

## Civilization 861

### Chapter 861: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, Attack of the Sri!

On the third day of landing on Bird Mountain Island, it was still peaceful. Seabirds spread their wings in the blue sky, and whales surfaced and submerged in the light blue waves. In the yellow-brown island interior, there were bouncing antelopes, while on the edges, there were crawling desert tortoises. This was a peaceful natural sanctuary, filled with the songs and tranquility of all creatures.

For hundreds of years, the Sri people regarded Bird Mountain Island as their ancestral land, yet they never built villages or left behind any large structures. Perhaps this also had to do with the lack of water sources on the island, which was perpetually dry.

The old Militia Chiwaco led the fleet from south to north, circling half of Bird Mountain Island. MeKate confirmed once again that the island was about one hundred li in length and about sixty li in width.

In just one day, giant fish in the sea continued to appear. They sprayed water and called beside the fleet, curiously eyeing the longship they had never seen before. The crew was in awe, praying to the Chief Divine, and then kneeling at the bow, showing their mortal respect to the massive sea creatures.

"Ah, so many sea creatures! ... Could it be that Bird Mountain Island is the end of the world?"

Chiwaco was somewhat surprised. He had never seen so many seabirds, nor had he seen so many giant fish. In fact, the sea near Tiburon Island was home to one-third of the world's whale species and over eight hundred species of sea fish. The island itself housed over five hundred species of animals, mostly birds. This was a desolate place rarely touched by humans, yet a paradise for thousands of creatures to inhabit.

The fleet circled to the northeast side of the island and landed again for exploration, setting up sentries on a nearby mountain. Looking from the mountain, the shallow strait was right before their eyes, at its narrowest point only eight or nine hundred meters wide, easily swimmable. Beyond the strait, they could clearly see the Eastern Continent. The vast desert was dotted with sparse greenery, gradually turning into a desert toward the north.

One peaceful day passed without incident. By the fourth afternoon, the mountain sentries finally blew the warning horn again.

"Beep! Beep! Beep!..."

The horn echoed in the distance, and the exploration fleet immediately mobilized. The samurai donned their armor, raised their shields, and drew their prepared long spears and bows. By the time the sentry ran down from the mountain, he was faced with nearly two hundred ready-for-battle Kingdom warriors. He took a few deep breaths before anxiously reporting.

"The Sri people... they're... coming!"

"How many? One hundred or two hundred?"

Huitu Puapu, holding the hilt of his dagger at his waist, asked angrily.

"At least five hundred! A huge crowd, all swarming over from the other side of the strait. And... there might be more behind them!"

"What! That many?"

The Huitu warrior abruptly turned pale. He whispered in disbelief.

"The desert tribes can only support a thousand or so people at most, how could there be so many warriors?"

"It must be more than just one tribe. I'm afraid this island holds a very special significance to the Sri people!"

Chiwaco shook his head, analyzing calmly, then waved his hand decisively.

"We're retreating! Everyone, back to the ships!"

"Hmm..."

Puapu slightly nodded, releasing his hand from the dagger. The aggressive Huitu warrior said nothing and took the lead to run towards the ships.

In less than half a quarter, everyone boarded the fleet. A few quarters later, the advance scouts of the Sri people appeared on a nearby hill. They were still wet, looking in the direction of the fleet. Then, an old hunter blew a peculiar stone whistle, and a mournful howl drifted out across the sea and sky. Moments later, more and more Sri warriors appeared on the hill and then ran towards the shore near the fleet. Hundreds of them waved their short spears, shouting angrily at the three large ships.

From over a hundred paces away, Chiwaco meticulously observed the Sri tribal warriors. Most of them were bare-chested, wearing their hair long, holding short spears, with throwing spears or hunting bows on their backs. A few elite warriors had snake-like tattoos on their bodies. Some leaders wore feathered hats, and a few even wore cotton armor with clanging stones attached, loudly directing the surrounding tribal warriors.

"Hmm. Hunting or fishing, no forging. Stone weapons, simple hunting bows. Lacking cloth and pottery, and no gold or silver ornaments. Truly... both poor and fierce!"

As Chiwaco observed, he analyzed and gradually sketched out the image of the Sri people.

Puapu glanced at the shore for a moment. Those with feathers and cotton armor were undoubtedly the chieftains or heads of the tribes. He estimated the distance to the opposite side and observed the short hunting bows of the Sri people, showing a hint of ruthlessness on his face.

"Old Chi, we can move the ships closer! Once within sixty paces, the Sri people won't be able to reach us with their bows, but we can reach them. Then, have ten skilled longbowmen aim and simultaneously take out a few chiefs! The tribal warriors usually need their leaders for direction. Once the leaders are down, the Sri people will fall into chaos. I'll then lead the warriors for a charge, and we can slaughter them until they are blood-soaked and scatter like chickens!"

"Ah? Old Pu, you, you really are a... killer!"

Chiwaco scratched his head, holding back for a while before finally spitting out a suitable word.

In terms of pure combat, Puapu's idea was very correct. With the advantage of long-range attacks, a surprising and precise decapitation strike to throw the enemy into chaos. Then, well-equipped warriors would seize the moment and launch a fierce charge to crush the disorganized enemy. This tactic was very simple and effective against unorganized tribal armies and had been repeatedly successful.

"But, Old Pu. Think about it, do the Sri people necessarily have to be our enemies? Killing them and slaughtering many warriors, what good is there in that? The warriors would definitely suffer unnecessary casualties. I feel like there must be some sort of misunderstanding between us... We should find a way to talk to them, resolve the misunderstanding, rather than letting it turn into an unresolvable blood feud..."

The tribal warriors at the shore had already gathered more than four hundred. At some point, several feathered leaders had lit a fire and started a war dance, the stones on their bodies jingling. Then, hundreds of tribal warriors joined in the dance, singing towards the sea!

"... tazo, coocj, capxa... tazo, Kuk, Kapusa... Hante, Tintika, Entaho! ... Quiyatavpu? ... comcáac, Pak, Yuzka. ... Tintika, Hante, Z, Iquii, Min! ... Ita, quih! ..."

"Uh... what?"

Chiwaco listened attentively for a while, completely puzzled. He tugged at his hair, asking the nearby Bird Mountain.

"What are they doing? Why did they suddenly start singing?"

"Captain, uh... This is the Sri people's way of intimidating their enemies. They dance the war dance and sing the war song, indicating they are prepared to fight to the death with their enemies."

Bird Mountain pressed his lips together, showing a hint of worry in his eyes. He had never experienced a large-scale tribal war. The Sri people were fearless, and the fleet was at a numerical disadvantage...

"What?! Why did it suddenly escalate to a fight to the death? What are the Sri people thinking?"

Chiwaco shook his head and sighed. The exploration team had boarded the ships, so there was no need to fear. It was just the extreme attitude of the Sri people that was confusing and worrisome. He thought for a moment and asked again.

"Bird Mountain, what are they singing?"

"Uh, I'll listen more carefully... One, two, three large ships... leave our ancestral land! Who has arrived? ... Unwelcome guests have come. ... They must go somewhere else! ... Kill them until they are dead! ..."

Bird Mountain stuttered as he translated, his face growing paler.

"Hmm..."

Chiwaco fell silent. The Sri people were showing complete hostility. He had originally planned to send an envoy with some gifts to show goodwill. But judging by the situation, sending an envoy would be like sending fresh meat to the coyote, surely a one-way trip.

"Captain! The enemy fleet is approaching!"

The Sri people's war song wasn't even finished before a large number of small boats appeared on the other side of the sea, rowing swiftly like arrows.

