

Civilization 651

Chapter 651 - Camp Howl and Chaotic Battle

A massive fireball streaked across the night sky, trailing a meteor-like trail before crashing into the Canine Descendants' encampment, releasing billowing thick smoke. Countless Fire Arrows attacked from the mountains like sudden torrents of rain, igniting the dry grass nests and converging into a sea of flames in the camp. The tranquil night erupted with thunderous roars like the divine wrath of gods, bringing an unstoppable disaster.

"Ah! The Divine Powers' Spell!"

Amoxltli, shocked, lifted his head to see the sky full of fire, and the terrifying thunder filled his ears. He smelled the burning char and quickly diffusing scent of blood. Thousands of Canine Warriors in the camp were shouting and colliding, desperately fighting in a chaotic madness!

"Flames and thunder, blood and death... It's the Great Chief's divine magic!"

Miwa, full of awe, looked toward the origin of the fireball. He stretched out his hand and clasped the Sun Amulet hidden within his clothes.

"Praise the Chief Divine! Pray for your forgiveness..."

After a brief pause, Miwa looked back at Amoxltli. This time, his eyes were filled with murderous intent, no hesitations remaining.

"Amoxltli!"

"Aran, my daughter!"

As divine fire descended, Amoxltli suppressed the trembling in his heart. He took a deep look at the completely chaotic camp, then suddenly let out a low roar and hurled the Stone Spear in his hand at Miwa. Then, the Red Crow Chieftain swiftly turned and, without looking back, fled into the forest behind him.

"Let's go!"

A few Red Crow elite also followed their chieftain, escaping like foxes.

Miwa leaped to avoid the incoming javelin. Then, he lifted his Hunting Bow and aimed at Amoxltli's retreating figure, releasing a sharp arrow!

"Whoosh!"

In the deep night, shadowy and indistinct. Amoxltli, like a turkey, crouched low and ran in a zigzag pattern, dodging the incoming Bone Arrows.

"Whoosh, whoosh!"

Miwa shot twice more, both missing their mark. Watching Amoxltli flee swiftly, he roared unwillingly and angrily.

"Amoxltli, you sly Red Crow!"

"Boss, should we chase into the forest?"

The nearby Red Salamander warrior gathered around, waiting for their leader's command. Miwa, with a fierce look, watched the several figures about to disappear into the forest and finally clenched his teeth and shook his head decisively.

"No! We attack the Great Tribe's camp, spreading the chaos further... for Chieftain Keka!"

The Red Salamander warriors looked at each other, then all wore a determined expression. Dozens of them silently charged forward, heading toward the nearest Red Monkey camp.

The chaos in the rear camp continued and grew even more brutal. Living people ran through the mayhem, while corpses burned in the flames. The cruel camp outcry was but a moment, yet the entire campsite had already gone completely out of control. Different tribes collided with each other, mixing into a tumult, killing into a turmoil, and dying in heaps!

At this moment, all other tribes were enemies! More than a dozen howling tribal militia, waving their weapons, charged crazily.

Aran, with no hesitation, lifted her Hunting Bow and rapidly shot three arrows, felling the nearest three warriors. Other Red Crow warriors mercilessly swung their War Clubs and thrust their Stone Spears, killing these approaching "enemies." Over a hundred Red Crow elites thus gathered into a group, fiercely holding their corner in the camp.

"Aran, more tribes are charging in, and the camp is getting more chaotic! We can't just wait here!"

Chieftain's trusted aide Moqi called out anxiously. The warriors had been woke up early by Aran, gathering ahead of time. This quarter hour of early awakening meant the difference between life and death. Aran was the chieftain's daughter and an outstanding redhead hunter. Appreciating her efforts, everyone acknowledged Aran as the leader, temporarily following her command.

"Uncle Moqi, Dad hasn't come back yet!"

Aran bit her teeth, stood on tiptoes, and looked toward the mountains. The firelight rendered the nearby campsite blazingly bright, whereas the distant forest remained unseeable. Only deep darkness lingered there, occasionally bursting with beast-like roars, as if to swallow life itself.

"We can't wait any longer, the battle cry has been called!"

The redhead hunters gathered around her, looking seriously at Aran. They temporarily followed her command but were not going to obey indefinitely. Seeing this, Moqi stepped forward and said affirmatively.

"The chieftain is too far away to come back! The elite of the tribe is all here, quickly lead the warriors away!"

"But..."

"Aran, don't forget the old chief's words. The survival of the tribe is everything, no one is indispensable... Hurry and lead the warriors away! If the chief truly can't come back, then a new chieftain will lead everyone. I hope, that person can be you!"

"Uncle Moqi..."

Aran bit her lip hard, the pain bringing her to a more alert state. She looked towards the fort, seeing a Hell of Fire scene. Flames fiercely burned, tribal folk screamed in battle, and corpses lay everywhere. The young huntress finally made a resolve.

"Go! Head north, back to the old camp! Anyone who blocks our retreat, kill them!"

"Ow!"

The Red Crow warriors cried out all at once, then followed Aran's lead, charging down the northern mountain path.

A few hundred meters away, at the Red Monkey camp, a clash had just momentarily paused.

"Zucata, continue to form the Spear Formation, hold the camp entrance! Whoever charges in, kill them all without hesitation! Red-haired elite, command the warrior squads. Take out the prepared mud and smother the campfire!"

"Yes, chieftain!"

Zucata responded in a muffled voice.

The Red Monkey encampment had a complete fence and gate, and although part of it had been burned away, it mostly remained intact. At that moment, Zucata, holding a long spear in both hands, stood at the entrance of the encampment. Beside him was a small formation of forty to fifty people with long spears, and in front of them were dozens of fallen bodies of the Canine Descendants. The young Militia, Chipawa, also held a long spear in both hands, mingling with a few old brothers from Tarasco, yet the tip of his spear had no blood on it.

"Boom, boom, boom, boom!"

Four thunderous sounds exploded again, terrifying prayers arose in the camp. Randomly shot fire arrows ignited the vegetation, illuminating the faces of hundreds of people in panic and uncertainty.

In the center of the gathered Tribes warriors was the camp's fire pit. Ozoma, panting, stood in the firelight, comforting his men loudly while counting his warriors. His copper armor was completely soaked in fresh blood, just like the blood-dripping War Club in his hand.

The Mexica attack had come suddenly, with tremendous force, shocking everyone. The camp was momentarily in chaos, someone led the screaming, and many people ran around recklessly.

The Red Monkey Chieftain himself led his personal guard to suppress it. He did not discriminate against anyone, killing dozens of people in the camp before the situation was barely stabilized. Then, scattered militiamen and unidentified enemies stormed in, and the sudden battle persisted for a quarter, killing dozens more warriors and defeating the enemy.

After a brief count, adding the death and dispersal, the number of Red Monkey warriors had reduced by one-third, now fewer than a thousand.

"Damn! My warriors!"

Ozoma's heart bled. He looked up at the night sky as another fireball came hurtling down, smashing into the front of the camp.

Not long ago, the massive fires in the mountains still deeply engraved in the hearts of tens of thousands of Canine Warriors. Now facing another celestial fire attack, the encampment ahead finally broke down! Countless figures fled from the campsite, desperately colliding toward another campsite. Subsequently, thousands of warriors from both encampments, as if possessed, fiercely fought each other. In less than half a quarter, screams and howls came with the wind, like the mournful songs of dying autumn birds.

"Heavenly Divine! The divine weapon of the Mexica, so terrifying!... Earth Mother Goddess, please protect me, do not let the fireballs smash here! Chief Divine of the Mexica, also please protect me, I will devoutly offer sacrifices!"

Ozoma muttered to himself, praying to the myriad gods, filled with dread. It was close, just a moment ago, the Red Monkey camp almost completely dispersed! He looked serious, asking his trusted Scout.

"Which two camps were those?"

"The bombed one was Red Salamander Camp, the one that got stormed was Red Frog Camp."

It was difficult to distinguish directions at night, the trusted Scout squinted his eyes, confirmed for a while, then assuredly answered.

"Haha, dog eats dog, a mouth full of fur. Damn Red Salamander, Red Frog, for laughing at me earlier!"

Ozoma cursed bitterly, then immediately became tense again.

"Those two camps are near the main camp of Red Dog!"

"Yes, Chieftain! The main camp of Red Dog is over there, where most of the burning is happening!"

On hearing this, Ozoma quickly looked up toward the main camp of Red Dog. The main camp was a key target of Mexica, with fires burning everywhere. Amid the surging flames, occasional warriors from Red Dog fled the camp, vanishing into the darkness. However, the main force of Red Dog's grand camp didn't seem to have dispersed nor were there hysterical screams.

"The leader of Chichika... alas!"

Ozoma's expression changed, a torrent of thoughts clashing in his mind, then transformed into a long sigh.

"What about Red Deer Camp?"

"At the start of the night raid, the Red Deer Tribe fled north in a swarm! It seems that Masate Chieftain led them, running at the front."

The trusted Scout sincerely asked without reservations.

"Chieftain, the rear camp also broke down, all the tribes are in chaos. The Mexica will definitely launch a major attack by morning!... Shall we escape now?"

"... No. Secure the camp, just wait! Running at night, colliding with each other, who knows how many will disperse, how many will be injured."

Ozoma pondered for a while. He looked toward the camp, under the command of Red elites, the warriors had gradually regained order, staunchly defending the camp. The Red Monkey Chieftain made up his mind, instructed.

"The divine weapon of the Mexica is all thunder, no rain. As long as we do not lose our formation, not that many will die! We... will wait till dawn to move!"

"As you say! Chieftain is wise." Stay tuned to Freewebnovel

The trusted aide nodded in agreement, smiling.

"Hmm, the camp has stabilized. You take charge outside, I need to return to the main tent."

Ozoma surveyed his surroundings, his expression suddenly flickered. He involuntarily lowered his voice.

"Send two men, secretly escort the captured enemy leader to the main tent!"

"Ah, the leader just now? He was hit by a spear, it's Zucata's war trophy. Chieftain, what do you want with him? He's just a stocky redhead hunter..."

"Fool! This attack came suddenly, clearly premeditated. He has backers... stop asking! Give Zucata a reward, bring the man to me, quick!"

"As you say! Chieftain is wise."

The trusted aide immediately left. Ozoma stood up straight, gazing into the distance. Fire descended from the sky, burning everywhere, yet not forming fierce blazes. Thousands of warriors from various tribes ran amok in the firelight, continuously colliding and fighting, with very few actually burned to death.

"Mountain camps lack fuel, unable to create a fire that destroys everything."

Ozoma sighed deeply, chanting in a low voice like a wilderness Priest.

"But the flame of human hearts has already blazed up, unstoppable!"

Chapter 652 - Chichika's Oath

"Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!"

The terrifying thunder was within an arm's reach, roaring just below the main camp like fearsome specters. The whistling fire arrows tore through the night sky, and rolling fireballs attacked from afar, turning Red Dog's front camp into a sea of flames! Soon, pungent smoke filled the encampment, and the toxic scent of sulfur overwhelmed even the bravest red-haired Hunter, rendering him unable to stand his ground.

Chichika Chieftain's face smeared with soot, he retreated awkwardly to the higher ground at the back of the camp under the escort of red-haired Hunters. This area with steep and bare terrains did not have burning forests. On both sides were towering mountains, where a mighty mountain wind dispersed the poisonous smoke.

