

Civilization 601

Chapter 601 - The Advance of Black Wolf

"Boom, boom, boom!"

The attack war drums sounded vigorously. Led by dozens of Prepetcha archers, two thousand Longbow Militia arranged themselves in a loose formation and advanced, ready to shoot. These Tarasco archers were dressed in gray paper armor, wore yellow vine hats, held bamboo longbows, carried a bag of inexpensive reed bone arrows on their waists, and each had a dagger for self-defense. They were cheap to assemble and relatively easy to maintain but were not adept at close combat, which is why they maintained their light mobility.

As the large group of archers steadily approached, the Canine Descendants shouted nervously. Hunters raised their Hunting Bows, relying on the terrain of the small hill, and valiantly fired towards the outskirts of the camp. However, the Hunting Bows were short, and the flurry of bone arrows ran out of force after traveling a few dozen steps, ineffectively sticking into the archers' paper armor without causing any damage.

"Tweet, tweet!..."

Accompanied by two short whistles, the Longbow Militia stopped in their tracks and then drew their bows and nocked their arrows. At this distance of about sixty paces from the camp, the Canine Descendants' Hunting Bows could hardly damage the archers' paper armor, while the archers' longbows could easily penetrate the Canine Descendants' cloth garments.

"Tweet!... Whoosh!"

The shrill flute sounded, and the leading Samurai suddenly released their fingers, conducting the first round of test firing. Dozens of long arrows drew a short arc, slanting into the wooden fence. The Canine Descendants burst into laughter and curses. Then, the Samurai adjusted their angles, leading the archers behind them in a direct volley!

"Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!"

Thousands of reed arrows tore through the sky, like birds taking flight, carrying the howls of the God of Death as they shot into the Canine Descendants' camp! Over a hundred Canine Descendants were wounded and fell to the ground, emitting piercing screams and spilling copious blood. Within the Red Mouse Tribe, chaos and noise erupted suddenly, like a disturbed nest of mice.

"Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!"

The second volley of arrows arrived. Dozens of impulsive Canine Warriors tried to open the camp gates and rush out, only to make perfect targets for the arrows; others crouched and hid behind fences and grass huts to avoid the deadly flurry of arrows.

"Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!"

A dozen red-haired warriors roared loudly, attempting to command the chaotic Tribe, but the third volley of arrows came down again, turning them into porcupines!

"Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!..."

"Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!"

The roaring rain of arrows continued for five rounds, and the ground was soon littered with several hundred unfortunate Canine Descendants. Toltec looked at the Tribe's camp, which had lost command and was in disarray, and sneered dismissively. He issued another command with a voice as loud as thunder.

"Vanguard, launch and charge!"

"Roar! Chief Divine protect us! Kill!"

Two thousand Tekos Barbarians let out excited shouts, growling as they charged forward.

As members of the Royal Family's forbidden army, these Barbarian mercenaries were meticulously selected from captives taken in western campaigns and Tribes that had surrendered. They were always agile and ferocious, skilled in close combat and throwing, and after converting to the Chief Divine, they regarded life and death with indifference. They were also the best vanguard for close combat, capable of throwing dangerous Clay Tribulus during sieges. Of course, attacking a small Tribal camp did not require the use of difficult-to-transport explosive weapons.

At that moment, the Barbarian vanguard wore Mexica green cotton armor, donned sturdy vine hats, held a sharp Copper Spears in one hand, and two inexpensive Obsidian javelins in the other. Their movements were extremely fast, and they quickly closed to within twenty paces of the camp. Hidden Tribal Huntsmen started to pop up, shooting sparse arrows. The vanguard accelerated their run while raising their arms, returning fire with accurate javelins.

"Whizz, whizz, whizz!"

At a distance of ten paces, the power of the javelins was immense! The thrown javelins pierced directly through the gaps in the fence, transfixing Hunters who were desperately resisting in their chests and bellies, nailing them to the ground and eliciting unhuman-like agonized howls!

Soon after, the intense "thump thump" of chopping wood rang out. The leading Vanguard Samurai took out their Bronze Axes and hacked vigorously at the fence and camp gates. The Barbarians behind them threw ropes, snagging the broken camp gates, and then pulled together.

"Crack...crunch!"

The wood broke with a sharp "crack," and the camp gates burst open! The Vanguard Samurai swung their axes again, and the red hedgehog flag was cut down the middle, falling to the ground and trampled under the feet of the warriors. The sacred totem fell, no longer able to protect the Tribe! The Canine Descendants immediately let out cries of despair.

"Roar, roar, kill!"

Hundreds of Mexica green figures roared excitedly and ferociously stormed into the fort. They thrust their Copper Spears without mercy, striking with full force, and quickly advanced from the entrance of the camp to the central chief's longhouse of the Tribe!

Over a hundred Canine Warriors swung their Stone Hammers and Wooden Shields, resisting valiantly in front of the longhouse, but they were repeatedly pierced by the encircling Copper Spears. Soon, a fierce red-haired warrior let out a terrible scream, clutching the bloody hole in his chest, and collapsed onto his back.

"Red Mouse Chieftain!"

The Canine Descendants shouted in panic, losing their last bit of morale. They dropped their weapons one by one, kneeling before the formidable enemy, giving up all struggle and leaving themselves to fate.

Beneath the hill, Toltec laughed heartily, as victory was so easy before an excellent Commander-in-Chief! Then, he looked back at the camp and frowned.

Black Wolf, the Commander-in-Chief, called over a trusted aide and gave a few orders. The trusted aide nodded and led a large troop of warriors and the accompanying War Priests forward.

After a while, the slaughter in the camp finally ceased completely. The Vanguard of the Barbarians, covered in blood, escorted the able-bodied captives who could still walk and filed out of the camp. The Priests, with benevolent expressions, soothed the frightened and fearful Canine Descendants and had the Samurai take the children away.

In the wailing camp, the Samurai searched briefly before turning back to report to the Commander-in-Chief.

As expected, this ordinary Canine Tribe, despite having nearly two thousand people, was so poor that they rattled. The storage tent didn't even have a rat; there were only a dozen or so bags of grain, barely

enough to keep two thousand people alive until the harvest. Then there was tree bark, grass roots, cactuses, agaves, various insects, rat meat, some dubious dried meat, and a few baskets of strange medicinal herbs. The only valuable items were a few bundles of furs in the back, ranging from mouse to bear pelts.

"These impoverished Canine Descendants!... After a battle, they can't even recoup the cost of the arrows."

Looking at the spartan loot, Toltec shook his head. He coldly waved his hand, and the Barbarian soldiers, ignoring the low wails on the ground, swung their torches and set fire to the longhouses, thatched huts, and tents.

Soon, the encampment on the hillside became a sea of flames. Black, thick smoke rose violently, erasing all traces. The wails gradually ceased, and even the wind grew quiet, leaving only the fields below the hill still nurturing hopes of harvest.

From the start of the encirclement to the end of the scavenging, the battle lasted about an hour. The attacking camp lost just over a dozen men and wounded a few dozen, and had utterly destroyed the encampment of two thousand Canine Descendants, capturing a thousand prisoners.

Black Wolf glanced over the captured prisoners, all young and strong men and women from the Canine Descendants. The Mexica Samurai had already used sturdy hemp ropes to neatly tie them up. This kind of prisoner capture was something they had done countless times before.

"Hmm, the Guajili Tribe really has few old and weak. Sent to the south, they would be suitable as slaves for agriculture. The Nobility and Samurai have been granted so much land, at last, they will have able-bodied serfs!"

With this thought, Toltec nodded in satisfaction. He looked at his trusted aide beside him and ordered resolutely.

"Tupa, take two hundred men! Escort these able-bodied prisoners back to Mespa. And tell him to arrange for transportation to the rear army camp, so that His Highness can review them! His Highness likes young and sturdy serfs most!"

"At your command! Chief, shall we wait for General Mespa? He has three thousand Samurai..."

"Wait for what? Raiding Canine Tribes has to be fast! We must wipe out as many as possible before the rats can react. Who knows where they'll hole up next? I don't have the time to chase after rats all over the mountains. The Pamus Samurai lack discipline and move too slowly. We only need to take a few Scouts as guides for the legion, and the rest can stay behind to slowly take in the prisoners!"

Black Wolf waved his hand grandly. Then, he determined the direction and signaled with his command flag toward the northwest.

"All troops, rest for a quarter of an hour! We march on to the next tribe before nightfall!"

"Roar!"

The roar of the Samurai instantly rose over the wilderness, drowning out a low bark hidden in the bushes.

"Awooo! He saw us, he's waving flags at us!"

Ivican raised his head in terror and let out a low cry, almost ready to turn and run immediately.

"Shut your dog mouth! Ivican, they haven't moved! Hidden two hundred steps away with vine hats on, no one can see us in the grass!"

Amoxkli swiftly extended his hand, pressing Ivican to the ground. Ivican shivered for a while before calming down. He widened his eyes, looking towards the burning camp with a deep sense of dread.

"Ancestors! Amoxkli, how long did they fight? The two-thousand-strong Red Mouse Tribe, just gone like that?"

"Ivican, you've always had better eyesight than I do, can't you see for yourself?"

Amoxkli was equally shocked. He responded gruffly.

"Half of the Red Mouse Tribe has gone to meet the ancestors, and the other half has been captured as prisoners. They couldn't be more finished!"

"Ah, Amoxkli, the Red Mouse Tribe is finished just like that! Why didn't they run?"

"Run? When we just managed to survive the cold snap, common Tribes were cannibalizing each other—where would they find the food to flee? Do you think they're all like your Red Fox Tribe? Many red-haired Warriors, plenty of plundered grain, and a cunning leader!"

"Awoooo! Chief Otuwa is indeed smart, never fights a losing battle all the way!"

Hearing such an evaluation, Ivican felt some pride. He nodded in agreement and then whispered quietly.

"Amoxtli, we've seen what we needed to see, let's hurry back to our tribe and report the intelligence to the chiefs! The Cactus Tribe is so formidable, we need to let the chiefs weigh in on what to do."

"Right! We can't stay in the south any longer; let's go now!"

Among the bushes, two red-haired Warriors crouched down, taking one last glance at the black smoke on the hill, then silently slipped away following the ridge's contours. Above in the sky, several black American eagles, attracted by the scent of blood, circled down. They squawked eagerly, anticipating a more bountiful feast.

Chapter 602 - The Vast Northern Land

The afternoon sun pierced through the post-rain clouds, casting its light on the damp wilderness and causing a faint mist to rise. The summers on the northern highlands were always dry, with no accumulation of vegetation, so the soil's surface moisture could seldom be preserved for long. And water sources were the most precious resource.

Only where streams and springs flowed could crops be planted and tribal populations supported, allowing passage for large-scale armies. For a thousand years, the battles in the north revolved around water sources. Blood nurtured the fertile soil by the rivers and made the rare greenery all the more vibrant.

Thousands of Mexica legionnaires marched across the arid land, kicking up plumes of dust visible from afar. The lofty Wolf Banner fluttered at the center of the formation, and Xiulote, clad in sturdy Medium Armor, proceeded forward, guarded by his Copper Armor-clad personal army. He surveyed his surroundings; his trusted aides' faces were sun-reddened and beaded with fine sweat. Looking back, he saw the legion's trail, countless drops of sweat falling on the wilderness, only to evaporate quickly, leaving behind mere specks of white.