"Everyone, prepare for battle!"

Chiwaco immediately abandoned all thoughts and shouted sternly.

"Warriors, pick up your longbows, raise the shields along the ship's sides! Paddlers, be ready to ram at all times!"

The combat tactics of large oar-sail ships were somewhat similar to those of large war canoes. They either shot arrows from dozens of paces away, engaged in boarding combat, or accelerated for a sudden

ramming attack. In sea battles, the number and bravery of warriors were no longer the keys to victory. Instead, it was the performance and size of the ships.

Large ships defeated small ships, large cannons defeated small cannons, more ships defeated fewer ships, and more cannons defeated fewer cannons. These were ranked in order, with large ships being the primary factor.

A quarter of an hour later, the Sri fleet was within a few hundred paces. Under the sunlight on the sea, Puapu squinted his eyes, examined closely for a moment, then laughed heartily.

"Haha! It's just small canoes with five or six people! Even though there are fifty or sixty of them, they are just like scurrying fire ants. Our large ships are like mighty anteaters that can squash those tiny boats with a single slap!"

Then, the Huitu warrior licked his lips and once again placed his hand on the bronze dagger.

"Old Chi, stop hesitating, give the order! The fleet should move closer, fire two volleys of arrows, then charge! Use the bronze rams on our ship bows to smash their small boats to pieces!"

"Hmm!"

Chiwaco nodded. The enemy was moments away, and when it came down to a fight, there was no room for mercy. No longer hesitating, he pushed all other thoughts aside and commanded loudly.

"Wave the red flag! Order all ships to maintain alignment. Close in on the enemy fleet, fire two volleys, then charge! ... Praise be to the Chief Divine, we shall win this battle!"

"Praise be to the Chief Divine, we shall win this battle!"

The sailors shouted in unison, then buried their heads in rowing. The warriors stood at the bow, raising their shields and readying their longbows. The two fleets drew closer and closer, and within the time it took to drink a cup of water, they were within a hundred paces.

The Sri people rowed their small boats, waving their short spears and shouting furiously. The Kingdom fleet steadily advanced, the warriors gripping their longbows, silently exuding a murderous aura. Above the blue sky, seabirds watched below, emitting sharp cries. A great clash between the two-legged beings was imminent, and the light blue sea was about to be stained red!

#### Chapter 862: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, The Inevitable Naval Battle

The edge of the Great Island, within the bay, the waves were calm as a lake, and the birds chirped like the wind. Amid this picturesque scenery, two fleets were rapidly approaching each other. They were filled with murderous intent, hesitating not at all, rushing to the battlefield of death.

The galleys swiftly advanced, breaking the calm waves, bringing with them a howling wind. Chiwaco stood at the bow, grasping a spear, shouting loudly.

"Beat the drums!"

"Boom! Boom! Boom!"

The fierce battle drums immediately sounded. Both sides had arrived within sixty paces, entering the range of the Kingdom Fleet's archers.

"Fire the arrows!"

"Whizz! Whizz! Whizz!"

The Prepetcha Warriors were mostly gathered on the flagship. Having been prepared long ago, they collectively drew their longbows, a volley of dozens of copper arrows shot out like lightning.

"Thud!"

The sharp arrows flew, deeply embedding into bodies. Seven or eight warriors of Sri screamed in agony, tumbling over from the small boats, then with a "splash," they fell into the water. They wore no armor; being hit meant severe injury or death.

Yet, these few casualties did not shake the morale of the Sri people. Instead, it provoked them into wild cries. In the desolate and harsh Sonora Desert, death was the most common occurrence. In the tribe, apart from the chieftain, leaders, and witch doctors, few lived past thirty. For a sip of spring water, dozens could die or be injured, let alone for the holy ancestral land of the Sri!

Soon, sixty or seventy small boats swarmed in a rush, closing to within forty paces. The tribal warriors on board, drawing their hunting bows, lifting their javelins, ready to engage at any moment.

"Fire the arrows!"

Chiwaco, his face stern as water, gave the order again.

"Whizz! Whizz! Whizz!"

Dozens of copper arrows shot out. This time, the distance was even closer, and the accuracy was significantly higher. The two foremost small boats were subjected to a concentrated attack, a dozen or so Sri warriors were either killed or injured, falling into the water one after another. Large patches of red spread in the light blue seawater, the small boats on the surface losing power, spinning in place like splendid ocean flowers.

"Itako, quick!"

The sixty-plus small boats continued relentlessly, ignoring the injured in the water. The Sri people shouted wildly, rowing desperately, charging towards the large ship thirty paces away. The tribal hunters on the boats fired bone arrows, tracing low arcs, "bang bang," nailing into the shields of the galleys!

"Swish swish swish!"

Bone arrows flew, emitting sharp whistling sounds. The dark red arrowheads piercing like a death god's greeting,

"Oh! Blind Heavenly Divine, please protect me!..."



Seeing hundreds of charging Sri warriors, the old militia Chiwaco shuddered instinctively. Though simply dressed, he stood at the center of the warriors, an eagle feather symbolically stuck in his helmet. The Sri hunters glanced, and all aimed their poison arrows at him!

"Bang, bang, bang!"

Chiwaco was wearing sturdy leather armor, a bronze helmet, and holding a shield. He felt impacts on the shield, his head, his body, looking down to see several dark red poisoned arrows lodged in. However, as both boats were moving, the galleys had erected tight shields. The range of the Sri hunting bows was insufficient, weak and powerless. Those poisoned arrows either fell to the ground or slanted into his body without penetrating the defense.

"Chief Divine bless!"

Chiwaco murmured softly, sweat slightly visible on his forehead under the armor. His legs trembled a bit, yet his face showed no sign. This time was different from the past; as a militia or militia leader, retreating was an option. Saving a few men would satisfy his conscience. But now, as the leader of the expedition fleet, commander of hundreds, he could not show fear, nor could he retreat an inch. If he retreated, the entire army would waver, possibly leading to a rout. At that moment, who knew how many would die!

"Damn this blind Majesty! Putting me on the fire for roasting!"

The old militia spat, cursing silently. Then, holding up his shield, he shouted sternly.

"Accelerate! Charge! Sailors, row with all your might! Increase the speed, ram them with the bow!"

"Accelerate! Charge!"

Hearing the order, more than twenty sailors puffed their cheeks, rowing with all their strength. The 20-meter-long, 6-meter-wide flagship, like a gigantic shark, with violent splashes, fiercely rammed into the 6-7 meters long, 1.5-meter-wide canoes. The canoes, like frightened fish, wobbled in the waves, trying

to avoid. By then, the galleys' speed had reached its peak! In just a few breaths, the sharp bronze ram gleamed, heading straight for the side of a small boat!

"Crack... Snap!"

The sound of wood breaking was so sharp and piercing! The rammed canoe only held for a few seconds before suddenly snapping under the fierce impact! Two Sri warriors were killed on the spot, shards of wood flew like blades, injuring the remaining four. Soon, the sounds of falling into the water followed successively, large patches of red quickly rising to the surface. The blood in the air was but the prelude to the event.

"Haha, satisfying!"

Puap, holding a longbow, stood on the port side. Though his body swayed, he stood firmly on the deck. The violent collision shook the big ship too, but the use of high-quality pine and keels made the Kingdom's warship much sturdier than the small boats of the Sri. The Huitu warrior swayed twice but then drew his longbow again. Slightly aiming, he released an arrow, killing a tattooed Sri warrior!

