

Civilization 671

Chapter 671: The Conclusion of the Northern Expedition, Sacrificial Rite Ceremony, Follow-ups, and the Journey Home_3

"The population of Pamus Valley is still too thin, even with the refugees from the surrounding areas, it's less than twenty thousand people."

Xiulote gazed at the blazing Sacred Fire, deep in thought and silent.

"We still need to leave five thousand Canine Descendants Tribes to bolster the population of the valley and also establish a battalion of a thousand Canine Descendants."

Thinking this, the face of each chieftain flashed through the king's mind, finally settling on the most harmless-looking one.

"Hmm, you've seen the power of the new weapons firsthand, had your courage broken by the Alliance, and you were betrayed by Red Fox and Red Frog, experiencing the despair of becoming Sacrifices... It's you, Red Cat Chieftain Mizili!"

Xiulote smiled faintly. After being captured, Mizili had been detained in Red Fox Valley, receiving teachings from the Chief God Priest. On the army's return journey, he would personally examine him to determine his fate.

"A versatile City Lord, twenty-five thousand residents, three thousand warriors. The balance between Mexica, Otomi, and Guajili... With such an arrangement, even at a distance of seven hundred miles, it should at least be sustainable for more than a decade!"

The king looked down slightly, gazing at the fertile Pamus Valley and the time-worn Pamus City. Then, his gaze continued southward, over the journey's route, toward the mountain city hundreds of miles away.

"The western Guamare State will maintain nobility self-governance, led by Chalki Great Chieftain as leader. The southern Ototpan Mountain City is a key node, and although autonomy has been promised, it is necessary to demarcate a fief nearby and station an army of the Kingdom."

Xiulote breathed in the air filled with the scent of charring, his expression calm and relaxed. His mind was already made up, his will, not to be defied.

"The two thousand archer Militia of the First Spear Legion will be stationed around the mountain city, to establish farming fortresses! As for filling the vacancies of the First Spear Legion, pull from the Canine Descendants captives. The Guajili are naturally good at archery; they will also cultivate the land in Rivermouth County. Once the Canine Descendants have converted to the Chief Divine, draw out a thousand Archers to complete the ranks of the Imperial Guard Legion..."

The midday sun gradually sank, then slowly set. The evening light stained the sky red, another resplendent sunset. The holy sacrificial ceremony continued for a day, and forty thousand of the Guajili Tribe underwent the ritual baptism.

And in the red sunset, under the gaze of tens of thousands of Canine Descendants, Xiulote took off his Ceremonial Dress and donned the Wolf Robe symbolizing the Chieftain. Then, he reached out his hand towards the sacred red sky and scattered Chichika's ashes into the wind, spreading them across the vast wilderness.

This was a tradition of the wilderness, as well as a legacy of the Chieftain!

Upon witnessing this, tens of thousands of the Guajili Tribe stood transfixed, and the little city fell into a momentary silence.

Red Monkey Chieftain Ozoma was prepared. He rose first, raising his hands with his trusted aides at his side, shouting at the top of his lungs.

"Praise the Great Chief! The powerful God of Death Great Chief is the true master of the wilderness!"

Then the Red Deer Chieftain, Red Frog Chieftain, also stood up and cheered. In moments, the shouting echoed throughout the valley, carrying with it a heart-stirring force.

"God of Death Great Chief! The true master of the wilderness!"

In the afterglow of the sun, Xiulote laughed heartily, looking northward. The northern wilderness stretched for two or three thousand miles, and beyond that was the boundless North American continent. There lay endless lands and infinite journeys!

The grand sacrificial ceremony came to a close within the night. Xiulote invited the Guajili chiefs and Otomi nobility to a banquet. The banquet ended with an oath of allegiance, and the king one by one smilingly comforted each person by touching their hair.

Three days later, the first batch of legions and tribes set off to the south, the subsequent migration stretching nearly a hundred miles. The Guajili people blew their horns, imitating the howl of a wolf, singing mournful songs as they disappeared at the end of the mountain path. They were leaving the familiar wilderness for the unknown fertile lands of the south, towards the mighty Cactus Kingdom.

Over ten days later, the Royal Banner of the Black Wolf left Pamus City, and with thousands of Armored Warriors as an escort, embarked on the long journey home.

The fluttering Royal Banner clattering in the wind, Xiulote climbed to the camp at the mouth of the valley. Turning one last time, he looked back at the northern wilderness and another red sunset, as if called by the mountains beyond.

The king listened calmly for a moment, then nodded. Smiling towards the sunset, he said,

"Don't worry, I'll come back! In my lifetime."

Chapter 672: The End of the Year 1485, A Voyage of Death

In November 1485, midstream of the Congo River, more than a thousand miles from the great river's mouth lay Gombe Matadi. In the Congo language, this name means "walking in the land of rocks."

The tumultuous rapids rushed down from the highlands above, battering the steep riverbanks and scouring the dense rainforest. White pelicans flapped their wings, soaring up and down the azure river, hunting for plump fishes. Swarms of black mosquitoes buzzed and whirled, clustering in the blue sky, following the scent of blood. Farther off, a hazy mist rose and wound around, while the unbounded jungle shaded the sun, and no trace of civilization was to be seen, only untouched wilderness.

At this moment, three caravels were making their difficult journey upstream toward the East, making use of the slight westerly winds amidst the raging rapids. The flagship at the fore was slightly larger, and the high mast bore the flag of the Portuguese Royal Family. Several curious birds, drawn to the slow-moving vessels, chased the ships and circled the masts.

The captain, Diogo Cao, was pale and morose. He sat motionless in the captain's quarters at the stern of the ship, like a silent statue. Even in the heat of the tropics, he was wrapped in a thick woolen blanket. From time to time, the "statue" would tremble slightly, emitting a few suppressed coughs.

In front of the "statue" lay a scroll of parchment. Next to the parchment were an ink-dipped feather, a crude protractor, and a pair of parallel rulers used for navigation. The parchment was covered with curving lines, precise lines of latitude, blurry lines of longitude, and densely-packed Portuguese annotations. Clearly, this was a recently drawn navigational chart.

To the north on the map lay the starting point of the voyage, the Capital City, Lisbon. In August of the previous year, the Portuguese fleet had sailed from Lisbon, heading southwards, passing the Madeira Islands, Canary Islands, Cape Verde Islands, crossing the Gulf of Guinea, approaching the Gold Coast, and finally reaching the newly constructed Elmina Castle in this year's spring.

