

Civilization 721

Chapter 721: Rebellion, The Battle of Kulamo City

Flames blazed in front of the Temple, thick smoke drifted across the city, and the intense killing had been ongoing for two days and two nights. The rebellious Militia had occupied most of the city, and thousands of civilians had already fled. On the city walls, the flags of the three divinities and the Zicao Family stood erect, just like in the era of the Tarasco Kingdom. And when the sunrise rose once again, all the colors within Kulamo City were revealed. At this moment, the pearl of Atoyac Lake was stained bright red with the fierceness of battle.

In the city's center, blood flowed down from the Akatla Pyramids, over ten meters high, and gathered into shallow streams. The veteran Etalik, dressed in Heavy Armor, sat calmly atop the pyramid in the Temple of the Chief Divine, munching slowly on a corn cake in his hand.

The Temple of the Chief Divine had been recently renovated, and one could faintly discern the remnants of the three divinities' murals. However, the symbol of the Hummingbird Sun stood erect in the center, the highest Chief Divine suppressing all remnants of the old gods. Beneath the symbol of the Chief Divine, a Mexica War Priest, holding the Book of Ama Colley, chanted the Chapters of holy war aloud, buoying the Samurai's morale.

The generals were calm and confident, the Priests devout and fearless. Under their influence, the more than five hundred Mexica Samurai stationed at the pyramid were settled. Relying on the sturdy pyramid, they were divided into three layers of defense.

The outermost layer consisted of four hundred Samurai, shield and spear in hand, forming a defensive formation suitable for guarding the middle part of the pyramid. Above them were over a hundred Archers, gripping Longbows in groups of three to five, occupying positions with excellent lines of sight to precisely shoot down enemy warriors. Caught off guard, the Archers did not have enough Arrows and couldn't shoot at will.

At the very top were forty elite Samurai clad in Cloth Heavy Armor, each wielding a great axe, resting and storing energy. When a side of the pyramid suffered a fierce assault from the enemy's elite, and the situation became dire, they would rush down from the top, scattering and crushing the enemy with an unstoppable force!

As the early sun rose, there was quiet for just a moment before the sounds of slaughter rose again. Engulfing smoke rose from the base of the pyramid, blackening both sides' warriors but effectively obstructing the Archers' vision.

Five to six hundred Kulamo Militia, under the leadership of over a hundred Zicao warriors, climbed up from the south, struggling to make a difficult assault on the pyramid. They thrust their Long Spears upward but were easily blocked by the Mexica warriors. Then, from above, Copper Spears whist right down, piercing the heads and necks of the Militia, bringing up great spurts of bright red!

"Whoosh, whoosh!"

A large number of stone-throwing Kulamo gathered close to the pyramid, hurling stones from below that struck the Mexica warriors' Cotton Armor and shields, occasionally hitting a warrior's cheek, causing excruciating pain. The warriors were terribly annoyed but always followed the general's orders, steadfastly holding their ground on the pyramid and not attacking.

"Swoosh, swoosh!"

The Mexica Archers observed for a moment and, through the smog, shot out dozens of scattered Feathered Arrows. Over a dozen Zicao warriors hidden among the Militia let out wails as they were grievously wounded or killed. The precious Arrows couldn't be squandered on the grass-like stone-throwing Kulamo.

Hundreds of lives were sacrificed in front of the Temple of the Chief Divine, and the stream atop the pyramid was replenished once again, slowly flowing down the stone steps, making the ascent even more difficult. The Zicao Family's assault continued for a quarter of an hour but never managed to breakthrough, only leaving behind more bodies.

In the blood and fire of the battle, old Etalik finished his cake. He stood up, looked down from his high position, and glanced at the battle on the south side of the pyramid, nodding his head. The battle line was stable, and it was not yet time to utilize the Heavy Armor warriors.

The Kingdom's Copper Armor production had gradually increased, and each main general had acquired a group of Armored trusted aides numbering around several dozen. These elite Armored Warriors served

to protect the generals and were utilized in critical assaults. As a veteran of the Alliance, Etalik had been given fifty expensive sets of Copper Armor, only to lose ten sets in a recent attack.

Thinking of this, old Etalik was incredibly angry.

Two days ago, he was attacked by an assassin from the Zicao Family. The attacker, claiming to be a descendant of a minor nobility, presented three letters of conspiracy regarding Prepetcha's plans for rebellion. After he read them, he found the language vague and interspersed with various Tarasco glyphs, so he summoned the man for a detailed inquiry.

Who would have known, the man, seemingly timid, was actually stubbornly fierce. He suddenly erupted in an attack, one of the trusted aides was scratched on the arm and instantly died from the poison. Luckily, Etalik was clad in arm-guard Heavy Armor and skilled in Martial Arts, he swiftly drew his Copper Sword and quickly killed the attacker. Afterward, looking at the spots of blue Frog Poison on the Cloth Armor, his heart skipped a beat.

"The rebellion of the Zicao Family must have been long in planning! May the Chief Divine protect us, may our ancestors protect us, and let's hope His Highness is unharmed!"

Etalik looked toward the north and prayed devoutly for a moment.

Shortly after the assassination attempt, thousands of rebellious militia and samurai appeared in Kulamo City. With the help of collaborators inside, they launched a surprise attack on Etalik's camp.

At least half of the two hundred newly conscripted Prepetcha samurai in the camp participated in the rebellion. They shouted slogans like "The barbarian King of Mexica has been assassinated, the Royal Family of Tarasco is about to be restored," and surrounded the area from all sides. Many residents of Kulamo City also joined in, some guiding the rebels, some providing them with food, and even some joining the battle.

Thinking of this, rage, along with some regret, rose in Etalik's eyes.

"After disbanding the militia, I shouldn't have conscripted two hundred Prepetcha samurai! An enemy within is the most dangerous. Everyone in Kulamo City is a traitor! When the King's grand army arrives, I

must suggest to His Highness: all the traitors in the city should either be sacrificed or demoted to slaves!"

Left intact after the campaign to the west, Zicao County to the south maintained its towns and villages largely intact. Excessive remnants of nobility, the slow spread of faith, and the people, having never witnessed the might of the Mexica legion, still held illusions about the old Tarasco regime. The Kingdom's rule here was not stable, which is why Etalik recommended to His Majesty to go south and reorganize.

A legion of a thousand Mexica samurai was attacked by the rebellious Zicao Family, suffering over three hundred casualties and then being surrounded by the rebellious militia and residents. The veteran Etalik made a quick decision, leading the six hundred or so remaining samurai in a desperate charge, breaking through the enemy besieging the Chief Divine Temple and seizing the central pyramid in the city.

There was enough food and water inside the Chief Divine Temple to last the people three days, and more than fifty steadfast Temple Guards joined them. Although these Temple Guards were of Prepetcha origin, they were extremely loyal to the Alliance. This loyalty was not just because of religious faith—because their fate was already tied to the Temple—once the three-God rebellious took the city, they would have nothing but death to face!

"Only samurai who devoutly believe in the Chief Divine are trustworthy and good warriors."

Etalik murmured to himself. The spread of faith was crucial to the stability of the Kingdom's rule.

Under his command, the six hundred plus Mexica samurai and the Temple Guards held the pyramid with the advantage of the terrain, defending it to the death. Once free from the initial surprise attack and the chaos of close combat, the full combat power of the Mexica samurai could be unleashed. In two days of fighting, the warriors only suffered a little over a hundred casualties but killed more than five hundred enemies. By now, the rebellious Zicao Family had lost its edge, and it was likely that most of their elite had been exhausted. The samurai holding the Temple faced their greatest threat yet—the impending exhaustion of food and water.

"Guramo, the head of the Zicao Family, the leader of the rebels."

The veteran Etalik watched with a solemn expression down at the base of the pyramid.

The Zicao Family's banner was erected beyond the reach of longbow shots. Beside the banner, a handsome warrior leader, donned in copper armor, was watching the defending army atop the pyramid. Then, he spoke a few commands to his trusted aides around him, and over a thousand Kulamo militia regathered on the east, west, and north sides. On the south side, where the warrior leader stood, nine copper-armored elites led more than two hundred leather-armored warriors, making their final preparations.

"Ha ha! Guramo, the warriors are short of food and water, and yet you are so impatient, committing all your elites."

Etalik ignored the imminent attack, a smile forming on his lips.

"Praise the Chief Divine! It seems that His Highness is safe and sound, and reinforcements are about to arrive!"

Chapter 722: Three Gods are Dead, Chief Divine Supreme!

"Thud, thud, thud!"

As the sun climbed, it bathed the Stone City in a bloody hue. After many years, the sonorous beat of war drums sounded once more in Kulamo City. Beneath the pyramid, the Copper Armor Leader personally struck the drum, and large troops of rebels shouted the slogan of the three gods as they charged towards the pyramid!

"Whoosh, whoosh!"

The first two hundred or so rebel Archers, in a loose formation with Hunting Bows and Reed Arrows in hand, climbed to the bottom of the pyramid. They took their positions and aimed upwards at the Mexica Samurai. Although the bows of the rebels were supple, from such a close distance, they managed to injure a few Samurai.

General Etalik's eyebrows arched. He waved the command flag, and the Mexica Samurai retreated a few meters upward, taking position on the upper part of the pyramid, forming an even tighter battle

formation. If they could hold this final assault, the rebels would no longer have the strength to mount a strong attack. Then, it would be his chance to counterattack.

"Thud thud thud!"

After three rounds of shooting, the rebel Archers paused for a brief moment. The drumming then became more urgent, and the shouts louder. Over two hundred rebel Javelin Throwers with Javelins on their backs passed the Archers at the base and continued to climb towards the middle of the pyramid. Soon, the fastest of the Javelin Throwers had reached the middle of the pyramid, raising their wooden and stone Javelins, ready to throw them upwards.

Etalik immediately blew the war whistle and waved the red flag. The Mexica warriors put down their shields to cover their lower bodies. Then, the Royal Army Archers stopped sparing their Arrows and rapidly fired at the climbing Javelin Throwers.

"Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!"

With the enemy so close and the Royal Army Archers shooting downhill with their powerful Longbows, it only took two rounds of firing before the two hundred Javelin Throwers suffered heavy casualties and started tumbling down the steps. The steep stairs were over ten meters high, and the Javelin Throwers screamed as they crashed at the base of the pyramid, leaving behind a jarring crimson splash. In total, they had only managed to throw a half-round of javelins, barely bringing down a dozen Samurai.

Guramo watched the scene, which resembled a sacrifice, with an unchanged expression. He abruptly signaled with his hand, and another group of two hundred Javelin Throwers/climbed up, their formation loose.

Etalik's brows furrowed, and he ordered another round of shooting.

"Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!"

The piercing Copper Arrows penetrated the bodies of those dressed in plain clothes, bringing with them the cries of the dying! In the face of the one-sided slaughter, the rebel troops halfway up the pyramid gradually scattered, fleeing in terror towards the base, and some even leaped down in a frenzy.

With an impassive face, Guramo gave orders to his trusted aide. The Zicao warriors beheaded over a hundred fleeing men in front of their formation and then pressed the third group of Javelin Throwers to attack.