The army had marched on resolutely for days, covering more than three hundred miles, with the scenery along the way resembling the same monochromatic painting. The endless flat paths of the northern wilderness stretched infinitely, with only the towering peaks of the East gradually falling behind. Soon, as the sun dipped low, today's march came to an end, and the Samurai found a stream thick with vegetation to encamp and hurried to gather water for cooking.

"Bertade, it seems that in this Northern Land, the greatest difficulty in battle isn't the Canine Descendants, but the long supply lines and the dry land!"

The King lifted his water flask, gulping down several mouthfuls of the cool brackish water. He let out a contented sigh before looking around sentimentally.

A shallow stream flowed from the eastern Sierra Madre Mountains, struggling to reach this place, finally giving the land a touch of vitality. Around the stream, yucca flowers were in bloom. Long, sword-shaped leaves sent up tall spires, and on these spires blossomed brilliant white flowers, like little bells. There were a few tiny dots crawling on the bells. Curiously, Xiulote leaned in closer, only to find that they were white yucca moths, busy with the pollination of the flowers.

At this moment, the setting sun dipped in the west, dyeing half the sky with a red glow. The heavens were awash with colors, the mountain ranges majestic with their undulating peaks, the highland vast and endless, and the air was filled with a sweet fragrance as the blossoms burst forth in front of them!

The King paused his steps, silently gazing for a long time, his heart swelling with a conqueror's pride.

"The highland vast and wild, the rivers and mountains picturesque. This Northern Land is boundless, but I do not need to build a Great Wall; I just need to hold them all in my hands!"

Upon hearing the King's proclamation, Bertade stood solemnly behind His Majesty, in his unwavering armor. It was only after His Majesty turned to look again that he began to speak with a smile, his words laced with caution.

"Your Majesty, this march is not truly difficult. Many rivers flow west from the mountain ranges in the East, and we have local Otomi guides to point out the roads and water sources. The truly daunting march will be crossing the Pamus State and entering the stronghold of the Guajili people, the Kolawea Wilderness that spans two thousand miles! There, the water sources are even scarcer, supplies even more lacking, and combined with complex terrain and no guides, any large-scale military campaign would be a disaster of death!"

Hearing this, Xiulote gave a slight start and sighed softly.

The Kolawea Wilderness was the cradle of the Guajili people, and further north lay the future border between the United States and Mexico, New Mexico, and Texas.

In Xiulote's vague memory, although extremely arid, Kolawea was the mining heart of the North. There were not only extensive gold and silver mines but also massive open-pit coal mines and an iron ore deposit of unknown location. Yet, with the logistical capabilities of the time, advancing two thousand miles across the wilderness to exploit the minerals of Kolawea was simply an impossible task.

"Bertade, I understand your meaning! This land is barren and desolate, and far too distant from the Mexica Alliance. There's no way to occupy it at this time, nor is it worth occupying. The purpose of this northern campaign is to engage in combat with the Guajili, to kill their warriors, to plunder their able-bodied population, and then to destroy the Tribal Alliance of the Canine Descendants! The large-scale military operations of the Allied Forces will be confined within the territory of Pamus State!"

After marching for more than ten days, the King personally witnessed the desolation and vastness of the North and further clarified the objectives of the northern expedition. The North is infinitely vast, and without fast-moving Cavalry, it simply cannot be controlled. And once horses are obtained, the Canine Descendants of the North will become a major concern for the Empire. All of these factors require advance planning and the strategic placing of pieces. In areas the legions cannot reach, only trade and religion are the keys to containing the North.

"Have the captured prisoners all been transported to the South?"

After a moment of thought, Xiulote asked.

The army had now fully entered the territory of Pamus State, over three hundred miles away from the Mountain City. With the sweeping strikes of the three Mexica legions, reports of victory continuously came from the front lines. More than ten ordinary Guajili Tribes had been destroyed by the Allied Forces, and over fifteen thousand Canine Descendant Tribes were erased from the map. According to the Samurai's report on their merits, more than three thousand Canine Warriors had been killed, and over eight thousand young men and women had been taken prisoner, while the casualties of the Allied Forces were only a few hundred.

"Your Highness, the gradually captured population of over eight thousand have already been escorted by the Otomi Militia in charge of grain transportation to concentrate in the Mountain City to the South. Next, General Kuluka will arrange the subsequent journey, transporting them across the Lerma River, and into the heartland of the Kingdom. Finally, Marshal Olosh will personally allocate, according to the register, those captured Canine Descendants who can farm, evenly to the Nobility and Samurai who have been granted land for their military service,"

Bertade explained in detail. Guajili warriors are notoriously unruly, and most veteran red-haired warriors were killed or fled during the attacks on the Tribes. Therefore, most of the Guajili prisoners were ordinary Tribal inhabitants, and their fate was to become Agricultural Slaves of the Kingdom. Only a very small number of surrendered Guajili warriors would be absorbed into the Kingdom's legions after truly converting to the Chief Divine.

In fact, considering the degree of hatred the Otomi people held, during combat with the Guajili Canine Descendants, they were close to leaving no survivors. But the King issued strict orders, providing food for the prisoners, and since all Otomi legions knew the Mexica tradition of sacrifice, they obediently turned over the captives. To appease the feelings of the Otomi Warriors, Xiulote selected the Chieftains and Chieftains of the Canine Tribes and, in the presence of the generals, sacrificed them to the most high Chief Divine.

Xiulote nodded. He looked to the not-so-distant bleak village, situated at the headwaters of the stream. It was now dinner time, and there wasn't a single wisp of cooking smoke in the village, nor any sign of people moving about. Only vaguely visible were exposed white Bones scattered around the village, with Otomi clothing strewn nearby.

"Along the way, Pamus State has been completely devastated; who knows how many years it will take to recover..."

Bertade shook his head. He had heard the Scouts' report and was aware of the brutality of the Canine Descendants. They were ferocious and glorified strength, and they even disregarded the lives of the elderly and weak amongst their own, so how could they care about the lives of the Otomi? The remaining population of Pamus State was probably even lower than previously estimated.

The two stood by the creek, watching the sun set in the West, while discussing the military strategies for the northern campaign. Far off, several Scouts were running from the North. They carried the green flags that represented victory, evidently bringing more good news.

August ended amidst slaughter. The three Mexica legions, like charging wild buffaloes, stampeded forward, heading for the camps of the Canine Tribes, completely destroying every obstacle in their way.

The thunderous fall of rocks into the lake would always startle a flock of birds. Facing an existential threat, the remaining Canine Tribes finally reacted. They abandoned the nearly harvested fields, packed up their rudimentary belongings, and fled northward in the night. However, like birds returning to their nests, the escaping waterfowl had yet to lose heart, gathering around the major Tribes, heeding the arrangements of the lead birds.

In a few fertile areas of Pamus State, the Canine Descendants gradually amassed into tens of thousands, forming contiguous camps. The eight Great Tribes each gathered their vassal Tribes, mobilizing thousands of warriors. The Tribal leaders debated day and night, arguing loudly, determining the future of nearly one hundred thousand Guajili people!

Chapter 603 - Red Fox Valley

The continuous mountains undulated across the highland, shaping various forms as if crafted by the Earth Mother Goddess herself. The mountains altered the direction of the wind and also affected the flow of streams. When the cold northern breeze was blocked by the high mountains, the climate grew warm; when the mountain streams converged into small lakes in the valleys, the soil became moist. Where it is warm and moist, precious patches of fertile land would form. In the endless wilderness of the Northern Land, these were the dwelling places that Tribes fought and killed over.

Amoxtli and the Scouts ascended a narrow mountain path, reaching the top of a small hill two hundred meters high. Gazing out, he saw two mountain ranges hundreds of meters high extending parallel from the East to the West, converging in the North and South to form a valley about twenty or thirty miles long. A winding river followed the mountain's range, meandering from the East. More streams joined the river in the valley, bringing the source of life to all things.

"What a wonderful place this is!"

Standing on high ground, Amoxtli gazed at the precious expanse of greenery beside the river, unable to help but voice his emotion.

"Awooo, this is Red Fox Valley, of course, it's a great place! Our Red Fox Tribe is one of the strongest tribes, naturally, we occupy the best fertile land!"

Ivican grinned. In the entire Pamus State, the valley before them was the second-largest fertile land after the surroundings of Pamus City.

Naturally, such a desirable spot in the wilderness wouldn't be vacant. Along the long river, there were hundreds of thatched huts and sheds, as well as farmlands close to the river. Before the southern invasion, as many as over twenty thousand Otomi people had settled here, even establishing a small Otomi City-State.

When the Canine Descendants moved south, they split into many groups, and this sizable fertile area was quickly eyed by the Otuwa of the Red Fox Tribe. Otuwa brought together the "Red Frog" and "Red

Cat," which were at the bottom of the eight major Tribes. The three tribes joined forces and conquered this fertile land.

Next came the division of territory according to strength. The Red Fox Tribe took over the small town in the center of the valley, the Red Cat Tribe took the river entrance on the east side, and the Red Frog Tribe occupied the valley exit on the west. As for the local Otomi inhabitants, aside from three or four thousand people who escaped quickly, the rest were mostly slaughtered, leaving only two thousand able agricultural slaves.

"Awooo, the land to the south is very fertile, the crops are growing well! The pumpkins are already being harvested, it's just that the corn has to wait one more month. This time Chief Otuwa asked us to plant more quick-ripening pumpkins and less late-ripening corn. The warriors were secretly complaining... but now it seems, the Fox Chief is an old fox after all, much smarter than us!"

In the center of the valley, vast areas of pumpkin were ready for harvest, and thousands of tribal folk and agricultural slaves were busy harvesting. Seeing this scene, Ivican laughed happily. His gaze then moved to the cornfields in the east and west of the valley, and he sneered.

"The Red Cat Chieftain is a dumb cat, the Red Frog Chieftain is nothing but a stupid toad! Right now, the Cactus Tribe's large army is stationed just eighty miles to the southeast, and who knows when they will attack. Guarding such a huge patch of unripe cornfields, really puts them in a tough spot — if they want to fight, they can't win; if they want to leave, they can't escape!"

Hearing this, Amoxtlí's heart stirred. He moved closer to his friend, lowering his voice to ask.

"Ivican, you often go in and out of the Chieftain's longhouse, reporting military intelligence to the Chief, you're someone with insight! With the current situation, what exactly are the plans of the Chieftains of the three great Tribes?"

Flattered by his friend's compliment, Ivican laughed proudly. Then he scratched his head somewhat distressfully.

"We've been discussing this for many days, and I still don't fully understand the Chieftains' plans. The Jiowar leader ordered the Tribal Warriors to pack their belongings and be ready to retreat at any moment. But from what I've heard the three Chieftains discussing, it seems like they still want to face off against the south. Now with so many ordinary Tribes gathering here, with our numbers and the defensive advantage of the valley terrain, there's a general feeling that we can still put up a fight, at least until we harvest the corn in the valley before we leave!"

Amoxkli thought for a moment and then nodded in agreement. He looked at the dozen tribal banners fluttering in the valley and the tens of thousands of tribal folk. The cacophony of voices filled the valley and reached his ears from here, inexplicably bolstering a bit of confidence.

With the northward move of the Cactus Tribe, many Guajili Tribes retreated northward, gradually gathering. Now, within the Pamus State, surrounding the fertile lands, two major tribal centers have emerged.