At Elmina Castle, the fleet divided. Two-thirds of the ships and the majority of the soldiers were stationed at the castle's harbor under the command of Sir Dias.

Sir Dias was to lead the over six hundred sailors and soldiers aboard the ships to subdue the nearby indigenous tribes. The Royal Family's orders were explicit: gold, gold, and more gold! They were to scour the surrounding villages, plundering precious gold, capturing strong slaves to be put to work in the gold mines around Elmina Castle.

Captain Diogo continued southward with five caravels. He navigated the difficult doldrums of the Equator, losing one ship, and once more reached the wide rivermouth of the Congo River. Then, the turbulent river, the endless rainforest, and the swarming mosquitos appeared before them once again. Seeing this, the sailors who survived the previous expedition cried out in terror, whispering "the land of the Demon."

Diogo was not afraid. His expression grim, he personally hanged the most vociferous sailor at the bow of the ship. Then, holding a Silver Cross gifted by an old friend, he prayed devoutly to the Lord before leading the fleet without hesitation into the rivermouth, toward the land of the Demon.

Under the scorching sun, the fleet sailed upriver for six to seven hundred miles. The land of the Demon was filled with dark-skinned pagans, sinister bloody altars, powerful native Kingdoms, and thousands of Tribal Warriors armed with iron spears.

Suppressing his murderous urges, Diogo met the Envoy of the King of Congo with a mild expression and exchanged gifts to show friendship. Then, two Priests from Lisbon and four Envoys disembarked from the fleet, accepting an invitation from the King of Congo to go to the Capital City Mbanza Kongo. There, they were to preach the doctrine of the Lord to King Nzinga Mbemba and seek to spread the glory of the Lord.

After brief resupplying, Diogo left the bustling native Kingdom. The crew continued up the Congo River, in search of the legendary land of abundance, the mighty Kingdom of Elder Yue. As the fleet ventured deeper, sightings of human habitation became scarce, the jungle grew denser, and the power of the Demon grew stronger.

One robust sailor after another succumbed to the Demon's Curse. They suffered from fevers and chills, had bloodshot eyes and tongues, and even bled from mouth and nose, covered in red rashes, they moaned desperately before dying. The number of sailors quickly dwindled, forcing the fleet to abandon another ship. Even Diogo himself occasionally suffered the alternating pains of chills and fever.

Facing such adversity, Diogo could only grit his teeth and endure, praying devoutly to the Lord and tossing the sick sailors into the swift Long River. Finally, he relaxed his stance and allowed the sailors to go ashore to plunder and slaughter a few tribal villages, unleashing their beastly desires, and then capturing some of the locals as ship's crew.

Under Diogo's steely resolve, the deadly route continued for another four hundred miles. The route transformed into the freshly inked Long River on the map before him, flowing towards the mysterious and unknown East. The captain felt the clear call of the Lord's voice, as though it were right before him.

With this thought, Diogo looked up slightly, peering through the small window of the captain's quarters toward the birds atop the mast. The brave birds circled amidst the flags of the Royal Family, much like the irises of the cape, searching for a land to rest, chasing after the holy light.

Gentle knocking interrupted the captain's thoughts. Diogo silently gripped the short sword at his waist and asked in a deep voice,

"Who is it?"

"Respected Noble Knight, Captain Diogo Cao. It's me, the Royal Family's Court Advisor, Martin Behaim."

The voice at the door came, in the Classical New Latin style. This revival of Latin in the style of the Roman era had not long since emerged, spreading mainly among the prosperous commercial City-States of Italy, alongside the trend of reviving classical art.

Diogo frowned. He could understand New Latin, but he preferred the Old Latin used by the Church. Now, he responded in an old-fashioned tone,

"Respected Court Advisor, please forgive me for not being able to rise to greet you, please come in directly."

The door to the captain's quarters opened, and a young Noble Scholar entered. He was in his twenties or thirties, dressed in a complex noble outfit with deliberately tightened cuffs on his hands and feet, and shiny leather boots. Despite the sweltering climate, the Noble Scholar's hair was soaked in sweat, but the buttons on his collar were done up tight.

He was Martin Behaim, the offspring of Nuremberg nobility, the son of a Republic of Venice congressman, a student of the astronomer Johannes Muller, and a Court Advisor to the Portuguese Royal Family.

Martin entered and sniffed lightly. There was a faint but unmistakable smell of blood in the captain's quarters. He hesitated, then asked softly,

"Captain Diogo, how is your illness?"

"The Holy Mother is merciful to me, I am not greatly hindered."

Diogo responded calmly. He had already quietly covered up the navigation map on the captain's table, the highest secret of the Royal Family.

"Ah! That's good."

Martin's face showed a sincere smile. Then, he pulled out a piece of paper with numbers written on it from his chest and handed it to Diogo.

"Here, Captain! These are the latitudes I've surveyed this week, along with the recorded hydrographic data along the way."

"Praise the Almighty! Thank you for your help!"

Diogo replied with a smile. He took the paper, glanced at it, and nodded. Routine surveying of latitudes and recording hydrographic data were tasks normally performed by the captain or first mate. But now, with the first mate dead from coughing blood, and the captain himself suffering joint pains and trembling hands and feet, this important task had to be entrusted to the young Noble Scholar, Martin. In the current era, longitude could not yet be accurately measured and relied on the estimates of experienced navigators.

Martin stood still. He carefully observed the captain in front of him, as if at a fierce yet weakened lion. Now, he somewhat regretted participating in this dangerous voyage. The ocean voyage was not the romance he had imagined.

The difficult accommodation, the deplorable food, the seemingly endless journey, constantly tormented the young Noble Scholar. The seemingly gentle captain turned cold and ruthless when killing, like a lion. The vulgar sailors with blood on their hands were oppressed beasts on the ship, yet even more brutal than beasts on shore. What was even more terrifying was the Demon's Curse on this land! It silently took away one fresh life after another, completely unforeseeable, regardless of one's lineage or blood!

Martin stood for a while until the captain's sharp gaze seemed to pierce through him.

"Scholar Martin, do you have any other matters?"

"Ah! Respected captain, I, I..."

