

Civilization 851

Chapter 851: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, A Fair Trade

The firelight gleamed brightly, the plains stretched out endlessly, and the distant sea appeared vast and boundless. On the coastal plains, the Prepetcha Warriors of the kingdom and the warriors of the Yaolem Tribe gathered around the firelight, their expressions relaxed and joyful. At the center of the bonfire, two leaders stood facing each other, smiles on their faces and thoughts flickering in their minds.

At their feet, a wicker basket was tilted over on the ground. A large pile of gold blocks scattered, shining with a captivating golden light, catching everyone's eyes and stirring their hearts. The Prepetcha Warriors looked on with longing, while the warriors of the Yaolem Tribe seemed indifferent.

The old militia, Chiwaco, stared at the sparkling gold blocks, scratched his head, and spoke up.

"Friend, how would you like to trade this gold stone for long spears? We don't have many weapons left on our ship from this voyage..."

Upon hearing this, Chieftain Kalan nodded. In his view, since the Lake Tribe was seeking the Holy Land, they must have dispatched their most elite warriors, armed with the best weapons... The Deer-head Chieftain's eyes flickered, he first extended one hand, then another.

"Hmm... a large basket of such gold stones, I want to exchange for... fifteen... no, twenty copper spears!"

"Ah! Friend, twenty copper spears? For a basket of gold blocks?!"

"Yes! The weight of twenty copper spears is about the same as a basket of gold stones, right? Equal weight for equal weight, very fair..."

"This, fair?!"

Chiwaco's mouth dropped open in astonishment, unable to speak. A two-and-a-half meter long spear weighed about four to five jin, and a bronze spearhead weighed only four to five liang. Twenty copper spears together weighed less than a hundred jin, with less than ten jin of copper. The large basket of

gold blocks before him, conservatively estimated, weighed at least one hundred and fifty-six jin. Judging by the color, even if the gold content was lower than that of the Alliance, it would still be worth at least a hundred jin of gold dust... Calculating it this way, ten jin of copper exchanged for a hundred jin of gold dust?!

"Uh... friend, I know this request is a bit much..."

Seeing the astonished expression on the opposing leader's face, the Deer-head Chieftain felt a little guilty.

The long spears of the Lake Tribe not only had sharp spearheads but were also made of very sturdy pine or fir wood. These woods, whether for cutting or processing, required a lot of tools. And using such useless stones to exchange for so many fine weapons from the other side felt somewhat unfair to his friend...

Thinking of this, he hesitated for a moment, took a step back, and extended both hands once again.

"Otherwise, eighteen, no, fifteen would be fine too! After all, although there are many gold stones in the mountains, some are not pretty enough and need to be smelted with firestones. And to get firestones, we have to travel far to dig them..."

"Ah? Fifteen copper spears?"

Chiwaco was still in a state of shock, unsure how to respond. Puap, standing nearby, couldn't help but step forward excitedly and pulled at old Chiwaco's arm.

"Exchange! Exchange with him! Fifteen per basket, we have sixty spare spears on the ship, exchange all of them!"

In the Kingdom of the Lake, one jin of gold dust could be exchanged for more than one jin of copper. The difference was easily ten to twenty times, wholly benefiting the expedition fleet!

With Puap pulling him, Chiwaco finally snapped out of his shock. Pressing his lips together, he thought for a moment and shook his head in disagreement.

"No, Old Pu, the sixty spare spears are the ship's backup weapons, we can't exchange them all. We can only exchange a maximum of twenty... As for cocoa, cotton cloth, and gemstones, if the other party wants them, we can trade more of those."

Then, withholding his greed, he looked at the ever-observant Deer-head Chieftain and spoke sincerely.

"Friend, good friend! In our place, these golden stones are highly prized by the Priests and nobles! But the fleet has few weapons, we can only trade twenty... For this basket of gold stones, we will give twenty long spears, ten cloaks, and one gemstone!"

Upon hearing this, Puap discontentedly muttered under his breath.

"Old Chiwaco! What are you doing!... "

"Old Pu, shut up! I am the captain!"

"Ah?!"

This time, it was Chieftain Kalan's turn to be shocked. After understanding Chiwaco's meaning, he gazed at his counterpart for a while. Then he spoke again, his smile much more sincere.

"Friend, good friend! Thank you for your honesty! It's alright, there are many gold stones around the tribe, picking them up isn't difficult, after all, they can't be eaten or worn. When you leave, I can also give you five more baskets of unsmelted raw ore... Do you want to see the remaining baskets of stones that aren't gold stones?"

"Good friend, good, thank you!"

Chiwaco nodded repeatedly. They could bring back the gold ore to the Alliance and smelt it themselves... Next, he recalled the firestones repeatedly mentioned by the other party and responded affirmatively.

"I want to see!"

Without further ado, Chieftain Kalan directly dumped the second basket of stones on the ground. Instantly, a gleaming silver light appeared before everyone's eyes—a basket of silver ore.

Seeing this basket of roughly smelted silver, the expressions of the people did not change much.

The Kingdom of the Lake already produced silver, and the price of silver had always been low. In Central America, gold and copper symbolized the light of the sun, holding high religious value. Silver symbolized the moon, less often used in temples, and thus had a relatively limited value, often used to make silverware and silver jewelry.

"This is silver ore exchanged with wandering Wilderness Tribes on the eastern plains. Although there are silver ores in the eastern mountains, they are far less abundant than gold stones."

Chieftain Kalan understood their expressions. It seemed the Southern Tribes did not lack silver ore. The rarer the commodity, the higher the price. In the Mayo people's tribes, silver ore was actually valued higher than gold stones.

"This basket of silver ore is more expensive than gold stones... Friend, do you want them?"

"Thanks, friend."

Chiwaco shook his head. Chieftain Kalan did not press further. Then, he kicked the third basket of stones over, and a reddish-orange light appeared before them.

"Ah? This, this is!..."

Chiwaco's eyes widened, staring for a long time. Then he turned to look at Puap, and the well-informed Huitu warrior's eyes sparkled, nodding affirmatively.

"It's raw copper... and it seems to have high purity."

"Uh..."

"Friend, this is red stone from the northern mountains, smelted with firestones, and can be used to make containers. There is a lot in the mountains, but it is labor-intensive to extract. The Opata people from the far north collect refined red stones and make various utensils, selling them to other tribes... Do you need them?"

Chieftain Kalan blinked, his face full of expectation.

The Opata people established a strong Alliance in the northern mountainous valleys, consisting of three Great Tribes, with several smaller tribes attached. There, red stones were abundant, and some could be used to make vessels directly without smelting. The Opata people used these red stones to make containers, bells, and small ornaments. The Desert Tribes further north even used these red stones to make hand axes, small knives, and long spears. However, this red stone, though plentiful, produced weapons that were too soft after smelting to compare with the long spears of the Lake Tribe.

"Uh... we need this red stone!"

After a moment, Chiwaco nodded heavily, his expression complex. He knew that the kingdom's bronze weapons were made from copper as a raw material, using a secret method.

"So... how would we exchange it?"

"It's half as expensive as gold stones, a basket for thirty long spears. Friend, it's labor-intensive to extract red stones and smelt them with firestones, and making them into something useful is quite troublesome for the tribe..."

Chieftain Kalan slightly lowered his head to conceal his expression. A red stone mine not far north of the tribe could be smelted with firestones without much trouble, although mining required a lot of tools. In fact, these red stone veins, like the gold stones, were found among various northern tribes and boasted high purity. The further north one went, the more abundant and pure the raw red stones became. Legends spoke of large mounds of exposed red stone ore in Sli and Desert people's lands, glowing golden and green. Entire mountains of high-purity reddish-yellow natural red stones were said to exist!

Red stone was copper. What the people didn't know was that the entire coastal area of Sonora lay within a tectonic collision zone between the Pacific Ocean and American Plates, rich in mineral deposits, and accounted for more than half of Mexico's copper ore! Moreover, in northern Sonora, near the US-Mexico border, the Cananea copper mine was the world's second-largest copper mine, and it was an open-pit mine! Its future reserves were estimated at 4.52 billion tons, with an annual production of 510,000 tons, supplying 2%-3% of the world's copper ore demand.

"A basket for thirty long spears... over a hundred jin of raw copper exchanged for a dozen jin of spearheads..."

Chiwaco pursed his lips. While he didn't know what a scissor difference was, he still felt a pang of conscience. After pondering for a while, with the simplicity of a farmer, he spoke sincerely.

"Good friend, we don't have that many long spears... but we have many expensive gemstones we can trade! Of course, we also have practical cocoa and cloth."

"Gemstones for red stones? Hmm... okay then!"

Chieftain Kalan thought for a while and hesitantly agreed. The tribe didn't have a high demand for gemstones, but gemstones could be traded with northern tribes for cloth, food, and refined red stones. Especially the Opata people, who highly esteemed turquoise and were willing to trade many red stones for it. However, given the long trade distances, passing through multiple tribal hands involved significant discounts.

"Then a basket of red stones for ten emeralds!"

"Deal!"

Chiwaco thought about it, considering the value of gemstones and red copper in the kingdom, the trade was fair and didn't cheat his new friends. He did some quick calculations and added some extras.

"I will also give you a bag of cocoa and three cloaks!"

"Good, good friend!"