One is located a hundred miles northeast in Pamus City, with the strongest Red Dog Tribe at the helm, comprising five large tribes and dozens of ordinary ones, numbering more than sixty thousand tribal people. The other is the current Red Fox Valley, headed by the second strongest Red Fox Tribe, with three large tribes and over a dozen ordinary tribes, amounting to at least thirty thousand people.

"Hmm, if all the tribes of the valley mobilize, we should be able to muster over ten thousand fighting men, and the robust women can help with the defense. With this advantageous terrain, as long as each tribe guards the valley entrance well, we should be able to hold out until the corn harvest!"

Amoxtli comforted himself while looking around. The valley's north and south were lined with continuous mountains, with only a few narrow mountain paths like the one beneath his feet, which were virtually impassable for large armies. The valley had two steep entrances to the southeast and northwest, barely allowing two hundred people to pass side by side. As long as they could use the terrain to their advantage and defend these entrances well, they might stand a chance, right?

Both men, weighed down by their thoughts, gazed at the valley below, desperately cobbling together some semblance of confidence. They had both seen the Cactus Tribe in combat up close. Although the enemy's archery was formidable, attacking uphill at the valley entrance would reduce its power due to the terrain, and the thick-skinned Samurai could be countered with powerful stone-throwing.

After a while, Amoxtli managed a forced smile.

"Ivican, the scouting report hasn't changed much since a few days ago. The Cactus Tribe's legion is still resting eighty miles away to the southeast. I wager their food supply won't be that plentiful either, so it's not certain they can afford to fight... If there's nothing urgent, I'll head back to the tribe!"

"Alright then, I'll report back to the Chieftain first. Later tonight, if you're free, let's eat meat together! Aww, and bring your daughter with the exceptional Archery skills! I still have some stockpiled hedgehog meat, which roasted and eaten with fresh pumpkin is especially delicious!"

"Sure! Aran's Archery has already surpassed mine; you're the only one who can give her some pointers now!"

"Great! Aww, in another couple of years, Aran will be able to dye her hair red! I'm really envious of you!"

The two men pounded each other's chests in farewell. Ivican led the Red Fox Scouts back towards the valley center, traversing the narrow mountain path and over a small hill to the north. Amoxтли, along with several tribal Scouts, went west along the mountains, heading to the northwestern valley entrance.

The group proceeded westward, moving away from the densely populated center of the fertile valley. Amoxтли's tribe, as a vassal of the Great Red Fox Tribe, naturally could not settle in the fertile valley. They were allocated just outside the northwestern valley entrance, relying on mountains that turned northward, a position further to the north.

This area was downstream of the river, where the small river was already drying up, only moistening a small patch of fertile soil along its banks. The soil had been cultivated into farmland, planted with patches of pumpkins and corn, where hundreds of tribal people were working hard in the fields, harvesting pumpkins. A row of low thatched huts had been set up along the edge of the farmland, close to the nearby hills. At the base of the hills, a number of semi-subterranean dwellings had been dug for habitation to save on the wood and grass needed for the huts.

A sparse wooden fence surrounded the farmland and hills, outlining a typical tribal camp. Over a hundred Tribal Warriors stood guard in the camp, and at the gate fluttered a red crow flag.

The "Red Crow" Tribe—this was Amoxтли's home. Seeing this barren camp, he exhaled a breath of relief. He led the Scouts down to the camp gate, where the Tribal Warriors guarding it bowed their heads in salute to him.

Amoxтли nodded indifferently, maintaining the dignity of a red-haired warrior. Just as he was about to head for the tribe's central longhouse, he spotted a sixteen- or seventeen-year-old Canine Descendant girl dashing towards him.

The girl ran with determination, her body was strong, her movements as agile as a cheetah. She wore a tight-fitting short-sleeved gambeson and carried a small cedar Hunting Bow on her back, with a rare Obsidian Dagger at her waist. Carved on the exquisitely handled dagger were three enigmatic square symbols and a mysterious black wolf's head.

Chapter 604: Three Hundred Chapters: The Young Girl Alan, Tribal Chief

"Daddy! You're back!"

The young girl moved quickly, reaching him in two steps. Her eyes were bright, sharp like a hunter's, and her eyebrows lifted with a warrior's confident fierceness. Her majestic eyes and upturned lips together formed a somewhat delicate face.

Seeing the young girl in front of him, Amoxltli's face showed a rare kindness and tenderness. He reached out and tousled her short hair.

"Alan, I'm back! How has the tribe been while I was away?"

"Daddy, the pumpkins in the tribe are ripe, and everyone has been busy harvesting them. Seeing us gather pumpkins, many common tribe nomads have been lurking around. The warriors have been holding weapons day and night, sleeping by the fence, vigilant against these people!"

Alan pursed her lips and pointed towards a distant figure looking around. Her movements were agile, with calluses on her palms and fingers from archery, and her skin was a healthy wheat color, showcasing a vigorous beauty.

Amoxtli glanced over and saw several lean figures with crude weapons, peering into the pumpkin fields from afar. But they were too far away to see their faces clearly. The red-haired warrior's eyebrows raised, his expression turning somewhat menacing.

"Recently, many common tribes have been moving north, severely short of food. To fight over food, people die every day in the valley... Alan, grab your bow and arrows later, and come with me to shoot these people! Leave two alive, and interrogate them about their origin. Conveniently, Ivican will be here tonight; he's from the Great Red Fox Tribe, and he can bear witness!"

"Sure!"

Alan nodded briskly, gripping her bow and arrows on her back. As a hunter of the wilderness, she was long accustomed to death. Then, the girl pulled out two pairs of sharp rodent teeth from her pocket, smiling brightly.

"Daddy, yesterday morning, I shot two groundhogs! I've already processed the meat; tonight, I'll invite you and Uncle Ivican for some roast. Hee hee, it'll be a good opportunity to consult on archery..."

"Groundhogs, two of them? Alan, did you shoot them yourself?"

Amoxtli was somewhat surprised. Groundhogs were one of the most familiar animals to the Canine Descendants of the wilderness. They were highly alert, quick to run, and adept at burrowing. The usual hunter traps couldn't hold groundhogs, and shooting such nimble creatures was easier said than done.

"Yes, Daddy. The pumpkins in the field are ripe, so the groundhogs will surely come. The night before last, I took my bow and slept early in the field. I waited until dawn when a few groundhogs came to

nibble, and I shot one with a raise of my hand! The others scattered, and I aimed two arrows at the entrances of their holes and luckily hit another one!"

Alan showed a happy smile and vigorously shook the rodent teeth in her hand.

"Two of them, two! One was especially fat, after skinning it weighed three pounds!"

"Ha ha, patient, quick to react, and smart... Alan, you really are a born hunter!"

Amoxtli laughed in admiration. He affectionately tousled the girl's head again.

"Once this battle is over, I'll teach you all the scout skills and take you to hunt a couple of Otomi dogs!"

"Daddy, my archery is already better than yours! You promised before that if my archery surpasses yours, you would let me join the Scout Team... I want to start scouting now!"

Alan widened her eyes expectantly at Amoxtli. However, he sternly replied,

"Not now, being a scout now is too dangerous with the warriors from Cactus Tribe around! Let's discuss this after the war is over!"

Hearing her father's refusal, Alan lowered her head, disappointed and sulking.

"Hmph! The warriors from the Cactus Tribe, I've seen them before... they are the ones to be killed."

"Ah..."

Hearing the girl's words, Amoxltli sighed, memories of long ago flooding his mind. Back then, the girl was only around eleven or twelve years old, traveling north along the Madre Mountains alone. She was wrapped in a small shawl, carrying a dagger and a Hunting Bow, with a bag of nearly depleted food on her back, dirty as if she were a wild child. When he first met her, he saw her Obsidian Dagger and thought she was a lost young boy from a Tribal Chief's family, so he took her back to the tribe. Unexpectedly, he ended up raising her as his own daughter...

Amoxltli reminisced for a while, then smiled tenderly and asked earnestly.

"Alan, you once lived in Vastec people's lands in the East; what was it like there?"

"Ah, the East? There's a lot more to eat there than here, more animals, more trees, everything is green!"

Alan lifted her head, furrowing her brows in thought.

"As for the Vastec people... I was young then. I only remember that occasionally Vastec traders would come to the tribe for trade. They were quite friendly, liked to go unclothed, and really liked dancing..."

Tribes in the East are different from those in the North; they rarely kill each other. But the capture teams from the Cactus Tribe appeared often..."

As she spoke, Alan's voice gradually grew solemn, and her eyes seemed to harbor flames. Amoxtli shook his head and lovingly tousled the girl's hair again.

"Hmm, plenty of food, they like dancing, and rarely fight... good, very good! Alan, I'll go report to the Chieftain first and look for you later!"

"Understood, Dad."

Amoxtli waved his hand and continued to stride forward, his mind full of thoughts. He soon reached the center of the camp, directly lifting the cloth curtain and entering the leader's longhouse.

The longhouses of ordinary Canine Descendant tribes were poor and small, to the extent that they couldn't even afford wealth disparity. This one, referred to as a leader's longhouse, was so cramped and lowly that in the southern Alliance or Kingdom, it would only be considered a home for commoners. The longhouse was filled with the strong smell of herbs and scattered bones of various animals everywhere. A lean figure was sitting cross-legged amid the piles of herbs and animal bones.

Hearing the noise, the over fifty-year-old Chieftain "Crow," Kakalo, looked up towards the entrance as Amoxtli walked in.

"Amoxtli, you're back! How's the situation in the south?"

"The same as usual. The Cactus Tribe's army hasn't made a move, probably waiting for the food supplies to arrive."

"Any news from the three Great Tribes? Are the other tribes mobilizing?"

"The surrounding tribes are all mobilizing, and many tribal warriors have gathered in the valley. According to Ivican, the three Great Tribes are planning to fight with the south until the corn harvest. But Chieftain Otuwa has already received plenty of food, I'm not sure if he will retreat."

Kakalo's aged face had deep-set eyes. Upon hearing this, he definitively said,

"Otuwa, that old fox! In all these years, I've never seen him lose a battle. The Red Fox Tribe has gathered enough food. If the main forces of the southern allied troops encircle us, and our warriors' casualties increase, that old fox will surely flee! Hmm, although this valley has strategic advantages, it might not hold for long!"

"What?! But Otuwa is currently the leader of all tribes in the valley! If he runs during the battle, then there's nothing left to defend! Red Cat and Red Frog control the strategic passage at the mouth of the valley, how would they let him escape?"

Amoxkli was worried. He looked at the old chieftain who shook his head.

"Red Cat and Red Frog's chieftains... Let's watch and see. We also need to be prepared! The tribe has already mobilized five hundred fighting men, and the previously captured weapons have also been

distributed. Based on your intelligence, plenty of early-ripening pumpkins were planted in the fields. After this harvest, we should be able to manage for a few months."

"Chieftain, since the tribe now has some food, why don't we leave the tribe-concentrated valley and retreat early..."

Amoxtli paused, his expression flickering, but he showed no shame. For the Canine Descendants of the north, the primary concerns were the survival of the tribe, the number of able-bodied members, and the amount of food. Thus, running away was not shameful; staying alive was most important. As for such things as honor or beliefs, those were troublesome things concocted by the well-fed southern tribes.

Kakalo thought for a moment, his face trembling with wrinkles, and shook his head.

