

Civilization 691

Chapter 691: Three Generals and the Legion

The setting sun dipped toward the end of the Great River, infusing the red and yellow heavens and earth, casting a lengthy silhouette of the Rivermouth Fortress. The twilight rested on the center of the fortress where a magnificent residence stood. Several hundred samurai in copper armor guarded it closely, with dozens of Guajili chieftains waiting at the entrance.

The residence had spacious front and rear courtyards. In the front yard, bonfires were set up, cooking turkeys, roasting deer legs, steaming red crabs, and boiling fish soup. Dozens of skilled servants were bustling about preparing for the banquet. The scent of spices mixed with the aroma of food, wafting afar, tantalizing the palate.

The fragrance drifted to the back yard, blending with the rich scent of flowers. Within the garden in the back yard, early spring flowers bloomed in full glory. Rare American pouch orchids produced pouch-like lips, radiating exceptionally vivid blossoms that spread a perfume-like delightful fragrance. Beautiful blue-capped hummingbirds were attracted to the scent. They flitted lightly among the flowers, hovering before the pistils, like dazzling streaks of color.

Xiulote, wearing leather armor and bearing a gentle smile, watched the hummingbirds in the garden. Several people stood behind him, accompanying him in flower-viewing. The noise from the front yard occasionally carried over, making the back yard seem all the more serene.

"The hummingbird is symbolic of the War God, and priests have studied them carefully. They possess sharp beaks with saw-like serrations. It is said that the earliest obsidian clubs were modeled after the mouth of a hummingbird."

Xiulote turned around, his smile warm like a priest scholar's.

"In regard to hummingbirds, the males typically have vibrant head feathers, while the females have more modest head feathers. However, they have another interesting trait. Some females, to avoid the attention of males while feeding on nectar, intentionally grow vibrant head feathers to masquerade as males."

At this point, Xiulote paused, then pointed to a dazzling hummingbird in front of him, asking the Red Frog Chieftain Keka.

"Keka, do you think this hummingbird is a male or a female?"

"Uh..."

Keka, adorned in the attire of the Alliance and wearing an amulet of the Sun God on his neck, stared at the tiny hummingbird for a long time with wide eyes.

"Great Chief, is this a female?"

"Are you sure?"

"Ah, is it a male?"

Xiulote smiled. He extended his hand again, pointing to the flecks of yellow feathers on the hummingbird's head.

"You see, it has these yellow feathers on its head, not purely blue. So, it is a female."

"Uh... Great Chief, you are wise."

Keka, gazing at the hummingbird, barely larger than a finger, struggled to discern the few yellow spots and then responded hesitantly.

"Keka, these are common knowledge for the Chief God Priest."

Xiulote's expression turned serious.

"Have you been diligently learning from the priests lately?"

"Great Chief... I learned, only... I forget after I learn it."

Upon hearing about learning from the priests, Keka's face soured. Holding a spear for half his life and shooting a bow for over a decade, he had just realized that there were things more exhausting than combat: memorizing priestly knowledge and learning pictographic writing.

By Keka's side, Red Monkey Chieftain Ozoma snickered to himself, while Black Wolf Toltec looked on with approval.

"Oh? How can that be? In these past few months, Ozoma has outdone you by far, even the guiding priests are full of praise."

Xiulote glanced at the two chieftains with a faint smile.

"Keka, how about I send you to the Divine Might university in the capital city for a good five years of study? How does that sound? Ozoma, you are exceptionally talented, you come along and study for just three years. When you both emerge, you will just in time become esteemed Chief God Priests, governing a domain."

"Ah! Great Chief!"

At these words, Ozoma's smile froze. He quickly fell to his knees, pleading with the King.

"I only wish to don armor and wield a spear for you, to fight valiantly!"

"Indeed! Great Chief, Keka does not wish to be a priest, only to lead your armies into battle!"

Keka also hastily kneeled, his face filled with trepidation.

"Oh? You both wish to lead troops rather than become priests?"

"Only wish to lead troops! Great Chief, you've made me a promise before!"

Keka clenched his teeth, boldly raising his head to shout. Ozoma stayed silent but nodded while kneeling.

"Indeed. I did promise you, and it's not impossible to let you continue leading troops."

Xiulote nodded slightly, a hint of difficulty on his face.

"However, I have great need of the Guajili warriors. They must form a formal legion and come under the directive of the Kingdom. We cannot continue with this disorganized and lax discipline..."

Upon hearing this, Ozoma instantly understood. He pursed his lips, cast a covert glance at the Great Chief's expression, and then prostrated himself.

"Great Chief, you are my Wolf King! I will obey your commands in how to reform the tribes!"

"Hmm."

Xiulote nodded, then turned to Keka.

"Keka, what do you say?"

Keka hesitated. He looked at Ozoma and then to the nearby Black Wolf General. Toltec scowled fiercely, his hand pressing down on his war club. Keka was startled and promptly threw himself to the ground.

"I will follow your orders in everything, Great Chief!"

"Good!"

The King revealed a smile on his face. He stepped forward, grasped the hair of the two men, and then issued his orders.

"Keka, Ozoma, all your tribal warriors are to be incorporated into the banner troops!... Among the fifteen banner troops, the Red Frog and Red Monkey Tribes can each occupy a four-thousand-man banner troop, with you serving as the leaders of your respective banner troops, while the priests will be dispatched by the Alliance. As for the surplus population, new banner troops must be established!... Each banner troop provides four hundred adult males, forming an army of six thousand, to establish the Guajili Legion, trained and commanded by the officers of the Kingdom. You will serve as two Vice Legion Commanders, each leading three thousand men. As for the Legion Commander..."

Xiulote looked toward Toltec. Toltec shuddered. He was excited and seemed to have some inkling.

"The Legion Commander will be Black Wolf Toltec!"

"Your Highness! Thank you for your forgiveness! I, Toltec, will serve you unto death!"

Black Wolf suddenly knelt down, his forehead thumping to the ground three times, until a red mark formed.

"Black Wolf, my beloved general. Rise!"

Xiulote personally helped Black Wolf to his feet, speaking softly.

"In the northern campaign against the Red Fox Valley, you fought bravely until you were wounded and could fight no more, and there was nothing wrong with that. In my heart, you have always been a peerless warrior! However, Black Wolf, from now on, you must take on more of a Commander-in-Chief's responsibilities. As the Commander-in-Chief, you must focus on the war's overall situation, plan for overall gains and losses, and not throw away your life lightly!..."

"These past few months, I did not summon you. On one hand, it was to let you heal in peace, and on the other hand, it was to let you calm your mind and properly reflect on your gains and losses. I heard that you patiently read books in the camp, and I am very pleased. To bear great responsibilities, one must go through this level of tempering... Next, I will convene the generals to collectively review the gains and

losses of the northern campaign and summarize war experiences. You must be present, speak up, and patiently learn and reflect!"

After hearing these words, Toltec nodded emphatically, a wetness in his eyes.

"Your Highness, I will listen to you!"

"Good, Black Wolf! Be neither proud nor impatient, neither dispirited nor discouraged. He whose chest harbors thunder, yet whose countenance is like a placid lake, can be a leader of legions! Regarding you, I have always had high hopes."

The King smiled warmly and patted Black Wolf on the shoulder. Then he turned to the two chieftains. Ozoma quickly bowed his head, tucking away the envy on his face.

"Keka, Ozoma, rise as well! From now on, you must lead your troops well and follow the commands of Black Wolf, the Legion Commander!"

"As you command, Great Chief."

"By your command, Great Chief."

Xiulote watched the three men, lost in thought for a while, before slowly speaking.

"Black Wolf, since you are to be the Legion Commander, you must have a direct command over your troops. I grant you permission to take five hundred throwing vanguard from the Imperial Guard Legion, and I allot a quota of one thousand Prepetcha Samurai, selection from the Kingdom's garrisoned troops."

The majority of the Kingdom's garrisoned troops were from the surrendered Tarasco army, which included a not insignificant number of samurai.

"As for the rest... Keka, am I right in remembering that it was you who wounded Black Wolf?"

Xiulote gazed at Keka, asking calmly.

"Ah! Great Chief, truth be told, it was actually Ivican from the Red Fox Tribe and Amoxltli from the Red Crow Tribe who really wounded Black Wolf. I just..."

Keka spoke with some bitterness. At the time, to inspire his tribe, he had taken credit for wounding Black Wolf, but now, it backfired on him and he was at a loss for words.

"Keka, I know you have four hundred red-haired hunters. Hmm, give two hundred to the Black Wolf Legion Commander, as compensation."

The King smiled lightly, his words leaving no room for refusal.

"Ozoma, and you as well, hand over a hundred red-haired hunters. Furthermore, conscript two hundred red-haired from among the tribes to form an elite unit of five hundred for Black Wolf's direct command."

With this, the Guajili Legion would have a full complement of eight thousand men. The Legion Commander Black Wolf had direct command of two thousand elites and led three thousand Canine Descendants from both the Red Frog and Red Monkey, essentially maintaining balance.

Xiulote waited for a moment, until both Keka and Ozoma had nodded in acquiescence, before he again cried out.

"Witnessed by the Chief Divine, the three of you will swear in my presence! You will support each other in the legion, unite in one spirit, and never again harbor any grudges between you!"

At his words, Black Wolf's eyebrows lifted, Keka's eyes widened, and Ozoma's gaze flickered. The three looked at each other, at a loss for words for a moment.

As the sun set in the west, twilight filled the courtyard, and hummingbirds fluttered among the flowers. The King's gaze brought a heavy pressure, and Bertade looked on with equal gravity.

Black Wolf closed his eyes, taking his time before he opened them again. He exhaled deeply and finally raised his hand to take the oath.

"Witnessed by the Chief Divine! I, Black Wolf Torc!"

Keka's eyes remained wide, glancing now at the God of Death Great Chief, then at the other two, before speaking haltingly.

"Witnessed by the Chief Divine! I, Red Frog Keka!"

Ozoma lowered his gaze, clenched his fist over his chest, his expression one of sincere and devout piety.

"Witnessed by the Chief Divine! I, Red Monkey Ozoma!"

