

Civilization 621

Chapter 621 - Blocking the Valley Entrance

The purple sunset turned to red, and the green valley mouth was drenched in fresh blood. Three thousand rodent-like tribal people faced directly against two thousand leopard-and-tiger-like Imperial Guards along the rolling mountain pass.

Under the flag of Black Wolf, the Imperial Guard Warriors formed a battle formation, swinging their war clubs in unison, forcefully slashing at the enemy's heads, necks, and abdomens. The Canine Descendants Tribes fell like cornstalks, splashing out bursts of vitality. The tribal people's formation was loose, their morale low, lacking war experience, and they posed almost no threat. They thrust their stone spears, leaving only shallow punctures in the warriors' cotton armor, before being killed by the sharp war clubs. The frantic sounds of slaughter carried on the wind, soon turning into the moans of the dying and the screams of terror.

Within just moments of the battle, more than three hundred Canine Descendants had fallen. The tribal formation expanded like a balloon and fell into disarray, as people continuously turned and fled. Thousands of Red Fox warriors in the rear showed no mercy, firing bone arrows that drove the frightened tribes back to the front lines. Then, from a distance of forty or fifty steps, they launched volleys of arrows, vigorously harassing the warriors' ranks.

"Charge with me!"

Bertade glanced at the Red Fox warriors holding the line and then led three hundred Jaguar Warriors in a personal assault, charging into the enemy's ranks!

The Head Warrior moved with agile steps and quick actions, without any superfluous movements, striking directly at vital points. He wielded his war club with agility, cutting through the neck of a Canine Descendant, then with a horizontal blow, cleaving another Canine Descendant's head. In just over a

dozen breaths, he had killed several men! The Canine Descendants died instantly, without even leaving behind a cry of agony.

Afterwards, three hundred Jaguar Warriors let out a roar and charged together! The warriors, clad in tiger skins, burst into the fray, slashing wildly as if they were in a land with no one to oppose them. Faced with this kind of assault, the Canine Descendants Tribes couldn't hold on any longer. They let out screams of extreme fear, like balloons expanded to their limits, bursting suddenly and scattering in all directions!

"Continue the charge!"

Bertade did not stop. He discarded his worn Obsidian Club and drew the Bronze Qin Sword from his waist, striding towards the Red Fox warriors. Droplets of blood fell from the sharp edges of obsidian, sinking into the increasingly dark red earth, just like the evening sky.

"Ao! Thick-skinned Chieftain!"

Ivican squinted and shot out a bone arrow with force. The sharp arrow only grazed Bertade's copper armor, barely scratching the cloth. The Head Warrior paused slightly, glanced at Ivican's red hair, and then charged straight towards him.

"Swoosh swoosh swoosh!"

The red-haired warriors fired a volley of arrows. The charging Jaguar Warriors didn't stop. Bone arrows stuck in their cloth armor, but they suffered no harm. The warriors ran like fierce beasts, and within moments they were within thirty steps, all raising their war clubs and letting out a pre-battle roar.

"Roar!"

Ivican's pupils constricted instantly, and he turned to flee.

"Ao! Thick-headed Tiger Warrior! Retreat quickly!"

The red-haired captain sprinted away like an agile Red Fox. Over two hundred Tribal Scouts also turned and ran. They had clashed with the Tiger Warriors before and knew well the ferocity of their opponents. Without a significant numerical advantage, it was impossible to defeat a large group of the elite thick-skinned. The remaining Red Fox warriors, either confident of their bravery or unable to react in time, were directly killed as the Jaguar Warriors broke into their ranks.

A Jaguar Warrior slashed sideways, slicing through a red-haired warrior's Cotton Armor and gashing his chest and abdomen. The red-haired warrior screamed in agony as he fell, desperately clutching at the torn wound, staining his hands bright red. His life's blood streamed out, mixed with his viscera. He was silenced within moments.

Witnessing this, two Tribal Warriors closed in. They thrust their Stone Spears with all their might, striking the Jaguar Warrior's chest and back, producing a "clang" of metal but failing to penetrate the armor. The Jaguar Warrior sneered with a smile, gripped his club with both hands, and fiercely swept it across. The warrior in front of him let out a blood-curdling groan; his neck twisted at a ninety-degree angle as he fell dead, askew. The other, a young warrior, showed terror on his face and, eventually, turned to flee.

The Jaguar Warrior's eyes flashed with killing intent. Clad in Medium Armor, he did not pursue but instead reached for the Bronze Javelin strapped to his back, took two steps forward, and hurled it with great force.

"Thud!"

The sharp javelin followed a precise trajectory, accurately piercing the young warrior's back and pinning his entire body to the ground. The young warrior writhed on the soil like an insect spiked to the earth, unable to move a step. Warm blood gushed forth, his screams piercing the air, yet no one cared as his cries slowly faded to silence.

Bertade stepped forward, thrusting his right hand forward and stabbing a warrior wielding a Stone Hammer. Then, he stepped back, sheathed his sword, gripped it with both hands, and delivered a diagonal slash downward! The head of a red-haired warrior rolled onto the ground. The Head Warrior, impassive, halted his advance, his armor soaked with blood, the Copper Sword in his hand crimson. He had cut through the enemy ranks; before him, there were no more foes, only hundreds of fleeing Red Fox warriors!

"Whiz, whiz, whiz!"

Thousands of Imperial Guards dropped their War Clubs and raised their Longbows, unleashing a volley of arrows. Dozens of Red Fox warriors, with their backs to the rain of arrows, cried out and toppled to the ground. The Red Fox warriors fled desperately and were hit by two more rounds of Feathered Arrows, leaving behind dozens of corpses. Only then did the remaining warriors escape the range of fire, becoming tiny specks in the distance, soon far away.

"These Canine Warriors are useless in formation but extremely fast when fleeing!"

Bertade, holding his Eight-Sided Qin Sword, watched for a moment and then smiled subtly. He then raised his Copper Sword and gently wiped it with his finger, admiring the shiny, sharp edge.

"Having killed several men and still without a scratch, truly a fine weapon! Hmm, with the Copper Sword being short and sharp, I should focus on thrusting, supported by the Great Shield for defense."

The Head Warrior looked up at the sky. After a fierce battle, the sunset had fallen to the horizon, and the sky was growing dim. He surveyed his surroundings; the ground was littered with over a thousand fallen Canine Descendants. Scattered tribe members were everywhere, alongside many wounded who could hardly move. Around a hundred trusted aides were searching the battlefield, occasionally delivering a finishing blow.

Bertade nodded and turned his gaze to the valley entrance not far north. Silhouettes were flickering at the entrance as the Canine Descendants Tribes, carrying large and small bundles, emerged once more. They glanced at the southern battlefield and, in terror, fled northward, utterly devoid of the will to fight.

"One thousand five hundred Imperial Guards, follow me to block the valley path and take the encampment! Four hundred Imperial Guards, pursue the scattered tribe members until nightfall, then return! The remaining hundred, tally the battlefield, and tend to the wounded!"

With a loud command, the Head Warrior led a large contingent of the Imperial Guard toward the valley entrance. Hundreds more of the Canine Descendants desperately scattered in flight. The Mexica warriors surged forward with ferocity, cutting off the entrance, leaving the Canine Descendants in the valley like rats in a trap, with no more strength to escape!

The darkness of night fell quickly. In this battle, of the three thousand Canine Descendants, one thousand three hundred were killed or wounded, leaving behind more than eight hundred unarmed

tribe members and over five hundred Red Fox warriors. The two thousand strong Imperial Guard suffered only a scant few dozen casualties.

Chapter 622 - Surrender

"Your Highness, an envoy from the Red Frog Tribe has arrived, seeking an audience with you. He is currently waiting in the main camp!"

The night was dim, the sky filled with stars, and the valley's entrance camp was lit by fire. Balda, clad in eagle warrior attire, strode into the medical tent and reported to His Highness. He stole a glance around and saw only two people in the tent. His Highness stood in the center, his expression stern, his face showing barely contained anger. Black Wolf Torc lay on a straw bed, his face full of shame, having clearly just been scolded harshly. Seeing this, Balda smirked slightly and chuckled to himself.

"An envoy from the Red Frog Tribe? Coming at night?... Hmm."

Xiulote paused to think for a moment and then slightly nodded, once again looking at the ashamed Black Wolf.

He had just dismissed everyone else to scold Torc alone. As a Legion Commander, how could he recklessly charge to the frontline, gambling with life and death? Regarding the forceful attack at the valley entrance and the loss of eight hundred Imperial Guards, it was merely a matter of being too fierce in battle and needed some pointers. Now, since Balda was present, it would be inappropriate to continue scolding so harshly to prevent his beloved warrior from becoming a laughing stock among the others. In fact, a great general should not be humiliated in front of others, or else it would be like the enemy is in Honnoji...

The King's anger subsided as he looked at his trusted aide and grasped his hair.

"Torc, my Black Wolf! On your recent expedition north, you were courageous and excelled in battle, breaking through enemy camps and earning many merits! The Central Legion struck through the wilderness like Jaguars, showing the Guajili Canine Descendants the might of the Alliance... However, a blade too sharp is easily broken; a cornstalk too tall bears little fruit. The same applies to warfare, where fierceness must be balanced with gentleness, and battles demand consideration of timing and circumstances. You must not rush too hastily..."