"Not now. The three Great Tribes have already given orders for everyone to comply with the conscription. We are a tributary of the Red Fox Tribe, watched by many eyes. Besides, there are several tribes blocking the way outside, and patrols from the Great Tribes are around. Everyone still wants to fight; if we flee first and get caught, we would be punished severely. We can only wait for an opportunity when everyone else doesn't want to fight, or when the battle becomes too fierce to manage!"

Amoxtli lowered his eyes. After a while, he sighed.

"Chieftain, the Cactus Tribe is formidable in battle... Facing such a powerful tribe, according to the traditions of the Wilderness, it might be better to surrender early!"

"Foolish! Amoxltli, have you been frightened by the Cactus Tribe? Speaking such nonsense, how can I trust you to lead the tribe! Cough, cough..."

Upon hearing this, Kakalo suddenly became angry and started coughing forcefully. Amoxltli quickly stepped forward, carefully helping the old chieftain catch his breath. It was a while before Kakalo calmed down. He said in a deep voice,

"Amoxltli, the traditions of the Wilderness only apply to the Canine Descendant tribes living there! These southern tribes, though descended from the Wilderness, have forgotten their roots and accepted others as their ancestors! They don't see us as their kin, how can we trust them and entrust our lives and livelihood to them!"

"Moreover, to whom would you surrender? The Cactus Tribe? What is their reputation? Capturing robust individuals, sacrificing nobles, destroying other tribes... Over decades, even the far-flung Sakatekas know of their brutality."

"As for the Otomi Tribe... how many Otomi dogs have we killed along the way? At that time, everyone was out of food, and hardly any prisoners were kept. The Great Tribes think only of occupying lands and have also wiped out the nobles of the Pamus State. With such hatred, if the Otomi get their hands on us, wouldn't they flay us alive!..."

Amoxltli closed his eyes and nodded slowly. He remained silent for a good while before opening his eyes again.

"Chieftain, encountering a hostile tribe on the Wilderness, if we can beat them, we fight; if we cannot, we run; if we can't escape, we surrender. Now, since we can neither overcome them nor surrender, we really need to think hard about where to run! Before coming to see you, I suddenly had an idea..."

"Oh? Let's hear it..."

Kakalo widened his eyes, leaning forward to listen. Amoxkli whispered his plan. After a long time, the old chieftain finally nodded heavily.

"If that's the case, it might indeed be a way out. We, the Guajili people, never worry about long distances, nor do we fear confrontation. But along the way, we still have to overcome two more challenges! Hmm, maybe we can also contact a few familiar tribes to join us..."

Soft whispers vanished into the hut, as the faint scent of herbs drifted into the distance. The sun gradually set, casting the hut's shadow towards the East, as if pointing towards a new direction

Chapter 605 - Chieftains

"Ivican, you can go down now! Scouting all the way must have been tiring, go to the warehouse and receive two bags of pumpkins."

"Yes, Chieftain. Oh, thank you for your bounty!"

Ivican grinned from ear to ear. He looked up at the solemn hall where three tribal leaders sat cross-legged, then bowed with a clenched fist, respectfully saluting the Red Fox Chieftain. The Red Fox Chieftain waved his hand, and the red-haired scout obediently turned and left.

This year, the Red Fox Chieftain Otuwa was in his early forties and was no longer considered young among the short-lived Canine Descendants. Time had taken the strength from his muscles and etched

lines onto his face. He wore a wolf fur robe, with high cheekbones and slightly tilted eyes that were sharply piercing. At first glance, he looked like a fox in wolf's skin.

This place had once been the most solemn Temple in the Otomi City-State of the Valley. Now it served as the Guajili's council hall. Inside, the sculpture of the Primordial God was damaged and broken, the surrounding murals stained with congealed blood, and dozens of tanned hides were spread across the floor.

The Red Fox Chieftain sat on the soft hides, opposite the other two large tribal leaders. Mizili, the Red Cat Chieftain, was tall and thin with narrow eyes. Keka, the Red Frog Chieftain, was slightly plump with fierce eyes. The three of them, wearing wolf fur robes and seated together, emitted an intense jungle aura.

"The Aztecs have stopped eighty miles to the south, just as a few days ago, motionless. According to the scouts' report, they are transporting grain northward and sending the strong captives caught within the tribes southward, possibly to sacrifice them before the gods!"

Otuwa spoke indifferently. The Red Fox Tribe had a century-long heritage and was very familiar with the southern tribes, owning special paintings that narrate the history of the Cactus Tribe.

"Damned Cactus Tribe, ferocious Jaguars, destined to be torn into pieces by packs of wolves!"

Upon hearing this, Keka's eyes widened as he vehemently cursed.

"Otuwa, Mizili, the Cactus Tribe's camp is not too far. We can gather five hundred red-haired warriors from our three tribes, along with some ordinary tribal scouts, and give them a night raid!"

Hearing this proposition, Otuwa and Mizili exchanged glances, then gently shook their heads. Night raids were a task for the elite, and regardless of the outcome, most were sure to not return. Red-haired warriors were the ruling core of the tribes, and even combined, the three tribes had no more than a thousand red-haired warriors—who could not be recklessly squandered.

"Keka, don't rush! The Aztec's camp is heavily guarded and has many patrols and tiger-headed scouts at night. We'll discuss the night raid later. I've already arranged for six or seven flexible ordinary tribes to move hundreds of miles south and harass their grain route! These days they haven't moved north immediately, presumably because of the harassment!"

Otuwa looked at the angry Red Frog Chieftain and soothed him with a smile.

"Recently, all tribes have been mobilizing warriors and reinforcing the fortress at both the eastern and western valley mouths. We have the geographical advantage, just need to hold for one month, until everyone has gathered their harvest. After that, whether we fight or flee, we'll be much more at ease!"

Mizili nodded in agreement. He pondered for a moment, then asked in a low voice.

"Otuwa, has there been any response from the envoy sent south? What did the Great Chief of the Aztecs say to our offer of peace?"

"Mizili, you think of surrendering! I should take your head..."

"Keka, shut up, this is just a tactic to buy time!"

Otuwa roared coldly, and Keka glared, finally keeping his mouth shut. Then, the Red Fox Chieftain, frowning, continued.

"The Great Chief of the Aztecs did not want to see our envoy. It was only after the envoy bribed the chief's trusted aide with many precious feathers and gemstones that we learned it was Chichika the Great Chief's letter that was too arrogant and provoked the Great Chief!"

"What? The Red Dog Tribe is the Red Dog Tribe, and we are us. Although the eight tribes formed some kind of alliance, it's just a sham... Otuwa, hurry and let the envoy clarify, it's not like our three tribes and the five Red Dog tribes are in cahoots!"

Hearing Mizili's words, Otuwa was momentarily speechless. After a while, he shook his head and sighed.

"During negotiations, everyone tends to exaggerate their strengths; nobody pulls the rug out from under each other! In my opinion, this is just an excuse. The Aztec Great Chief is having it all too easy and underestimates us Guajili people!"

"We must show them what we're capable of! Otuwa, let's mobilize our tribes and gather ten thousand men. Call on the five Red Dog tribes to gather another ten thousand warriors! With twenty thousand men attacking from both front and rear, we'll first shred those Otomi dogs on the right flank!"

Keka couldn't help but speak up again. Known for his bravery on the wilderness battlefields, he had an innate sense for warfare. Hearing this suggestion, Otuwa was taken aback and actually found it somewhat feasible. However, a moment later, the Red Fox Chieftain shook his head.

"It's not that easy! I did indeed send an envoy to Chichika for reinforcements, but I'm not sure if they will come or how many will come. Besides, the Aztec forces are still watching us from the central road, and it's not so easy to move ten thousand men."

"Then let's select five thousand tribal warriors and leave the rest to defend the valley! The elite five thousand will take a detour from the northwest. With the speed of our Canine Descendants, who are skilled in quick strikes, it's a good strategy! The Cactus Tribe is extremely arrogant, splitting their army into three routes, each two days' march apart. If we time it well and coordinate with Chichika, we can eliminate those Otomi dogs on the east road in just one day! Afterwards, we'll let Chichika harass the Cactus Tribe in the middle and cut off their supply line..."

Keka continued with his strategic plan, growing more excited as he spoke, his loud voice echoing in the hall like the croaking of frogs in summer. The other two chieftains, however, pursed their lips and remained silent.

After a while, once he had tired of talking, Otuwa finally spoke indifferently.

"Keka, your plan is good, but there's a problem... how can you make Chichika do as you say?"

"We can send an envoy, explain it to him, even plan it together!"

"But even if Chichika agrees, can you trust him? If we send troops to attack the enemies on the eastern route and Chichika doesn't show up, what then? If the Aztec forces from the central route arrive in time, we'll be caught in a pincer attack, and then we're all done for!"

"Ah, Chichika's leader..."

Keka opened his mouth to say something, but Mizili interrupted him.

"I don't trust Chichika! We must keep the tribe's fate in our own hands, not hand it over to someone else!"

"The Red Cat Chieftain speaks sense. Keka, if everyone mistrusts each other, your plan of a large collaborative force is just hot air, noisy and foul!"

Otuwa made a crude joke, and Mizili burst out laughing. Keka, somewhat embarrassed and angered, shouted back.

"So this won't work, and that won't work either. Then you tell me, what should we do? Should we just sit here and wait to get beaten up?"

Hearing Keka's question, the Red Fox Chieftain's mind worked rapidly, but a gentle smile appeared on his face. He affectionately patted Keka on the shoulder.

"Keka, forget all these plans! With all these tribes here, we can mobilize over ten thousand men to properly defend the valley! The Red Frog Tribe is the best at fighting, and you're the strongest among us three, so I'm relying on you to arrange the defense of the valley!"

Keka paused, then slowly nodded, a smile spreading across his face.

Chapter 606 - The First Battle in the Valley - Part 1

September arrived on the tail end of the rainy season, bringing clarity to the skies with its sunshine and hope for harvest to the earth. Rain during the start of autumn ensures a bountiful collection of crops. To the south of the Lerma River, the Kingdom of the Lake was still abundant with rainfall, providing ample moisture for the crops. Messengers were boating on Lake Patzcuaro, relaying orders to hasten the autumn harvest. At a glance, they saw towering cornfields everywhere, lush and seemingly endless.

Farmers in the Lake Region were busy in the fields, inhaling the mature scent of grains and wearing the joy of the harvest season on their faces. Pumpkins had already been collected, beans had just ripened, and corn had formed ears. Under the supervision of the Priests, the kingdom's spring ploughing was timelier this year than last, with favorable wind and rain all the way, promising a bountiful year!

In the Wilderness of the Northern Land, where the brief rainy season had just passed, the clarion calls of war grew more urgent by the day. The desolate highlands rose and fell, with thousands of Otomi Militia hustling back and forth. With shoulder loads and hand carriages, and some single-wheeled carts provided by the kingdom, they shuttled military rations from the Mountain city to the Northern Land and then escorted prisoners back from the Northern Land to the Mountain city.

After several days of rest and replenishment with the latest batch of provisions, the three routes of the Allied Forces followed the Royal Decree of the central army and once again sprung into action. Black Wolf Toltec was the first to break camp and strike. The army's Scouts and skirmishers spread out far and wide, engaging in combat with small squads of Canine Descendants. The unstoppable eight thousand Central Regiment advanced northward with grandeur, and after three days of marching to the sound of the bugle, they arrived at the Red Fox Valley where the Canine Descendants gathered.

