfully trialed!"

Upon hearing this, Xiulote was filled with excitement, his face beaming with joy. He turned around, gazing at the southern horizon, wishing he could fly back immediately to see the trial shot of the Eagle Cannon. After a while, the King finally calmed his fluctuating emotions and said with a smile.

"Tilipi has not let me down, he deserves a generous reward! Once I inspect the performance of the Eagle Cannon and give him a firm talk, I'll promote him to hereditary Nobility."

"Your Highness, besides Tilipi, there is another person you should reward generously. He alone has contributed at least one-tenth of the Kingdom's taxation!"

Chapter 598 - Latest News from North and South_3

"Oh, who could it be? Who has such wealth?"

The King looked at the Head Warrior with curiosity.

"The Director of the Special Trade Bureau, Losano. In half a year, he has made over a thousand jin of various 'gemstones.' The Kingdom, in order to control the prices, has only sold a small portion so far. Despite this, jade merchants from all over the world have gone mad, and the spies who have come to probe are too numerous to be captured."

"Over a thousand jin... 'gemstones'..."

Xiulote's mouth twitched. He wanted to say something, but faced with the exorbitant profits from glass trade, the words at the tip of his tongue shifted to a different sentence.

"For now, there is no further promotion available for Losano. We must protect his safety closely. As for his demands for luxurious living, fulfill them as much as possible! Moreover, instruct him to quickly research and develop colorless gemstones. The existing manufacturing process must continue to improve, the closer to natural gemstones, the better!"

Bertade smiled and took out paper to jot down notes. Afterward, he added another point.

"Your Highness, the Shipyard's trial production of the first catamaran has just been launched in Cuitzeo Lake. The Master Craftsmen are adjusting the details of the hull and sails. By the time the northern campaign ends and we return, we should have the results!"

Hearing these good news, Xiulote was in a pleasant mood. Every breakthrough in technological development always brought a sense of satisfaction with the progress of civilization. Bertade waited for the King to digest this information for a moment before asking solemnly.

"The Guamal Canine Descendants from the northwest have sent an Envoy. This cold wave has caused tribes from all regions to migrate southward. They too have been impacted and have captured over ten thousand Canine Descendants, looking to sell them to us."

"Oh?"

At the mention of population trade, Xiulote perked up.

"Which tribe did they capture, and what's the proportion of able-bodied men?"

"It's mainly the Sakate Castes from the far northwest, and a portion of Guajili people. The Canine Descendants heading south didn't include the old and weak, half are able-bodied men and half are women."

"Tell them, the Kingdom will take all of them. We'll accept as many young able-bodied and women of marrying age as they have. Settle them all in Rivermouth County."

Without hesitation, the King decided immediately. Population is the cornerstone of a civilization, and the newly-formed Kingdom also had sufficient capacity for cultural assimilation. He thought for a moment and then added,

"Right, take some samples and ask the Guamal people. Besides grain, salt, cotton cloth, weapons, and cotton armor, would they be interested in gemstones? We have them in every color..."

Bertade could not help but smile silently at this, and he noted down the King's command.

Xiulote gazed into the distance, pondering for a while before speaking again.

"The Canine Descendants' large-scale invasion southward, the Otomi electing a new leader... All these northern upheavals, I have dispatched Envoys to report to King Aweit and requested support from the Alliance. Counting the days, there should also be a response by now. Has the King sent back any replies?"

"Your Highness, the Kingdom has not yet received a response from the Alliance; it may take some more days. However, regarding Your Highness's support for Prince Jiowar in becoming the leader of the Otomi, there seem to be some unfavorable rumors in the Lake Capital City."

"That matter, indeed, tends to give rise to rumors..."

Xiulote reflected for a moment, sighed, and took out a letter he had just written, handing it to the Head Warrior.

"Bertade, this is my letter to Alisa. It contains some personal language, observations from the north, and regards to pass on to Aweit. I have also obtained some strange plants unique to the Northern Land and some secret Otomi Potion recipes from Priest Olte as gifts. Dispatch an Envoy tonight at full speed to deliver both the letter and the gifts to the Lake Capital City, and ensure they are handed personally to Alisa!"

Bertade nodded, carefully stored the letter, and immediately set out to carry out his instructions. Before leaving, he paused and bowed to the King.