Chieftain Kalan repeatedly nodded, shaking his deer head with satisfaction. The two then discussed and reached a fair trade agreement: The Yaolem Tribe would exchange a basket of raw gold, a basket of raw copper, and five baskets of gold ore for twenty long spears, thirteen cloaks, a bag of cocoa, and eleven emeralds from the Lake Tribe.

After finalizing the trade agreement, both sides were very content. Chiwaco and Puap looked at each other, grinning from ear to ear.

Chieftain Kalan laughed heartily, feeling immensely proud. Trading these useless, commonly seen stones for useful weapons and items for the tribe was a great deal! However, he felt a little bad for these kind friends from afar...

He shook his head and thought for a while before generously making a grand gesture.

"My friends! The Yaolem Tribe and the Lake Tribe, speaking similar languages, must be distant brothers, sharing common ancestors! And as brothers..."

Chieftain Kalan's voice was strong as he pointed to the final basket of black stones. The black stones glistened with a dark glow, unremarkable in the firelight but containing a burning force within.

"This basket of firestones, symbolizing our ancestors, I gift to you!"

Chapter 852: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, Firestone, Yoeme Tribe, and Divine Mountain

Bright campfires burn in the wilderness, reflecting the metallic glow into people's eyes. In the shining gold and silver light, the gray and black firestone appears insignificant, carrying an ordinary silence.

Old Militia Chiwaco looked attentively for a moment, inexplicably finding the firestone somewhat familiar. He hesitantly asked.

"Symbol of the ancestors' firestone? The stone that can burn?"

"Exactly! This is the gift from our ancestors, brought by the brave and decisive Divine Frog from the ancient Divine Mountain! The fire seeds spread in the land by the Thorned Rat, making the stones capable of burning. And the souls of the ancestors watch us in the flames!..."

Chieftain Kalan swayed his head, looking ethereal, as if communicating with the ancient ancestors.

"The firestones in the mountains are gifts from the ancestors and blessings from the ancestors! We, the Mayo people, use firestones to ignite fires, cook meals, drive away wild beasts, resist the northern cold wave, and even refine these glowing stones. Firestones are easy to dig up, have great firepower, and are much easier to get than chopping down trees. With them, the tribe no longer needs to spend too much effort and manpower to chop wood and burn firewood!..."

"Easy to excavate, strong firepower, capable of refining gold bronze..."

Puap always listened attentively, suddenly remembering his experiences at the Black Rock Mountain mine, and came to a realization.

"Chief Divine bless! Isn't this firestone just coal, as His Highness mentioned?! Black Rock Mountain mine uses these black things to burn the difficult iron ore. Each time, coal is transported from the Qinganbate mining area, and I have to lead people to receive it, which costs many manpower! Yes, His Highness seems particularly interested in these various stones, like coal and iron..."

Puap's mind raced, his eyes flashing, thoughts surfacing in his mind.

Necali is in charge of the Mining and Metallurgy Bureau, with a growing number of subordinates over the years, almost equal to the rank of each Legion Commander. And Black Wolf's Personal Guard Mavik, who got the position at Black Rock Mountain, is also doing great, considered at least a Camp Commander with a thousand men. Even I myself, relying on the achievement of discovering Iron Mine

Mountain, could resume my position. Now this tribe has gold and copper, and firestone... This is a huge merit!

Thinking of this, he stepped forward two steps, leaned toward the old militia's ear, and whispered a sentence.

"Old Chi, these firestones, His Highness can put them to great use! You should ask properly, where can we find them, are there many?"

"Hmm, alright."

Upon hearing this, Chiwaco nodded. He looked at Chieftain Kalan, and asked solemnly.

"Friend, we, under the Great Chief's orders, are searching for the Holy Land of the seabirds and divine things... Are there many firestones? Can we trade for them?"

"Uh..."

Hearing the envoy of the Lake Kingdom's inquiry, Chieftain Kalan's expression paused, showing slight embarrassment.

"Friend, of course, there are firestones near our tribe! But the tribe has used them for many years, and there aren't many left on the ground, and digging underground ones is too troublesome..."

"So... where are there many firestones?"

"Haha, friend! Firestones are scattered by the fire seeds of the Divine Mountain, naturally, there are the most in the Divine Mountain!

Chieftain Kalan laughed heartily, answering without hesitation. This question indeed seemed a bit foolish. Without the Divine Power of the Divine Mountain, how could stones burn?

"...Containing fire seeds, the Divine Mountain is in the remote north of our Yaolem tribe, northeast of the brother tribe Yoeme Tribe! Once, the tribal Priest went to worship at the Divine Mountain and told us: The Divine Mountain is the origin of the fire seeds, containing the deepest divine power. The land there is dry, without any grass, birds, or beasts. Everywhere are scattered firestones and towering piles of firestone mountains!..."

"The dispersion of firestones is also centered around the Divine Mountain, distributed throughout the northern regions. Not far north of the Yoeme Tribe, there are two large firestone fields, with firestones that can be used for generations!..."

Saying this, Chieftain Kalan's eyes showed longing and a hidden trace of greed. Then, his expression changed, first proudly declaring, then solemnly asking.

"In the vast wilderness and mountains, whether heading east or south, there are no firestones. Only in the north, only in the lands of our Mayo and Yaji people, are these gifts from the ancestors found! This land is the fertile soil inherited from our ancestors! The despicable Siri people dare to occupy our land, so they are destined to die under the curse of the ancestors!... Friend, ancestors witness! Will you help us, continually bringing new weapons and supplies to fight the northern Siri people?"

"Certainly. Ancestors witness! Friend, we will return, as friends!"

Chiwaco solemnly swore by the name of the ancestors. Both nodded, touching each other's antlers, then clinking the gourds in their hands, producing a sacred "dingling".

After the ceremony, Chieftain Kalan waved his hand. A grand feast began in the open air, under the magnificent and brilliant star river, accompanied by the waves of the sea.

The warriors of both sides laid down their weapons, greeted each other, and exchanged carried foods according to tribal rituals. The Kingdom's side provided corn cakes, salted fish, and tequila, while the Mayo people brought black bean paste and pumpkin, along with a uniquely flavored bean tea.

Everyone feasted, enjoying themselves with great enthusiasm. Then, the Kingdom's warriors began dancing to the drumbeats with distinct rhythms; the tribal warriors shook wooden bells, singing short and high-pitched tunes!

"Ah haha! Friends come from afar, the cedar trees rustle. Let us light the flames and dance around the fire circle. Ah haha! Ancestors' gaze is upon us as we dance by the fire!... Ah hahahahah!"

Chapter 853: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, Firestone, Yoeme Tribe, and Divine Mountain_2

The Mayo people's position is already on the edge of the Great Basin of North America. They have many exchanges with their northern neighbors, and their music style has also been influenced, making it somewhat similar to the various Apache tribes in the basin.

The tribal warriors sang loudly together, with simple and repetitive melodies, and the pitch gradually rising. The desolate and ancient songs floated away among the mountains and wilderness, accompanied by the continuous jumping steps, resembling the galloping buffalo herds on the wilderness, making it unforgettable!

The bonfire burned fiercely, and everyone sang joyously until dawn, without stopping for the entire night. Chiwaco danced all night, his old waist almost breaking in half. It wasn't until the afternoon of the next day that the fleet replenished some food and water, preparing to move northwest.

Chieftain Kalan personally came to the seaside to bid farewell to the fleet of the Lake Central Tribe. He hadn't slept all night, yet he was still full of energy. At this moment, he looked at Chiwaco, who was about to leave, and at the sturdy large ships of the Lake Central Tribe. After thinking for a while, he finally made up his mind!

The chieftain, wearing a deer head, waved to the warriors behind him. A young tribal warrior, barefoot and carrying a long spear, took two steps to stand before the old militia and smiled simply.

"My friend, this is my nephew, Cavado. You can call him 'Mountain Bird.'"

"Ah? My friend, your nephew? Is this...?"

Chiwaco showed a look of surprise. He looked at the young man in front of him, vaguely guessing something.

"Yes, according to our tradition, when we meet close tribes from afar, we exchange the young members of the tribe. My friend, if you continue north, the languages of each tribe will become more and more

difficult to understand. As for the Seri people's language, it is completely different from ours. Although Mountain Bird is young, he understands the languages of many tribes. His mother was taken from the Seri tribe by my elder brother... Take my nephew with you; he will be helpful to you! From now on, he will be a member of your Lake Central Tribe."

"... Thank you, my friend."

Chiwaco pondered for a while, then chose to agree. The fleet indeed needed a local translator to continue north. He nodded sincerely and smiled at the young tribal warrior. Then, he looked at Puap, ordering in a low voice.

"Old Puap, you have to offer a warrior."

In the desolate northern land, exchanging the young members of the tribe between close tribes has long been a tradition for many northern tribes. Behind this tradition, there is probably the purpose of blood exchange to prevent inbreeding.

"... All right!"

Huitu Puap touched his chin and looked at the warriors behind him. He also called over a trusted Prepecha warrior.

"Gray Cat Warrior Putu, you are my kinsman and have not yet married, so stay here! I will leave you with more property. Marry more wives and have more children, and settle down here..."