Chiwaco, holding onto the ship's rail, slightly squatted, hiding his upper body behind a great shield. Surveying the surroundings, he saw the Sri people, impacted by the large ship, were momentarily in disarray, not immediately swarming. Yet, bone arrows kept flying in. The flagship already had two warriors and a sailor down by arrow wounds. As for the fallen or drowned Sri warriors, there were more than thirty!

"Bang! Crack! Snap!"

Several intense collisions came from both sides, overpowering all voices. The other two galleys followed the flagship, launching fierce charges, ramming and capsizing three or four small Sri boats. These two ships had fewer warriors, fired fewer arrows, but had plenty of sailors, charging like stampeding wild bulls.

Chiwaco quickly surveyed his surroundings. The Sri people's canoes, though numerous, had shallow drafts, making them panicked under ramming. They had never encountered such large ships, unable to respond immediately. A brief thought, and the old militia decisively ordered.

"Continue! Accelerate the charge, break through the Sri fleet! Chief Divine bless!"

"Chief Divine bless!"

The rowers strained, the decelerated galleys moved again. This time, Chiwaco adjusted the strategy, no longer ramming wildly, but brushing past the sides of the canoes, capsizing them with the advantage of the larger ship. Within less than a quarter, four or five Sri boats were tipped over, dozens of Sri warriors jumping into the water, becoming arrow targets.

The other two large ships followed the flagship, charging furiously, crashing through the enemy fleet. Feathered arrows flew wildly over the water, drastically reducing accuracy. The galleys stood tall, armed with great shields and longbows, holding an absolute shooting advantage.

"Haha, refreshing! Truly refreshing!"

Having broken through the Sri fleet, Puap panted, laughing heartily. During the brief charge, he shot over a dozen arrows, killing at least three Sri warriors. Their returning bone arrows did not penetrate his leather armor. Of course, this was partly because he had secretly removed his feather crown, wearing only ordinary warrior gear.

"Old Chi, let's turn around and ram them again!"

Chiwaco pursed his lips, not speaking. This round of charging saw the Sri losing at least a fifth, an estimated seventy to eighty men. Many tribal warriors merely fell into the water, temporarily losing combat capability. The flagship's casualties were only three or four.

"Adding the casualties of all three ships, that's over a dozen."

The old militia frowned, pondering. He wasn't dwelling in the advantage but thinking of turning the tide. Killing these Sri warriors held little meaning for the expedition fleet. The deaths of the Kingdom's warriors and sailors were real losses.

Though the fleet had restocked ample sailors from friendly tribes, bringing back an extra Prepetcha would mean an extra life saved!

"Yes... with so many small boats, so many Sri warriors, there must be a leader!"

In the swift and fierce clash, the fleets crossed paths again. By now, they were a hundred paces apart, temporarily disengaged.

Chiwaco did not hurry to attack. Squinting, he closely watched the movements of the Sri fleet, seeking truly valuable targets. Soon enough, a tattooed Sri warrior caught his eye.

"Icátax! Icatas! Come here, come here!"

The tattooed warrior Pikam urgently commanded the small boats to regroup. These canoes and warriors came from different tribes. They were strangers to each other, some even with blood feuds. The recent chaotic battle saw them barely touching the enemy!

"Damn, listen to me! Coyotes hunting down a lone buffalo must circle it! Circle it! ...The enemy, few ships! We, many boats! In the coming battle, stick to the lead big boat, eat it! Ignore the rest!... Icatas! Icatas!"

In the fleet, the tattooed warrior Pikam held the highest position. He was a chieftain of a small coastal tribe, with the most boats directly under him, accounting for a third of the fleet. In Sri, Pikam (ptcamn) meant a resilient and water adept lobster. Yes, the big lobsters were plentiful in this era's seaside.

"It's him!"

After observing for a while, Chiwaco finally locked in the target. Under the tattooed warrior's command, the enemy fleet was rapidly regaining order. Without hesitation, the old militia pointed a red flag, sternly ordering.

"Accelerate! Accelerate! Accelerate! Full speed ahead, towards the direction I point, right at the enemy fleet's center!"

"Full speed ahead!!"

"Heave ho! Heave ho!"

The fleet rowers chanted, mustering their last bit of strength, rowing desperately. The flagship gradually picked up speed, the wind blowing past the bow carrying a fierce whistle.

"Chieftain, the enemy is coming again!"

On Pikam's small boat, an experienced tribal warrior squinted, looking toward the enemy fleet. This time, it seemed the enemy was...

"Listen to me, surround them! Icatas! Charge!"

Pikam stood at the bow, waving his arms vigorously, directing the nearby small boats. He surveyed the surrounding warriors, raising a javelin high, roaring like a mountain lion.

"Itako! Kill!"

"Bang! Bang! Crack! Crack!"

The three galleys fiercely advanced, crashing into the canoe group once more. This time, the Sri fleet was slightly dispersed, with a few more canoes capsizing. However, the remaining boats did not fall into chaos. Instead, led by several war boats, they closed in from both sides, gradually approaching the Kingdom fleet's flagship.

Seeing this, Pikam's face revealed a smile. But such smile was short-lived, as rainstorm-like arrows shot out from the enemy's large ship!

"Swish swish swish!"

The Prepetcha warriors did not hold back, wildly firing to both sides. Dozens of Sri warriors fell into the water, causing the closing canoes to halt momentarily, showing signs of hesitation. The tribal warriors on each boat looked to others for cues before deciding the next move. In this gap, the flagship giant boat surged, its speed abruptly rising, charging straight ahead.

"Chieftain! The enemy, they're ramming... ramming... ramming us! Aaaah!"

Pikam's eyes widened in rage. He stared at the approaching large ship, its bow gleaming with a golden cold light, like the fangs of a giant beast. Then, the dreadful giant beast struck with a roar, completely capsizing the unfortunate small boat!

Chapter 863: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, Oath of Blood on the Large Ship

"Smack, smack!"

The incessant pain on his face woke the unconscious warrior. Pikam struggled to open his eyes, his vision showing a large unfamiliar face. He blinked forcefully and saw a peculiar golden amulet hanging from the neck beneath the large face, seeming to resemble the sun and birds.

"Itako!"

Pikam suddenly realized this was the Southern Tribes invading the ancestral land! He let out a roar and reached for the short dagger at his waist, but his arm couldn't move at all, it had long been firmly bound.

"Ah!"

Startled by the roar, the Huitu Puapu jumped up from the deck. A few breaths later, he snapped out of it. The Huitu samurai, in a rage, extended his arm and slapped him seven or eight times.

"Damn wild man, why are you shouting? How dare you scare me, I'll beat you to death!"

"Smack! Smack!..."

The crisp slapping sounds echoed on the deck. Chiwaco watched for a moment, squinting his eyes, but said nothing.

"Smack!"

Puapu slapped him over ten times, making Pikam's vision blur with gold stars, his head dazed. Only then did Puapu stop, calling for Mountain Bird, the translator.

"Wild man, why did you attack us?"

"...?"

Pikam stared blankly, unable to react for a moment. After a while, he glared fiercely at Mountain Bird who spoke the Sri language, spitting out a mouthful of bloody foam.

"Spit! You treacherous mouse, you bring outsiders into the ancestral land! I'll twist off your head and offer it to the spirit of the ancestors!"

Mountain Bird was speechless, his face turned red. After being stunned for a moment, he lowered his voice and replied.

"I... I'm not a Sri person, I'm a Mayo person!"

"Mayo person? Enemy?! Itako! Kill you all!..."

"Smack!..."

Puapu roared angrily and slapped him another dozen times. Furious, he scolded.