"Raise my flag, gather the tribal warriors!"

As soon as Red Dog Chieftain moved away from the flames, he urgently roared out. He stood on the highest rock, holding a torch high in his hand, revealed to all.

The sky full of fire arrows paused momentarily, but sporadic fireballs continued rising incessantly. The fireballs loudly crashed into various spots of the camp, spreading unknown fear. Suddenly, amidst the dim fire light, a hysterical shout erupted from the Red Salamander encampment, and countless figures burst out from the camp, rushing into the nearby Red Dog encampment.

Then, a wild shout exploded in the Red Dog encampment too, and large groups of figures surged out. Countless warriors chaotically collided, swinging their weapons, stabbing into "enemy" bodies. On this terrifying night of flames, two large tribes loyal to their leaders, thousands of elite Canine Warriors, just like that, without distinguishing friend from foe, frenziedly fought each other!

"No, my warriors!"

Chichika roared in agony, his expression on the verge of splitting. He looked around; flames like tidal waves inundated the lower areas, with tribal warriors running around in chaos. He listened to the left and right, where the thunder reverberated through the valleys, mixed with sharp cries of panic and fear. Over ten thousand diligently gathered Guajili elites, just like that under the unknown attack of the Mexica, suddenly completely collapsed in the depth of the night!

"No! Roar!...Roar! I'll kill you all!"

Red Dog Chieftain's eyes were bloodshot, furiously roaring. Countless past efforts, countless future plans, all in one night, turned to ashes with the fire. After a while, Chichika barely calmed down. He took a few steps, grabbed the tribal Priest Zuma by his collar with one hand, and pointing towards the fireballs rising from the enemy camp below, he demanded.

"Zuma, what is this?!"

"Ah! Great Chief... This, this must be a spell from the Mexica or a weapon bestowed by the gods..." the elderly tribal Priest Zuma choked, struggling to breathe under the grip of the Great Chief. His efforts to speak were labored, like an old owl in the claws of a coyote.

"It's like the previous...Catapult...except it throws fireballs..."

"Catapult?"

Chichika paused for a moment and then showed a touch of realization.

"So the wood beast from the other days was for today!"

"Cough cough!..."

Red Dog Chief released his grip, and old priest Zuma coughed repeatedly. In Nava language, Zuma means "Anger," and Montezuma is "One who makes oneself angry." Of course, in front of Chichika right now, "Angry" Priest Zuma could only passively endure the other's rage, daring not to show his own anger.

Chichika's expression was fierce as he stared at the priest's aged face and asked again.

"Priest Zuma, what about those fire arrows and thunder sounds?"

"Cough cough!...Great Chief, it's all about unity and proliferation, coexistence of all things. The gods are part of nature and follow its laws... Since the gods can create a stone-throwing beast, a fireball-throwing beast, they can also create one that shoots fire arrows, emitting thunder sounds. Now it seems, the Mexica's gods are adept in creating wood beasts, surely led by a craftful Evil God!"

Zuma steadied himself, answering conclusively. No matter what the real truth was, at this moment, the most important thing was to provide a simple, reassuring explanation to the tribal warriors terrified by the unknown.

"Various types of wood beasts...A craftful Evil God..."

Fear flashed across Chichika's face. He then asked urgently.

"If so, esteemed Priest Zuma, do you have a way to counter the enemy's wood beasts?"

"Cough cough...Great Chief, it's the cycle of balance. The stronger the entity, the more fatal its weakness. Gods' creations are no different, lacking the human spirit..."

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Priest Zuma's expression flickered. As he spoke using the rhetoric of the wilderness priests, he rapidly pondered his next words.

"Well, you see, these beasts, although releasing thunder and fire, can't move, can't strike our steep camps. Thunder, although violent, and fire, although searing, lack precision and can't truly harm many people. That's nature's limitation, everything has balance..."

"Priest Zuma! What do we do now?!"

After listening for a moment, Chichika's expression turned fierce again. He looked at the chaotic fire light around, feeling as if there were flames burning inside him.

"Can you cast a spell to counter the enemy's wood beasts?!"

"Eh, respected Great Chief...The warriors are so panicked because it's their first time encountering the creations of the Evil God, and it's happening in the dark night, their spirits devoured by unknown fears. Once they see it more, get used to the roar of the creations, find the weaknesses, they won't be so..."

"Now, I want you to cast a spell! Can you or not?!"

"Ah, well... There are too many enemy priests, their mana too strong. My materials have fallen in the camp, all burned out..."

"Get out!"

Chichika bellowed, tossing the old priest away.

Chapter 653 - Chichika's Oath_2

"Take a few Priests and appease my warriors!"

"Cough cough! As you command, Great Chief."

Zuma crawled up from the ground and hastily fled as if in escape.

Chichika's eyes were red as he continued to stand his ground. He glared fiercely at the enemy camp, like an angry bison from the north.

"Uh... Chieftain, I've counted the Tribal Warriors. There are about two thousand left, with more than eight hundred scattered. Among the remaining warriors, six hundred elite redheads are mostly accounted for."

Uman reported to the Chieftain on bended knee, war club in one hand. The Red Dog Tribe was the most powerful in the wilderness, and they always had a high proportion of redhead Hunters. During the onslaught of the sky fire, these elite had barely maintained order within the tribe, allowing the warriors to retreat without scattering and now regathering.

"All six hundred redheads are present!"

Upon hearing this, Chichika breathed a sigh of relief. The redhead elite were the backbone of the major Tribes, equivalent to the reserve of seasoned soldiers. The Tribal Warriors could be summoned or conscripted from various parts if lost, but if too many redheads were lost, the tribe would truly be devastated.

"Uman, dispatch people, and do your best to gather the scattered troops from all parts!"

"Uh... As you command, Chieftain."

Uman nodded but didn't move his feet. He glanced at the Chieftain, hesitated for a moment, and then spoke woodenly.

"Chieftain, I think, our current situation, is not good... very bad!"

"Nonsense, I'm not blind!"

At this, Chichika, eyes still red, almost laughed from anger. He pointed at the fires of the camps and berated.

"What are you trying to say?"

"Uh... Chieftain, I think, we can't hold this place. All the parts have collapsed, and we of the Red Dog Tribe should leave quickly too!"

"Hmm?!"

Chichika stepped forward and grabbed Uman by the collar fiercely.

"What did you say?"

"Uh... I said, we can't hold this, it's time to go."

"Say that again?"

Fire seemed to blaze from Chichika's eyes, a dangerous intent to kill rising within them.

Uman looked at the Chieftain, his eyes somewhat blank and dazed, yet his expression extraordinarily resolute.

"Chieftain, the warriors' morale is gone, we can't fight this battle. We have to abandon this place, retreat a hundred and eighty li, and properly reassemble our forces... Actually, actually, I think we shouldn't stay in one place for too long, fighting these kinds of head-on, stupid battles..."

"Smack! Smack! Smack!..."

In a fury, Chichika pulled out his whip and lashed out six or seven times, knocking Uman to the ground, then whipped him another seven or eight times.

"I'll whip you to death! You're rebellious!"

"Ah!..."

Uman cried out in pain, rolling back and forth on the ground. After a while, he climbed up, covered in dirt, and continued speaking to the Chieftain.

"Chieftain, I still think, we should leave."

"You!"

Chichika once again raised his whip, burning with anger. Then, meeting Uman's blank but resolute gaze and seeing the bloodstains on his face, something softened in his heart. After a while, the Red Dog leader slowly lowered his whip and asked in a deep voice.

"... If we abandon this strategically crucial stronghold, we won't have much room left behind. The walls of the small city of Pamus are low and the area narrow. The terrain in the Valley is open, tens of thousands from the Tribes scattered everywhere, how can we defend it?"

"Uh, Chieftain, there's the mouth of the Valley behind us, we could hold it for some time."

"The mouth of the Valley is rather open, and the terrain isn't high or dangerous enough. The Cactus Tribe's attacks are fierce, and it won't hold for long."

"Then take the Tribes and leave the Valley. We can escape into the wilderness from the northwest, or flee through the mountain paths to the northeast or the East..."

Hearing this, Chichika lowered his gaze and didn't speak for a long time.

"Chieftain!"

Uman knelt on the ground, burying his head at the feet of the Chieftain like a subdued wolf.

"Say no more!"

Chichika shouted angrily.

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"Summon the Scouts to me! Everything is in chaos now, and the Tribes have no idea how many they have lost."

Afterward, the Red Dog Chieftain stood on high ground, once again surveying all directions. Before long, Scouts from various directions returned, reporting back to the Chieftain.

Chichika personally arranged the camps for the Tribes. The current situation fell into view one by one, which, combined with the Scout's intelligence and his memory, turned into a helpless sigh.

"Ah! The rear camp has collapsed, Red Deer has fled, and Red Salamander and Red Cranes are slaughtering each other in their camps... Red Monkey, they should still be there."

Seeing this, Chichika's emotions were complicated. That the Red Monkey Tribe had managed to hold out until the end in the night assault was unexpected. He pondered for a long time and finally took a deep breath, forced to confront the cruel reality.

"Uman, you're right, the camp can be forsaken. But retreating now is too dangerous, the Tribes could easily disperse on the night roads!"

Chichika suppressed the emotions in his heart, pacing back and forth. Then, he looked toward the distant sky, the long night was about to pass, the noise of people was gradually receding, and the Morning Star had already risen from the East. He turned to look at the camp, where the Priests had just calmed the people's hearts. Two thousand Tribal Warriors, once again, gripped their Hunting Bows and Long Spears tightly.

"Dawn is approaching! When daylight comes, we will first lead the Tribes back. Then we will gather the scattered warriors from each Tribe and fight the Cactus Tribe once more!"

"Uh... Chieftain, the Cactus Tribe has long been plotting this, they won't let us leave easily!"

"I know!"

The Red Dog Chieftain became somewhat irritable. He swung the whip in his hand, sending out a sharp whistle.

"I will leave some people behind to rely on the remaining encampment to block the Cactus Tribe's army!"

"Uh... Chieftain, the Tribes need to maintain distance during the retreat, and it will take time to collect warriors from each Tribe. The Cactus Tribe's offensive is fierce; ordinary men can't hold them back."

"Damn it! Uman, can't you shut up?!"

Chichika couldn't help but roar out loud.

"Don't caw like a jackdaw in front of me, voicing ominous sounds!"

"Uh... Chieftain!"

Uman knelt again, once more pressing his head to the feet of the Chieftain.

"What exactly do you want to say?"

Chichika impatiently grasped the other's hair.

"I will stay behind and resist the advance of the Cactus Tribe!"

Uman lifted his head. This time, his eyes were clear, devoid of any dullness.

"Chieftain, now only I can buy you time!"

Upon hearing this, Chichika suddenly stood still, motionless. He slowly lowered his head, looking into the eyes of his trusted aide at his feet, silent for a long time.

"Chieftain, I am a wolf, willing to die for the Wolf King."

A fierce smile appeared on Uman's face, the bloody whip marks quivering.

"Our Red Dog Tribe will surely endure in the Wilderness!"

"Uman..."

Chichika lowered his gaze, once again grasping his beloved general's hair. This time, he did not let go for a long time.

