

Civilization 841

Chapter 841: Alliance, Kingdom and the Sea_2

Xiulote pondered wistfully, his face full of longing, and his body filled with strength. Afterwards, he had lunch with an avocado and saw the kingdom envoys depart from the camp. The envoys bowed their heads to the king at a distance and headed north.

The wind rose, stirring the autumn leaves. The group carried the royal decree, crossing mountains and ridges, steadily running without almost any pause.

They passed by the edge of the lake capital city and saw thousands of alliance warriors gathering from all city-states. They went by the villages on the shore of Lake Texcoco and saw millions of civilians carrying the autumn harvest to the granaries in the north and south. They boarded the kingdom's oar-sail ships and sailed west along the Lerma River for five hundred miles to the Rivermouth County in the north of the kingdom. Along the way, the banks were mobilizing villages, and militias were marching in groups through the empty fields towards the east. On the convenient river channel, countless canoes carried warriors from the western city-states and tributes from various states, heading in a grand procession to gather at Lake Texcoco.

Tlaxcala clans were old enemies of the alliance, with nearly a century of bloody enmity deeply engraved in the hearts of the nobles of each state. Almost all the great nobles from every city-state had relatives who died at the hands of the Telascallans. On this eastward expedition, all the states of the alliance were fully mobilized, deploying warriors and militias en masse! The goal of the war was not just to subjugate the enemy; it was to utterly annihilate the divine descendants of the God of the Hunt from the face of the earth!

The envoys continued westward and disembarked north of the River Mouth Fortress. Black Wolf Torc, clad in armor and leading the Guajili Legion, had been waiting at the riverbank for a long time. He took the royal decree for the eastward expedition, read it through, and then laughed aloud!

"Haha, the eastward expedition has finally started! Brave warriors, valiant fighters, raise your long spears and follow me eastward! Kill all the Telascallan nobles, seize all their wealth and women, and capture a batch of agricultural slaves for the kingdom!... I, Black Wolf, swear to the Chief Divine that I will fairly record achievements without stealing anyone's credit! Military merits grant fields, military merits grant titles, killing enemies shall be rewarded! Awwooo! Kill, kill, kill!"

"Awwooo! Kill, kill, kill!"

Hearing their commander's rally cry, thousands of canine descendants howled excitedly, their killing intent boiling, gone mad with battle fervor. The wolf howls echoed far and wide across the vast land, reaching the nearby River Mouth Fortress. On the fortress walls, Monkey Kuluka suddenly stood up, watching Black Wolf and the kingdom envoys by the river, with a look of envy and yearning in his eyes.

"Let's go! General Balda, the royal decree is about to arrive, we must go out of the city to greet them!"

Eagle Warrior Balda, standing beside him, listened to the wolf howls of the canine descendants, frowning slightly. Then he nodded in agreement.

"Right! Kuluka, I will send someone to gather four thousand imperial guard warriors to prepare for boarding... The eastward expedition is long, and when the prince's great army returns victorious, we shall drink together!"

"Good! With the blessing of the Chief Divine, the eastward expedition will surely be victorious!"

Kuluka's eyes sparkled, he replied with a smile. Having been in charge of an area for many years, he was no longer the ordinary commoner warrior of the past. Among the six marshals of the Kingdom of the Lake, he was the most approachable, befriending all the generals.

"With the blessing of the Chief Divine, the eastward expedition will surely be victorious!"

Balda nodded solemnly and strode out. The prince's invincibility in attack and battle was indisputable. As long as the prince led, victory for the eastward expedition was assured!

Moments later, four thousand elite imperial guard warriors gathered from the fortress barracks. These seasoned warriors moved with efficiency, their expressions indifferent, long accustomed to life and death. Unlike the canine warriors, their killing intent was not overt but was declared through their weapons!

The envoys split into two groups, passing on the royal decree, then continued southward. They crossed vast plains, passed through vibrant villages, and arrived at the capital city just as the dawn light broke, with the sound of early prayers rolling like thunder.

Carrying the royal decree, two of them entered the city from the north gate. One went to the residence of the Chief Minister and Sage, Jatili; the other went to the barracks within the city to inform the Jingji Legion Commander, Jaguar Olosh. The rest of the group continued south, treading the harvested fields towards Apal and Zicao counties. Upon reaching the military city of Patzcuaro, one member set off directly for the nearby military settlement.

The morning sun rose to mid-sky, illuminating the simple encampment. Old militia member Chiwaco sat cross-legged, hunched over, pressing a long spear under himself, happily munching on a corn cake outside the camp kitchen. This year's harvest was good, and the granaries were full. The military settlers had paid their tribute and had enough stored grain, finally allowing them to grind some cornmeal to make cakes.

Chiwaco carefully chewed the cake, not letting a crumb fall. After a while, he finished a piece, his whole body relaxed, and his old face beamed like a flower.

"Ah! Eating corn cakes and enjoying peaceful times, life... is bliss!"

"Uncle, I've been looking for you everywhere, and here you are!"

Wei Zi, with a headscarf and hands tucked in as he hurried over, saw his uncle and father-in-law, his face breaking into a smile, looking as happy as a wooden flower.

"Woodhead, what do you want? Rushing around like a thief, no proper demeanor."

Chiwaco glanced up, eyed Wei Zi disdainfully, and pursed his lips.

"In a couple of days, I'll give you a break. You should tidy yourself up, look sharp, and go home to see Luwei. I have to stay in the camp, can't leave. You need to work hard, and give our family a descendant soon!"

"What? Another break? If I go out every other day, how will my brothers view me? Besides, having children is up to the divine's blessing..."

"You fool! If it doesn't work once, try twice, if not twice, then ten times, eventually, it'll happen! And in the garrison camp, all we do is farming for the lords, just to make a living. Why bother with other things?... We hardly get peace, don't tell me you want to pick up a long spear and lead men to war again?... Hmm? I'll beat you to death!"

Chiwaco raised his eyebrows, reaching out as if to strike.

"Uh, uncle, don't hit me! I won't go to war... I won't."

Wei Zi jumped in fright, retreating two steps. Then, he scratched his head, looked around to ensure no one was nearby, and proudly fished out half of a roasted spiny rat from his bosom.

"Hey, uncle, look! Last night, I set some stone traps with corn kernels. This morning, I found two spiny rats! Got two 'rat pancakes'!"

The so-called stone traps involved placing a heavy stone slab tilted on fine wooden props with a trigger underneath and some corn kernels under the slab. When the greedy spiny rat tried to eat the kernels, it would topple the wooden props, and the heavy stone slab would fall down, smashing the rat into a flat 'rat pancake'.

"Hmm? Two roasted rat pancakes, you ate one and a half, leaving me half?!"

Chiwaco feigned anger with a stern face.

"No, I only ate half a piece. The other whole piece, I dried it and kept it for Luwei. She loves meat the most..."

"Hmm... At least that's something sensible to say."

With this, both faces lit up with smiles. Wei Zi sat closer, and Chiwaco chewed on the rat pancake. The morning sunlight warmed them a bit.

However, such leisurely times did not last long. Only a moment later, a young militia member came running from outside in a panic.

"Uncle! Uncle! Something terrible has happened!"

"What?!"

Chiwaco sprang up, a sense of foreboding. Wei Zi hadn't seen it clearly, but his uncle already had a long spear in his hand. Then Chiwaco, with a stern expression, said in a deep voice.

"Little Ayuli, what happened? Speak clearly!"

"At the camp gate... Outside the camp gate, there is a kingdom envoy!"

"Ah, so it's a kingdom envoy. What's the big deal?"

Hearing this, old militia Chiwaco let out a sigh of relief.

"Tell me, why did the envoy come? Is it to requisition grain or labor for canal repairs?"

"Neither... neither!"

Ayuli took a few deep breaths before speaking.

"Uncle, he said... He said... he wants to recruit you! The king wants you to board a ship, to some great lake in the west, to find some bird dung-colored island!"

"What! Recruiting me?!"

Chiwaco was thunderstruck, standing there stunned. The long spear in his hand dropped with a "clank" to the ground, bouncing a few times, making a clear, crisp sound like the waves of the sea.

"My Heavenly Divine... you must be blind once more..."

After a while, Chiwaco's face fell, letting out a helpless sigh.

"Damned! This day has finally come!"

Chapter 842: The End of the Year 1487, Successor Dias

November 1487, 22 degrees south latitude, Namibian coast, Cape Cross.

The summer sea breeze of the southern hemisphere blew in from the Western Ocean, carrying a moist salty scent, surging towards the sandy sea of the East. Under the clear sky and sea, flocks of seabirds soared. Albatrosses spread their long wings, red-breasted herons sang loudly, white pelicans flew to the sea and back to the sky, while flamingos hovered high.

The sea sparkled with waves, dolphins circled the anchored sailboats, curiously observing many people they had never seen before. A few miles away, humpback whales, over ten meters long, leaped out of the water, splashing several meters high. These massive creatures moved leisurely, waving their wing-like pectoral fins, and emitting complex and prolonged low chants!

"Tenho saudades!... This is the deep sea's confession, as if from a departed friend. He grew weary of life on earth, and found eternal rest in Heaven... leaving me, a lonely pathfinder, to suffer the passage of time in this world!..."

Dias stood by the shore, gazing at the wooden tombstone before him, murmuring his low chant with a sense of longing. He wore the noble captain's uniform symbolizing his rank, his hair meticulously groomed, with the captain's hat held in his hand. His weathered face exuded the deep melancholy unique to the Portuguese people. After a moment, he closed his eyes and prayed devoutly to the Almighty.