"Ha! You wild man captive, still dare to shout and kill? Watch me cut off your tongue!"

Saying that, the Huitu samurai pulled out the obsidian dagger at his waist with a click and pressed it against the opponent's mouth.

"Ah!"

Pikam froze, quickly understanding Puapu's intention. He desperately twisted his tightly bound body like a fish out of water. However, the Huitu samurai's arm was incredibly strong, directly gripping his neck and forcing him to stick out his tongue. Then, the sharp dagger touched the edge of his tongue, sending a chill to his heart.

"Saate! Saate! No, don't!"

Pikam let out a desperate scream, his whole body trembling.

He did not fear death, but the thought of becoming mute filled him with uncontrollable dread. The Sri people revered singing, embedding everything about their culture within songs. They used songs to narrate the tribe's history, heritage, and the divine nature of heaven and earth. Each person could sing hundreds of songs proudly. Losing the ability to sing meant losing communication with ancestors and heaven, bringing scorn from the whole tribe, and even the soul could never return to the ancestral land.

"Old Pu, that's enough! I still need to question him, don't actually hurt him."

Chiwaco had been observing coldly. Finally, seeing the deterrence had worked, he stepped forward and signaled the Huitu samurai to stop.

"Hmph! There are so many Sri people on the island, kill him, and we can just capture another one!"

Puapu snorted a couple of times and put away the dagger. He thought for a moment, slapped Pikam twice more, and then swiftly rose and left.



The two had prearranged roles, one playing the villain, the other the good person, to extract some information from the Sri chieftain.

The setting sun cast shimmering reflections; the clouds were splendid, tinged with a faint blush. Half a day had passed since the fierce battle on the water that afternoon. After the chieftain Pikam's small boat was rammed and overturned, the Sri fleet plunged into chaos. Some small boats rushed forward desperately to rescue the chieftain in the water, while most hesitated and stayed behind, fearful and uncertain. The enemy's boats became disjointed, lacking numbers to truly threaten the large ships. The Kingdom Fleet pushed forward, raining arrows, finally scattering the Sri fleet completely!

Then, Chiwaco ordered a search and found the unconscious, tattooed warrior, chieftain Pikam, from a Sri small boat.

After a brutal battle, the expedition fleet lost over ten people, while the Sri had hundreds of casualties. Watching the fierce water battle, the warriors on shore shouted furiously, crazy with anger, even shooting arrows onto the sea, but to no avail.

To guard against a night assault by the Sri, Chiwaco did not stay near the shore much longer. He directed the fleet northwest for half a day, temporarily evading the Sri's sight before dealing with the captives.

"Warrior, you fought bravely to the last moment! The Lake Tribe values warriors highly, and we admire your courage and extend goodwill to you!"

Chiwaco's old face showed a smile as he approached Pikam. He squatted down and first fed Pikam some honey water.

"Here, drink some honey water. It's very sweet!"

"...Uh?"

Chieftain Pikam felt a bit dazed. He instinctively opened his mouth, carefully retracting his tongue, and drank several gulps of honey water. The tribal warriors had set off at dawn, traveling for half a day to reach the ancestral Great Island. Then, after fighting fiercely with the invaders all day, he hadn't eaten

anything. Only now, coming to his senses, did he feel extremely hungry and exhausted, completely drained.

"You, Lake Tribe?"

"Yes. We are warriors from the distant south, the Lake Tribe. We have come here without any malice toward your Sri Tribe. We are not enemies. You are not enemies! There's a misunderstanding between us!"

"No! Taheyoq, Hante, our ancestral land!"

Upon hearing Mountain Bird's translation, Pikam's eyes widened. He stared intently at Chiwaco's face, suppressing a low growl.

"You are invaders! To trespass on the ancestral land and destroy the tribe's heritage makes you the mortal enemy of all tribes! Leave here, Lake Tribe!"

"..."

Chiwaco scratched his head, finding the situation tricky. His suspicion was confirmed; Tiburon Island was indeed the ancestral land, the sacred island the Sri fought desperately to protect! After a moment, the old militia sighed and tried to smile while replying.

"Calm down, warrior! We are not enemies. We are friends. We will leave soon! We will leave very soon!"

"Not enemies, but friends? You will leave soon?"

Pikam showed skepticism. He looked at Chiwaco's expression and thought about his situation. The opponent seemed somewhat friendly, stopping the guy who tried to cut his tongue and gave him some honey water, perhaps not deceiving him. He tried to use his brain, speaking loudly.

"Swear it! Use the ancestors to swear!"

"..."

Chiwaco raised an eyebrow, patiently clenching his fist to his chest and solemnly swearing.

"Ancestor witness! Our Kingdom Fleet is not the enemy of the Sri. Soon, we will leave your ancestral land! We have no malice!"

Pikam listened but, without translation, didn't understand a word. The translator's words were hard to believe. He bit his lip hard and shouted again.

"Leader of the large ship! I don't understand your oath. I want to cut my hand and swear with you in blood!"

"What?!"

Chiwaco was stunned by the request. He looked at Mountain Bird, puzzled and asked.

"What does he want to do?"

"Captain, he wants a blood oath with you. Both cut their palms, press them together, let the blood mingle, and repeat the vow. Through the medium of blood, witnessed by ancestors, the pledge binds both sides..."

Mountain Bird blinked and carefully translated.

"...cut palms, press together for the vow?"

Chiwaco's old face twitched. He looked up at Huitu Puapu.

"Old Pu!"

"Old Chi, why are you looking at me? I won't do such a thing! Hmph, if it were up to me, I'd just torture him until he said everything!"

"...Ah!"

The old militia sighed helplessly. He thought for a moment and seriously said.

"Ancestor witness! A blood oath requires both sides to make vows for it to be fair! I can swear to leave the island, return you to the tribe, and not be your enemy! But you must also swear!"

"What! You're willing to swear and return me to the tribe?!"

Upon hearing this, Pikam was stunned, showing surprise. After being captured, he had prepared for death, ready to return his soul to the ancestral land. But now, with hope suddenly emerging, he was caught off guard, his mind loosening. After a while, he stammered a reply.

"Um, well...mutual oath would be fair. So, what do you want me to swear?"

"I want you to swear not to be our enemy and to tell me about the North!"

"Not to be your enemy, and tell about the North?"

Pikam hesitated, thinking seriously for a long time.

They had killed many Sri warriors, even his tribe's warriors. But they were on the large ship, the tribe's small boats were no match for them. The tribe needed to hunt and migrate, with not much food reserve. So such large-scale mobilization by the tribes brought great pressure and could not be sustained for long. Once most warriors left, few guards couldn't defend the Great Island. Overall, if he could make them leave the ancestral land, the sacrifice of a few warriors would be acceptable.

Moreover, being captured, even if returned to the tribe, would tarnish his name. But if he could make them leave, he would be a brave warrior, alone venturing onto the large ship, persuading the fierce enemy tribe, ultimately protecting the sacred ancestral land. This would turn into a celebrated tale, bringing fame within the tribe!

As for the Northern news, he would never divulge information about the Sri tribe. Other details wouldn't matter much.

Pikam thought for a while and decisively made his decision.

"Alright! Leader of the large ship, I accept!"

"Good! Warrior, good!"

Chiwaco laughed joyfully, his face blooming into a smile. He had Pikam untied and handed him an obsidian dagger. Then, both raised their daggers towards the brilliant sunset, swiftly cutting their palms!

Chapter 864: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, the End of the Bay, the Boundless Northern Continent!

"Ancestors witness, Chief Divine watches us! I, Chiwaco, swear that the fleet will soon release the captives and leave the ancestral land of the Luwei people. The tribes in the Lake and the Konkaklik Tribe are friends, not enemies!"