"I give you six hundred warriors, fifty red-haired ones! Hold for two days for me!"

After a while, the Red Dog leader turned his back, looking toward the dawn in the East. He silently bit through his lips, and with the pain of the blood and the acrid smell of gunpowder, he made a hate-filled oath.

"May the ancestors witness! If you die for me in battle, I will slaughter the three thousand Otomi agricultural slaves in the Valley, then gather warriors from each Tribe to avenge us against the Cactus Tribe!"

Chapter 654: The Red Sky

The cries of terror had lasted all night, and the chaos among the Canine Descendants had as well. When the morning sun rose and cast its light upon the mountaintop encampment, the densely packed Canine Warriors were nowhere to be seen. From a distance, the treacherous camp looked utterly devastated, marked by the chaos of the raging fires and the haphazardly strewn corpses of the Canine Descendants.

Xiulote ascended a small hill, looking down at the mere hundreds of enemies left in the mountain stronghold, and nodded with satisfaction. Then, with a smile, he said to his most trusted Head Warrior,

"The Canine Descendant battalions have been broken. I am weary from listening to their chaotic howling all night long, I shall go sleep for a while. Bertade, you will crush the remnants for me!"

"As you command, Your Highness!"

Bertade responded with a smile. Xiulote then turned to leave, not casting another glance at the mountaintop. Soon after, the sounds of battle echoed from behind.

"Whiz, whiz, whiz!"

The rain of arrows launched from mid-mountain struck the ruined encampment, leaving fresh streaks of red. As the noonday sun reached its zenith, the brilliant sunlight fell from the blue sky, illuminating the intertwining red and brown mountains and the stronghold that had seen repeated fighting.

The remaining two hundred or so Canine Warriors, sparse in numbers, lay behind the stronghold, pinned down by the relentless flight of feathered arrows, unable to show their faces. After wave upon wave of attacks from the Cactus Tribe, they had suffered heavy losses, abandoned the main camp of the Red Dog, and had retreated to the higher ground at the back of the camp.

Shortly, following the barrage of arrows, the elite Jaguar Warrior Brigade, clad in heavy armor and holding up great shields, formed loose, small formations and began their cautious ascent once more.

The further up they went, the narrower and steeper the slope became, and the terrain grew increasingly rugged. The Canine Descendants made use of the terrain to resist step by step. Uman, the trusted aide, peeked out, raising a shield in his hand. After quickly surveying the situation, he issued commands to the red-haired Huntsmen on either side, and then personally pushed down a large boulder.

"Boom! Boom!"

A few thunderous echoes resounded—the stones rolled down from above, carrying the force to kill those in heavy armor. Seeing the fierce boulders falling, the Jaguar Warrior Brigade halted their advance. They spread out their formation even more and patiently dodged on the spot, waiting for the boulders to roll away before climbing upwards again.

"Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh!"

Soon, the Jaguar Warrior Brigade had climbed up to the encampment again. The bone arrows from the red-haired Hunters fell from an even higher place, aiming to avoid the armored bodies and hit the vital areas of the face and neck. Occasionally, small enemy squads burst out from hidden spots in the mountain, swinging stone hammers wildly and entangling in a fierce fight with the Jaguar Warriors.

Facing all manner of attacks, the Jaguars carefully halted their steps, defending before attacking steadily. They covered for each other, making full use of the advantages of their shields and armor to minimize casualties. Then, the elite Warriors systematically turned the attacking Canine Descendants into corpses.

"Too slow!"

Bertade stood mid-mountain, frowning as he looked a hundred paces away. To his surprise, it was already midday.

"The bulk of the Canine Descendants have already scattered; only a few hundred remain to cover the retreat. The Jaguar Warrior Brigade is known for their elite status; they've been assaulting the mountain half the day, yet they still haven't wiped out the remnants!"

"The Great Chief, the remains of these troops are putting up a fierce resistance, fighting to the death. Especially their red-haired leader, persistent in battle, constantly throwing stones and shooting arrows from hiding—he's already killed two Jaguar Warriors."

Tupa, holding a bow, squinted his eyes and observed the shifting figures on the mountaintop.

"The enemy on the mountain has been forced to the highest point, completely surrounded—by now, they're just trapped beasts struggling in vain. As for the Jaguar Warrior Brigade... indeed, they might be a bit too steady. Is it because the terrain is too treacherous, and the heavy armor hinders their climb? Haha, or is it the fear of being crushed by a boulder and dying an inglorious death?"

Hearing this, a smirk lifted Bertade's eyebrows. Although the Jaguar and Eagle Warrior Brigades, both noble battalions, were exceedingly elite, they each carried the autonomous will of their military nobility. These forces, even he could not command them effortlessly. Within the entire Alliance, the only ones who could truly command the noble battalions to fight to the death were probably only King Aweit and His Highness Xiulote.

The Head Warrior watched for a while longer and then shook his head. He turned to Tupa and said.

"Tupa, take two hundred longbow trusted aides and kill that leader for me! Black Wolf was injured and missed the battle here. Now, win some battle honors for him and yourself!"

"Understood, Holy Eagle Leader!"

Receiving the order, Tupa nodded with understanding. Without any hesitation, he knelt on one knee and saluted.

Black Wolf Toltec came from His Highness's first batch of trusted aides, and he was from the second. Both of them were commoner samurai loyal to His Highness, having been tutored by the Head Warrior. Over years of campaigning, many such trusted aides of His Highness were gradually selected by the Head Warrior and appointed as mid-level military officers of the various battle groups. They were more loyal, braver, and united than the military nobility inherited by the Alliance, subtly forming their own distinct lineage.

Subsequently, Tupa, leading the two hundred longbow trusted aides, clutching their longbows, swiftly climbed up the mountain. In just a quarter of an hour, he had crossed past the Jaguar Warrior Brigade and reached the forefront of the fighting!

"Close-range shooting!"

Tupa ordered in a low voice, and the trusted aides immediately stopped and took aggressive close-range shots. The red-haired Hunters of the Canine Descendants also stood up and furiously hurled stones and shot arrows downwards. After two volleys, both sides saw a dozen or so men fall. Tupa himself, dressed in the simple attire of a samurai, along with a few Divine Archers, lay in wait patiently behind the rocks.

Soon, Uman once again raised his shield and showed his head. Observing the precarious situation, his voice hoarsely encouraged.

"Warriors, if we hold out till nightfall, the main force of the tribe can get another day's head start! For the sake of our tribe, for the Great Chief, and for the old camp behind us, hold on for half more a day!"

The expressions of the Canine Warriors were numb as they responded weakly. They were not the core forces of the tribe but the rear guard left behind. After experiencing chaos the night before and enduring a hard fight for half the day, everyone had nearly exhausted their energy and was running on their last breath.

"Howl! Kill!"

Uman, with a fierce expression, let out a wolf howl. After a brief observation, he targeted the direction where the trusted aides were gathered and suddenly pushed down a large rock. The boulder thundered down, disrupted the formation of the trusted aides, and exposed the bodies of the warriors.

Next, he quickly put down his shield, raised his longbow, and aimed at a vital point of a trusted aide, releasing an exquisite arrow!

"Whoosh!"

The sharp bone arrow came from high above, cleverly avoiding the medium armor and accurately piercing the neck. The targeted trusted aide immediately clutched his throat, swayed as strength left his body, and rolled down the mountainside with a backward tilt of his head.

"Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!"

Almost at the same time, several prepared copper arrows struck together! In an instant, the cluster of lethal arrows pierced through the cotton armor and penetrated Uman's torso!

"Ah!..."

The fierce look on Uman's face vanished in the blink of an eye. As the arrow entered his body, the tremendous force sent him leaning backward; his shattered insides made him instantly lose strength. Staggering, he fell backward to the ground, a large amount of blood seeping from the wound in his chest and abdomen, staining the brown rocks. He looked up at the azure sky, imagined the boundless wilderness, and his gaze fixated for the last time.

"Ah, ah... So dying doesn't hurt? It's light and floaty, like a bird taking off... What's flying really like? Don't... Don't block me... Let me fly to the wilderness, just to see once, just once... then... return to the... earth..."

In just over a dozen breaths, Uman's gaze dissolved. He vaguely heard chaotic shouts, followed by an engulfing darkness.

A few red-haired trusted aides rushed forward, crying out as they knelt on the ground and haphazardly clung to their leader's body. The remaining Canine Warriors had lost their fighting spirit, howling as they turned and scattered in retreat, even kneeling to surrender.

"Haha, hit them!"

Tupa laughed heartily, confidently swaying the longbow in his hand.

"My archery seems to be only slightly inferior to the Black Wolf's! Hmm, two points behind the Chief Divine... and compared to His Highness... hehe... hahaha!"

After laughing for a while, Tupa straightened up, his face showing a murderous intent.

"Let's go! To claim our victory!"

The elite archers swiftly attacked uphill, and the Canine Descendants on the mountain could no longer mount a substantial resistance. Another quarter past, and the last few red-haired warriors fell dead from arrows, with the remaining hundred or so Canine Descendants kneeling in surrender.

With his head held high, Tupa, carrying his bow, led his trusted aides to the high ground of the rear camp. He strode boldly and then suddenly stopped.

The body of Uman lay quietly on the rocky mountain. Even in death, his eyes were still wide open.

"Phew!... He was indeed a true warrior!"

Tupa let out a breath and clasped the amulet around his neck with both hands, bowing his head and praying fervently.

"Praise the Chief Divine! He loves warriors the most! May you rest in the Red Kingdom and transform into a butterfly amongst the mountains!"

After the sincere prayer, Tupa smirked once again. He reached deep into his bosom and pulled out a sharp obsidian dagger, cheerfully addressing Uman.

"Alright! Now that you've gone to the Divine Kingdom and turned into a red butterfly... lend me your former head for a while!"

The sun hung low in the west, and the red sun drenched the clouds. Red butterflies fluttered among the mountains, the warrior's head was passed down the mountain path, until it reached the hands of the King.

Inside the great tent, Xiulote looked at Uman's severed head for a while and nodded calmly. Then, turning to Keka who stood at his side, he said with a smile.

"Keka, do you recognize this warrior?"

"... Great Chief, he was the Head Warrior of Chichika's trusted aides, the most famous warrior of the Red Dog Tribe, Uman."

Keka bowed his head, his expression full of reverence. The Red Dog Alliance had completely disintegrated overnight, and even Uman had died here!

"Oh?"

Xiulote glanced at Keka indifferently and asked with a smile.

"According to the customs of the wilderness, how should a warrior be laid to rest?"

"Each tribe has different ceremonies, but they all involve fire. The ashes of a chieftain are carried with them, while the ashes of the tribal members are buried in the earth. As for brave warriors..."

Keka paused. He looked at Uman's head, his expression complicated.

"We would climb a hill. At sunrise or sunset, facing the sacred red sky, we would scatter the ashes into the wind, letting them disperse over the vast wilderness."

"Cremation and ash scattering... It's the same as the Guamal Canine Descendants."

Xiulote nodded slightly before falling into deep thought.

"The sacred red sky... it coincides with the Red Kingdom in the Alliance's faith. It seems that the origins of the Guajili Canine Descendants and the Aztec Tribe could be quite similar."

After a moment, Xiulote said warmly with a smile.