At this moment, his soul was immersed in nostalgic memories, and the hundreds of sailors and crew behind him became insignificant background.

Bruno, dressed in his captain's uniform, stood silently behind Dias, head bowed. He pursed his lips and drew a cross on his forehead with force, as indescribable emotions surged within him but he could not find the words to speak.

"Merciful Holy Mother, please grant me sacred protection to discover the route to the East and find the Kingdom of Prester John!..."

After a while, Dias drew a cross and recited the final prayer. Then, his expression grew cold as he glanced at Bruno behind him, and a killing intent emerged in his heart.

"Bruno, I heard you attended the last rites of the Royal Knight Diogo?"

"Yes! Esteemed Royal Knight, when the honorable captain passed away, I was by his side, preparing olive oil for him... The captain suffered from the demon's curse, coughing blood for months, and he was as thin as a twig when he went to Heaven, even lighter than a child..."

Bruno replied respectfully, albeit with trepidation. As he spoke, tears welled up in his eyes, a mix of genuine and false emotions, even he could not distinguish them.

"Hmm."

Seeing the tearful Bruno, Dias remained silent for a moment before nodding slightly. He turned his head again, looking at his old friend's tombstone, finally suppressing his killing intent, which turned into a long sigh.

"Alas, I understand your feelings... You let him attend the final rites and handed the flagship to him, which meant you chose to forgive... In that case, let him return alive!... Rest in peace, my old friend, Diogo!"

During the exploration of the Congo River's depths, there was a mutiny on Diogo's ship. Though the mutiny was eventually quelled and the ringleader hanged, the intrigue could be hidden from Lisbon's court but not from the experienced Great Navigator. Dias was convinced that the Noble Knight Bruno was undoubtedly guilty...

Thinking of this, Dias shook his head slightly. How many Navigators persist in their maritime paths are truly innocent? Whose hands have not been stained with blood?... Even he, at Elmina Castle, having massacred the indigenous tribes to occupy the surrounding gold mines... With a brief recollection, Dias bowed his head again, praying softly.

"Praise to my Father in Heaven!... The Almighty shows His grace through redemption, from ages to eternity... He granted me the Holy Sword to cut through all evil and bestows the light to redeem my blood!..."

Hearing Dias's chant, Bruno quickly bowed his head and adopted a devout praying posture, not daring to make a sound.

Having followed the captain for many years, he had roughly understood the Royal navigational nobility's conduct principles. Even if being ruthless, killing in the sea of blood, like demons, one must have unwavering faith, believing in the light of their soul and the Almighty's redemption... Don't be fooled by Dias's benevolent praying demeanor now; if he raised a killing intention, he could chop heads without blinking an eye...

Though Bruno harbored resentment in his heart, he dared not show it on his face. He patiently waited for Dias to finish his prayer before softly speaking.

"Esteemed Royal Knight! The tombstone of Captain Diogo was temporarily carved from wood. Nearly two years have passed, and it's already somewhat decayed... How about letting the fleet rest here for two days to carve a stone monument for the captain?"

"Rest for two days, carve a stone monument..."

Upon hearing this, Dias pondered for a moment, apparently a bit tempted; but in the end, he shook his head.

"Let it be. The Kingdom will remember Diogo Knight's name, remember his piety and dedication. As for his burial site, let him rest peacefully without being disturbed by anyone! This place is, after all, far from the Kingdom..."

"Yes, yes... You are right! Praise the Holy Mother, may the captain rest in peace!..."

"Hmm."

Dias nodded, looking at the respectful and devout Bruno, finding him slightly more agreeable.

Last summer, the fleet exploring south returned, bringing the news of the Navigator Diogo's death and a sea chart extending to the southern latitude of 20 degrees along the African coast.

After Pope Sixtus IV went to Heaven, his nephew, Giuliano della Rovere, through various struggles, still firmly grasped the Holy See's power, sidelining the new Pope, Innocent VIII. The Holy See's policies still continued the tradition of the previous Pope, remaining zealous about finding the Kingdom of Prester John in the East.

King João was ambitious, desiring new route openings. The gold mines of Elmina greatly improved Portugal's finances. The discovery of the Congo Kingdom further motivated and inspired the kingdom. Last October, King João summoned his highly trusted Royal descendant, Royal Knight Dias, appointing him the head of the expedition fleet, commanding him to continue exploring southward to find the route to the East.

After nearly a year of preparation, Dias set sail from Lisbon this year in August, leading three oceanic exploratory ships, searching for the unknown boundaries of the Southern Continent. He learned from Diogo's fleet's mutiny experience, selecting two Caravel sailboats and one square-rigged supply ship.

The flagship Caravel, personally led by him, was the "São Cristóvão," carrying the most sailors. The square-rigged supply ship, loaded with food and water, was under the charge of his brother, Pero Dias. The brothers, one controlling the sailors and the other managing the supplies, echoing each other, minimized the risk of crew mutiny. As for the last Caravel sailboat...

Dias turned back, casting another indifferent glance at Bruno.

The Royal Family originally favored the Noble Knight Joao Infante, but surprisingly, the court advisor, Scholar Martin Behaim, who had returned from the sea, highly praised Noble Knight Bruno, vigorously

recommending him to the Royal Family. Joao Infante's temper was indeed somewhat irritable... After much deliberation, Dias, harboring killing intent, finally entrusted this risky opportunity to the experienced Bruno.

"Bruno, you are now an honorable Kingdom Captain! Regardless of your past, from today, you must devoutly serve the Almighty, loyally serve the Kingdom!... Remember, the Almighty shows His grace through redemption, from ages to eternity... Do well, and grace will be bestowed upon this world!"

"...Yes, yes! Esteemed Royal Knight, I will devoutly serve the Almighty, practice His words, and embrace His ways... And I will dedicate my life to the Kingdom! During this voyage, I will follow your every command!"

Bruno immediately knelt on the ground, raising his left hand, devoutly crying. He heard the forgiveness in Dias's words, and the trepidation of many days was suddenly swept away, even feeling a surge of joy. The Royal Knight before him was a significant figure, deeply trusted by the King. As long as he clung to this powerful connection...

"Hmm. Stand up!"

Dias, with a calm expression, instructed in a deep voice. Then, he scanned the sailors and crew, all with bowed heads, sternly commanded.

"Sailing Master Pero de Alenquer!"

"Here! Captain."

A savvy senior crew member, with a sharp scimitar, stepped forward and saluted.

"Report latitude!"

"Yes!"

Sailing Master Pero reached into his bosom and pulled out a volume. He unrolled it and, after scanning a few lines, loud reported.

"Captain, based on last night's Southern Cross measurements, we are between 20-22 degrees south latitude!"

"Very good!"

Dias nodded, his expression solemn, looking around at everyone, loudly announcing.

"The purpose of this voyage is to bypass the boundary of the Southern Continent, head to the East, and seek the powerful Kingdom of Prester John! The honorable Royal Knight Diogo sacrificed his life, extending the Kingdom's navigational exploration boundary from the Equator to 20 degrees south latitude! And our voyage will truly begin from here, extending to 40 degrees south latitude!..."

"40 degrees south?!"

Hearing this, Bruno was startled, many sailors also showed fear, raising their heads as if to speak.

Dias's eagle-like gaze, filled with undeniable killing intent, coldly swept over the crowd. The sailors immediately fell silent, not daring to complain at all.

"Very good! The Almighty witnesses, you all agree with me! Since there are no objections, now, board the ships and head south!... Holy Mother be with us!"

"Holy Mother be with us!"

The sailors responded softly, quickly dividing into three teams and boarded the three ships. Soon, the anchors were drawn up, sails raised, the flag of the Kingdom of Portugal flying high, as the Caravel sailboats slowly picked up speed.

On the vast South Atlantic, beyond the long Namibian sands, whales played, seabirds sang. This deserted sea was so pure at this moment. Between the sea and sky, only the three small exploratory sailboats, against the Benguela Current, sailed arduously towards the unknown south!

Ahead of them lay the endlessly extending Southern Continent and unknown mysterious seas. Behind them, a lone cape, a decaying tombstone, and a buried Kingdom pioneer.

Chapter 843: The Starting Point of the Year 1488, the Celebration of Epiphany

The sea breeze blew gently, the moonlight cool and dim. Clouds gathered in the sky, leaving only pinpricks of starlight. A few sea swallows circled in the night sky, gazing down at the vast, boundless sea, encircling the three anchored sailing ships like a mysterious omen.

The flagship "St. Cristobal" flew the flag of the Kingdom of Portugal, anchored between two other ships. Following Captain Dias's instructions, the expedition fleet usually did not sail at night for safety. The night was quiet and deep, with dozens of crew members crowded inside the musty cabins, most already asleep. On the wet deck, only a few sailors on duty and the Sailing Master Pero de Alenquer remained.

Pero stood with a solid build and stern face. He stood under the long mast, holding an iron compass and a wooden angle measurer. He raised his head, watching the stars in the sky, patiently waiting for a long time. When the clouds slightly cleared, revealing the bright four stars of the Southern Cross, he sprang into action, swiftly climbing up the mast.

Before long, Pero was steadily standing on the lookout platform. He wrapped the mast's ropes around his arm and carefully observed the bright Gamma and Alpha stars of the Southern Cross. Then, he imagined drawing a line passing through the Gamma and Alpha stars, extending southwards until it was about 4.5 times the distance between the two stars, leaving an imaginary point in the night sky. This point was the estimated position of the South Celestial Pole!