The shooting from atop the pyramid finally began to thin out. The Royal Family Archers were running out of arrows, and Short Spears and small shields were brought up. Amidst the sparse Feathered Arrows, the third wave of Javelin Throwers barely managed to reach the middle tier, took the Javelins from their backs, threw them haphazardly upwards for a round, and then hurriedly retreated!

Seeing this, Etalik looked startled, and fury surged in his heart.

"Guramo! You venomous snake of lies!"

The third group of Javelin Throwers' throws were disorganized, and the Javelins they cast were feeble, lacking force and precision. These men appeared to be not the dangerously skilled throwers but harmless green hands!

Beneath the pyramid, a slight smile crept onto Guramo's face. The Javelin possessed great power and was even more difficult to train with than bows and arrows. Among the three waves of Javelin Throwers, only the first group contained a hundred true throwers, while the latter two groups comprised conscripts hastily gathered from nearby, merely carrying Javelins as a show. These men, dressed in plain clothes, were meant to exhaust the Royal Army's arrows with their lives.

Poor inhabitants of Kulamo City risked the annihilation of their clan to join the Zicao Family's rebellion, only to be used like fodder to deplete arrows!

As the defeated troops retreated down from the pyramid, Guramo no longer hesitated. He loudly encouraged them.

"Loyal Samurai and brave Militia! The brutal king of the North has died! The loyal Prepetcha warriors have all taken up arms! As long as we eliminate the enemy in front of us, Kulamo City will once again be embraced by the three gods! After the restoration of the Tarasco Kingdom, everyone will be rewarded, and everyone can become part of the Nobility! Charge, for we are blessed by the glory of the three gods! Sacrifice for Halatana!"

"Sacrifice for Halatana!"

The rebel forces' morale soared, and they shouted in unison. Then, led by several leader warriors, thousands of rebels carrying Long Spears, Stone Hammers, and War Clubs surged onto the pyramid, nearly filling all the stone staircases.

Etalik looked around. On the east, west, and north sides, teams of Zicao warriors led more than five hundred rebel Militia upwards, while on the south side, under the Zicao banners, nine Copper Armor elites commanded three hundred Leather Armor Samurai, followed by two hundred plain-clothed Militia. The number of rebels was nearly four times that of the Mexica warriors, and the Royal Family Archers had used up all their arrows.

Etalik lowered his eyes and took the Aztec Death Whistle from his bosom. He looked up toward the east of the Mexica Alliance and blew the whistle hard.

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

The rebels surged up the stone steps, and the brutal close-quarters combat finally began! Along the edges of the steps, warriors from both sides thrust their Long Spears, fiercely jostling each other. The Mexica Samurai had the advantage of the terrain, thrusting downwards forcefully while using their shields to block the rebels' stabbing attacks.

A young Mexica Samurai shouted and suddenly raised his arm, thrusting down with force! The sharp Copper Spear pierced the neck of a Kulamo Militia, severing the artery and entering the chest and back. A great burst of fresh red blood sprayed out, covering the faces of the surrounding warriors. The Militia let out a half-scream and, with the stuck Copper Spear, slanted down towards the bottom of the pyramid. The Mexica Samurai stumbled and was temporarily unable to pull out his weapon, forcing him to let go and abandon the spear. Then he drew the Short Dagger from his waist, slashed another Militia's arm, and continued to raise his shield to defend.

A Zicao warrior nearby saw an opportunity, slightly bent his body, and suddenly thrust upward. His spear accurately went through the gap in the shield and into the Mexica Samurai's calf, cutting the connecting tendon. The young warrior screamed in pain. His footing gave out, and he lost his balance. Another Militia's Stone Spear took the opportunity to come thrusting wildly, piercing the Cotton Armor and into

his lower abdomen! The young warrior roared and grabbed the nearby Militia, plummeting together from the dozen meters high pyramid, immediately followed by two chilling "thuds."

Under the watchful eyes of the divine, the bloody skirmish gradually reached its climax. Neither side had a way to retreat, and the will of the commanders was extremely resolute. The hand-to-hand combat gradually became entangled, and life burst forth in blood in the tangle. A large amount of fresh blood splashed out, completely soaking the pyramid.

Etalik continued to blow the Death Whistle while watching the battle unfold.

The Mexica Samurai were defending on all four sides of the pyramid, and the standoff on three sides, mainly formed by rebel Militia, was still holding, but the southern front led by the Zicao warriors was gradually falling behind. Among these Zicao warriors, there were always a few exceptionally agile warriors skilled in Martial Arts, constantly making surprise attacks on the Mexica Samurai showing vulnerabilities.

In just two Quarters of brutal fighting, the Mexica Samurai lost more than a hundred men, and the rebels left behind three to four hundred corpses. Seeing that the southern defensive line was about to break, Etalik finally stopped blowing the whistle and waved the red flag in his hand.

"Heavy Armor warriors, attack!"

Forty Heavy Armor warriors roared like tigers and, with Bronze Great Axes in both hands, surged toward the gap in the south. They swung their axes fiercely, chopping the Kulamo Militia in two! With just one charge, at least twenty or thirty rebels were cut down. The southern rebels immediately wavered, and the Zicao warriors were pushed back a few steps. They raised their Long Spears, relying only on nine elite Heavy Armor warriors to barely contend with the Heavy Armor warriors.

As the southern offensive was about to collapse, a smile crept on Guramo's face. The Mexica's reserves were now depleted! He waved his command flag, and two to three hundred forcibly conscripted strong men were thrown into the southern side of the pyramid, blocking the retreat of the warriors in front. Then he stretched his hand toward the west and ordered the Personal Guard Death Warriors before him.

"Sour Fruit Vine, Earth Cinnamon, take the Personal Guard and strike the west side!"

"At your command, Family Head."

The Personal Guard Death Warriors knelt to salute. Then, with seventy to eighty Personal Guard Warriors, they swiftly climbed up the west side of the pyramid. At this moment, each of the two leaders on the pyramid had committed all their elites into the battlefield.

Unmoved, Etalik raised the Death Whistle again, with a will to die emerging in his heart. The Heavy Armor warriors, although brave, could only fight for two Quarters. Their physical strength depleted rapidly and could not be quickly restored. And the defense of the west side was soon to falter.

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

The shrill sound of the whistle blew once more, like the screech of the God of Death. Guramo curled his lips, watching the Mexica commander on the pyramid. If only he could eliminate the Royal Army in the city, capture a batch of Armor and Arrows, then levy three thousand strong men from the city, assemble the rural Militia, and rely on the sturdy Stone Walls, maybe...

"Ooom!... Ooom!..."

The deep sound of the conch horn suddenly came from the distant northern sky. Guramo's smile abruptly froze. Only the northern Kingdom Legion would use such a strange instrument, obtained from the body of a wilderness behemoth.

"Ooom!... Ooom!..."

The low horn sounded again, resonating through the clouds. Warriors fighting on both sides of the pyramid paused at the sound. Then, the morale of the Mexica Samurai suddenly surged, while that of the Kulamo rebels plummeted.

"The reinforcement has arrived!"

The War Priest in the Temple walked out excitedly. He saw at the edge of the horizon, thousands of emerald green warriors, carrying the Kingdom's flag, approaching the outskirts of Kulamo City. He stood before the Chief Divine's symbol and shouted to all the warriors.

"The reinforcement has arrived! This is the Chief Divine's blessing! The three gods are dead, the Chief Divine is the highest!"

"The three gods are dead, the Chief Divine is the highest!!"

Chapter 723: Catching the Snake

"Whoo!... Whoo!..."

The prolonged sound of the horn came from the north, echoing through the rebellious Kulamo City. It was like a judgment from the Supreme God, and like a cold wave from the distant north, sending a chill through the entire body of the Clan Leader Guramo in an instant.

"How is it possible... how is it possible... so soon?!..."

Guramo trembled all over, in disbelief. Since Medina's assassination attempt, only three days and four nights had passed!

He had traveled day and night to the south, mobilizing samurai to attack the garrison in Kulamo City, without any delay. Afterwards, he organized thousands of rebels, besieging the Mexica troops for two days and nights, exhausting their stamina and arrows, and victory seemed within reach! Who would have expected...

"So soon... it can only be... all results are the worst..."

Guramo murmured to himself, his heart instantly filled with despair.

The sound of the Royal Army's horn appearing here, at this time, was the worst possible outcome imagined: Medina's assassination of the King had utterly failed, and had not even caused a bit of chaos. The King had directly targeted the Zicao Family, sending out an urgent envoy who traveled a hundred

miles in one day, commanding the Jingji Legion to head south. Then, the Jingji Legion, without any delay and not attacking the Crow Fief, had traveled almost a hundred miles in two days, heading straight for Kulamo City!

Such an outcome, once it occurred, signified that this premeditated rebellion was completely doomed. Faced with the crusading Kingdom Legion, the Zicao Family would not even have a chance to defend the city. A family of more than two hundred years of glory, was about to completely collapse in his hands, to be burned to ashes by the King's wrath!

An endless regret surged in his heart, Guramo stood silently on the spot, his heart twisted with pain. The fighting on the pyramid continued, but the rebels' assault was already powerless. The rebel leaders of Kulamo City were somewhat uneasy, clearly the King in the north was dead, so how could there be a Royal Army attack?

Soon, a scout rushed from the north of the city, panicking in his report.

"Family Head, a large number of Royal Legion troops have appeared in the north of the city, numbering three to five thousand. Looking at the flags, one is the Hummingbird Flag, and the other is the Sky Flag!"

The meaning of Qinchongcan is Land of the Hummingbird, and the Hummingbird Flag should belong to the Qinchongcan Samurai Camp. And there is only one Sky Flag, that of the Sky Samurai Camp.

"Haha! Huitu Puapu, Sky Oorta! You came really fast!"

Guramo gave a bitter laugh in his heart. These two came so fast, not to abide by the agreement to rebel together, but to silence him, acting with even more ruthlessness than the Mexica people. He was silent for a moment, suddenly smiled, and said to the leaders of Kulamo City on either side.

"Haha! Soldiers of the Prepetcha Samurai in the Royal Army have come as agreed, to rise up together and restore the Tarasco Kingdom! But when their troops enter the city, they will definitely plunder and demand property. Kulamo City is ours, we must not give them even a bit. You continue to command the Militia to besiege the Mexica samurai on the pyramid, take down the enemy as quickly as possible! I am now heading to North City, to guard the city walls while negotiating with them!"

The leaders in Kulamo City looked at each other, nodding their heads in doubt and belief. At this point, they had all reached a dead end, with no choice but to deceive themselves and others.

After briefly reassuring everyone, Guramo left the family's main banner and did not recall the Zicao samurai. He only took about twenty of his trusted aides, carrying the family's small banner, and hurried to the north gate.

The fierce fighting on the pyramid continued, but the intensity rapidly diminished. The veteran Etalik was surprised at the stability of the rebel's morale. He stood at the highest point, watching the Golden Armor leader head northward, disappearing into a manor for a moment. Afterwards, the Golden Armor leader set off again with a dozen of his trusted aides, heading to the north gate to personally command the rebels in defending against the Royal Army.

"Guramo, how can you be so decisive?"

Etalik raised an eyebrow. Then, after a moment of thought, he suddenly clenched his fist.