"I will take on the responsibilities of the legion, obey the orders of Your Highness (Great Chief), support them, unite in one spirit, and never again harbor any grudges between us!"

After a brief pause, all three spoke in unison, pledging their sacred oaths in the presence of the King!

"Excellent! Very well! I entrust the new legion to you three!"

Xiulote laughed with satisfaction. His gaze swept across the assembly of generals, their expressions varied, but he felt immense joy within himself.

"Haha, let's go to the front court! The banquet has long been prepared. Let the chiefs waiting outside come in and take their seats! Tonight, we feast heartily on meat, drink merrily, sing with abandon, and will not return until we're all drunk!"

The King's laughter soared to the sky, and the sun comfortably dipped into the Great Lake. Night fell, the breeze billowed, and the blazing bonfires lit the front courtyard, filling the air with enticing aromas.

The musicians played uplifting tunes on bamboo flutes, and girls danced merrily. Commanders and chieftains sat around the bonfire, saluting the Great Chief. Then, the grand banquet began. Everyone drank deeply, reveled through the night, basking in the joy of the evening, until they were blissfully unconscious!

Chapter 692: The King's Life and Overview of the Kingdom

The tropical April marks the end of the dry season. Cloudy weather gradually increases, and the air carries a hint of moisture. As the foremost event of the year, the busy spring plowing is about to begin.

Waves of messengers ran throughout the Kingdom of the Lake. Heading north, they passed through fields teeming with life and lakes dotted with fishing boats, till they finally reached the Rivermouth fortress, delivering reports from all over the kingdom into the hands of the king.

In the central courtyard of the fortress, Xiulote sat cross-legged, flipping through documents from different regions.

Calling them 'documents' might be a bit of a misnomer; they more closely resembled illustrated books with captions. The resilient bark paper was painted with figures in various actions—some holding weapons, some with farming tools, others clutching cotton or corn, some mining stones, others smelting metals, and some praying. Beside each figure, there were various counting symbols and native pseudoscripts, with a few boxed Chinese characters. The kingdom's written language had been popularized for less than two years, and even the simplified native pseudoscripts were only mastered by some priests, with even fewer familiar with Chinese characters.

Since literacy had not yet become widespread, the 'illustrated books' were somewhat voluminous. Large scrolls of documents piled up on the two desks in front of the king—one pile reviewed, the other awaiting inspection.

The two desks were short, solid wooden stumps, hard in texture, dark green in base color, and with unique, naturally occurring patterns on the wood surface that varied with the grain. At first glance, the two solid desks resembled dark gemstones, exuding a sense of weight and antiquity. In fact, due to the wood's hardness, the kingdom's craftsmen used methods for processing gemstones to polish them. This wood would become the priceless and treasured Mexican blackwood, known as ebony and persimmon wood, in later generations.

In this era, persimmon wood was considered quite valuable. It had a peculiar fragrance and was endowed with religious significance, often planted near temples. The persimmon wood featured varied textures and its dark colors gradually diffused like the surface of satin or a naturally formed inkwash painting.

Xiulote was particularly fond of the pattern of this wood, so he had the craftsmen create some furniture from his memories to place in his living quarters. These pieces reminded him of his distant homeland. After reviewing documents for a while, he reached out and picked up a deep purple teacup from a small ebony table next to him.

The deep purple teacup was newly fired by the official kilns of the Capital City. To supply the Royal Family, craftsmen used heated charcoal to produce stoneware, something between pottery and porcelain. Although Xiulote had pointed the way, the porcelain technique was still a long way off, with even glazing technology still in exploration, producing only occasionally some fine stoneware.

"The unglazed fine stoneware does remind me of Yixing's purple clay pottery," he mused.

Xiulote examined the beautiful texture on the surface of the teacup and its subtle purple sheen, his face breaking into a smile. Under the guidance of the Divine Revelation Priest, the kingdom's pottery craftsmanship was making slow progress, just like other handicrafts. He then lowered his head and took a sip of the kingdom's specialty hibiscus tea. The tart taste immediately reverberated in his mouth, accompanied by a faint floral fragrance, refreshing his spirit.

Hibiscus, also known as Roselle (Flor de Jamaica), is mainly produced in tropical Africa, but is also native to America, especially the variety from Jamaica is the most famous. In later-day Mexico, it is a common beverage found in any market, where the dried hibiscus tea is visible. It also has a slight stimulating effect, which the king used to alleviate fatigue.

A few steps away, Bertade also sat cross-legged with a bronze sword by his side. In front of him was a desk, upon which lay paper, pen, and seal. The political structure of the kingdom was rough but streamlined, and important matters were decided by the king with a single word.

"Bertade, reports have arrived at the Palace from everywhere, updating on the population count and preparations for spring farming. Only the report from Zicao County in the south is vague."

Xiulote frowned, tossing the wooden tablet portfolio in his hand onto the desk. This portfolio was still in the traditional style of the Alliance and the Kingdom—bulky wooden boards with abstract drawings, and a few ancient pictographs without specific numbers or explanations. The king glanced at it and was immediately displeased.

"Your Highness, Etalik, who is stationed in Kulamo City, wrote that the Great Nobility of Zicao County appear submissive on the surface but actually create many obstacles to the kingdom's administration. Led by the noble families of Guramo and Zotol, they secretly band together. With their interference, the spread of the Chief Divine faith is extremely slow, and the priests are unable to take control of the villages, often under attack by bandits..."

Bertade spoke calmly, detailing the situation in the south.

"Last year, when the army campaigned to the north, the southern nobility already showed signs of unrest and held frequent gatherings. Citing a flood in the Tarsas River as an excuse, they reduced their tribute following the autumn harvest. Fortunately, Ezpan's second Spear Legion is stationed just south of the Capital Region, preventing the southern nobility from taking any significant actions."

"Guramo of the Zicao Family, Zotol of the Palm Family... Are they honored nobles who surrendered after the western campaign?"

Hearing this, Xiulote asked in a cold voice.

In the Nava language, "Zotol" means palm, and "Guramo" refers to the Zicao hibiscus. Zicao County was named after Kulamo, showing the long history of these families.

"Exactly, they were among the Great Nobility granted lands at the frontier during the early establishment of the Tarasco Kingdom. Through over two hundred years of inheritance, both families have deep roots in Zicao County and are intermarried with many other nobility."

Bertade pulled out a scroll of maps and unfurled it to examine.

"Your Highness, after last year's autumn harvest, the population of Zicao County, which numbers over 200,000, paid only a quarter of the Tribute to the Kingdom compared to the Capital Region. The Great

Nobility only paid some token tributes. It is said that during the era of the Tarasco Kingdom, this was already the case. They neither paid Tribute nor taxes, controlling the populace and the land, merely providing military service."

"Hmm, I understand," Xiulote replied, lowering his eyes and nodding without speaking further. The power of the southern nobility had always been etched in his mind; it was just that the sudden outbreak of the northern campaign had taken almost a year, delaying his previous plans.

After finishing his hibiscus tea and refilling his cup, all the documents had been reviewed. The King then spread out a new map of the Kingdom and patiently began to mark down the reports from various regions on the map.

It had been two years since the founding of the Kingdom of the Lake, and the situation in each county had been sorted out.

In the northern Rivermouth County, after settling 60,000 Canine Descendants, the population had reached around 210,000, all firmly under the control of the Preaching Priests. The influence of the nobility in this land had been the most thoroughly cleansed, so the vast majority of the populace had been incorporated into the Kingdom's civilian settlement system. The farmers paid a third of their produce in taxes each year and complied with the labor draft.

The belief in the Chief Divine spread quickly in Rivermouth County, with compost and new agricultural tools becoming commonplace. Last year's autumn harvest increased by 20%, with each Milpa producing nearly 100 pounds of corn and beans, and 200-250 pounds of pumpkin. In this way, just three acres of land could roughly sustain one able-bodied adult. With the current land productivity, if the Kingdom reduced the tax from thirty to twenty-five percent, each household could afford to raise an additional child.

After pondering for a while, Xiulote made a note on Rivermouth County, "Pop. 210k, Able-bodied 50k, Directly under the Kingdom, Major grain-producing county, Lerma River shipyard".

Next was the Patzcuaro Lake region in the Capital Region, with a population of around 280,000. As Sage Jatili became involved in politics, more and more Prepetcha elites joined the Kingdom's governance, managing every aspect of the Capital Region. As a precondition for the participation of Prepetcha elites in politics, the belief in the Chief Divine had completely covered the Kingdom's upper echelons.

The Capital Region established a large number of military settlements, gathered the Kingdom's finest groups of craftsmen, and vigorously mined the copper and coal mines to the southwest of Qinganbate, even establishing the Kingdom's first university.

The Capital City of Qinchongcan was the political and religious center, as well as a hub for workshops and culture. South of the Capital Region, the city of Ihuatzio was an important commercial center, the largest in the world for copper mining and gemstone trade. It could be said that the output from the Capital Region supplied the Kingdom's standing army and provided the best bronze equipment.

Xiulote drew several circles, then annotated, "Pop. 280k, Able-bodied 70k, Directly under the Kingdom, Copper mines, Coal mines, Bronze, Gemstones, Workshops, Markets, University."

Then, the vast southern region of Zicao County was rich in precipitation and stored copper and silver, yet it was where the Kingdom's rule was weakest. Zicao County's southern border was marked by the Tlaxcala River, whose branches irrigated the lands along their course, offering excellent agricultural conditions, as well as plentiful fishing and mining resources that had yet to be developed. The county seat, Kulamo City, lay along the Tlaxcala River and was an important center for trade, frequented heavily by southern tribes.

Recalling the estimates from Etalik, Xiulote wrote, "Pop. 200k, Able-bodied 40k, Nobility autonomy, specifics unknown. Foreign trade center, seaport."

West of the Tlaxcala River led to an outlet that flowed into the Pacific Ocean, a mere three hundred miles from Zicao County's Kulamo City, the nearest channel to the ocean. At this thought, his mind was flooded with plans for exploration, and the fleeting image of a person. Moments later, the King looked up slightly, turning his gaze northward.