Gray Cat Warrior Putu looked bitter, glanced at the impoverished Yoreim Tribe, which had nothing but gold, and for a moment, could not speak. However, in this era, the orders of the clan leader could not usually be disobeyed. After a while, he had no choice but to nod reluctantly.

"... All right, Chieftain. I will follow your orders."

"Good! When you have free time from making children, explore the size of the gold and copper mines here. Since there's gold and copper, His Highness will surely value this place... In a few years, the kingdom will definitely send more people!

"Okay!..."

Both sides exchanged a young warrior, and then parted ways. Chieftain Kalan watched the fleet of the Lake Central Tribe disappear into the vast distant horizon. After a while, he took a deep breath. Then, he smiled, pulled the young Gray Cat Warrior Putu, and announced boldly.

"Gray Cat, let's go! Haha, the tribe will hold a party tonight. Any girl you fancy will be your wife! If one is not enough, you can choose another one!"

"Ah? This, Deer Head Chieftain... Uh, no, Great Chief Kalan, you..."

"Come on! Since you have joined the tribe, you are now a member of the tribe. First, tell me about the situation of the Lake Central Tribe!..."

The sea and sky stretched endlessly, the water's color turned desolate, and the route became progressively drier, with no clouds or rain in the sky. The Kingdom Fleet set off from the bay occupied by the Yoreim Tribe. Within just five days, they traveled four to five hundred miles to reach the territory of the Yoeme Tribe.

The Yoeme Tribe is a great tribe with a population of over eight thousand, including several affiliated small tribes, reaching up to ten to twelve thousand people. They control the mouth of the Yaqui River, occupying the rare fertile land along the river, and thus also call themselves the Yaji People. Here, the fleet anchored again, resupplying food and water from nearby tribal villages.

As the most powerful tribe along the coast, the Yoeme Tribe was very wary of the arrival of the Lake Central Tribe's fleet. On the second day, their chieftain did not appear, but sent several hundred fully armed tribal warriors to inquire about the intentions of the Kingdom Fleet.

The old militia Chiwaco, along with "Mountain Bird" Cavado, met the warrior leader sent by the Yoeme Tribe. He answered frankly.

"We are sent by the Great Chief of the Lake Central Tribe, from the distant south, to seek the Holy Land and the Divine Mountain! We are very good friends with your brother tribe, the Yoreim Tribe!"

"Seeking the Holy Land and the Divine Mountain? The Holy Land in the sea has nothing to do with our Yoeme Tribe. But the Divine Mountain in the northeast is a gift and blessing from the Divine Spirit, the ancestral land of our Yaji ancestors! Outsiders, if you wish to go to the Divine Mountain, you need permission from our tribal chieftain and priest!... As for the Yoreim Tribe, although we share the same ancestors, having emerged from the Divine Mountain, we do not have any intimate relationships with them and they are not our brothers!"

Upon hearing this, "Mountain Bird" Cavado's face showed a trace of indignation. He blushed, wanting to retort, but held back, standing there sulking.

Hearing this, Chiwaco was stunned. He looked at the expression of the leader opposite, then recalled Chieftain Kalan's words, gradually gaining some understanding in his heart.

"The relationship between the Yoreim Tribe and the Yoeme Tribe... it's probably not that simple!... Chieftain Kalan is no simple person..."

"Outsiders! Having reached here, do you still wish to continue north?"

"Yes. I heard that the Holy Land where sea birds gather is further north."

"The Holy Land of the sea birds? Further north?... That would be the land of the Seri people."

The warrior leader of the Yoeme Tribe, wearing a deer head, looked serious. He cautiously examined the attire of the Lake Central Tribe and then noticed the eagle feather crown on Chiwaco's head.

"What is your relationship with the Seri people, who are further north?"

"Uh?... Our Lake Central Tribe comes from the Divine Mountain in the wilderness, and we do not know any Seri people..."

The old militia pondered for a while, then calmly answered. Similar to the Aztecs, the ancestors of the Prepecha people also came from the northwest wilderness tribes, only arriving at the Mexican Plateau earlier.

"Hmm? You are also a Divine Mountain Tribe?! Tell me some of the ancestors' legends and let me listen... Indeed, the Divine Mountain is the origin of all wilderness tribes, the center of the vast world. By listening to your language, you should be a tribe that also emerged from the Divine Mountain, and not the same as the despicable Seri people!"

The warrior leader listened carefully for a while, then approvingly nodded. The language of the various Navas from the distant south indeed bore some similarity to those of the coastal tribes in the far northwest, despite a distance of three to four thousand miles. The long history embedded within made people ponder deeply and long, yet without being able to verify it.

"Distant Lake Central Tribe, the flame of the ancestors illuminates us! I am Vice Chief of the Yoeme Tribe, 'Mountain Hawk' Viejo, since you are also a branch of the Divine Mountain Tribes..."

'Mountain Hawk' Viejo thought about it and solemnly promised.

"The Divine Mountain is very distant and cannot be allowed for outsiders to enter. Actually, even I have only visited the Divine Mountain once. It is too desolate there; no crops can grow, and no tribes live there, only the vast firestones... The firestones contain Divine Power, and we, the Yaji People, are favored by the Divine Mountain, possessing huge fields of firestones. I can allow you to go to the ancestral firestone field not far north of the tribe to worship!"

Chapter 854: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, First Encounter with Various North American Tribes

The mountains undulate in the east, extending toward the sea in the west, transforming into gradually gentle hills. The winding Yaqui River comes from the mountains, carrying turbulent currents that flush out vast fertile plains. Between the plains and the hills, many grayish-brown knolls are scattered across the yellow-green earth, silently telling the ancient life journey.

Old militia Chiwaco climbed a knoll, bent down, and picked up a piece of grayish-brown stone. He grasped it firmly, the hard gray stone resisted his grip, neither deforming nor breaking.

"Hey? The firestones of your Yoeme Tribe seem much harder than those of the Yaolem Tribe?"

"Hahaha! Outsider, how can the firestones of the Yaolem Tribe compare with ours from the Yoeme Tribe?"

Upon hearing this, the mountain eagle Viejo burst into loud laughter, proudly announcing.

"We, the Yaji People, are the descendants residing under the Divine Mountain! Our firestones can burn for a very long time, far surpassing those of other tribes! The reason lies in the fact that the spirits of our Yaji ancestors are the strongest, always protecting our tribe!"

"Uh... yes, true."

Chiwaco scratched his head, feeling that the logic was somewhat off but couldn't pinpoint why. He didn't understand the difference between bituminous coal and lignite. Moreover, he didn't know that the firestone fields here were prime bituminous coal deposits, and even contained a surprising amount of anthracite... The old militia just kept nodding, following Viejo's words, his old face smiling like a flower.

"Friend, good, good! The Yoeme Tribe, powerful, a great tribe!"

"Hahaha, naturally! Our Yoeme Great Tribe has a whopping three thousand warriors, the most powerful tribe in this area!"

Viejo nodded in satisfaction, extending his arm to indicate. He pointed from the plains in front of him, all the way to the small hills in the east.

"From here, to there, the distance one can run in a day, is all our firestone fields! Further east, there is an even larger firestone field. These two best and largest firestone fields are all ours from the Yoeme Tribe!"

"Three thousand warriors? The most powerful?"

A few steps away, Puap heard this, raised his eyebrows, and his lips curled into a strange smile. He once commanded the samurai camp of Qinchongcan, with two thousand elite warriors from the capital city, enough to crush the so-called Yoeme Great Tribe! But now... The Huitu warrior sighed and his eyes flickered as he heard the next sentence, a look of surprise appearing on his face.

"What, a day's run! Such a large open-pit coal mine, and there are two of them!"

The gray-brown knolls spread out endlessly before everyone's eyes, stretching for dozens of miles. The coal mines here, compared to the Qinganbate mining district of the kingdom, had many times the reserves, probably enough to burn for hundreds of years. Moreover, the coal produced here was much harder than that of the kingdom.

"Hard coal is good coal! The higher the hardness, the stronger the fire, because it contains more divine power! Two large coal mines, and one large copper mine, several scattered small gold mines... This northwestern coastal land is truly a rich land abundant in minerals!"

Puap lowered his eyes, concealing the joy in them.

The fleet had stayed at the Yoeme Great Tribe for two days now. Although they hadn't yet been received by the chieftain, they had gone to the local tribal market and traded with surrounding tribes. The Yoeme Tribe was a large settled tribe, and their tribespeople cultivated the fertile lands along the Yaqui River and fished near the sea and river mouth.

When food was plentiful, the tribe would allocate people to dig the nearby mineral deposits for daily use or trade with other tribes. They mainly produced firestones, followed by copper stones, and lastly some Jin Shi.

The Yoeme Tribe was strong enough and conveniently located to be the trading center for various tribes. At the Yoeme market, besides the Mayo People, the kingdom's warriors also encountered the Oyata People from the mountains and the Macurawe People from the edge of the wilderness.

The Oyata People lived in the valley upstream, north of the Yaqui River. They could conveniently trade with the Yoeme Tribe by simply traveling downstream on canoes. Indeed, the location of the northwestern Divine Mountain was approximately between the Oyata People and the Yoeme Tribe,

forming a wide belt of coal production. To the east of this coal belt, there were abundant copper mines with astonishingly high copper content. The whole region's copper smelting techniques were learned from the Opata People.