"Your Highness, despite Princess Alisa's seemingly naive and unaffected demeanor, she is as clear-minded as a mirror and is your best ally! As long as you regularly correspond with the Princess, informing her of major affairs... There will be no misunderstandings between you and the King."

Hearing this, Xiulote slightly lowered his gaze and remained silent. When he looked up again, the Head Warrior had already gone far. The King raised his head, gazing at the dark clouds in the sky, and let out a resigned smile.

"The white clouds are pure and unblemished; I had not wished for her to be touched by worldly dust. Yet when the rainy season comes with the wind, the sky may soon be filled with dark clouds... With thunder rolling down from the sky, how can the clouds avoid it?"

Alone on the rampart, the King's voice grew more somber. A thunderclap sounded in the distance, and the heavy rain fell once again. The raindrops on his face and in his mouth, when gently savored, carried the fragrance of the clouds~

Chapter 599 - Two Hundred Ninety-Five: Expedition in August

The rains of July fluttered down, soaking the lush fields and nurturing the early blossoming summer flowers. On the south bank of the Lerma River, the raindrops in the Lake Region were like cheerful bamboo flutes, melodies connecting from one to the next, forming a long line drawn by an ink brush, covering the entire canopy of the sky. On the north bank of the Lerma River, the downpour over the Mountain City was like heavy war drums, each beat falling into the ear, accompanied by the highland thunder, solemnizing the boundless land.

In the sparse wind and rain, envoys after envoy left Otapan Mountain City in all directions. Soon, Otomi Warriors and Militia from all over started to mobilize. Thousands of Warriors formed camps, converging into legions, and gradually gathered at the Mountain City; an even greater number of Militia took up Long Spears, shouldered food supplies, sustaining the army's logistics.

With unrelenting rain, the ancestral lands of the Mountain City stood tall like a Divine Mountain. The Kingdom's Wolf Banner and the Mountain City's Bird Banner both fluttered atop the city walls, while the camp below was filled with boiling voices. Xiulote stood on the Watchtower, overlooking tens of thousands of troops, and felt a surge of pride swell in his chest.

The mobilization began in mid-July, and by the beginning of August, all the camps had completed their preparations. The Otomi people had assembled sixteen thousand Warriors and twenty-four thousand Militia, a total of forty thousand troops. Rivermouth Fortress's First Spear Legion arrived at the end of July, bringing the number of the Kingdom's Warriors to fourteen thousand.

The full mobilization of the Otomi people was immense and could not be concealed. Guajili Scouts hurried back and forth, repeatedly reporting the latest military information. Faced with the continuously gathering vast Allied Forces, the Canine Descendants' large Tribes were panic-stricken and sent out envoys southward to seek peace with the Allied Forces.

Inside the palace of Otapan Mountain City, Xiulote summoned several envoys from the Canine Descendants' great Tribes. The King lost interest upon hearing their similar terms, "nominal submission, but retaining land and wealth, maintaining tribal autonomy..." These were not far from what he had anticipated. These proud Canine Descendants were truly wild dogs, who would not submit like tamed house dogs until they had experienced a real war, a battle that would break their spines.

Soon, the legions of the various states arrived one after another. Fifty thousand troops marched mightily, filling the fields of the Mountain City and startling flocks of birds into the sky. The Northern expedition would travel at least four hundred miles, passing through barren highlands and withered villages. Given the Otomi's food reserves, it was not possible for them all to march north.

In fact, the northern Guajili people were already scattered according to tribal distribution. They moved swiftly, and if they avoided battle, the heavy troops could not catch the moving main force of the Tribes.

Faced with scarce supplies along the way and the dispersion of the enemy, Xiulote and Jiowar discussed for a long time and finally set the strategy for the Northern campaign. The entire Allied Forces would split into three elite prongs, roughly forming a line, plowing through the Northern Land like a Step Plow.

The left flank was made up of five thousand Warriors from Guamare State, three thousand Militia, led by the Great Chieftain Chalki as the Commander-in-Chief of the left flank; the right flank consisted of eight thousand Warriors from the Otapan State, with Jiowar as the Commander-in-Chief of the right flank; the vanguard of the middle flank comprised three thousand Warriors from Pamus State, two thousand Barbarian mercenaries from the Imperial Guard Legion, one thousand Temple Crossbowmen, and two thousand light-armed Archers from the First Spear Legion, led by Black Wolf Torc as the Vanguard Commander-in-Chief. The left, right, and middle vanguard, each was a fully-staffed Xiquipilli Legion of eight thousand troops. Each force was spaced fifty miles apart, moving quickly and providing mutual support.