Not a single cloud marred the sky, while the earth brimmed with a desolate intent to kill. Mountains converged with rivers to form the rare fertile soil of the Northern Land, attracting the brutal battles of the Wilderness. The eight thousand Allied Forces pitched their camp southeast of the Red Fox Valley and

then slowly expanded outward, enveloping the southeast entrance of the valley. Tens of thousands of Guajili Tribe members consequently retracted into the Red Fox Valley, with each Tribe only sending a few Tribal Warriors to harass, while the majority of their forces remained steadfastly fortified within.

"So this is the Red Fox Valley?"

Standing before a southeastern valley entrance, several miles away and closely observing the terrain of the valley mouth, Toltec, accompanied by his Personal Army, soon furrowed his brows.

The narrow mountain path stretched for miles, gradually ascending, and at its end were several wooden and stone bastions built upon high grounds. A red mountain cat flag fluttered atop the bastions.

Beneath the flag were the defending Guajili Canine Descendants. Brandishing Short Bows, spears, Stone Spears, and Stone Hammers, their numbers exceeded a thousand. Among these thousand Canine Warriors, there were also two hundred seasoned red-haired warriors who were now bellowing loudly and brandishing their weapons, provocatively challenging the southern Allied Forces from afar. From a distance, despite the rudimentary equipment of the Canine Descendants, they appeared to be high in spirits.

"Respected Black Wolf Commander, this is the fertile Pa River Valley! Among the Allied Forces, many lands of the Nobility are located here, and a third of the Pamus Samurai come from this place. This is our Otomi territory; it has simply been shamelessly occupied by the Canine Descendants, who also changed it to a canine name!"

Mespa led a hundred family warriors and stood by Black Wolf's side. He shouted angrily, his eyes filled with hatred as he glared at the Canine Descendants in the Valley, as if trying to kill them with his gaze alone.

"Hmm, the mouth of the valley is narrow, making it difficult for the army to maneuver. The enemy holds the high ground with fortified bastions. The bastions are stocked with throwable rocks and timber. Huh, these Wilderness Canine Descendants know how to defend themselves quite decently! Could they have learned from the Otomi people?"

After observing for a while, Toltec turned to Mespa with surprise and asked.

"You mentioned there is a small city inside the valley? What's the terrain like there, does it still have Otomi who are holding out that we can use to coordinate with?"

Upon hearing the question, Mespa's expression darkened, and he shook his head bitterly.

"Commander, the valley's terrain is natural, its defense relies solely on the encircling mountains, as well as the bastions at the northwest and southeast valley entrances. The city in the middle of the valley doesn't even have defensive walls; it's just a dignified place for the Nobility to live. The only thing that can be considered sturdy is the stone Temple at the center of the city."

"The deceitful Guajili Canine Descendants attacked so swiftly that everyone had no time to prepare! They had sent over a hundred red-haired warriors in advance to infiltrate the bastions around the valley entrance. It took less than half a day for the northwest entrance to be overrun, and thousands of Canine Descendants, howling like wild beasts, charged in. Their eyes were blood-red with fury, killing anyone on sight and devouring whatever food they found, akin to demons emerging from the earth! The Nobility, along with their family warriors, retreated to the vicinity of the Temple and valiantly held out for half a day. But then more and more Canine Descendants kept coming, with over ten Tribe's flags showing up..."

"Seeing that the situation was hopeless, the Chieftains of the Nobility discussed together and decided to lead their family warriors to retreat through the southeast valley entrance, which was still under their control. When they left, they left hundreds of brave Militia in the Temple to hold out, now all have gloriously returned to the Divine Kingdom!..."

Toltec patiently listened to Mespa finish speaking. After contemplating and filtering out the redundant words, he asked in a serious tone.

"Mespa, from what you've said, with such a treacherous valley, you Otomi only held out for one day?"

"Ah, not just one day. From the time the Scouts reported the enemy, it was about... roughly two to three days!"

When questioned, Mespa looked ashamed, his face turning crimson with embarrassment.

"Mainly, the warriors were unprepared, and there was no unity among the Nobility. Moreover, the Canine Descendants were fiercely descending from the south in such a frenzied search for survival..."

"How many residents were originally in the valley? How many Militia, how many men could be withdrawn? Are there any Otomi still captured in the valley who can be rallied to our cause?"

...

Toltec interrupted Mespa's explanation with a further question. Mespa paused, momentarily lost for words, before replying.

"There were originally twenty or thirty thousand people in the valley. When it fell, only about a thousand nobility and samurai managed to escape, and later we gathered two to three thousand militia. As for the other scattered common people, the nobles did not have the time to care, and it is unknown how many escaped. Not long ago, scouts saw from the mountains that there are now thousands of captured Otomi farmers in the valley, tilling the fields for the Canine Descendants. However, they've been so terrified by the Canines that at best they can pass on messages; we can't count on them for anything else..."

"Black Wolf Camp Chief, I was in Pamus City at the time and, frankly, do not know much about the situation in the valley that day. If you need it, I can have a few nobles who hail from the Pa River Valley come and report in detail."

"No need! We've come a long way, seen plenty of Canine Tribes—nothing more than rats in the fields. There are just exceptionally more of them here. As for the fortifications at the mouth of the valley, let's lay into them for a while and see what they're really made of!"

Toltec raised his head, waving his hand grandly, then pulled out a small red flag and pointed toward the camp at the mouth of the valley.

"Thud, thud, thud!"

The low drumbeats of war sounded, the messenger's flag waved. Samurai Camp Chief Yolike blew his bone whistle, and five hundred lightly-armored archers wearing paper armor, with a loose formation, quickly entered the narrow mountain path. Behind the large group of archers were five hundred vanguard barbarians poised to charge.

Soon, the archers reached just over a hundred paces from the mouth of the valley and deployed a shooting formation. Clutching their longbows and looking up, they inched closer, ready to shoot. The enemy encampment, leveraging the terrain, stood a good ten meters high! Atop it, hundreds of Canine Hunters, each with short bows, set their bone arrows, also ready to strike.

Yolike squinted his eyes, raised his shield, and gauged the distance for the upward shot. He continued to close in until he was sixty paces from the camp. On the camp, an impatient Canine Hunter couldn't hold back and, lifting his hunting bow, "whooshed" a short arrow downwards. Influenced by him, the surrounding Canine Hunters started shooting their arrows.

"Whoosh, whoosh!"

An arrow storm approached head-on, bringing with it blasts of wind, and faintly intermixed with the curses of red-haired warriors.

"Pah! These barbarians from the northlands, squawking wild dogs! Without hearing the command, they shoot a flurry of disordered arrows, not even as good as the Tekos, totally lacking in discipline!"

Yolike spat disdainfully. Hailing from a surrendered Tarasco army, he had many years of combat experience: skilled in both archery and spear technique.

Both the Kingdom and the Alliance legion imposed strict requirements on the samurai to follow orders, especially in large-scale battles, where it was crucial to act in unison. In comparison, the discipline of the Canine Warriors was far inferior even to the Kingdom's long-spear-wielding militia.

"Thunk, thunk."

A few feathered arrows thudded into the wooden shield. Gaugeing the force behind the arrows on his shield, the Samurai Camp Chief sharply blew the bone whistle around his neck.

"Toot toot! Volley fire!"

"Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!"

A volley of arrows rose from behind Yolike, raining down on the encampment sixty paces away. Eight or nine Canine Hunters screamed piercingly and "thumped" off the embankments, leaving behind long trails of blood. The remaining hunters paused for a moment, then crouched lower and shot back even more ferociously. Soon, nearly ten legionary archers fell to the ground as well, clutching their throats or faces, groaning as they collapsed.

From their elevated position, taking advantage of the terrain, even the Canine Hunters' short bows could wound the legion's longbowmen at the same distance. Some of the red-haired warriors were particularly adept at archery, each arrow targeting vital points such as the head, throat, and chest.

Just as Yolike moved his shield aside to observe the effect of the shooting, a bone arrow whistled sharply toward him, hitting his rattan helmet squarely on the head. A pain shot across the Samurai Camp Chief's forehead, causing his heart to tremble, and he stepped back twice before reaching up to his head. The bone arrow, having lost much of its force, had merely penetrated the finely-woven rattan helmet enough to graze his forehead, leaving a shallow cut.

"Damn it! Such fierce archery... these Guajili Canine Descendants... are actually somewhat formidable!"

The Samurai Camp Chief muttered under his breath, once again shielding himself with his shield. Behind him, the beat of the war drums continued incessantly, the calls growing louder. Encouraged by the War Priests, the vanguard barbarians prayed loudly to the Chief Divine, ready to launch a desperate charge at any moment. Arrows flew back and forth between the two sides' archers, and the onslaught drew forth sprays of blood—soon, a hundred lay dead.

The bodies of the warriors collapsed on the ground, draining away the warmth of life. Lifeblood flowed at the mouth of the valley, trickling into the valley's streams, washing out a faint crimson. Beside the stream, the blood-drenched cactus flowers bloomed more brilliantly, as if heralding impending death.

Chapter 607 - The First Battle in the Valley (Part 2)

The arrows whistled back and forth, and intense shouting reverberated through the valley. The sun was slightly slanted to the west, casting thick shadows over the mountain range, and a faint smell of blood wafted through the breeze.

Black Wolf Torc, carrying the battle flag, stood at the mouth of the valley several miles away. He watched the exchange of fire, his expression growing colder by the moment. The Canine Descendants in the valley were skilled in archery and held both the camp and the terrain. The advantage of the legion archers' longbows was negated, and they were slowly losing ground in the exchange of fire. After observing for a while, Black Wolf's brows arched, and he once again waved the command flag.

"Boom, boom, boom!"

The drumbeats suddenly quickened, accompanied by the shrill sound of flutes. Five hundred vanguard barbarians clad in cotton armor had been awaiting their turn. They let out a collective roar, praising the name of the Chief Divine. Then, with rattan shields in one hand and copper spears in the other, they charged toward the camp at the valley entrance from nearly a hundred paces away.

Although the campsite at the valley entrance was elevated, it was not particularly steep, in fact, it was just a slope. The vanguard barbarians strode quickly, soon breaking through the lax archer line and drawing within fifty paces before rapidly surging up the slope.

"Toot, toot! Fire at will!"

Watching the barbarians rush by, Yolike blew the bone whistle urgently once again.

Feathered arrows "whizzed" and instantly soared like birds, raining down in swathes upon the stronghold. The legion archers were accelerating their shooting, suppressing the Canine Descendants on the ramparts. The Canine Warriors howled, but the storm of arrows significantly lessened.

Yolike moved his shield aside and glanced carefully at the opposition, his pupils suddenly constricting. He saw many conspicuous red-haired warriors, bows drawn but not releasing, silently staring at the charging barbarians as though patiently waiting for prey.

Outside the valley, Torc wore a smile on his face. He watched as the vanguard barbarians almost entirely unscathed, successfully reached within twenty paces of the camp, close to scaling the ramparts.

"Drip, drip, swish!"

Black Wolf's smile instantly stiffened. A harsh bone whistle blew in a flash, followed by the mournful sound of arrows slicing through the air. Then, a mass of charging barbarians fell hard, their death cries

peaking in an instant. From merely twenty paces away, the red-haired warriors accurately avoided the cotton armor, striking the barbarians in the head, face, and neck, and more than thirty brave vanguards fell to the ground.