"Rest well! Black Wolf, I will send you a scroll of my marching notes with some insights from last year's campaign to the west. Take this opportunity while you recover to read and reflect slowly. This injury is not necessarily a bad thing... Hmm, once you have recovered, I will let you lead the legion again!"

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

Overcome with emotion, Torc turned over, prostrating himself before His Highness.

Xiulote smiled, patted Black Wolf on the shoulder, and then turned to leave. Balda, envious, cast a glance at Black Wolf and followed His Highness out.

Starlight fell on the nearby mountains, and a melancholy song lingered in the wind. The King paused in front of the large tent, looking towards the distant Red Fox Valley, before finally entering through the tent flaps.

In the tent, eight trusted aides, solemn and draped in Copper Armor, stood guard. In the corner was the envoy from the Red Frog Tribe, who had been waiting for a long time. Xiulote looked at the envoy, who was short and stout with a rough face. Though he tried to squeeze out a smile, he couldn't hide the aura of combativeness.

The King surveyed the envoy and then calmly sat at the head of the tent. Balda, holding his weapon, stood guard on either side. The tent was quiet, filled with a solemn murderous intent.

After a long while, the envoy from the Red Frog Tribe could no longer restrain himself. He reverently looked at Xiulote and cautiously spoke.

"Ahem... Respected God of Death, Great Chief! Your mana is as boundless as the sky, your warriors numerous and brave like the mountains. The Red Frog Tribe, along with twenty thousand Tribesmen from the valley, wish to honor you as the supreme Great Chief and fight under your banner!"

"Oh? The Red Frog Tribe wants to surrender?"

Xiulote's expression remained calm, his voice deep.

"Then hand over all your weapons and come out from your mountain camps to accept your fate."

"Surrender... no, I have come to negotiate! God of Death, Chief, there are still twenty thousand valiant Guajili people in the valley! We also have camps on both the eastern and western mountain sides! Our crops have been harvested and can sustain us for months!"

The envoy from the Red Frog Tribe widened his eyes, speaking vehemently.

"Although the Cactus Tribe is brave, to take the valley, you would have to suffer thousands of casualties! In the East, in Pamus City, we still have tens of thousands of reinforcements soon to arrive! When they do, we will strike from both inside and out, and it will be you who falls!"

"Oh? Then go back, tell the Red Frog Chieftain. He can continue to hold the valley! Tomorrow the army will attack, and I want to see how long he can hold out."

Xiulote glanced at the fiercely growling envoy and shook his head slightly. After all, being a Canine Descendant, this peace-seeking envoy was as rigid as a warrior, utterly unqualified.

The envoy from the Red Frog Tribe faltered in his words, unable to speak for a while. Only after some time did he manage to bow his head, reluctantly.

"God of Death Great Chief, as long as you spare the Red Frog Tribe and allow the Red Frog Chieftain to continue leading this tribe, we will hand over the camps and the valley, and surrender with more than twenty thousand of the Guajili Tribe to you!"

"Oh? Spare the Red Frog Tribe, and continue as Chieftain?"

Xiulote smiled faintly.

"How many people are in the main part of the Red Frog Tribe, and how many able-bodied individuals do you wish to retain?"

"Seven thousand... no, just six thousand able-bodied individuals! The other more than ten Tribes, sixteen or seventeen thousand people, will all be at your disposal! Moreover, the Red Frog Chieftain will also lead the warriors of this tribe to fight for you!"

"Six thousand able-bodied individuals... sixteen or seventeen thousand Tribes..."

The King became serious and pondered slightly before asking again.

"The main part of the Red Frog Chieftain has only six thousand; how can it decide for more than twenty thousand Tribes? There are three Great Tribes in the valley. The Red Fox Tribe has fled, the Red Frog Tribe wants to surrender, so what does the Red Cat Tribe plan to do?"

"God of Death Great Chief, our Red Frog Tribe now controls the valley with several thousand warriors! Whatever the Red Cat Tribe plans, it is inconsequential."

The Red Frog Envoy straightened his back, his face confident.

"The camps at the east and west valley entrances are in our hands. Just by relinquishing the camps and the Red Frog Tribe taking the lead in submission, other Tribes will have no choice but to surrender as well!"

"Hmm..."

Xiulote looked at the Red Frog Envoy with interest again.

"Retaining six thousand able-bodied individuals is somewhat too many, better I take them myself!"

"Five thousand able-bodied people... no, just four thousand!"

The Red Frog Envoy's eyes widened as he shouted anxiously.

"The Red Frog Tribe only asks to preserve four thousand able-bodied individuals. We will hand over the valley, return north to the Wilderness, and no longer raid to the south! God of Death Great Chief, we will also submit to you and fight under your banner!"

"Oh?"

Xiulote smiled faintly. He looked at the anxious Red Frog Envoy and said with a smile.

"The Red Frog Tribe's surrender, sparing four thousand able-bodied individuals. This condition is acceptable. However, with the Red Frog Chieftain leading the charge south, he must accept punishment! Tell the Red Frog Tribe, hand over the chieftain's head, hand over the camps and the valley, and they may return to the Wilderness!"

"How could this be possible! How could the Red Frog Chieftain die!"

The Red Frog Envoy immediately stood erect, hopping anxiously.

"Great Chief, the Red Frog Chieftain is brave and good in battle, willing to die for you!"

"Oh?"

The smile on Xiulote's face grew more intense.

Chapter 623 - Three Hundred and Nineteen: Night Talk

The campfire flickered within the encampment, causing darkness to ebb and flow. The Red Frog Envoy looked visibly unsettled, while Xiulote was brimming with laughter. As their eyes met, the envoy shivered, speaking up with a hint of fear.

"Ah, wise Great Chief! I am from the Red Frog Tribe..."

At this point, the envoy paused, his eyes wide as he looked at Xiulote. He hesitated for a long while but eventually mustered his courage.

"Greetings to you, honorable God of Death Great Chief! I am Keka, the battle-hardened Chieftain of the Red Frog Tribe!"

"Oh, Chieftain Keka!"

Xiulote remained composed, nodding slowly. He had already anticipated this answer. The King pondered for a while, then waved at his trusted aides around him.

"Release him."

The aides let go and stepped back, and Keka collapsed to the ground as his strength left him.

"Keka, why have you come yourself? Are you not afraid of being discovered by the Alliance and sacrificed to the divinities on the spot?"

Xiulote asked with a smile. He was quite interested in this Red Frog Chieftain. The man had managed to defend his camp against the onslaught of Clay Tribulus and withstand the Black Wolf's attack, even wounding his favored commander. Now he dared to come in person as an envoy to meet directly with him... Putting other things aside, there was indeed an animal-like acuteness, tenacity, and bravery about him.

At the mention of sacrifice, the Red Frog Chieftain trembled. He kept his kneeling posture and looked up as he shouted.

"Great Chief, only by coming in person can I show my sincerity in surrendering!"

"Oh? But at the start, you did not voluntarily reveal your identity. Playing such a hide-and-seek game, you might as well be sacrificed! With the Red Frog Tribe suddenly losing its leader, it will be in chaos. Tomorrow would be a good day for a decisive battle!"

Xiulote shook his head and chuckled. He looked into the round eyes of the Red Frog Chieftain and threatened coldly.

Keka was at a loss for words for a moment, then fearing for his life, he lay prostrate on the ground and shouted with a trembling voice.

"Great Chief, I revere your power and truly wish to submit to you! The reason I did not reveal my identity right away is that I had wounded your Great General in the previous battle. I did not dare to be honest with you without your promise of safety..."

"I am willing to lead the tribes of the Valley in surrender, to fight for you! I am also willing to make the tribes of the Wilderness acknowledge you as their sovereign! Great Chief, your ambition is as lofty as the sky, and your magnanimity as vast as the Wilderness! I am the first Coyote of the Wilderness to surrender to you; why must you kill me and dishearten your warriors?"

"Fight for me, sovereign of the Wilderness?..."

Upon hearing this, Xiulote fell into contemplation. He watched the Red Frog Chieftain's sincere demeanor but inquired about something else.

"Keka, in the battle at the valley's entrance, when you first faced the explosive Divine Power Globes, did you not feel fear toward the divinity? How did you think quickly and find a way to respond?"

"Uh..."

Keka's eyes widened with surprise. He lifted his head and looked cautiously at Xiulote.

"So those were Divine Power Globes? I thought they were the witchcraft, no, Divine Arts... of the Cactus Tribe. Of course, divinities should be feared, but how can one be distracted on the battlefield? One must survive first, then sacrifice some birds and beasts... As for the response, as long as you keep the witch... Divine Arts from landing inside the camp, they can't harm the encampment. I was watching very closely..."

"Hmm, not bad."

Xiulote sized up the Red Frog Chieftain once more, his interest evident.

"Keka, have you seen herds of great beasts running across the Wilderness?"

"Ah? I have. The Priest of our tribe said that these great beasts mostly roam the distant northeastern plains, with a few occasionally coming to the Coahuila Wilderness. They are immensely powerful and swift runners, making them difficult to capture. But if you kill just one, it's enough to feed a hundred people for two days."

Facing the Great Chief's question, Keka was somewhat puzzled. However, since he couldn't figure it out, he just gave up trying and answered honestly.

"Hmm."