From the Opata merchants, they also learned about the powerful Apache tribes further north, and the Tohono O'odham desert people in the northwest. These two major groups were mostly nomadic, chasing after migrating game, and were very warlike and combative.

The powerful Apache Tribes were accustomed to fighting, controlling vast areas of land. They were in direct contact with the Opata Alliance in the mountains, frequently engaging in small-scale skirmishes. The Opata People forged primitive red copper weapons specifically to combat several southern tribes of the Apache People.

The Macurawe People were semi-nomadic, semi-migratory, living to the east of the Yoeme Tribe. Their tribe wasn't very powerful, but their land was rich in gold. However, there was so much gold in the area that no one paid much attention to these useless Jin Shi. Actually, the tribe with the most gold was to the east of the Macurawe People. There, a large number of nomadic, canine-like Tarahumara People roamed.

The Tarahumara people's land area was also considerable, occupying the northwestern Sakatekas Desert, hundreds of miles upstream of the Mayo River. Essentially, they were not far from the Yaolem Tribe, but the towering Western Madre Mountains formed a barrier that made any large-scale military action impossible. Their land was not only rich in gold but also produced more silver.

Puap suspected that the silver of the Yaolem Tribe likely came from trading with the Tarahumara People.

"All these confusing tribal names, each one harder than the last, really give me a headache!"

The Huitu warrior internally lamented. Along the way, he tried hard to memorize these names and roughly categorize them.

The coastal tribes of the northwest, from south to north, were the Totonac People, Mayo People, and Yaji People. All three lived by the coast, at the rivers' mouths, were settled farmers, and fished for sea fish, with relatively large populations. As the coast moved further northwest, where rainfall became

scarce, there were the yet-to-be-contacted semi-nomadic Seri People and the completely nomadic desert people.

"Hmm, these are the five coastal tribes. To the east is the border of the wilderness, and there are two tribes that resemble the Canine Descendants."

Puap murmured to himself, glancing at the eastern mountains. Having cooperated with the Guajili Legion, he had a deep impression of the resilience of the Canine Descendants.

"I heard the Tarahumara People are better runners, capable of chasing down wild turkeys and exhausting them to death! This sounds just like wild wolves!"

At the edge of the eastern wilderness were the two tribes of the Macurawe and the Tarahumara, both resembling the Canine Descendants, roaming the arid wilderness. They sometimes farmed, sometimes hunted, living nomadic lives, migrating year-round, and fighting each other. Compared to the Macurawe tribe, which was more settled on the edge of the wilderness, the Tarahumara People were more nomadic and sent tribespeople to trade here.

"Finally, there are the two northern tribes, the Oyata People and the Apache People. One seems better organized, the other presumably better at fighting!"

In the northern mountains, the Oyata People, who established small city-states and initially formed alliances, lived. Their metal craftsmanship was starting to take shape, producing enough cotton cloth and copperware to send caravans to trade with other tribes. Further north were the fierce nomadic tribes known as the Apache People. It was said that this name came from some Pueblo people further north, and in their Zuni language, it meant "enemy." The Oyata accepted this name, seeing the Apache as enemies.

"Such a vast northern land!"

Puap took a deep breath, heartily admiring. Absent this journey, he could never have imagined, the sea was so vast, the north so expansive, and the world had so many tribes!... After thinking for a moment, he listened to the conversation between the old man and the mountain eagle.

"Ah! Friend, a basket of firestones for five long spears, or two pieces of cloth? This price won't do, it's too high!"

Chiwaco's face showed difficulty. There was so much coal here; digging it up was virtually costless, yet they were pricing it so expensively. Moreover, coal was a consumable that burned up quickly.

"Ha! Outsider, these are the firestones left by our Yaji ancestors! Though they are plentiful, they are gifts from the ancestors, imbued with the power of the Divine Mountain, and cannot be exchanged lightly! In our Yoeme Great Tribe, trading firestones with outsiders is done this way!"

Viejo's eyes twinkled with a calculating look. He glanced at the long spear in Chiwaco's hand and said with a smile.

"The Opata People also sold us similar long spears, with red copper spearheads, also for five pieces for a basket of firestones! Actually, we don't lack weapons. The Yoeme Tribe is the strongest; there is no tribe nearby that can threaten us. We don't care about those useless Jin Shi and Silver Ore, all common stones. But your cotton cloth, the tribe likes it very much. If there is a large quantity, we can give you a discount on the exchange!"

"Ah! Our long spears are not the same as those of the Opata People; they are sturdy and sharp!"

Chiwaco explained briefly but seeing that the mountain eagle was unmoved, he said no more. There wasn't much cotton cloth on the ship, but they still needed to exchange for more baskets of firestones to bring back to Your Majesty... Hesitating for a while, with some caution, he finally asked again.

"Friend, we come from the rich and distant Kingdom of the Lake. The lake tribes produce Lake Gems, green, red, blue, and yellow! Gems, uh, do you want them?"

Chapter 855: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, Gemstone Trade and Setting Sail Again

Black coal dust spread over the plains, buried deep beneath the earth. A group of people stood on the coal hill, watching the firestone field ahead, discussing the first trade encounters between the tribes and the kingdom.

"Gemstones? Your tribe produces gemstones? Of all colors?"

Hearing Chiwaco's words, Hawk Viejo was somewhat surprised. He carefully looked at the old militiaman's simple attire and hesitantly said.

"If you really have red or green gemstones, the tribe's chieftain and priests would like them, willing to trade firestone for them!"

The Yomei Tribe used firestone, revered the flames of their ancestors, hence they liked red or yellow ornaments. But the tribe did not lack gold or copper, yellow ornaments were very common, while red gemstones were precious. Rubies were also revered by the Wilderness Tribes of the East, representing the divinity of heaven and earth, just like the Guajili Canine Descendants.

As for emeralds, they were favored by coastal tribes, mountain tribes, tribes of the Mexican Plateau, and even various Maya tribes. It symbolized eternal life and held the wisdom of the spirit, revered by the noble chiefs, priests, and witch doctors! From this point of view, these coastal tribes, regardless of their geographical location, actually all belonged to the cultural circle of Central America.

At this time, trade between tribes was not very cunning. Most were straightforward, expressing their needs and directly bartering. Chiwaco nodded at the words, glanced at Puap, and instructed.

"Old Puap, give me two pieces of the gemstones you have!"

"Huh?! Old Chiwaco, how did you know I have gemstones on me!"

Puap was immediately shocked. He subconsciously extended his hand, pressed his chest, and felt the hardness and firmness of the gemstones under his outer robe.

"Ha! All the trade goods on the journey passed through your hands. How can a rat slip into the granary and still be hungry?"

Chiwaco squinted his elderly eyes and smirked. Then, he straightened his expression and said sternly.

"Stop dawdling. Give me one red, one green, quickly!"

"..."

Puap chuckled awkwardly. He reached into his bosom, touched a few gemstones, carefully looked at them, then put back the excess pieces. Then, he slowly extended his hand, grumbling.

"Going through life and death on this journey, taking some gemstones is acceptable... You owe me later!"

Chiwaco snatched the gemstones, glanced briefly, and handed them to Hawk Viejo.

"Friend, these are the gemstones from our Lake Tribe. Bright and lovely, pure and transparent, great!"

"Hmm?!"

Hawk Viejo took the gemstones, looked them over repeatedly, and exclaimed in surprise.

"Ancestor! Your tribe's gemstones are indeed excellent! The colors are very bright and pure, and they are so big, like the eggs of a green trogon!"

Chiwaco smiled confidently. He closely observed Viejo's expression, seeing no excessive greed in his eyes, he nodded secretly, feeling slightly relieved.

In fact, he had a few river-pebble-sized "top-grade gemstones" with him. After showing them once at Three Rivers City at the mouth of the Lerma River, they attracted an attack from the Northern Tekos Tribe. He never dared to take them out again afterward.

Before the fleet set off, His Majesty gave him a bag of gemstones. He thought it was a small cloth bag, but it turned out to be a big bag weighing dozens of pounds, filled with various gemstones! All of these gemstones were equally deep in color, equally pure, and very regular in shape!

Throughout the journey, Chiwaco was very careful, periodically checking these valuable assets himself. Seeing them more, he gradually had some guesses about the origin of the "gemstones" from the Lake Tribe. However, he kept these thoughts to himself, never mentioning them to anyone.

Chiwaco's old face beamed with a smile, watching Viejo hold the gemstones tightly, he spoke kindly.

"Friend, if you like these two gemstones, take them!"

"Ah? Give them to me?"

Upon hearing, Viejo's face lit up with joy. He hesitated briefly, then directly stuffed the gemstones into the quiver at his waist. Veteran warriors from the Northwestern Tribes generally mastered either the javelin or hunting bow. Relatively speaking, the hunting bow was less powerful but safer.

"From today on, you are a friend of Hawk Viejo!"

"Friend, good, good!"

The old militiaman nodded repeatedly, his wrinkled face beamed, making him seem very kind.

"Good friend, then your tribe..."

"We will trade! The chieftain and priests will agree to trade firestone for gemstones!"

"Great! How do we trade?"

"How to trade..."

Hearing this, Viejo thought for a moment, scratching his head. He was somewhat uncertain.