After that, hundreds of Canine Warriors roared fiercely, gripping stone spears and hammers, and they stormed out of the rudimentary gates to clash with the vanguard barbarians. A Canine Warrior swung his stone hammers with both hands, all his might aimed at a young barbarian's shield, hardly defending at all. The barbarian smirked, blocking with his shield, then thrust his copper spear deeply into the Canine Warrior's abdomen.

Yet, the dying Canine Warrior, like a wild beast, lunged forward instead of retreating, bellowing as he grabbed onto the long spear that pierced his abdomen, seizing the arms behind it. Another Canine Warrior immediately closed in, swinging his stone hammer and smashing it down onto the barbarian's shoulder. The barbarian screamed, curling up like a shrimp, only to be met with another hammer blow to the head, silencing his cry on the spot.

Seeing this brutal scene, the middle-aged barbarian beside him, eyes reddened, lunged with his copper spear, stabbing the exhausted Canine Warrior wielding the stone hammer to death. Another Canine Warrior charged, holding up his stone spear. The middle-aged barbarian agilely stepped back, lifted his shield to block, and counter-thrust with his long spear, killing the Canine Warrior!

The vanguard barbarians were after all picked elites. Skilled in martial arts, they were swift and fierce. Coupled with superior equipment, they quickly gained the absolute upper hand in close combat.

However, the red-haired warriors atop the ramparts showed no mercy, disregarding the possibility of friendly fire, shooting arrows ruthlessly down the slope. These lethal hunters narrowed their eyes and continuously released piercing bone arrows. At such close range, they struck the barbarians' vital spots. The barbarians growled and fell unexpectedly, dying together with the Canine Descendants, their bodies piling on top of each other.

The urgent drumbeat incessantly urged the offensive, and the slaughter in front of the valley encampment grew increasingly cruel. Yolike, with his archers, continued advancing, drawing closer for a direct shoot-out with the hunters on the ramparts, and casualties on both sides rapidly escalated. Arrows ceaselessly reaped lives and also drained the morale and strength of both sides.

Toltec frowned silently, observing two quarters of fighting. The assault in front of the stronghold showed no signs of breakthrough, the opponents pressing against each other, gradually devolving into a drawn-out war of attrition. Although the Canine Descendants suffered nearly six hundred deaths, most were Tribal Warriors and ordinary able-bodied men, with few casualties among the red-haired elites.

Yet, of the thousand-strong troops deployed, a full three hundred had fallen. Half were militia archers caught in the exchange of fire, the other half vanguard samurai. The light-armored archers were easy to replenish, with their simple equipment, their losses were of little weight. But the vanguard barbarians were selections from the Royal Family's Imperial Guards, his own direct troops—who could afford such wastage!

Thinking of this, Black Wolf clenched his fists and slowly shook his head.

The unique valley terrain limited the deployment of forces on both sides and confined the scale of the frontline battle. Although the Central Legion had eight thousand men, only about a thousand could be committed to the frontline. It was the same for the Canine Descendants; a great number of warriors gathered behind the camp, awaiting orders. Once the fighting began on a tribal basis, it concealed the Canines' weakness of lacking coordination and instead played to their advantage in small-scale combat.

"We can't keep fighting like this. Crossbowmen, advance to cover! Sound the conch, a thousand vanguard retreat!"

Toltec took a deep breath and waved the command flag. Five hundred Temple crossbowmen stepped forward briskly, reaching about a hundred steps from the valley entrance, they spread their legs apart, steadied their stance, and lifted the Stirrup Heavy Crossbows with both hands. Under the puzzled gaze of the Canines, they suddenly all tilted back in unison and fired a fierce volley of crossbow bolts.

"Whizz whizz whizz!"

The sharp crossbow bolts rained down from the sky, shooting at the camp's battlements, and then "thudded" into the wooden stockade. Over a dozen Canine Hunters died on the spot, including a few red-haired warriors. The Canine Descendants on the camp were instantly suppressed, and the retreat conch was immediately sounded. The vanguard barbarians fought as they retreated, calling out to one another, withdrawing beyond the range of the camp's archers.

The attacking Canine Warriors still wanted to pursue. However, once they left the narrow valley entrance, and lost the cover of the camp's Hunters, their exchange ratio with the barbarians greatly increased, and their morale quickly declined. The vanguard barbarians retreated while swinging their weapons, killing another hundred Canines. A retreat horn then sounded from the camp as well.

The Temple crossbowmen fired ten rounds in a row, then ceased firing. They retreated alongside the archers, with heavy crossbows and longbows mingling together, occasionally clashing and making noise. The crossbow bolts used by the Stirrup Heavy Crossbow needed to withstand several times the pressure and required the use of sturdy hardwood. Compared to the wooden and Luwei reeds used in ordinary bows and arrows, the crossbow bolts were more expensive to make and required more effort.

In this northern expedition, facing Canine Descendants who were either in light armor or unarmored, the power of the longbow was sufficient. For these reasons, the allied forces carried a very limited supply of crossbow bolts and couldn't shoot indiscriminately.

"Red Fox Valley, Red Cat Tribe..."

Toltec watched the feline flag on the camp, deep in thought. There were tens of thousands of Canine Descendants in the valley, now occupying the terrain and holding out, which was somewhat difficult to deal with. Black Wolf frowned in thought for a moment and looked again at Mespa by his side.

"Mespa, call over the nobility you mentioned before, I want to enquire in detail!"

Mespa then summoned a few nobles who had fled from the valley, who thoroughly recounted the events of that day, the skirmish among the Canines, and the surrounding terrain.

After listening for a moment, a light sparked in Black Wolf's eyes. He grabbed the middle-aged Otomi noble in front of him.

"Ico, you just said, the mountain ranges to the south and north of the valley have narrow paths that can accommodate hundreds of warriors?"

"Yes, Commander Black Wolf. Although the southern and northern mountain ranges are steep, pathways through them have been explored. However, the northern range is relatively gentle and easier to traverse than the south. Pamus scouts often use the mountain paths to scout the valley. On the day of the incident, hundreds of red-haired warriors from the Guajili infiltrated through the northern mountain path and caused chaos in the valley. For the past half month, scouts from both sides have frequently skirmished in the mountains. To accomplish your reconnaissance mission, I have lost several elite family warriors!"

The middle-aged noble Ico looked somewhat distressed. Toltec pondered for a moment, then grabbed Ico's arm and asked a question that alarmed him even more.

"Ico, you were born an Otomi noble of the valley, more familiar with this place than anyone. The Guajili Canine Descendants have occupied your fief, slaughtered your people – you have a score to settle with them! Do you not wish for revenge?..."

Black Wolf paused, peering intently into Ico's eyes, and spoke in a deep voice.

"I will give you five hundred Pamus warriors familiar with the terrain! If you infiltrate through the mountain trails and coordinate with the main force, you can attack the camp at the valley mouth from behind under the cover of night. Though dangerous, if successful, it will be a great accomplishment! I will personally report your name to His Highness! What do you say, do you dare to do it?!"

Chapter 608 - Night Raid

The sunlight illuminated the vibrant cactus flowers, and a gentle breeze stirred the streams in the valley. The weather in September remained warm. On hearing the words of the Black Wolf Chieftain, Ico's forehead broke out in fine beads of sweat. He stammered as he spoke.

"Ah, Black Wolf Chieftain... although we Pamus Samurai are familiar with the terrain, we are not adept at night battles..."

"No need for a night battle. You will secretly enter through the mountains at night, and attack the encampment in the valley at dawn. The Vanguard elites will attack the mouth of the mountain in the early morning, joining you in a pincer movement to utterly break these Canine Descendants!"

"Ah, my lord, you have never been to the interior of the valley. The valley is long and narrow, twenty to thirty miles from east to west, and there are multiple camps on both sides. There's another camp blocking the valley's path two miles behind the forward camp at this entrance. Only by breaking through both camps can we enter the wider hinterland..."

"Oh? There are two camps?"

Upon hearing this, Toltec was taken aback and asked urgently.

"What is the terrain of the rear camp like?"

"The rear camp is not much different from the front camp, only slightly wider. Once the rear camp is taken, the army will face no more obstructions."

Ico replied with his head bowed. Black Wolf thought for a moment, then patted Ico's shoulder.

"Two camps, if we attack from the front, who knows how long it will take. To defeat the enemy quickly, we must achieve the element of surprise! Ico, summon your courage and resolve, and be a man like the Jaguar!"

"Ah, Chieftain, infiltrating the valley, there is always the risk of being discovered by the Canine Descendants. The narrow mountain paths also prevent a quick retreat; it's truly too dangerous... General Mespa, what do you think..."

Ico's body trembled slightly, turning to Mespa as if seeking aid. The other coughed softly.

"Black Wolf Chieftain, we can discuss the attack slowly..."

"His Highness will arrive in five days! If we, with an army in hand, make no progress and are blocked by these rat-like Canine Descendants, how shall we explain to His Highness?!"

Toltec glared furiously at Mespa.

"General Mespa, you are also familiar with the terrain. Why not you personally lead the troops and sneak into the valley?"

"Uh..."

Mespa suddenly fell silent. This northern expedition was to reclaim his ancestral fief. He had led his troops northward, battling wherever possible. But to personally lead a nearly suicidal stealth attack was asking too much... Let Ico go instead.

"Ah, General Mespa, Black Wolf Chieftain..."

"You timorous fish-rat! The valley is your fief! The Canine Descendants are your enemies! Show some warrior's honor!"

Toltec stared intently into Ico's eyes, like a fierce beast.

"Ico, I'm giving you five hundred Pamus Samurai. Infiltrate the valley tonight, attack from inside and outside at dawn. This is a military order!"

There was no backing out of battle, the strike was set. The middle-aged nobleman Ico trembled for a moment before mustering some valor, bowing his head to receive the order.

"I will obey your orders, Chieftain!"

The slanting sun slowly set, and the legions outside the valley withdrew to their camp. A cheer erupted from the camp of the Canine Descendants, while the Pamus Samurai were visibly upset, but the Mexica Samurai remained calm and composed. They had campaigned for many years, always victorious, and today's sortie was merely a probe; the fiercer assault was yet to come.

Upon returning to the main camp, Toltec first called upon five hundred Pamus Samurai. Black Wolf personally inspired their morale, then entrusted them to the Nobility Ico to feast well. Afterward, he ordered the Temple Crossbowmen and the Vanguard to rest and build up their energy, and had his men check the Clay Tribulus that had accompanied the army, carefully inspecting each one to prepare for tomorrow's strike.

Darkness came swiftly, and the earth grew quiet. Ico led five hundred Pamus Samurai, who knew the terrain well, to silently leave the rear camp and blend into the deep night. Without lighting conspicuous torches, they used their memory of the landscape to grope their way into the mountains. For a

nighttime attack in the mountains, knowledge of the paths was crucial, hence the choice of Pamus Samurai.

The faint moonlight fell on the land as a large mass of moving shadows entered the mountains, disappearing into the mountain shadows, becoming indistinguishable. Only the Canine Descendants' Scouts lit sporadic bonfires in the mountains, like flowers of the night.

Ico carefully avoided the light wherever possible, and if it couldn't be avoided, he dispatched elite squads to advance. Sharp War Clubs swung, and swift Feathered Arrows were shot. Dots of fresh blood blossomed in the mountains, with faint clamor, but the sound did not carry far.