"The flames of the ancestors witness this oath! I, Lobster Pikam, swear as long as the leader of the Large Ship releases me back to my tribe and leaves our ancestral land, he is my friend! I will lay down my weapons and join him in sharing and singing the northern songs of the ancestors."

The two men cut their palms, and blood immediately flowed. Then, solemnly, they first swore in different languages, then simultaneously extended their right palms, pressing them together tightly, letting the crimson blood mingle!

"Ancestors witness! The blood oath will not change!"

After the shouts, the blood oath was completed. In this era, the oaths of ancestors and blood held a sacred power in people's hearts, a promise respected and adhered to by tribes across America!

After swearing the oath, Pikam's face softened considerably and even wore a smile. Chiwaco laughed heartily, his face still twitching in pain. The two applied some yucca juice and bandaged their wounds. Then they bowed their heads, touching foreheads like a mountain cat and a wild deer meeting for the first time.

"Friend! Let me go, I won't attack anymore!"

"Hmm... alright!"

Chiwaco hesitated slightly, then carefully untied the ropes binding Pikam. Pikam moved his thick wrists, glared fiercely at the ferocious Puap, then looked deeply at the old Militia. Then, he sat cross-legged on the deck.

"Friend, I'm thirsty and hungry. Is there anything to drink and eat?"

"...Yes."

Chiwaco raised an eyebrow and gave a low order. Soon, a sailor brought over hard corn cakes, watered-down black bean paste, and some non-perishable light fruit wine. Central America was not lacking in fruits, and fruit wine was common for both commoners and warriors.

"Gulp, gulp!"

Pikam drank several big gulps of the fruit wine, his face showing surprise and satisfaction. Then he took big bites of the cakes, spooned the bean paste, chewing like a bear gnawing on corn.

"Mmm... delicious! Mmm... tasty!"

"..."

Chiwaco's eye twitched, watching Pikam wolf down his food. As a chieftain of a tribe, he ate as if he had never tasted food before, not even as civilized as the Warriors of the Kingdom.

"It seems that although the Luwei people are as combative as coyotes, their food is rather scarce."

Soon, Pikam finished his drink and cakes, licking his fingers with a bit of reluctance.

"Friend, your tribe in the Lake, eats very well!"

Chiwaco smiled and nodded.

"Good, good! Friend, are you full?"

"Me? Of course not! But this is enough, if I eat too much, I won't be able to run."

Pikam shook his head. As a member of the Desert Tribe, food was always a major issue. They were generally lean and tough, with no excess fat, and rarely had the chance to eat heartily.

"...Uh, well then. There are plenty of cakes on the ship, you can take a bag back with you when you leave."

"Really?"

"Yes, really!"

Chiwaco blinked, seeing Pikam's face light up with delight. The old Militia smiled kindly and patted him on the shoulder, then got down to business.

"Lobster, how many warriors did the Luwei bring this time?"

"Warriors? Our warriors are as numerous as the stars in the sky, impossible to count! Across this vast desert, extending to the distant North, our tribes are everywhere. To defend the sacred ancestral land, all tribes set aside their differences and united! And more tribal warriors are still on their way!"

Pikam straightened his back, speaking boastfully.

The range of the Luwei people was indeed broad, but mostly in arid deserts, severely lacking in food, making long marches difficult. Only the tribes within a hundred or two hundred miles could mobilize warriors to protect the ancestral land. Moreover, they couldn't abandon fishing and hunting to stay long. Other tribes wouldn't send more than a few warriors skilled in battle. Reinforcements, whether they existed or not, made little difference.

"Uh... okay."

Chiwaco blinked, noting Pikam's guarded expression, and refrained from asking further about the Luwei warriors. He thought about it and changed the topic.

"Lobster, why is that Tahyok Island your ancestral land?"

Hearing the translator's explanation, Pikam sat up and solemnly replied.

"Friend, Tahyok Island is the common ancestral land of all Konkaklik tribes. No matter where the tribes are, whether on the east, north, or the Peninsula on the west of the Great Island, each has a song passed down from the first ancestor."

"The west of the Great Island, the Peninsula?"

Hearing this, Chiwaco took note.

"What, there are also songs?"



"Yes. We are a tribe skilled in singing, using songs to pass down epics."

Pikam looked up, gazing into the vast night, watching the boundless sea, and sang softly.

"At such a time, as night falls. The Spirit Whales reside around the ancestral land, floating and diving in the sea, hiding in caves... Swift-running tribesmen! When you visit the ancestral land at midnight, you will see the giant Spirit Whales sliding on the waves. This is a sign of good fortune, protectors of the tribes! Look at them, they will leave the water, rise in the air, and fly towards you! Envelop you with mighty spirits, bestow upon you divine blessings... This is the covenant of the ancestors and the Spirit Whales, at this blessed ancestral land! You shall be free from evil attacks, bestowed with powerful healing, able to walk safely in the dark night... Tahyok is the sacred land, the island of the Spirit Whales!..."

"Tahyok, sacred land, island of the Spirit Whales..."

Chiwaco gazed at the sea, vaguely seeing the rising and falling whales. He bowed his head slightly, paying respect to the mythic legend. Then, the old Militia felt a bit troubled. Scratching his head, he asked seriously.

"Friend, the Great Chief of the Lake tribe sent us to sea to find the islands where the flock of birds resides! This Great Island has flocks of birds but is your sacred ancestral land. So, are there any other islands nearby?"

"Oh! So, you are searching for the sacred islands."

Pikam scratched his head, casting a wary glance at the warriors on the ship. After thinking for a bit, he pointed westward.

"Friend, in a long and narrow bay, we have a large number of whales and countless seabirds. In the northwest of Tahyok, a day or two's rowing, there is another large island with many birds. To the southwest, there are several small islands with many birds. Then, if you follow the long Peninsula to the west, turn south from the middle of the Kochimi people's territory to the southernmost small tribes, there are many small islands along the way!"

"We are in a long and narrow bay? The west is a long Peninsula? So, the end of the sea is to the Northwest?"

Chiwaco was surprised. He always thought he was still sailing on the vast sea.

"Yes. We are in a bay, and the west is a north-south stretching Peninsula. Blessed by the Spirit Whales, it's calm and tranquil. The tribes paddle small reed boats to fish in the sea without worrying about the waves."

Pikam nodded firmly. As the chieftain of the tribe, endowed with epic tradition, he knew the surrounding conditions. He turned and pointed northward.

"Since it's a bay, naturally, there is an end. From here, paddling a small boat for about ten days, you will reach the end of the bay, the edge of the northern desert. That's the direction our ancestors migrated from. North of the bay, west, and east, all are our Konkaklik tribes! The vast northern wind comes from the broad Northern Continent and mountains, called 'haaha' or 'haitáapa'!"

"'Haaha'? 'Haitáapa'?"

Chiwaco widened his eyes, repeating the mysterious words, feeling the mystical power.

"Yes! 'Haaha'!"

Pikam exclaimed, his face full of piety and longing.

"'Haaha' is the northern wind, the true wind. 'Haitáapa' is the truth of all, and the place of tribal origin! Ancestors, to escape the dreadful flood, had to leave the warm and fertile lands. Through hardships, they journeyed long distances, singing inherited songs, shaking stone bells. They traveled south along the coast, south all the way, across thousands of miles, finally blessed by the Spirit Whales, settling in the desert and bay! And Tahyok is where the ancestors met the Spirit Whales!"