The territories of the three Otomi states in the north had already been marked, with Otapan State "Pop. 200k, Able-bodied 30k, Nobility autonomy, Mountain city ancestral land", Guamare State "Pop. 140k, Able-bodied 20k, Nobility autonomy, Western Guamal Canine Descendants." The furthest north, Pamus State, was "Pop. 80k, Able-bodied 15k, Semi-autonomous, Wilderness outpost."

Even though these figures were estimates, they demonstrated the Kingdom's control over the local areas. All in all, if the vassaled Otomi forces were also included in the Kingdom of the Lake, then the nascent Kingdom would have over 1.1 million people and more than 200,000 able-bodied adults, spanning 500 miles east to west, and nearly a thousand miles north to south!

Ambition burned fiercely in the King's heart. His expression changed as he couldn't help but stretch out his hand, touching the Lake Capital City of Tenochtitlan to the east, which had the world's largest population, the most fertile valleys, and the most powerful Alliance.

Then, his hand gradually moved west, caressing the Chapala Lake Region, an area with equally rich soil that would be known in later times as the "River of Stones", the "Valley of Fortresses", the location of the great Guadalajara metropolitan area. Finally, the King brought his pen down and drew a bold, red circle around Kulamo City.

"After the autumn harvest, I shall visit this place!"

Chapter 693: Northern Shipyard, Wind Canoe and Viking Longship!

By the end of April, the warm and bright spring weather fostered growth everywhere. Columns of smoke from burning fields rose in various parts of the Kingdom. Under the guidance of the village priests, farmers leveled the land, prepared to plant grain, repaired their tools, and busily engaged in various spring farming preparations. Some villages, eager to meet the demanding cultivation quotas, had even begun planting.

In this busy season, Xiulote was not idle. Accompanied by two hundred armored personal guards, he left the Rivermouth fortress and headed straight to the shipyard by the riverbank.

Not long ago, the northern shipyard sent some good news. After over a year of exploration and manufacturing, the first oar-and-sail ship of the Kingdom had finally been launched!

The King traveled hastily, stepping on the spring grass, and soon arrived at the Rivermouth shipyard.

The shipyard craftsmen had been waiting outside, with the shipwright master Pucuta leading them, his hair graying but still wearing a necklace of obsidian and dressed in a Divine Revelation Priest's robe. Indeed, since the establishment of the northern shipyard, Pucuta, as the most senior master shipwright, had been promoted to a Second Level Scholarly Divine Revelation Priest. He practically led the shipbuilding efforts in the north, becoming a member of the Kingdom's rulers.

"Most High Majesty, Pucuta greets you!"

Pucuta knelt down in salute, and the shipyard craftsmen followed suit, all kneeling at once. The front row of senior shipwrights also wore robes of First Level Explorer Divine Revelation Priests. With this status, they could reduce their taxes and forced labor, enjoying a position equal to the village's preaching priests.

Xiulote looked at the many excited shipwrights and nodded with a smile.

"All rise! Where is the newly launched ship?"

Pucuta smoothly rose from the ground. He straightened his back and adjusted his High Priest robe. The robe was plain, simple and elegant, with the Chief Divine's hummingbird emblem on the left chest and the two square small characters "Scholar" embroidered on the right chest, signifying his status as a Second Level Priest. The senior shipwrights behind him also stood up, revealing the neatly embroidered "Explorer" on their chests.

The Divine Revelation robes were, of course, Xiulote's design. In fact, when designing the robes for the Divine Revelation Priests, the first symbol that came to his mind was a blue "beaker," and the second symbol was an "atom" with tracks around it. These symbols, as emblems of scientific research, represented the King's ardent hopes for the Priesthood.

The reason he had overcome resistance to establish the system of Divine Revelation Priests was to attract craftsmen and scholars from various industries, enabling them to gain wealth and status through technological research and becoming a driving force for the development of productive forces.

Pucuta confidently extended his hand, pointing out towards Lake Cuitzeo outside the shipyard.

"Your Majesty, please follow me!"

The crowd moved, and they quickly arrived at the lakeside. The first thing that caught Xiulote's eye was a twin-hulled outrigger canoe. It was assembled from two smaller dugout canoes with a wooden beam deck meticulously joined between them.

"Your Majesty, this Wind Outrigger Canoe is approximately 7-8 meters in length, and with the two canoes' decks, it spans 2-3 meters in width, capable of carrying 24 rowers. If additional decks are added, it can carry several tons."

At this, Xiulote nodded. He pondered for a moment, then asked,

"The carrying capacity of this Wind Outrigger Canoe seems similar to that of the Kingdom's large dugout war canoes."

"Indeed, it is!"

Pucuta nodded. He gestured from the bow to the stern of the boat, explaining,

"However, this twin-hull does not require large timbers. The Kingdom's large dugout canoes need strong timbers over 15 meters tall and 2-3 meters in diameter, and the preparation of such wood is extraordinarily lengthy. These twin-hulls, on the other hand, only require smaller timbers of 7-8 meters. Additionally, the design of these twin-hulls makes the vessels faster and more stable, and they draw very little water."

As he spoke, Pucuta stepped forward onto the twin-hull, carefully explaining to the King,

"Your Majesty, please observe! The base of this ship consists of two hollowed-out tree trunks made into dugout canoes. Then, on the outside of each canoe, an outrigger for the oars is designed. Moving on, the two boats are connected by wooden beams, joined with mortise and copper nails. After completion, a deck is laid between the two boats, forward and aft masts are erected, secured with rigging, and sails made of sisal fiber are added..."

Xiulote closely inspected, nodding at the craftsmanship where the two boats connected. After a while, Pucuta stopped explaining, his face full of expectation as he asked,

"Your Majesty, do you have any Divine Revelation to guide us regarding the craftsmanship of this boat?"

"Hmm... the ship is symmetrical front to back, left to right, the bow and stern can be interchangeable, which is very flexible on the battlefield... The form of the sails could be adjusted, both triangular and square sails could be tried..."

Xiulote replied somewhat hesitantly, then suddenly became serious and asked,

"Pucuta, what is the speed of this Wind Outrigger Canoe?"

"... Your Majesty is wise."

At this, Pucuta bowed his head, offering a compliment without expression. Then, he suggested,

"As for the specific speed... the shipyard's apprentice craftsmen are familiar with the vessels and can demonstrate for Your Highness."

Xiulote nodded in agreement. The two men then stepped off the boat, and two teams of 24 apprentice craftsmen took their places as rowers. Soon, Pucuta personally waved the command flag, and the apprentices puffed their cheeks, straining to row into the lake. Occasionally, the vessel turned agilely or even swapped its front and back, rowing in reverse.

The King stretched out his arm, squinting one eye to measure, and roughly estimated the vessel's speed.

"With the rowers straining to push forward, the top speed reaches 20 kilometers per hour, about 6 meters per second. Of course, such speed can only be maintained for a quarter of an hour; the normal traveling speed should be half of the maximum. The water flow in Lake Cuitzeo is basically stationary, so upstream and downstream speeds must subtract the flow rate. Rotating sails could utilize wind power, appropriately saving the rowers' energy..."

Chapter 694: Northern Shipyard, The Solo Canoe of the Wind and the Viking Longship!_2

"All in all, this is a nimble and sturdy small craft, similar to the Polynesian twin-hulled boat, mainly for river and lake use, but it can also attempt coastal sailing. Archers can be stationed on deck for naval combat."

After observing for a moment, Xiulote nodded with satisfaction.

"Pucuta, you've done very well! This type of boat is low-cost and can be mass-produced to replenish the Naval Forces of the Kingdom. I will reward all the craftsmen!"

Then, he looked eagerly towards the other side of the shipyard.

"Is that large longship the newly launched paddle sailboat?"

"Exactly!"

Pucuta nodded proudly. He first waved the command flag, signaling the canoe of the wind to return. Then, he personally led the King to the brand-new paddle sailboat.

"Your Highness, this is the fruit of a year's hard work by the Shipyard, a powerful warship the likes of which the Kingdom has never seen, the Crocodile God Paddle Sailboat!"

"...Crocodile God Paddle Sailboat?"

"Yes! Its shape is as graceful as the crocodiles of the Lerma River, and as strong and courageous as them! And its speed far surpasses any crocodile!"

Xiulote stopped in his tracks, squinted his eyes, and sized up the "colossal" ship before him. This paddle sailboat was much larger than he had estimated. Its form was long and slender with a shallow draft, resembling an enlarged giant canoe. In the middle of the ship was a long mast with a sail hanging from it.

"...Isn't this just a Viking longship? The wave-piercing 'Skei'..."

"The Prince is wise! The wave-piercing Crocodile God longship!"

Standing beside him, Pucuta, after hearing only half the comment, proudly raised his head. He extended his hand to introduce the ship to the monarch.

"Your Majesty, this paddle sailboat is approximately 20 meters long, with a beam of 5.5 meters. The sides of the hull can accommodate 40 rowers. In the center, it can carry 40 soldiers or a cargo of 30 tons! Its top speed even exceeds that of the canoe of the wind, with an average speed between 10-16 kilometers per hour!"

"A warship that can carry 80 people, with a load capacity of up to 30 tons, and an average speed of 5-9 knots!"

Upon hearing this, Xiulote became somewhat moved. He immediately went forward to inspect the ship's structure carefully. Pucuta followed suit, proudly explaining each part.

"Your Majesty, following your guidance, we first selected a 20-meter long oak log from the Shipyard's stock to serve as the main keel running from bow to stern. Just treating this oak log took us several months! Then, the craftsmen spent several more months relying on the main keel to join the rib frames on either side, constructing symmetrical bows and securing them with copper nails. Only after all this could the craftsmen attach the deck with rivets and add support ribs..."

"Moving on, I personally erected the central mast and the sails of the paddle sailboat, which are as high as 10 meters! At the stern, I installed two fixed rudders following the steering philosophy you spoke of to facilitate turning. Then, after continuous testing and adjustments, I finally completed this 'mighty warship' never seen before and named it the Crocodile God Paddle Sailboat!"

As Pucuta described his masterpiece, his presence was as formidable as a crocodile.

Xiulote listened attentively, saying nothing, but nodding continuously. Although longships were widely used by the Vikings more than a thousand years ago to sail across the waves of the North Sea, in this era, in the land of Central America, it was indeed a mighty "warship" the likes of which had never been seen, capable of crushing the naval forces of every faction!