Xiulote nodded slightly, pondered for a moment, and asked again.

"Keka, how would you deal with it if you encountered foreign tribes riding these great beasts, claiming to be incarnations of divinities? They possess weapons that roar like thunderbolts, and armor that is difficult to penetrate; what would you do?"

"Uh? Tribes riding great beasts? Wouldn't that mean a lot of meat, enough for the tribe to eat for a long time..."

Keka stared with wide eyes, reaching toward his waist only to remember that their weapons had been confiscated. After a moment's thought, he cautiously spoke again.

"Since it is a Divine Being, it's natural to be careful and submissive to show submission," he said.

"What if they want to steal your food, kill your men, and plunder your women?"

"Ah! Are there many of them? Can they fly?" Keka asked.

"Not many and they can't fly," was the reply.

"Then there's no need to run, just kill them directly!" Keka exclaimed, a fierce glint appearing in his eyes. He glanced at Xiulote and then cautiously lowered his head, whispering an explanation.

"Great Chief, the Priests of the wilderness often say that nature is a rotating circle, everything in the world has weaknesses, Divine Arts and Witchcraft have flaws. A giant beast cannot run through the mountains, Thunderbolts cannot strike all the time. And thick skin can't cover the eyes or prevent falls... Even a Divine Being can be tried for killing. If not killed, then running is it..."

Upon hearing this, Xiulote stared at Keka's face for a long while without speaking.

The Red Fox Chieftain Huitu had an earthy face but bore an innate wildness, as cunning as a beast in survival, and a heart unafraid of deities... In some respects, he truly was a rare general worthy of employment.

King pondered for a moment and finally made his decision.

"Keka, do you believe in deities, willing to sacrifice for deities?" he asked.

"Ah, this... I..."

Keka's expression changed and it took a while before he reluctantly answered.

"All things have spirits... Deities, of course, I believe in. To sacrifice for deities, let's wait until I'm about to die... Ah, Great Chief, I swear on my ancestors, I am willing to fight for you, to die for you!"

Keka threw himself to the ground once more, clutching at Xiulote's legs.

"Great Chief, please accept my surrender! The Red Fox Tribe only asks to preserve four thousand able-bodied individuals, to keep the life of the Chieftain! The whole Red Fox Valley, and the tens of thousands of other Tribes, I will offer to you!"

"Good. Keka, rise. I accept your surrender, forgive your trespasses, and preserve your Tribes and your life!"

Xiulote waved his hand, signaling Balda to put away their weapons. Aides stepped forward and forcibly lifted the Red Fox Chieftain to his feet. The King looked into his eyes and said with a smile,

"You said you wanted to fight for me, so I will give you that opportunity! Keka, the Chief Divine needs a Noble Chief as Sacrifices... You go back, I'll give you one day to bind the Red Cat Chieftain, then submit and surrender the camp!"

Upon hearing this, a look of joy crossed Keka's face. However, after a few moments, a hint of hesitation appeared.

"Great Chief, your promise... the witness..." he said.

"Hmm?"

Xiulote looked coldly at him, and the Red Fox Chieftain prostrated himself once again, refusing to rise. The King thought for a moment before raising the Divine Staff and slowly saying,

"Keka, I swear upon the honor of my ancestors, I accept your surrender and promise you a future!"

"Great Chief, under the ancestors' witness, I shall surely die for you!" Keka exclaimed with great joy, kowtowing heavily several times before getting up to leave.

"I will return to the camp now and bring Mizili to you bound!"

Xiulote gave a faint smile and nodded slightly. He watched as Keka lifted the tent flap and, accompanied by the trusted aides, disappeared into the deep darkness. Then, the King turned and gave a stern command.

"Order the Craftsmen to inspect the wooden cannons and Gunpowder! Command the trusted aide camp to check the Gunpowder and Fire Arrows! Distribute the copper armor in the camp to the warriors ready for a trap! Dispatch Pamus Samurai to blockade the south and north mountain paths. Also send orders to Bertade, have the entire army ready one day and meet with the Chalki reinforcement forces. If the Guajili people do not surrender, by early morning the day after next, a two-pronged force will attack the camp!"

The trusted aides bowed their heads, their faces filled with a murderous intent as they departed.

The moon faded behind the Mountains, and dawn lit up the sky, marking the arrival of a new day. Mexica legions at the east and west valley mouths were gradually awakening. Thousands of Samurai prepared for battle like fierce beasts showing their fangs. By the afternoon of the next day, Chalki Great Chieftain's vanguard of reinforcement forces finally reached the northwest valley mouth, with more than two thousand Pamus Samurai blocking the mountain paths to the south and north of the Valley.

Chapter 624 - Pacifying the Valley

The sun hung low in the western sky, the clouds were tinged with red, and the mountains also glowed with a reddish hue. The Red Fox Tribe fled alone, as the Cactus Tribe's army bore down on them, completely sealing off the Red Fox Valley. The Canine Descendant Tribes were in turmoil; each individual's face showed panic and confusion as chaotic shouting erupted all around.

Amidst the changing sentiments, the disorderly situation gradually reached a boiling point. In the rearmost camp at the southeastern valley entrance, a fierce clamor and melee suddenly erupted. Then, two quarters of an hour later, the camp gates were flung wide open!

Under the watchful eyes of thousands of Mexica samurai, Chieftain Keka of the Red Frog Tribe stepped out of the gates, personally dragging the securely bound Mizili, the Chieftain of the Red Cat Tribe, to wait on the slope of the mountain path. Behind him, over a hundred red-haired warriors escorted the leaders of the Red Cat Tribe, who also stood with bowed heads along the road.

Shortly after, the Royal Banner of the Black Wolf arrived at the gates along the valley road. Xiulote waved the command flag, and two thousand samurai in armor gripping clubs entered the camp, taking control of the strategic point at the valley mouth. Following that, the King issued a deep command, and several hundred trusted aides stepped forward with weapons to take custody of the prisoners and then lead the two chieftains to the foot of the Royal Banner.

"Respectable Great Chief, God of Death! Keka greets you and is willing to submit to you, to become a minor chieftain under your command!"

Keka, dragging the captive, was still several steps away from the Royal Banner when he suddenly knelt down and called out in salute.

"I offer you the highest-ranking captive from the valley!"

Xiulote nodded slightly. He gestured with his hand, signaling Keka to come closer.

"Is this Red Cat Chieftain Mizili?"

Keka nodded and yanked on Mizili's red hair, forcing him to raise his head so that the Great Chief could see clearly.

"Ah!"

A pained cry escaped Mizili, his face pale and his heart ashen. He had agreed with Otuwa on a joint retreat, but then Otuwa abandoned him and left first with the tribe. He had never thought much of Keka, yet it was Keka who had bound him and presented him to the Aztecs. Proud of his intelligence, he had been betrayed twice and now found himself a hapless prisoner, his life hanging by a thread. As he thought about the Aztecs' ritual sacrifices, he finally couldn't help trembling.

Xiulote scrutinized the captive Red Cat Chieftain closely. Observing his trembling figure, the King first shook his head, then nodded slightly.

"Take him away and keep him under guard in the camp. Hmm, also dispatch a priest to guide his spirit."

The trusted aide immediately took the order and led the numb Mizili away. Keka hesitated briefly, then ventured hesitantly to speak.

"Great Chief, what will become of Mizili? Will he be sacrificed?"

At these words, Xiulote looked at Keka with a smile that was not quite a smile.

"Keka, do you wish for him to be sacrificed?"

"Ah, I will heed all of the Great Chief's decisions!"

The Red Frog Chieftain instantly stiffened, closing his mouth and bowing his head in salute.

He personally bound Mizili and surrendered, tying them both in a death feud. In the eyes of the wilderness people, it was better to kill such irreconcilable enemies sooner rather than later. Besides,

with Mizili dead, there would be only one leader left in the valley. As long as he stayed low and obedient, once the Aztec left, wouldn't there be great opportunities for him? With three thousand tribal warriors in hand, what were six thousand or four thousand people? They could all be replenished from the common tribes! By borrowing the might of the Aztec, he might even rise further.

Thinking this, Keka became even more subservient. He knelt respectfully on the ground, his face full of smiles.

Xiulote pondered for a moment. He had some thoughts regarding Mizili's arrangement. The king continued to look toward Keka.

"Keka, how are the various tribes in the valley?"

"Great Chief, there are more than a dozen tribes in the valley, over twenty thousand people in total. More than half are under the control of my Red Frog Tribe! The rest are either fleeing to find a way to survive or sitting in their camps, waiting. I beseech the Great Chief to send a large army into the valley!"

"Very well! Have your tribal warriors lead the way. The army will enter the valley immediately to take the surrender of the valley tribes!"

Xiulote's face revealed a smile. He took off the Sun Amulet around his neck, awarded it to the Chieftain of the Red Frog, and then personally helped him up from the ground.

"Praise the Chief Divine! Bestow glory and a future upon you. Keka, you have done well. From today on, follow by my side, taking on the role of a trusted aide for the time being!"

Upon hearing this, Keka was stunned, and his expression changed. He touched the strange amulet wrapped around his neck as if his throat was being grasped.

"Great Chief... I... I must return to my tribe..."

"Let your trusted aide take over for the time being! Keka, you are familiar with the details of the various tribes, and can assist the army in the northern campaign. Once we defeat the Red Dog Alliance of the East, you may return to the tribe. What, are you unwilling?"