In the end, Pikam emphasized again. His eyes still gazed north, whispering dreamily.

"Maybe, in my lifetime, I can journey a thousand miles to the ancestral origin. To see what the fabled fertile land is truly like!"

In the Luwei language, "east, west, south" were ordinary terms. Only "north, northern wind" symbolized noble origin. The fertile soil of Luwei's origins might be around San Francisco Bay in California.

"Huh?"

Hearing this, Chiwaco was dumbfounded. He clicked his tongue in surprise, asking incredulously.

"Lobster, did you say there is boundless land to the north of the sea?"

"Of course! According to our ancestors' songs, the northern lands are endless, with lively rivers and numerous tribes like forests. The bay where the ancestors lived was always warm and bountiful in food, the east being continuous mountains, never threatened by cold tides. Only terrible floods..."

Pikam sighed. Ancestors' songs mentioned that fields could yield several times, but in this arid and desolate land, there was hardly any fertile land for farming. The tribes had long lost the planting skills, unless...

The Lobster Chieftain glanced deeply south, pursing his lips. Then, as if remembering something, added.

"Friend, you misspoke. The north isn't the end of the sea, it's the end of the bay. West of the long Peninsula is still the endless sea. Our ancestors moved south along the coastline, so our language is different from surrounding tribes."

"Hmm, I see."

Chiwaco nodded slightly. He touched his wrinkled old face, pondering in silence. According to the Lobster Chieftain's description, the bird islands are along the Peninsula to the west, heading south, that's the way home. But going north, ten days by small boat, probably less by large ship, reaches the

northwest bay's end, some endless Northern Continent's border... "Next, should the fleet head south to explore the sea bird islands, or continue north to see the endless Northern Continent?"

The old Militia frowned deeply in thought. After a moment, he glanced at Puap's expression, lowered his eyes, and finally made a decision!

#### Chapter 865: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, The End of Northern Voyage!

The sky in March was clear, like the coastal waters, revealing a distant light blue and an infinite depth. The bright daylight fell, and the vast wilderness was intertwined with gray and dark brown. The narrow stretch of land between the sea suddenly widened here and extended to the east and west, turning into an endless desert. Some verdant mountains rose sporadically in the North, stretching deep into the desert, becoming brown at the horizon's end!

Chiwaco stood on the coastal dunes, staring blankly at the vast world he had never seen before. He never thought that the North of this world could be so grand! The fleet had been at sea for several months and finally reached the end of the ocean, this endless northern continent!

"Priest Mekate, at what latitude are we now?"

"Captain, we are between 31 and 32 degrees North, having sailed 13-14 degrees from the Tarsas River estuary at 18 degrees North!"

Mekate opened his eyes wide, looking towards the northern wilderness and the mountains at the horizon's end. He couldn't help but exclaim.

"Chief Divine! We have traveled nearly five thousand li to the northwest for four months! And according to the Sri people's songs, this vast northern continent might extend another five thousand li!"

"Bless the Chief Divine! Such a vast land! If we can explore it, it would be a tremendous achievement!"

Puap, emotionally agitated, tightly grasped the Sun Amulet around his neck and murmured a trembling prayer.

"Chief Divine, Ancestors!... The northern tribes are so savage yet possess such an immense continent! If the Kingdom were to move north... perhaps I, Huitu Puap, could become a king of a state in this distant northern land!"

"Five thousand li along the coast, five thousand li inland... The world's north, could it be ten thousand li?"

Chiwaco murmured to himself. He couldn't imagine how vast a distance ten thousand li really was. Just rowing might take seven or eight months... According to Pikam, how far does this endless northern continent extend? What sights await at the ends of the mountains and sea? What kind of tribes live on this boundless land?...

He pondered for a long time, with a hidden yearning, a curiosity for exploration, and an inexplicable fear beyond comprehension. After a while, he let out a long sigh and muttered lowly.

"Ah! Damn Heavenly Divine, how did you create such a vast land with your eyes closed?... If that blind Your Majesty knew... the rest of my life... I'm afraid will be restless!"

Puap looked up, squinting at the intense sunlight overhead. It was mid-March, and it had been over ten days since the battle on Bird Mountain Island.

That night, the old man and the captured Chieftain, Lobster Pikam, swore blood oaths, making mutual promises. Afterwards, Pikam told them all he knew about the northern land.

The Sri people occupied the Sonora Desert along the coast, with footprints in all directions. In the mountains to their immediate east, the Opata People had established their city-state and occupied Copper Mountain. To their northeast, the vast basin and plains were home to the nomadic and fierce Apache Alliance.

To the true north of the various Sri tribes, even more savage and linguistically different desert people, the Tohono-O'odham, dwelt. These desert people roamed the northern desert, similar to the Sri but unable to fish, with fewer numbers and more aggressive nature. They occasionally ventured south to capture food and women from the northern Sri tribes.

Pikam said the desert people were even poorer than the Sri, not even possessing feathered hats! At the moment, the fleet had landed near the border between the desert people and the Sri.

To the northwest of the Sri was the land of legend, according to their songs—a place with bays, fertile lands, rivers, and mountains. The furthest the Sri had ventured to the northwest was to a large salt lake about five hundred li from here.

"The ancestors said the lake water there is salty, but two great rivers from the north flow with non-salty water. Crops can be cultivated by the rivers, yielding abundant food each year. The surroundings of the salt lake are unsuitable for planting, but there are many wetlands, plants, and game, thus sustaining numerous tribes! I recall a song of the owl, speaking of the northwest legend! At night, the owl awakens, famished. It dives from the low treetops, capturing wild rabbits and lake fish, feasting heartily..."

Speaking of the salt lake, Pikam's eyes gleamed. All the Sri tribes knew of its wealth. Naturally, such a rich place was occupied by powerful tribes.

"The Kumeyaay occupy the salt lake and the northwestern mountains! They regard the salt lake as their ancestral land, with legends of its lake spirits, forbidding migration to the lake shores. They are plentiful in number, skilled in archery and running, dwelling in houses built of branches and stone-mud, a powerful northern tribe! They also fish using reed rafts and occasionally visit the bay. Oh, they have very sharp stone weapons, resembling your daggers!... Further northwest are the Hoka-speaking Chumash!"

"The rich salt lake, obsidian weapons? The Kumeyaay of the northwest, the Chumash further northwest?"

At the mention of these strange tribe names, Puap felt dizzy. With the fleet's exploration, the messages of countless tribes emerged like stars in the sky, one after another, from the boundless continent.

"Hmph! They are all just small tribes of tens of thousands! If Your Majesty gives me a legion, I will trample them all, conquering them all!"

Puap gazed at the northern horizon, filled with desire, greed, and confidence.

However, he seemed never to have considered that if war broke out, how the Kingdom could support a legion in the desolate northern land thousands of li away with supplies. And if these tribes fled into the continuous mountains or hid in the vast deserts, how would they deal with it?

The old militiaman Chiwaco hadn't thought about these things much. He harbored no greed, only awe for the vast land and a commitment to his duty. Remembering the experiences of the past ten days, he recalled asking Pikam before letting him go.

"Lobster, my friend! Are these gray-white stones on the island made of condensed guano? Can they fertilize the fields?"

"Uh, friend, what do you mean by fertilizing the fields?"

"It means making plants grow lushly."

"Haha! Friend, look at this Great Island, full of gray-white stones, yet hardly any greenery. Though built with guano, how could they ever make plants grow lushly? The tribe tried planting on the island but nothing could grow! The priests said there is the spirit of the spirit whale's divine power here, killing off non-native life!"

"...What about the other islands to the west?"