Next, Pero opened his eyes wide, looking up without moving an inch. He took out the compass, with one foot of the compass directed horizontally, the other foot aimed at the imaginary South Celestial Pole. He then fixed the compass and took out the angle measurer, carefully measuring for a while. The measured angle at this moment was the southern latitude where the fleet was located.

"About 32 degrees south latitude..."

Pero silently noted this number. Then, he lifted the angle measurer again, measuring several times, obtaining numbers between 31-33 degrees south latitude. Once sure of the numbers, he didn't linger, casting a glance at the east where the endless Southern Continent lay, and quickly slid down from the mast.

It was even later now, and the deck was completely silent. The sailors on duty respectfully bowed to Pero as they saw him. Pero nodded slightly, without saying a word.

On an ocean voyage, the Sailing Master was responsible for navigation and determining latitude, holding a very important position. The methods of determining position were not something ordinary sailors could master; one had to be literate, numerate, and have professional nautical training. In the Kingdom of Portugal, those who could serve as Sailing Masters were usually graduates of the naval academy or descendants of navigation nobility, naturally different from the common sailors of humble origins.

Moments later, Pero passed the inspection of the guards and stood in front of the captain's cabin at the stern. He gently knocked on the door a few times.

"Praise the Almighty! Honorable captain, Sailing Master Pero at your service!"

"Hmm. Come in!"

Pero lowered his head and carefully pushed open the wooden door, entering the captain's cabin.

Captain Dias, dressed but lying in bed, sat up. He held a short dagger, with a short knife hanging at his waist, speaking calmly.

"How is it?"

"Honorable captain, I just measured the latitude and observed the weather. The fleet is located between 31 and 33 degrees south latitude, with the wind direction from the southwest. Clouds are gathering in the night sky; there might be wind and rain..."

"31 to 33 degrees south latitude..."

Upon hearing this, Dias pondered silently, thinking deeply. After a while, he asked in a deep voice.

"How is the morale on the ship?"

"The sailors' morale..."

Pero hesitated slightly, then spoke frankly.

"Not very good. Since setting out from Cape Cross, we have been adrift in the sea for two months, only occasionally going ashore to hunt seals and replenish fresh water. The Southern Continent to the east endlessly stretches out, and for two months, it's been barren desert, with not even a sign of indigenous people... The crew is secretly spreading rumors that the desert of the Southern Continent is endless, fearing we might never find the end!"

"Hmm..."

Dias nodded, silently gripping the short dagger, seemingly calm as he asked.

"Are there any sailors conspiring together? Any secret gatherings? Has the Quartermaster in charge of weapons shown any abnormal behavior?"

"...Captain..."

Instantly, sweat broke out on Pero's forehead.

"I haven't seen any sailors conspiring, and the Quartermaster is perfectly normal... On this voyage, we have not delved into Demon's land, and only a few have suffered the Curse... The food and water on board are more than adequate; the sailors are just a bit discontented..."

"Hmm, good."

Dias nodded slightly, his expression easing a bit.

Before this voyage, he had thoroughly questioned the crew members involved in the previous exploration and learned that the main cause of the previous mutiny was their deep incursion into Demon's land, being afflicted by Demon's Curse, leading to many falling ill and dying.

So, for this voyage, he did not linger long in the vile Congo basin, instead heading directly south along the coast. Moreover, the supply ship was filled with non-perishable light wine, dry cheese, hard bread, and salted fish. Now it seemed that although the morale was not high, it was still maintainable.

"Pero, after midnight, today is the Epiphany, right?"

"Yes, captain. Today marks January 6, 1488, celebrating the first revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Gentiles after His birth..."

"Very well. On this day of Epiphany, our Lord first acknowledged Himself as the incarnation of God. Let the onboard Priest preside over a solemn prayer! Then, as tradition dictates, let the fleet anchor and rest for a day, distribute stored light wine and food, and hold a celebration feast!"

Chapter 844: The Starting Point of the Year 1488, the Celebration of Epiphany_2

"Ah! Praise you, my captain! Your generosity and kindness are like the brilliance of the Almighty."

Sailing Master Pero saluted respectfully. With this prayer and celebration, the crew's morale should be slightly restored.

"Hmm. With the Almighty's blessing! We certainly can reach the East!"

"...With the Almighty's blessing!"

The next morning, Captain Dias gathered the crew and announced the good news of celebrating Epiphany. The sailors cheered and then rushed to the nearby beach like wild horses freed from reins.

"Bang! Bang!..."

Bullets flew, flesh splattered, and a massive body fell with a thunderous crash. The elite sailors brandished their matchlock guns, hunting the strong elephant seals mercilessly.

These elephant seals were scattered all over the surrounding beaches. As the dominant species of the local coastlines, they had not faced any threats from predators for tens of thousands of years and did not know to avoid humans.

The sailors then dismembered the seals' corpses, skinned them for meat, and extracted fat. Bonfires soon rose, the smell of roasting meat spreading immediately, while the previously clear seawater turned crimson with blood.

"Praise the Almighty! He has bestowed upon us meat and fine wine."

Dias sat on a dry rock, leisurely sipping light wine and tasting the roasted seal meat offered by Bruno.

"Hmm... It tastes like venison, with a strong blood flavor... Not bad, Bruno, you've put in effort!"

Bruno stood respectfully to the side, his head lowered. Right after the crew hunted a seal, he quickly roasted two pieces of meat and rushed over to present them to the esteemed Royal Knight and expedition leader Dias.

"The only thing missing is the lack of spices... If there were a bit of pepper or a few leaves of thyme, the flavor would be marvelous!"

"Uh..."

Hearing this, Bruno lowered his head with an embarrassed look. These spices were worth their weight in gold in the Kingdom; there was no way a mere Noble Knight like him could afford them. The only time he had ever tasted spices was in the palace of the King of Congo, the land of the Demon...

"Ha ha ha!"

Seeing Bruno's embarrassment, Dias laughed heartily. He reached out and patted Bruno's shoulder.

"Bruno, as long as this voyage is successful, and we discover the route to the East and find Elder John's kingdom, each captain will be richly rewarded upon our return to the Kingdom! You would not only be promoted by First Level in nobility but also receive a gift of up to 1,000 Ducats! Then, you can have spices every day, no problem at all!"

"1,000 Ducats!"

At this number, Bruno held his breath, his face filled with intense greed and longing.

It should be known that one Ducat is equivalent to one Kingdom Coin, weighing about 3-4 grams. One thousand Ducats would be 3-4 kilograms of gold, plus the premium of minted currency! This large sum of money would be enough for him to buy a large house in Lisbon City and finally qualify to participate in the nobility's banquets...

"Honored Royal Knight, I will follow your orders throughout this voyage!"

"Hmm."

Seeing Bruno's expression, Dias nodded approvingly. Then, he asked solemnly.

"Bruno, how is the situation on your ship now?"

"Honored Royal Knight, everything is stable on my ship. On the way south, only a few captured convict sailors have perished from exhaustion. There is no Demon's curse, and the official sailors' morale is quite good!"

"Hmm, very well!"

Dias's expression remained unchanged. In long voyages, convict sailors were usually captured poor people, fishermen, or natives, forbidden from having weapons, doing the hardest work, and were not considered as people. Only official sailors, who were frequently in contact with weapons and capable of mutiny, were regarded as meeting the minimum standard of being human...

"Let's go, the Priest's prayer is about to begin!"

After a few exchanges, Dias got up and set off towards the Priest in the distance, escorted by his guards.

The onboard Priest erected two wooden sticks, setting up a simple cross. Quickly, the sailors gathered around the cross, and led by the Priest, clasped their hands and lowered their heads.

The Priest was the first to speak, praising devoutly.

"Almighty, open my lips!"

"My lips will praise you!"

Everyone responded in unison.

"On this day, our Lord Christ was born for us... Come, let us adore Him!"

Declared the Priest loudly, Dias took the lead in kneeling down and worshipping the cross before them.

"Almighty, glory be to You! As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever!... "

Then, more than a hundred sailors knelt down, worshipping along.

"Almighty, glory be to You!... Forever!... "

"From sunrise to sunset, let us sing to Christ... You existed before all time yet were born for us in time..."

The Priest lifted his head, looked at the Sun amidst the Clouds, and sang hymns and chants. Trained by the Church, his expression was solemn, his voice deep and steady, rising suddenly at the final praise.

"...Praise You, merciful Almighty! May Your name be honored, Your Kingdom come, and Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven!... May Your glorious true light shine in the hearts of Your believers, redeeming our sins!... I pray to the Almighty, may the Almighty bless us, protect us from disaster, and lead us to new paths, Amen!... "

"I pray to the Almighty, may the Almighty bless us, protect us from disaster, and lead us to new paths, Amen!"

Everyone repeated in unison, their faces showing anticipation. Bruno glanced stealthily, only to see a pious tear streaming down Captain Dias's face. He shuddered and quickly lowered his head, sneakily wetting his eyes with some saliva.

After the prayer, the solemn atmosphere relaxed. Dias wiped his tears, stood tall, and looked around at everyone. His gaze paused slightly on Bruno's face, nodding almost imperceptibly, then loudly announced.

"Praise the Almighty! Today we rest for a day, no need to embark. Play the wooden flute, blow the harmonica, distribute food and light wine... Tonight, sing to your heart's content!"

"Praise the Almighty! Praise the Captain!"