Two hours later, Ico took a deep breath. The perilous and narrow mountain path was behind them, and the five hundred warriors had ascended to a mid-mountain ridge. Now they would turn along the ridge towards the East to reach the rear of the valley camp. He stood on the ridge and looked northward, only to see dense bonfires in the Canine Descendants' camp and shadows of vast cornfields by the stream. Each bonfire represented hundreds of gathered Canine Descendants. Ico counted the bonfires, shuddering involuntarily. He then looked towards the center of the Valley City-State, where the tall stone Temple was ablaze with lights, seeming still busy inside. Ico prayed briefly to the Primordial God for ancestral protection before turning eastward. The warriors behind him lowered their voices to pass along the order to turn.

The valley stretched for dozens of miles, and so did the Mountains. On a ridge several miles away, two red-haired warriors sat cross-legged on a mountaintop, gazing at the moonlight gracing the Earth with Divinity.

"Amoxltli, you invited me out for a drink so late, but didn't even bring a piece of groundhog meat?"

Ivican held a small leather water bottle, carefully sipping Rice Wine. For the wilderness Canine Descendants, whether it be Tequila, honey liquor, or fruit wine, all were their favorites, although rarely enjoyed.

"Give it a rest, Ivican. This Tequila is a treasure of our Tribe; I had to coax it out of Chieftain Kakalo... alright, here, for you, some fine dried venison."

Amoxtli rummaged in his shirt for a while, finally producing a bundle of dried venison wrapped in leaves, handing it over to Ivican reluctantly.

"All yours, eat up!"

"Ow! Meat and drink, what's the occasion today? An ancestral Sacrificial Rite? Or, the Blessing Day of the Moon God? No, it's still early. Amoxtli, could it be that your Tribe's Chieftain is finally on his deathbed, so he handed you his position and the tribal storehouse?"

Having caught the scent, Ivican could tell it was indeed fine venison. He looked at his friend with surprise and curiosity. On the wilderness, venison was truly precious and not eaten on just any ordinary day.

"What nonsense! Although Chief Kakalo isn't well, it's still not a problem for him to live a few more years."

Amoxtli punched Ivican, making him reel back. He then steadied his friend and said in a low voice,

"Haven't seen you for a few days, right? Got some good stuff to enjoy a meal. The great army of the Cactus Tribe has arrived at the mouth of the valley. The three Great Tribes have ordered the gathering of the warriors from various Tribes; who knows when we will be pushed to the front... So, how was the battle at the valley mouth today? I heard the Red Cat Tribe won and repelled the Cactus Tribe's attack?"

"Pah! Win the battle? What a joke."

Ivican spat, bit hard into the venison, and washed it down with more Rice Wine.

"The Red Cat Tribe lost seven hundred warriors, and the red-haired lost five or six. The other side only left behind over three hundred men, and that was with the protection of the camp and the advantage of terrain! Tonight, Chief Mizili kept complaining in front of the Chieftain. Now the warriors of the Red Frog Tribe have gathered at the rear camp, and depending on the situation tomorrow, they might be sent to the front. Each of the ordinary Tribes has to send their red-haired warriors to the frontline, and other Tribal Warriors take turns to follow."

"Ah! How did the Red Crow Tribe arrange this? We have to guard the northwest valley mouth, don't we?"

"They'll probably draw some warriors. The Red Crow's allied Tribes always have to send troops to the East."

Upon consideration, Ivican's ears twitched suddenly.

"Huh, did I hear something?"

Chapter 609 - Three Hundred and Five: Night Talk and Discovery

The night deepened, and faint sounds echoed intermittently between the mountains, resembling the rustling of a long wind through the forest.

Amoxtli was urgent, the survival of his tribe at stake, he had to get answers. He grabbed Ivican's arm firmly.

"Don't change the subject! Ivican, whatever arrangements the Red Fox Chieftain has made, he'll surely inform you red-haired warriors. We have been friends for so many years, you must tell me!"

"Ah! Amoxtli... not all red-haired warriors know the chieftain's plans..."

Ivican showed a troubled expression, stammering reluctantly.

"There are indeed other arrangements! What are they exactly? Is the Red Fox Tribe going to withdraw?"

Amoxtli's expression shifted, but he did not relent, continually pressing his friend.

"Ah! I promised the chieftain I wouldn't say..."

"Ivican, are you going to just stand by and watch me and Alan go get killed? Tell me, I promise I won't tell anyone!"

"It won't happen! All elite red-haired warriors from the tribes will be conscripted and taken away... Ah! Okay, don't pull at my neckline, I'll tell you..."

Ivican sighed helplessly and downed his rice wine in one gulp. This meal was truly not worth it. Afterwards, the young red-haired warrior wiped his mouth and looked at his friend.

"During the summit of the three tribes, Chief Otuwa personally promised that after the Red Frog Tribe has held the front for a few days, the Red Fox Tribe will take over. The three major tribes together with their vassals, taking turns at the front of the valley mouth to fight, no one loses out, those replacing go to the rear camp to guard it."

"Tomorrow there will likely be a unified command issued, to rally all ordinary tribe's red-haired warriors, under the command of the three major tribes to resist the brutal Cactus Tribe; half of other tribal warriors will be drawn to the front line initially, and if the battle intensifies, more will be drawn... And as compensation, men of fighting age from the ordinary tribes can periodically receive a share of food supply from the hands of the three major tribes."

"Ah! These orders..."

Upon hearing this, Amoxtli clenched his fists, his eyes widening. Taking advantage of the pressing force of the Cactus Tribe, the three major Guajili Tribes were beginning to integrate the vassal tribes under their control, gradually seizing the ordinary tribe's warriors and able-bodied men. Such conscription was nearly equivalent to absorption, completely contrary to the traditions of the wilderness. However, given the current situation, the ordinary tribes had no way to refuse.

Amoxltli pondered hard over the situation. His eyes showed worry and confusion. The senior red-haired warrior began to mutter, gradually raising his voice.

"We avoided the cold snap, emerged from the wilderness of Kolawea less than a year ago, yet everything seems to have changed! Along the way, all we faced were hunger and skirmishes, countless ordinary tribes vanished, their red flags falling into the mud. The traditions of the wilderness are no longer upheld; instead, the large tribes grow stronger and more prosperous! You've absorbed more and more able-bodied men, seized more and more warriors. You've occupied vast fertile lands never seen before, even owning slaves from the Otomi and their city-states! Now, you even want to absorb us completely!"

"Ah! Amoxltli, what are you rambling about?! Along our journey, we've faced cold, hunger, thirst, troublesome Otomi people, fierce Aztec people... To overcome these challenges, we could only band together for warmth! This is the choice of the wilderness!"

"The choice of the wilderness... is the cactus in the rainy season, indifferent to the drought's perseverance, merely seeking the blossoms of outcome. All tribes are children of the wilderness, and they too will see the day their flowers bloom! As long as they can catch the rainwater in time..."

The old chieftain's teachings emerged in Amoxltli's mind. His eyes brightened, as if flames were ignited, seeing the distant flickering light. After a while, as if nothing had changed, he grabbed Ivican once again.

"Ivican, you haven't finished! These orders will soon be known by everyone. What is it that the Red Fox Chieftain told you not to talk about?"

"Ah!... Amoxltli, you mustn't tell anyone!"

Ivican clenched the fist-sized piece of venison in his hand, feeling its immense weight. He gritted his teeth and glared at his friend's face.

"Chief Otuwa ordered us to be prepared! Once the main force of the Red Frog Tribe advances to the front line and clears the Northwestern valley passage they occupy, there will be no obstacles preventing the Red Fox Tribe from leaving at any time! The reinforcements from the Cactus Tribe are on their way north, we must leave the dangerous valley before they block the Northwestern passage. The Red Fox Chieftain has already chosen a new campsite approximately two hundred li to the northwest in the valley, a hill with water resources!"

"What? So the chieftain guessed right! Ivican, then what about the tens of thousands from the Canine Descendants Tribes here?"

Amoxtli was shocked, staring back in response.

"Canine Descendants Tribes... Over these few days, the Red Fox Tribe will massively conscript the warriors from the vassal tribes. A portion of ordinary warriors will be sent to the rear camp to ease the mind of the Red Frog Chieftain. As for the elite red-haired and veteran warriors, they will be swept away along with the tribe!"

"Ah! The chieftain said, the tribe's food can only support eight thousand able-bodied men, so all the elderly, women, and children are unwanted, and any men who cannot fight as well. The chieftain also said the Aztec people won't stay in the Northern Land for too long; as long as we have eight thousand warriors, everyone will continue heading south next year, to raid the Otomi people!"

When he had finished, Ivican grabbed his friend's arm back, his expression sincere.

"Amoxтли, I've told you all the chieftain's plans! Come on, you hurry back, dye Alan's hair red, and take her with you to join the conscription of the Red Fox Tribe! In this cruel, chaotic Northern wilderness, only the powerful tribes can survive and control everything! Your small broken tribe won't last much longer... Ah! Amoxтли, with your wisdom and martial arts, as long as you join the Red Fox Tribe, you can definitely become a captain of a hundred men!"

Upon hearing this, Amoxтли's mind was in turmoil. He looked into his friend's eyes, unsure of what to say. But the thought of leaving the Red Crow Tribe, which had raised him like a son, and abandoning the elderly chief father who had treated him as his own child was utterly unbearable. While he hesitated, his ears suddenly twitched slightly.

"Ivican, I think I heard something too! Ah, it sounds like the rustling of leaves, and it's getting closer...this is...!"

The two seasoned scouts exchanged looks, both seeing disbelief in each other's eyes. They immediately crouched down and moved slowly toward the source of the sound along the shadows of the ridge.

In the deep darkness of the night, a large shadow moved toward the East, accompanied occasionally by the sound of stepping on branches. The faint moonlight fell on the edge of the moving shadow, illuminating many indistinct figures and flashes of gray-blue.

"Awo! Gray-blue, walking at night without torches, this is..."

Ivican was about to exclaim when Amoxltli suddenly covered his mouth. The two red-haired warriors quietly approached and then silently receded. The footsteps faded, followed by Amoxltli's voice next to his ear.

"Ivican, it's the Otomi dogs! If they can walk the mountain roads at night, it must be the local Pamus warriors! Judging by their marching direction, they're heading toward the valley camp in the East... You must hurry back and report to the Red Fox chieftain. I'll follow them from here!"

"Yes, they're moving slowly, it'll be a while before they reach the valley mouth. Fighting in the dark is utterly chaotic, and the Cactus Tribe outside the valley can hardly respond. I reckon they'll wait until dawn to launch the raid! After you see the chieftain, have someone notify the camps on the east to prepare their defenses. Then, bring the warriors of the Red Fox Tribe over, and when the day breaks, we'll jointly strike at the Otomi!"

"Alright, Ivican, you really think things through; I'll do as you said! Awo! I'll tell the chieftain that this was all your idea. Let's share the credit for this victory!"

Ivican, excited like a hunting hound, nodded vigorously. He quickly turned and left, still carrying the deer meat Amoxltli had given him.

"Awo! This meal sure was worth it!"

The moon waned and stars scattered, and the profound darkness shrouded everything. The mountains were veiled in peaceful night colors, and in the valley, only the flickering flames were vaguely visible. Soon, the cold crescent moon set in the west, and a faint morning light began shining in the east. Dawn was about to break, turning the blood from darkness to bright red.

Nobility Ico gazed at the faint light in the east, feeling hopeful for victory. He watched the familiar valley. Behind the valley gates, the camp was built of wood and stone, surrounded by a crude fence. The watchtower's flag of the Red Frog fluttered unattended, seemingly unguarded.