"Keka, in that case, I entrust you with the funeral of this warrior! You are to integrate the customs of the wilderness with the faith in the Chief Divine as per the Priest's instructions, and create a new ceremony to properly honor the Guajili warriors from both sides who died in battle!"

"Ah! Great Chief? Me... I'm to conduct the funeral?"

Keka's eyes widened in surprise at the words.

"Yes, this is the first task I'm entrusting to you."

Xiulote said with a slight smile. Then, his expression turned serious, issuing an undeniable order.

"Also, pull out a thousand warriors from the Red Frog Tribe! Five hundred to join the Head Warrior's Vanguard Army and pursue the remnants of the Red Dog Alliance through the night! The other five hundred will reinforce the rear army and, along the mountain paths on both sides, invite the dispersed tribal warriors to surrender!"

"Ah! Your Highness, this, I, the thousand men..."

Keka's face revealed his anxiety, yet he dared not voice his opposition. The fate of Miwa's five hundred elite was uncertain, unknown how many would return, and now another thousand were being called!

"Keka, if you faithfully serve the Chief Divine, I promise you a future."

Xiulote gently patted his shoulder.

"As for the thousand warriors you're to draw upon, I will replenish them from among the captives who surrender! Hmm, and I will also assign an army Priest to accompany you!"

Keka opened his mouth to speak but found himself unable to say anything. The fire from the day before flashed in his mind, just like Uman's head today. After a while, he resignedly knelt down.

"I obey you, Great Chief!"

The King smiled and turned to look towards the eastern sky. Evening was approaching, the sun about to set, the sky filled with red. And the faith in the Chief Divine had been sown over the vast wilderness, just like the glory of the Alliance!

Chapter 655: Counterattack

"Amoxtli, have the Cactus Samurai caught up yet?"

The Red Dog Chieftain stood on a hill, his voice cold as he asked. His eyes were bloodshot, and his face was filled with a ferocious killing intent, yet he suppressed it to maintain calm. Behind him were hundreds of red-haired Hunters, and a fluttering Red Dog banner.

"Great Chief, we've traveled fifty to sixty miles overnight, all on difficult mountain roads. The Cactus Samurai haven't caught up; they are at least ten miles behind us."

Amoxтли stood behind Chichika, also looking toward the south. In his sight was a scene of retreating chaos. In the narrow mountain path, the Canine Descendants Tribes, in ragged clothes and with incomplete weapons, were jumbled together. Thousands of Tribal Warriors appeared frantic and messy as they sprinted toward the old camps in the north, though they were quite fast.

The rapid march kicked up clouds of dust, startling flocks of birds in the wooded area. Eagles and crows circled and danced, occasionally emitting ominous croaks. In the distance, flags of the Mexica could be vaguely seen. Large groups of figures in grey-blue and dark green swayed among the mountain tops in the horizon, like a crawling giant snake, devouring all the lagging Tribes.

"What's going on with the enemy over there?"

Chichika stood for a moment and pointed toward the far south. The Canine Descendants Tribes stretched for miles in the mountain path, and had not been stable for long when the tail end in the far south suddenly burst into noise and began fighting once again.

Amoxтли narrowed his eyes and, after watching for a while, spoke with certainty.

"Great Chief, it is a small band of enemies in pursuit, hardly a hundred or so. The Cactus Samurai usually wear Armor and carry shields and Greatbows, preventing them from moving that quickly. Judging from their attire, most appear to be the terrain-familiar Otomi dogs, along with some lightly equipped, swiftly moving members of the Red Frog Tribe!"

"The Red Frog Tribe..."

Upon hearing this, Chichika's expression darkened, and his grip tensed. He turned his head, looking at the seriously composed Red Monkey Chieftain.

"Ozoma, you said that night you encountered a night raid, and among the enemies you killed were a dozen or so red-haired, also from the infiltrated Red Frog Tribe?"

"Yes, Chichika Chief. The Red Frog warriors infiltrated the camp, taking advantage of the wildfire to strike, catching us off guard. Even my camp nearly scattered."

Ozoma nodded, still frightened by the memory. Beside him were over a hundred red-haired Hunters and several dozen Spear guards. The mountain path led north without branching. All Tribes retreated day and night, quickly converging together. The Red Deer Tribe ran the fastest and had already escaped back to the valley. The Red Salamander Chieftain disappeared in the chaotic night raid, and both tribes had scattered everywhere.

Chichika sprinted the whole way, raising the Red Dog great banner, gathering the tribes. Now, he held six hundred red-haired, having gathered over two thousand routed soldiers. Ozoma escaped a bit earlier, holding two hundred red-haired, and had gathered around fifteen hundred. Amoxтли, with a few trusted aides, traversed mountains and valleys to rejoin with Alan and others. He was the first to arrive here, holding over a hundred red-haired, now also seizing the opportunity to gather nearly a thousand Tribal Warriors.

"Uman, my warrior!... Roar! Keka! I'll sack you in cloth and have the northern beasts trample you into pulp!!"

Chichika suppressed his rage, growling like a wounded beast. Just two days ago, he had been in command of fifteen thousand troops, the elite from all Tribes. And now, the Red Dog, Red Monkey, and Red Crow combined, they totaled only five thousand warriors!

Seeing the Great Chief's anger, Amoxtli bowed his head, remaining silent. Ozoma arched an eyebrow, silently observing, weighing quietly in his mind.

Chichika roared several times, then ceased his bellowing. He stared at the skirmishing squad in the south, his eyes gradually showing the predatory glare of a hunter.

"Ozoma, Amoxtli, we cannot keep fleeing north!"

Upon hearing this, both men raised their heads, surprisedly looking toward the Great Chief.

Chichika regained his composure.

"It's just a dispersion, not many deaths. Many of the tribespeople are left behind. If we continue north, they will all become captives of the Cactus Tribe! I have already sent Envoys ahead to the valley. All tribes in the valley are urgently preparing, summoning people, and conscripting warriors. We must buy time for the old camps in the valley!"

"Chichika Chieftain, the warriors of various tribes had just gathered not long ago, and morale has severely crumbled, we won't be able to hold out for long..."

Ozoma hesitated.

"No, this time we won't hold out!"

Chichika shook his head.

"Great Chief, are you suggesting, the old method?"

Upon hearing this, Amoxтли's eyes flickered, making a hand gesture of an ambush by scouts.

"Exactly!"

Chichika nodded approvingly. He made a decision and swung his hand forcefully.

"The Cactus Samurai are at the rear, those catching up are all mongrels and traitors! They won't expect the old method, and we have enough redheads in our hands now. Right here, let's have a battle with the pursuing Otomi mongrels!"

The Red Dog Chieftain's expression was resolute, his fighting spirit flaring up like fire. He looked towards the two chieftains and called out loudly.

"The Red Dog main force will retreat while fighting, luring the pursuing mongrels! Ozoma, you lead five hundred elite warriors, take the small mountain path, and hide to the south. When the enemy's main force passes by, you storm out and attack their rear!"

"Amoxтли, take your group of redhead Hunters, lie in ambush in the forests on both sides. When the mongrels' chieftain passes by, lead the Archers to strike and assassinate the enemy chieftain!"

"Once all the ambushers have struck, I will lead the Red Dog Tribe's redheads, turn back and attack, cutting off their dog heads!"

Ozoma and Amoxтли exchanged looks, then each knelt on one knee, respectfully accepting the command.

"As you command, Great Chief!"

The cool breeze swept through the valley, lifting the yellow leaves. The leaves fell, covering the corpses scattered everywhere, and also landed on the blood-stained mountain trails. Along the trails, many captured Guajili Canine Descendants knelt. The Canine Warriors all looked panicked and timid, no longer displaying the fierce bravado they had during their southern invasion.

Under the escort of over a hundred Samurai, Mespa strode forward. He lightly dusted off the yellow leaves that fell on his Cotton Armor, then suddenly kicked a kneeling redhead captive several times. The redhead captive's leg snapped loudly, and he rolled on the ground, wailing.

"Tsk tsk, even the fierce redhead Hunters wail, huh?"

Seeing this, Mespa, usually cautious, finally showed a fulfilled grin. Memories of some Canine Descendants' southern invasion surfaced in his mind, making him feel ashamed yet madly agitated. He abruptly pulled out his War Club, adjusted the sharp blade, and with a swing, chopped down at the wailing captive!

"Ah! Haha! This time, it's your turn to flee!"

Mespa watched the rolling redhead head, as if shattering the nightmares within his heart. He laughed heartily for a long while, then roared at his trusted aide beside him.

"Pick up the pace! The whole army pursue! I want to take the redheads' dog heads!"

Chapter 656: Dead or Alive

"Chieftain, the Canine Descendants are scattering in defeat!"

The sun dipped low in the west, reddening the yellow leaves among the mountains. Chieftain Mespa, dressed as an ordinary warrior in cotton armor, took two steps to climb the nearest knoll. While he listened to the family samurai's report, his gaze stretched toward the distant battlefield.

A couple of miles away, the Red Dog's banners wavered in retreat to the north, and red-haired figures fled in panic. Mespa finally let out a satisfied laugh.

"Ha-ha! After a persistent chase, we've finally caught the wild dogs by the tail! Send the order down, all the samurai in the front rush for me! The samurai in the rear quicken your pace, pay no mind to the

fleeing troops along the way. Whoever captures the barbarians' leader, I will reward him with two hundred acres of good farmland from the valley's fief!"

"At your command, Chieftain!"

The family samurai bowed to receive the command. Then, hesitating, he spoke in a low voice to offer counsel.

"Chieftain, the Otapan legion is ten miles away, clearing out the remaining enemies. The Mexica legion is further behind, taking surrendering prisoners. Here, only our two thousand Pamus samurai and a few hundred subdued barbarians are in pursuit... Shouldn't we slow down and wait for the rear troops to catch up before pressing the attack?"

"Wait for what! The legion's morale is peaking, and the barbarians have already scattered. Pamus Valley is just twenty miles to the north. The samurai's hometown, the nobility's fief, are all within sight! This is the time to pursue them relentlessly, how can we allow the enemy to regroup and rally their forces!"

Mespa's expression changed, and he burst out angrily. Then, he looked around at his confidants and lowered his voice in their presence.

"Besides, we have not made any remarkable achievements during this northern campaign. Once the Canine Descendants are expelled, and the states discuss merits and rewards, if we don't have enough military achievements... how will our Pamus nobility manage to secure our domestic fiefs without outsiders meddling!"

"Chieftain... I will follow your orders."

Hearing this, the family samurai nodded helplessly. He bowed to the ground, then left with the orders.

Half a mile away, Amoxтли silently lay in the forest. He watched the samurai bowing on the knoll, exhaling heavily.

"I've searched for so long, and finally, I've found you!"

Amoxтли gripped the bow and arrows beneath him and squinted. He extended a hand to measure, then quickly furrowed his brow.

"At this distance, if I shoot my arrow..."

Amoxтли pursed his lips, then turned to look at his companion.

"Alan, that stocky samurai there, could very well be the opposing leader... Yes, the one just bowed to, the one now walking this way... When he reaches the path directly below the hill, are you confident you can hit him?"

"Dad, no problem."

Alan was dressed in a tight short garment, with straps tied tightly around the impeding parts. She squinted one eye, measured with two fingers, and nodded affirmatively.