"No good, he's trying to escape!"

Outside the north gate, Oorta, leading two thousand elite Sky Samurai, had already arrived first. The Huitu Puapu samurai camp was slightly slower, still a few miles behind.

The walls of Kulamo City were about five meters high, sparsely manned by rebel militia and able-bodied men, estimated to be around five to six hundred people. At that moment, the rebels, observing the well-arranged Royal Legion outside the city, appeared uncertain and fearful.

Without hesitation, Oorta immediately ordered the samurai to attack the city. Four hundred bow samurai, clad in cotton armor, approached directly under the wall and fired deadly copper arrows at the rebels on the ramparts!

"Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh!"

The sharp arrows rained fiercely upward; cries of anguish instantly echoed from the ramparts. Most of the Kulamo rebels were civilians, lacking not only protective shields and armor but also experience in combat against shooting. After just a few volleys of feathered arrows, there were a hundred casualties on the ramparts. Then, over a thousand Sky Samurai spread out to both sides of the wall. They looked for less defended spots, throwing grappling hooks to prepare for climbing.

Seeing that the defending army of North City was about to collapse, a leader in golden armor suddenly led about a dozen trusted aides and two hundred militia levied along the way, hastily climbing up the battlements. He wore a half-mask and carried a small flag of the Zicao Family behind him. The trusted aides loudly directed the militia to set up shields for defense, then to throw the prepared javelins, rocks, and ash bottles. After a brief fight, the Sky Samurai left dozens of bodies and concluded the first wave of the assault, temporarily retreating.

Oorta watched the battlements with a grave expression. He stared at the familiar figure of the leader in golden armor, his vaguely recognizable face, and glanced at the family flag on his back. Like a Hunter closing in on his prey, he smiled with delight.

"Guramo, it's you!"

Now that Guramo was there, Oorta was in no hurry. The Sky Family's samurai were already few, and saving even one was a gain. As for the Mexica samurai inside, they naturally had the protection of the Supreme God. He first instructed the bow samurai to shoot slowly, draining the morale of those on the ramparts while he began arranging manpower to construct simple ladders.

At the end of two quarters, the ladders were still incomplete. Puap had already arrived. Oorta, pointing at the leader in golden armor on the ramparts, exclaimed emotionally.

"Puap, our timing is perfect. I didn't expect Guramo to have such courage, leading his troops personally at the battlements! Hmm, I wonder how General Etalik inside the city is doing, I hope the Supreme God protects him! From the sounds of it, fighting is still underway inside. Look, the Supreme God's flag is still flying on the Temple Pyramid; they must still be holding on..."

Puap glanced at the battlements, noted the leader's mask and the small flag, and measured the man's position ahead of his troops, and his expression suddenly changed. He gripped his fingers tightly and cursed out loud.

"Oorta, you fool! That's not Guramo! What stupidity! How could I have a comrade like you!"

Then, ignoring the surprise on Oorta's face, he ordered directly.

"The city is still resisting, the rebel forces are limited, they cannot hold all four walls! Leave a thousand men here, then send five hundred to both the East City and West City! I'm sending a thousand men to the south, to block off South City and the lakeshore!"

After speaking, Huitu Puap didn't stop for a moment. He immediately took his trusted aides and hurried off to the southwest.

"Ah! Puap, where are you going now?"

Oorta called out hastily from behind.

"Damn! I'm heading to Guramo's fief, Zicao Manor! May the Supreme God protect us, I hope it's not too late!"

The afternoon sun twinkled on Lake Atoyac, and desperate cries arose within Kulamo City. The four thousand Prepetcha samurai paused briefly, then dispersed in all directions, blocking off the entire rebellious city. They cast themselves like a loose, large net, thrown with force to capture the cunning water serpent lurking in Lake Atoyac.

Chapter 724: Secret Letter

The setting sun cast a bloody glow, falling upon the Zicao Manor. The once brilliant and ostentatious glamour had now transformed into the sights of devastation and destruction before their eyes. Outside the manor, torn pieces of cloth and scattered branches and leaves lay about, marred with marks of chopping and hacking. Inside, the stems of the large dahlias were broken, trampled into the mud. Amongst the flowers and trees, the gold and silver decorated buildings were smeared with fresh red, as if the God of Death himself had painted the final marks with his brush.

Huitu Puapu, leading a thousand elite Samurai, came with murderous intent. In less than half a day, they had conquered the Zicao Family's manor. Over two hundred Zicao samurai mostly died in battle, a few were captured, and only a handful escaped to the southeast. Afterward, more than three hundred

members of the Zicao Clan were captured by the samurai and detained in a grand hall deep within the manor, including about sixty to seventy relatives and concubines of Guramo alone.

At this moment, hundreds of Qinchongcan samurai were repeatedly patrolling inside the manor, searching for any that might have slipped through the net. Meanwhile, Puapu personally led a hundred samurai, interrogating the Zicao Clan members in the hall.

"Speak! Where has Guramo gone?!"

"I... I'm just a servant... ah..."

Huitu Puapu's expression was ferocious, as he grabbed the servant's hair with his left hand and with his right hand's Long Dagger he fiercely slit it! Warm blood splattered in an instant, and Guramo's servant died immediately. Then, with bloodshot eyes, he grabbed a middle-aged nobleman by the hair, placing the bloody long dagger against his neck.

"Speak! Where has Guramo gone?!"

"I... I don't know, my clan brother... uh..."

Puapu's eyes flashed viciously, and he swung the blade again. Then, wiping his face with his sleeve and licking the corner of his mouth, he seized another elderly clansman.

"Speak! Where has Guramo gone?!"

"I... he, he is Guramo's son, he knows."

"Hmm."

Puapu nodded. He smirked as he withdrew the dagger, then suddenly thrust it forward, stirring vigorously before pulling it out!

"Ah!..."

The elderly clansman bled from his chest and slumped to the ground. Afterwards, Puapu strode forward, seizing the young nobleman who had been pointed out. He pressed the blood-dripping Long Dagger against the young man's cheek.

"Speak! Where has Guramo gone?!"

"Ah! Father... Father just came back a while ago, hurriedly took a few brothers, and then he went, he went..."

The young nobleman's legs gave way, and he collapsed to the ground, his nose running and tears streaming. Guramo hadn't even entered the manor; he had just hurriedly taken a few who had been waiting. Lagging behind because he was frolicking with a dancer, the young man missed the only chance of escape.

"Where did he go?!"

"He went to the southern lake... Ah!"

Puapu briskly drew out the dagger, angrily instructing his trusted aide.

"Send out two hundred Samurai to search the southern lake! Try to find some small boats!"

"Yes, Vice Legion Commander!"

The trusted aide bowed his head to acknowledge the command and left. General Huitu preferred not to be called Camp Commander, liking the title Vice Legion Commander more, although currently this was just a designation used within the camp.

Huitu Puapu stood still, his eyes red as he surveyed the hall. The four walls of the hall were painted with depictions of naked goddesses and graceful dancers. Now, the goddesses were stained red, and the

dancers stepped over corpses, adding a sinister beauty to the scene. His agitated gaze swept over the crowd, lingering on Guramo's concubines.

Moments later, he made a choice, striding over, seizing a bound voluptuous woman, and dragging her into an adjacent side hall. Soon, deep breaths followed, along with the woman's coquettish moans. The sounds quickly became frantic and then intensely loud. First a hysterical scream from a man, then a woman's shriek, and all the sounds abruptly stopped.

Puapu emerged from the side hall, his body stained with fresh blood, his crazed eyes finally settling down. By this time, he had to admit that Guramo, that crafty snake, had already slipped through the net.

"The secret letter... the secret letter... where is it?!"

Puapu, clinging to a last glimmer of hope, muttered to himself. Then, his eyes turning cold, he replaced his worn Obsidian Dagger and walked towards the Zicao people again.

The sun set beyond the horizon, darkness enveloped the land, covering endless bloodshed. The samurai sent to search the southern lake had not yet returned, and the skies over Oorta had already arrived first.

"How did it go?!"

Oorta asked, his expression anxious and irritable.

"He escaped. The letter wasn't found."

Puapu lowered his eyes, shaking his head. Then, just as urgently, he asked.

"How is the city?"

"The city has fallen. The Legion circled to the East Gate where the Defending Army immediately disbanded. Then, the Samurai climbed over the walls and entered, the insurgents initially resisted a bit, but soon they all surrendered. Now, all four gates of the city have been blocked, a large number of

insurgents are either dead or have surrendered, only a few scattered soldiers remain, and they also can't escape..."

Oorta answered confidently. He didn't mention the Golden Armor leader who died at the north gate, because indeed as Huitu had predicted, that was just a decoy.

"What about General Etalik?"

"He's unharmed, and still has five hundred Mexica Samurai under his command."

At this point, a hint of resentment crossed Oorta's face.

"That old man Etalik! We've marched hundreds of miles, day and night, to come to his rescue. He just sits high in the Pyramid Temple, making me go meet him alone!"

"Oh? Meet him alone?"

Puapu raised his eyebrows, asking in return.

"You went alone?"

"...I went. I took a dozen trusted aides, and he didn't dare say anything!"

Oorta's eyes shifted slightly, avoiding Puapu's gaze.

Chapter 725: Secret Letter_2

"If it weren't for his deep experience and the fact that he comes from the family of Your Highness's samurai..."

Huitu Puapu pondered silently. Taking a dozen trusted aides was hardly different from going alone. He thought for a moment, then asked.

"What did the old general say?"

"The old man told me to divide our forces to suppress the disorder in the city, then control the streets and prohibit civilians from passing. I left fifteen hundred men to quell the unrest in the city and came here directly with five hundred trusted aides."

"Are the five hundred Mexica samurai still at the Temple Pyramid?"

"They were still there when I left."

"Hmm."

Puapu silently nodded his head. It seemed General Etalik also had suspicions about them. The assassination by Guramo put all commanders from the Prepetcha lineage in an awkward position. His and Oorta's repeated contacts with Guramo added another layer of embarrassment, even danger.

"Damn! Oorta, you've really screwed me over!"

Thinking this, Puapu cursed softly.

"The secret letter might have been taken by Guramo!"

"Ah!"

Oorta tensed up, instinctively clutching the short dagger at his waist.

While the two were agonizing over this, suddenly a trusted aide came from the grand hall and reported.

"Deputy Head, we have interrogated Guramo's trusted servant, who says Guramo has a secret chamber!"

"Hmm?"

"Let's go!"

Hearing this, their eyes lit up. They almost simultaneously shouted.

"Lead the way!"

Everyone, carrying torches, followed the trembling servant to the family storeroom behind the grand hall. The storeroom had many rooms, one of which was filled with unknown herbs and jars. The servant walked to the back of the room, pushed a wooden table aside, and pointed to a floorboard below.

"Sir, it's below here."

Oorta scoffed at the so-called "secret chamber" which had nearly no secretive measures, but merely a cool cellar. He directly lifted the plank, and immediately, a pungent smell of herbs mixed with a strong stench of blood rushed to their noses.

Puapu's expression turned stern, gripping the long dagger at his waist. He signaled to his trusted aides, and some carried torches and cautiously entered the cellar. Then, a series of low exclams arose from the front.