Martin hesitated for a while, faltering. The suggestion to return remained stuck in his throat, unable to come out. It took a while before the Noble Scholar spoke,

"Captain Diogo, I feel that the atmosphere on the ship lately, is a bit off. The sailors sometimes gather privately..."

"Oh?"

Diogo's eyebrows lifted slightly as he nodded slowly.

"I understand. You may go now. If it's convenient for you, please summon Noble Knight Bruno," said Diogo.

"Alright!"

Martin turned to leave as if escaping. In the moment he opened the door, he remembered the nobility's etiquette. So, the Noble Scholar turned his head and made the sign of the Cross on his chest.

"May the Almighty protect us!"

"May the Lord give protection!"

Diogo responded calmly, watching Martin hurry away. He stood straight, his right hand always tightly gripping the short sword by his side, becoming a silent statue. After a while, the door to the captain's quarters was knocked again, and a familiar voice came,

"Captain, did you call for me?"

"Come in, Bruno."

The door "creaked" open, and Bruno, dressed in a tight sailor's uniform, cautiously entered.

"I greet you, respected captain."

Diogo nodded. He looked at his outstanding nephew and showed a melancholic smile. Then, his gaze sharpened, and his expression turned serious,

"Bruno, how have the sailors been these past few days?"

"Ah?"

Bruno raised his head to look at the captain's expression, then bowed respectfully.

"Four days ago, the sailors landed and plundered a native village, which somewhat lifted their spirits. But yesterday, two more sailors fell gravely ill and were cast into the river. The sailors aboard fear the power of the Demon, praying day and night to the Holy Mother, some even becoming delirious..."

"The Holy Mother's power will protect us from the Demon's onslaught," said Diogo, his left hand clutching the Silver Cross around his neck, resolute.

"Those who can't resist are harboring Demons and lack devotion!"

With this, Diogo swept a glance at Bruno, then asked quietly,

"Besides praying, are there any other voices among the sailors?"

"Other voices..."

Bruno paused before replying in a low voice,

"Indeed, there are some voices, wanting... wanting to return."

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"Hmm?"

Diego's eyes showed a cold killing intent, but he quickly lowered his gaze, concealing all emotion. After a few moments, a gentle smile appeared on his face.

"Bruno, you are a nephew of our lineage, and I have always valued you highly. I remember that recently, you married a Moorish woman and moved to Lisbon, did you not?"

"Ah? Yes, captain. She is the sister of the former Sailor Chief Paulo, and we moved to Lisbon together..."

"Hmm, do you like her?"

Diego asked with a smile.

"Yes. She is beautiful, with delicate features, and kind to me. Holy Mother bless! She was pregnant before I left..."

Speaking of his wife, Bruno's face lit up with a happy smile.

"Holy Mother bless! Very good."

Diego affectionately patted Bruno's shoulder. Then, with bright eyes and a grave tone, he said,

"Bruno, now that you are married and have a child, you have become a true man, understanding the meaning of responsibility! In our last contact with the native Kingdom, you earned merit and showed sufficient courage. To bear responsibility and to have courage are the two most important virtues for a man of Aviz!..."

"We are sailing on the Demon's land, and we must muster the courage to fulfill the duties bestowed upon us by the Kingdom! This voyage is so crucial. Our duty is to find Elder John's Kingdom, even if it costs noble lives... because it concerns the fate of the Kingdom, the support from the Holy See, and the future of we Portuguese!... Cough, cough!"

While speaking, Diego suddenly started coughing violently. Bunoru stepped forward to support the captain but was stopped by a gesture from him.

"Cough, cough, I'm alright!... Under the protection of the Holy Mother, honest and brave fishermen, farmers, and mountain people—all Portuguese will stand together, never submitting to the neighbors from the East. My child, think about it, if Spain were to absorb us, the Inquisition would come along with them. What would become of your wife and child then?"

Hearing this, a chill ran through Bunoru. He gazed at captain's resolute face and could not help but kneel on one knee and loudly vowed,

"Captain! I will muster the courage to fulfill my duties and continue to sail steadfastly!"

"Good! Bruno, you differ from those common sailors... within you flows noble blood. I have always held high hopes for you."

Diego smiled and laid his hand on Bunoru's shoulder. Then, with a solemn expression and cold eyes, he said,

"Bruno, keep a close watch on the sailors aboard. Identify the ringleaders plotting in secret, and then... tell me."

"... Yes, captain."

Upon hearing those words, Bunoru felt a chill down his spine and broke out in a cold sweat. He quickly bowed his head and prayed devoutly.

"Holy Mother protect us! We will surely find Elder John's Kingdom!"

"Holy Mother protect us!"

Diego nodded calmly.

"Go now, there's much work to do on the ship."

After bowing, Bunoru turned and left. He exited the cabin and looked up at the sky. The tropical sun was so hot that his back was soaked with sweat. He walked a few paces with a worried heart, scolded a few sailors on the deck casually, and then went down into the cooler ship cabin.

Bunoru fretfully walked around the ship cabin for a while when a trusted sailor came up to him.

"Boss, Quartermaster Matim is looking for you."

"Matim looking for me? It's not time to repair weapons, is it?"

Bunoru was somewhat surprised. A quartermaster is an essential position on every ship, responsible for the storage and distribution of weapons. In the early days of the Age of Exploration, the origins of common sailors were diverse, and their loyalty was not reliable. For most of the journey, their weapons were confiscated and kept by the quartermaster, only to be issued before combat.

"Boss, Matim said he just fixed some weapons, and he wants you to pick a couple before they're all gone!"

"... Alright. I'll go pick a couple for you as well. Where is he?"

"In the forward storage room."

The storage room wasn't far ahead. Bunoru didn't hesitate and walked briskly towards it.

The light below deck was dim and murky, and the air was foul. Two sailors were guarding the door of the cabin, each with a dagger at their waist. Seeing Bunoru approaching, they opened the door halfway and invited Bunoru in.

"Ha ha! Matim, you finally remembered..."

Bunoru walked into the dimly lit cabin, smiling at the silhouette in front of him, but his words suddenly stopped.

In the cramped cabin interior, four brawny men were standing, their gazes coldly fixed on him. Bunoru recognized them after a moment, and cold sweat began streaming down the back of his neck.

"Quartermaster Matim, Sailor Chief Diego, Chief Cook Haroldo, Carpenter Ivo... you, all of you are here?!"

"Bang!"