"All the same! The islands inhabited by colonies of birds have no rain, only a bleak, gray-white or earthy brown!"

Chiwaco, deep in thought, nodded heavily. Then, following the agreement, he escorted Chieftain Pikam to the eastern continent's coast with a bag of corn cakes. The Sri warriors of Bird Mountain Island kept careful watch, and any landing attempt would surely have triggered a needless battle and casualties.

"Friend, I follow my oath to return you to your tribe! We will leave your homeland and never land again! The Lake Tribe, the Konkaklik, are friends!"

"Good! I too will abide by my oath and inform the chieftains of the tribes of all that has happened! As long as you leave our homeland, you will be friends of the Lobster Tribe! As for other tribes, I will do my best to persuade them!"

Pikam gripped his wounded right hand and made a solemn promise. With heavy hearts, the two pressed their foreheads together again. Then, Pikam, with the bag on his back, went south alone towards Bird Mountain Island where his tribe gathered.

Meanwhile, Chiwaco led the fleet to continue north to the bay's end. Huitu Puap wanted to land in the northern lands to return and claim merit before Your Majesty. As for the old militiaman himself...

"After being at sea for so long, let's reach the ocean's end for a look!... Such a long journey, I likely won't have another chance in this lifetime..."

So the fleet left the vicinity of Bird Mountain Island, spent two days finding the largest island of birds in the northwest, and dug some grayish yellow guano rocks. This island, slightly elongated, lay near a narrow western peninsula. The island had low hills, was even more arid, with no greenery or rivers to be seen. The island's size was similar to Bird Mountain Island.

Looking at the countless sea birds on the island, Chiwaco thought for a moment and then gave it a new name.

"Snakebird Island!"

Since when the fleet landed, they encountered several pythons at the island's edge. With birds in the sky and snakes on the ground, it was aptly named "Snakebird Island". (Now Ángel de la Guardia Island, Baja California, Mexico)

Then, the fleet departed from Snakebird Island, sailing north again and finally reaching the end of the bay after traveling nearly 700 li over eight to nine days.

At the bay's end, they encountered a skirmish between a small group of desert people and Sri. Both sides had seven to eight men, thrusting short stone spears and shooting wolf-tooth short arrows,



fighting fiercely by the river, with blood flowing! Their deadly battle was only over two wild deer that had fallen from arrows and bled out.

Seeing the massive oar-sail ship, both the desert people and Sri were stunned, staring at the shore in astonishment. They felt awe and fear at the sight of the massive ship they had never seen before!

Standing at the bow, Puap shot the desert chieftain dead with an arrow from a distance. The desert people, almost naked and covered in strange patterns, fled in a panic to the northern desert. The Sri did not pursue them but watched the ship warily. The feathered chieftain said a few words softly, then one man lowered his weapon, placed the dead, arrow-struck deer before the kingdom's fleet, and kept a smaller deer for themselves.

Chiwaco, with the warriors, went ashore and climbed the dunes. He didn't take the Sri's hunted deer but had a Bird Mountain translator inquire about their location.

The Sri chieftain, though vigilant, did not withhold information. News of what happened in their southern homeland, nearly 700 li away, had not reached here. He responded affirmatively.

"Strangers, this is the bay's end, the edge of the northern desert! Further north lies the vast, boundless northern continent!"

Upon hearing this, the entire fleet cheered. The captain had promised that upon reaching the ocean's end, they would return.

"Praise the Chief Divine! We have reached the ocean's end! We have arrived at the northern continent's border! And here is the furthest we have sailed!..."

#### Chapter 866: Exploration of the Kingdom of the Lake, The End of the First Voyage

The endless sea of sand stretched into the distance, bright sea birds circling and singing loudly. The desert was always sparsely populated, with only a faint touch of green here and there. Yet, behind the desolation lay the vitality hidden in the North, with boundless lands!

At this moment, Chiwaco stood on a dune, gazing at the new northern mountains and seas. They were vast and desolate mountains, and the sea of the desert. Memories from months poured into his heart, leaving him infinitely emotional.

In mid-December of last year, the Kingdom Fleet officially set sail from the mouth of the Tarsas River. They travelled along the coast, filled with the unknown and apprehension, heading northwest of the world. Then, MeKate measured for the first time, it was at 18 degrees North Star.

At the end of December, the fleet reached the heart of the Southern Tekos Tribe, resupplying at a village on the edge of the Fire River Plains, and encountering an envoy from Fire River City for an inquiry. The recorded position was about 19 degrees North Star.

In early January this year, the fleet reached the mouth of the Lerma River, the center of the Northern Tekos Tribe, the prosperous Three Rivers City. There, they were attacked by the hostile Tekos Tribe, resulting in more than ten casualties. The location was near 21 degrees North Star, having travelled approximately fifteen hundred miles!

In late January, the fleet arrived at the mouth of the Tarsas River, encountering the first unknown tribe, the Totomei people. The group resupplied at Fish Mountain Village and heard of the northern Mayo people. As for the location of Fish Mountain Village, it was presumably between 22-23 degrees North Star.

In early February, the fleet reached the mouth of the Mayo River and encountered the powerful coastal tribe, the Yoreim Tribe of the Mayo people. Following traditional customs, Chiwaco danced with the Yoreim Tribe's Chieftain Kalan, wearing a deer head. Subsequently, the two had a pleasant conversation, sharing their backgrounds and reaching a fair trade, even exchanging young warriors.

In the Yoreim Tribe, the fleet first learned about the islands where flocks of birds resided, located on the northwest seashore. They heard about the Yaji people along the northern coast, the Opata people in the northern mountains, the Kochimi people on the western peninsula, the Teli people in the distant northern desert, and the desert people in the farther wilderness.

The group also witnessed the abundant gold and copper mines of the Mayo people and learned about the tribal firestone fields, which were coal mines. The location of the Yoreim was between 25-26 degrees North Star, nearly three thousand miles from the starting point at Tarsas River mouth.

In mid-February, the fleet reached the mouth of the Yaqui River, encountering the even stronger Yoeme Tribe of the Yaji people. The Yoeme Tribe not only produced copper and gold but also had extensive open-pit coal mines with impressive reserves. Chiwaco made the acquaintance of the warrior leader of the Yoeme Tribe, Viejo Mountain Eagle, and visited the Yoeme Tribe's firestone fields, exchanging for some hard quality coal fairly.

The location of the Yoeme Tribe was crucial, serving as the trade center for surrounding tribes. The fleet encountered merchants from the mountains belonging to the Opata people, carrying red copper weapons for trade, confirming the rumors of the Opata red copper mountains. The group also met tribespeople from the edge of the eastern wilderness, the Makuvi Tribe. From these people, they heard about the powerful Taro Tribes in the eastern wilderness and the fierce Apache Alliance in the northern grasslands.

The position of the Yoeme Tribe was approximately between 27-28 degrees North Star.

In late February, the fleet learned precisely in the Guaima Tribe that the island inhabited by the Teli people, the gigantic and peculiar "Tahkoi" Island, was known as the Sea Bird Island.

In early March, after a long trek, the fleet reached "Tahkoi" Island. The island was home to many seabirds and towering mountains. Chiwaco named it "Bird Mountain Island". The group explored the island, digging up some oddly colored guano rocks, soon engaging in severe conflict with a hunting party of the Teli people.

Shortly after the initial conflict, a larger battle ensued. The fleet landing on Bird Mountain Island was like stirring a hornet's nest of Teli people from all over the desert.