The tribe's firestone was different from gold and copper ore, it was not difficult to extract and was all mined from open pits without any danger. Just send a few tribespeople with stone shovels, and they could collect dozens of baskets in a day.

However, according to the tribe's rules, the firestone field was the legacy of the ancestors and always had warriors patrolling and protecting it. Apart from what the tribespeople needed, it could not be mined casually. And when trading with outsiders, sufficient compensation had to be obtained.

After a while, Viejo came up with a number he felt was fair and reasonable to decide on his own.

"Friend, firestone is, after all, a gift from the ancestors, and there are rules in the tribe... Let's say one gemstone for two... no, three baskets of firestone?"

"One gemstone for three baskets of firestone?..."

Chiwaco showed a look of surprise. This number was more than he expected.

"..."

Viejo pressed his lips, thinking that Chiwaco found it too little. After all, firestone was as abundant as mud in the area, and it was very easy for the tribe to dig it up. He bit his lip, embarrassed, and revised his offer.

"Considering our friendship, let's add half a basket! Trading firestone is strictly regulated... One gemstone for three and a half baskets of firestone!"

"Uh... three and a half baskets, that is..."

Chiwaco scratched his head. He estimated a basket of firestone to weigh around seventy pounds, so three and a half baskets would be two to three hundred pounds?

Puap watched Chiwaco's expression and chuckled.

"Old Chiwaco, can't you calculate that?"

Chiwaco blushed. He was a militiaman after all, unlike Puap, who was more knowledgeable and had learned some arithmetic. He glared at Puap, secretly determining to ask the camp priest for help in learning math when he returned.

"Friend, good, great! One gemstone for three and a half baskets of firestone, deal! We want to trade for twenty baskets, so we'll give you... uh..."

"Six gemstones!"

Puap interjected with a smile, feeling proud. In the entire fleet, aside from the ship priest MeKate, he was the most learned.

Viejo counted with his fingers, roughly estimating. Six gemstones, two for the chieftain, two for the priests, one for the witch doctor, and one for himself.

"Good! Friend, it's a deal! Let the ancestors witness, just like how deer meet in the mountains, they touch foreheads... We are friends exchanging goods, not enemies fighting!"

Saying this, Viejo bowed his head, touching his forehead to Chiwaco. The old militiaman paused, thinking of Chief Kalan's deer head, and quickly understood. He also lowered his head and touched foreheads with Viejo, pressing firmly.

"Let the ancestors witness! Good friend, good deer, good friend!"

After exchanging local rituals, the two descended from the coal hill. The Kingdom Fleet then traded twenty baskets of coal and added some food and water, filling their three large oar-sail ships to the brim.

After the trade was completed, they did not hold a celebration ceremony, and Chiwaco did not linger. He only took a deep look at the large coastal village, watched the thick black smoke of the burning firestone.

"Firestone... coal... firestone field... big coal mine... three thousand tribal warriors..."

Chiwaco muttered. He had a vague premonition that His Highness's emphasis on the coal mine might exceed gold and silver. After a long time, the old militiaman sighed and issued an order to the sailors on board.

"Divide into two teams, row alternately! Next, stick to the coast, continue to the northwest! Praise the Chief Divine, let us cross the waves!"

"Praise the Chief Divine, let us cross the waves!"

The sailors and warriors shouted in unison, full of piety. Then, the kingdom's exploration fleet set off again, heading to the unknown northwest, extending the boundaries of the world.

Three days later, the fleet reached a bay more than two hundred miles away, where they encountered a small coastal tribe, Guaymas. Chief Kalan had mentioned that Guaymas was a tribe of the Yaji People, showing loyalty to the Yomei Tribe but intermarrying with the Seri. Their lifestyle consisted of settling by the rivers to farm while sending out people to fish and hunt.

The Kingdom Fleet made a brief stop to replenish some fruits and, with the help of their new guide, Mountain Bird, inquired about the northwest sea area.

"Islands full of seabirds, the great turtle-turned island, is not far to the northwest! Follow the coast, you will see it. You definitely will!"

Upon hearing this news, the entire fleet cheered. Chiwaco was delighted that finding the seabirds' holy land meant the way home was near! However, he still held some doubts about the local tribe's words.

"Follow the coast, and you will see it?"

The old militiaman suppressed his doubts and led the fleet further. The waters were calm, and the surface was exceptionally smooth, maintaining a good speed.

The fleet sailed for another three days, covering three hundred miles. The vast number of flying birds, like clouds in the sky, first caught everyone's eyes! The sailors and warriors were all excited, mustered their strength, and sped up rowing. Within fifteen minutes, an exceptionally grand gray-white island, like a giant turtle resting on the sea, emerged before the Kingdom Fleet!

Chapter 856: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, Bird Mountain Island and Guano Rock

"Chief Divine, it's truly a mountain-sized great island!"

The vast expanse of water and sky, the giant island looming on the horizon. Chiwaco, the old militia, stood at the bow of the oar-sail ship, speechless and wide-eyed, staring at the suddenly appearing great island. As the expedition fleet approached, the gray-white giant island grew larger until it filled everyone's vision completely, blocking the wave-sprayed coasts on both sides!

"Priest Mekate, can you estimate its size?"

Priest Mekate, aboard the ship, closed one eye, extended his arm, and estimated horizontally with his thumb. Quickly, he reported the number in surprise.

"Captain, it's at least a hundred li in length and several dozen li in width! The high peaks on the island are probably over a thousand meters tall!"

"Indeed, indeed, a miraculous great island! We've traveled this far, hardly encountering any islands along the way, how could such a huge island suddenly appear?... Could it be, actually transformed from a divine giant tortoise?"

Chiwaco murmured to himself, the shock on his face yet to fade, now with more contemplation.

"No wonder the people of Guayma tribe said we would definitely see this great island... Mountain Bird, what's the name of this island?"

"Leader, the Guayma tribe calls it 'Tahejöc.'

"What, Ta-what? What does it mean?"

"Uh..."

Mountain Bird Cavado scratched his head, not really knowing the meaning, just having a vague impression. He took a good look at the island ahead and improvised based on his knowledge of the Seri language.

"Tahejöc! It roughly means 'a holy, towering island with many birds'!"

Tahejöc Island is what later became known as Tiburon Island along the northwest coast of Mexico! It is the largest island in the Gulf of California and all of Mexico, spanning 1,200 square kilometers, about half the size of Shanghai. Due to the multitude of seabirds inhabiting the island, it was later established as a bird sanctuary.

"Ah! Indeed there are many birds, many large birds!"

As the fleet reached the edge of Tahejöc Island, a deafening chorus of bird calls emanated from all around, drifting leisurely into the distance. Chiwaco looked up to see tens of thousands of seabirds circling over the island. They soared and descended in flight, perched on the gray-white and yellowish-brown mountain ranges in the island's center, like spirits guarding the mysterious island.

"Hmm... Ta-whatever island is too hard to remember! Such high mountains and so many birds..."

Chiwaco glanced at the towering, continuous mountain ranges and the sky-crossing flocks of birds and quickly made a decision. He patted Cavado on the shoulder beside him, smiling as he spoke.

"Cavado, let's name it after you, Mountain Bird Island! Haha, we found Mountain Bird Island with Mountain Bird, so people will remember you in the future!"

"This... I... Mountain Bird Island..."

Cavado's eyes widened, looking at the laughing leader, not knowing whether to be grateful or grateful.

The old militia paid no mind. He swiftly gathered his smile and gazed at the strange great island, contemplation showing in his expression.

"This suddenly appearing great island should be the bird sanctuary His Majesty instructed us to find. An island full of seabirds, guano-stained rocks..."

"Splat!"

As everyone observed from the ship, birds circled overhead. After a short while of staying still, sparse bird droppings, carrying a sense of freedom, rained down like droplets from the sky.

"Splat, splat, splat!"

"Ah, damn it!"

Huitu Puap suddenly covered his eyes and lowered his head. He wiped his face desperately but only smeared the wet substance everywhere. Fortunately, the stuff looked disgusting but wasn't too smelly, with a faint salty taste. That was the taste of phosphates in the guano, which fixed the stinky ammonia.

"Huh? Faint salty taste?... Damn it!"

Puap froze momentarily, then spat furiously.

"Ptooeey, ptooeey ptooeey! Damn birds, damn bird poop!"

"Countless birds, year after year of bird poop... stone..."

Chiwaco extended his hand, shielding his forehead. Moments later, he flipped his hand and back, looking at the green and white mush on his hand, then glanced at the many gray-white mountain rocks beneath the nesting birds.

"The color of these rocks, different from those we've seen along the voyage!"

The old militia pondered in silence, a realization dawning on his face. Then, he glanced at the choking Puap and a smile appeared on his wrinkled face.

"Old Puap, bird poop in the mouth, a blessing from the Heavenly Divine, is a good omen!"

"Ptooeey ptooeey!... A good omen? Crap! Why don't you try this so-called good omen!"

"Haha, of course, it's a good omen! An omen for our return! So many birds on the island, so much bird poop, and so little rain..."

Chiwaco looked at the island, where green vegetation was scarce.

Recalling the journey, as they sailed further northwest, rain decreased significantly, the surroundings grew desolate, and even large villages couldn't be sustained. When they neared this great island, the surrounding tribes were no longer the settled Yaji people but the semi-nomadic Seri people. Naturally, it was known that the rainfall here was scarce, probably none or just one or two showers a year.