The cabin door slammed shut behind him, plunging the room into darkness. Only a faint candlelight illuminated the grim faces of the four men. The shadowy figures danced on their faces like the power of the Demon.

Chapter 675: The End of 1485, Conspiracy in the Cabin

In the sultry heat of the tropical rainforest, flows the Congo River. On a swaying light sailboat, in the oppressive lower deck, a pungent odor permeated the air, stretching all the way to the front of the crucial storage hold.

Two muscular sailors gripped their daggers tightly, staunchly guarding the entrance. Their eyes fixed on the narrow passageway, they couldn't help but prick up their ears, listening to the slightest movement within the cabin.

Faint candlelight cast dim shadows, illuminating less than ten square meters of the storage hold as the boat swayed. The silence in the cabin was terrifying; four burly men armed with weapons stood mutely

around a newly inducted nobleman clutching a dagger. Everyone's hand rested on their weapon, their eyes alert, watching each other's hands without blinking. The sound of rushing water came from below, as if heralding the outbreak of something imminent.

Bruno clutched his dagger at his waist, holding his breath, ready to cry out at any moment. Sweat rolled down his forehead, wetting his eyelashes and stinging the corners of his eyes, yet he dared not blink.

After a tense standoff that lasted dozens of breaths, yet seemed like a century, Sailor Chief Diego spoke first, his face fierce.

"Bruno, what did Diogo tell you when he called you over just now?"

Hearing Diego call the captain by name, Bruno felt his heart sink to the bottom of the Congo River.

On a seafaring ship, the hierarchy is strict. The captain is the marshal who can decide life and death; the various department heads control their respective areas as officials. The Sailor Chief controls a large team of sailors, the Quartermaster controls a vast amount of weapons, the Chef controls the stored food, and the Shipwright goes unnoticed throughout the ship for repairs. Now, these officials were gathered here, disregarding the captain's authority... What did this mean?

With that thought, Bunoru stayed silent, only gripping his dagger more tightly.

"Fuck! I'm asking you what Diogo said!"

Seeing that Bruno didn't respond, Sailor Chief Diego stepped up aggressively, about to grab the other's collar.

Bunoru clenched his teeth hard and "whoosh" pulled out his dagger, holding it in front of him. That sound seemed to be a signal—four men on scene also "whoosh" drew their daggers and short swords! They pointed them at Bruno while also distancing themselves from others, each wary of one another.

"Fuck! Damn it!"

As a fray was about to erupt, Quartermaster Matim couldn't stay silent any longer. He growled and shouted.

"Stop, everybody stop! The sailors on the ship have been tainted by demonic forces, and nearly half of them have died; among the officers, only a few of us have survived! Do we really want to fight it out here and lose a few more?"

Then, Quartermaster Matim turned his head to Sailor Chief Diego and yelled.

"Diego, take two steps back, don't get too close to Brulo!"

Sailor Chief Diego muttered a few unsatisfied curses but still stepped back two paces. The atmosphere in the cabin eased slightly.

Next, Quartermaster Matim looked at everyone, slowly lowering his weapons, and said in a weighty tone.

"I called you all here today with no other intention but to find a way out for all of us together! I will count to three, and let's all put away our weapons first!"

"Good!"

"Makes sense!"

"I'll listen to you!"

"Don't hurt each other by mistake!"

The men glanced at each other and nodded in agreement. Quartermaster Matim then said in a low voice.

"One,"

"Two,"

"Three!"

After the count of three, a terrifying silence settled in the cabin. With everyone staring at each other, not a single person put their weapon away, including the Quartermaster Matim who called the count. Silence engulfed them once more.

The Shipwright Ivo, responsible for ship repairs and indispensable, held the most transcendent position. After a pause, he coughed twice and asked first.

"Cough, cough, Matim, you called me here claiming you have a way for us all to survive... What exactly are you planning? Just so you know, I have my old folks and kids back in Lisbon; if you're plotting against the captain, I won't be part of it... Of course, I won't remember either."

In the entire cabin, only Shipwright Ivo had the standing to speak such words. During unpredictable ocean voyages, a shipwright is the ship's lifeline as well as the crew's, sometimes even more important than the Sailing Master who provides direction. Thus, no matter what happened on the ship, the shipwright usually remained uninvolved.

Hearing this, Bunoru breathed a sigh of relief. It seemed that the four men in the cabin hadn't truly come together yet.

"Well..."

Quartermaster Matim was momentarily at a loss for words. He looked at Diego, who was suppressing his anger, and then glanced at the silent Chef, sighing helplessly.

"We haven't thought about plotting against the captain; we just want to turn back! This is demon's land, and evil forces are everywhere, bound to taint us! How can mere mortals resist such evil? The captain

himself has been cursed and can't come out to walk. We're even more helpless and must leave as soon as possible!"

Hearing about a response to the curse, Bruno silently pressed his left hand on his waist. There was a potion from Satan's Apostle, which he had coerced the village Priest to provide after slaughtering the tribal village. From his previous exploration, he had drunk the potion of that terrifying old woman, Satan's Apostle, and knew it could temporarily ward off demonic assault. Of course, to prevent this corrupt act from being discovered, the elderly village Priest was promptly beheaded by him.

"Ivo, didn't one of your apprentices also get cursed? On the captain's orders, Diego personally threw him into the river, and then a dozen crocodiles pounced on him, tearing him to pieces alive... Tsk, that sight! Do you want to be cursed as well, grow red rashes all over, scream while being thrown into the sea, and end up eaten by fish only to be released again with a splash?"

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Listening to Matim's description, a shiver ran through everyone simultaneously. The round-faced chief cook Haroldo, with a shrinking nod, spoke up for the first time.

"Indeed, if we do nothing and let the captain continue eastward, that will be our end!"

Upon hearing this, the carpenter Ivo's expression fluctuated for a long time before he finally gave a silent nod.

Bruno slightly lowered his eyes. At this moment, everyone's stance was clear. Quartermaster Matim, Sailor Chief Diego, and Chief Cook Haroldo had already joined forces. With the carpenter Ivo tacitly approving their actions, now only...

The gaze of the four men once again fell upon Brulo.

"Second Mate Brulo, we all consider you one of us, involving you in our affairs solely because you married the sister of the former Sailor Chief Paulo!"

Sailor Chief Diego, with a ferocious look, stepped forward again. He waved the curved dagger in his hand, threatening the newly noble in front of him.