The sailors cheered thunderously, their faces beaming with joy. Soon, the sweet sound of the harmonica echoed among the crowd, and the crisp sound of wooden flutes wafted along the coast. After just two or three cups of rice wine, the sailors were flushed, bellowing songs of their homeland.

"Dawn sleeps, embracing the harbor and fondness,

The moonlight gently caresses the dancing waves,

Just as the Sun leaves its realm,

Just as we leave our distant homeland..."

Bruno sang and danced, enjoying a moment of indulgence with Quartermaster Matim. Only at this moment, singing with the sailors, could he feel truly relaxed and free.

Dias still sat on the high rock, cross-legged, watching the sailors sing and dance. His lips curled slightly in a smile, his face showing a fleeting look of longing, which was soon suppressed by his hardened heart. He then stopped watching, turning his head to gaze at the sky toward the South, seeking unknown hope. In the distant horizon, thick clouds gathered, like a shroud pressing on the horizon, lingering for a long time.

"That is..."

Dias suddenly rose. He stared at the southern sea and sky, lost in deep thought.

Chapter 845: The Starting Point of the Year 1488, Waves in the Storm!

The furious wind howled at the prow of the ship, and the murky sea churned waves. The continent of the East was shrouded by dark clouds, disappearing tens of miles away. The dark clouds loomed over the horizon, and the gloomy sky seemed on the verge of collapsing. Large flocks of petrels cried "woo woo" as they fled northward in a panic.

However, ten or so miles to the south, heavy black clouds piled up like mountains, cutting off the entire sea, uniting the sky and the ocean! From a distance, the rolling waves and clouds surged fiercely, with flashes of lightning and howling winds, resembling an abyssal cavern that devours everything!

"Almighty! The real storm is coming!"

Bruno stood at the prow, his face pale, mumbling under his breath. He stared at the storm clouds approaching rapidly from the south, his heart filled with a sense of foreboding.

It's been more than a week since the celebration of Epiphany. After recovering some morale, the expedition fleet continued southward, advancing hundreds of miles. The desolate African continent still showed no end, but the endless sandy sea finally came to an abrupt stop, replaced by a vibrant green savannah.

The changing coastal scenery greatly excited the sailors on the ship. They had grown tired of the undulating sand dunes, suspecting that it was the end of the world. The appearance of green brought some hope. Along the coastal plains, faint sightings of grazing deer and goats made their mouths water.

"The rapid change in scenery, vast greenery, and lush grass... actually foreshadow heavy rains and storms..."

Bruno's face showed a bitter smile. He recalled the recent days' events.

Three days ago, the expedition fleet had already reached 33-34 degrees south latitude, while the promised return latitude of 40 degrees south was still far off. The southern sea was covered with dark clouds day and night, and the relentless rain seemed to have solidified, never to disperse.

No one in the fleet knew that they had reached the southern boundary of the Atlantic Ocean, a perilous zone where storms and thunderbolts intertwined year-round!

Here, the warm Mozambique-Agulhas current from the Indian Ocean met the cold Benguela current from Antarctica. They collided at the southern tip of the African continent, crashing along the expansive land! The encounter of warm and cold currents turned into unending heavy rain, and the ocean current hitting the land's lateral obstruction formed towering waves. Coupled with the prevailing westerlies' gale-force winds at mid-latitudes, it was a terrifying stormy expanse!

The fleet waited here for a few days, with every crew member feeling restless, talking amongst themselves, claiming this was the end of the world created by the Almighty. Further south, they said, lay an endless and terrifying abyss—it was better to return early...

Seeing this situation, Captain Dias stepped forward without hesitation. He promptly hanged a few ringleaders causing trouble, displaying their bodies on the mast, successfully intimidating and

persuading the rest. Then, without further delay, he led the fleet to set sail, resolutely heading into the stormy southern sea.

"Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!..."

The ferocious northwest wind swept in, filling the sails of the fleet, blowing the canvas into arcs. The Caravel ship, like a Feathered Arrow shot from a bow, dashed towards the storm to the south. Its speed made the hull tilt continually to the left, and the prow dipped repeatedly.

Bruno seized the ropes tightly, his eyes wide open, watching the storm rapidly closing in from the southern sky. Feeling the wind's force on his face, he determined the ship's speed had far exceeded 20 knots, surpassing the Caravel's limits. The new captain, panicking, angrily shouted at the sailors.

"Damn it! Damn it! Why aren't you all getting to the right side to stabilize the ship? Quick, reef the sails a bit, reef the sails!"

Upon hearing the captain's orders, the sailors swiftly split up. A few elite sailors, braving the fierce wind, adjusted the mast spars, reducing the sail's wind-catching angle. Soon, the ship's speed visibly decreased, and the hull stabilized slightly. However, as the ship sped forward, it had already breached the storm's edge. Dark clouds obscured the sky, the day turned instantly dim, and the endless storm surged in, drenching everyone on board.

"Boss, boss! We can't go any further! Judging by the storm ahead, it will only get worse! Quickly signal for Captain Dias to turn back!"

The new boatswain Haroldo, braving the fierce wind, stumbled over to Bruno's side, repeatedly urging with panic.

This voyage, Bruno had promoted Haroldo from head chef to boatswain. Given Haroldo's history of poisoning, even as old comrades who had accomplished great feats together, Bruno wasn't keen to eat the food he cooked.

Surprisingly, Haroldo firmly established himself as the boatswain, somehow winning over many sailors. Whatever sinister rituals he led them in, the pious and kind-hearted Bunoru neither heard of nor partook in.

"Signal for a turn back?..."

At this, Bruno looked towards the fleet's front, where the flagship "St. Christopher" led the way. It too had lowered some sails yet continued straight southward. Nearby, the square-rigged supply ship closely followed the flagship without a pause. Bruno hesitated for a moment until a wave six or seven meters high crashed head-on, making him tremble.

"Foda-se! Signal for a turn back! Uh..."

"Splash!..."

Another crashing wave struck head-on, soaking Bruno's head and face. The salty cold seawater washed over him, flooding his eyes and mouth. After that wave, the new captain wasted no time, spitting out the seawater and shouting urgently.

"Ptooeey, ptooeey! Signal for a turn back! Quickly, quickly!"

Before long, an elite sailor reached the prow, waving two bright flags, signaling the flagship to turn back. After a while, a sailor appeared at the flagship's stern, coldly waving for a reply.

"No turning back, continue south!!"

"No turning back, continue south!!"

Bruno stared, using the faint light of day to see the flagship Dias' reply, feeling a chill in his heart.

"Mad... He's gone mad! Captain Dias has gone completely mad!"

The northwest wind blew fiercely while the current surged southeastward. By now, the entire fleet had no choice. The combined wind and current would continue pushing the fleet towards the storm's center, making a return impossible.

"Splash!"

Another massive wave struck with overwhelming force, causing the entire ship to rear back. Worse yet, thunder roared from the storm ahead, and lightning struck from the dark clouds! The intensifying northwest wind drove the ship straight into the storm's lightning!

"Boom!"

A bolt of lightning struck down, exploding a few hundred meters to the right, causing everyone's eardrums to tremble. Bruno's vision flashed bright, and then darkened, blinding him for a moment. Torrents of heavy rain pelted his face, leaving it numb.

"Almighty! Please protect me!"

It took a while for Bruno to regain his senses, forcing his eyes open. The small Caravel tossed violently in the waves; barrels rolled across the deck, making it impossible for anyone to stand steady. He lowered his stance, tightly gripping the ropes with his arms and hooking the planks with his legs, shouting hysterically.

"Damn it! Damn it! Forget the flagship's orders! Lower the sails! Lower the sails!"

In the captain's roars, a few brave sailors staggered before the mast, frantically trying to operate. The fierce wind tightened the ropes, making them hard to untangle.

"Idiots! Cut it!"

Hearing the order, a sailor, wobbling, pulled out a Dagger from his waist, vigorously cutting the ropes. The ropes, soaked with water, had become tough and slippery. With the ship pitching heavily, he struggled to apply force, unable to cut through. A fellow sailor, seeing this, anxiously moved to help.

"Buzz... Boom!..."

A terrible wave sound came from several hundred meters ahead, sounding like the roar of a deep-sea giant beast!

Bruno turned to look and became pale, trembling with terror. As the sailors turned to look, they too were horrified, paralyzed with fear, even despairingly praying.

"Merciful Almighty! Please, please!..."

Prayers proved futile. In moments, an overwhelming giant wave rose in front of the ship like a towering mountain!

This wave was 15-20 meters high, spanning over ten miles! The wave's front was like a towering cliff, while the rear resembled a slow slope, coming with the power to obscure the sky, crashing down like an unstoppable Titan! Before such a giant wave, the over twenty-meter-long Caravel was merely a toy in the hands of Giants, utterly powerless to resist.

"Almighty! Plea..."

"Buzz... Boom! Boom!!"

Chapter 846: The Starting Point of the Year 1488, The Call and Songs of New Routes!

"Boom!!!..."

A deafening roar suddenly exploded, and the Caravel shook violently! The majestic waves swept across the deck, pressing the entire ship underwater, leaving only the three protruding masts. The two sailors cutting the ropes were not secured properly and got swept away by the waves in an instant, without even a chance to grunt.

Bruno felt a sudden lightness, his whole body submerged in the water, and then he floated back up from the deck. He closed his eyes, held his breath, and clung firmly to the cable, his fingernails digging into his

flesh. The surging waves rolled several times but still couldn't sweep him away. After a good dozen seconds, the crest of the giant wave regretfully moved on, letting out a terrifying sigh.