"His Majesty ordered us to find an island with many birds, a lot of bird poop, and no rain... This must be the bird sanctuary, the Guano Island we're looking for!"

"Ah? Old Chi, are you certain this is the place His Majesty instructed us to find?"

"Yes, I think it is! You see, it fits His Majesty's words, and the surrounding tribes are aware of it. At least... it should suffice to report back!"

Chiwaco stroked his wrinkled face, pondering aloud. Within him, a yearning for home stirred. After this long trek of probably thousands of li, it was immensely arduous. He yearned to see his simple-minded daughter, Luwei, and give a good scolding to his son-in-law, Weizti. But His Majesty's command, though lightly spoken, weighed heavily on his not-so-broad shoulders...

Chapter 857: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, Bird Mountain Island and Guano Rock_2

"Ah! Blind Heavenly Divine... Let's go, we'll land on the island and take a look at the stones there!"

Everyone immediately anchored on the South side of the Great Island, landing on a gentle mudflat. As soon as they stepped onto the island, a faint scent hit them. It wasn't exactly foul, but it had a bit of a pungent odor that was hard to describe.

"Hmm? This smell..."

Puap sniffed, with a few fleeting memories flashing across his face.

"It smells a bit like the old dung heaps outside Qinchongcan City that have been piling up for decades..."

"Old Pu, have the Samurai be cautious! This is the territory of the Sri people, we might encounter them. If we do, don't attack first, try to show goodwill..."

"Understood! But a few hunting tribes are no match for the Kingdom's Warriors, right?"

"It's best to avoid conflict if possible! Since we brought our brothers out in one piece, we need to bring them back in one piece. We've already lost one or two percent along the way..."

"...Alright then!"

Puap nodded and then ordered the thirty or forty Prepecha Warriors who had landed.

"You form teams of five, look around the island for any tribes or wild people. Everyone put on your Leather Armor and take your Greatbows. If you encounter any tribes, don't attack first, try to be friendly! Also, take the issued horns, blow them if there's any situation! Chief Divine bless!"

"Chief Divine bless!"

The warriors bowed and then scattered. This island was vast, with mountain ranges crisscrossing the middle, so exploring it would require some effort.

The old Militia gazed at the nearby towering peaks, estimated to be at least seven or eight hundred meters high. He thought for a moment, then looked back.

"Priest Mekate, I'll have a few people accompany you to climb the nearby peak and measure the size of the island."

"Yes, Captain!"

Mekate nodded respectfully, showing great compliance to Chiwaco. He took some simple tools and suggested.

"I'll spend the night on that mountain to measure the angle of the North Star and determine our position."

"Good! There shouldn't be any beasts on the island, but be cautious of possible tribes. Chief Divine bless!"

"Chief Divine bless!"

Everyone started to get busy. The sailors chose a high point to set up a temporary camp, planning to spend the night on the island.

"Guano rock... Bird guano rock..."

Chiwaco muttered as he wandered around. Eventually, he found a pile of stones mixed with gray and yellowish-brown colors. The stone heap was covered with bird droppings, with a colorful bird perched on top, curiously looking at him.

"Chirp, chirp?"

Chiwaco lowered his old face, imitating the call of a night hawk, letting out a hoarse growl.

"Hiss!"

"Tweet!"

The bird shivered instantly, flapped its wings without looking back, and flew away.

"Ha ha!"

The old Militia laughed heartily. For some reason, he was in an exceptionally good mood today. He eagerly walked to the stone pile, picked up a small stone, and pinched it a few times. The stone crumbled into smaller fragments.

"Not hard, very brittle, somewhat soft..."

Chiwaco stared at the crumbs in his hand, pondering for a moment, then lowered his head to taste it. But then he thought of something and immediately stopped.

"No. If it really is... It's best to let Old Pu... give him the credit, I don't want to go back out to sea... Old Pu, Old Pu!"

"Huh? Old Chi, why are you calling me?"

Puap raised his head at the call. He was sitting cross-legged on a stone, nibbling on a cactus fruit. The sweet and sour taste made him feel refreshed.

"Come here, quickly, there's urgent business!"

"Hmm?"

Puap scratched his head, quickly finished the fruit in two bites, and walked over with long strides.

"Old Pu, hold out your hand, catch this... taste these crumbs!"

"What?"

Puap reached out, bewildered, and took some gray and yellow crumbs.

"Taste it?"

"Yes! Lick it, see if it dissolves and what it tastes like."

"???"

Puap was confused. He lowered his head, just about to lick, when he suddenly realized.

"Damn it! Damn you, Old Chi! What is this? Isn't it dried bird dung?"

Chiwaco stifled his laughter, shaking his head, and told the truth.

"I don't know either, that's why I asked you to try it."

"No way, I won't taste it even if you kill me!"

Puap's face turned angry, and he was about to throw the crumbs away.

"Old Pu, if this is the bird guano rock that His Majesty is looking for, it would be a great merit!"

"Huh? What? Great merit?"

Puap paused, then clenched his hand and brought it back. He suspiciously looked at the unremarkable crumbs in his hand.

"This is what His Majesty is looking for? The legendary bird guano rock blessed by the Chief Divine, which can make farmland more productive? But aren't these stones all over the island? Do they all have these divine powers?"

"How would I know? His Majesty's Divine Revelation is something only he understands. He just pointed to the Northwest, and we've traveled thousands of miles to reach the edge of the world..."

Chiwaco shook his head with a serious face. Then his old face showed a slight smile as he whispered.

"Well, Old Pu, are you going to taste it? If you don't, I will! Then the credit for discovering the Divine Stone will be mine..."

"I'll taste it!"

Puap quickly opened his mouth and poured the crumbs into it. Then he paused, his face turning bitter.

"Ugh! Ptooeey!..."

"Wait! Don't spit it out yet, carefully discern the taste, so you can report it to His Majesty!"

"..."

Puap immediately closed his mouth, his face turning into the color of liver. After a while, he spat out forcefully.

"Ptooeey, ptooeey! Damn it, it's all dissolved in my mouth!"

"Ha ha!"

Chiwaco couldn't help but laugh.

"What does it taste like?"

"Ptooeey, ptooeey! It's salty, astringent, and bitter! But at least it doesn't stink..."

"Huh? No foul smell in the bird guano rock?..."

The two looked at each other, both uncertain.

"Old Chi, is this really the bird guano rock His Majesty is looking for?"

"Old Pu, if you ask me, who should I ask? Why don't you taste some other rocks?"

"Ptooeey! Again, you want me to taste?"

Puap showed his displeasure. Then his eyes gleamed as he looked towards the East coast.

"Old Chi, do you think the nearby Sri people know? If this can fertilize the fields, wouldn't they be using it?"

"The Sri people only hunt and fish, they don't farm, what would they know?"

"Humph! How about we capture a few Sri people and ask them! They've lived here for hundreds of years, they must know something..."

In front of the bird-resting stones, the two were discussing in low voices, uncertain of their next move. Suddenly, a sharp horn sounded not far away, echoing over the entire island, startling a flock of birds!

"Toot toot toot! Toot toot! Toot!..."

"Short horn blasts, there's an enemy situation!"

"Damn!"

In an instant, the old Militia Chiwaco had a sturdy long spear in his hand. Huitu Warrior Puap gripped a bronze dagger tightly. Both wearing Leather Armor, though they had been chatting and laughing, they maintained the vigilance of old soldiers.

In no time, dozens of sailors gathered, wearing Cotton Armor and Leather Armor, holding Long Spears and Longbows. After a brief gathering and preparing for battle, they rushed towards the direction of the horn's sound!

Chapter 858: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, Battle in the Valley!

The scorching sun fell on the barren mountains, casting a halo of light on the gray-white rocks. The island's mountains were mostly yellow-brown, forming narrow valleys with undulating heights. The valleys were sparsely vegetated, with nothing to cover them except for the mountains on both sides. Flying Birds circled and chirped overhead, filling everyone's ears and masking the sound of their footsteps. Occasionally, a wild deer would jump by in the distance, always keeping a cautious distance from people. This was a behavior passed down through generations after being hunted.

After turning a corner like this, two teams of warriors, each holding weapons and looking vigilant, suddenly encountered each other unexpectedly and were shocked!

A dozen Sirius warriors with long hair, bare upper bodies, wearing loincloths, and holding Hunting Bows, Throwing Spears, and Short Spears stood alertly, watching the five strange warriors not far away. The old Hunter leading the team wore a feathered straw hat and had a stone drum strapped around his waist. He took two steps forward, scrutinized the peculiar clothing of the people opposite, and then loudly asked.

"...Quihya...me? Who... are you?"

The structure of Sirius language was different from the languages of other tribes, putting important words in the front.

Upon hearing the question, the Prepetcha Warriors looked at each other in dismay. The language opposite was entirely different from Navajo and unrelated to Prepetcha as well; they couldn't understand a single word. The squad leader hesitated, but still stepped forward to face the leader directly. He lowered his weapon to show goodwill and then replied loudly in Prepetcha.

"...Ochi, kungurikua! We are friends!"

"Tahéjüc, hant comcáac! This is Tahéjüc Island, ancestral land of the Konkak people!"