Seeing this, a rare surge of courage bubbled in Ico's chest. He shouted loudly,

"Brave Pamus warriors! Charge, kill the despicable Canine dogs, and reclaim our lands!"

"Roar! Kill the Canines!"

The remaining four hundred-plus Pamus warriors roared in unison. Though they were familiar with the mountain paths, they had lost dozens along the way. Yet at that moment, victory seemed tantalizingly close! Ico was the first to raise his War Club, charging toward the camp, closely followed by the four hundred warriors.

"Whistle!...Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh!"

Amid a sudden and mournful bone horn, hundreds of red-haired warriors suddenly emerged from various parts of the camp and drew their Hunting Bows, releasing sharp Bone Arrows at the charging Otomi Warriors!

"Ah! Ah..."

Ico let out a terrible scream. A Bone Arrow hit him in a vital spot on his face, followed by a second and then a third. The middle-aged nobility, propelled by inertia, charged forward another two steps before toppling into the soil of his homeland. His screams abruptly ended, leaving no last words.

"Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh!"

A second wave of arrows flew at them head-on, several Pamus warriors screamed as they fell, while the remaining warriors plunged into chaos. Hundreds of ordinary Tribal Warriors, wielding Stone Hammers and Stone Spears, surged from deeper within the camp. Meanwhile, a flag of the Red Fox suddenly erected in the woods at the rear, and thousands of ambushing Canine Warriors charged from all sides!

Keka, wearing a Wolf Robe, stood at the highest point of the camp. He watched the scene unfold before him, grinning broadly.

"Haha! It seems the battle-hardened Cactus Tribe is just as vulnerable!"

Miles away, Black Wolf Torc, clad in Copper Armor, lowered his gaze, waiting personally at the mouth of the valley. Behind him, two thousand assault troops were ready to move. Suddenly, from the valley ahead, the bone horn of the Guajili sounded, and intense sounds of battle drifted over!

Black Wolf's eyes snapped open, revealing a fierce, wild beast-like gaze. He then swung his command flag and roared forcefully.

"Temple Crossbowmen, close to within a hundred steps, fire continuously, suppress the camp! Vanguard throwing unit, groups of a hundred, ignite the Divine Power Globes a hundred steps away and launch them in a charge!"

"Roar, Vanguard, attack! If you don't seize the Canine camp, then die trying!"

Chapter 610 Battle at the Valley Mouth Part I

The morning sun rose from the horizon, illuminating the narrow valley, and dispelling the tranquility of the night. The fierce war drums resounded through the heavens, and carrion-eating American eagles gathered at the sound, a prelude to a feast's beginning.

"Boom, boom, boom!"

A thousand Temple Crossbowmen clad in cotton armor, armed with heavy crossbows and carrying war clubs made of obsidian on their backs, belonged to the Imperial Guard Legion and were selected from the ranks of the Temple Guards. They were generally strong, skilled in martial arts, and proficient in combat at any range. The crossbowmen quickly entered the valley path, and soon they were a hundred steps from the encampment, ready to shoot.

"Ah!... Ah!..."

The leading dozen Temple Warriors took out their death whistles resembling skulls and blew into them with force. The deathly wails of the dying instantly rose at the entrance of the camp within the valley and carried far on the wind. The defending force of Canine Warriors at the camp had grown to two thousand. Hearing the terrifying whistle for the first time, many warriors showed signs of shock and fear on their faces.

"Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh!"

The sharp arrows of the crossbows attacked amidst the wails, bringing with them the actual screams of the dying! More than a dozen Tribal Warriors were pierced by the crossbow bolts, pinned to the earth or wooden walls, unable to die quickly, only able to let out their desperate howls.

"Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh!"

The second volley of crossbow bolts arrived instantly, striking the wooden fortress of the forward camp with a "thwack, thwack" sound. Hundreds of red-haired warriors clenched their teeth, kept low, and gripped their Hunting Bows, enduring the arrow rain with all their might. At this distance, the Hunting Bows commonly used by the Guajili Canine Descendants couldn't harm the crossbowmen protected by cotton armor.

"Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh!"

The third volley of arrows slightly extended towards the back, killing another dozen warriors. The impulsive Canine Descendants dodged all over the place while angrily calling out. There was some commotion in the camp.

A red-haired camp commander bent over, surveyed the situation inside the camp with concern. He then stood up and hurried toward the center where the Red Cat flag stood.

"The Cactus Tribe's crossbows have too far a range; we can't shoot them! Taking hits like this one way, the morale of our warriors is being shot to pieces. Chieftain, let me take five hundred warriors and charge at their archers!"

The red-haired camp commander shouted loudly, his eyes brimming with a beast-like desire for battle.

Mizili raised his shield, standing under the Red Cat flag. As the main force of the warriors was guarding this spot, he naturally had to command the battle in person. The Chieftain of the Red Cat first looked at the equipment of the crossbowmen, then at the vanguard barbarians who followed. He thought for a moment and then bit his teeth hard.

"Charge my ass! Pull back half of the Tribal Warriors into the camp to avoid the arrow storm, and strike when the enemy charges up!"

Soon, the Chieftain dispatched an envoy, ordering a tightening of the defense. Half of the Tribal Warriors cried out and disorderedly fell back to the rear. Only the elite red-haired warriors still held their Hunting Bows, always ready to shoot near the camp walls.

"Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh!"

Seeing the enemy's movements, the crossbowmen's camp commander waved his little flag. The Temple Crossbowmen advanced twenty steps forward, and the fourth volley of crossbow bolts shot straight toward the camp's central flag.

The howling arrow rain came head-on, bringing with it the wind of death! Several of the Chieftain's trusted aides screamed as they fell to the ground, bleeding profusely. Mizili's shield was struck repeatedly. He bent over, using the force of the impact to quickly retreat, breaking into a cold sweat.

"Damn! The Aztecs' crossbows have such powerful force!"

Mizili wiped the sweat from his forehead. He looked at the tribe's flag, now shot through with many arrow holes. He also saw his fallen and wounded trusted aides, and a sudden rush of anger rose in his chest.

"I will send out warriors to tear these crossbowmen to shreds! Someone..."

"Praise Chief Divine Huitzilopochtli! He has bestowed upon us the power to destroy! We shall spread His glory!"

A wave of frenzied shouts suddenly came like thunder, echoing through the narrow valley, like the collective call of a pack of beasts. Mizili was stunned for a moment, turning towards the source of the noise.

He saw hundreds of barbarians in cotton armor standing spread out in several rows, with wooden boxes nearby and dozens of leaders holding torches. They first raised their hands high and prayed to the sky. Then, the front-row barbarians, each holding a clay ball the size of a human head, paused briefly in front of the torches before charging towards the camp with frenzied shouts.

"To sacrifice for the divine!"

"Eh, what's this?"

Mizili looked puzzled, watching the loosely arranged barbarians charge. Just this few men, were they coming to their deaths?

"Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh!"

Another barrage of crossbow bolts whizzed through the air, constantly suppressing the red-haired hunters on the low fortress wall. The barbarians pressed closer under the cover of the bolts, quickly closing to within forty paces.

"Swoosh swoosh swoosh!"

The red-haired warriors began to pop their heads out, shooting fiercely at the barbarian soldiers. More than twenty barbarians in the front line fell instantly, and the smoking spheres they held tumbled down the slope. However, their formation was loose enough, and the remaining barbarians, still fervently clutching the spheres, charged forward.

"Whizz whizz whizz!"

The crossbowmen accelerated their rate of fire. A fierce hail of arrows rained down on the fortress wall! Nearly ten red-haired warriors who had exposed themselves were struck by arrows and fell, making Mizili wince in pain.

"Ah, despicable Aztec people, to actually use small units to deceive our shooters!"

The crossbow bolts kept the battlements suppressed, and the remaining half of the barbarians finally made it up the slope to the edge of the fortress wall. The low wall was only about chest height, and behind it was a large group of red-haired hunters firing away. With a fierce roar, the barbarians hurled the spheres imbued with divine power at the defending army.

"Praise the Chief Divine, Divine Might descends!"

"Hm?"

At the edge of the fortress wall, the red-haired captain's eyes sparked with ferocity. First, he shot an arrow with his hand, aiming for the enemy's eyes and killing a barbarian who was within arm's reach. Then, puzzled, he looked down at the smoking clay sphere at his feet.

"What is this? A clay jar? And it's smoking?"

The red-haired captain bent down and touched the sharp-angled surface of the sphere. Then, squinting his eyes, he brought his head close to the small smoking opening...

"Boom!"

The clay tribulus, weighing several pounds, suddenly exploded with a thunderous roar! The red-haired captain's spine bent like a small tree in a fierce wind, his body burst open, and flames erupted instantaneously. Countless sharp shards of clay burst forth, shredding the residual corpses in front into sieves.

"Boom, boom, boom!"

Dozens of clay tribulus spheres exploded in succession, sending out large plumes of flame. In an instant, billowing smoke rose! More than two hundred Canine Warriors screamed as they fell to the ground, rolling into a tangled mess. Even more tribal warriors were stunned by the blasts, descending into chaos. They ran about, howling meaninglessly, calling out the names of ancestors and priests.

Mizili's eyes reddened in an instant. But in a mere moment, he saw fifty to sixty elite red-haired warriors fall victim to the enemy's terrifying attack.

"Witchcraft! Witchcraft! This is the witchcraft of the Aztec people! Trusted aides, charge up there, calm the hearts, and slay the barbarians unleashing the witchcraft!"

Hundreds of the chieftain's trusted aides immediately grabbed captured war clubs and rushed toward the fortress wall. They shouted loudly to soothe the chaotic warriors while swinging their weapons, surrounding and killing the remaining barbarians. The first wave of barbarians crossed the wall, roaring fiercely as they fought desperately, causing turmoil within the camp, but their fate was sealed.

As the smoke billowed and the killing shouts continued, the shooting from both sides weakened considerably. Outside the camp, under the faint hail of arrows, a second group of several hundred barbarians rapidly surged up the slope. They howled the names of their Chief Divine and approached the fortress wall, once again throwing spheres of divine power.

"The War God descends!"

The clay spheres rolled and fell among the clusters of Canine Descendants. This time, most of the Canine Warriors dodged in horror, scrambling into a frenzy. But the camp was cramped, and there was no avoiding in many areas.

"Boom, boom, boom!"

The clay tribulus exploded once more, and the gunpowder rose, igniting the wooden blocks within the camp, as well as the frantically running Canine Descendants. The shattered clay shards flew in all directions, carrying immense kinetic energy like vicious arrows. The shards cut through the tribal warriors' cotton cloths, sliced their bodies, and even penetrated their heads and necks. The piercing screams were instantaneous, like torrential rain in the rainy season, scattered everywhere.

"Roar!"

The dozens of surviving barbarians threw their last clay tribulus, then drew their copper spears and shields from their backs, leaped over the fortress wall, and frenziedly killed their way into the camp. The chaos in the camp was rapidly spreading, and the hunters' shooting had almost completely stopped.

At the mouth of the valley, Black Wolf Torc watched the vanguard forces charge the camp once more and laughed with satisfaction.

"Good! Very good! The Divine Power Globes may not differentiate between friend and foe, but they truly possess unmatched might, as if Divine Might has descended!"

After praising, Black Wolf Torc waved the command flag again and bellowed with a fierce shout.

"The time for battle has come! Vanguard, throw, Temple archers, all charge into close combat! Take the camp for me!"