Only after Pucuta had finished speaking did the King pass his water bottle to him, then said with a smile.

"Pucuta, do have someone demonstrate it now!"

"Right away! Thank you, Your Majesty!"

Pucuta unscrewed the water bottle and took several gulps. Inside was hibiscus tea sweetened with honey, which was refreshingly sour and sweet. After drinking, the old shipwright waved his hand grandly.

"You, you, and you...get on the boat and row, show His Majesty a demonstration!"

Forty apprentices boarded the ship. They sat facing the stern on wooden stumps along both sides of the ship, hands gripping long wooden oars, legs slightly extended, pushing against the edges of the stumps for leverage. Special racks on the sides of the hull held the oars in place. With the command flag waved, the apprentices all pulled on the oars in unison, propelling the ship forward. The oars lifted from the water, swept in a half-arc under propulsion, and plunged back into the water for another stroke. In this repeating cycle, the longship cut through the water like an arrow, rushing forward with a whoosh!

"Haha, good, very good!"

Seeing the longship moving swiftly, Xiulote waved his arms excitedly, laughing heartily.

The appearance of this longship signified that the Kingdom had finally broken through the constraints of the Era, possessing the first type of ship capable of real navigation on the seas! The islands off the coast of Lower California, the Isthmus of Panama, and even the Caribbean archipelago, the Inca coastline... A grand maritime world, endless hopeful futures, at last opened its embrace to the King.

After a while, Xiulote turned around contently, looking at the equally excited Pucuta.

"Pucuta, I want to reward you richly! The Chief Divine witnesses! From today on, as the head of the Shipyard, you are now a Third Level Divine Revelation Priest, a Fire-Driller! Within the Kingdom, your status shall be equal to that of a Second Level hereditary nobility, and you are granted 2,400 mu of land!"

"Ah! Praise the Chief Divine! Tha-thank Your Majesty for your generous reward!"

Pucuta was momentarily stunned, overwhelmed with joy. He suddenly knelt to the ground, paying deep respects to the King. From then on, his family would skyrocket in status, stepping firmly into the ranks of the upper nobility, sharing the Kingdom's rest.

Hearing such a reward, the craftsmen behind were all seeing red. Xiulote glanced over them and generously promised.

"The Shipyard has done meritorious work in developing new ships, all craftsmen shall receive rewards! The Kingdom will bestow upon you gold, silver, gemstones, cotton, and cocoa! And according to the merits, the top three performers will be promoted to Second Level Fire-Drillers, and the following seven to First Level Explorers!"

Low exclamations arose among the craftsmen. The King's rewards were magnanimously generous! Once they obtained the position of Priest, the craftsmen could change their identities and become part of the Kingdom's rulers. It was a straightforward path to changing their fates!

Xiulote watched everyone with a smile, hope flowing in his heart. Then, he asked again with anticipation.

"Pucuta, the Sand Ship Scroll I entrusted to you, how goes the research?"

"Your Majesty..."

Pucuta hesitated for a moment before speaking frankly.

"Your second scroll of ship designs, the Shipyard can't make it."

"Hmm?"

Xiulote raised an eyebrow, looking calmly at Pucuta.

A heavy pressure came rushing in, making one's knees go weak. Pucuta bit his lip, still standing straight, shaking his head affirmatively.

"Your Majesty, the flat dragon keel you described, the Shipyard can't figure it out, we can only slowly grope our way through trial and error. Shipbuilding is a trade of experience and technique, without those, if we can't make it, we just can't. Unless a more skilled Master Shipwright joins us."

At this point, Pucuta spoke with confidence. In his view, the only shipbuilding technology that might surpass that of the Kingdom of the Lake is that of the distant Maya. And among the people of the Lake, there certainly was no one who could surpass his shipbuilding skills.

"The only way is to keep making new ships to try, then after trial and error, to improve and rebuild. I have carefully studied the ship types you described, and to have a rough prototype, it would take at least ten years to start!"

After that, Pucuta paused, looking cautiously at the King's expression as he cautiously said.

"Your Majesty, in my opinion, there is much room for improvement with our current Crocodile God paddle sailboats. The Shipyard is confident to keep improving them, to make them bigger, faster, and more robust! As long as you can continue to provide sufficient manpower, wood, and copper materials..."

Xiulote was silent for a moment then let out a long breath. He knew that shipbuilding was an industry that most needed accumulation and was difficult to outpace on a shortcut. And now, relying on the Kingdom of the Lake's copper materials and craftsmen, to be able to build catamarans and Viking longships, was already an enormous progress, even considered the pinnacle of the world's shipbuilding!

The King showed a gentle smile, extending his hand to rest on Pucuta's shoulder.

"Pucuta, work well, think carefully! A professional should manage a professional department. Since the Shipyard is in your hands, you need to practice shipbuilding more, accumulate more wood, and don't worry about the material consumption. As long as I am here, the Kingdom will always support you! I will say it again, shipbuilding is of great importance, the vast future of the Kingdom, lies in your hardworking hands!..."

"Your Majesty, you are the true Sun!"

At this, Pucuta's aged face showed rare admiration. He knelt down, bowed deeply, performing a loyalty ritual, surrendering his hair to the King.

Xiulote wore a solemn expression, reaching out to grasp the old Shipwright's graying hair. The young and the old facing each other, yet it was like a great compelling connection, a King and his loyal subject. And the Era of maritime exploration for the people of America awaited their inauguration!

Chapter 695: Inspecting Spring Plowing, The King's Ideal

May, the migratory birds of the tropics ceased their journey northward, nestling in the forests by the lake, their cheerful chirping filling the air.

The songs of the flock traveled beyond the forests where countless Prepetcha farmers were bustling in the fields. They toiled with stone and wooden plows to cultivate the land and sow the seeds of corn. On the village's finest farmland, a step plow operated by two people could vaguely be seen, slowly yet forcefully turning the soil. In the Kingdom of the Lake, metal agricultural tools were expensive and limited, uniformly kept by the village priest and prioritized for cultivating the fertile lands by the river.

By the riverbank, newly constructed channels guided the flowing water, gradually saturating the nearby fields. A few small hand-operated roundabouts stood by the river. Several robust men, drenched in sweat, tirelessly rotated the roundabouts under the scorching sun, drawing precious river water into the channels. Water was the foundation of agriculture and the key to determining the harvest! Providing sufficient water sources during the crop's growth could effectively secure the annual yield.

Near the fields close to the villagers, makeshift straw shelters scattered around. The shelters housed a couple of carrying poles and several big barrels filled with salt water. During breaks from the intense farming, the farmers could come here to drink a few mouthfuls of the refreshing, salted well water. As for why salt was added to the water? Naturally, it was because "Salt is a blessing from the Chief Divine, granting vitality to believers under the blazing sun."

At a corner outside the village, under a large tree, were several well-drained pits. Approaching them, a strong odor hit, forcing one to keep their distance. This was a "composting" site in the village, excavated under the strict demands of the priests. To the villagers, this place somewhat resembled a bizarre altar.

The pits contained the villagers' daily excrement, rotten vegetable peels and fruit skins, mud dredged from the lake, and some dried leaves and straw from autumn, all covered by a thin layer of soil on top.

The villagers did not understand the principle behind it, but as part of religious rituals, they regularly accumulated the "vitality" demanded by the Chief Divine at this site, awaiting the descent of Divine Power. Based on last year's experience, this "vitality" would ferment for months and under the Divine Power, turn into "fertilizer." By the end of June, when the corn began to grow tall, the "fertilizer" would be applied to the fields to supplement the crops with critical "vitality".

Last spring, the villagers were dubious yet followed the Divine Priest's guidance and scattered the fertilizer across some fields, which unexpectedly increased the yield by nearly thirty percent! The villagers genuinely witnessed the might of the Chief Divine, and since then, their faith had become much more devout. This year, additional guards were arranged at the composting site to prevent theft from neighboring villages. Because the village's compost was always limited and could only be applied to the best fields.

It is worth mentioning that in this era, the economic basis across all tribes was primarily a collectivist tribal commune. The chieftain and the priest held the most important say, directly interfaced with the kingdom. The village land was still collectively cultivated, and the harvest was distributed uniformly. Overall, the village was the smallest tribute unit, rather than the individual households of the Celestial Empire.

Since the ancient collapse of the Teotihuacan Empire, the world had fallen into chaos for over a thousand years! Tribes fought yearly, and human sacrifices were incessant. The Stone Age reached its zenith, and societal productivity stagnated for a long time. Heavy tributes and frequent labor conscriptions were the norm. The Great Nobility occupied most of the wealth and land, living comfortably and often reaching fifty to sixty years of age with advanced herbal medicine to treat diseases. However, the average lifespan of the vast majority of the lower classes was barely over twenty years. Many lost parents at a young age, living life without a spouse or children. The unit of households could hardly sustain for long, and collective upbringing was the most common scenario.

At this moment, Xiulote was inspecting spring cultivation in a village near Rivermouth County with two hundred personal guards. He first, under the village leader's guidance, checked the village's Chief God altar, stone granaries, stone treadmills, and compost pits, expressing great satisfaction. Afterwards, he listened to the village priest's report, learning about the spread of Chief Divine faith, the progress of this year's spring cultivation, and the prevalence of new agricultural tools, verbally offering praise.

Next, the King summoned the village's Militia Captain, watched the militia's training, and inquired about local bandits. The surrounding bandits had disappeared, but the village recently lost a few turkeys, suspecting it was the work of the newly migrated Canine Descendants. Hearing this news, the King frowned slightly, keeping it in mind.

Finally, after observing the peasants' modest thatched cottages, he declined the village leader's offer for a feast and directly led his personal guards out of the village.

The King left the village and stood on the vast fields, watching the dark clouds on the horizon. The seeds of spring cultivation had just been sown, and the precious spring rain was about to fall. The corn would soon sprout, bringing a season of hope.

"Your Highness, it's going to rain soon. Should we return to the village we just visited to avoid the rain and have a meal?"

Bertade waited a while, watching the clouds drawing nearer, then stepped forward to ask.

"No, we return to Rivermouth Fortress."