The Konkak people were the self-proclaimed title of the Sirius people, roughly meaning people of the desert, tribes that migrated south, or hunters. The captains of both sides continued to shout at each other while making gestures, trying to communicate.

The old Hunter relaxed his palm and shouted several times without understanding any response. Then, his expression turned serious, he grasped his bow, a threatening look appeared on his face, and he shouted louder.

"...tintica ntáho! Go away!!"

"Ochi, kungurikua! We are friends!"

"Tintica, ntáho! Leave here! ... Hante, Tintica, ntáho! Leave our ancestral land!!"

"Ochi, kungurikua! We are friends!"

"... itácö!"

The old Hunter's face twisted in anger. He glanced at the towering mountain peaks on the island, a sacred place of blessing and ancestral heritage. Now, the ancestral land of the Konkak people was being invaded by a strange tribe!

"Itácö! Kill them! Kill!!"

The old Hunter roared in anger, waving his hand forward and shouting the attack order. Immediately, he swiftly shot an arrow straight into the squad leader's face!

The squad leader of the samurais screamed miserably, clutching his eyes as he fell to the ground. He writhed in pain, and boundless darkness surged over him, invading his brain from his eyes, drowning the fate of Tonali.

"Itácö! Kill!"

A dozen Sirius warriors shouted in chaos and charged forward. Three or four Hunters aimed their Hunting Bows at the samurais. The remaining seven or eight warriors charged with Short Spears from both sides.

"Swoosh!"

Almost at the same time, a Copper Arrow shot through the air, heading straight for the old Hunter. The old Hunter instinctively stretched out his hand to block, but the fierce arrow pierced through his palm

and deeply embedded into his neck! Blood sprayed instantly, and the lifeless body fell powerlessly, bringing a touch of moisture and brightness to the yellow earth.

The young archer in the back row fired an arrow and then discarded the Longbow. At such a close distance, he only had time to shoot one prepared arrow. Then, he grabbed the conch around his neck and blew it vigorously.

"Beep beep beep! Beep beep! Beep!..."

The urgent and shrill conch echoed in the vast sky, drifting towards the landing shore. The three Prepetcha Warriors in the front row raised their shields and held their Copper Spears, mutually protecting each other. Three or four Bone Arrows shot precisely but were either blocked by the warriors' shields or lodged obliquely into the Leather Armor, causing almost no harm. The warriors wore solid Leather Armor; as long as they guarded their faces cautiously, the enemy's Soft Bows couldn't easily bring them down.

"Itácö!!"

After a round of Bone Arrows, the tribal warriors of Sirius attacked from both sides. They shouted loudly, forcefully stabbing with their Short Spears. Compared to the precise Archery of the Sirius Hunters, the warriors' spears were much inferior. Most of them attacked wildly, their hits blocked by the warriors' shields, like frenzied Coyotes.

The middle-aged warrior in the center of Prepetcha was the most experienced, occupying the central position. His expression was stable as he wielded his shield, deflecting a Short Spear from a Sirius warrior. Then, he gracefully stabbed with his Copper Spear, precisely piercing his opponent's exposed chest and quickly withdrawing, causing a fountain of blood to spray out!

The Sirius warrior howled miserably, clutching his chest futilely before falling back. Against such unarmored opponents, spearing too forcefully would embed the spear too deeply and get stuck in the ribs, making it hard to pull out. As long as the spear lightly pierced the internal organs, the ensuing pain and internal bleeding would immediately incapacitate the opponent, ruthlessly claiming their lives!

"Puff! Puff!"

The sound of Copper Spears piercing flesh echoed continuously, and with two more deadly stabs, two more Sirius warriors fell. The disorganized tribal warriors grew increasingly chaotic. Though they had a fierce courage, they couldn't muster any strength. The four Prepetcha Warriors formed a tight formation, and despite the opposing numbers being twice their own, they couldn't be shaken.

With both captains dead, the battle was intense yet somewhat chaotic. After another tribal warrior fell, a tattooed Sirius warrior finally realized. He quickly retreated several steps and shouted loudly.

"Enemies, like turtles, hard! Use Javelins, use Poison arrows! Kill the tough ones in the middle!"

"Bang! Bang!"

Soon, three Bone Javelins came flying, heavily striking the middle-aged warrior's shield and pushing it aside. Then, three dark red Bone Arrows swiftly followed, hitting his shoulder, chest, and arm separately. The shoulder and chest had thicker armor, unpenetrated by the Soft Bow. Only the arm, where the armor was thinner, was grazed by the Bone Arrow.

"Arg?!"

At first, the middle-aged warrior didn't notice and continued fighting carelessly. But soon, he felt a sharp, burning pain in his arm, like a fire igniting from his arm to his brain. Within moments, his vision darkened, and he collapsed to the ground diagonally.

"Itácö! Kill!"

Seeing their enemy fall, the remaining Sirius warriors summoned their last bravery and charged forward wildly.

"Praise the Chief Divine!"

The Prepetcha Warriors' formation scattered as they engaged in close combat with the tribal warriors. The remaining three warriors, filled with ferocity, turned and charged, relying on their Leather Armor to engage in hand-to-hand combat with the tribal warriors.

"For the Chief Divine! Kill!"

The fierce fighting continued for several breaths. One warrior was hit by several spears, puncturing his Leather Armor deeply into his abdomen, while three Sirius warriors were killed in close combat! The dozen tribal warriors were reduced by half, and the survivors could no longer hold on, turning to flee towards the East. They needed to quickly bring back the news of their ancestral land being invaded to the tribe!

The tattooed Sirius warrior was also injured, stumbling as he fled. After running a dozen steps, a sharp Copper Arrow whizzed through the air, piercing his back and bringing him down. Then, the only mobile Prepetcha archer walked forward. With a pursed mouth, he bent down and drew the Short Dagger from his waist, plunging it fiercely into the exposed neck of his enemy!

"Ssshhh!"

The young archer's eyes turned blood-red. He scanned the battle-scarred valley with his red-tainted eyes, seeing only blood everywhere.

In just a brief skirmish, the Sirius left behind eight corpses. The five-man patrol team also lost two men, one severely injured, and the remaining two were heavily wounded, with only him able to move.

The bright sun fell on the somber earth, with vivid blood slowly spreading, like swaying red flowers. This was the first encounter between the Kingdom of the Lake and the Sirius in the blossoming March, on the barren, arid Great Island, where the blood flowers of life bloomed.

The young archer stood dazed for a moment, then raised his conch again and blew it high.

"Beep! Beep beep! Beep beep beep!... Beep! Beep beep! Beep beep beep!..."

The conch sound shifted from urgent to long, signaling: "Alert lifted, enemies... scattered!"

Chapter 859: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, The Sri Tribe, The Northern Sea and Sky

Samurai squad's trumpet echoed not far from the mountains. Chiwaco stopped and listened for a few moments, his expression eased slightly. He signaled the sailors to quicken their pace. After passing through two mountain passes, the bloody battlefield suddenly appeared!

On the yellowish-brown earth, over a dozen corpses lay scattered, forming pools of bright red. At the location where the corpses were concentrated, two injured Prepetcha warriors squatted on the ground, anxiously checking something.

"Damn! It must be the Serei dogs!"

Seeing the attacked squad, Huitu Puapu roared furiously, unable to contain his anger. He searched desperately for a while and found a corpse with an arrow through its eye, the captain of the scouting team.

"Chikari!"

Puapu's heart trembled. He let out a mournful cry, stumbling, and ran towards the fallen trusted aide.

He was demoted to the seaside, followed only by a dozen loyal subordinates, dozens of capital city warriors, and three hundred surrendered southern warriors. Since setting out to sea, he had already lost two loyal aides. Now another died here, truly piercing his heart with pain.

It must be known that these loyal aides, seasoned in battle, were the backbone of his forces, the capital for his future reinstatement! This exploration, even strictly along the coast, was still a risky venture!

"Damn... Serei dogs!"

Puapu cursed angrily, suddenly pausing. When he spoke again, he changed the name.

"Chikari..."

Seeing the gruesome state of the corpse, Chiwaco's eyes were twitching. In Prepetcha language, "Chikari" chkari means log, somewhat similar to his name. The old militia pursed his lips, walked forward, and asked the two surviving injured warriors.

"What happened just now? Was it an attack by the Serei?"

"We encountered a tribe of Serei warriors, possibly hunters, and were ambushed by them!"

Young archer gritted his teeth and spoke venomously. In many hunting tribes, warriors and hunters were often of the same word, since archery was an essential survival skill.

"We could not understand their language at all. The captain lowered his weapon, expressing goodwill, but was shot dead by the Serei leader with an arrow! Then, the Serei charged directly... They had over a dozen men, but we had only four, yet we still defeated them!"

"Phew!... Praise the Chief Divine! You are all brave warriors! May the spirits of the deceased find peace in the Divine Kingdom... All who die exploring, I will report to Your Majesty and request generous compensation!"

Chiwaco's expression was stern, he rarely prayed, and made a solemn promise. Then, he asked in a deep voice.

"I remember you. Your archery is quite good! Your name is... Kexi? Toad of the water?"

"Yes! Captain!"

Kexi nodded in surprise. His name was Kexi koki, which was a common name for a toad in the countryside. According to the tradition in the Celestial Empire, it was akin to names like Two Dog, and Dog Egg. In traditional beliefs, such names were chosen because petty names were easy to raise, and also to communicate with divine animals to ward off worldly spirits.