Xiulote's expression grew cold, watching Keka. The Red Frog Chieftain fell to his knees with a "thump," like a toad prostrating on the ground.

"Willing, certainly willing! Since the Great Chief values me, I will exert my utmost to serve unto death! Great Chief, your Mana is boundless, and your brave warriors are as numerous as cactus spines. How could Chichika of the Red Dog stand a chance? Once the Great Chief conquers the Northern Land, I will guard the wilderness for you!"

Xiulote smiled again. He waved the Royal Banner, and the call to march sounded immediately.

The Mexica vanguard passed the rear camp and emerged from the narrow valley mouth, and the fertile valley suddenly unfolded before their eyes! Thousands of Samurai in the central army, with stern expressions, hastened their march and entered in succession. Guided by the Red Frog Tribe, they divided into camps of a thousand and headed toward various tribal encampments.

At the northwest valley mouth, the Red Frog warriors guarding the camp also received orders. They morosely stepped aside from the camp, laying down their weapons and surrendering to the Allied Forces. Bertade, with the Imperial Guards, led Chalki's eight thousand warriors of the western army into the valley, spreading out to accept the surrender of the tribes.

The Red Fox fled, the Red Cat was captured, and the Red Frog surrendered; the three great tribes could resist no more. Other tribes in the valley also lost their will to fight and bowed their heads one after another to the Allied Forces. There was even a minor incident; a few common tribes held their ground, fighting desperately, refusing to surrender to the Otomi Warriors. But when the Mexica Samurai arrived, they opened their camp gates, dropped their weapons, and surrendered to the banner of the Black Wolf.

When the news arrived, it was sunset. Xiulote reflected momentarily, then sent his trusted aides to oversee the Otomi encampments, forbidding slaughter of the surrendered Guajili Tribe. Then, he dispatched priests with the army to comfort the surrendered Guajili Canine Descendants. Bertade received orders to be stationed in the central city, taking control of the entire valley. As for the king himself, he remained at the northeast valley mouth, waiting for the valley to stabilize.

In the blink of an eye, another two days passed, and the Red Fox Valley was finally in the hands of the Allied Forces. The banner of the Black Wolf fluttered everywhere in the valley, and a large number of Canine Descendants were closely watched. The surrendered Guajili Tribe totaled over twenty thousand, mostly able-bodied men and women, half and half, the rest were children, with almost no elderly or weak. Around two to three thousand liberated Otomi Agricultural Slaves were also arranged to continue farming in the valley.

Order was restored in the valley, with no Canine Descendants causing chaos or collisions. Only then did Xiulote, with his trusted aides and led by Keka, step into the Red Fox Valley.

Chapter 625 - Northern Strategy, Inspecting the Valley

The wind was robust and the flags soared high as the marching Samurai maintained a grave composure, the clangor of their armor striking forcefully, demonstrating the King's power. Xiulote led a thousand trusted aides to inspect the valley, observing the captives' situation while pondering the management of the various Tribes.

Along the way, as far as the eye could see, winding rivers flowed through the valley, flanked by lush corn fields. The Otomi Agricultural Slaves numbly bowed their heads, clearing the scattered debris, corpses, and bloodstains in the valley. Tens of thousands from the Guajili Tribe had laid down their weapons, doffed their Cotton Armor, and were held in separate camps under watch. Unknown fears were etched on their faces, yet as the Royal Banner passed, the Canine Descendants lowered their heads, showing reverence to the mighty.

Seeing the bowing Guajili, Xiulote nodded in satisfaction. This Northern Expedition was in response to an invitation from the Otomi people, to resist the southward advance of the Canine Descendants. But by now, the King's ambition had inflated. He yearned to control the Northern Land as much as possible and to establish a preliminary suzerain rule among the Canine Descendants Tribes.

The King ascended a hill and looked North. At the end of the undulating Mountains, was the boundless Northern Wilderness. It stretched two thousand li from East to West, and over two thousand li from North to South, adjoining the Great Plains of North America. Apart from the eight Canine Descendants Tribes, many more fragmented Tribes hunted in the North, chasing the herds of wild bison and migrating deep into the Great Plains.

To conquer the Northern Land required constant warfare and the spread of influence. The first step was to subdue the Otomi as vassals and continue assimilation. The second step was to defeat the southward-moving Canine Descendants and establish prestige among the Wilderness Tribes. The third step was to extend Northward, grasp important strongholds, and use these as a base to implement suzerain control over surrounding Tribes, while also engaging in trade and missionary work.

The above three steps were the objectives Xiulote needed to achieve with this Northern Expedition. With the foundation set by the first three steps, the fourth would be to emulate the Spaniards of a later

era, encourage settlement and agriculture along the border, persuade the Canine Descendants Tribes to settle and farm, grant them partial autonomy, and gradually incorporate them into the Empire's governing territory. The vastness of the Wilderness meant conquest was an extremely prolonged process, a vision for a lifetime.

However, according to the trajectory of history, Western colonizers would arrive within a decade or so, dispersing horses across the Wilderness. Then within half a century, the entire Northern Wilderness and the Great Plains of North America would be populated with millions of horses. All the Tribes of the Wilderness would mount horses, evolving from hunting Tribes to nomadic Tribes. By then, the difficulty of conquering the Northern Land would exponentially increase.

"Therefore, we must conquer the North as early as possible. However, the Alliance's strength is limited, while the land of North America is boundless, not to mention the unpredictable cold currents. Let me think, how exactly did the Khans rule the steppes?"

After reflecting for a moment, Xiulote shook his head slightly. He again turned his gaze to the valley, and it was a while before he spoke.

"Keka, what do you primarily eat on the Kolawea Wilderness?"

"What do we eat?"

Hearing this question, Keka stared with wide eyes, dumbfounded. After a moment, he began counting on his fingers as he replied.

"The Tribe eats whatever we find as we go! This includes roots, wild vegetables, corn, beans, squash, wild fruits that grow in the soil. When the climate is favorable, the Priests have everyone plant some crops, waiting a season to harvest. The unplantable ones that are all over include rabbits, deer, birds, frogs, snakes, worms, moles, rats, ants, and lizards. If the harvest is really poor and there's nothing to eat, we have no choice but to wage war against other Tribes, capturing people from other Tribes..."

Xiulote nodded calmly and thoughtfully. After a while, he asked another question.

"Keka, compared to the Wilderness, how is the Otomi land?"

"Much better! Everyone said after arriving, had they known, they would have moved South earlier to take the Otomi land. There's more Water here, more grass, and the soil is fertile, with high crop yields. Just one season's planting can feed Tribe members for most of the year. Great Chief, before you advanced North, everyone was ready to have more children and settle down here..."

Keka scratched his head, a hint of bitterness on his face.

"Hmm, Keka."

Xiulote smiled faintly, his gaze fixed on the eyes of the Red Frog Chieftain.

"If I asked you to lead your Tribe to farm further South, would you be willing? The land there is even more fertile, and as long as you work in the fields, you can eat well all year round."

"As long as we work in the fields, we can eat well all year round..."

Upon hearing this, a semblance of yearning appeared on Keka's face, but he quickly became cautious again, replying carefully.

"Great Chief, the Wilderness Tribes and Southern Tribes are different, we are not adept at farming and are accustomed to migrating. Ordinary Tribespeople might be content to dig for food in the fields, but the warriors of the Tribe rather prefer to obtain food with their Hunting Bows..."

"Great Chief, the people of the Wilderness are born warriors, and I am willing to grasp the Hunting Bow and fight for you!"

Xiulote fell silent in thought. Indeed, the Canine Descendants of the Wilderness were natural warriors, excellent Hunters, and the finest Light Infantry. After this battle, with enough prisoners and sufficient prestige established, it was time to form a few thousand-strong battalions of Canine Descendants. His expression turned solemn, and he looked at Keka once again.

"Keka, how many warriors does your Red Frog Tribe have now?"

"Two thousand... no, three thousand."

Keka looked at the Great Chief's serious expression, trembled slightly, but still answered truthfully.

"Once the army has settled in the Valley, it will march out again to subdue the Red Dog Alliance in the northeast. Keka, all three thousand warriors of the Red Frog Tribe must join the campaign!"

"Ah, Great Chief, I am willing to lead the Tribes and fight with all my might for you!"

At this point, Keka's eyes flickered.

"Please let me return to prepare the warriors of the Tribe..."

"There's no need. Keka, you and the Tribe's Chieftains will stay by my side and serve as trusted aides. Hmm, I've heard from the Chieftains that you have a red-haired trusted aide named Miwa who is also skilled in battle. Let him lead the three thousand warriors!"

"Ah? Great Chief, Miwa is very blunt, how can he compare to me? He doesn't know how to fight, he only knows how to charge with the warriors!..."

Keka's expression changed as he hurriedly explained.

"Blunt, only knows how to charge?"

Xiulote showed a hint of a smile.

"Very well, that's enough. The Red Frog warriors just need to charge with all their might, no matter how many casualties there are, I will replenish your forces!"

Having said that, the King spoke no more and strode forward. Surrounded by his Escort, he inspected the camps of the ordinary Tribes.