"If you don't wise up, I'll slaughter you right here and throw you into the great river to feed the fish! When we return to Lisbon, I'll take care of Paulo's beautiful sister, making sure she's happy every single day!"

Hearing this, Bruno's eyes flashed coldly. With an equally fierce look, he stared intently at Diego's neck, slowly raising his dagger.

"Brulo, we've gathered here only to survive. You know as well as we do that without finding that damned Kingdom of John, the captain is definitely not turning back. And if we keep going forward, all that awaits us is a dead end! Can the Lord's citizens stay in such a demonic land?"

Quartermaster Matim stepped forward as well. He wore a sincere smile, yet he held a short sword in his hand.

"Don't you want to return safely to Lisbon to see your beautiful wife? Over a year of sailing has passed, your child must have been born by now, whether a boy or a girl, who knows? Ah, what a lovely little angel that must be!... Do you really want to die here and leave your wife and child at the mercy of some fat noble swine?"

At this, Quartermaster Matim paused. He looked at the struggling expression on Brulo's face and smiled confidently.

"Besides, Noble Knight Brulo, you're not like us. You have a good father, noble blood, seen as a real person by the nobility! You have such a bright future ahead, how can you die here? Why not join us in acting, we'll leave the captain with a skiff to go find the Kingdom of John on his own. Then, we'll all elect you as captain to return to Lisbon!"

In the hellish tropical Rainforest, to leave a cursed captain with only a skiff? How was that any different from directly plotting the captain's demise?

Brulo's face went through a range of emotions, his mind whirling like a vortex. He hesitated for a long time, until all his thoughts were swallowed by the vortex. In the end, what remained in his mind was only his pregnant wife and the smile on her face, serene as the Holy Mother.

Brulo lowered his gaze, and with it, his weapon. The power of the Demon, along with the potion he had drunk, had seeped into his heart.

"Matim, I can take part in your scheme. But, I have one condition."

Matim's brows lifted, his smile radiant.

"Brulo, rest assured, once the captain is expelled, you will be our captain!"

"No!"

The Noble Knight Brulo firmly refused.

"The respected captain has been kind to me, and he is also an elder in my family! We can band together to force the captain to turn back, but we must not harm his life!"

"Yes! That's the most appropriate!"

The carpenter Ivo nodded in agreement. Captain Diogo Cao was a royal knight pardoned directly by the King! With so many people on the ship, if they really plotted against him and the news leaked out, his family in Lisbon would be utterly ruined.

"I think Brulo and Ivo are right! As long as we turn back, we don't have to kill the captain, that would be for the best!"

Chief Cook Haroldo also voiced his agreement.

The decision was made by a vote of three against two, to force the captain to turn back, but to spare his life. Matim looked at these faint-hearted fellows and felt somewhat irritated.

What sort of man was the captain? A lion-like leader! Even if he was cursed, he was still a weakening old lion. A pack of wolves scheming against a lion, yet thinking of showing mercy, was simply courting death!... However, as long as he persuaded everyone to act, when the time came...

After mulling it over for a moment, Quartermaster Matim's face broke into a smile. He nodded in agreement, then patted the shoulder of Sailor Chief Diego, who after some cursing and grumbling, also reluctantly agreed.

Quartermaster, Sailor Chief, Chief Cook, Carpenter, Second Mate. The five influential people on the ship finally reached a consensus to "persuade" the captain to turn back.

Then, Matim was the first to sheathe his short sword. He prayed in a low voice.

"Praise the Holy Mother! Protect us on our return home!"

"May the Holy Mother protect us!"

Everyone echoed in unison and sheathed their weapons. The atmosphere in the cabin truly relaxed, and soon, whispers began to spread throughout the ship.

"Brulo, how's the captain's health?"

"Matim, the revered captain is blessed by the Holy Mother, his curse is not as severe. Every time I see him, his demeanor is very calm. His thoughts are sharp, his speech is clear, and there is no sign of being troubled by the curse."

Hearing that the captain was all right, everyone became a bit apprehensive, and the resolve they had just set seemed to waver again.

"Impossible! I have followed the captain for over a decade, I know him better than anyone."

Quartermaster Matim looked deeply at Brulo, scoffing as he shook his head.

Chapter 677: The End of 1485, The Conspiracy in the Cabin_3

"He's just holding on with incredible will!" the captain said, "If he could stand, he definitely wouldn't be sitting in his cabin! How many times has he stood at the bow of the ship, all day long. If he could move, why would I... anyway, the former captain was a lion, but now he's just a sick cat!"

Bruno was silent for a while, not speaking. He knew the captain must be seriously ill, as the smell of blood couldn't be hidden. After a long time, Bruno finally asked,

"Diego, how many men do you have under your command?"

Sailor Chief Diego "hmmphed", glanced at Brulo, then lifted his head and said,

"Matim, Haroldo, and I together have over twenty battle-ready sailors under our command, all armed with scimitars, daggers, and five matchlock guns! If we include your men and Ivo's, definitely over thirty!"

Bruno thought silently. The flagship's crew would be replenished from other ships, roughly maintaining a number of about fifty. Diego controlled the largest group of deck sailors, usually the main force in boarding combats. The quartermaster needed to watch over the weapons and also controlled some elite sailors. And the Kingdom's soldiers were all left at Elmina Castle... By this calculation, a vast majority of the ship's fighting force was ready to rebel.

"Ah! Dear Captain, it's your persistent drive eastward that has led to this abandonment..."

Thinking this, Bruno heaved a sigh and asked again,

"Sailing Master Reinaldo also has a few men. If we persuade the captain... Have you guys tried sounding him out?"

"Pfft, Reinaldo is a son of nobility. How would he mix with us!"

Quartermaster Matim laughed and shook his head, his face full of confidence.

"Though he has complained before about the captain's tyranny. He fears the demon's land and has long wanted to return. In fact, Haroldo has sounded out the crew when distributing food. On the entire ship, only the captain wants to continue sailing east!"

"Foda-se! I've been dissatisfied with Reinaldo for a while!"

Sailor Chief Diego cursed, his eyes flashing fiercely.

"Just because he's a noble's son and knows some navigation skills, he thinks himself above our brothers! Foda-se! If he dares to interfere, I'll chop off his head and mount it on the mast as a navigational aid!"