"Ah!"

"What is this?"

"Chief Divine!..."

Puapu patiently waited until one of the trusted aides returned.

"Vice Legion Commander, there's no danger ahead, just an odd... earthen wall?"

"Hmm?"

Puapu glanced at Oorta, then took the lead into the cellar. The cellar was not deep, cool and dry. As they went deeper, the smell of blood grew stronger, dizzying them. Soon, the group reached the deepest part where a vast underground room appeared before them.

"... Guramo, that disgusting snake! Warriors collect the heads of mighty samurai to build skull walls, to display their martial prowess! And he collects so many women's heads, preserving them with herbs, what a disgusting coward!"

Puapu spat disdainfully. Oorta shivered.

Before them stood an earthen wall about seven or eight meters long and two meters high. The wall had holes the size of human heads. Inside each hole, the heads of young women were neatly preserved with preservative herbs. Most of them had long hair, their skin dry and pale, their expressions still discernible. Some showed terror, some fear, some despair, some relief, and some even a smile.

At this moment, the entire wall was adorned with over a hundred heads, all with hollow, eerily staring eyes. Beside the heads on the wall, there were finely detailed pictographic notations that seemed to be evaluations of the collection.

If Xiulote had been standing there, examining closely, he could have recognized a withered head in the center. It bore a smile of relief, and its features bore a slight resemblance to Medina. Next to it, there was a regretful smile etched into the annotation.

Historically, such below-ground or semi-subterranean structures were called "skull walls," a tradition passed down since the Teotihuacan Period, usually built beneath ancient temples. The skulls themselves recorded the achievements of their creators and also symbolized sacrifices to the gods. This reverence

for death was deeply rooted in the hearts of all parts of Central America, just like the later Day of the Dead.

"Tch, what a waste of time!"

Puap looked for a moment, confirming that this was merely a skull chamber. Unable to contain his anger, he grabbed a servant from the floor and swung his Long Dagger with force, adding a fresh crimson to the chamber.

The crowd emerged from the cellar and returned to the manor. After the chaos, the samurai who had gone to search by the lake had returned. They had found neither boats nor people, returning without success.

"Puap, what do we do now? Do we continue the interrogation?"

Oorta looked worried, vaguely fearful.

"Continue the interrogation? The Imperial Guard Legion is on its way south; we don't have time!"

Saying this, Puap's eyes turned cold, and murder boiled in his chest.

"His Majesty said we need to sacrifice the Zicao Family! So, let's kill all the members of the Zicao Clan, then set the whole manor ablaze! After all, none of the Zicao Family are innocent; they're all rotten wood of the kingdom... If the confidential letters are still in the manor, it will all be resolved."

"Ah? What if the confidential letters are still in Guramo's hands? Wouldn't we be at his mercy?..."

"Hmm... The only way now is to confess our sins to His Majesty!"

Puap furrowed his brow, pondering for a moment. Recalling the reasoning an old militia had spoken after drinking, he finally spoke decisively.

"Since we can't find the letters, we can only confess! There was nothing in those letters anyway, just... just some hypotheses that wouldn't come true."

"The old man said, where in the world is there loyalty solid as stone? It's all loyalty like a tree. As long as His Majesty reigns supreme, that tree lives. Every branch, every leaf, is loyal! It lives if he wishes it so, and dies if he wills it. But if His Majesty never returns from the northern campaign, that tree dies. The loyalty rots, the wood decays. Then, not just us but even the most loyal Ezpan will choose to rebel against the Alliance!..."

"His Majesty, graced with Divine Revelation, is a king who can see far. We are useful to His Majesty as long as we sincerely admit our guilt, even if we face some punishment, we still have a chance!"

Oorta thought for a moment, then helplessly nodded.

"It's our only choice now! Alas!"

The two sighed, gave a few instructions to their trusted aides, and fell silent. Soon, desperate cries rose sharply, then abruptly ceased. The Prepetcha samurai quickly looted some valuables, then set the stone and timber houses on fire.

With the wind aiding the flames, in just two quarters of an hour, the vast Zicao Manor was engulfed in a roaring fire! Trees were burning, flowers were burning, buildings were burning, even bodies were burning.

A family of glorious heritage that had lasted over two hundred years was thus destroyed! All past glories, all past sins, turned to ashes in the great fire, subsequently scattering in the wind. Outside the manor, the towering Zicao deadwood trees caught fire, blazing from the base to the top, like a row of twenty-something-meter-high torches, shimmering in the dim night.

"Puap! Oorta!..."

Atoyac Lake reflected the distant glow of the fire. Guramo stood on a canoe, with just a few people by his side. His heart was filled with immense pain, his face twisted like a snake's, and tears of regret fell

heavily, then turned into venom of hatred, deeply buried in his heart. After a while, he wiped away his tears and spoke softly but firmly to those around him.

"What are you crying for?! As long as we are alive, our family lives. Let's go!"

"Father, where are we going?"

One young noble trembled, asking in a low voice.

Guramo did not speak. He reached deep into his robe, carefully pulling out a Jade Talisman. This was from a visitor from afar during the King's northern campaign, which he never thought he would need. Yet, it turned out to be his last resort... it was unclear what fate awaited him.

"Row to the East!"

Guramo glanced at the mysterious symbol on the Jade Talisman and said coldly. Then, clutching the Jade Talisman tightly, he turned away, took one last look at the burning manor, and boarded the canoe. On the front of the Jade Talisman was engraved a hummingbird in the sun, and on the back, surprisingly, a small square Han character, "secret."

The night was vast, the fire bright. At the same time, Etalik stood to the south of the Great Temple, the last battlefield where the Zicao samurai fell. He furrowed his brow, staring at a body in front of him, lost in thought.

The body wore a smile, next to it was a stripped Copper Armor, and above the armor, lay a blood-soaked leather bag. This bag, found inside the copper armor of the deceased, was well-preserved. Upon examining it, there were... two confidential letters!

Chapter 726: Royal Banner Marches South and the Religious Trial

The wind whistled fiercely, and the Wolf Banner fluttered triumphantly. Seven thousand Imperial Guard Legion marched southward from Otto City, carrying the power to suppress all unrest. The samurai clad in heavy armor along with their copper cannons, the legion could only advance thirty li per day. It took Xiulote four days to reach the fief of the Crow Family. A thousand troops from the Jingji Legion had already stationed at the Crow Manor, taking over every aspect of the fief.

Old Crow Xiteli, along with his clansmen, knelt at the entrance of the manor to welcome the arrival of His Majesty's banner.

He hurried along, slowly and steadily, and finally made it back to Crow Manor just before the Mexica samurai launched their attack. After reading the secret letter, he slapped his foolish eldest son to the ground with a smack and cursed loudly.

"Told you to learn your letters! Told you to learn your letters! You almost doomed our family, you fool!"

That very night, the Crow Family surrendered to Olosh, the Legion Commander, handing over their entire lands and a population of over ten thousand, along with a secret letter from the Zicao Family. Olosh left a thousand samurai to wait for His Majesty and continued southward to support Kulamo City.

Xiulote stayed one day in Crow Manor and met with the old clan leader of the Crows. The King expressed great pleasure over Old Crow's submissive decision. In the entire Zicao County, only three noble families, each controlling over ten thousand subjects, achieved the glory of nobility. Both the Palm and the Zicao families had subsequently rebelled, leaving only the Crow Family to obey the decree and surrender their lands.

After pondering for half a day, Xiulote decided to set up the Crow Family as a model. After handing over 200,000 mu of their lands, they would be re-granted 20,000 mu reserved for the Zicao family in the state of Guamare and allowed to retain 1,000 subjects.

Old Crow repeatedly kowtowed, his tears of gratitude mixed with bittersweet joy. The lands and subjects assigned by the kingdom were directly doubled, reducing the reduction from 95% to 90%.

"...still better than the already extinct Zicao family and the soon-to-be-extinct Palm family!"

Old Crow thought thus. In such tumultuous times, mere survival was not easy. Next, his real task was to hinge closely on the wings of the kingdom, soaring high with the Divine Eagle...

After dealing with the Crow Family, the seven thousand Imperial Guard Legion proceeded southward and arrived at Kulamo City three days later. By then, the rebellion in Kulamo City had been quelled,

leaving behind unerased traces of blood. The banner of the Chief Divine fluttered again over the city walls, and the patrolling Mexica Samurai controlled the entire city. Thousands of rebellious civilians were captured and concentrated in the north end of the city for guarding.

Jaguar Olosh and the veteran Etalik met and divided their responsibilities. Olosh stayed in the military camp outside the city, commanding the Jingji Legion and taking over all the noble lands around Kulamo. Etalik stayed inside the Temple Pyramid in the city, calming the city's order.

His Majesty's Royal Banner stayed at the military camp outside the city for one day. Olosh reported the latest developments.

After extinguishing the Zicao Family, the Jingji Legion split into several teams, sweeping across the north coast of the Atoyac Lake. Where the king's forces went, the southern nobles all bowed their heads in submission, handing over lands and subjects. The Jingji Legion proceeded east to the easternmost boundary of the Atoyac Lake and west to meet with the Second Spear Legion from Ezpan. In just a few days, the plains along the north shore of the lake stretching over a hundred li, plus over ten noble fiefs including Kulamo City... The eastern part of Zicao County, with over seventy thousand people, was now under the control of the royal forces.

Xiulote nodded in satisfaction. He had brought along artillery as he traveled south, yet there hadn't been a chance to use them. The rebellion in the east had risen and been extinguished abruptly; the flames had barely sparked before they were rapidly suppressed by the army of samurai. He praised Olosh a few times and then enjoyed a merry drink with his former teacher.

The next day at noon, the Imperial Guard Legion, escorting the Royal Banner, entered the city of Zicao County, while the Artillery Camp remained outside the city. The old general Etalik led His Majesty into the city while recounting the beginning and end of the rebellion in Kulamo City.

"Are you saying that two thousand militia members in the city, along with several thousand robust subjects, all joined the rebellion? Were they coerced or did they volunteer?"

Xiulote paused in his steps, gazing at the deserted streets along the way. The streets were only occupied by the solemnly vigilant samurai and the scattered residents hiding in their homes.

"There was coercion, but more volunteered,"

Etalik spoke gravely.

"The Zicao Family shouted stirring slogans, saying His Highness was assassinated and there were mutinies in various legions. They wanted to restore the tri-god faith and rebuild the Tarasco Kingdom. After the restoration, all participants were promised great rewards!"

Xiulote remained silent in contemplation. After a while, he firmly spoke.

"Zicao County harbors too many remnants of the old dynasty. This purge should improve things significantly. Priests from the kingdom have already headed south, taking over the recaptured noble lands, organizing households, and spreading the faith of the Chief Divine. Once the old nobility are relocated north across the Lerma River, the entire Zicao County will be directly governed by the kingdom. By next autumn's harvest at the latest, public sentiment should have greatly improved!"

"Your Highness is merciful!"

Etalik bowed deeply. Then, with a serious expression, he offered his advice.

"However, open rebellion in Kulamo City must not go unpunished. Only by ingraining fear into the bones of the southern people can the spread of faith be greatly facilitated!"