The hierarchy of an ordinary Tribe generally consists of three levels: Chieftain, warrior, and Tribal civilians. From the Chieftains to the Tribal civilians, everyone was equally poor, with very few personal possessions. The Tribe's storeroom was communal, with priority given to warriors and adult males. The mortality rate of newborns was high, with most being raised collectively. In the camps, the Chieftains' clothing was complete and colorful, especially favoring red. The warriors, on the other hand, had more robust physiques, boosted by the occasional hunted game.

"Any village in the south is wealthier than the ordinary Canine Descendants Tribes. Hmm, the Guajili people are fierce and untamed and are also impoverished and desperate, treating life and death with indifference..."

Seeing everything before him, Xiulote pondered deeply. He traveled west along the narrow Valley, visiting each encampment and appeasing the Tribal leaders. The King passed through the rudimentary small city at the center of the Valley but did not enter it. Instead, he issued a somber command.

"In the Temple at the center of the city, erect the Emblem of the Almighty! Send the accompanying Priests to the Temple to soothe the people's minds. The captured Canine Descendants Tribes must regularly pray in the Temple!"

The King traveled west, passing many abandoned camps, until he reached the Valley's northwest opening. Bertade's expression was solemn, having once again followed close behind His Highness. The two continued on until they arrived at a Red Crow camp.

"Your Highness, this camp has been abandoned. Most of the Tribes from within have fled through the Valley opening."

Chapter 626 - Wilderness Legacy

"Oh? The aged tribal priest?"

Xiulote looked toward the camp with interest, seeing only a worn Red Crow flag and a low chieftain's longhouse, with traces of migration everywhere else. He looked for a while, then turned to the Red Frog chieftain at his side.

"Keka, do you know this wilderness priest?"

Keka widened his eyes, glanced at the camp's flag, and nodded.

"It's Kakalo from the Red Crow Tribe. He is both the wilderness priest of the heritage and the chieftain of the Red Crow Tribe. The crow is a wise divine bird, so he is also a man of wisdom and mana. Great Chief, when you were traveling north, the Red Crow Tribe was the first to sense danger and the first tribe to flee!"

"The Red Crow Tribe, the first to flee the valley? Kakalo, the crow?"

Xiulote mulled over this Nava word. Indeed, in the culture of Central America, the crow is a divine bird that can foretell death and the future.

"Since he is both chieftain and priest of the Red Crow Tribe, why didn't he leave with his tribe?"

"Great Chief, the wilderness tribes are always migrating, and those who cannot keep up will leave forever. It is the custom of the wilderness to abandon the aged and weak with limited time left, regardless of whether they are venerated priests or chieftains."

Keka shook his head, speaking frankly.

"Actually, as a wilderness priest, Kakalo has already lived longer than most people."

"Hmm."

Xiulote nodded. He had always been intrigued by the wilderness priests. The King pondered for a moment, then decided with a smile.

"Since he is a wilderness priest and a rare elder, let me go and meet him! Bertade, Keka, accompany me."

The Head Warrior nodded. He made a cautious gesture, and several trusted aides, fully armed, entered the chieftain's longhouse to inspect. After a moment, the aides came out again, signalling that all was well, and then stationed themselves around the longhouse.

Only then did Xiulote move his feet. He bowed slightly and entered the low longhouse. Sunlight filtered through the cracks, illuminating the earthen floor. The floor was scattered with bones of various animals, sculptures of wood, and carvings on stone. The scent of herbs permeated the room, and a light sniff calmed the mind.

In a corner of the longhouse sat a white-haired priest. He wore the vestments of a priest, with a gray and aged face and listlessly slumped on the ground, holding a wooden plank in his hand. On closer inspection, the old priest's clothes were stained with blood, and his eyes were slightly closed, as if he had fallen asleep.

The King shifted his gaze, looked past the sculptures of the moon and the wolf, and picked up a stone carving. On the small stone surface, dense figures were engraved, with a stone vessel at the center, containing square streams of water and flames. On either side of the vessel were lush flowers and fruits; above and below were sprawling grass and root systems. Further out were tree-like human figures.

"Cough, cough... Respected God of Death Chieftain. This is the heritage carving of the wilderness priest..."

Kakalo spoke with difficulty. The aides had already informed him of the visitor's identity.

"Oh, a heritage carving? Respected wilderness priest, could you explain this to me?"

Xiulote smiled warmly, approached the old priest, and sat down cross-legged. Bertade, holding a Bronze Sword, stood guard beside the King. Keka looked on with a complex expression, watching the dying Kakalo.

Kakalo opened his murky eyes, scrutinizing the God of Death Chieftain before him, and was surprised by the other's youth.

"Cough, cough... God of Death Chieftain, you are so young!... I have heard your name for a long time, to meet you before my death must be an arrangement of fate..."

Kakalo sighed lightly, and then started coughing again. Xiulote took out a piece of cotton cloth from his chest and handed it to the old priest. The latter took it with difficulty, covering his mouth, and quickly stained the cloth red.

"Cough, cough! Don't worry, the Earth Mother is calling me, she's always a bit impatient."

The old priest said with a strained smile, looking at the carving in the King's hand.

"God of Death Chieftain, I am willing to tell you about the spirit of the wilderness and also beseech you to treat the citizens of the wilderness kindly. The tribes that migrated south have committed many killings, not for the sake of killing, but to survive. To survive is the eternal pursuit of all the Tribes, and the mercy and cruelty of the Earth Mother."

Xiulote slightly bowed his head, giving no response, just listening patiently.

"Cough, cough... We come from the wilderness, we believe that all things have spirits, we love the sky, the earth, the sun, the moon, we believe in the balance and cycle of the world. The wilderness priest is one who venerates the way of nature, believing in the unity and coexistence of all things."

"God of Death Chieftain, please look at this carving. One side of the wilderness is a world of unity and derivation, the coexistence of nature! The stone vessel symbolizes the Earth's embrace, the restraint of nature. Even water and fire can coexist in the narrow vessel. And the streams bring life, the flames bring light and heat, the Earth nurtures life... Water, fire, and earth blend together, and then lush grass grows, deep roots are set, dazzling flowers bloom, and fruitful harvests are borne. Grass, roots, flowers, fruit, these are all symbols of life's abundance."

At this point, Kakalo paused, struggling to suppress the nauseating taste rising in his throat. Then, he continued to speak.

"When life flourishes to its utmost, there arise trees and humans, surrounded by animals and wind. Humans are the beloved of the Earth Mother and should live like trees, facing the high winds and sunlight. Water, fire, earth, roots, flowers, fruits, trees, animals, wind, and people. All are born from the same source, coexisting with each other! They all have strengths and weaknesses, so they depend on each other..."

At these words, Xiulote's eyes flickered. Water, fire, earth, wind, flowers, plants, trees, animals, and people—it did sound like the familiar concept of "from one comes two, from two comes three, from three comes all things."

Kakalo looked into Xiulote's eyes, pondered for a while, and then pointed to another plank painting on the pile of bones.

"God of Death Chieftain, please look at this painting," he said.

Xiulote raised his eyes to look, and was startled.

At the center of the painting, there was a huge, hollow, spherical nest. The hollow sphere had an opening, and inside it was the combined shape of petals and ovary. On the inner wall of the ovary were the heads and bodies of people, forming into newborn Canine Descendants who stepped out from the opening of the sphere. The older Canine Descendants would return to the sphere, merging into the inner wall, reverting to scattered bodies once again.

In the center of the sphere, the newborn and the dying were in conversation, greeting and taking leave of each other. At the entrance of the sphere, priests from the Wilderness were conducting ceremonies, welcoming the newborn and extolling death. Around the periphery of the sphere were busy Canine Descendants, spending their youthful days.

"God of Death Chieftain, one aspect of the Wilderness is the cycle of birth and death, the balance of nature! The Earth Mother is a hollow cactus sphere, nurturing new life and welcoming old death. Life is in constant cycle, emerging from the Mother's womb young and healthy. He travels through the Wilderness, planting, hunting, multiplying, singing. He returns to his birth nest, old and frail. He returns his life to the Earth, his body disintegrating, dying peacefully... The spirit of the Wilderness teaches us to smile at birth, to smile at death. Birth and death are both parts of nature, both an end and a beginning, with no need for gods to control!... Cough, cough!"

Upon hearing this, Xiulote became solemn. Such natural thought, full of the philosophy of life, was the enemy of the Divine Church. The King looked at the old priest and said calmly,

"Respected Wilderness Priest, your words are well-spoken! I like the Wilderness tradition and feel the spirit of nature. But, throughout the whole world, including this boundless Wilderness, birth and death

must be under the supreme authority of the gods, a blessing given by the gods to people! My name is Xiulote, and I am the avatar of the god of birth and death!"

"Cough, cough!..."

Kakalo began to cough, his expression pained. He stretched out his hand with difficulty and said to Xiulote,

"God of Death Chieftain, the Wilderness priests have no intention of challenging your authority... The tradition of the Wilderness can be changed, as long as it can continue... I beg you, be merciful... Cough, cough!"

The old priest coughed violently, blood streaming from the corner of his mouth, unstoppable. Shaking all over, his grip loosened, and the wooden plank he was holding rolled away.

Xiulote glanced at the plank, his heart pounding, his pupils contracting rapidly. He saw that the plank was engraved with the black wolf head emblematic of the God of Death and three neat, square characters: "Xiulote."