Chiwaco squatted down, only then seeing on the bloodstained ground, a middle-aged warrior still alive, but with a flushed face, motionless in a coma.

"What happened to him?..."

"The Serei shot a red arrow during the fight, it seems to be poisoned. He was hit by two arrows and soon after..."

"Red arrows?"

"Like this!"

Kexi took out a Bone Arrow, the arrowhead was dark red. Chiwaco frowned, sniffing the arrowhead carefully, detecting only a faint scent of blood.

"Shanbird, what poison is this?"

Young Shanbird stared blankly at the gruesome battlefield, his limbs trembling slightly. Chiwaco asked twice before Shanbird came to his senses. He took the Bone Arrow, examined it closely, and couldn't decide for a while. Then, he recalled a song his mother used to sing, suddenly realizing.

"...The tribe in the desert raised poisonous scorpions and rattlesnakes. Warriors shoot out dark red arrows, like the rays of the setting sun, taking away the enemy's light... This is an arrow of scorpions and rattlesnakes!"

"What? Scorpions and rattlesnakes?"

"Leader, the Serei tribe survives by hunting, they have few people, neither crafting skills nor exchangeable materials. Their Bone Arrow heads come from coyote teeth, arrow shafts from stems of grass and wood, feathers from seabirds. In fighting against enemy tribes, such bow and arrows find it hard to cause fatal damages. To make their arrows more deadly, larger tribes often raise scorpions and rattlesnakes. They throw weak prey into the scorpion and snake cages, let the poisonous beasts tear them apart. Then they take out the prey's toxic liver, soak the arrowhead in the liver for several days, then dry it in the shade. The resulting poison arrow can be stored for a long time!"

"Making poison arrows..."

Chiwaco blinked, gaining more understanding of the desert hunting tribe's dangers. Then, he asked urgently.

"Shanbird, is there an antidote for such poison? Can he still be saved?"

"Um... scorpion poison and snake poison..."

Shanbird looked into the comatose warrior's eyes, felt his feverish face, hesitated a bit, but then answered firmly.

"This poison arrow is very fresh... He probably... can't be saved..."

"...Ah! Blind Heavenly Divine!"

Chiwaco's face showed sorrow. He sighed heavily.

"Dying in this barren land, thousands of miles from home... really at the end of the world..."

After sighing for a moment, he suddenly paused, realizing something, and urgently questioned.

Chapter 860: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, Sri Tribes, Northern Sea and Sky_2

"Mountain Bird, you say these poison arrows are very new?! How long can the poison last on such arrows?"

"...Right after drying in the shade, the toxicity of the poison arrows is at its peak. At this time, the arrowheads need to be wrapped and stored in the quiver, away from light. For the next four to five days, the poison remains potent, breaking the skin means certain death... After that, the poison mysteriously dissipates, gradually losing its lethality. After two weeks, it can only be used to hunt birds and small animals.."

"Break the skin and die... So these arrows were made within the last four to five days!"

Chiwaco's face turned grave, muttering to himself. His mind was racing, a sense of impending danger surfacing once again.

"So, an enemy Seri tribe is just three days away from us... No, a hunting party wouldn't travel in a straight line, it should be within two days' distance!"

"Within two days? An enemy Seri tribe?"

Puap had just arrived. Upon hearing this, a fierce killing intent crossed his face.

"Let me lead the sailors to find this tribe!"

"Old Pu, don't be reckless!"

Chiwaco shook his head. He looked towards the east of Bird Mountain Island, beyond the narrow strait, to the edge of the continent. The eastern continent was a vast expanse of grey and yellow, an extending desert in the north and south, and the increasingly desolate Gobi Desert.

"Look at the Eastern Coast! Do you really want to lead your men deep into an unfamiliar desert to search for an enemy tribe you don't even know the whereabouts of?"

"But..."

Puap was momentarily at a loss for words. He stared at the eastern continent, asking hatefully.

"The Seri attacked without reason, killing the warriors of the Kingdom! Are we just going to let this go?"

"Let it go?"

Chiwaco bit his lip, worry surfacing on his face.

"Ah! The Seri attacked so decisively, and many of them got away... I fear they will come back!"

"Hmph! Damn Seri dogs! If they come again, I will personally cut off their heads!"

Puap gripped his bronze short sword, pressing against his leather armor, his face full of murderous intent.

Chiwaco sighed lightly and looked at the archer Kexi.

"Toad, do you remember what the other side said?"

"Uh..."

Kexi scratched his head with his bloodstained hand, staining his hair red, looking both simple and fierce.

"Captain, I don't remember much... Something, something... Itako!... Yes, also something, Tah-york, Hante!"

"Tah what? Isn't that the name of an island? What do Itako and Hante mean?"

Chiwaco looked puzzled, turning to Mountain Bird Cavado, who came along.

Cavado thought for a moment and hesitated before answering.

"Itako... should mean kill, kill them! As for Hante, it seems to mean land, soil... it could also be the ancestral land of a tribe!"

"Hmm..."

Chiwaco furrowed his brows, pondering silently. After a while, he murmured.

"Bird Mountain Island is so special, if it's the ancestral land of the Seri... that could be trouble!"

"What trouble! They're just Wild Tribes with crude weapons and shabby clothing, relying only on some brute courage!"

Puap's face was stern, his chest boiling with killing intent, his grip on the short sword unyielding. He had inspected the Seri warriors' bodies and equipment, finding no decent cotton armor or sharp obsidian weapons. These Wild People only had spears tipped with flint and hunters' bows, along with a few poison-tipped bone arrows.

"I'll kill as many as they come!"

"Let's go! Bring the severely injured and the warriors' bodies back to the landing camp."

Chiwaco lowered his eyes, calmly giving orders. Then, he looked at the Seri's bodies, pausing before speaking again.

"As for these Seri bodies..."

"Damn it! Cut off all their heads and pile them on the stone heap covered with bird droppings to warn those Seri dogs!"

"No! Dig a big pit and give them a proper burial. Erect a wooden plank with the Chief Divine's runes and leave an amulet of the Sun Hummingbird!"

"Old Chi, you!... Hmph!"

Puap widened his eyes, glaring at old Chi's stern expression. He let out a cold snort but said nothing more.

The men soon followed their captain's instructions, hastily burying the dead Seri. Then, they carried the severely injured and the bodies of the warriors back to the ship.

"Boom, boom, boom!..."

The assembly drums soon sounded, echoing for a long time. By evening, all the scattered warriors returned, cautiously on guard. They had scouted the island thoroughly, finding no Seri village, only deserted mountains and a river running north to south. Only the Priest Mekate remained on the mountain to measure the angle of the North Star.

The night was heavy, the moonlight dim; the dawn was faint, the midday sun bright. By noon the next day, the unconscious warrior could no longer hold on and breathed his last. Soon, the prepared pyres were lit on the shore, and three bodies were thrown into the fire. Thin black smoke wafted up, spreading into the vast sky, accompanied by low prayers.

The fleet was thousands of miles from the Kingdom, all they could bring back was a pile of still-warm ashes.

Mekate arrived just in time to preside over the funeral ceremony, sending the warriors' souls to the Divine Kingdom. When the black smoke dissipated, and all was returned to dust, he reported seriously.

"Captain, our current position relative to the North Star is between 28-30 degrees... approximately 29 degrees."

"North Star 29 degrees..."

Chiwaco nodded heavily, pretending to understand.

"Uh, what was it when we started?"

"Tarsas Rivermouth, about 18 degrees of the North Star."

"So, we've sailed about ten degrees north?"

Chiwaco scratched his head, grumbling.

"Three whole months, just for these ten degrees... it's too slow! Should we continue northwards then?"

The old militia thought for a while, uncertain. He then asked.

"Priest Mekate, not long ago, at the position of the Yoreim, what was the degree there? I remember the chieftain with the deer head said there were many bird islands to the west."

"Yoreim... Mayo people..."

Mekate pulled out a rare hemp paper scroll from his bosom, densely packed with small characters and diagrams, recording all the celestial and water observations along the way.

"Captain, it was at 25-26 degrees of the North Star!"

Chiwaco nodded again. After contemplating, he asked uncertainly.

"Priest Mekate, can you find our previous position based on this degree?"

"Captain, the North Star's degree can only determine north-south, not east-west. However, the east-west direction has another marker, the Eastern Coast. As long as we follow the coast, we can roughly find our previous position!"

"Excellent! Wonderful! These stars in the sky can aid navigation, truly the Almighty's revelation!"

The old militia nodded repeatedly, joy on his face, sincerely praising. Then, he put away his smile, his expression turned solemn, making a leader's decision.

"In the afternoon, gather some stones, grayish-white, yellowish-brown, hard ones, and soft ones... pile them in the bottom hold of the ship to bring back to His Majesty! After that, everyone must be on alert tonight, staying aboard the ship! Praise the Chief Divine, He will protect us!"

"Praise the Chief Divine! May the Divinity protect us!"

Everyone responded in unison, looking towards the zenith. Their devout prayers echoed among the towering mountains, startling flocks of flying birds that vanished into the boundless sky. The northern sea and sky were so vast, seemingly endless!