"Buzz... Bang!"

The layers of waves seemed endless. The Caravel was like a toy in the hands of a giant, first pressed into the water, then lifted by the waves, and finally, the bow suddenly rose from the water, crashing down heavily, making a teeth-gritting buzz.

"... Crack!"

The waves rolled and the winds surged, and the aft mast of the ship, under too much pressure, suddenly broke! The broken aft mast, along with the sails, was then swept away by the tail tide of the giant wave. A sailor tied to the mast cable let out a half-cry of despair, only to be swallowed by the monstrous waves in an instant.

In the face of the overwhelming power of nature, humans were nothing but futile struggling ants, hopelessly waiting for the merciless judgment of fate!

After the giant wave, Bruno was thrown heavily onto the deck, trembling all over, unable to straighten his back. His hair was disheveled, and he was in a state of disgrace, with even his captain's hat swept away. After a long while, he barely managed to lift his head and look around. Just one unexpected giant wave had reduced the sailors by three and the aft mast was nowhere to be seen. And this was just the beginning of the storm!

"Oh Almighty!... Killer... Killer wave!"

Bruno trembled and moaned in pain, feeling despair about the fate ahead. Dark clouds obscured the vision, and the torrential rain formed a water curtain, making it hard to see even the flagship a few hundred meters away. A moment later, amidst the roaring thunder, he regained some consciousness and shouted with all his strength.

"Lower the sails! Quick!..."

Quartermaster Matim gritted his teeth and rushed out from the covered rear deck. He stepped through the puddles on the deck and reached the main mast in two steps. The giant wave had just passed, and the next one would take some time to form, giving the ship a moment of calm.

"Slash!..."

Matim gripped his dagger tightly and slashed several times, finally cutting the cable holding the sails!

"Bang!"

The huge sail, filled with water, fell straight down, brushing past Matim's head, and slammed onto the wet deck with a "Bang". Several sailors rushed over simultaneously, gathered the mainmast's sails, and tied them tightly to the ship. If the main sail was lost, there would be no spare on board. Soon, Haroldo also lowered the foresail.

Once all the sails were lowered, the Caravel stabilized slightly, no longer affected by the wind, only rising and falling with the waves.

"Phew!"

Bruno let out a long breath. Kneeling on the deck, he looked up, only to see layers of dark clouds with no sign of daylight.

"Merciful Almighty! I beseech you, protect your devout citizens, grant me the light that illuminates the soul!..."

After a brief prayer, the storm around them showed no change, resembling an apocalyptic judgment with seemingly no end. Not far away, another terrifying wave sounded.

"Buzz... Boom!..."

Bruno looked up to see another terrifying giant wave rising ahead, quickly reaching over ten meters high. The sailors on board showed fear on their faces, frantically tying themselves to the cables, then lying down flat and clinging tightly to the planks.

"Ah!... Almighty, please..."

"Buzz... Boom Boom!!..."

The raging wind roared day and night, and the torrential rain persisted. The surging waves carried the Portugal exploration fleet, shaking violently while heading constantly south. Lightning struck from time to time, illuminating the rising giant waves and outlining an apocalyptic scene. Each time the giant waves came and submerged the tiny ship, it meant a test of life or death!

The terrible storm lasted nearly five days before falling behind the fleet. Then, the wind and waves temporarily subsided, and everyone survived. The layered clouds slightly dispersed, revealing a bit of daylight.

Bunoru emerged from the hidden deck cabin, looking at the still raging storm a dozen miles away, almost pale-faced. During these five days, the ships had been jolting day and night, up and down, left and right, sometimes submerged by huge waves and pressed into the sea. Even an old sea dog like him was vomiting to the point of dizziness, with no appetite at all.

All crew members, every moment, seemed to be on the edge of hell, unable to find peace even hidden in the cabin, let alone get restful sleep. Because, in such a terrifying storm, if the ship capsized, there was no escape for anyone!

"Quick! Bail out all the water in the cabin!"

Bunoru didn't have time for lamentation and immediately shouted an order. The sailors, with their remaining strength, started bailing with wooden buckets, like pale revival corpses.

Yesterday afternoon, the right side of the lower hull was hit violently by something and cracked a big gap. Everyone on board was terrified, and Carpenter Ivo, hugging a wooden plank, rushed over. He

struggled to cover the crack, but seawater still gushed in. Then, everyone hurriedly worked through the night, finally managing to patch up the crack temporarily.

Chapter 847: The Starting Point of the Year 1488, The Call and Songs of New Routes!_2

"Fortunately, my ship is from Captain Diogo, and it is made of sturdy cold fir, and it's not that old..."

Bunoru felt fortunate in his heart. He climbed onto the deck, stood up, and under the dim sky, he tried hard to look for other ships. The waves over the past few days had all moved in one direction, and as long as the sails were down, the ship would not drift too far.

Everyone gazed at the murky sea, searching in vain for half a day, gaining nothing. Until noon, when the daylight broke through the clouds, the visibility broadened slightly, and a caravel suddenly appeared in front of Bunoru. Beside it, there was a broken, ragged supply ship.

"It's the fleet flagship, 'São Cristóvão'!... The supply ship is here as well!"

Bunoru looked closely; the flagship was anchored a few miles away and looked relatively intact. All three masts were still standing, and even the main sail was not fully lowered; it was close to the deck, held at a very low height.

"This is..."

He paused and looked at the flagship riding the waves for a while before realizing the key. It turned out that by furling the main sail halfway at a certain height, the ship could lift itself over the rough waves, avoiding being completely submerged.

"Captain Dias' sail handling skills are truly... impressive...."

After a while, Bunoru sighed softly. Captain Dias hailed from nobility, surely possessing the most precious nautical heritage, and had years of experience at sea, incomparable to him, a noble's bastard. In critical moments, such invaluable experience and knowledge determined life and death!

"Captain, the flagship... is coming... coming closer!"

Haroldo looked for a moment and hurried to Bunoru's side. His voice was hoarse and he was noticeably thinner, appearing more agile.

"Huh?... The flagship is signaling!"

Upon hearing this, Bruno widened his eyes and looked at the approaching flagship.

"Raise the sails, continue south!!"

"Raise the sails, continue south!!"

"Foda-se! Mad, crazy! Dias is a demon!"

Seeing the signal clearly, Bruno was instantly furious. He pounded the deck in anger, roaring out.

"Continue south?! We just passed through a storm zone, going further south, it's still stormy weather!"

However, the flagship merely issued orders without giving them a choice. Soon, the flagship stopped approaching and turned its bow again, then raised its sails.

"Foda-se!"

Bruno cried out in despair. He turned to the north, where a storm was still raging. Then he looked south, where flashes of lightning illuminated the new storm. Caught between two storms, what choices did they have? The newly appointed captain stretched out his hand, feeling the still strong northwest wind, and had to order again.

"Raise the sails, continue south!... Don't tie them too tightly, be ready to lower them at any time!... Lord, Demon, whoever it is, please protect me... As long as I survive, I will surely offer sacrifices to you!..."

Of course, these last two sentences, only Bruno himself could hear.

A day later, the three Portuguese exploration ships, with sails at full speed in the strong winds, charged into the southern storm once more. This time, the terrible storm lasted seven days, with mountainous waves appearing continuously. When the fleet finally broke through the storm, everyone was exhausted, collapsing on the deck like dying salted fish. Each ship had lost at least a quarter of its crew compared to half a month ago!

"Foda-se!... Thirteen days, a hellish voyage that lasted thirteen days!"

Bruno, sore all over, lay on the deck, gazing at the long-lost clear sky. Sunlight filtered down from the pristine blue sky, shining on his vampire-pale face, as if it were a gift from the Lord... or perhaps a gift from the Demon...

"Foda-se! Tenho saudades! I miss, that long-lost hometown!... If another storm comes, we'll all go to hell!..."

The newly appointed captain lay motionless, lost in the unfamiliar sky. Beside him lay the newly appointed boatswain Haroldo, quartermaster Matim, and carpenter Ivo. The four officers had expended all their strength, let alone the ordinary sailors.

Luckily, Bruno's prophecy did not come true. The fleet had already passed through the most dangerous storm zone. With the storm calmed, the following days were all clear. At this time, the wind direction turned to the west, howling day and night, forming the prevailing westerlies.

The fleet had drifted for too long in the storm. Dias, pale and stern, stood on the deck, gazing at the vast sea around him. Though his expression did not change, his heart was full of confusion.

"Where is this...?"

Dias pondered for a long time. In this unknown sea, with no reference points, he couldn't make an accurate judgment. However, no matter what, the current priority was to reach the shore quickly and repair the severely damaged fleet.

After a few moments, he reached out his hand, felt the vast westerly wind, and ordered sharply.

"Raise the sails, turn east!"

No one defied the captain's will. Those who dared to defy had ended up as corpses in the sea. Despite having survived the dreadful storm, an unspoken consensus of dark undercurrents flowed among the crew, waiting for the day when the accumulated emotions would burst forth. The lingering feeling of survival and the longing for home grew stronger.

On January 29, 1488, the Portuguese exploration fleet continued east, sailing day and night for three days with the strong westerlies, covering at least eight hundred miles. However, the African continent, which was supposed to appear in the east, was nowhere in sight. Sailing Master Pero measured the latitude, approximately between 37 and 39 degrees north.

First confused, Dias then had a sudden, unbelievable thought come to mind! He suppressed his speculation and issued another command.