Bertade, following His Highness's gaze, also suddenly changed color. Drawing his Bronze Sword, he stepped forward swiftly, pressing it against Kakalo's chest.

"Speak! Who taught you these three characters!" he demanded.

"Cough, cough... Three characters?"

"The wolf head and the inscription carved on the wooden plank! That is His Highness's emblem and true name, not to be known by outsiders!"

Bertade's face showed a murderous intent as he placed the Bronze Sword against Kakalo's neck.

"Speak quickly!"

"Cough, cough, the true name of the God of Death Chieftain?!"

Kakalo was shocked. Recalling the origin of the wolf head and characters, he couldn't help but laugh with timeless mirth, even forgetting his cough,

"So it is! It all makes sense! Ha-ha!..."

"Are you using witchcraft to spy on His Highness?!"

Anger tightening his grip on the sword, Bertade was ready to slay Kakalo on the spot.

"Bertade, let him finish," said Xiulote, waves churning inside him, though his face was as calm as a still lake. The Head Warrior then loosened his grip, stepping back slightly.

Kakalo's wrinkles shook as he revealed a strange smile. Stretching out his hand, he pointed at Xiulote but faced toward the East,

"Ha-ha! Life is a spinning circle, with many fates converging in the cycle!... The shadow of death comes from the south, harboring the hope of life, unknown to the common man... Hardship and challenge lie to the East, that is the arduous journey, also the node of fate!... Alan, the soul you've been searching for all along is in the place you strive most to avoid, doomed never to meet! Cough, cough... Cough, cough... Ah!"

After uttering this mysterious prophecy, the old priest began to cough violently again. Then, he suddenly collapsed to the ground, a great clot of blood spilling from his mouth, his body shuddered twice, and beneath the astonished eyes of all, he lay motionless.

Chapter 627 - Three Hundred and Twenty-Three: Sending Troops

The low longhouse was shrouded in silence, with only a faint stench of blood carried by the wind. Kakalo lay quietly on the ground, as if returning to the embrace of the Earth Mother Goddess. The mysterious words, like prophecy, weighed heavy on the hearts of the three men, leaving them unable to forget for a long time.

Bertade stepped forward two paces and reached out to check the old Priest's breath, then turned and shook his head.

"Your Highness, he is dead."

Xiulote's expression was grave as he picked up the wooden plank from the ground. He looked at his own emblem and name, speechless for a long while. It was only after some time that he turned to Keka.

"Keka, did you hear the last words of the old Priest clearly?"

"Ah, respected God of Death, Great Chief!"

Keka carefully glanced at the name on the plank and then at Kakalo who lay dead on the ground. Though he did not believe in deities, faced with such mystical phenomena, he still regarded it as a prophecy from a Priest of the wilderness and was filled with awe for Xiulote. The Red Frog Chieftain bowed deeply and answered.

"Great Chief, Kakalo's last words were, 'Oh Death's Flower, the soul you have always sought, is where you travel without end, always eluding capture!'"

In the language of the Chichimec people, "Alán" means "Death's Flower," "far away" also has the meaning of "travel," and "meeting" is akin to "capture."

"Hmm, that's similar to what I heard."

Xiulote nodded calmly, yet inside, storms of shock and bewilderment raged.

"Knowing my name, knowing my emblem, a prophecy before dying... Death's Flower cannot capture me? Does this refer to the secret of my reincarnation?... The node of fate is in the East? Is this a prophecy that the colonizers will soon arrive?... Does the shadow of death coming from the south speak of the impending smallpox epidemic?... Does this world truly possess someone who can see through everything, foretelling the future?"

The King was silent for a long time, immersed in thought. Bertade's demeanor was somber, while Keka respectfully bowed his head. Time in the longhouse seemed to freeze until a trusted aide came forward, bowing.

"Your Highness, an Envoy from the Eastern army is just outside the house, with urgent military dispatches."

At this, Xiulote was jolted from his reverie. After a moment's thought, he gave his orders in a deep voice.

"Bertade, give this wise Priest of the wilderness a proper burial! Erect a tombstone for him and inscribe his last words upon it. Treat the Priests of the renegade tribes with care. Have them select two persons to compile the wilderness traditions, and bring those to my tent!"

"By your will, Your Highness! I will dispatch men to check on the Priests from the wilderness."

Bertade bowed in salute. As Xiulote had taken two steps, he seemed to recall something and turned back to ask.

"Keka, did you say the Red Crow Tribe was the first to flee?"

"Yes, Great Chief."

"Where did they flee to?"

"Uh... it should be to the north, but I am uncertain if it was to the northwest or northeast."

Keka said, eyes wide, unable to provide a definitive answer.

The King shook his head slightly and instructed the Head Warrior.

"Watch for the traces of the Red Crow Tribe. It would be best to capture their lead figures!"

"As you command, Your Highness!"

Xiulote spoke no further, striding out of the longhouse. There were too many secrets in this world, silently buried in the dust of history. And he was destined to leave his own footprints upon the dust!

Outside the longhouse, an Otomi Envoy was waiting. He was covered in dust, his face weary and his eyes revealing a hint of urgency. Seeing Xiulote emerge, the Envoy abruptly knelt down and cried out.

"Your Highness! Two days ago, the eastern army was attacked by the Canine Descendants! Prince Jiowar sent me to request your support!"

"Who is the leader of the Guajili Canine Descendants? How many tribes have come? How many warriors in total?"

Xiulote's expression remained unchanged as he asked in a grave tone. He had anticipated the eastern army would be attacked by the Canine Descendants and had already ordered Jiowar to make an encampment for defense. Relying on the camp, even if they could not achieve victory, they would not be utterly defeated.

"Your Highness, the leader of the Canine Descendants should be the Red Dog Chieftain Chichika. The battle has raged for two days, and the banners of five major tribes—Red Dog, Red Crow, Red Deer, Red Monkey, Red Salamander—have all appeared! The enemy facing us is estimated to be between eight to ten thousand. The Red Dog Tribe has sent over two thousand, Red Crow, Red Deer, Red Monkey, Red Salamander each have over a thousand, and the rest, ordinary tribes, also add up to two thousand."

"Eight to ten thousand?"

Xiulote furrowed his brows. In the northeast near Pamus City, more than sixty thousand Canine Descendants were gathered, and if all able-bodied men were armed, they could mobilize up to twenty thousand at most. The number of troops dispatched suggested that the Canine Descendants still had strengths in reserve.

"Prince Jiowar has eight thousand Samurai! His forces are comparable to the Guajili, and he has established a camp in advance. Why is he so quick to seek my aid?"

"Your Highness, the Guajili Canine Descendants split into two groups. One is the main force, with five major tribes forming a united front directly confronting the Prince. The tribes with red-haired individuals are numerous, and they harass the camp day and night, leaving the Samurai no respite."

The Envoy paused to catch his breath, continuing carefully.

"The other group consists of smaller forces that harass and raid. Over two thousand warriors from ordinary tribes split into more than ten squads, circling to the southwest of the camp. These ordinary tribes are agile in their movements, scattering behind the legion's lines, constantly plundering our supply convoys! When I left, the most recent convoy carrying grain had just been completely looted, with the Militia suffering over two hundred casualties..."

"What is Jiowar doing?"

Hearing this, Xiulote was somewhat dissatisfied.

"He has eight thousand Samurai at his command, and he cannot even protect his own supply route?"

"Your Highness, per your orders, Prince Jiowar has fortified a camp for defense! The Canine Descendants attacked twice and, after losing two hundred of their number, stopped their forcible assaults. There is still half a month's supply of grain in the camp. As long as there are enough Militia to transport grain, the Canine Descendants cannot truly blockade the supply route."

Then, the Otomi Envoy hesitated, looking at the side where Keka, the Red Frog Chieftain, quietly stepped back a few paces. Only then did the Envoy speak in a low voice.

"Your Highness, the Prince begs for your understanding! He has only recently become the leader of the Mountain City, the Otomi King of Bird Shooting, and his prestige is not yet established, his hold over the legion still uncertain. With the Guajili Canine Descendants coming fiercely, he dares not engage in a major battle right now. A defeat would shake the morale of the troops. Even if they achieved victory and the Guajili scattered without falling apart, they often set up hidden ambushes. The former leader of Mountain City had an initial victory but later suffered defeat, being ambushed by a Divine Archer while pursuing the fleeing enemy..."

Here, the Envoy paused, then suddenly prostrated himself, shouting aloud.

"Your Highness, the Prince holds firm in the camp, invulnerable. He requests that you lead the main force to join him, to defeat the enemy together!"

After a moment of contemplation, Xiulote slowly nodded. He smiled and said.

"Becoming the leader of Mountain City for only a few months, Jiowar has indeed improved quite a lot! You go back and tell him, to hold out for another five days. Once I have stabilized the situation in the Valley, I will lead the main force to march east!"

The following days were full of busyness. Xiulote gathered two legions, pacifying the Valley captives. He drew out one thousand Samurai and three thousand Militia from the western army to defend the Valley,

managing nearly twenty thousand Canine Descendant captives. Then, the King led over ten thousand Samurai eastward, in a mighty force!

Chapter 628 - Mountain Melee

The long wind swept across the vast highland, and the mountain ridges undulated under the far-off sky. The rainy season had passed, and the land was dry once more. Columns of dust rose from the marching armies, morphing into different shapes in the air. A skilled general needed only to gaze from afar to know the size of the troops.