Hearing Diego's harsh words, Bruno furrowed his brows. This guy was indeed capable of such a deed, having done the same with a native chieftain's head before. In this brutal era, as the ship's sailing master, one had to be sufficiently fierce to hold sway over sailors from all over the world.

"The sailing master can guide the route, as long as he knows his place, the crew won't harm him."

Matim smiled and diverted the topic. He kept a keen eye on Bruno.

"Everyone's intent on this ship is clear. The only thing I worry about is the two ships behind us. Bunoru, you've been in charge of communicating with the other two ships. How are things going with them?"

Bruno pondered for a moment and shook his head.

"The situation on those two ships isn't much better than ours. Sailors keep dying from disease, morale is very low, and in total, there are just over seventy left now. The two nobility captains, Pero Anes and Pero Dacosta, are neither skilled in comforting people nor free from grievances themselves."

"Good! Good! If that's the case, our only obstacle left is the few guards around the captain!"

Upon hearing this, Matim's eyes brightened.

"The demon's influence spreads day and night; we cannot wait any longer, we must act soon!"

At that moment, the carpenter Ivo seemed to recall something and cautiously asked,

"There's also a noble scholar of high status aboard, from Braganza Palace. I heard his family is quite distinguished and highly valued by the King. Convincing the captain won't be easy without him noticing! If he tells the King anything..."

"Foda-se! He's just a tender-skinned young master from a noble family. Wrapped up so tight on the ship, haha! I've never had my way with a noble young master before. Let the brothers have their fun first, then throw him in the river to feed the crocodiles!"

Diego's eyes gleamed lewdly, making Bunoru feel somewhat sickened. Proper ocean-going ships didn't carry women, and the sailor scum were never particular about gender, so certain practices were prevalent.

"Ah! How can that be done? We mustn't kill, it would cause too much trouble!"

Carpenter Ivo waved his hands vigorously, his face anxious; he had a family back in Lisbon, unlike these free-spirited sailors.

"If we're not going to kill him, just to silence him, I do have a method."

Everyone looked at the source of the sound, which was the usually quiet chief cook, Haroldo. Haroldo's eyes flickered, and a strange smile crossed his chubby face.

"What method?"

"A young noble like him hasn't seen much of the world. Just get some leverage on him, keep it in our hands."

"Haha! With such deep connections, what leverage could possibly pressure him!"

"Ordinary methods indeed won't work, but... what about worshipping demons?"

The cabin suddenly went quiet. Bruno's eyes widened, staring at the normally timid chief cook as if seeing him clearly for the first time. Quartermaster Matim raised his eyebrows, sizing him up, then murmured a prayer.

"May the Holy Mother forgive us!... Haroldo, do tell us in detail..."

The ship continued forward, seeking the distant Holy Light; the water whooshed backward, sinking into the deep river. The dim candlelight flickered back and forth, one moment bright, the next dark. It shone on the conspirators' faces and sank into everyone's hearts, under the protection of the Holy Mother, on the demon's land.

Chapter 678: The End of 1485, Mutiny!

The night was dusky, and the Congo River surged mightily, its raging currents hidden as clouds obscured the moon. Three caravels dropped their hefty anchors, mooring at the river's edge, spaced a hundred meters apart. Tiny torches sparked to life aboard the ships, illuminating the fluttering Portuguese flags, and also the watchful sailors on night duty.

For the Portuguese exploration fleet, sailing at night in an unfamiliar inland waterway was extremely dangerous. Thus, Captain Diogo Cao, as always, had given the order to berth in place and assigned Sailor Chief Diego to stand guard.

"Foda-se! This place really is the land of demons! It was clear during the day, but at night, you can't even see a hint of the moon! Hmph, huh!"

A captain's guard squatted on a wooden plank at the bow, his pants down, his bare buttocks facing the outside of the ship.

Clearly, it was a necessary task. But aboard a caravel of the great Age of Sail, such matters were not straightforward, even requiring a certain level of skill. At that moment, the guard's hands gripped a rope tightly to maintain his balance. The wooden plank beneath his feet stood horizontally suspended in mid-air, swaying periodically. And beneath the swaying plank flowed the deep, ever-passing Congo River.

"Foda-se! Even shitting attracts so many mosquitoes! I'm sick of this life!"

Another voice came from nearby, belonging to another captain's guard. He held a rope with one hand while furiously slapping his rear with the other. Tropical mosquitoes, drawn by the scent, converged and persistently tried for a more intimate contact but were impossible to dispel.

"Damn it! Tulio, the food tonight must've been rotten! My legs are about to go numb from squatting!"

Aboard a seafaring ship, eating moldy food was common. But if one got diarrhea, that was "bad mold."

"Martin and the others got diarrhea too, they've been running out all night long! Damn Head Cook Haroldo! I'm going to smear the rope I wiped my ass with across his fat face!"

Yes, please don't be shocked; the toilet tool on the ship was indeed a rope, and quite a sturdy hemp rope at that. Using it would typically be a very "raw" experience, but the sailors had gotten used to it over time. If they were out at sea, they would improvise with various freshly caught sea creatures. The soft feeling of those was comfortably unforgettable.

"Ah! When can we head back! Endless trees, an endless river, endless swarms of mosquitoes, crew members continually tainted by demons... This green hell is like a nightmare!"

"Shh! Sounds like someone's coming."

The conversation between the two captain's guards came to an abrupt halt. They both looked ahead, watching several torches flickering closer. The guards grabbed the ropes with one hand, the other hand resting on the daggers at their waists. Even while relieving themselves, they hadn't put down their weapons.

"Diego?"

One guard called out cautiously.

"It's me!"

The torches grew closer, revealing Sailor Chief Diego's face, flanked by two other sailors on night duty. Diego's face was etched with suffering. He walked briskly, hunched over in pain and clutching his abdomen with his right hand.

"Come on, guys, make some room. Let me squeeze in a spot. Foda-se! Damn Head Cook, what kind of shitty dinner did he make! I'm gonna stuff his head up his ass!"

"Haha!"

The two captain's guards relaxed and removed their hands from their daggers, laughing in agreement. Then one guard, eyeing Diego as he approached quickly, muttered discontentedly.

"Foda-se! Can't you set up your own plank?"

"Ah, I just can't wait any longer!"

Mid-conversation, Diego had already come within a couple of steps with his men. The torchlight grew brighter, and as the talking guard stared at Diego, his expression suddenly changed! He clearly saw a metallic gleam flashing in Diego's right hand, which was pressed against his stomach.