"Turn the sails, keeping the angle with the west wind at 45 degrees, and the same with the ship hull! Turn the bow north!"

The battered Portuguese fleet immediately adjusted course, using the westerly wind's force to sail half-speed north. Only two days later, on the afternoon of February 3rd, the long coastline appeared once again. But this time, the southern continent's coastline extended horizontally!

"Lord have mercy! This, this land is oriented east and west!"

Dias stood at the bow, staring at the coastline stretching east and west, dazed for a few seconds. Then, boundless joy surged in his heart, making him tremble all over.

At this moment, he realized that he had finally rounded the southernmost tip of the African continent, and the route to India and Seris was now directly in front of him!

"Merciful Lord! Thank you for your grace! You sent angels to deliver peace to your faithful followers and preserved our lives with your peace!... Praise you, eternal Savior! Thank you for protecting me and enabling me to discover the route to the East!!"

Dias wept with joy, kneeling forcefully on the deck and praying loudly.

He looked up at the clear blue sky, feeling enveloped by sacred light. At this moment, he was certain that the Lord had blessed him and the Portuguese people. The Pope's mandate, the King's decree, and his old friend's unfulfilled wish would be realized in his hands! He would be remembered by the Catholic World, and perhaps even enshrined after his death, forever etched in history!

"Praise the Lord for his grace! Two thousand years after the Phoenicians first circled Africa, I will once again lead the fleet to the land flowing with milk and honey, filled with gemstones and spices in the East! The new trade route will be in my hands, and it will also be in the hands of the Kingdom of Portugal!~~"

Dias's frantic shouts spread in the vast sea breeze. On the flagship 'São Cristóvão,' the surviving crew exchanged glances, eyes hinting at unspoken thoughts.

On the nearby coast, a short Khoisan herdsman was tending to a few lean cattle grazing on the nearshore grassland. He heard the calls in the wind, climbed a small hill in curiosity, and looked at the ships on the southern sea. The oldest tribe in Africa had finally, at this moment, met the youngest nation of Europe.

At this moment, the Khoisan herdsman did not know what was about to happen on the land that had belonged to them for generations. He only watched in surprise for a few moments, then smiled and sang softly.

"Mother of the Moon, thank you for bringing me good fortune! I see strange big ships, blossoming with crosses... Where did these wizards come from, riding on the planks of gods and demons, where are they heading?..."

On the sunlit coast at the southernmost tip of Africa, the desolate song echoed, responding to the distant shouts in Portuguese. It seemed like a friendly greeting, telling the beautiful beginning of a story, while the subsequent death and tears remained hidden beyond the sea and sky~

Chapter 848: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, A Distant First Meeting

Melancholic song, accompanied by deep drumbeats, echoed along the vast coastline, bringing unfamiliar and intense greetings.

"The sacred heaven and earth bless us! It's the flowers of spring, the dew of summer, the fruits of autumn, and the songs of winter!...Thank you, envoys of the lakeside tribes, for bringing us precious gifts!...Nature's spirit guides us to let 'the people of the riverside' and 'the people of the lakeside' meet and share this beautiful day. Come, envoys of the lakeside tribe, let's dance together in celebration!..."

Chieftain Kalan wore white clothes decorated with frogs, donned a heavy deer head on his head, had grass ornaments similar to those of the Guajili people wrapped around his legs, and held two gourd-like wooden rattles. His face showed a passionate smile. He stood up from beside the blazing bonfire, walked over to the leader of the lakeside envoys, and extended a dance invitation.

"Uh...dance? Yes, yes...dance, alright!..."

Old militia Chiwaco, intermittently, enthusiastically responded using a few newly learned Guajili words.

The great tribe here calls themselves "Yoreime," which means the people of the riverside, a branch of the coastal Mayo people. The chieftain Kalan in front of them is the leader of the Yoreime great tribe, commanding one or two thousand tribal warriors. The Mayo people are located in the northwest of the Sakatekas Desert, at the coastal edge. Their language shares some similarities with the Guajili people of the wilderness, and also has common words with Mexican. This likely hints at some ancient connection.

Chiwaco's eyes flickered, his smile was sincere. He wore gray leather armor, had an eagle feather crown signifying a leader on his head, and had a dagger made of Obsidian at his waist.

"So, who among you will go dance?"

The old militia smiled and looked at Puapu beside him. Huitu warrior lowered his head, pretending not to hear. He then looked to the other side at the onboard priest MeKate. MeKate, curious about Chieftain Kalan's attire, was inquisitively examining it for its religious significance, barely paying attention to Chiwaco. Finally, he looked to the onboard Guajili guide Pavi.

"Captain, this is a dance to show friendship between leaders. You or the deputy captain must dance!"

"Dance...good! Alright!..."

Chiwaco smiled, glanced at the hundred-plus guards with long spears behind Chieftain Kalan, sighed internally, stood up, and followed the deer-headed Kalan to the center of the crowd, standing side by side in front of the bright bonfire.

"Haha, friends from the lakeside tribes! Come, wear the sacred deer head, take the blessed wooden rattle, and dance and sing with me in front of the bonfire of heritage!"

"Uh, deer head? Alright! Okay!..."

Chiwaco stood still, allowing two Yoreime warriors to step forward and place a heavy deer head on him. The deer head hung down two sisal ropes, tightly tied under his chin, causing him discomfort. Then, a middle-aged man dressed as a witch doctor bowed and handed him two gourd wooden rattles.

Once done, Chieftain Kalan was already dancing by the bonfire. He bent his waist, crouched his legs, maintained a jumping posture, enthusiastically jumped up and down, shook the wooden rattles in his hand, sang like a frog, recounting ancient legends.

"Ahaha! A long, long time ago, there was no flame in the world. All animals coveted the flame!

The flame was at the highest peak, so they sent a frog to the top of the mountain to search.

The frog wouldn't get burned because it lived in the water and held water in its mouth!

The frog jumped and jumped, finally reaching the peak, and swallowed the burning firestone.

He used the water in his mouth to envelop the firestone. Two streams of smoke emerged from his nostrils.

The frog acquired fire!...

Ahaha! The fox then said, turkeys, you should follow the frog.

When the fire in the frog's mouth was about to go out, quickly blow it to ignite!

So, the turkeys followed the frog, reigniting the firestone when it was about to extinguish.

However, the frog's mouth was too large, and the firestone fell out, striking the opossum's tail.

The opossum's tail caught fire, he screamed and ran around, igniting the grass and wood on the mountain...

Ahaha! Thanks to the frog, fox, turkey, and opossum.

Since then, all animals had fire!...

Ahahaha!...

"

"Uh...ahaha! Frog, fox, turkey, and opossum?"

Chiwaco widened his eyes, mimicking Chieftain Kalan, danced the frog dance, twisted his old waist, jumped up and down with effort, and the wooden rattles in his hand made a series of "dingling" sounds. Chieftain Kalan's song was like thunder, making him dizzy, only barely understanding a few words. After a while, he blinked his eyes sharply.

"Hmm? There's a firestone?"

Among the seated crowd, Guajili guide Pavi whispered in admiration, seemingly being the only one in the exploration fleet to fully comprehend the song.

This ancient song speaks of the tribe's heritage. The flame is the spirit of the Wilderness tribes' heritage, a gift from the divine heavens. The climbing frog symbolizes the tribe's leader, the bravest and most resilient warrior. The wise fox represents the tribe's priest, guiding the leader and warriors. The following turkeys are naturally the guided samurai, responsible for protecting the flame. The opossum with the flaming tail is the numerous tribespeople, spreading and sharing the flame.

Leaders, priests, warriors, tribespeople—these four groups form the Northern tribes. They are united because they inherit the divinity of the ancestors, passing down the tribe's flame!

Intense dancing lasted for two quarters until Chiwaco's old waist was about to break. The leading dancer Chieftain Kalan, drenched in sweat, stopped dancing. He laughed heartily, extended his hand with the wooden rattle, and heavily collided with Chiwaco's rattle, making a crisp "ding!"

"Ahaha!...Turkeys from afar, the Yoreime tribe's frogs welcome you! We have sung and danced together, and will now be reliable friends!"

Hearing the chieftain's words, the Yoreime tribe warriors stood up abruptly. They put down their long spears, waved their hands, and laughed loudly.

"Ahaha!...Ahaha!...Ahahaha!...

"Ah, friends? Good! Alright! Ahaha!..."

Chiwaco nodded with a smile. Then, he slightly turned around, looked at his team members, and gestured.

"What are you doing sitting around? Everyone, celebrate!"

"...Praise the Chief Divine! For friends to meet, ahaha!..."

A moment later, more than thirty Prepetcha warriors stood up, put away their weapons, raised their hands high, and celebrated in prayer. Seeing their actions, the tribe warriors on the opposite side became even more enthusiastic, almost rushing over to embrace them in dance.

"Phew!...Damn it...whoever...put me through this...the Heavenly Divine must be blind!"

At this moment, Chiwaco finally confirmed that the tribe opposite had no hostility. He breathed a long sigh of relief, cursing repeatedly in his heart at a noble who had been constantly thinking about him.

The journey had been incredibly difficult, with everyone narrowly brushing past the God of Death several times. Looking back, it was simply tear-inducing.

Last November, he received the kingdom's conscription order, had to shoulder the long spear, leave his daughter Luwei and son-in-law Ezpan, and head south alone. Several old brothers wanted to accompany him, but he chased them away.