"Where should I shoot?"

"Uh, where should I shoot?"

Amoxltli paused, bewildered. Could one even choose? It seemed Alan's archery skills far surpassed his own.

"Shoot... wherever you have the greatest certainty."

He thought for a moment, then added.

"Alan, I will charge out with the warriors to attract the attention of the escort samurai! Don't rush, wait for the best moment!"

"Okay!"

The silence settled again in the woods, leaving only the subdued sound of breathing. As Mespa approached self-assuredly, walking toward the narrow mountain path, his expression suddenly changed.

"Kill!"

Amoxtli roared, leading several dozens of elite fighters surging out from the woods. Mespa took two steps back and swiftly gestured. Dozens of his family samurai charged forward, clashing with the ambushing enemies.

"Whiz!"

In that brief lull, a Bone Arrow suddenly shot out! In the blink of an eye, the Bone Arrow crossed sixty paces, its deathly whistle in the air!

"Ah!..."

"Alan!"

The evening breeze mournful, the night song lamentable. The red sky embraced the horizon, and fresh blood saturated the soil. Soon, the deep night swallowed all the red hue. Darkness crept southward, halting at last in front of the large tent in the mountains.

"Your Highness!"

Bertade lifted the tent flap and strode in, then calmly bowed his head in respect. He swept a glance at an old acquaintance in the corner who had clearly just arrived not long ago.

"Hmm?"

The discussing voices in the tent came to an abrupt halt. Xiulote lifted his head toward the Head Warrior who had directly entered the tent and greeted him with a faint smile.

"What's the matter?"

"Your Highness, the pursuing Pamus legion has fallen into an ambush."

At that point, Bertade paused, his expression somewhat complex.

"Chieftain Mespa has been assassinated by an ambushing redhead Hunter on the spot. The Pamus legion subsequently scattered. The Otapan legion urgently struck out to rescue. Up to this point, out of the two thousand Pamus samurai, only half escaped!"

"Another feigned retreat leading to an ambush. Aquili fell victim to such a trap and died, Jiowar faced an intense battle when ambushed, Quino was captured in an ambush, and now Mespa died in combat from an ambush... such a foolproof tactic."

Hearing the Head Warrior's report, Xiulote shook his head, yet his expression remained unchanged.

The strategy of feigned retreat leading to an ambush, though simplistic, was foolproof against undisciplined adversaries. To effectively employ it required tremendous mobility and flexibility from the troops; it was a quintessential tactic of nomadic horsemen and bandit camps. More than a century later, the peasant armies of the late Ming Dynasty would similarly employ this tactic, defeating the formation-skilled official army on numerous occasions.

The King fell into a moment of contemplation, a faint smile playing on his face. He looked at the Head Warrior and asked calmly.

"Pamus City was originally Mespa's fiefdom, right?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

Bertade nodded in understanding. He took another glance at the corner, then spoke solemnly.

"When the Guajili people moved southward, the Red Dog Tribe advanced quickly. Chieftain Mespa abandoned his family, taking only his eldest son and a few loyalists to flee southward. Now with Mespa's eldest son fallen in the Red Fox Valley and Chieftain Mespa tragically perished here... Pamus City is now without a master."

Xiulote nodded and continued.

"How many of the Pamus nobility remain?"

"Your Highness, the Pamus nobility leading the troops was targeted and decimated by the Red-haired Hunter, with few survivors. When the Canine Descendants headed south, the slaughter was extreme... The entire Pamus Valley has almost become a land without masters,"

"Hmm."

Xiulote lowered his gaze, nodding slightly. Then, he asked, as if it were an afterthought,

"How is the rest and refitting of Jiowar's Otapan legion going?"

"Your Highness, the Otapan legion's rest and refitting have been completed. Despite significant losses through numerous battles, the mountain city legion's morale remains high... and they are now fully under the Prince's control,"

Bertade smiled quietly, the meaning profound.

"Very good!"

Xiulote smiled and calmly gave his orders,

"Since that is the case, move the Pamus legion to the rear! Let the Guamare legion take their place, pursuing day and night, putting pressure on the Canine Descendants. The main force of the Imperial Guard Legion continues to press steadily at the back."

In just a few words, the King decided the fate of many. He then turned to the figure kneeling in the corner and said with a gentle smile,

"Well, it seems that the orders I gave you earlier need to be slightly changed. Now, the Pamus Valley can be directly incorporated into the kingdom's domains. After reclaiming the Pamus Valley, you will be the City Lord of Pamus City. I also will establish a Northern Land legion, and you will be the Legion Commander. Establishing rule in the Northern Land requires sufficient military force..."

"Yes! Your Highness, I will follow Your will,"

The figure prostrated, following the ritual for meeting the King, bowing reverently nine times. Then, he lay prostrate without moving, chanting a poetic hymn in a deep voice,

"Holy Your Highness, you are a valiant eagle bathed in the miraculous red sun, bestowing light upon the Northern Land!... It is a wilderness devoid of green trees and life, ancient through thousands of years of ignorance. Yet, by your arrival, it has blossomed with brilliant flowers, giving birth to a dense vitality!... Your Highness, you are the Northern Land's red glow! I will follow the guidance of the light, forever groveling at your feet!"

"Ha ha, not a bad poem, arise!"

Xiulote burst out laughing. He reached out his hand, gripping the other man's hair forcefully, then personally helped him up.

"The greater the setback a poet faces, the more touching the poetry he writes. Balamo, it seems you have indeed experienced many hardships over the years!"

Upon hearing this, Balamo slowly lifted his head, revealing a weathered face and a pair of exceptionally profound eyes. Listening to His Highness's words, a bittersweet smile of experience appeared on his face,

"Your Highness, I have been in the wilderness for over three years. I've eaten countless mouthfuls of windblown sand, seen innumerable mountain ranges, and even encountered the white scourge of the gods. Day and night, even in my dreams, I waited for your summons! The moment your Envoy delivered the edict, I rushed to the altar at once, praying to the Chief Divine, praising your grace!"

"Oh?"

Xiulote smiled faintly, noncommittally.

"I heard that when the Envoy arrived, he couldn't find you at first. And you were in the tent of a Guamare noblewoman?"

"Ah, this! Your Highness, I was following your divine will, spreading the faith of the Chief Divine! The glory of the Chief Divine has taken root in every part of Guamare. Many female leaders who control the tribes have become devout followers of the Chief Divine!..."

At these words, Balamo's face twitched, then he looked sincerely mournful and answered,

"For the light of the Chief Divine, I am willing to give everything! Even if it means undergoing physical suffering, I must ignite the Sacred Fire of brightness in the barbaric hearts!..."

"Enough."

Xiulote put away his smile and waved his hand. Balamo immediately shut up and bowed to listen. The king turned to the Head Warrior, his expression turning solemn.

"How many are the Guajili people ambushing the Pamus legion, and how many tribes are there?"

"According to the reports from the scouts of the Red Frog Tribe, the enemy numbers between three to five thousand warriors, nearly a thousand of them with red hair. The main tribe flags are those of the Red Dog, Red Monkey, and Red Crow."

"The main forces of the Red Dog have been beaten yet not scattered, and now they can still organize a counterattack. Chichika could be considered a valorous hero."

Xiulote commended with a phrase. Then, he became somewhat puzzled.

"The Red Crow Tribe? I remember, is that not the small tribe that escaped from the Red Fox Valley?"

"Yes, Your Highness. The Red Crow Tribe fled to the east and became a vassal to the Red Dog Tribe. Their number of warriors is not high, but their archery is extremely good. The hunters who ambushed the great chieftain of Mespa were from the Red Crow!"

"Hmm."

Xiulote nodded his head. He always remembered the prophecy of the old priest of the Red Crow and thus had an impression of this small tribe. The king pondered for a while and then spoke again.

"The Red Monkey Tribe... It was this tribe that captured General Qipa and then quietly brought him to the main camp, right?"

"Yes, Your Highness. The chieftain of the Red Monkey Tribe, Ozoma, seems to have an in-depth understanding of the Alliance. He is not a stubborn frog in a well, but more like a flexible water serpent in a lake," Bertade replied softly.

"Hmm. A flexible water serpent... How is Qipa's injury? Has it healed?"

The king nodded with understanding and calmly inquired.

"He has been in the rear camp, and his injury has healed," was the reply.

"Good, summon him here," Xiulote decided. Then, he turned around, looking at Balamo with a light smile.

"Balamo, my poet commander. Before your moment of glory arises, there is one small trial."

Upon hearing this, Balamo's heart tightened. He promptly knelt down and respectfully stated his position.

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

"Come closer."

Xiulote gestured, and the poet commander crawled forward on his knees. Seeing this, the king raised an eyebrow and quietly conveyed his will.

The night sky, like a heavy net, enshrouded everything within. In the tent, the bonfire gradually dimmed, shadows flitted by and left. When everything returned to stillness, the king stood in the shadow of the bonfire, gazing up at the vast expanse of stars.

The constellation of Libra in the autumn sky sketched out a radiant diamond on the path of the sun's journey, flickering as if symbolizing a measure of human hearts.

Xiulote watched alone for a long time, remembering arrangements made since beginning the northern campaign, feeling emotional turbulence, yet he spoke to himself calmly.

"The northern campaign, it's for ruling the Northern Land, not for expelling the Canine Descendants... The Otomi nobility that obstructs my rule must die in this war; the Guajili tribes that will be beneficial to rule will be preserved after the war. War is merely the continuation of politics, serving the purpose of governance... Such is the true meaning of 'those who comply shall live, those who resist shall die!'"

Chapter 657: The Crow, the Monkey, and the Wolf

Dawn light touched the far sky, and the morning sun rose from amongst the mountains, illuminating the temporary camp of the Canine Descendants. The chaotic camp sprawled for miles, with wisps of cooking smoke twirling around the edges of the forest, the aroma of corn permeating the air.

"Having temporarily repelled the Otomi, the Tribes can finally settle down for a moment and enjoy a warm breakfast."

The banner of the Red Crow was slanted on the highest point of the small hill. Below the hill was the fenceless Red Crow camp, no, it should be said it was a gathering point for the Tribes.

Amoxltli, dressed in Cotton Armor, accompanied by several dozen red-haired trusted aides, patrolled the Tribes' gathering point. Resolute, he continually greeted the surrounding warriors and occasionally erupted into hearty laughter. The Chieftain's laughter echoed through the valley, drifting towards the sun atop the eastern mountain peaks, gradually brightening the gloomy camp.

"Truly the blessing of the ancestors! Chieftain, we've rallied one thousand five hundred warriors! And with the northern old camp, the Red Crow Tribe now boasts over two thousand able fighters. We are no longer the small Tribe we used to be!"

Moqi, the trusted aide, showed exhilaration mixed with a hint of nostalgia. On the night of the surprise attack, they had been separated from the Chieftain, and under Alan's lead, they had fled in panic in the dark, constantly on the brink of destruction. But just a few days later, they not only rejoined the Chieftain but also raised their banner high and gathered scattered soldiers from various defeated factions. Now, witnessing the Red Crow Tribe with so many fighters was like living a dream.

"Thanks be to the ancestors and even more to the wise Great Chief! The Great Chief is like the Wolf King, acting bravely and decisively, yet also kind to warriors, truly admirable!"