"Oh? What do you suggest?"

"All twenty thousand individuals in Kulamo City and the Zicao lands who participated in the rebellion or are related to it should be sent north to become agricultural slaves, awarded to the military nobles and samurai!"

Etalik studied His Majesty's thoughtful expression and continued.

"Your Honor, half of a thousand Mexica samurai fell in this rebellion! Without fear, there is no grace. Fear and grace are twin-born. The people of Kulamo must be severely punished! Moreover, according to the newly promulgated royal decrees, agricultural slaves are allowed to marry. If the children of

agricultural slaves are raised by the village community and the government, they are considered commoners. And once the agricultural slaves have labored for ten years, they can regain their status as commoners and receive a plot of land sufficient for subsistence."

Xiulote nodded, this decree was indeed initiated by him at the suggestion of the Sage. The initial proposal was that agricultural slaves, after working for five years, could return to being commoners. However, as soon as this was announced, various military nobles came forward to the court, earnestly advising otherwise.

The Sage had also carefully calculated for His Majesty that it was only by toiling for ten years could an agricultural slave not only sustain his military noble master but also accumulate enough wealth to buy another slave for the master. In other words, the military nobles wished to maintain their wealth for generations without taking part in production. Given the average lifespan of the time, most adult agricultural slaves would not live past ten years.

The nobility born from military service was the foundation of the King's power. Facing such resistance, he could only compromise temporarily. Once agricultural production technology had improved and the Kingdom had grown richer and stronger, the decree would have to be amended again.

Thinking this, Xiulote made a decision.

"Etalik, as you said. Twenty thousand people from Kulamo shall be demoted to agricultural slaves and sent to the North!"

Following that, the King shook his head with a bitter smile.

"Old Etalik, you are the administrator of Kulamo City, charged with guarding one part of the kingdom. Yet, you consider punishing all your subjects?"

"Haha, Your Highness, it's much easier to paint on a blank slate than to patch things up extensively!"

Etalik also shook his head with a bitter smile.

"These past two years, I have suffered quite a bit in the South! You must relocate some civilians here and send more priests. Once the priests distribute the homes in the city, the new civilians will naturally be grateful!"

Xiulote smiled and nodded, choosing not to say more. In the midst of their jovial conversation, the fate of twenty thousand rebels was decided. The King then ascended the pyramid at the city's center, his expression solemn. Looking at the bloodstains yet to be cleared, he could imagine the fierceness of the battle. The traces of the melee extended all the way to the top of the pyramid, where the High Priest of Kulamo, Yitai, had long been waiting.

"Praise the Chief Divine! Greetings to you, Supreme High Priest of Divine Revelation!"

"Praise the Chief Divine! High Priest Yitai, you have fearlessly upheld Kulamo City for the Chief Divine, establishing meritorious achievements. The Chief Divine has seen your devotion and will grant you grace!"

"Praise to Him!"

Yitai knelt and bowed his head, suppressing the excitement in his heart. With the King's words, his future was promising.

Xiulote smiled and nodded slightly, then tousled his hair. He then sat down in the temple and asked about the details of proselytizing in the city.

"...Supreme High Priest, the Prepetcha Samurai from the Temple Guards who converted to the Chief Divine fought bravely to the end, none deserted or surrendered," Yitai respectfully reported.

"The civilians in Zicao County are not devout yet; there are too many believers in false gods hiding among them. Please grant the permission to increase the number of Temple Guards in the Kulamo parish and establish a specialized squad to empower the capture and disposition of these false believers!"

Hearing this, Xiulote raised an eyebrow. Given that Kulamo City had just experienced a rebellion, increasing the Temple Guards was understandable. However, empowering them to apprehend and

dispose of false believers... that equated to granting judicial religious power! Although religious trials were conducted to some extent everywhere, dealing with influential old god believers, they were generally small scale and mostly reactive. Now, here was Yitai, daring to propose establishing a tribunal right in front of him!

The King pondered for a long time. Thinking of the increasingly urgent timeline, his internal balance tilted more towards agreement. After a while, his expression stern, he finally nodded his consent.

"Granted."

"Praise the Chief Divine! Praise You!"

Joy appeared on Yitai's face. Being a rare high priest of commoner origin in the Alliance, he had finally found a chance to distinguish himself in the southern part of the Lake Region!

"For the determined stubborn false god believers identified in the trials, do not execute them privately."

Xiulote thought for a moment before he added,

"Gather them and send them to the Qingambat Mine, where there is a shortage of workers. Have the newly formed squadron start operations in the Kulamo area. If they perform well and the belief in the Chief Divine effectively spreads, I will consider establishing a dedicated Treason Tribunal, with its head's position equivalent to a Fourth Level High Priest."

"Praise You! Praise the Chief Divine!"

The Third Level High Priest Yitai grasped the implicit meaning in these words, his mind agitated. This was a genuine path to greatness! The road to priesthood for commoners typically ended at the Third Level, with the Fourth Level positions, overseeing various regions, being extremely rare. And now, he had received this unprecedented opportunity...

"Supreme High Priest of Divine Revelation, I will offer my life for the glory of the Chief Divine!"

"Praise the Chief Divine! He protects you."

Xiulote looked at the Temple's Hummingbird Sun, nodding calmly. He understood the power of religious trials, as well as their cruelty, yet he decided to unleash this fierce beast. Because, after an assassination attempt, the King's heart had finally taken the ultimate step.

Old General Etalik was silent, sensing the emergence of a terrifying force. After a long moment, he reached deeply into his chest, took out a stack of papers, and handed them to the King.

"Your Highness, these are the confidential letters from the Zicao Family, related to many Prepetcha generals!"

Chapter 727: An Audience

The Chief Divine Temple perched atop the pyramid, overlooking the entire city of Kulamo. The King sat solemnly in the temple, governing thousands of his subjects. His expression calm, he received the secret message and went through it one by one.

The content of the first few secret messages was roughly the same as those submitted by the Crow Family. Many warriors from the Prepetcha clan who were generals had been in contact with the rebellious Zicao Family.

The extent of the contact was about three levels; the first level was simple ceremonial greetings, as was the case with Ezpan. The letters merely mentioned a sense of homeland, involving some ordinary gift exchanges. The second level was regularly receiving substantial gifts from the Zicao Family, ranging from gold and silver, gemstones, luxurious feathers, to houses, and entertainment from beautiful dancers. The Zicao Family, historically settled in the south, not only owned land and labor but also controlled the waterways for trading with the southern tribes, and were immensely wealthy. Their gifts were enticing enough that most generals were happy to accept them. The third level was, on the basis of the previous, to agree to mutual support and lookout, forming private alliances, and even intermarrying. There were not many generals at this level, but those who were controlled considerable forces.

Xiulote quickly flipped through these, his expression unchanged throughout; all of these were within his tolerance, until the last two secret messages were received. One of them was written by the hereditary noble Huitu Puapu. The letter contained only a few words, followed by abstract drawings.

The King furrowed his brows, looking at the hand-drawn images, trying to decipher their meaning. The first image was of a huge Divine Eagle, and below the eagle stood several small figures side by side, each wearing the forked Prepetcha Eagle Feather Crown.

The second image depicted a giant holding a Divine Staff, lying motionless in the north of the picture, adjacent to a moon symbolizing death.

Xiulote squinted his eyes and continued to read. In the third image, the same group of small figures held sceptres of the exalted nobility, standing around an abstract person. This time, the Divine Eagle lay beneath their feet.

Upon seeing these three drawings, the King's face turned a shade of iron blue. He continued to open another letter, which was written by the hereditary noble of the sky, Oorta. Oorta's letter was more straightforward, filled with large segments of pictorial writing interspersed with the script circulated by the Alliance.

"Beneath the Divine Eagle, the Prepetcha nobility stand shoulder to shoulder, watchful and supportive..."

"If the Divinely Inspired King should unfortunately perish during a northern campaign..."

"The generals of Prepetcha will then unite, elevating the prince of bygone days to control the rejuvenation of the Tarasco Kingdom together! By then, we will all be the pillars of the kingdom, the sacred exalted nobility!..."

"Snap!"

Reading this, Xiulote's anger could no longer be suppressed. He fiercely slammed the secret message on the table, bellowing.

"Where are Puapu and Oorta now?!"

"Your Highness, after Puapu and Oorta suppressed the Zicao Manor, they each led their warriors to suppress the surrounding nobility's fiefs. Shall we immediately dispatch envoys to recall them to Kulamo City?"

Old General Etalik, who had already read the contents of the letters, stepped forward respectfully to ask.

Upon hearing this, Xiulote pinched his fingers, suppressing his rage and said calmly.

"The Royal Banner has arrived. Allow them to finish their normal patrol of the nobility's fiefs and return to report back in Kulamo City. Etalik, prepare the houses and food. From today, the Imperial Guard Legion will take over the defense of Kulamo City!"

"At your command, Your Highness!"

Following this, Xiulote rested in the city. After the Imperial Guard Legion was stationed in Kulamo City, the entire city turned into a massive military camp. Warriors in heavy armor conducted thorough searches, capturing civilians related to the rebellion, and confining them to the north of the city. Soon, the first batch of five thousand rebellious citizens would be sent to the north to serve as agricultural slaves.

At this time, the only one who could change the fates of these people was Yitai, the High Priest of Kulamo. He led a tribunal formed by the War Priests, conducting religious evaluations day and night. Among the twenty thousand rebels, those faithful approved by the priests could escape the fate of becoming agricultural slaves. Nobles and merchants in the city wept and begged, offering bribes to Yitai, but the devout High Priest rejected them all.

Xiulote watched all these events in silence. He had his "eyes" among the War Priests, who reported to him the list of the devout faithful identified during the evaluations. Satisfied to hear that the majority of these faithful were the impoverished townspeople, he finally nodded in approval.

"High Priest Yitai is indeed capable of the task," he noted.

The Royal Banner quietly fluttered atop the city of Kulamo, subduing the nobles of the south. A few days later, Ezpan's report arrived. The Second Spear Legion had already fully controlled the central part of Zicao County, dominating a population of over sixty thousand. Now, of the more than two hundred thousand people in Zicao County, one hundred and forty thousand were under the control of the kingdom. The few hereditary noble families who resisted had been annihilated, and their clansmen demoted to agricultural slaves. The first batch of Temple Priests from the capital was moving southward, soon to take over various towns and villages.

The rebellion in the southeast had suddenly sprung up and just as quickly been extinguished; the nobles in the south-central region were compliant and submissive, allowing the King's gaze to finally turn to the southwest. Despite the southward march of tens of thousands of the Royal Army, the rebellion in the southwestern mountains continued to spread—the mountain people always possessed a stubborn valor, similar to the rampant plateau ceratogyrus.

Zotol, the Clan Leader of the Palm Tribe, had mobilized early and gathered more than a dozen mountain nobles. Now, at least three thousand local warriors and seven thousand mountain Militia were gathered within the solid walls of Apachigan City, with numerous hostile villages outside the city. Deep in the mountain regions, the Tekos Tribe had also been persuaded by the related southwestern nobles. Driven by the chieftains, thousands of Tekos began assembling, and numerous impoverished tribesmen surged out from the deep mountains towards what they perceived as lands of wealth to plunder.