Xiulote shook his head. Rivermouth County had only stabilized from the turmoil two years ago. The village had just begun to recover a bit of vitality, and the farmers' cottages were still shabby and dilapidated. If two hundred personal guards consumed a meal of finely ground staple food, it could impoverish the entire village.

"Bertade, you know, I just took a careful look around the village and asked both the village leader and the priest."

The King spoke calmly, yet his words carried a hint of emotion.

"Among the village's thousand-plus residents, only two people over the age of forty in the village leader's family and the two successive priests!"

Bertade remained silent. After a while, he spoke softly.

"Your Highness, during the western campaign, the Tarasco Kingdom took away the villagers' rations, and basically, the old and frail starved to death. After all, the kingdom has only been established for a short time..."

"And what about the villages of the Alliance? How many over the age of forty are there?"

The King sighed, continuing the inquiry.

Bertade cast his eyes downward in silence. He likely knew the numbers but speaking them aloud would only add to His Highness's troubles. After a long while, he finally said quietly.

"Your Highness, it is the same in all parts of the world. In the eyes of the Nobility, peasants are like ants, like kindling. Worked until they no longer have strength, they should die or be burnt like firewood. Farmers over forty are considered old, like completely burnt out wood. It is difficult for villages to retain old people, nor is there a need for useless ashes..."

The two fell silent for a moment, as few words were needed to stir ripples in their hearts. Only when the spring rain began to drip, dampening the King's long hair, did he softly speak.

"Bertade, I have always had an aspiration."

"Your Highness, go ahead; I am listening," Bertade replied.

"I hope that in the villages under my governance, out of the infants that do not die young, one-tenth could live to the age of sixty."

As he spoke, Xiulote looked toward the sky. In his faraway homeland of the East, the thriving Celestial Empire, this was the rough proportion of elderly people in average, inland villages at the close of the 15th century.

"One-tenth living to sixty?"

Bertade softly repeated the words, unable to help but lower his gaze. Even in the most absurd dreams, he had never thought of such a thing. The world had never witnessed such a prosperous era, only endless bloodshed and conflict. Even in ancient myths, there were only heroes and divinities, never a glimpse of common folk.

A long time later, the Head Warrior sighed deeply and said in a heavy voice.

"Your Highness, the rain is getting heavier; you should go back."

Xiulote nodded without saying more. Some words held more power unspoken. He calmed his emotions and recalled the Militia Captain's words.

"Bertade, arrange the schedule. Once the inspection of the surrounding settlements is complete, I want to visit the village of the Guajili people."

"...Yes, Your Highness."

Bertade's expression shifted slightly; investigating the Guajili village required advanced precautionary measures.

"Your Highness, shall we inform the Chieftains Red Frog and Red Monkey?"

"Inform them and bring Black Wolf along as well."

"By your command, Your Highness!"

Xiulote nodded slightly. He looked at the Personal Guard Warrior standing silently in the rain, his resolve strengthening once again.

"The rain is getting heavier; let us go. We have just set out on our journey amidst storm and rain!"

"Your Highness, your expedition is the ascent of the sun to its zenith. When the sun is warm enough, even weeds can thrive and grow!"

"Yes, spring has arrived, and summer is not far off. Let's go~"

"By your command, my King~"

Chapter 696: Canine Descendant Village, the Chieftain and the Priest

The rains of June drizzled, saturating the fields of the Lake Region. In the vast expanse of farmland, corn stalks sprouted, bean plants grew true leaves, and pumpkins put forth new shoots. Even the weeds peered out, gazing at the rainy season's sky. The land by the lake was so fertile, filled with the power of life.

Axolotl, clad in his raincoat, wearing a cloak, carrying a bamboo basket on his back, stood by the field ridges like an old farmer. He gazed absentmindedly at the fertile fields, unable to help murmuring softly to himself.

"With so much rain, everything can grow. The soil of the Southern Tribes is incredibly rich, truly a blessing from the Earth Mother Goddess!"

By Axolotl's side huddled over thirty strong men of the Guajili Tribe. Some were bare-chested, showing tattoos on their torsos; some had short daggers tied to their legs, others had hand axes slung at their waists; and some even carried bows and arrows, adorned with Bone ornaments... In any case, they looked nothing like docile farmers.

"Arno chieftain, today the brothers hunted two doves, three hares. We invite you to dine with us tonight!"

"Yes, chieftain, we also snagged a few turkeys, plump ones that will smell so good when roasted!"

"Roast? The Southern Tribes have a kind of large clay pot, perfect for stewing the whole bird to make soup. Add some cheap salt, maybe some Priest's spices, and that is real deliciousness!"

A few leading strong men squeezed in front of Axolotl, offering their eagerness respectfully. Two of them even secretly dyed their hair red. But in reality, in the entire village of over a thousand people, there were only a very few true red-haired Hunters. Among them, the most capable, the most imposing, was none other than "Arno" standing before them.

"I've said it before, don't call me chieftain!"

Axolotl glared fiercely at the strong men, causing them all to shrink their necks in unison. Then, he grabbed one by the chin and scolded fiercely.

"And you! Don't think I don't know how those turkeys came to be! Don't cause trouble for me!"

This was a resettlement village of the Canine Descendants in the Red Fox Valley, located in the eastern part of Rivermouth County, near the border of the Kingdom's mountain forests. Nearby there were six Canine banners, over a dozen village settlements, and more than twenty thousand people of the Guajili Tribe.

At that moment, most of the Canine Warriors had been conscripted by the Kingdom. The village was left with only ordinary tribal folks; nobody recognized his identity as Chieftain of the Red Salamander. But after all, he had been dominating one side, serving as Tribal Chief of the Great Tribe for many years. In the Eastern Canine Alliance, he was second only to the Great Chief Chichika himself.

From the full vessel, the tip is revealed. The villages of the Canine Descendants always revered the strong. The young men came from various Tribes and constantly collided with one another, establishing a hierarchy of strength. Even though Axolotl intended to hide his identity, his red hair could not be concealed. Once he struck down a row of challenging tribespeople, he naturally became the village's "chieftain".

Thinking this, Axolotl sighed to himself. His identity was truly sensitive, and it was always best to keep as low a profile as possible.

"Oh Earth Mother Goddess, since You have blessed me to live through the attack of the heavenly fire, surely You won't take my life again! And you, Hummingbird Chief Divine, this is Your territory, I am willing to offer sacrifices to You, with no intention of being Your enemy again! And to the three gods of

the Divine Eagle Tribe, please bless me as well... may all the deities protect me, and let me live out my days in peace!"

Axolotl clasped the Sun Amulet around his neck, sincerely praying to all the gods for a while.

Not far off, the village's aged Priest Teya watched with cold eyes. Seeing Arno's prayers, he silently nodded. Making up his mind, he grasped the Divine Staff in his hand and walked slowly up to Axolotl.

"Praise the Chief Divine! Arno, as guided by the Chief Divine, when the corn has five leaves, it is time to weed."

Old Priest Teya was of the Prepetcha. After the campaign to the west ended, he was dismissed from his position as village Priest and drafted to the Capital City to learn the doctrines of the Chief Divine. By the time he had finished his studies, he was assigned to this ferocious Canine village, responsible for guiding the settled Guajili Tribe.

Upon hearing this, the eyes of the Guajili strong men turned sour, staring at the elderly Priest. This old Priest, all day long, did nothing but push them to the fields. Since the end of April, they had been toiling non-stop until the beginning of June, never before so exhausted. Buried in the fields, where was the joy of hunting and traveling!

"Yes, praise the Chief Divine! Respected Priest Teya, I will take everyone to the fields immediately."

Axolotl gave a respectful bow. Although the Priest before him was old and frail, he represented the powerful Cactus Tribe! Turning around, he roared fiercely at the people.

"Get to work, all of you! Strap on the baskets, grab the stone agricultural tools, and go weed in the fields! Damn it, make sure not to mistake the pumpkins for weeds! You're planting crops, and if you bury the seeds in the ground, by autumn they will yield several times the fruit. Then, everyone will have enough to eat!"

Following that, Axolotl pulled out the short dagger from his waist and swung it fiercely a few times, creating a sharp gust of wind.

"By the ancestors' witness! Whoever doesn't work hard, and causes us to have nothing to eat by fall, I will send him to the other Tribes!"

Upon hearing this, the strong men shuddered. On the Wilderness, as the population of the Tribes grew, there would be shortages of food every few years. Sometimes the Tribes would fight each other, sometimes they would trade the weak among them directly. Being sent away by the Tribe, they knew full well what fate awaited them from a young age.

The men were silent as cicadas, obediently shouldering baskets, grasping stone hoes, and heading into the fields to work.

Seeing this, old Priest Teya was extremely pleased. He had no background in the Kingdom; otherwise, he wouldn't have been assigned to a newly established Canine village, taking on the hardest, most dangerous, and unrewarding position as a Canine Priest.

Fortunately, within this village, there was a Canine chieftain who truly believed in the Chief Divine, understood the big picture, and could control the situation. It was entirely due to his management that the spring farming was completed on time. It should be noted that other nearby Guajili villages were acting slowly, some had only just finished sowing.

Thinking this, old Priest Teya looked at Axolotl with a kindly smile.

"Arno, come with me, I have something good for you!"

"Eh... Okay."

The strong Axolotl followed behind the gaunt Teya, heading towards the wooden hut of the village priest. It was the only building in the entire village that looked decent, apart from the granary, with all the others being mere straw huts and grass sheds.

Old Priest Teya approached the dim wooden hut and groped around for a while before pulling out a sturdy bronze hoe.

"Here! Arno, this hoe is for you! Its blade is very sharp, making it very convenient for weeding."

"Eh, is this... sharp and durable bronze?"

Axolotl took the hoe and examined it up and down, a look of surprise appearing on his face. The Cactus Tribe was so powerful that they used precious bronze for farming tools!

"Hm? Arno, you actually know about bronze?"

Old Priest Teya was equally surprised.

"Oh, venerable Priest Teya. After I was captured by the armies of the Great Chief, the God of Death, I was detained in the supply camp. Sometimes, the legion would have us transport some weapons and equipment, which I heard about from the mouths of the samurais guarding us."