Amoxтли nodded in reflection, as clear in his mind as a placid lake. When he had escaped from Red Fox Valley, he was merely a leader of a small Tribe. Now, to be able to stand his ground among the tens of thousands of eastern Canine Descendants, all was due to the esteem of the Great Chief Chichika!

Previously, it was the Great Chief who had summoned him to his side, allowing him to participate in military councils, ranking after the five major Tribes. Now, it was also with the Great Chief's tacit approval that he could raise his banner, gathering the scattered warriors of defeated Tribes. After all, these warriors were the elite, conscripted from various Tribes, many even from the Great Tribes of the Red Stork and the Red Salamander.

At that, Moqi fell silent for a moment. He glanced around, checking no one was near before he spoke.

"Chieftain, you've fought to the death for the Great Chief on numerous occasions and survived the night raid, all for these privileges. You owe the Great Chief nothing..."

"Hmm?"

Amoxtli stopped in his tracks. He looked at Moqi, pondered for a while, and then spoke slowly.

"Moqi, my old brother. The Great Chief has been gracious to us, treating us well!... When we were under the Red Fox Chieftain, how many times did we put our lives on the line, and what did we get in return?"

Hearing this, Moqi's eyes widened as he earnestly looked at the Chieftain.

"Chieftain, I did not mean it that way. It's just... I often recall the words of old Chieftain Kakalo. He was a Priest of the Wilderness, capable of foreseeing the future. He told us... the lifeblood of the Guajili people was not here, but rather to the East and North!"

"Old Chieftain, Father Kakalo... huh, the lifeblood of the East..."

Amoxtli lowered his gaze and fell silent, a touch of longing on his face. After quite some time, he finally turned his head to look at Alan who had been listening all along.

"Alan, we're near the Valley entrance, merely twenty-odd miles from the old camp inside the Valley. You go back to the old camp first, gather the provisions, and prepare for the migration."

Then Amoxtli looked at Moqi and commanded.

"Moqi, you too. Take five hundred of the newly rallied warriors and return north through the mountain paths."

Moqi paused. Looking at his captain who he had followed for decades, he couldn't help but call out.

"Chieftain, what are you doing?..."

"Go! Move quickly before the new orders from the Great Chief come in!"

Amoxtli made a decisive decision, his expression firm once again.

"Father!"

Seeing this, Alan felt an inexplicable anxiety. She stepped forward, grabbing Amoxtli's arm. The young girl looked at her father's expression, finding herself unable to say the words of discouragement. After a while, she finally spoke.

"Father... you... you must come back alive. I don't want to lose a father again."

"Alan, my daughter. The night of the raid, you did very well!"

Upon hearing this, Amoxтли extended his hand and ruffled his daughter's hair, smiling tenderly.

"You go back to the old camp and prepare. If I don't return, the Tribe is in your hands. You must lead the Tribe to the East, to the lands of the Vastec people!..."

"Ha ha, I still remember the first time I saw you, in the mountains on the Eastern side. You wore a little cape and carried a small bag, like a little squirrel... Time flies indeed! The little girl from back then has become the Red Hawk, able to stand her ground in this Wilderness, no longer in need of an adult's protection..."

"Father!"

Alan couldn't hold back any longer and embraced her father tightly. Tears rolled down her cheeks as she cried out.

"You must come back... promise me!..."

Amoxтли lowered his gaze, suppressing the emotions swirling in his chest. After a while, he nodded solemnly and gently pushed Alan away.

"Yes, Alan, I promise you. But you are a red-haired warrior of the Wilderness; you must be strong!"

Then, with a solemn look, he turned to his trusted aide Moqi and instructed.

"Moqi, you're Alan's uncle and an elder of the Tribe. Although Alan has great potential, she is still too young. The situation within the Tribe is complex, in many cases, we still need to rely on you... If Alan truly cannot shoulder the responsibility for the Tribe, then you must take over as Chieftain!"

Hearing this, Moqi shook his head. After a long silence, he spoke.

"Chieftain. The Red Crow Tribe has expanded too quickly along its migration, and has also taken in too many from other Tribes. If you don't come back, nobody can hold the Tribe together. Even if we manage to migrate to the lands of the Vastec people, we still won't escape the fate of dissolution."

Chapter 658: The Crow, the Monkey, and the Wolf_2

Hearing this, Amoxтли did not speak. He turned, like a crow in the wilderness, and gazed at the distant mountains. In his eyes, the world was filled with traces of death. The ash-blue and ink-green legions, like the tides in the sky, were coming in an unstoppable deluge.

Arantza stopped crying and silently looked towards the south, like a grown red hawk.

The three stood in silence for a long while until a red-haired Scout hurried over.

"Chieftain, the Great Chief summons you."

"Good."

Amoxтли turned to Arantza, smiled, and then ruffled the girl's hair. Then, he looked at Moqi and gave a stern order.

"Don't delay, leave now!"

"...Yes, Chieftain."

Moqi bowed deeply, clenching a fist in salute.

Amoxтли nodded slightly and then, without looking back, left with several dozen trusted aides. Along the way, many red-haired elites were shouting loudly, reorganizing the scattered warriors from various Tribes. The Canine Descendants camps along the way were chaotic but gradually restoring order.

Soon, the banner of the Red Dog Tribe appeared before him. Amoxтли took a moment to observe, and his Scout's instincts allowed him to make quick calculations in his mind. The Red Dog Tribe was on high alert, with more than six hundred red-haired Hunters and nearly three thousand tribal warriors ready to fight at any moment.

"Great Chief!"

Amoxtli approached the banner, knelt on one knee, and respectfully saluted the Great Chief.

"Amoxtli, my loyal warrior."

Chichika nodded in satisfaction. He personally lifted Amoxtli and patted the warrior's shoulder.

"You've come at the right time; I was just discussing military affairs with Ozoma."

Amoxtli bowed again, saluting Ozoma. The Red Monkey Chieftain smiled back in response, his eyes containing a scrutinizing look.

After the Tribes retreated, the military power of the Alliance became even more centralized. The Red Dog Tribe had gathered the most warriors, had grown significantly, and now had the foundation to establish a powerful City-State. The Red Crow Tribe had also gained a place within the Alliance.

"The Great Chief is indeed far-sighted... He has always supported these smaller Tribes, which I had not taken seriously. Now it seems, he might have been prepared for a long time, to counterbalance or even replace the other Great Tribes."

Ozoma pondered in silence. The Great Chief had stopped the retreat, defeating the pursuing enemy. The balance in his heart thus slightly tilted again towards the Great Chief.

"My warriors! The Tribe's warriors are reorganizing; the Envoy to the old camp has just rushed back, and the situation of each division is now clear."

Chichika watched the two, his voice steady.

"Red Deer has fled back to the Valley with a few hundred remnants and has been ordered to return with troops. Red Salamander disappeared during a night raid and may have been captured by the Cactus Tribe. His Tribe in the old camp will be temporarily managed by me... As for the other scattered forces, you are free to gather them!"

Chichika looked towards both men. Amoxтли bowed his head in salute, the first to respond.

"As you command, Great Chief."

"I will follow your arrangements, respected Great Chief."

Ozoma also bowed his head in respect.

Chichika nodded gravely. Then, his speech carried a hint of sorrow.

"The Scout has confirmed clear news: Uman has fallen in the rearguard..."

On hearing this, a shadow crossed Amoxltli's eyes. Uman was an acquaintance of no more than two months, but a comrade who had experienced life and death with him.

The Great Chief paused for a moment. Then, he reached out both hands, firmly placing them on the shoulders of Ozoma and Amoxltli.

"Ozoma, Amoxltli, now, my left and right arms are you two!"

"As you command, Great Chief."

Amoxltli's expression remained unchanged.

"Willing to die in your service!"

Excitement appeared on Ozoma's face.

"Good, very good!"

Chichika looked at them for a moment, then nodded slowly. After a while, he spoke again, his words leaving no room for debate.

"The army of fifteen thousand from before the night raid has already regathered over eight thousand. Today the army will move northward twenty miles, and establish a camp at the mouth of the Valley to defend to the death!"

Hearing this command, Ozoma and Amoxltli exchanged glances for a few moments, then bowed their heads in unison.

"By your command, Great Chief!"

Chichika smiled in satisfaction. He glanced towards the north, with words of encouragement.

"The gathered remnant forces need to be reorganized, and the old camp in the Valley is mobilizing. I have given orders to conscript men from all Tribes. Within three days, we will call upon another five thousand able-bodied men to be incorporated into the divisions."

"Another five thousand able-bodied men?"

Ozoma was somewhat shocked. Over 60,000 Canine Descendants Tribes had already conscripted nearly 20,000 warriors. To draft another 5,000 now, they might have to conscript even the healthy women and the youths. How could the Tribes accept such a call to arms?...

"Hmm."

Chichika grinned, revealing his teeth.

"There are still over a thousand Red Dog warriors in the old camp. I will also send another thousand warriors to the north to oversee the conscription of the Tribes. Additionally, Priest Zuma will hold a great sacrifice in the Valley. The Wilderness priests of all the Tribes will blood sacrifice all the Otomi Agricultural Slaves and kill all the captives from the south to pray for victory in war to the Divinity of the earth and sky, and to the ancestors in the winds!"

"Blood sacrifice all the slaves and captives?!"

Ozoma exclaimed in shock. There were at least three thousand Otomi Agricultural Slaves working in the Valley, and with the men and women captives privately kept by the Tribes, the number could even reach six thousand. Amoxtli also appeared deeply moved.

"That's right!"

"This, Great Chief... such a large-scale blood sacrifice has never been held on the Wilderness before..."

Ozoma looked towards the Great Chief, only to see a cold, smiling face.

"Ha ha, no matter. Everything has a first time."

Chichika laughed softly, suppressing the murderous intent within his heart, and gently licked his teeth.

"Holding the great sacrifice, on one hand, is to memorialize the warriors who died in battle. The Earth Mother needs the nourishment of flesh and blood to allow the souls of the warriors to rest. On the other hand, it is to cut off the retreat for the Tribes."

The Great Chief's expression was calm, but it hinted at madness.

"The priests will tell all the Tribes: we have killed all the Otomi, and if the Valley falls, the Otomi will kill all of us. Whether we surrender or not, it's the same fate. The only way to live is to hold the Valley!"

"Ah, the way to live..."

Upon hearing this, Ozoma felt the scales in his heart tip rapidly towards a vague boundary. In this fleeting moment, his body trembled slightly, countless thoughts flashing in his mind. Then, he bowed his head deeply, like a monkey hiding in the forest, and said softly.

"We could continue to retreat to the Wilderness..."

Cold eyes swept over, staring at the bowed head. The Red Monkey Chieftain instantly contained his expression. He then raised his head again, swallowing his saliva, and fearfully knelt on the ground.

"Great Chief! The Cactus Tribe can summon Fire from the heavens, and no matter how treacherous the terrain, it is hard to defend against!"

"Fire from the heavens?... It's just the wooden beast created by the Evil God! The warriors just need to overcome fear, then there is nothing to be afraid of."

Chichika squinted his eyes, staring at Ozoma for a while, before speaking indifferently.