When the main force of the Guajili Legion arrived at Apachigan City, they did not besiege or attack. The Canine Descendants Legion operated like on the wilderness, with flexible tactics and avoiding real encounters. Great fires sprang up in the southwest, and thousands of Guajili warriors split into several groups, raiding day and night, plundering extensively throughout the vast mountainous and hilly areas. Several mountain noble strongholds had been leveled to the ground, with clansmen either killed or captured. The vanguard of the legion even raided several assembling Tekos villages, slaying thousands of tribespeople.

Seeing this, Xiulote pondered briefly and then understood Black Wolf's intentions. He smiled and nodded.

"Small squads wreaking havoc surely unsettles the people inside Apachigan City... After the northern campaign, Black Wolf has finally learned from experience and started to use his brain! Well then, let's wait a few days before sending the Ezpan Legion westward."

The lengthy November finally drew to a close, and the light-footed December, arriving in the wake of the year's end, gracefully arrived. After quelling the noble fiefs, Ezpan and Oorta led their troops back to Kulamo City.

The Black Wolf's Royal Banner waved atop the citadel walls, as Armored Warriors guarded the city walls. Trusted warriors of Qinchongcan and the Divine Eagle were stationed in the camps outside the city, not allowed to enter the city. Subsequently, the King summoned two hereditary nobles for an audience.

At this point, there was no escape, they must face their fate. The two, nervous in their hearts, each with several trusted aides, entered the city. This entrance into the city was entirely different from any before. Along the way, Armored Warriors patrolled the streets, and Longbow Warriors controlled strategic points. Thousands from the Imperial Guard Legion transformed the entire city into a fearsome lair of fierce beasts. And, positioned like a potent beast king, the King occupied the highest point of the pyramid.

Upon reaching the base of the pyramid, their personal aides were stopped by warriors, and their weapons were taken away. Puap and Oorta, unarmed, ascended the towering summit. Hundreds of Jaguar Warriors, arms crossed holding Bronze Great Axes, crammed the Temple's great hall to the brim.

A foreboding feeling arose in Puap's heart. He licked his lips and, steeling himself, walked beneath the cold gleaming axes of the warriors. Once within ten steps of the King, he knelt down to pay homage.

"Your Highness, your loyal warrior, Huitu Puap, pays his respects to you!"

"Praise to Your Highness, your loyal warrior, Divine Eagle Oorta, pays his respects to you!"

Dressed in Golden Armor and wearing a Copper Helmet, the King by his side did not speak for a long time, only coldly observing the two. Behind the King was the towering Hummingbird Sun emblem. Light fell from the Temple's celestial roof, casting the King's golden silhouette as though a deity amongst them.

"Hereditary Nobles Guramo, Hereditary Nobles Oorta," the King called out.

Xiulote calmly extracted two secret missives and tossed them on the ground. The lightly fluttering secret missives, landing on the ground, felt as heavy as mountains. Puap knelt down, his complexion turning deathly pale as the missives fell before his eyes. His pupils suddenly constricted, his heart racing, and an overwhelming fear assaulted him. Then came the King's icy words.

"Who is this Prince of Tarasco Kingdom that you wish to crown?"

Chapter 728: Execution and Purge

The Temple hall was filled with a deadly silence, the quiet that follows the crash of thunder. The King's words echoed like rolling thunder in their ears, striking terror into their hearts.

Terrified to the core, Oorta's back was slick with a sudden cold sweat. With a loud thud, he fell prostrate in the hall, banging his head on the floor.

"Your Majesty... Your Majesty! ... I... I am innocent, I was deceived, I harbor no thoughts of rebellion! Your Majesty! ..."

Xiulote observed coldly, then turned to look at Huitu Puapu.

"Thud! Thud! Thud!"

Huitu Puapu banged his head on the floor three times, nearly breaking his forehead. His thoughts raced as he struggled to speak.

"Your Majesty! The Zicao clan leader deceived us, drugged us with hallucinogenic drinks, these... these were all drunken ramblings. I have long wanted to confess to Your Majesty, but fear... Chief Divine bear witness! I have no duplicity! If I harbor even the slightest thought of betraying Your Majesty, I must have my body decapitated, and my soul forever plummet into the Abyss! ..."

"Exactly! This was written under coercion when we were drunk... Your Majesty! We traveled night and day to the south, suppressing the Zicao Family and nearby nobility, without any disloyalty! The Zicao manor has been turned to ashes, and the surrounding nobility subdued... We are your loyal hounds, tearing apart all traitors!"

"Chief Divine bear witness! Your Majesty, our hearts are full of loyalty! You are our only sun!... Thud! Thud!"

The two continuously kowtowed, their words of defense becoming more frantic and terrified. The King listened expressionlessly for a moment, then asked coldly.

"These two secret letters, were they written by you?"

"Your Majesty, we were deceived and coerced when drunk..."

"Were they or not?!"

"Ah! Yes... but at that time..."

"Speak. Who is the Tarasco prince? Where is he?"

The hall instantly went silent. Puapu glanced at Oorta, and with a bitter expression, he spoke.

"We do not know..."

"You don't know?"

"... Guramo showed us some Royal emblems, and claimed to possess a prince from a pretender dynasty. If the timing was right, something could be arranged... We were heavily drunk at the time, excitedly agreed without fully considering... Hence, we never inquired further..."

"Exactly, exactly! Your Majesty, you are the supreme sun, overshadowing the Kingdom, how could we dare oppose? In fact, the next day when we sobered up, we regretted it..."

"This assault on Zicao Manor, we also found no trace of any pretender prince, probably just fabricated lies..."

"Yes! Your Majesty, we... we were framed..."

Xiulote pondered silently. He knew that as long as he was alive, these two in front of him would never have the courage to rebel. And if he were not around, there wouldn't be many among his generals who could stand the test... Among the two letters, what concerned him most was the so-called "Tarasco prince". Most of the princes of Tarasco had been executed, and only a few were at large...

"Your Majesty! We were framed! ..."

"Your Majesty! Spare us! ..."

The King shook his head, no longer contemplating. He looked toward the two men, their hair disheveled, their expressions miserable, and said indifferently.

"You two wrote treasonous secret letters, colluded with the southern nobility, committing a grave offense! Armored Personal Guards, drag them to the Sacrificial Stone for beheading sacrifices!"

"Ah! What! ..."

"Your Majesty! ..."

Several Armored Personal Guards immediately stepped forward, seized the wildly struggling men on either side, and dragged them to the two Sacrificial Stones. Their arms were then tied, and their heads forced onto the dark red stones, exposing their sunburnt necks.

Two guards raised the Bronze Great Axe high, aiming at the necks of the two hereditary noblemen, waiting for the King's command. With just one command, the axes would fall, and the two would be instantly decapitated!

The gleaming Bronze Axe hung over their necks, the dark red Sacrificial Stone cushioned underneath, countless sacrifices had despairingly died here.

Smelling the pungent blood, Huitu Puapu's defense finally broke. After struggling for so long, betraying his chief, old friends, and relatives, rising to become a distinguished member of the Great Nobility, was he now going to die silently here? At this thought, his face twisted in terror and he screamed, his voice filled with bitterness.

"Ahh! Your Majesty, please! Consider the cities I have conquered in the West! I am willing to die for you, to fight in the vanguard for you! Ah! ... Ah! ..."

"Whimper! Whimper! Whimper! I don't want to die! Father, my family..."

Oorta had completely broken down by now. Tears and snot streamed down as he wept uncontrollably. His father had passed the family legacy to him before dying, he was only in his twenties, the sole heir to the family, and the people of the Chapala Lake Region had been executed... Was the Sky family, passed down for generations, going to perish here? How could he face his deceased father? ..."

Xiulote watched the two men expressionlessly, never giving the command for the sacrifice.

The axes did not fall. The two endured the agony of impending death, their sweat, tears, and snot flowing down their faces and necks, soaking the dark red stone. The spread blood stained their cheeks red like dead fish., their bodies still twitching.

"Your Majesty, please..."

"Whimper... whimper..."

After a while, the cries of the two became hoarse, the fear of death overwhelming their hearts, turning into a lifelong indelible shadow. Finally, Xiulote spoke coldly.

"Cut off their hair!"

"Rip!"

The sharp great axe fell precisely, skimming the scalp of the two men, shaving their hair off completely. Huitu Puapu felt as if his liver and gallbladder were splitting, closing his eyes in terror, waiting for the pain in his neck... He kept his eyes closed for a long time, tears silently rolling down, until he suddenly realized, his head was still on his neck.

"Ah?"

"Ah! Woo woo..."

Oorta screamed miserably, screeching again like a quail.

Watching the reactions of the two men, Xiulote smiled indifferently.

"Drag them here."

The Armored Personal Guards dragged the two men over, and as soon as they let go, the two collapsed on the ground like mud. Huitu Puapu was in a pitiful state, his face ashen, but he felt a surge of relief in his heart.

"Your Majesty..."

"Woo woo..."

"Did you just say you wished to redeem your crimes and die for the Kingdom?"

Xiulote asked indifferently, his gaze calm yet piercing.

"Yes, yes! Your Majesty, I, Huitu Puapu, wish to redeem my crimes and devote myself to death for you!"

"Woo woo... I, Oorta, as well..."

Xiulote nodded. He had no intention of executing the two. Oorta, a native of the Chapala Lake Region, could still be useful in the subsequent campaigns. Huitu Puapu was a model of the surrendered army during the western campaigns; keeping him was better than executing him.

"Then I will spare your lives, granting you one last chance! But although the death penalty can be spared, punishment is inevitable!"

The King spoke softly.

"Bring someone, under the gaze of the Chief Divine, whip each person twenty times!"

Several trusted aides stepped forward, removed the two men's armor, and pressed them down on the ground. Then, two Samurai swung the whips, lashing fiercely at the men's backs without mercy.

"Smack! Smack! Smack!..."

"Ah! Ah! Ah!..."

Screams arose, the unrelenting whipping was extremely painful. After twenty lashes, Huitu Puapu was already covered in blood, while Oorta was nearly unconscious.

After the whipping, Xiulote watched the two men who could hardly move and issued a stern command, giving the final judgment.

"Oorta will hand over the Sky Warrior Camp, transfer to the Farming Army, and serve as a camp commander of a thousand men! Huitu Puapu will relinquish the Qinchongcan Warrior Camp, exiled to Pamus..."

Xiulote paused, a thought crossing his mind, and when he spoke again, his words shifted.

"Exiled to the end of the Tarsas River, the southwestern sea entrance, guarding the southernmost frontier of the Kingdom!"

Upon hearing this, Huitu Puapu felt his vision darken, as if he had fallen into a bottomless abyss.

With the king popularizing the idea, the boundless Great Lake had been endowed with the concept of "sea," a perilous journey to a distant continent. The southwestern sea entrance of the Tarsas River was quite remote, over two hundred miles away from Kulamo City. That area had just a few nominally tributary Tekos Tribes, officially included in the Kingdom's jurisdiction last year following explorations by Tlapanec merchants... This was truly exile to the wilderness.