"You!...Ergh! Heh heh..."

At the guard's hushed cry, Diego stepped forward menacingly. His right hand, swift as lightning, extended the dagger hidden in his grasp, then violently slashed across the other man's neck!

"Slash!"

Blood spurted instantly. The guard's cry choked in his throat, turning into a haunting groan. Diego swung the dagger again, severing the fingers that clutched the rope, then kicked the guard in front of him into the Congo River. Almost simultaneously, the two sailors on night duty took out the other guard, followed by a "plop" in the water.

The pungent smell of blood spread through the air, as large swarms of mosquitoes rushed toward the river surface. The "driftwood" floating in the river also came to life, opening their gaping maws and swimming over. Within just a few minutes, the guards' bodies had disappeared.

Watching the blood-stained water, Diego grinned, sticking out his tongue to lick the blood off his dagger, shouting in excitement.

"Ah, I just can't wait any longer!"

In the vast night, the fires blazed dimly. The crew was in motion, and soon enough, a sailor with a joyous expression hurried over.

"Boss, the other four captain's guards have been taken care of! Ivo has locked the Sailing Master Reinaldo and that scholar in their cabin! Matim and Bruno have secured the lower deck, leaving a few to keep watch. Now everyone's gathered near the deck entrance, waiting for you!"

"Haha, I just can't wait any longer!"

Diego licked his tongue excitedly, scampering like a wolfhound to join them. Quickly, he saw the four leaders above the deck entrance. Bruno looked solemn, Matim was all smiles, Ivo appeared anxious, and Haroldo still cowered. The remaining dozen or so sailors waited nervously below deck.

Chapter 679: The End of 1485, Mutiny!_2

"It's surprisingly smooth sailing! Ivo did a great job, and Haroldo has made a significant contribution!"

Matim patted the head chef's shoulder, laughing as he spoke. The captain's six guards were supposed to be the toughest to deal with, but after Haroldo tampered with their dinner, they became like lambs to the slaughter, not even making much noise.

"The crew all want to turn back. When they heard we were going to 'persuade' the captain, there was hardly any resistance!"

Bruno said with some emotion. There were originally a dozen or so sailors on the lower deck, but once the purpose of the confrontation was explained, most of them remained neutral on the spot, and some even wanted to join us on the spot.

"Ha! The captain is deserted by his supporters, he brought this upon himself!"

Matim chuckled, looking at everyone.

"Everyone's here, let's go! Bruno, you lead the way, go and 'persuade' the captain!"

Bruno nodded and walked out first, with everyone following behind him.

Not far away, in the narrow captain's cabin, Diogo was hunched over, lying on a wooden bed covered with soft cloth. This was a privilege reserved for the captain, while everyone else could only sleep on the deck or in hammocks. At this moment, the captain furrowed his brow deeply, his stomach rumbling like a tempestuous sea.

"Tulio! Tulio!"

After shouting, there was silence outside the captain's chamber, with no response. Diogo listened, hearing only the sound of the Congo River's flowing water and some miscellaneous noises. He held his stomach with one hand, and continued shouting.

"Martin! Martin!"

An unusual silence, with no voice answering. Diogo struggled to sit up, staring at the bucket in the corner of the room. His stomach was especially troublesome tonight, and the small bucket had been filled to the brim with filth. A pungent odor permeated the cabin. At this embarrassing time, the guards were nowhere to be found, and nobody had come to replace the bucket.

"Guard! Guard!"

Diogo's voice was tinged with anger and urgency. He clenched his teeth and slowly stood up from the bed. A sharp pain shot through his knee. The Demon's curse had already penetrated deep into his bones, robbing this lion-like man of his former strength. In agony, he moved slowly toward the corner bucket.

"Respected captain!"

A familiar voice suddenly rose from outside the door, accompanied by a "knock knock" on the door. Diogo paused, then sat back down on the bed. He straightened his back, his hand resting on the short sword on his waist, and asked in a deep voice.

"Bruno? What is it?"

"Captain, I have a suggestion I'd like to make."

"It's too late, wait until tomorrow!"

Diogo's voice was calm and authoritative.

"Right, call my guards. They should be near the wooden boards at the bow or stern."

"Respected captain, I'm sorry, but I'm afraid we can't wait until tomorrow."

Bruno held up a torch, shaking his head. He glanced back at the few tense faces behind him, then forcefully pushed open the wooden door to the captain's cabin.

"Creak!"

The door opened, and a pungent smell wafted from the captain's cabin. Under the light of the torch, Diogo looked furious, his hair and beard bristling. He was like a disturbed lion, glaring fiercely over.

"Noble Knight Bruno! What are you doing?"

"Captain, I want to give you a suggestion."

"Get out!"

Diogo bellowed, his voice commanding, intimidating to the core.

Bruno stood in place, silently bowing his head slightly. Then, illuminated by the torchlight, the figures behind Bruno emerged: the fierce Sailor Chief Diego, the smiling Quartermaster Matim, the cowering head chef Haroldo, and the evasive carpenter Ivo.

Diogo's heart plummeted into the abyss. In his twenty-odd years of sailing, he had encountered such scenes several times, but each had been suppressed by him! A mighty rage rose in his heart. For a moment, the captain forgot his pain and stood up fiercely, drawing the short sword from his waist and pointing it towards the people at the door.

"What are you doing! Thinking of mutiny? Guard! Guard!"

The ailing captain stood up suddenly, startling everyone at the door into taking a step back. Then, Sailor Chief Diego, irritated and ashamed, swiftly drew his curved blade, pointing it at the captain as well.

"Diogo, you dying old dog, still trying to scare people!"

Quartermaster Matim also quietly drew his short sword, his gaze fixed on the captain like a venomous snake.

"Captain, there's no one left on this ship who supports you! You'd better listen to us!"

Bruno respectfully bowed his head to the captain.

"Respected captain, we mean no harm. We only wish to represent all the crew members, and persuade you to turn back!"

"Turn back?... Bru... no..."

Diogo, grinding his teeth, uttered Bruno's name, deliberately enunciating each syllable. His gaze was fixed solely on Bruno, the relative from his family he had personally promoted, the Noble Knight in whom he had placed great hopes. At this moment, his eyes were so profound, filled with complex emotions.

"How disappointing you are!"