"We defend for a few days, the old camp needs time to regroup. If it really becomes untenable, I will give the order to retreat. Since the Alliance has been established, it should be like a wolf pack, with order and rank! It cannot be a headless flight, scattering in all directions..."

Saying this, the Great Chief paused slightly, his gaze flickering.

"Of course, the elderly and weak in the Valley can indeed be evacuated in part... hmm, after the great sacrifice, there will be warriors controlling every valley entrance. The tribes that yield enough people can retreat first."

Upon hearing this, Amoxтли's heart grew cold. He kept his composure, bowing respectfully.

"The Chieftain is wise."

Chichika watched the two men, his gaze as heavy as falling mountains, and issued a sharp command.

"Ozoma!"

"Yes, Great Chief!"

"Your Red Monkey Tribe has high morale, so encamp in the forward camp at the mouth of the Valley. I will lead the main force and support you from behind. When the first batch of reinforcements arrives, they will be supplied to you first!"

"I will follow your command!"

Ozoma fell to the ground to accept the order.

"Amoxtli!"

"Great Chief."

"Your Tribe has just gathered the fugitives, station them to rest in the rear of the Valley entrance. But the Red Crow Scouts are quite elite, they must scout for enemy intelligence, and constantly strike and harass. You personally lead the team, head south along the mountain forests! There are still many scattered Tribes trapped in the south, as long as you can bring them out, they all belong to your Tribe!"

"As you command, Great Chief."

Amoxtli also knelt on the ground, bowing respectfully.

"Very well!"

Seeing the two men's obedience, Chichika nodded in satisfaction. He cracked a smile, and instructed.

"You may go. Return to your Tribes and act swiftly! The ancestors in the wind will protect us!"

"Ancestors protect us!"

The two responded in unison, turning to leave immediately. On the hilltop, only Chichika remained. He stood for a long time, looking towards the mountains in the south, and suddenly grinned,

"Come then, Mexica! The Wolf King of the Wilderness, destined to die covered in scars, will never surrender!"

Chapter 659: Cactus

At the end of October, it was always solemn and scattered. It was the cold wind on the wilderness and the leaves floating everywhere in the long wind.

In the following days, nothing dramatic occurred. Over fifteen thousand southern Allied Forces impressively set camp outside the mouth of Pamus Valley. Thereafter, the Guamare legion continuously attacked the valley mouth, expending logs of wood and stone, and damaging the camp's fences. Meanwhile, the Imperial Guard Legion guarded the Black Wolf's flag and established the Mexica main camp on a fire-resistant, sparse hill.

At this moment, the King was seated in the main camp, organizing the register of different states with one hand while contemplating his next military move with the other. Although it was called a register, it was actually a genealogy of Otomi nobility/clans depicted with long flags, feathers, and family crests.

Bertade remained quietly standing with a serene expression. His gaze occasionally fell on the register, where many unusual symbols were marked, mainly red "X" and "O".

Xiulote opened the previous day's battle report, calmly marking an "X" over deceased nobility and an "O" over warriors who performed exceptionally. Beside him was another atlas, recording the landholdings and population figures of each nobility/clan. These figures were not precise and were merely complex, vague estimates.

Now, the three northern states had set up a new Chief Divine district and reported it to the Lake Capital City with the old High Priest Olte assuming the role of High Priest for the three states. The Church of the Primordial God was comprehensively adapting to merge with the Church of the Chief Divine. Soon, more priests from the Kingdom would be dispatched to various parts of the three states. They would preach deep within the tribes and gather more specific data on the arable land and population. If the Kingdom desired to govern the haughty tribes of the northern land, it would have to start with registration.

The tent was quiet for a long time. Suddenly, an intense disturbance rose from the periphery of the main camp, followed quickly by cries of attack.

Bertade instantly grasped his bronze sword, his eyes sharpening. He strode out of the tent to check and gave an escort gesture. Ters, followed by a dozen Personal Guard Warriors, holding great shields came in, shielding His Highness completely.

Sunlight fell from the tent's apex directly onto the King's desk. Xiulote's expression unchanged, continued to peruse the atlas. Soon after, the shouting outside quickly ceased, followed by several shouts and then sporadic screams.

After a moment, Bertade returned calmly from outside the tent, bringing with him a Warrior Captain in charge of managing captives.

"Hmm?"

"Your Highness, a band of Red-Haired Canine Descendants just infiltrated and attacked a captive camp, but were repelled by the Personal Guard Warriors,"

the Warrior Captain reported gravely.

"Oh?"

Xiulote put down the book he was holding and looked up.

"What is the situation now?"

Bertade patted the Warrior Captain, who immediately knelt on the ground, looking remorseful.

"Most High, two quarters of an hour ago, fifty-sixty red-haired burst suddenly from the eastern mountain forests, attacking the outermost captive camp. The captives in the camp also created a commotion. The warriors killed seven or eight red-haired, but four handfuls of captives managed to escape in the chaos."

"Which tribe do the enemies belong to?"

"The Red Frog Scouts identified the bodies, saying they're from the Red Crow Tribe."

"Again the Red Crows... How many casualties did our warriors sustain?"

"The enemy's attack was extremely sudden, and the warriors... also lost about ten,"

"Hmm... What are the follow-up measures?"

"A hundred-man squad has already taken up with the Priest Xiulote Itz Kunli, currently pursuing them in the woods. There are over two hundred captives in the camp, with four handfuls having escaped, thus four handfuls of barbarians were beheaded. The remaining captives were all whipped ten times!"

"Hmm. Very well, you may go,"

The Warrior Captain prostrated himself and respectfully left.

Xiulote stood up and slowly paced inside the large tent.

In the Mexica legion, the accompanying War Priests bred a few Mexican hairless dogs, known as Xiulote Itz Kunli (xoloitzcuintli). "Xiulote" designates the God of Death, and "Itz Kunli" stands for dog, thereby collectively termed as the "Dog of Death." Their combative abilities might not be outstanding, yet they hold a significant religious status. In Mexica mythology, they are guides to the underworld, able to lead the souls of the deceased, hence they are an integral part of sacrificial rites.

"Bertade, command the pursuing squad to return, do not fall into an ambush."

The King pondered briefly and calmly issued the order.

"Extract one thousand warriors from the Ototpan legion and immediately escort four thousand captives southward, all the way to Ototan Mountain City."

Over the past few days, the Allied Forces had moved northward. The main legion, guided by Pamus and led by Red Frog Scouts, cleared the forests along the path.

The Guajili Tribe, dispersed during the night raids, was largely captured, netting over four thousand Canine Warriors. These warriors were elite from the canine eastern parts, adept at surviving the wilderness and accustomed to bloodshed and murder. As they recovered from their fear of celestial fire, they became unstable elements within the camps.

Xiulote had no time to individually verify these warriors' identities and simply opted to send them all back south.

"As you command, Your Highness,"

Bertade immediately left the tent to arrange the personnel.

"Ters, you too, go out!"

"Yes, Your Highness."

The loyal Shield Guards bowed and returned outside to stand guard.

The King walked to a corner of the large tent, looking towards the earthen ground. There grew a Cactus, the most common sight in the wilderness. This cactus, having been chopped by a Canine Descendants' stone axe, was left with just a remnant of thorny stem stubbornly surviving. In the food-scarce northern lands, cacti were akin to tofu from home, the most mundane daily staple.

"The Canine Descendants of the wilderness are like the cacti of the northern lands, surviving on the barrenest soils. They are resilient and tough, possessing a strong vitality and prickly thorns,"

Xiulote observed for a moment and murmured softly.

"But once you harvest the cactus, remove its sharp thorns, and take a bite... only then can you realize how crisp and delicious it is."

Thinking of the taste of cactus, the King smiled and continued to sit cross-legged. He opened the atlas of the armies, tallying the troops at his command.

At the start of August when the campaign began, the Imperial Guard Legion was at its full strength of six thousand men. Over the next three months of campaigning, they had lost over a thousand. Most notably, when Black Wolf launched a fierce attack on Red Fox Valley, eight hundred were lost in a single battle. Subsequently, he recruited Otomi Warriors from three states and selected hundreds of Guajili captives, filling the legion's ranks once more.

Continuously engaged in battles, the Otomi legion from the three states also suffered significant casualties. Of the eight thousand Ottopan Warriors, only six thousand remained, and of the three thousand Pamus Warriors, only just over a thousand were left. Five thousand Guamare Warriors had left a thousand in Red Fox Valley, losing over a thousand, now fewer than three thousand remained.

Besides the loss of warriors, the nobility of the states also suffered heavy casualties, leaving vast hereditary lands vacant. How these lands were to be allocated was key to establishing the rule of the Kingdom.

"Buzz... thump!"

Xiulote was deep in thought when he was suddenly interrupted by a low buzzing sound. After listening for a moment, a smile appeared on his face, and he put down the atlas he was holding, patiently waiting.

Sure enough, moments later, the tent's curtain was again lifted, and Chalki Great Chieftain entered cautiously, bowing in succession to his Highness and the Head Warrior.

"Divine Revelation highness, greetings to you!"

"Chalki, how is the legion fairing?"

"Highness, twelve catapults have been assembled and are currently being tested."

Chalki knelt on the ground, his expression exceptionally respectful.

"What reaction does the guarding Red Monkey Tribe show?"

"Somewhat panicked. Their chieftain appeared in person and calmed the morale of the troops."

"Continue the tests, get familiar with the range. Later in the attack, catapults might be used."

Upon hearing this, the middle-aged chieftain paused slightly. He looked up at the highness and tentatively asked.

"Highness, you said 'might'?"

"Hmm, might."

The King nodded, his face confident.

"If we end up using the catapults, it will require more effort, lose more warriors, and capture fewer prisoners. If not, then the opposite will happen."

The legion still had enough gunpowder weapons for one more battle, enough to burn down the valley camp. Capturing the valley's mouth wouldn't be difficult as long as the Canine Descendants hadn't fully adapted to the thunderbolts and fire. The real challenge was how to prevent the tribes of Canine Descendants from scattering, to maximally deplete or capture the able-bodied from all tribes. To some extent, the Chichika Great Chief, who forced each tribe to fight to the death, had solved the most difficult tactical problem for the Allied Forces.

Chalki's eyes twinkled, pondering over the words of his Highness.

Xiulote, expression unchanged, asked again.

"Chalki, how is the legion doing?"

The middle-aged chieftain was briefly stunned, then realized. He lowered his voice.

"Highness, the legion has fought at the valley's mouth for three days, losing over a dozen nobles who refused to convert."

"Are the rest willing to convert?"

"Yes, they are."

"Very good. Then gather the Guamare nobility beside the catapults and hold a prayer ceremony to the Chief Divine. I'll send a War Priest to you, make it happen tonight!"

"I obey your command, Highness."

"Go prepare now!"

"Yes."

Chalki bowed respectfully and quickly departed.

Xiulote watched the middle-aged chieftain's retreating figure and slipped into contemplation once more.

After the northern campaign, he would designate direct-controlled territories in Ottopan and Pamus State, maintaining a garrison in each. As for the vast Guamare State to the west, it would largely retain nobility autonomy. Therefore, for the Guamare nobility, the only requirement was conversion, with no need for extensive purging.