"From this day onward, the Sky Warrior Camp will be renamed the Chapala Warrior Camp, the Qinchongcan Warrior Camp will be renamed the Patzcuaro Warrior Camp, and a thorough purge will be conducted!"

Xiulote ordered sternly, making the decision.

In the Kingdom's five legions, the Imperial Guard Legion consisted of veteran Samurai from various departments, the First and Second Spear Legions were well-trained elite militia, the Guajili Legion had just subdued the Canine Descendants, only the Jingji Legion absorbed many from the surrendered nobility and Samurai of the Tarasco Kingdom.

In the early days of the Kingdom, these surrendered forces were used to appease the people, and it was not advisable to act hastily. But by this time, the kingdom had stabilized, and using the opportunity of the rebellion of the southern nobility, it was perfect to completely purge this legion! Thoroughly eliminating the influence of the Sky Family and other nobilities in the old private armies. The warriors of various legions who belonged to the Prepetcha, were all to be incorporated directly under the Kingdom.

In fact, the King had once considered completely breaking apart the four thousand Prepetcha warriors and integrating them into other forces. But in this era, local sentiment was an important source of fighting strength. Ordinary Samurai organized by their place of origin would fight more resolutely and bravely, so it was better to retain them.

"Yes, after the southern campaign is over, the Second Spear Legion will also undergo a slight reorganization."

The King contemplated for a moment, looking at the two hereditary nobles in the palace. Sky Oorta still had tear stains on his face, showing both the joy of a narrow escape from death and the sorrow of losing military power. Meanwhile, Huitu Puapu looked utterly despondent, lying on the ground motionless, seemingly resigned to his fate.

"Sky Oorta, Huitu Puapu, do you have any objections?"

"Woo woo... I will follow your will..."

"...Praise Your Majesty! Puapu is willing to obey, to die for you in the south!..."

Xiulote nodded again, observed the two men for a moment, then waved his hand.

"Go! Hand over the affairs of the camp promptly, then tend to your injuries properly."

Several personal guards immediately stepped forward, lifting the two men, who were unable to walk, down the Temple Pyramid. Then, five hundred Imperial Guard Warriors, along with them, proceeded to the military camp outside the city for the military handover. There, Camp Commander Olosh had already selected new successors for these two warrior camps.

The cold December wind swept through, as the Jingji Legion underwent purging on the spot. Any officer mentioned in the letters from the Zicao Family was sternly dismissed, sent to the wilderness of Pamus City a thousand miles away to be stationed. Most of these officers who could contact Guramo were from Tarasco nobility, conveniently being replaced by outstanding commoner warriors.

The King personally oversaw the situation, well-prepared, and the purge of the Jingji Legion progressed very quickly. Ten days later, the purge was essentially complete. Dozens of officers, over a hundred warriors, were about to be exiled a thousand miles away. Only then did the King, in the presence of the Chief Divine in the Great Temple, gather all the generals and burn all those secret letters, promising forgiveness for past actions!

The strong wind blew across the Great Temple, surging westward. Two hundred miles to the west, outside the city of Apachigan, after several days of entanglement, a crucial chase battle was nearing its end.

Chapter 729: Palm Clan Leader and the Southern Tekos People

"Chase! Chase him fast! Catch that red-haired savage chieftain! I want his skull made into a drinking cup!"

The hills undulated, the forest scattered, the yellow leaves danced in the air. The courageous Palm Clan Leader, Zotol, roared excitedly, running like the wind through the hills. He led his troops, clad in leather armor, with over three hundred Samurai following closely behind.

Behind the Palm Clan Leader, hundreds of Apachigan warriors loosely formed a long snake-like line, swiftly catching up. In front of him, more than a hundred red-haired savages were fleeing in panic. Among them, one wore a wolf robe and kept looking back in fear. It turned out he was a rare Canine Descendant Chieftain, commanding thousands of savage soldiers.

"Quick! Quick! Attack from both sides! Drive them into the valley!"

Zotol had chased them for a long while, suddenly his face lit up with joy. This area was north of Apachigan City, and he was very familiar with the terrain. Just a mile or two ahead was a sunken valley. The valley looked deep, with no way out, only steep cliffs that were impossible to scale in haste. By driving these savages into the valley and having the warriors block its entrance, the red-haired savage chieftain would have nowhere to run!

"Good! Good! Chase their tails and storm into the valley!"

The red-haired savages ran frantically towards the valley, pausing briefly at the entrance as if hesitating. But the Palm warriors accelerated from both sides, and the savages were still forced into the valley. The courageous Palm Clan Leader, Zotol, was overjoyed, personally leading three hundred skilled trusted aides, eager to chase down and kill.

"Haha! Savages truly are savages, flashy on the outside but collapsing at a touch!"

Zotol entered the valley, laughing heartily.

Thousands from the Royal Army had moved south, he gathered heavy forces and held firm in Apachigan City, only to have savages from the Northern Land come. These savages wore cotton armor and wielded bamboo longbows, moving swiftly and without any samurai's honor. They simply looked at the fortified Apachigan City, not challenging or attacking it, but directly scattered, pillaging across the hundred miles of Apa Plain nearby.

Zotol had waited in the city for half a month, until the area outside the city was ablaze with signals and squads of looting savages everywhere. Several southwestern nobility's fortified villages had been conquered by the savages, all the men killed, and families taken northward, only a few somehow escaping to come sobbing into the city.

Even the Tecos Tribe, a hundred miles to the south, had several households attacked, and three clans of a thousand people each were wiped out. The "Shield" Great Chief, Kimari, immediately sent envoys, requesting the Zicao Family to send troops to encircle and kill these roaming Northern savages.

Kimari was a great Chieftain of the Tecos, from the southern Apachigan part of the Coahuayana Mountain Region, leading a tribe of twenty thousand with five thousand warriors. He had familial ties with the Palm Family. The families of the Palm Clan took refuge in the southern Tecos tribes. This time, invited to lead troops, as the alliance leader of the southern mountain Tecos tribes, Kimari was the only reinforcement the Palm Family could hope for.

The Palm Family had a longstanding presence on the edge of the mountains, historically intermarrying and interacting with the southern Tecos tribes, giving Zotol a deep understanding of the southern Tecos people. He knew that based on their areas of concentration, the southern Tecos people could roughly be divided into the west, southwest, and southeast.

The western Tecos tribes were concentrated in the Colima (today Colima) Mountain Region west of Zicao County, populous with a wide influence. They established their ancestral Fire River City on the mountain plain. In the local language, "Colima" means both "land of the volcano" and "place where water bends," hence it's also known as Fire River City. It boasted a huge smoking volcano, fertile volcanic ash plains, and the Ameca River (Rio Armeria) connecting northward with the Chapala Lake Region and flowing south into Endless Lake.

Fire River City was nestled among mountains, five hundred miles from Apachigan City. With Fire River City as the center, west and south to Endless Lake, east to the western borders of Zicao County, the

edge of the Apa Plain to the north, and the southern Chapala Lake Region... this five hundred miles east-west and three hundred miles north-south mountain area was entirely comprised of loosely organized Tecos tribes.

Facing the continuous expansion of the former Tarasco regime, the western Tecos tribes were forced to form a Tribal Alliance, including mountain barbarians, controlling a total population close to two hundred thousand. They had several large tribes, each tens of thousands strong, repelling the attacks of the old Tarasco regime for decades until they nominally submitted to the kingdom. And the Alliance leader, the strongest Colima Great Chief, even sent his daughter to intermarry with the former Tarasco Royal Family, producing a prince with Divine Bloodline from both sides.

Before Zotol raised his troops, he too had sent envoys to Fire River City asking for help, but there had been no response. The western tribes were too distant, and the Colima Great Chief's attitude was unclear, seemingly unwilling to rashly provoke the powerful northern king.

The southwestern Tecos tribes were concentrated in the Coahuayana Mountain Region southwest of Zicao County, with the Coahuayana Valley as the core, where they established the small Coahuayana City (today Coalcomán). Coahuayana City was about two hundred fifty miles from Apachigan City. In the local language, "Coahuayana" means "snake with hands," so it could also be called Hand Snake City.

The territories of the tribes in the southwest also spanned five hundred miles east to west and three hundred miles north to south. They extended east to the Tarsus River, north to the Apa Plain, south to the Endless Lake, and west to the borders of the Colima Mountain Region. However, due to the lack of fertile volcanic ash plains like those in the Fire River Plains, the southwestern tribes had a population of only about 110,000 to 120,000 people, many of whom were scattered along the plains surrounding the Endless Lake.

Before the sudden downfall of the previous Tarasco dynasty, the southwestern tribes were vassals of the Kingdom. Powerful tribes were deliberately suppressed or even divided, and many tribal warriors were conscripted during the western campaigns. Only after the downfall of the previous dynasty did Kimari, the "Shield" Great Chief, finally break free from the Kingdom's control and rise to power. During Kimari's ascendancy, the Palm Family traded much food and weapons, becoming an important ally of the Shield Great Tribe. The relationship between the two was extremely close.

Therefore, when the Envoy from Zotol arrived at Hand Snake City, the ambitious Kimari immediately gathered his forces and moved north to support his allies. Having been oppressed by the Kingdom for many years and having struggled to achieve independence, the southwestern tribes were unwilling to

see the old rule return. Now, at least ten thousand tribal warriors surged out from the forests, and many more were still gathering.

The Tecos Tribe of the southeast gathered in the southeastern region of Zicao County, nearly two hundred miles east of the mouth of the Tarsus River, on the Sakatula plains by the coast (modern Zihuatanejo). Sakatula, meaning "water in the yellow mountains" and located between the mountains and the Endless Lake, was also known as "the land of women," home to a large number of matrilineal clans; hence it was called Sea Woman City. Four hundred miles northeast of Sea Woman City was the Weytamo Mountain Region, and two hundred miles to the southeast lay the coastal Tlapanec peoples.

Sea Woman City was extremely remote, four to five hundred miles from Apachigan City, with large rivers and lakes in between. The Tecos tribes residing there, numbering forty to fifty thousand like the various sections of the Tlapanec, were nominally submissive to the Kingdom and the Alliance but effectively governed themselves behind closed doors. Their geographical position was highly isolated; they were protected to the north by the southern Sierra Madre mountains, and hundreds of miles of towering desolate mountains meant they feared no land-based campaigns and cared little for the situations beyond the mountains.

Zotol had also sent envoys to Sea Woman City, but he knew in his heart that it was nearly impossible for the southwestern tribes to dispatch forces.

Turbulent thoughts flashed through the mind of the Palm Clan Leader, making him increasingly aware of the dire circumstances. But for the moment, the only thing to do was to defeat this marauding band of frail barbarians who fled at the slightest scare!

With this thought, Zotol's strides did not falter. He pursued relentlessly and finally cornered the Wolf Robe Chieftain at the end of a valley. Looking around, steep cliffs surrounded them, leaving no escape routes. The Wolf Robe Chieftain, with over a hundred red-haired followers, turned around in desperation. He held up his bronze short spear and roared.

"Awoo!"

"Haha, see where you can run now!"

Zotol laughed heartily. He approached with three hundred trusted Samurai, his eyes filled with murderous intent.