Axolotl lied without a change in facial expression or heartbeat.

"Not bad! Arno, the fact that His Majesty's Imperial Guard Legion let you transport equipment shows that you have been performing well."

Old Priest Teya nodded with a smile. After thinking for a moment, he gave some advice.

"In the future, you should call him 'His Majesty,' not 'Great Chief, the God of Death.' His Majesty has succeeded the Tarasco Kingdom and appointed the sage from the Lake Region as Chief Minister; he is the sun of our Prepetcha people. All levels of Prepetcha officials revere him, even more than many Mexica warriors. Mexica warriors call him 'Your Highness,' so we call him 'His Majesty'... If you meet warriors coming to levy grain, saying 'His Majesty' can make people feel closer."

"...Yes, praise His Majesty! Thank you for your teachings, Priest Teya."

Axolotl was somewhat speechless and could only lower his head in agreement.

"Good! I've noticed over the past few months that you are a bright and clever boy!"

Old Priest Teya nodded in satisfaction. Then, he groped around the hut for a while and pulled out a worn yellow paper book.

"Here, Arno!"

"Uh... what's this?"

Axolotl looked at it for a long time, the pages of the book bearing three mysterious square symbols, like the divine script of priests.

"The fundamental scripture of the Alliance, the Book of Ama Colley. Arno, read it well, and your future will be bright!"

Old Priest Teya said with a gentle smile, and there seemed to be a glint in his eyes.

"Arno, the glory of the Chief Divine has not yet covered the hearts of the Guajili tribes. For the Kingdom, if a devoted priest from the Guajili Tribe appears, he will certainly be put to important use, perhaps even becoming a Third Level High Priest in charge of a diocese! You are a devout follower of the Chief Divine and also the head of the Guajili Tribe. You can make it through this path!"

"Ah, this?..."

Upon hearing this, Axolotl was utterly confused. He stared at the wise old priest in front of him, not knowing what to say for a moment.

"Keep it safe. Carry it with you."

Old Priest Teya said with a confident smile. He stuffed the scripture into Axolotl's hands, offering a kind reminder.

"Starting this evening, I will teach you the Kingdom's script every day! Within a month, try to learn as much as possible; it would be best if you could memorize the scripture!"

"Ah? Memorize within a month?"

Axotl was puzzled. Learning the divine script of the Southern priests was undoubtedly a good thing. But why was it limited to one month, and why was there an emphasis on trying to memorize it? He looked at Old Priest Teya, who just smiled mysteriously.

"Do as I say, Arno. When the time comes, there will be great benefits for you! Tremendous benefits!"

Axotl wanted to ask more questions, but Old Priest Teya simply waved his hand with a smile, signaling him to go and work in the fields. Axotl, carrying the sharp bronze hoe, obediently headed to the fields.

Watching Arno's strong back, Teya smiled again. He murmured expectantly to himself.

"One more month, just one more month. After a month, His Majesty will come here for inspection. If the village finishes the spring plowing on time, His Majesty's mood will certainly not be bad. At that time, I'll take the opportunity to introduce you to His Majesty! Arno, this is your only chance, and it's also my only opportunity! I can't live my whole life as nothing more than a down-and-out village priest..."

Chapter 697: Assassin Arno

July, the most intense rainy season had arrived, accompanied by the sweltering midsummer. The simultaneous heat and rain infused the crops in the fields with tremendous vitality. Corn grew rapidly, climbing beans twined upward, and pumpkins spread across the farmland, shielding the weeds from the sun's growth-promoting light.

In the pre-industrial agricultural production, large livestock were not only important sources of power but also the main suppliers of manure. The daily dung output of an adult cow could reach an astonishing 50 kilograms or more. In the well-known grass-field rotation, fallow fields would be planted with forage grasses, which were then fertilized efficiently through grazing by large animals.

However, in the Lake Region fief, due to the lack of large livestock, the compost in the villages was very limited and could only be supplied to certain fields. The farmers in the Lake Region followed the

Priesthood's guidance, concentrating the accumulated yearly compost into chosen communal fields to provide "vitality" for the rapidly growing crops. By this time, most of the field management had been completed. Next, it was a matter of patiently waiting for the Chief Divine's Divine Power to mature the crops and bring a bountiful harvest to the fields.

The scorching sun and heavy rains alternated, and the bustling village gradually returned to tranquility, nurturing new life. The Black Wolf's Royal Banner patrolled between villages, from the western domains of Rivermouth County's Saka to the ups and downs of the Eastern Domain. Not much further laid the noble Tepopolo's fief.

Under the midsummer sky, where the sunlight bathed everything in its glow, the Black Wolf's Royal Banner came to a halt once more. This was a Canine Descendants village near the border. Amidst a chilling silence, three hundred Personal Guard Warriors in copper armor, with shields and axes, guarded the village both inside and out. And by the King's side were Bertade, Toltec, Ozoma, and Keka, four brave generals. They donned copper helmets and heavy armor, following the King's steps, constantly guarding him on both sides.

In the village, hundreds of stalwart Canine Descendants bowed their heads in silence, crouching quietly in the corners like turkeys intimidated by a wolf pack. Among these strong men was the once Chieftain Axolotl, dressed as an old farmer. His gaze fixed on his nose and his nose on his heart, he kept his head down, shrinking in the corner of the village, silent and unnoticeable.

"Not bad, very good indeed! Priest Teya, I have seen more than twenty Guajili villages on my journey, but yours is the best!"

After inspecting the village's farmland and the Chief Divine's altar, a smile finally appeared on Xiulote's solemn face.

"As a newly established Guajili village just a few months old, you have actually completed the cultivation requirement of eight acres per adult. I am truly impressed! And the two neighboring villages have only completed half their cultivation tasks!"

At this point, the King grew even more satisfied and nodded towards the old priest Teya, who hastily returned a respectful salute.

"Most village priests have complained to me, saying how Canine Descendants are unruly and lazy, refusing to work diligently. Many able-bodied men sneak out to hunt birds and beasts in the mountains and even go to the Prepetcha village to steal chickens and dogs..."

"I sent people to investigate and know the priests spoke the truth. I did not punish them, but I have always been displeased in my heart. It wasn't until I came here and saw your well-administered village that I finally breathed a sigh of relief."

Xiulote paused, then asked with a smile.

"Priest Teya, do you have any management experiences you could share with me, to propagate to other villages? Speak freely, I won't overshadow your merit, haha!"

The old Priest Teya peeked around, making sure His Majesty was very pleased, and then he too smiled and said.

"Your Majesty, it is all the blessing of the Chief Divine! The light of the Chief Divine guides me, tirelessly spreading faith! The light of the Chief Divine also illuminates the hearts of the devout, influencing the Guajili Tribe in the village! When they believe in the Chief Divine, they will listen to the sacred voice, willingly follow the guidance. Then, the devout will lead the rest of their tribes, toiling day and night, completing the tasks of spring cultivation!"

"Devout believers? The Guajili Tribe?"

Hearing this, Xiulote's eyebrows rose. He glanced at the old priest's expression, thought for a moment, and slowly nodded.

"Very well, Priest Teya. In spreading faith, you have indeed done well, and you should be rewarded! As for the devotees in the village you just mentioned, who exactly are they?"

Upon hearing this, Priest Teya wore a confident smile and spoke with a deep voice.

"Your Majesty, there are many devout believers in the village. But there is one Guajili believer who is most favored by the Chief Divine! He is the most devout, did the most farm work, and constantly prayed to the Chief Divine. In no more than a month, he taught himself to read and write, mastered the Book of Ama Colley, and could even recite it! Under the grace of the Chief Divine, he has already gained the qualifications to become a priest!"

"What? A month's time, self-taught literacy? Reciting the Book of Ama Colley?"

Xiulote was greatly surprised. He glanced at the Black Wolf unintentionally, who then shamefully lowered his head, and Keka also remained silent.

"Indeed! Recently, when I heard him recite the Scripture, I was deeply moved! It turns out that with sincere faith and prayer, the light of the Chief Divine naturally falls into the hearts of the devout, unlocking their wisdom, cleansing their souls, and making them follow Your Majesty's edicts! This is certainly a manifestation of the Chief Divine's mighty power, and maybe we can use it as an example to propagate throughout all the parishes, so all the Guajili Tribe can learn from him..."

The old Priest Teya looked devout, praying with the amulet around his neck while he explained in detail to His Majesty.

Xiulote's gaze flashed with understanding, and he nodded knowingly.

"Excellent! Priest Teya, if there indeed is such a wise devotee, the news must be spread throughout the Kingdom, and even the entire Alliance! Not only will he himself be put to good use by the Priesthood, but the one who unearthed him will also be promoted, eligible for direct advancement by one level!"

Chapter 698: Assassin Arno_2

"Praise Your Majesty! Thank you for your generosity!"

The old Priest Teya immediately knelt down and paid his respects to His Majesty. Then, he stood up and eagerly shouted to the crowd.

"Devotee Arno! Come here quickly! His Majesty summons you!"

Upon hearing this, the person in the crowd named Axolotl shivered. He carefully lifted his head and saw hundreds of eyes looking at him. The village's Canine Descendants, envious, consciously parted to the sides, clearing a path for the chieftain. In just a few breaths, he was exposed in front of everyone like a fish pulled out of the water by a rod.

Axolotl looked around, three hundred Armored Warriors, several valiant Great Generals. There was no hope of escaping now; trying would only result in being chopped into mincemeat. He took a deep breath, his expression calm, and slowly walked toward the King, still holding the sharp bronze hoe in his hand.

A hundred steps, fifty steps, thirty steps, ten steps... As Axolotl approached closer and closer, Bertade suddenly furrowed his brows.

"Hmm?"

He swiftly stepped forward, blocking in front of His Highness, and gripped the bronze sword at his waist.

"Put down the hoe, take off your cloak."

"Yes."

Axolotl paused, bowed with a hunched back, and nodded in agreement. He threw away the hoe, took off his cloak, revealing striking red hair and a face blackened with dirt.

"Hmm?! Red-haired Hunter?"

Bertade, with a clang, drew out the bronze sword, slanted it in front of him, ready to launch a deadly attack at any moment!