The political objectives of the northern campaign were largely achieved by now. The nobility in the three states who resisted the Alliance and conversion were mostly cleared out. Chalki and Jiowar both controlled the situation, moving from titular leaders of the legion to its actual leaders. The remaining economic and military objectives were to capture as many Canine Descendant workers as possible to strengthen the Kingdom's foundations and establish forward outposts to manage the surrounding tribes.

Thinking of this, Xiulote looked beside him.

"Bertade, how is our Poet doing?"

"Highness, the Poet is still in the enemy camp, negotiating."

"Hmm. Convey my words through the Poet: 'The Chief Divine's wooden beasts have arrived, the Chief Divine's citizens will soon be slaughtered. The Chief Divine's fury is uncontrollable and will destroy everything... The terms of surrender are the same as for Red Frog, forming an independent army of three thousand men. Give him two days to decide, if no decision is made, the legion will call upon the heavenly fire and capture the valley camp. By then, everyone will be sacrificed!'"

"Your will is the destined future."

The Head Warrior bowed and silently departed again.

The King stood up and moved to the corner of the camp. He looked at the damaged cactus, then suddenly smiled radiantly.

"Someone!"

His trusted aides immediately rushed in, bowing their heads to listen to his command.

"Dispose of this cactus, use a copper pot to fry turkey eggs in oil, I want to eat it tonight!"

Chapter 660: A Bright Future

Night fell, and a profound darkness surged from the horizon, enveloping the cacti at the foothills. Flecks of crow cries echoed through the rugged mountains, and the simple encampment reflected the everlasting bonfires, imparting a profound desolation.

Ozoma stood alone atop the watchtower of the encampment. The balance in his heart swayed back and forth, just like the flames he saw before him.

"Great Chief!"

The Red Monkey Chieftain sighed deeply.

In recent days, the southern Allied Forces' offensive had been blocked by the forbidding vanguard encampment. Hundreds of Otomi Warriors were lost beneath the valley's camps, and more than a dozen enemy nobility fell!

Chichika Great Chief was quite invigorated, sent an envoy to praise Ozoma, and timely delivered the first batch of a thousand reinforcements. The Great Chief himself convened the valley's tribes, both to gather manpower and to prepare for a grand sacrifice.

According to the plan, all chieftains were to swear their loyalty in blood during the Grand Sacrifice and promise their ancestors to never surrender! The envoy reported that preparations for the blood sacrifice were complete, and the grand ritual would soon take place within the next two days.

"Chichika Great Chief is brave and strong, fair in reward and punishment, and a man of his word. If under the Great Chief's leadership, all tribes unite and hold out, could we defend the valley?"

Ozoma thought for a long time, indecisive. He looked again at the encampment below; the Mexica's catapults were lined up in a row, causing anxiety.

"God of Death is a Chief with profound mana, mysterious and unfathomable. If he summons heavenly fire and emits thunderbolts, could the warriors maintain their morale and hold the encampment?"

The Red Monkey Chieftain thought for another quarter of an hour, still without any decision. He could not help but softly ridicule himself.

"Red Monkey, oh Red Monkey, you've always been sharp, yet when facing life-or-death decisions, your mind wanders, and you are utterly indecisive! Without decisiveness, there is no courage. Your lifetime is nothing but reliance on the powerful."

The watchtower of the encampment was hastily constructed. Although called a tower, it was merely a hut built on a large tree, plus a ten-meter-long rope ladder hanging down to the ground. A gust of autumn wind passed by, the hut atop the watchtower swayed in midair, and Ozoma's body trembled along with it. He lowered his head to view the ground eight or nine meters below and shook his head.

"The hut in mid-air, teetering in the wind, how could it stay any longer in such danger? ...Great Chief, if you had retreated earlier, my loyalty would not waver!"

Having said this, Ozoma descended swiftly down the rope ladder like a nimble monkey, quickly reaching the ground. He jumped twice on the spot, felt the solid touch under his feet, and swiftly returned to the main tent.

The main tent was actually another hut, only more enclosed and slightly larger. The hut had an open roof with a fire pit in the center. The Red Monkey Chieftain, sitting cross-legged in front of the fire pit, continued to contemplate the situation.

The Red Monkey Tribe now had over three thousand warriors, holding the highlands' forward camp at the mouth of the valley, directly facing the Mexica's forces. A few miles behind the forward camp was Red Dog's main camp. Chichika's leader had over four thousand elite warriors and was continuously drafting from the valley's tribes. Further back, near Pamus City, was the rear camp of the Red Crow Tribe. The rear camp had over two thousand gathered warriors from various defeated troops, currently reorganizing.

The highland forward camp, the valley's main camp, and the valley's rear camp depended on each other, forming a neat triangle. Although the Pamus valley mouth was wide open, the forward camp was crucially positioned on the high ground. If the southern Allied Forces did not take down the forward camp, they could not advance peacefully. While the southern Allied Forces besieged the daunting forward camp, the troops from the rear and main camps could continuously strike, attacking the Allied Forces' flanks.

In brief, the valley mouth's defenses were carefully planned by the Great Chief; although appearing rough and simple, they were by no means weak.

"Just placing my Red Monkey Tribe here as a roadblock stone, with no way to retreat! ...No, perhaps not necessarily."

Mulling this over, Ozoma lifted his head and ordered his trusted aide.

"Has Zucata returned? Have him come see me!"

The trusted aide went out to check and returned to report.

"Chieftain, Zucata left this morning to escort the warrior from Red Frog Tribe back south, and he hasn't returned yet."

"Hmm? He hasn't run into an ambush by Amoxтли's raiding team, has he? ...Although Zucata appears simple-minded, he's always been thoughtful and prudent; he shouldn't make such a mistake."

Ozoma frowned and after a brief moment of thought, he called out loudly.

"Summon the scout who patrolled the outskirts today to come see me!"

In less than a half an hour, a red-haired scout hurried over. After Ozoma asked a couple of questions, he stood up abruptly, grabbing the scout's collar in shock.

"What did you say?! Zucata returned and then left the camp to go north!"

"Ah? Chieftain, didn't you know?"

The scout looked at the chieftain in surprise and fear.

"Captain Zucata said he received your instructions to contact the Northern Land's Red Deer Tribe. He even took a few Spear Guards... It was this afternoon, just after Amoxтли Chieftain's raiding team passed by..."

"...Damn it! Bring me the Spear Guard!"

Ozoma's face turned ashen as he pushed the scout away. A foreboding feeling arose in his heart. It seemed as if an invisible giant hand was forcing him to make a decision.

Soon after, the Spear Guard assembled in front of the tent. The Red Monkey Chieftain quickly did a headcount, and several guards from the Divine Eagle Tribe were nowhere to be seen. Upon inquiring with the warriors of the guard, he learned that these men each carried a small bundle, claiming it was a gift for the Red Deer Chieftain, which immediately sank his heart.

"Zucata, Zucata!... I regarded you as a trusted aide, treated you with such respect, yet you betrayed me!"

Ozoma roared inwardly, unable to contain his rage. Silently, he gripped the War Club, his expression as dark as a stormy sky. However, as his anger subsided slightly, a uncontrollable panic surged within him again.

"Where could Zucata be heading? He knows about my covert communications with the Mexica, and he was also summoned by the Great Chief to be at his side. If he reports to the Chichika Great Chief..."

Thinking of the Great Chief's wrath, the Red Monkey Chieftain couldn't help but shiver. Unbeknownst to him, the Great Chief's authority had deeply embedded itself in his heart, indelible.

Ozoma closed his eyes in agony. At that moment, countless thoughts swirled in his mind, and numerous emotions churned in his chest. He was angry, he was afraid, he regretted, he felt lost, he was in pain... He made a decision!

"Like the Wolf King of a Great Chief!... I know, you will never tolerate betrayal... thus, I can only choose to betray..."

After a long while, Ozoma let out a long sigh, and spoke with emotion. Then, as if unburdening himself of the weight of decision, he accessed a long-missed relief. At this point, there was no other path but to seek survival. The Red Monkey Chieftain's thoughts revived, turning him back into the clever Red Monkey.

"Spear Guard, go on alert at the camp entrance! Trusted aide, bring the two baskets I prepared! Yes, the heaviest two."

Ozoma issued the order with a heavy tone. Then, he looked towards the back of the camp, where a tightly guarded enclosed shed was located.

"Bring our guests from the south here!"

The trusted aide obeyed the orders. Not long after, led by two red-haired warriors, Poet Balamo, dressed in traditional attire of the Canine Descendants, came with a solemn expression.

"Ozoma, my distant friend."

Balamo bowed slightly, arms extended, performing a wilderness ritual. Then, he recited a poetic greeting, seemingly unfazed by any discomfort of his confinement.

"In the whispered secrets of dawn, I came with lofty visions. I follow the Chief Divine's guidance, wishing to wander the wilderness with you. In the evening breeze of this valley, filled with the fragrance of promises... The future is so bright, why do you continue to hide, unwilling to meet with me?"

"Uh... haha!"

Looking at Balamo's bright eyes, Ozoma's face twitched, at a loss for words. He forced a laugh, stepped forward, and warmly clasped the poet's arm.

"My friend, the flowers of the cactus must wait to bloom, the fruit needs time to develop. Now, I wish to walk with you in the wilderness as brothers! To show my sincerity and for the brotherhood, I have long prepared gifts for you!"

Saying this, Ozoma waved his hand carefreely. Two aides then strugglingly carried a heavy basket, heavily setting it down in front of the poet.

"I've heard that tribes in the south like this white metal. Haha, my brother, here is a hundred pounds, all yours!"

"A... hundred pounds of silver?!"

Even a worldly person like Balamo was shaken at that moment, his face twitched, his heart shocked. He quickly reached out, grabbed a roughly refined chunk, and bit it, tasting a unique faint sweetness. Despite their crude refining, these chunks were genuine silver.

"Whew... whew!"

After a while, the poet regained his strength and suddenly grabbed Ozoma's hand.

"Ozoma, my good brother! Your sincerity is enough! Let us talk about our bright future!"

"Great! Good brother! I have another basket of white metal, along with red gemstones, as a gift for your highness... "

Watching the poet's reaction, Ozoma inwardly scoffed, yet he also steadied the poet's hand. To think that a mere hundred pounds of useless white metal, which neither can be eaten nor worn, would astonish a Mexica envoy like this. Little did he know, in the lairs of Guajili tribes of Sattescas wilderness, piles of white metal ore were utterly disregarded, forming small hills!

In fact, a vast deposit of silver was located in the Sattescas wilderness. The largest silver mine in the world, Fresnillo, is situated in this area. The Spaniards launched the Chichimec War and fought arduously for fifty years in the wilderness because of this unparalleled silver mining region.

In the four hundred years following its discovery, the Fresnillo silver mine has produced almost ten percent of the world's silver, totaling 100,000 tons. Even up to 2013, this mine still produced more than 700 tons per year, second only to Australia's Cannington Silver Mine. The largest silver mining company in the world is named after Fresnillo. All in all, the silver mines in the Sattescas wilderness were a wealth that could change the flow of global currency and later established the reputation of the Mexican Eagle Dollar!

The campfire flickered, casting dancing reflections on the piled-up silver that shone a mesmerizing white light. Within the luminescent glow, the two men, hands clasped, eyes locked, each bearing the same sincerity and smile. In the bright silver light, they whispered softly, discussing a bright future and influencing the destiny of the Northern Land.