"Don't try to howl like a wolf; even if you kneel down and meow like a cat, today I'll still take your head!"

"Awoo!"

The Wolf Robe Chieftain roared again, a strange smile appearing on his face, and the red-haired hunters by his side also called out.

"Awoo!!"

Only moments later, as if in response to his call, a coordinated howling erupted from behind the cliffs, like a wolf pack's hunting cry!

Then, in Zotol's disbelieving gaze, on the cliff a few steps away, hundreds of red-haired hunters stood up. They raised their lightweight yet powerful bamboo longbows, took brief aim, and unleashed a deadly volley at the elegantly dressed Palm Chieftain.

"Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!!"

Chapter 730: Assassination Attack

The long wind howled and the grass and trees turned yellow. Swirling red leaves blew down from the small hills around the valley, covering the large swathes of corpses below, staining them a brighter red.

The Canine Hunters' precise shooting lasted only for a quarter of an hour, taking nearly two hundred palm samurai down. Subsequently, over a hundred of the red-haired elites charged, crushing the remaining samurai. The brief ambush burst out fiercely and ended swiftly. With roaring cries, the Guajili warriors waved their copper spears and shot out feathered arrows, chasing down the fleeing enemy.

Palm Clan Leader Zotol lay unmoving, face up in the grass. His eyes were widely open with unwillingness, his body pierced by dozens of sharp copper arrows, under him the crimson spread

continuously. Death came so suddenly that it left him no time for final words. Even in death, his eyes still held surprise and confusion, as if still asking: "How did I suddenly die?" The ambush by the northern barbarians was ruthless...

"Haha, you naive deer, feigning defeat to lure the enemy and ambushing to behead, it never fails!"

Red Monkey Ozoma grinned wildly, leading hundreds of hunters as they agilely climbed down the cliffs on both sides. Behind him, thousands of Guajili warriors appeared at the top of the cliff. They howled softly and moved along the cliff edge, swarming towards the Palm samurai in the valley.

"Red Monkey, I just don't get it, why is it always me luring the enemy? Chased like a dead dog and still having to keep enough strength to not shake them off."

Red Deer Masat gasped for air, his dissatisfaction evident. He'd lured the enemy for twenty miles, Zotol on his heels, before finally leading them to the ambushing valley.

Feigning defeat to lure the enemy might sound simple, but it's truly a skilled task, especially when running on two feet. If the warriors lacked sufficient combat resolve, they would scatter while fleeing; without enough mobility and experience, they might take the wrong path while running. Masat not only controlled his pace during his flight but also continuously adjusted his direction, losing over a dozen elite lurers in the process.

"You naive deer, isn't it because you have the experience and you're fast?"

"Hmph! Red Monkey, you'd get the experience too if you lured more often."

"Masat! I am the Chief Head of the Red Monkey Battle Group, and you are the Deputy Head. According to the rules of the Southern Great Tribe, you must follow my command!"

Red Monkey Ozoma straightened his face and adjusted the new bronze sword at his waist, his words tinged with a bit of pride. After the northern campaign, he was highly regarded by His Majesty and became the head of a battle group of three thousand men, with the naive deer Masat as his deputy. Their three thousand warriors, selected from tens of thousands of Canine Descendants, were all adept fighters.

"...Fine. But since I took on the most dangerous lure, according to the rules of the Southern Great Tribe, these over two hundred head trophies are mine!"

Red Deer Masat paused, his eyes twinkling, as he revealed his calculation.

"As for the subsequent battle achievements, we divide them equally!"

"...Take them! They're just over two hundred heads. I thought all the tribes of the southern regions were as tough as the Great Chief of the God of Death's tribe, but they fell so easily. Now it seems, not just a few hundred, thousands would be easy too!"

Ozoma was brimming with confidence. He thought briefly before looking towards the body of Palm Clan Leader Zotol.

"That southern chieftain's head..."

"Is also mine!"

Masat, anxious, shouted out.

"He chased me so long, I want to knock his skull off and use it as a bowl!"

Using bone utensils was a tradition among the Wilderness Tribes. However, lacking both food and wine in the wilderness, the Canine Descendants had no need for cups, only bowls. According to the Wilderness Priests, such utensils could absorb the enemy's bravery and life, making warriors even more fierce and vigorous!

"Take it, it's all yours. This southern chieftain was brave but not smart. Using his skull as a bowl might dumb you down. Naive deer, it's perfect for you!"

Ozoma laughed heartily, filled with the thrill of victory.

"But these heads are now very useful. Let the warriors mount them on spears to frighten the enemy's warriors and villages!"

"Right! The enemy, having lost its leader and spread out like a long snake, is just right for us to break in one stroke!"

Masat cracked a huge grin, evidently missing Ozoma's hidden mockery.

As the two Wilderness chieftains chatted and laughed for a moment, the red-haired hunters had already cut off the enemy's heads, threading them onto the sharp spears. Then, without pausing, the hunters turned and charged towards the southern entrance of the valley. There, thousands of Guajili warriors fought fiercely, having just crushed another wave of enemies.

The red leaves swirled. The three thousand men of the Red Monkey Battle Group converged from all sides, driving the defeated Palm samurai and attacking the rear. They raised Zotol, the Palm Clan Leader's head, howled like wolves, and shot deadly volleys of arrows.

"Ow-oo!"

"Palm Clan Leader Zotol is dead!"

"Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!"

With their allies in disarray, their leader dead, both flanks ambushed, and relentless arrows raining down... under the Canine Descendants' successive fierce assaults, the three thousand Palm samurai who fought outside the city could not establish their footing and were swept away by the retreating armies. The disarrayed formation broke like a collapsing mountain, with ferocious howling surrounding them on three sides, leaving only a deadly path of retreat to the south.

The fierce defeat continued for twenty li, from the ambush in the valley to the foot of Apachigan city. Along the way, the corpses of Samurai warriors were scattered everywhere, most lying face up.

Hundreds of Canine Warriors were jubilant, severing the heads of fallen warriors and searching through their belongings. Whenever they found jewelry made of jade or gold and silver, the Canine Warriors would excitedly whisper. Whenever they found accessories made of wood or stone, the Canine Warriors cursed under their breath. The tribe had just settled down but was still terribly poor, so being able to plunder a couple of valuable items would be worth a year of farming! Those Canine Warriors who found nothing could only proceed with cold faces, carrying their copper spears and longbows, continuing to pursue.

"Chase, keep chasing, don't stop! Damn it! The seized assets, everyone gets a share!"

Red Monkey Ozoma, cursing and swearing, drove the tribal warriors along with the Masate to continue the massacre. Although ordinary tribal warriors were brave in combat and very tenacious in adversity, once they achieved victory, the temptation of spoils would cause them to forget the rules of combat. Their discipline could not yet compare with that of the Samurai Legions.

A day later, thousands of Canine Warriors finally regrouped and approached the foot of Apachigan city. After the War Priests tallied the military achievements, they piled up the heads of two thousand Samurai warriors into a spectacle within two hundred steps of the city. The morale inside Apachigan city instantly plummeted.

The Samurai Clan Leader had led three thousand men into battle, and within a few days, was utterly defeated with two thousand warriors dead, five hundred captured, and only five hundred battered warriors escaping back into the city. The rebellious southwestern nobility were panic-stricken and lived in constant fear day and night. Even though there were still six thousand militiamen and four thousand able-bodied men inside Apachigan city, they had completely lost the capability to fight outside the city after losing the well-trained Samurai.

Being trapped in a lone city was undoubtedly a path to death. The only hope was the more than ten thousand reinforcements from the "Shield" Great Chief Kimari!

Black Wolf Toltec, accompanied by hundreds of trusted aides, stopped at the foot of Apachigan city. He frowned, observing the situation on the city walls.

This southwestern stronghold was crucial in the old dynasty, a frontline military city in the Tarasco Kingdom's campaigns against the Tekos. Apachigan was named after this city. Although the city was not large in area, its walls were nearly six meters high, even taller than those of Kulamo City. Due to the abundant rocky mountains nearby, the towering walls were constructed from a mix of different sizes of

granite, volcanic rock, along with mud and corn ash mortar. Although the walls looked ugly, they were extremely solid. Over the past hundred years, the Tekos had invaded several times but had been unable to overcome this stone military city.

"No wonder Zotol dared to rebel, relying on this strong city..."

Black Wolf murmured to himself after watching for a while. He thought for a moment and then ordered five hundred red-haired hunters to shoot for cover, and five hundred Prepetcha warriors to test the attack on the city.

"Swoosh, Swoosh, Swoosh!"

The red-haired hunters, dressed in cotton armor, approached within eighty steps. They braved the scattered volley of arrows, exchanging fire with the archers on the city wall! Arrows whistled and crisscrossed, piercing through warriors' bodies, and in a moment, dozens were dead!

Black Wolf frowned again. After the southwestern nobility submitted to the kingdom, they also learned the craftsmanship of longbows. At this moment, the greatbows on the city wall flickered, demonstrating formidable power. The archers could hardly move closer and suppress without suffering heavy casualties.

"Boom, Boom, Boom!"

The war drums sounded, echoing through the mountains and forests. Five hundred Prepetcha warriors, carrying great shields and crude wooden ladders, advanced toward the walls of Apachigan. Prepetcha warriors rushed within fifty steps; the bombardment of arrows from the city wall immediately shifted direction, starting to pierce through the cotton armor and kill the warriors. Within twenty steps, javelins thrown from the city walls shattered shields and struck around the ladders. Beyond that, Apachigan militiamen holding heavy boulders and clay pots filled with lime were already prepared to throw them down.

"Drip!... Drip!... Drip!..."

Prepetcha warriors, under the fierce attack and yet to close in on the city wall, suddenly heard the retreat bugle. The warriors paused for a moment, then dropped their ladders en masse and hurriedly retreated. A cheer immediately burst from the top of Apachigan city.

"Ah? Respected Black Wolf Legion Commander..."

Ozoma looked at Black Wolf Toltec.

"We're not fighting anymore! Ezpan's Spear Legion is about to advance westward. This broken city is so tough, let's leave it to him to gnaw!"

Toltec's expression remained calm as he waved his hand. Once bitten, twice shy, he would not make the foolish mistake of attacking a solid fortress ever again.

"Apachigan, a lone city, has completely lost its ability to field fight. Ozoma, leave five hundred men to guard, and let's continue westward! Keka has been eyeing the 'Shield' Great Tribe, and Kimari, the Great Chief's more than ten thousand men, have already entered Apa Plain!"

"Right, Legion Commander! Let us have a good battle with these southern barbarians!"

"No, the warriors of Kimari's Great Chief's tribe have just come out of the mountains, brimming with high spirits. We'll hang on with two thousand troops tethered to them, but let's not attack just yet."

"Ah? Then, Legion Commander, where shall we attack?"

Ozoma's face showed sudden understanding, though he still feigned confusion.

"Ha, ha!"

Toltec laughed out loud, proudly instructing.

"Ozoma, you need to learn more! Guajili warriors roam the wilderness, best at raiding! Let's plunge into the mountains, and raid their lair!"

"Legion Commander is wise!"

"Ha, ha!"

The laughter of Black Wolf dispersed into the wind, heading southwest, transforming into solemn thunderbolts.