"Your Majesty, Arno is not the Red-haired Hunter! In the village, all the elite red-haired were conscripted by the legion."

The old Priest Teya quickly explained. Then, pointing to the crowd, he said with a smile.

"You see, without fierce jaguars in the mountains, the wild cats take charge themselves! After the tribes were completely disbanded, these village strong men dyed their hair red to pretend to be the battle-hardened Red-haired Hunters."

Bertade, hearing this, looked over, and indeed in the village's hundreds of strong men, one or two hundred had dyed red hair. He slightly relaxed his vigilance, but still kept his intense gaze on Arno.

"Haha!"

Xiulote glanced and burst out laughing. He looked at the two chieftains beside him, jokingly said.

"Ozoma, Miwa, I didn't think that in a mere thousand people, there would be so many red-haired! Previously, from your guards, many elites were conscripted, why not fill them with these red-haired?"

At this, Miwa scowled and shook his head repeatedly.

"Great Chief, these strong men are not even warriors, what use do I have for them? Look at their red color, it's all messy, not pure at all, not the dyes from the Wilderness!"

"Respectable Great Chief, the warriors of the tribe have all been conscripted into the legion, these are merely ordinary strong men."

Ozoma spoke in agreement, but felt a bit of lament in his heart. A migration of seven hundred miles, the tribe was dissolved, and the tribal people were moved into the regimented settlement in the village, thus the laws of the Wilderness also collapsed. Were this on the Wilderness, if the strong men dared to do such things, they would surely be sent to the tribal hunting grounds, and wouldn't live a year!

Upon hearing Ozoma's voice, Axolotl instantly got goosebumps, shivering nervously. He then recognized among the great generals wearing bronze helmets, was the damn Red Monkey Chieftain! The shameless Red Monkey wasn't dead, and had been following closely behind the God of Death Great Chief!

"Arno, how can you come to meet His Majesty with such a dirty face? Go quickly to the well and wash your face clean!"

The old Priest Teya glanced at Arno, scolded out loud. Then, he respectfully paid his respects to the King.

"Your Majesty, please forgive Arno's disrespect..."

"No matter!"

Xiulote smiled and waved his hand. He turned to the peasant-dressed leader of the Guajili, speaking gently.

"Arno, you need not be tense. I have heard that you devoutly worship the Chief Divine, study scriptures, and within a month, could memorize the Book of Ama Colley?"

"Your Majesty, praise you! I had only memorized parts of the Chapters..."

Axolotl spoke with a deliberately hoarse voice, cautiously saying.

"Oh? Then recite the sections you remember."

Xiulote smiled and nodded, feeling a fondness for the honest and simple chieftain before him.

"...Heaven and earth are dark and yellow, the vast universe in chaos. Those who follow divine spirits shall ascend to Heaven, ever enjoying peace. Those who defy divine spirits shall sink into the Abyss, transform into Jin Shi, never to be freed... You must believe in our god Huitzilopochtli, His might is boundless, from the past to the future, controlling all that exists, until the day of doom arrives..."

"...The sun and the moon wax and wane, the stars align in order. The Chief Divine manages the changes of the celestial bodies, grants the world the sunlight for survival, reveals the truth of the world through the moon and stars, and teaches the truth to the servants of God..."

Axolotl stammered as he recited, trying his best to appear ordinary. After reciting two sections, he quickly shook his head, signaling that he could remember no more.

"Arno, why have you memorized so little!"

Seeing this, the old Priest Teya became somewhat anxious. He reached out his aged hand, seizing Arno's arm as if clutching their only hope.

"Last time, when you saw me, you recited more than a dozen sections!"

"I... seeing His Majesty... got nervous... forgot... couldn't recall..."

Axolotl trembled as he responded, his expression uncomfortably embarrassed.

"Hmm..."

Xiulote slightly frowned and fell silent in thought. Arno's performance was clearly far from the grace of the Chief Divine. However, the kingdom indeed needed a devout Canine Descendant Priest, to serve as an exemplary propagandist, creating a breakthrough in the faith amongst the Canine Descendants. After pondering for a moment, Xiulote made up his mind. He smiled at Teya and said.

"Wisdom can be taught later on, abilities can be supplemented through education. But only devout faith is the sole path to the divine light of the Chief Divine! Priest Teya, your recommendation of the devout believer Arlo is excellent. In the eyes of the Chief Divine, he is completely qualified to become the kingdom's Second Level Preaching Priest!"

"Ah! Your Majesty, thank you for your generosity! Arno will surely devote his life to the Chief Divine!..."

The old Priest Teya's face lit up with joy, he quickly knelt on the ground. As a representative among the Guajili Canine Descendants, Arno had just become a priest at the second level, standing directly at the end of his struggles. However, at this moment, he bore no jealousy, only full hearted delight. His old face broke into a smile as he reached out to pull the stunned Arno.

"Arno, won't you quickly kneel and pay homage to His Majesty!"

"Uh..."

Axolotl then came to his senses. He had only recited two sections and now he had become a Second Level Priest of the Cactus Tribe? The rules of the Cactus Tribe were truly perplexing. As he pondered laboriously, he knelt down, repeating the old priest's words.

"Praise Your Majesty! Thank you for your generosity! I will surely devote my life to the Chief Divine!..."

Xiulote watched with a satisfied smile as Arno knelt. Although the man seemed not the brightest, his honesty, simplicity, and devout obedience were rare, and it was no wonder that Priest Teya found such a candidate. Anyhow, Teya's village was well managed, and with the merit of his recommendation, he truly deserved to be promoted to Second Level. With this thought, the King cleared his throat and declared.

"Priest Teya, you have done very well. The divine light of the Chief Divine shines upon you, from today onwards, you are the kingdom's Second Level Preaching Priest..."

Not far away, Ozoma furrowed his brows. He stared at Arno, who was kneeling before him, always feeling an uncanny familiarity. The Red Monkey Chieftain's gaze swept back and forth over Arno, finally resting on his red hair. His expression gradually grew grave.

"This hair... this color... This is a dye from the Wilderness! He is indeed a Red Monkey Hunter!"

Ozoma was startled. An elite Red Monkey Hunter, feigning ignorance and getting within three steps of His Majesty, now kneeling on the ground, his hands' movements unclear... What could he be planning?!

With this thought, Ozoma shuddered and quickly made a decision. He suddenly stepped forward, under the bewildered and guarded eyes of the Head Warrior, kicked Arno to the ground. Then, "Bang," he drew his War Club from his waist, pointing it directly at Arno's throat.

"Your Majesty, he is an assassin!"

Chapter 699: The Vicissitudes of Fate

The rainy season's sky was always unpredictable. Moments before, the sun shone brilliantly; then, suddenly, it was overcast with dense clouds. The dark clouds overshadowed the sun, casting gloom on the land and leaving shadows in people's hearts.

As Ozoma shouted, Bertade instantly raised his bronze sword, shielding His Highness. Toltec drew his war club, guarding behind His Highness. Keka's hand was on his war club at his waist. He intended to draw his weapon to guard the Great Chief. But after glancing at the vigilant Black Wolf General, he lowered his hand and just stood there, motionless.

Xiulote looked puzzled. He turned his head, glanced indifferently at the old Priest Teya, and then looked toward Arno who lay on the ground.

"What's going on here?"

Facing the sudden turn of events, the old Priest Teya was at a loss. He knelt down in fear, kowtowing vigorously while crying out anxiously.

"Ah! Your Majesty, Arno, he has been diligent and hardworking in the spring plowing for months, faithfully believing in the Chief Divine... He is not an assassin!"

Caught off guard by the sudden change, Axolotl was in a dazed state. He struggled to endure the pain from a kick to his abdomen, stammering.

"Your Majesty, I'm not..."

"He's the real Red-haired Hunter!"

Ozoma was resolute. He lightly lifted his arm, pointing his war club at Axolotl's red hair.

"Chief Divine witness! Your Majesty, look at this hair color, it's the genuine wilderness dye! Keka can surely tell!... He's a Red-haired Hunter who has concealed his identity, feigned stupidity, and infiltrated your side with ill intentions!"

"Hmm? Keka, you say."

With empty hands, Keka stepped forward. He widened his eyes, took a glance at Axolotl's hair, then closed his eyes, shook his head, took another step forward, and looked again closely.

"Uh... respected Great Chief, this indeed is wilderness dye."

Following that, Keka grabbed Axolotl's right hand and observed the thick calluses formed at the index and middle fingers from long-term archery, confidently reporting back.

"Great Chief, he is an elite Red-haired Hunter!"

Axolotl suddenly trembled all over, his face ashen. He said shakily.

"Your Majesty, I am a Red-haired Hunter, but I'm not an assassin..."

Xiulote furrowed his brow, staring at the dusty and dirty figure of Chichika Chieftain before him. He asked in a deep voice.

"Arno, who exactly are you?"

"I... I'm a captive of the eastern Canine Descendants, scattered on the night of the celestial fire, then captured by Your Majesty's army. Since then, I was integrated into the flag team and headed south, crossed the great river, and was settled here..."

Axolotl narrated the facts, omitting the beginning and the end, his expression exceedingly sincere, almost on the verge of tears.

"I... I fled from Your Majesty's conscription because I didn't want to hold a bow and go to war again; I just wanted to peacefully farm until the end of my days... I've always been honest and upright; I had no prior knowledge of Priest Teya's recommendation... Your Majesty, I truly am not an assassin! I... I don't even have a dagger on me!"

Moved by Axolotl's genuine plea, Xiulote looked calm. He glanced at the Black Wolf, who then took a step forward, thoroughly frisking Axolotl. Afterwards, the Black Wolf respectfully replied.

"Your Highness, indeed, there are no weapons on him."

The King then slowly nodded. He observed Axolotl's expression, finding no trace of lying, seeing only a face full of grievance and fear. The King sighed softly.

"Arno, you were defeated and captured, feared war, and fled conscription, according to the law, should be executed!... But considering your excellent performance and devout faith in the Chief Divine, your punishment can be appropriately reduced... Come, bind him and whip him 30 times!"

Axolotl lowered his head, breathing a sigh of relief. He didn't resist and was compliantly tied up by the Personal Guard Warriors. Next, a warrior took out a whip, his expression solemn, and lashed fiercely.