In early December, he arrived at Atoyac Lake and reported to the Southern Shipbuilding Department. Following the king's instructions, the department handed over three newly launched Crocodile Oar-sail Ships to the old militia to lead.

Onboard were First Level priest MeKate, who knew a bit about navigation, could read and count, and estimate positions. Guajili guide Pavi, who grew up in the wilderness, was fluent in the Northern Land language and familiar with wilderness customs. Then there were sixty Prepetcha sailors, skilled in operating oar-sail ships.

The group rowed the kingdom's most advanced oar-sail ships, heading south along the Tarsas River, reaching the estuary after a few days. Huitu Puapu, leading fifty Prepetcha warriors, had been waiting for a long time. Upon meeting, naturally, there was a moment of poignant nostalgia.

Puapu regretted not heeding Chiwaco's suggestion to confess his interactions with southern nobles to the king earlier, potentially avoiding losing his military authority. Chiwaco cursed out loud, wishing to knock old Puapu's head. After reminiscing, Puapu, per the king's decree, joined Chiwaco's team as the expedition deputy captain. Thus, the kingdom's first ocean exploration fleet was formed!

The expedition fleet consisted of three large oar-sail ships with 110 people. The cabins were filled with food, fresh water, cloth, cocoa, two small bags of gold and silver, and a large bag of the kingdom's stored gemstones. The purpose was to follow the king's decree, to travel along the coast to the distant northwest, seeking the islands where birds roost, collecting stones formed by bird droppings, and documenting the water and route along the way until they successfully returned.

This marked the kingdom's first long voyage to explore the vast unknown world! This marked the kingdom's first long voyage to explore the vast unknown world! Nearly twenty years after arriving in this world, Xiulote finally completed all preparations and dispatched the first batch of explorers. And the vast American Continent would unfold anew before him, telling a future destined to change lives in a completely different way!

Chapter 849: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, The Old Militia's First Voyage!

In mid-December, the exploration fleet was assembled. Everyone set off from Tarsas River estuary, traveling along the southeastern coast, heading towards the northwest. They stopped twice for supplies at coastal villages of the southern Tekos Tribe.

This was the border of the Fire River Plains, only a hundred and twenty li from Fire River City. Hearing the news, an envoy from Fire River City hurried over, traveling day and night, to inquire about the fleet's purpose. Chiwaco responded briefly, saying they were going out to sea to find the Sacred Land of the seagulls, and left under the uneasy gaze of the envoy.

Afterwards, the fleet continued northward. At the year's end, cold winds from the northern continent blew in. The journey was difficult, relying almost entirely on rowing as the wind power was nearly useless. The crew rowed the large oar-sail ship, preserving strength, rowing only 8 hours a day, covering approximately 120-140 li each day. Accounting for rest and resupply time, it wasn't until early January that the fleet traveled 1400 li, reaching the Lerma River estuary.

The Lerma River surged forward, creating a broad floodplain at the estuary. This fertile land was populated with villages and a small Tekos town near the coast, known locally as Three Rivers City.

Because there were three rivers from south to north dividing the fertile floodplain, the town surrounded by these three rivers was naturally called Three Rivers City.

The fleet anchored at the bustling Three Rivers City for two days, trading gemstones and cloth to replenish their food supplies and recruiting a warm-hearted Tekos guide.

Once resupplied, the fleet soon encountered sudden strong winds and huge waves after setting out to sea. The low oar-sail ship was instantly overcome by waves, bobbing up and down, almost capsizing. The old militia, encountering such a storm for the first time, was so frightened that his soul almost flew out of his body, and he hurriedly led everyone to the shore to anchor.

On the day of anchoring, the newly recruited Tekos guide disappeared. The old militia searched for half a day but found no trace, feeling an ominous foreboding. They camped on the high ground by the coast, resting for two days as the winds slightly diminished and the waves calmed a bit.

By noon on the third day, the old militia grew increasingly uneasy. He thought over and suddenly realized that it would take about three days to sail back to Three Rivers City from there!

"Everyone on board! Everyone on board! Push the ship back to the sea, and move all the stuff back onto the ship!"

The Huitu Puapu were puzzled but chose to follow the anxious and uneasy old militia.

"After all, Old Qi has a knack for sensing danger faster than anyone else!... According to His Majesty, it means being favored by unforeseeable fate."

Sure enough, by evening, the missing Tekos guide reappeared with three to four hundred Tekos warriors. The warriors, armed with long spears, javelins, and even rarely seen hunting bows, saw the fleet and charged with fervor, waving their weapons and yelling.

"Feathered Warriors of the Tarasco Kingdom! Where do you think you're escaping to? Leave your heads!"

"Damn Divine Eagle Tribe! Extending the hands of evil all the way here, we must cut off their hands and feet!"

"Yes! And the gemstones, the gemstones! Leave the ship's gemstones, that's the chieftain's order!..."

Chiwaco was utterly shocked by the sudden appearance of enemies. He immediately abandoned the remaining food and water on shore, retreating with the crew back onto the ships. Then, he ordered the Huitu Puapu, familiar with the Tekos language, to raise shields and shout loudly.

"Warriors of the nearby Tekos tribes, we mean no harm... This is a misunderstanding! A misunderstanding! We are not the Feathered Warriors nor the Divine Eagle Tribe... We come from the Lake Tribe, from the Mexica Alliance!"

Hundreds of enemies surged to the shoreline, their faces gruesome, trudging through the water towards the anchored oar-sail ships. Their numbers were three to four times that of the expedition fleet. Some warriors hurled their javelins at the ships, while others drew their hunting bows to shoot at Chiwaco's position.

Arrows and javelins whizzed through the air, injuring three or four sailors in an instant. The Prepecha warriors aboard drew their greatbows and decisively retaliated.

Seeing the shouting and killing enemies, Chiwaco finally realized that all negotiations were futile. The true goal of these enemies was likely the treasures and gemstones on the ships. The old militia, looking at the still-wavy sea and the frenzied enemies, had no choice but to order loudly.

"Set sail! Row with all your might, head northwest!"

The kingdom's exploration fleet braved the waves, sailing at full speed along the coastline towards the northwest. The Tekos warriors chased along the shore for a full day, roaring in anger, but were eventually left far behind by the fleet.

After this encounter, Chiwaco dared not recklessly resupply in the northern Tekos tribes' villages. If food was really scarce, they would seek out smaller village tribes, making quick trades and then leaving swiftly.

Even so, they were still attacked by the Tekos once. A village elder on the shore, outwardly friendly yet secretly in communication with nearby villages, not only planned to launch an assault ashore but also organized an attack with over twenty canoes.

Seeing that the trade had dragged on, Chiwaco decisively led the crew away. They boarded the ship, avoiding the Tekos warriors onshore and engaging in a fierce battle with the Tekos on the water. The Tekos abandoned more than a dozen small boats and left behind fifty to sixty bodies, while the exploration fleet suffered the loss of over a dozen men.

The exploration fleet departed from Three Rivers City, rowing against the north wind, frequently stopping to evade storms and defend against Tekos attacks. It took more than half a month to travel a thousand li, finally reaching the estuary of a large river. To the east were towering mountains, with only the coastal plains suitable for farming. A clear river flowed from the desolate distant mountains, bringing green life along its path.

The local tribe called themselves the Totorames. They had a small population, living along the coast, planting corn, beans, and chili peppers, catching fish, shrimp, clams, and oysters, and producing sea salt. They established a large village at the river's estuary, called Fish Mountain Village.

Chiwaco anchored at Fish Mountain Village for two days, offering the Totorames some cloth and a few gemstones, and replenishing corn, beans, salted fish, and water. The Totorames lived in a narrow coastal area, with limited food reserves but abundant salt. Their language was similar to the Guajili people, and somewhat resembled the Mexica language of the alliance. It seemed that the tribes on the entire northwestern wilderness spoke similar languages.

The old militia inquired about the northwest, and the elder of the Totorames told him.

"Rowing many, many days further northwest, you'll reach the land of the Mayo people! The Mayo people are numerous, with many powerful tribes and hundreds or even thousands of warriors! My friends, they know a lot and can surely help you!"

In late January, guided by this information, the kingdom's exploration fleet set off again. After months of sailing, their experience gradually grew. They all had experience with inland waterways and, having adapted to coastal conditions, the supply of food and water became more orderly, and they handled occasional storms without mistake.

In fact, this vast coastal area was shielded by the long peninsula extending from Northern California, so the waves weren't too high and were far from matching the real ocean.

At night, the onboard Priest MeKate would use a strange compass to measure the angle between the bright North Star and the sea. It was said that this was a divine revelation personally guided by His Majesty, bestowed upon the shipyard. As the fleet continued northward, the measured angle of the compass grew larger. Initially, it was only about ten degrees, and now it was over twenty degrees.

Besides, MeKate also used divine arts to indicate direction. He hung a special thin needle on a fine line to indicate the direction. The needle, ground from the Divine Stone of Black Rock Mountain, would point north and south as soon as it was hung.

Chiwaco marveled at this, contemplating deeply but failing to grasp the principle, ultimately praising the Chief Divine.

At the beginning of February, the exploration fleet managed to travel another seven to eight hundred li, reaching this river estuary and encountering the Great Tribe of the Mayo people, the Yaolem tribe, with thousands of people. The kingdom's exploration fleet anchored at the estuary, offering the Yaolem Tribe a large bag of cocoa, ten rolls of cloth, and a small bag of Lake Gem.