On hearing this, Bruno's body shook, his knees weakened. The captain's gaze made him feel utterly ashamed. Something he had steadfastly believed in for so long seemed to shatter in an instant inside him. The light of the Holy Mother receded in that moment, and the boundless darkness, whispering with the voice of the Demon, enveloped him deeply.

"Fuck! You damned old thing, still pretending at a time like this?!"

Sailor Chief Diego cursed, then suddenly made his move. He parried Diogo's short sword with his own curved blade, then raised his right leg and kicked fiercely at Diogo's thigh.

Chapter 680: The End of 1485, Rebellion!_3

"Uh..."

Diogo groaned in pain and could no longer hold himself up, falling backward onto the ground. His head rested against the wooden bed, exposing his sun-darkened neck.

Diego sneered, raising the scimitar high, ready to hack at the neck.

"Bang!"

Bruno drew his dagger and blocked the scimitar with a swift motion.

"Diego, what are you doing!"

"Humph, what does it look like? I'm going to kill him!"

"We agreed, the captain cannot be killed, only imprisoned!"

Bruno roared in anger.

"We still need him to command the other two ships!"

"Right, we can't kill the captain!"

Carpenter Ivo wielded a shortsword in one hand, and oddly enough, held a shield in the other—something rarely seen on the ship. It was likely he had made it himself.

"Diego, spare the captain's life for now!"

Matim's eyes flickered for a moment, also speaking up to persuade.

"Humph!"

Diego resentfully sheathed the scimitar and then suddenly lifted his foot, viciously kicking Diogo in the stomach.

"Diogo, you used to order me around like a dog. Today, you'll be a dead dog!"

"Uh, ah..."

Diogo curled up on the deck in agony. His stomach had taken a heavy blow and, unable to bear it any longer, he let out a series of strange noises, followed by another series. Then, an even more pungent odor began to emanate from the lower half of the captain.

The crew stared wide-eyed at the miserable and weakened Diogo. At that moment, the once awe-inspiring and imperious image of the captain completely shattered in their minds.

"As hearts turn away, the majestic lion collapses with a thunderous fall, becoming a pitiful old dog..."

Head Chef Harold murmured to himself and then quietly retreated to the back.

"Diego!"

Bruno bellowed, violently swinging his dagger and forcing Diego back two steps. Then, he cautiously looked over at Diogo.

"Captain, you..."

"Get out!!"

The captain managed to straighten his back, shouting with effort, even with a faint hint of a cry in his voice.

The crew glanced at each other and stepped back a few. Bruno then closed the door to the captain's quarters, preserving the last shred of the captain's dignity.

"Haha! Poor dead dog!"

Sailor Chief Diego shook his head, laughing manically.

"What now?"

Carpenter Ivo swung the shield restlessly. The events were unfolding differently than he had expected.

Quartermaster Matim pointed at the captain's quarters, then glanced at Bruno.

Bruno nodded, shouting through the wooden door.

"Captain, we shall follow your orders and command a return voyage!"

It was as deathly silent in the captain's quarters. Only after a long while did a low voice respond.

"Where are my guards?"

"They...all accidentally fell overboard tonight."

Another lengthy silence followed. Then came Diogo's calm reply.

"Since that's the case, why bother asking me about matters on board."

Bruno and Matim exchanged glances before Matim gestured towards the stamp. Bruno then shouted again.

"Captain, we will assign two new guards to you. Please lend us the emblem of the Royal Knight!"

After a while, there was a rustling sound from inside the captain's quarters. Soon, there was a thud against the wooden door.

Bruno cracked open the door of the captain's quarters just enough to reach in and pick up the small emblem from the floor. On the golden emblem was the insignia of the Portuguese Royal Family and Diogo's family crest.

The men looked at the emblem symbolizing the captain's authority, their faces lighting up with joy.

Bruno stared at it for a while, his thoughts tumultuous. After a moment, he instructed.

"I'll go draft the orders for the other two ships. Matim, you go notify the crew about the captain's command to return home!"

"Right! Diego, let's go!"

Matim nodded with a smile and departed with Diego.

Bruno cast his gaze down, clutching the golden emblem tightly in his hand. It was a true symbol of power, the supreme honor of a knight, and what he had yearned for in the first half of his life. It wasn't until much later that Bruno opened his eyes. He turned to look at Ivo beside him.

"Ivo, would you arrange for someone to take care of the captain? He ate the food specially prepared by Haroldo tonight... It'd be best to bring along a barrel too."

Ivo bowed his head, performing a gesture of respect due to nobility, and hurried off.

"Haroldo, my friend."

Not until Ivo was a good distance away did Bruno extend his hand, revealing the golden emblem.

"What do you think of this emblem?"

"It's good, very tempting."

The head chef Haroldo smiled.

"So, how should I come to possess it?"

Bruno asked softly, his expression solemn.

"My friend, if you truly wish to possess it..."

Haroldo's eyes glittered, he hesitated for a moment but still spoke.

"Then, it would be best if you were the last noble sailor left on this ship."

Upon hearing this, Bruno cast his gaze downward. Before him, the night was deep, and clouds churned heavily. The darkness grew denser, with not a sliver of daylight to be seen.

The next day, a drizzling rain fell from the sky. After sailing east for several months, the Portuguese expedition fleet finally turned around, heading back toward the mouth of the Congo River.

The fates of this world are always unpredictable. Had they delayed just a few days more, continued forward another hundred miles, they would have discovered that the source of the rapid flows was an impassable great waterfall, known in later times as Victoria Falls. There, even the most resolute captain would have had no choice but to turn back, and mutiny might never have occurred.

The day of the return voyage was like a festival, with the cheers of the sailors echoing along the entire river. They praised the merciful Holy Mother, the enlightened captain. They lauded the respected Bruno, the second mate, and the brave Sailor Chief Diego. Nobody cared that the captain's guards had vanished overnight; nor did anyone mind that the nobleman's son Reinaldo had suddenly died a violent death.

After all, there were too many deaths on this deadly voyage. When they set sail from Elmina Castle, the five ships had well over two hundred and fifty sailors. But now, there were barely over a hundred left.

The Congo River rolled westward, joining the vast South Atlantic. The fleet sped up as it followed the current. Signs of human life reappeared amidst the dense jungle. The Portuguese flag waved from the mast, with seabirds circling around. The land of demons gradually disappeared behind them, while the hope for life was right in front of them!