"Ooh..."

Accompanied by the snapping sound of the air, intense pain emanated from his back. Axolotl clenched his teeth, not screaming, but making a low, painful moan, like a wounded coyote of the wilderness.

"Hmm, he's a man."

Watching Axolotl's resilient performance, Xiulote nodded quietly to himself, feeling a surge of admiration for talent.

By the time the solid thirty lashes were finished, Axolotl was drenched in sweat and blood, nearly collapsed on the ground, unable to even move his fingers.

Xiulote stepped forward and looked into Axolotl's eyes, speaking in a deep voice.

"Arno, these thirty lashes were your punishment for evading military service. But the light of the Chief Divine shines upon every devout believer, offering them the chance for salvation! My promise still stands. You will be demoted by one level but will still serve the Chief Divine. From today, you will serve as the First Level Preaching Priest for the nearby village of Guajili! Keep the teachings of the Chief Divine at heart and, with a devout spirit, guide more of the Guajili people into the embrace of the Chief Divine!"

"Ah! Your Majesty, thank you for your generosity and mercy! Arno, you must carry a heart of guilt, comply with the King's decree, and spread the glory of the Chief Divine!"

Priest Teya saw a turning point, hurriedly pulled Arno forward, and together they bowed deeply to the King.

"...Thank you for your generosity and mercy... I will comply with your decree and spread the glory of the Chief Divine... Praise the Chief Divine!"

Axolotl was weak and listless, propped up by Teya to bow. He endured the severe pain throughout his body and tremblingly repeated the words. This ordeal had nearly cost him his life, but luckily, he was finally out of danger. Damn, life was unbearable now. Once the God of Death Great Chief left, he would heal his wounds and immediately get a small boat to flee across the big river!

"Hmm. Praise the Chief Divine! That will conclude today's inspection."

Xiulote nodded his head. Encountering this ordeal, he had lost his mood to stay any longer. Before departing, the King cast one last glance at the injured Arno. A sense of compassion arose within him, and he spoke to the Head Warrior.

"Bertade, clean his wound and apply the Royal Family's medicine. There probably aren't any herbs in the village. It's the rainy season now, and if the wound is not well cared for, infection and pus formation will be deadly."

"Your Highness is merciful!"

Bertade deeply bowed out of genuine respect. Then, the Head Warrior ordered someone to fetch two buckets of well water and poured them directly over Axolotl to his horrified gaze!

"No..."

The rushing water washed over the immobile Arno, cleaning his face, which was covered in Wilderness dust, to squeaky-clean purity. Ozoma watched the scene with great interest and then suddenly widened his eyes.

"Ah?!"

Ozoma's mouth fell open in surprise like a monkey, shaping into a big "O". He looked at Arno's face, utterly shocked and even a bit flustered. This was a person he had never expected to see here!

"...Is it really you?!"

It only took a moment for Ozoma to recover, and realizing the great opportunity. He immediately raised his War Club, pointing at the pale-faced Arno and shouted excitedly.

"Ha-ha! What Arno, you are Axolotl! You are the Red Salamander Chieftain! You are indeed an assassin!...Speak! Were you planning to get close to His Majesty to avenge Chichika?"

"No...I'm not..."

Axolotl, wanting to cry but having no tears, weakly defended himself.

"You are! I would recognize that face even if it were burned to ashes!"

Ozoma was visibly excited, what could be more pleasurable than personally catching an old nemesis? He immediately knelt before the King and reported.

"Your Majesty! This is the missing Red Salamander Chieftain, second in command to the Canine Descendants in the east, only subordinate to Chichika, Axolotl!"

"Axolotl!"

Xiulote shuddered. In the Nava language, "Axolotl" means a salamander capable of regenerating its limbs, while "Xiulote" means death and rebirth. These two names were closely related and even symbolically similar in religion. Thus, he always remembered this missing Red Salamander Chieftain.

"Keka, is he really the Red Salamander Chieftain?"

Chieftain Red Frog Keka came forward again, scrutinizing Axolotl's face repeatedly. Since last year's successful invasion from the south and the separation of the eastern and western Canine Descendants, he hadn't seen the Red Salamander Chieftain. Fate is always unpredictable! Unexpectedly, they met again more than a year later, in the south, far from the Wilderness, under such circumstances!

Keka stared for a while, feeling emotional. He sighed deeply and lowered his head to report to the Great Chief.

"Great Chief, he is indeed the famous Red Salamander leader from the Wilderness, the undying and clever Axolotl!"

Chapter 700: The Death of Axolotl

Upon hearing these words, Xiulote's heart shuddered. His expression was icy as he glanced indifferently at the elderly Priest, Teya.

Sensing the King's murderous intent, Priest Teya's knees went weak, and he collapsed directly to the ground, pleading in a low voice.

"Your Majesty, I, I was wholeheartedly serving the Kingdom; I knew nothing about Arno's matter!"

Xiulote paid no attention to the elderly Priest. He remained expressionless, suppressing the fear in his heart, and scoffed.

"Heh, Axolotl, to think that among the Canine Descendants someone like you would emerge! To avenge Chichika, you managed to deceive everyone, getting this close to me?"

Hearing this, Bertade's face showed shame. Silently gripping his Bronze Sword, he fixed his gaze on Axolotl's neck, like a Jaguar poised to hunt.

"Your Majesty, I, I really am not..."

Axolotl trembled all over. He felt the breath of death closing in.

Watching his old rival's performance, Ozoma scoffed with disdain.

"Ha! Axolotl! Your deeds have been exposed, what's there to argue! On the night that the Tribe perished, you should have died! To think you were once a Chieftain of a Great Tribe on the Wilderness, yet you lack the courage to face death squarely!"

"..."

Axolotl was at a loss for words. He paused, then sighed.

"Yes! I should have died long ago! So many warriors died, the Tribes were gone, Chichika, the leader, also died, why am I still clinging to life? Now that it has come to this, it's just a death, that's all!"

Having said that, Axolotl looked towards Priest Teya and nodded calmly.

"Priest Teya, I am sorry for concealing my identity from you. I'm not Arno, I am Axolotl!"

Xiulote, observing this scene, nodded slowly. A warrior facing death with equanimity, blossoming like a flower only to wither away, resonated well with the Mexica aesthetic. He intoned solemnly.

"Axolotl, for the hatred of your Tribe, you bore humiliation, took the risk of an assassination attempt on me, disregarding your personal safety, you are a warrior worthy of respect! Being a warrior, I will accord you with the warrior's rites in bidding you farewell. Have you any verses to leave behind?"

"Poetry..."

Axolotl paused for a moment, then recited in a low voice.

"I am a salamander trapped in a pool, enduring the pain of never growing up... then, I climb out from the pool, shedding gills and tail, yet without feet to walk... I die at the banks of the pool, from life to death, achieving eternal transcendence!"

"Good!"

Upon listening, Black Wolf Torc could not help but exclaim in admiration. Bertade had a serene smile on his face. Xiulote, on the other hand, lowered his gaze. In the ancient myths of Central America, the salamander's life-to-death journey represented an imprisoned spirit's liberation, achieving ascendance to a higher realm. And what followed was the salamander's rebirth, experiencing the cycle of new life and death.

"Bertade, give him the warrior's farewell!"

The Head Warrior nodded, sheathing his Bronze Sword, and grasping the sacrificial Obsidian Dagger. With a solemn face, he stepped in front of Axolotl, placing the sharp blade against the other's neck, drawing a faint line of blood.

"Don't worry, it will be quick."

Bertade whispered softly.

Axolotl closed his eyes, bracing for death. A chilling sting spread from the skin of his neck, his senses momentarily becoming sharp. Then, he heard a deep inhalation, the prelude to the Head Warrior's exertion of force.

"In the next second, I will be dead!"

In this moment before death, a surge of immense terror suddenly overtook him. Axolotl's mind was greatly shaken, as if plunging into an endless abyss. He abruptly opened his eyes, and in the surprised look from Bertade, he yelled with all his might.

"Your Majesty! I surrender! I am willing to serve you!"

The air went suddenly silent. It felt like one second, you were quietly savoring the scent of a beautiful flower, and the next, a buzzing fly suddenly flew out from the flower's center.

"Your Majesty, I really am not an assassin! I was captured and taken south, only wishing to live out the rest of my life honestly. I hid in the crowd today, never intending to get close to you! And I was completely unaware of Priest Teya's recommendation!..."

Axolotl strained his neck away from the Head Warrior's Dagger as he pleaded fervently, whimpering like a pitiful dove.

"...Your Majesty, I am well-acquainted with the Wilderness Tribes, I am willing to serve you! I, I can offer you advice on managing the Tribal villages!"

Xiulote lowered his gaze, remaining silent. It wasn't until Axolotl finished his last sentence that he opened his eyes indifferently.

"Oh? What advice do you have for managing Tribal villages?"

"Uh..."

Axolotl took a cautious glance at Bertade, who had calmly sheathed the Dagger. Following that, the Red Salamander Chieftain rapidly pondered while stuttering out an answer.

"Praise Your Majesty! Praise the Chief Divine! I've spent several months in the Tribal villages, and there's chaos in many places... Ever since Your Majesty forcefully disrupted the Tribes, organizing the banner squads, traditional order on the Wilderness has been completely undone, and the Tribe's people are in a state of panic, still without established new norms..."

As he spoke, Axolotl's thoughts became much clearer. After all, he had traversed the Wilderness for many years and deeply interacted with the village situation, giving him a thorough understanding of the Tribal people's hearts.

"Your Majesty, strength is still the supreme authority in a Tribe. On the Wilderness, the Tribes were divided into red-haired hunters, warriors, and able-bodied men. The red-haired Hunters are not only the most elite warriors but also the captains of the hunting teams. They effectively manage the Tribe's manpower. Only under their command could the entire Tribe move as one, migrating for thousands of miles..."

"...Now, by forcibly disrupting the Tribes and drafting all the warriors, leaving only able-bodied men from different Tribes, you have dissolved the hierarchy within the Tribal villages. Our Guajili Tribe has always only feared the strong; relying on assigned Priests and village chiefs alone will not suffice to control them."