Following them, the main body of the middle column was where Xiulote's Royal Banner flew. Three thousand Armored Guards carrying Longbows and large crossbows, along with the artillery team, were positioned behind the three columns. Should any flank encounter heavy forces, the Armored main body would move out and strike like a Thunderbolt.

The three columns of the expedition amounted to around twenty-seven thousand troops. Marching north for at least four hundred miles, this was the limit that the supply lines could support. The remaining twenty thousand plus Otomi Militia were managed by the old Priest Olte, responsible for maintaining the lengthy logistics line. The Otomi's food supply was insufficient, with a large quantity of food still needing to be transported north from Rivermouth Fortress. And the crucial safety of the supply lines was entrusted by the King to the Monkey, Kuluka.

"Monkey, you will lead the six thousand Spear Legion and station near the Mountain City. If the Canine Descendants harass, threatening the supply route, you must drive them away. As the army marches north, the stability of the supply line must be ensured."

Atop the city walls, Xiulote wore a serious expression, issuing orders solemnly.

"Your Highness, I will exert all my effort to secure the army's supply lines!"

The Monkey's keen eyes showed determination as he knelt with both knees and bowed deeply.

"Good! The supply must precede the troops. This Northern expedition will cover vast distances, and it's possible the Canine Descendants will retreat northwards, making it uncertain how long the campaign will last. I am concerned that Rivermouth County's food reserves will not suffice, so I have requested assistance from the Alliance. King Aweit has replied with a promise that he will send a batch of supplies monthly to the Wooden Fort on the North Coast of the Lerma River from its upper reaches, but it requires equivalent goods in exchange from the Kingdom."

"Monkey, I will give you some 'gemstones', cotton fabric, and copper ware. Based on the amount of food the Alliance delivers, you will pay the transport officials. Hmm, you can give a few extra gemstones as appropriate for grease. The Divine Revelation Place will soon deliver one thousand sets of Medium Armor. You may equip five hundred of them in the army. As for the remaining five hundred, I have already agreed to give them to the King in exchange for the title of Prince Jiowar. These Copper Armors, you must personally hand them to the Alliance's Envoy!"

"At your command, Your Highness!"

The monkey prostrated himself again. Xiulote smiled, stepped forward, and personally helped Kuluka to his feet. Then, the king lowered his voice and whispered in the other's ear.

"Monkey, to prevent any mishap, the Jingji Legion has already moved north and is now stationed at the edge of Cuitzeo Lake. If anything happens to the mountain city, if Olte the Priest dies, or if the northern campaign fails and the Otomi people conspire with the Canine Descendants... then you must immediately contact Anna's Naval Forces and transport the Jingji Legion to the North Coast of Lerma River, coordinating from within and without to seize the mountain city directly!"

"Ah, Your Highness? Seize the mountain city?!"

On hearing this, the monkey's pupils constricted, and he clenched his fists silently,

"In all things, we must consider the worst outcome first, contemplate defeat, and then seek victory. Monkey, you needn't worry; these situations are unlikely to occur. It's just a strategy set in advance just in case."

Xiulote smiled faintly and patted Kuluka on the shoulder. He looked into the monkey's expressive eyes and finally said.

"Monkey, you have the bearing of a great general, always able to make the most appropriate response in critical situations. You are also one of those I trust the most. I leave my rear guard to you!"

"Your Highness, I am willing to die for you!"

Kuluka's expression was one of agitation. He knelt down again, prostrating himself fully in a ritual salute.

This time, Xiulote did not help him up again. He turned around, faced the tens of thousands of troops below the city, raised the Divine Staff in his hand, and pointed towards the wilderness in the north.

"In the name of the Chief Divine! Extinguish the Canine Descendants, reclaim the old lands! By Royal Decree, the army marches!"

"Roar!"

With the king's commanding wave of the Divine Staff, a sky full of cheers erupted outside the city! Whether Mexica or Otomi, whether samurai or militia, tens of thousands of warriors released a boiling battle cry all at once!

The shouts were initially chaotic, like the erratic rain of summer. But amidst the frantic cheers of the Otomi, the boiling roar quickly converged into a formidable title that became like rolling thunder in the distance.