Under the escort of a few red-haired guards, Chichika climbed the highest hill to overlook the battle situation in the valley.

Chichika was not yet forty, with a full forehead, fierce eyes, and a sharp facial structure, carrying the power of a seasoned warrior. His face bore the deep marks of windswept wilderness; following tribal tradition, his cheeks were painted with red tattoos. He was draped in a rugged wolf robe, with a spiritual wolf's paw hanging around his neck and the feathers of birds of prey tied to his arms. At a glance, one could tell that this was a battle-hardened chieftain with a wealth of experience in the wilderness.

Red Dog, the Chieftain, surveyed the surroundings, and the continuous range of small hills came into view. The hills were covered with rolling shallow trees and also surrounded by the large eagles of America. It was deep into autumn, yet the trees remained verdant in the shadows of the mountains, conveying a solemn and deadly mood. This was a branch of the eastern Sierra Madre mountain range, located between Pamus City and Red Fox Valley. The towering mountains eased here, transitioning into rolling hills.

A mountain pass wound its way along the edges of the hills, stretching a hundred miles east to west. It was also possible to march on the hills, though the path was often blocked by trees, making it difficult for large groups to pass. Eight thousand Otomi Warriors were camped in units of a thousand, along the hills and the mountain road. The eight rudimentary camps stretched for miles, blocking the route west for the Canine Descendants Army.

Countless Canine Descendants Tribes were equally encamped to the east of the mountain road, directly opposite the Otomi camps. At this moment, hundreds of red-haired warriors were closing in on the opposite camp from the hills, using the cover of the trees to exchange fire with the Otomi Archers. The whistling Arrows crisscrossed in the air, sparse in number but extremely sharp! Occasionally, warriors from both sides fell, with the grey-blue figures being the majority. The Otomi were clearly at a disadvantage in the exchange of fire.

The annoying raids had been going on for quite some time, rendering the Otomi Warriors in the camp restless and increasingly irritable. A deep horn sounded, and the Otomi suddenly opened their camp gates. Over eight hundred Samurai in Cotton Armor shouted loudly as they rushed out of the camp, attacking the harassing Canine Warriors in the forest.

Seeing this scene, Chichika cracked a smile, his face showing a murderous intent. He whispered an order to his trusted aides on either side.

"Get ready to go down, using the old method of the wolf pack hunting!"

The Chieftain's trusted aides nodded and set off to carry out their orders. Soon, the Otomi Warriors charged up to the red-haired warriors. After firing another volley, wounding about a dozen Samurai, the red-haired warriors turned and fled into the woods. The Otomi Warriors pursued them relentlessly, furiously chasing and throwing javelins. Occasionally, the lagging red-haired warriors were struck by javelins and then cut down by the Samurai with clubs.

"Tweet, tweet!"

A call to retreat sounded from the camp. Dozens of experienced Samurai sprinted from the camp, ordering the fighting warriors to return. However, the troops in pursuit were difficult to restrain. The cold Arrows of the red-haired warriors kept coming, inciting the minds of the Otomi Warriors. At least half of the bloodthirsty warriors, without any care, charged directly into the deep forest. The trees disrupted the Samurai's coordination and their favored battle formations.

In the deep forests, small-scale, gruesome skirmishes erupted now and then, accompanied by faint screams and the collapsing figures of both sides. Even though the Otomi were skilled mountain people, they could not gain any advantage in the forest compared to the beast-like Canine Warriors.

It didn't take long before a large number of agile figures flitted through the forest. Under the leadership of the Chieftain's trusted aides, hundreds of Canine Warriors closed in from all directions. Battle cries filled the air in an instant, startling the birds in the forest!

A Canine Warrior leaped out from the woods, swinging a Stone Hammer, and smashed it onto the back of an Otomi Warrior. The warrior let out a wail and collapsed instantly, only to be met by another hammer blow to the head. Another veteran warrior, upon witnessing this gruesome scene, his eyes bloodshot, swung his War Club with deadly precision, cutting through the neck of the Canine Warrior. The Canine Warrior let out half a scream before falling to the ground, his body stacking upon the corpses, their blood mingling together.

More Canine Descendants advanced from all sides. The veteran warrior swung his War Club and shield desperately, back to back with three other warriors, fending off the surrounding assaults.

"Swoosh!"

An accurately aimed Bone Arrow sliced through the air, "thud," piercing precisely into the veteran warrior's eye, and a piercing scream echoed through the woods. The veteran warrior's eyes bled as he

dropped his weapons in agony. He fell backwards, writhing on the ground, and then a sharp pain in his chest followed by violent struggling, and then he was silenced completely.

The redhead Canine pulled the Copper Spear out of the heart, admiring faintly. Such captured weapons were indeed sharp; he heard the southern Tribes had many more. Glancing at the remaining three warriors, he carefully took a step back and continued to command the ordinary Canine Warriors to engage, while he reloaded his Hunting Bow.

Similar scenes unfolded continuously in the forest. In close combat, the Canine Descendants' brute force was fully unleashed. Without the protection of a battle formation, the Otomi Warriors fell like stalks of corn, broken into different shapes.

In not more than a quarter of an hour, the forest had completely quieted down. The breeze brought a pungent scent of blood. Then, the Canine Descendants began to stoop and search, gathering any usable weapons and Cotton Armor, looking for personal Daggers and Necklaces, even stripping the fallen Otomi Warriors bare.

"Haha!"

Chichika laughed unrestrainedly. Soon after, the Chieftain's trusted aide came forward to report. Surrounded by Tribal Warriors, more than four hundred Otomi Warriors were utterly annihilated in the mountain woodlands, with almost none escaping. The Canine Descendants had lost only half their number of ordinary men and about a dozen elite redhead warriors.

The Red Dog Chieftain nodded and gave a few quiet orders. Not long after, hundreds of redhead warriors approached again, with loud clamor, shooting Arrows into the encampment. This time, the camp gates remained firmly closed, and the Otomi Warriors merely held their ground within the walls, no longer mounting an attack.

Chichika looked ferociously for a while before saying to his trusted aide.

"The morale at this encampment has plummeted. Tonight, select about a hundred redheads who can conduct a night raid, and have them kill their way in and set fire!"

Chapter 629 - Mountain Melee Part 2

"As you command, Chieftain!"

Uman nodded, his face hardening into a fierce expression.

"I will lead the team tonight and butcher those Otomi mongrels well!"

"Haha! Excellent, a fearless warrior should be undaunted!"

Chichika laughed heartily. He extended his fist and thumped Uman's chest forcefully. Then, the Red Dog Chieftain's expression turned cold as he gazed at the forest where the skirmish had paused.

"Uman, chop off the heads of the fallen hundreds of Otomi Warriors! Pile the heads outside the next camp. If the Otomi come for revenge, we'll hunt them again!"

"As you command, Chieftain!"

Uman nodded repeatedly. Then, he pointed towards the central command tent, where a flag with a bird was fluttering. Hundreds of archers were stationed in the encampment, some warriors still holding longbows.

"Chieftain, why not just pile the heads outside the Otomi leader's camp! If he continues to cower like a turtle, the morale of those mongrels will completely break!"

Hearing this, Chichika narrowed his eyes and looked over the formidable Otomi stronghold.

"Agreed, take three hundred adept at shooting the redhead, and get it done!"

"As you command, Chieftain!"

Uman looked excited and hastened away. Soon, the previously silent forest became noisy again. Hundreds of Canine Descendants, carrying dripping heads, formed a loose formation and surged to within a hundred steps from the main camp. They brazenly insulted the camp and then piled the heads on the soft earth.

Under the bird flag, Jiowar clenched his fists, watching the provoking Canine Descendants outside the encampment, burning with rage.

"Damn Guajili Canine Descendants! Damn Red Dog Chieftain! Damn it all!"

Jiowar angrily pounded his chest, the bronze Cloth Armor emitting a metallic clang. Feeling the solidity of the metal, he recalled the prince's military strategies and calmed down once more.

"The prince once said, as a commander-in-chief, one must control his emotions, especially not to send troops out in anger. One should play to their strengths and limit the enemy's ability to leverage theirs. The Canine Descendants are adept in close forest combat, unlike the Ottopan Warriors who excel in formation battles..."

"Otomi's bird king, cowardly armadillo, small mountain cat!..."

The insults outside the camp became unbearable, each word piercing his ears.

"Damn it, damn it! Personal Guard Warriors, follow me into battle!"

Jiowar's eyes were bloodshot as he angrily issued the order. These past few days, he had steadfastly held his position without engaging in combat, much to the warriors' chagrin, and his new leader's prestige was on shaky ground. Today, the forward camp had even struck out on its own, suffering heavy losses. If he allowed the Canine Descendants to keep insulting them, the morale of the Ottopan Warriors would truly disintegrate!

While contemplating deeply, Jiowar put on the bronze helmet and fitted several vibrant feathers into it. Then, he touched the sturdy metal armor, thought for a moment, and added an outer layer of tough leather cloak. The Coyote Prince, cautious as ever, made all his preparations before finally leading all the archers and a thousand warriors out of the camp.