The chieftain of the Yaolem Tribe, Kalan, received the gifts and led over a hundred trusted aide warriors, personally arriving at the coast. He was greatly astonished by the enormous oar-sail ships, the sturdy leather armor of the lake warriors, and their strange metal weapons. He then had bonfires lit, warmly inviting the lake envoys' leader to a gathering witnessed by the ancestors.

Chiwaco pondered for a long time, observing the relaxed and curious expressions of the opposing warriors before leading everyone off the ship. In this distant place, two to three thousand li from the Kingdom of the Lake, they represented the southern Kingdom of the Lake, meeting the leader of a Great Tribe for the first time!

Memories of the past months' hardships flashed through the old militia's mind. At this moment of celebration, he smiled, even smoothing the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. Looking at the deer-headed chieftain Kalan, he raised the gourd bell in his hand and, with a clear "ding-ling", clinked it heavily with Kalan's.

Then, he took a deep breath and asked in a solemn voice.

"Frog, Chieftain. We, friends! We, brothers! I, Great Chief, sent me to find seagulls. Seagulls, they fly, have feathers, many seagulls. In the northwest, small islands, where?"

"Hmm? You're looking for... the small islands with many seagulls in the northwest?"

Chieftain Kalan was stunned, eyes flashing as he repeatedly considered the leader's question.

After some interaction, he was convinced that these elite warriors were indeed from afar, not belonging to any nearby Great Tribe, nor harboring ill intent. It now seemed they were sent by the Great Chief of some lake tribe to find beautiful seagulls and feathers.

If the lake tribe could afford to disregard the lives of a hundred elite warriors, traversing such a distant journey just to find seagulls, there could only be two possibilities...

"Either they are very powerful, like us Mayo people, with thousands or even tens of thousands of warriors! Or, in their faith, the feathers of seagulls are extremely important tribute, and the islands of seagulls are sacred. Judging by their solid large ships and vibrant feather crowns, it's likely both! ... And a powerful yet devout distant tribe..."

Chieftain Kalan pondered for a long time, a friendly smile spreading on his face, with certain thoughts flashing in his mind. Then he looked northwest, nodded slowly, and spoke affirmatively.

"Ahahaha, my friends! I know the place your lake chieftain seeks!"

Chapter 850: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, The Glistening Jin Shi

The drums murmured softly, accompanied by the joyous singing of the crowd, echoing across the wilderness by the sea. The bonfire flickered, casting its light on both faces, revealing seemingly similar smiles.

Old Militia Chiwaco smiled with an aged face, carefully observing Chieftain Kalan's expression, and spoke.

"Friend, good! Well! ...where is that island with many seabirds?"

"Ahahaha!"

Chieftain Kalan's smile was warm, but he did not answer directly. He looked at the Copper Spears of the Prepecha Warriors with great interest and asked.

"Friend, your Long Spears seem different from ours... can I take a look?"

Chiwaco's expression paused for a moment, then he smiled and nodded after a few seconds.

"Friend, good!"

After speaking, he shouted a couple of words to Puap. The Huitu Warrior, with a wary expression, held a Bronze Shortsword at his waist with one hand while handing over a Copper Spear with the other.

Chieftain Kalan took the Copper Spear, glanced casually at the Bronze Shortsword on the Huitu Warrior's waist. Then he examined the edge of the Bronze Spearhead carefully and struck it with his Stone Knife at his waist, his expression changing instantly. He appeared surprised and spoke eagerly.

"Friend, what is this spearhead made of? It's both sharp and tough!"

"... this is made of a special kind of Stone. Friend, tell me the location of the island, and I will give you this Long Spear!"

Chiwaco stepped closer, tentatively extending his arm.

Chieftain Kalan instinctively wanted to dodge but restrained himself immediately. He also extended his arm, touching Chiwaco's shoulder as they grasped each other.

"Ahahaha! Friend, the flames of our Ancestor as witness, I will tell you everything I know! But I have a request, to trade such sharp and tough weapons with the Tribes in the Lake!"

"Ah? Trade weapons?"

Hearing this, Chiwaco was somewhat surprised. He scrutinized Chieftain Kalan's expression again, not sensing any obvious malice.

"This is not impossible. But, friend, what do you have to trade?"

Chieftain Kalan's eyes flickered as he thought for a moment. The tribe had corn, beans, fish, pottery, and cotton cloth and salt, but none in abundance. What could be traded with the Southern Tribes were a few types of stones abundant in the mountains. He had heard the Southern Tribes valued these useless things highly... He gave a few orders in a low voice, and several trusted aides quickly left, returning to the nearby tribe.

"Friend, please be as patient as the rock on the Eastern mountain peak. The warriors will return to the tribe and be back soon."

Seeing some people leave, Chiwaco became more vigilant. He lowered his voice and spoke in the Prepecha dialect.

"Old Pu, go and contact the Warriors, have them prepare just in case. If lots of Yaolem warriors come..."

Puap frowned slightly and nodded. He disappeared for a moment, and when he returned, he brought several of the best Warriors, subtly forming a circle around Chieftain Kalan.

Chieftain Kalan seemed oblivious. He still smiled warmly and spoke.

"Friend, actually, around here, the water and grass are abundant, there are many trees, and there have always been many seabirds. The fishermen fish nearby, and the small islands are full of beautiful birds. But if we talk about the island with the most seabirds... it must be Turtle Island in the Northwest Sea!"

"Turtle Island in the Northwest Sea? How far away?"

Chiwaco's spirits lifted, and he asked.

"From here, set out to sea along the coast, heading northwest, passing through the Yomei Great Tribe of the Yaji People (Yaqui), then the Guaymas tribe (Guaymas), keep going until you encounter the Seris. The Great Island is on Seri land, where their fishermen also frequent."

Chieftain Kalan shook his head, making the deer's head he wore bob up and down.

"Tribal fishermen have to row for more than ten days, stopping several times at Yaji villages to get there. But your ships are large and fast, so it might not take as long... Turtle Island is said to be transformed from a giant turtle, inhabited by countless flocks of birds. The Seri occupy the Great Island and also the adjacent waters, preventing other tribal fishing boats from passing."

"Hmm... Yaji People? Seri? Friend, can you tell me about them?"

"The Yaji People are brothers to our Mayo. We worship the flames of the Ancestors, grow the same corn, speak the same language, and share the same blood. As for the Seri..."

Speaking of the Seri, Chieftain Kalan's expression cooled slightly.

"They speak a language completely different from the surrounding tribes, with no shared blood! Their ancestors came from the northern deserts, with unclear ties to the warlike desert people. They hunt wild animals and seabirds, fish at sea, frequently migrating their camps, and often compete with the tribes for prey and fishing grounds, even harassing the tribes' camps... Friend, we need your sharp weapons to drive away these wandering tribes!"

"Good, good... Friend..."

Chiwaco responded warmly, his mind racing. Reaching the Great Island in the Northwest Sea, heading to the Seris' land, might not go smoothly... He thought for a moment and then smiled, asking.

"Besides the Great Island of Turtle Island in the Northwest, is there any other island with many seabirds in the sea?"

"Hmm..."

Chieftain Kalan hesitated for a moment. This question wasn't actually a secret; if the tribes continued to the Northwest, the Yoeme Tribe and the Guaymas along the way would know the answer.

"Friend, to our direct West, just two days by boat, there is a long, narrow Peninsula. The Peninsula stretches on and on and on... On the Peninsula, there are many, many, many bird flocks, also many, many islands... It's quite arid there, not able to sustain many people, and there are no large tribes. The middle of the Peninsula belongs to the Kalan (Cochimí), a small tribe that is quite friendly."

"Within two hundred miles to the West, there is a long, narrow Peninsula. Arid, many seabirds, also many islands... Kalan people?"

Chiwaco slightly bowed his head, organizing Chieftain Kalan's valuable information. He felt somewhat grateful for the other's honesty, his old face full of smiles as he looked at the other's eyes, nodding repeatedly.

"Friend, good! Good friend!"

"Mm. Friend, we are good friends!"

Chieftain Kalan smiled and tapped Chiwaco's bell with his wooden one, then fell silent. The two smiled silently until a dozen tribal warriors, carrying vine baskets, rushed to the Chieftain's side, changing the atmosphere again.

Puap quietly gripped his Shortsword, squinting, he counted the numbers of the new arrivals, then slowly relaxed his grip.

Chieftain Kalan's expression remained unchanged. He pondered for a moment, then extended his hand, receiving the heaviest vine basket and dumping it directly on the ground. Instantly, the brilliant dark

golden glow was reflected in everyone's eyes! Puap's expression changed suddenly, eyes flashing with greed.

A pile of coarse gold ore scattered at everyone's feet, some still carrying the dark color of raw ore, like pieces of golden pebbles. Among the gold lumps, there were even more small gold particles, scattered like corn kernels, sinking into the grass and soil.

With the gold scattered, Chieftain Kalan seemed indifferent, only paying attention to the expressions of the Envoys from the Lake. Seeing the joy in everyone's eyes, he felt reassured, gaining confidence.

In the nearby Mountains, there were many of these golden stones, and the small streams in the mountains had them too. The land of not only the Mayo but also the Yaji People, Seri, and even the northeast mountains of the Opata People (Opata), all had these gold stones! The surrounding tribes' lands were full of these gold stones. In future Mexico, it would be the largest gold and copper mining region in the area, with a quarter of the gold production and three-quarters of the copper production!

"Ah? This..."

Seeing the dazzling gold, the old militia's expression froze instantly. After a long while, he finally nodded with difficulty.

"Friend, good friend! This business, it's a deal!"