"God of Death!... Great Chief!... God of Death Great Chief!!..."

"Thud, thud, thud!"

The fierce war drums sounded across the fields! Amidst the sparse rain, tens of thousands of elite warriors turned north, making the damp earth tremble with their steps. Nearly thirty thousand warriors of the northern expedition set off promptly, like a surging torrent, as well as a wild wind from the north. Eager to march in August, swift as the wind. The three divisions and four detachments advanced as sharp as an arrow, destroying all the Canine Descendant tribes along the way!

Chapter 600 - First Battle in the Wilderness

The Northern Land stretched into the unknown distance. Marching northward from Otapan City for more than two hundred miles, the army entered the boundaries of the Pamus State.

The East here clung to the towering Eastern Madre Mountain Range. The moist easterly winds from the sea were blocked by the continuous mountains, resulting in a sudden decrease in precipitation and gradually sparse vegetation. The earth slowly lost its vibrancy, leaving behind vast traces of barrenness. Soon, the green highlands turned into gray-white wilderness, with yuccas and cacti dotted among the endless sand, appearing exceptionally magnificent and bleak.

As the Allied Forces advanced northward, the harrowing cries of battle resounded across the wilderness. Copper arrows and bone arrows flew back and forth, piercing soft bodies; war clubs clashed with stone spears, leaving fallen corpses behind. The small squads of scouts from both sides constantly entangled in skirmishes, showing no mercy upon encounter, coloring the wilderness with their lives.

A black jaguar circled in the sky, emitting the deathly squawks. It rotated its gaze, observing the two groups of gray-blue figures battling each other and also waiting for the forthcoming feast. Before long, the parched land was soaked in bright red, and the number of motionless bodies increased. It wasn't long before one side began to flee, while the other started the pursuit to kill.

"Whoosh!"

A sharp bone arrow sliced through the sky, and the figure running away collapsed to the ground instantly, without even a chance to let out a scream. Then, a red-haired warrior swiftly approached. He kicked the fallen corpse, looked at the feathered arrow that hit the heart accurately, and nodded with satisfaction.

"Pah, thought you could run! Could you outrun me?"

Ivican kicked the body twice more before stretching out his arm to wipe the sweat off his face with the cotton armor he wore. A dozen Canine Descendants scouts followed up from behind, likewise clothed in the gray-blue cotton armor of the Otomi. The scouts had been fighting continuously for months, and now they had all changed their equipment, wielding sharp obsidian clubs in their hands.

"Great! After such a long chase, we've finally left all those Otomi curs behind!"

Amoxtli glanced at the corpses and laughed with a wide grin.

"Ivican, your archery skills are powerful! Shooting a running person from dozens of steps away!"

"Aw! He was just running straight ahead, what's there not to hit? The real challenge is shooting that big black bird in the sky!"

Saying so, Ivican squinted and raised his longbow, aiming into the sky.

Seeing this dangerous action, the jaguar immediately spread its wings and soared up more than ten meters before stopping. While circling in flight, it squawked as if mocking the hunter on the ground. In the food-scarce wilderness, the large birds would have been hunted to extinction by the skilled Canine Descendants if they hadn't been so vigilant.

"Whoosh!"

A bone arrow flew upward forcefully, cleaving through the air and grazing the wing of the jaguar. The big black bird shuddered in fright, promptly abandoning the prospect of food and flew far away.

Ivican first let out a regretful sigh, then revealed a content smile. He fondled the longbow lovingly, intimately feeling the wood grain, as if communicating with a weapon of divinity.

"Amoxtli, this greatbow is really something! Strong and very steady."

Amoxtli's eyes brimmed with envy looking at the greatbow. A few days ago, two squads of scouts joined forces to ambush a group of scattered Otomi Warriors. They captured this handy greatbow from the hands of the leading nobility. For the ownership of this divine bow, the two argued, with Ivican of the Great Tribe ultimately taking possession.

"Ivican, when will we go and grab another greatbow?"

"We'll see! The Otomi curs rarely have greatbows; they usually stay within the main army. The Cactus Scouts do have many greatbows, but they're tough to beat, and one risks losing oneself if not careful."

Hearing this, Amoxtli sighed and kicked a stone on the ground.