The clarion call to attack sounded high, and the elite Ottopan Warriors charged out of the encampment, forming two lines. The front line attacked the provoking hundreds of sturdy Canine Descendants, and the rear line lifted greatbows, shooting at the Canine Warriors behind.

"Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!"

The fierce rain of arrows howled in, sharp screams tearing through the mountain forest, and in an instant, more than twenty Canine Descendants were dead. Soon, the Samurai engaged in fierce combat with the provoking Canine Descendants. The battle was brief, and the Samurai killed dozens of Canine Descendants, with the rest scattering like fleeing rats.

"Good, good!"

In the forest behind, Uman clutched a captured longbow, filled with the excitement of a hunt. Behind him stood three hundred red-haired archers, and five hundred warriors prepared for close combat. The elite of the Red Dog Tribe were ambushed here, ready to strike fiercely at the leader of the Otomi at any moment.

Under the protection of his trusted aides, Jiowar ferociously chased down the fleeing foes, displaying the martial prowess of a new leader. Coyote Prince continually shouted loudly, swung his war club forcefully, and slashed to death any enemy who dared to resist. His bright plumage fluttered overhead, so conspicuous.

The charging Samurai were inspired by their leader, their spirits lifted, they too began to shout loudly.

"The leader of the mountain city, the skillful Bird Slayer King!"

Jiowar charged for a while, killing several enemies, then gradually slowed down. He caught his breath slightly; the armor and the leather robe were indeed somewhat heavy. Afterwards, Coyote Prince looked around, and through the slits of his helmet, he saw the wooded area a hundred paces away and completely stopped.

"This charge, the leader's display of courage is sufficient! If the nobility dare whisper again, it's time to use the Thunderbolt. The skirmish in the woods is too risky, the cunning Guajili people will definitely have an ambush set up, better to order the warriors to retreat!..."

In the wooded area, Uman furrowed his brows. The opposing leader had actually stopped and gathered his trusted aides, seemingly not planning to advance further.

"Pah, the shrinking armadillos, quit halfway through the charge! The last Otomi leader was a warrior who personally led the charge, directly crushing two thousand tribal warriors!"

Uman spat fiercely. Naturally, the end result of the last Otomi leader's charge was being ambushed by the red-haired attackers he led, and shot dead by a volley of arrows. Thinking of this, he gripped his longbow tightly, excited once again.

"With this captured greatbow, watch me shoot you dead!"

"Drip, drip!"

The horn to retreat resounded through the mountain path. Jiowar personally blew the horn, calling the warriors to retreat. The charging Ottopan Warriors gradually halted their steps. They looked back for a moment, then gathered around the brave Prince.

"We can't wait any longer!"

Uman suddenly roared like a tiger, blew the bone whistle, and then shouted at the red-haired behind him.

"Charge! All tribal elite, close in and fire, hunt down the Otomi Bird King!"

Eight hundred Red Dog warriors howled like wolves, then fiercely charged out of the woodland towards the nearby Jiowar. Upon seeing this scene, a large group of Ottopan Warriors also gathered together, and the skirmishing erupted in front of the woods.

The ambushing enemies appeared from the woods and charged straight towards them. Although Jiowar had anticipated it, he was still suddenly startled. He instinctively prepared to turn and flee, then forcibly stopped himself. Coyote Prince looked around and whispered,

"Give me a shield!"

Hundreds of tribal warriors, like frenzied tigers. They hardly defended at all, swinging stone hammers and copper spears, desperately charging towards the enemy's leader. Uman personally led the red-haired, charging at the forefront.

Chapter 630 - A Deadly Fight in the Mountains - End

"Swoosh!"

The bone arrow came as fast as lightning, a flash before the eyes! Jiowar had not reacted when a sudden pain struck his chest, and his whole body shivered from the impact.

"Hiss... Bang!"

The sharp arrow pierced through the cloth, hitting the bronze armor plate with a "bang." The Coyote Prince stepped back, quickly lowered his head to look. The arrow hit right in the center, but it did not penetrate the copper armor.

"Damn it, they actually shot at my vitals!"

Jiowar was frightened and looked around for the enemy who had ambushed him.

Not far away, Uman was stunned. His arrow had hit the vital spot, yet the enemy did not fall. The red-haired trusted aide's face showed a ferocious color as he, along with dozens of red-heads, charged forward another ten steps and raised his hand for another shot.

"Swoosh!... Bang!"

The bone arrow hit the copper armor, making another metallic clank. Jiowar's chest hurt again, as if someone had punched him from afar, and he took another step back. He looked down to see this arrow also hit the heart area, merely two inches from the previous one.

"Damn it, such precise shooting!"

Jiowar glared ahead, finally spotting the enemy general who shot the arrows. It was a red-haired Canine Hunter, with no distinctive clothes. He held a Greatbow, rarely seen among Guajili people, now gazing this way.

"So it really is a thick-skinned armadillo..."

Uman lowered his bow to observe, his face revealing an incredulous expression. He stared at the unharmed Otomi leader and whispered a curse in surprise.

"Damn it, so thick-skinned!"

Standing more than fifty steps apart, both men looked at each other with intimidating killing intent. Jiowar turned around and gave orders to his trusted aides in a loud voice. Uman bit his lip hard and yelled to the red-heads around him.

"Charge another ten steps! Fight the Otomi dogs on both sides! At the center, red-headed hunters, shoot the bird king with me!"

After saying this, Uman charged ahead. The distance of ten steps was covered in an instant, as he once again lifted the Greatbow and pulled it taut with all his strength. This time, he aimed for the bird king's face! Around him, thirty-something elite red-headed hunters also raised their Hunting Bows, aiming for head and face vitals.

"Damn it, damn it! Despicable Guajili Canine Descendants attacking by stealth!"

Jiowar watched the group of red-heads aiming at him, shuddered all over, and cursed angrily. He threw away the War Club in his hand and lifted the shield with both hands, desperately covering his head, face, and neck.

"Swoosh swoosh swoosh!... Pfft pfft!... Bang!"

The red-headed hunters didn't miss their targets, as the whistling arrows brought a tremor of death. Most bone arrows struck the wooden shield, and the rest accurately stuck into the cloth armor. Jiowar bent over with the shield raised, like walking in a torrential downpour, his whole body getting painfully beaten. After a single volley, his Armor was stuck with more than a dozen arrows, turning him into a hedgehog.

"Damn it! Sneaky curs!"

Jiowar struggled to steady himself, carefully tilted the shield ajar, and peeked out to observe. Burning with rage, he stretched out his hand, pointed in Uman's direction, and roared orders to his trusted aides.

"Shoot! Shoot them dead!"

Nearly a hundred trusted aides had already taken out Longbows, ready to shoot. Upon hearing their leader's command, they drew their bows and notched arrows together, aiming briefly before firing at the opposite side.

After Jiowar became a prince, the generous lord bestowed two hundred Longbows. Half were distributed among the important nobility and chieftains. The remaining half were used to select elites, emulating their lord, and forming this team of Longbow trusted aides.

"Swoosh swoosh swoosh!"

Sharp Copper Arrows cut through the air. At this distance, the Canine Descendants' cloth clothes were like paper mache, and captured Cotton Armor could not provide resistance. Uman sensed the danger beforehand and violently threw himself to the ground, rolling back twice with force.

"Pfft, pfft... Ah!"

Arrows sinking into flesh made a blood-curling squelching sound, immediately followed by agonizing screams that drowned out everything else and fell upon Uman's ears. Lying on the ground, covered in dust, he looked beside him and his heart sank. More than a dozen elite red-headed hunters were hit by arrows and fell to the ground bleeding, clearly beyond saving.

"Swoosh swoosh swoosh!..."

The Longbow trusted aides stood firm and aimed, launching another round of fierce volleys that fell among the rear ranks of Canine Warriors. A dozen Canine Descendants fell instantly, the backlines thrown into chaos. Meanwhile, the several hundred Canine Descendants desperately charging at the forefront were also blocked by the converging Otomi Warriors.

"Blessings of the ancestors! Form battle formation, break the enemy line!"

Jiowar waved his shield and shouted loudly to bolster the morale of his forces. Seeing their leader personally at the frontline unharmed, the Ottopan Warriors' spirit surged. They let out a battle cry and began to fight ferociously. Soon, the warriors formed a battle formation, raised their shields to cover each other, and gradually stabilized the battle line.

A Canine Warrior frantically swung the Stone Hammer, charging at the Otomi Warriors' battle line. He struck with all his might, aimed forward but was blocked by a middle-aged warrior's shield. The middle-aged warrior braced against the dented shield, leaned back slightly, and another young warrior swung the War Club, slashing toward the enemy's chest and abdomen.

"Sizzle!"

A burst of fresh red sprayed from the chest and abdomen. The Canine Warrior suddenly arched his back, losing all strength and slumping sideways to the ground. Another Canine Descendant charged with the Stone Spear, the middle-aged warrior again raised his shield to block, and the young warrior cut diagonally from the side. After an anguished cry, another corpse was added to the ground.

Facing the formed battle array, the Canine Warriors began to incur rapid losses, while the casualties of the warriors significantly decreased. Uman looked around the battlefield, anxiety growing in his heart. He withdrew to where the Tribal Warriors were, commanding the striking elites.

"Howl! Red-headed hunters, scatter and shoot, suppress the enemy archers! Tribal Warriors, circle to the flanks, don't charge the formation head-on!"