"The Otomi are becoming increasingly troublesome! In today's battle, although our ambush was successful and we killed twenty Otomi curs, we also lost seven tribal warriors!"

Upon hearing this, Ivican put away his longbow. He looked at the scouts following behind him, and a rare look of concern appeared on his face.

"Awooo! Today we shot nearly half of the Otomi warriors dead, and only then did the curs' morale collapse, turning tail to flee. Damn it! Before, a simple skirmish would scatter them. Now, with the backing of the Jaguar heads from the Cactus Tribe, even the curs can hang their tails down and pretend to be wolves!"

"Hmm. At least we didn't let a single one get away alive. Otherwise, if the Jaguar heads from the Cactus Tribe were to come, we would be in trouble!"

At the mention of the Mexica's Jaguar warriors, both red-haired scouts shuddered. These expert warriors, adept at tracking, could not be shaken off and were all well-versed in martial arts, moving with fiendish speed, making them the Canine scouts' most dangerous enemies.

The two red-haired warriors looked towards the south, staring vacantly together, until Ivican was the first to speak.

"Amoxtli, the army to the south is too large, as scouts are scattered everywhere. After ambushing this group of curs, we cannot stay here any longer. Where shall we go next?"

"Ivican, there are three main forces in the allied army to the south, Otomi curs carrying bird banners on both sides, and in the center, Cactus warriors holding the Wolf Banner. We've just scouted the western

force, and the east is likely the same. Now, we should check out the enemies in the middle to report back to the Chieftain and the Elders!"

Amoxtli thought for a while, then made up his mind. As long as they could gather useful intelligence earlier, they could return to the tribe to report and would be able to leave the increasingly dangerous south sooner.

"Awooo, makes sense! The Cactus warriors in the middle run the fastest, charging ahead, and I reckon they're almost at the doorstep of the Red Mouse tribe's home. It's the perfect time to observe their battle formation! ... Amoxtli, my friend, while you may not run as fast as I do, you always seem to be a tad smarter. In my opinion, you should leave that small tribe and join us Red Foxes sooner rather than later! I guarantee that Chief Otuwa will value you highly!"

Upon hearing the familiar persuasion, Amoxtli casually shook his head. Being ordered around in a large tribe was nowhere near as enjoyable as leading in a small tribe! He squinted his eyes, noted the direction of the sun, and headed accurately towards the East.

The evening sun bathed the red-haired warriors, casting long slanting shadows that soon disappeared into the deepening twilight. The night on the highland was long and quiet. The moonlight was dim, infusing the air with a hint of chill.

To avoid detection, neither scouting party lit a bonfire; they simply rested quietly, conserving their strength. The Canine scouts, accustomed to hunting, could barely see at night but similarly lacked the capacity for night battles. A peaceful night passed uneventfully until the rising sun heralded the start of a new day's fighting.

In the bright sunlight, the Toltec, carrying the Commander-in-Chief's battle flag, stood proudly and gazed at a nearby hill.

Atop the hill, there was a rudimentary encampment belonging to the Canine tribe. The camp's perimeter was roughly enclosed with a wooden fence, and a red vole banner fluttered at the entrance. At that moment, hundreds of Canine warriors holding short bows and stone spears intently watched the approaching great army of thousands.

"One hundred, two hundred... one thousand, fifteen hundred... not even two thousand people, at most five hundred warriors!"

Toltec, magnificent in appearance, widened his eyes and mentally counted the number of Canine tribe members. He bent his fingers, doing the calculations for a while, until he finally estimated a rough number.

"Fools! What gave them the courage to stay and resist facing the Alliance's legion?"

Black Wolf was somewhat puzzled. He looked behind him, where three thousand longbow militiamen, two thousand barbarian javelin throwers, and one thousand Temple crossbowmen, five thousand strong of the Mexica legion, were arrayed in order, surrounding the hill without leaving a single gap. He also observed a small river winding below, with large expanses of cultivated farmland lush and green. The corn in the fields had already flowered and pollinated, producing small ears of corn.

"Ah, I see! The harvest is not far off; it's just hard to wait."

Toltec murmured to himself, then his face broke into a smile, pleased with his own learning. He laughed for a moment before taking out the command banner and swung it vigorously towards the direction of the encampment!

"Hear my command! Temple crossbowmen, be on the alert! Vanguard throwers, prepare your javelins!
Longbow militiamen, approach for shooting!"