Thousands of Teli warriors rushed in day and night from all directions of the desert to defend "Tahkoi". The fleet abandoned the island and took to the sea, engaging in a sea battle with the Teli. They lost more than a dozen men, while the Teli suffered over a hundred casualties. The chieftain of the Lobster Tribe, Pikam, was captured.

That night, Chiwaco shook hands and reconciled with Pikam. The two swore a blood oath, their blood mingling, dispelling the enmity brought about by the battle. From Pikam's words, Chiwaco learned that Bird Mountain Island was the sacred homeland of the Teli people, where the Spirit Whale resided, forbidding outsiders from entering. There were many other islands with guano rocks around Bird Mountain Island.

The fleet first realized they were in a particularly narrow bay, and the long, narrow peninsula in the west shielded them from the turbulent sea. If they continued to sail northwest, they would reach the end of the bay, at the edge of the Northern Continent!

As for the location of Bird Mountain Island, it was around 29 degrees North Star, over four thousand miles from their initial departure.

Afterward, the fleet discovered "Snakebird Island," with similar guano rocks, about a hundred miles west of Bird Mountain Island. The group collected some guano rock samples and proceeded towards their final target.

Today, in mid-March, the fleet finally landed at the edge of the desert, at the end of the bay! This was the endpoint of the Kingdom's first voyage and the beginning of the endless Northern Continent!

This was 31-32 degrees North Star, a full five thousand miles from the Tarsas starting point!

Northeast from here was the Apache Alliance of the hunting grasslands; due north were the desert people occupying the sea of sand; northwest were the Kumeyaay people who occupied the Salt Lake. Behind these tribes were vast endless lands and countless Northern Tribes like the grains of river sand!

"Five thousand miles travelled, without seeing the end of the world... What a vast land, what an endless world!... What a blind Chief Divine!!..."

After a long time, Chiwaco finally woke from his extended reverie and involuntarily shouted softly.

At this moment, he gazed at the vast northern desert and hills, with pure curiosity in his eyes, like that of an innocent child. At this moment, under the vast sky and sea, he forgot all the burdens he carried on his shoulders. He had only one abrupt question rising from his sea of mind, a question he had never thought of before.

"So, just how big is this world?"

The old Militia had no answer. He wanted to know the answer, yet he wasn't eager to seek it. His heart was small, unable to contain such a vast world, only holding a small home. His heart was also big, with enough resilience to bear the hardships of exploration and searching in the vast world.

After a moment of wistful thought, Chiwaco finally gathered all his thoughts. At this moment, having completed the task given by His Majesty, a strong desire to return home had already surfaced in his heart. The longing for his daughter and home overwhelmed him like a surging tide!

"Hmm, let's dig up some sand here to bring back to His Majesty!... You all should keep some for yourselves too, as a memento."

Chiwaco solemnly ordered. The group then took some sand, placing it inside their cotton bags with them.

The Teli had long departed, leaving only two tribal scouts to observe the actions of the large ship's people. Seeing this scene, they were somewhat puzzled and somewhat amused.

"Have these tribespeople who travel on large ships never seen sand? This endless sea of sand would take a whole month to traverse! And sand is the most abundant thing in the world..."

"Shush! It seems they're leaving after digging up some sand."

"Leaving? To where?"

"They seem headed southwest. Once they cross to the other side of the bay, that's the land of the Kochimi, beyond the concern of us Konkak people."

"Oh, leaving is good! Let's go too then!"

"No! They didn't take the deer, we must take it... It would feed us for days!"

"Huh? They didn't take the deer!? What foolish tribespeople! We'd better hurry, the desert people might come back!"

"Alright!"

Soon, the two Teli scouts lifted the wild deer and stood on the sand dune, staring blankly at the fast-departing large ships.

Chiwaco stood at the stern, wearing an old eagle feather crown, gazing towards the north. The vast sea of sand receded far behind; the boundless Northern Continent remained shrouded in the unknown. However, the entire Kingdom Fleet had reached the limit of their exploration, with no more energy to delve further into the unknown North.

Along the way, the exploration fleet had been attacked several times, in addition to the constant attrition, the crew had suffered heavy casualties! There were over a hundred Kingdom's Warriors and sailors at the time of departure, but now more than a third were lost.

The shortage of many sailors was filled by tribespeople recruited along the way. However, the losses of the Kingdom's Warriors were irreplaceable. The diminishing morale of the fleet was irremediable, even with devout faith and the Divine Revelation of the Royal Decree!...

"It's time to go home! We've traveled so far, enough to report back to His Majesty. And the journey home still spans five thousand miles!"

After a moment of gazing, the old Militia Chiwaco turned around. He looked towards the vast southern sea and sky and called out loudly to everyone.

"Praise the Chief Divine! May He protect us across the endless waves!"

"Praise the Chief Divine! Let us cross the waves!"

Sailors and warriors shouted in unison, voicing their hopes and aspirations fervently.

"The Ancestors will also protect us, as we return home to the Kingdom!"

"Ancestors protect us, as we return home!"

"Let's go, we're going home!"

"Home!!"

The fiery shouts echoed in the northern sky and sea, carrying a blazing will. The powerful long wind came from the northern mountains, carrying away the calls in the wind. This long wind blew southward, over the desolate desert, crossing the rugged mountains; it ascended the rolling highlands, followed the lively rivers, continuing to the east...

Finally, it paused at the riverside over six thousand miles away, arriving at a brutal battlefield. The real fire was fiercely burning in a strategically crucial City-State in the mountains, lighting up the entire sky!

Chapter 867: Southward Eastern Expedition, the Flames of Water Valley City

The sky was bright, the earth golden. The air was filled with the acrid smell of gunpowder, mingled with the shouts of the Mexica warriors.

"Fireballs, ready!"

"Yes! Divine protection!"

"Release!"

"Buzz!... Boom!"

More than a dozen burning fireballs shot up from the small catapults with a "buzz," like shining meteors! They streaked over a hundred paces, exploding with several loud booms on the six-to-seven-meter-high wall of the South City. Soon, more blazing fires ignited along the brick wall, filling the area with thick, nauseating smoke, blackening the green stone wall!

A burning fireball landed accurately atop the wall, bringing deadly flames! Several Tlaxcala warriors let out shrill screams, turning into burning human fireballs that fell from the high walls.

"Ah!... Boom!"

"Fireballs, ready!"

A Mexica captain, unsmiling, coldly issued the order loudly.

"Yes! Divine protection!"

Dozens of Prepetcha warriors busied themselves, quickly loading the fireballs with flammable paper and carefully igniting them.

"Release!"

"Buzz!... Boom!"

More than a dozen sulfur-filled fireballs rose once more, roaring into the city. Soon, a large cloud of sulfuric smoke dispersed behind the walls, wrenching agonizing coughs from the reserve enemy warriors.

"Cough, cough... Cough, cough! Oh God of the Hunt, not these cursed demon fumes again! Cough, cough!!"

"Hurry! Quickly! Have the militia pour dirt and wet sand! Cough, cough!"

After five volleys of fireballs, the area inside and outside the South City was engulfed in flames and toxic smoke. Behind the walls, two hundred Tlaxcala warriors frantically shouting orders drove nearly a thousand militiamen to busy themselves desperately. The militiamen, bare-chested and burdened with bamboo baskets, hurriedly dumped hastily dug sand and soil onto the seemingly inextinguishable flames. Meanwhile, the toxic smoke persisted, and as people sporadically groaned, they silently



collapsed to the ground, only to be trampled by numerous bare feet as the God of Death carried them away.

"Hold the line! Hold the line!! If we let the sworn-enemy Mexica into the city, everyone, regardless of rank or gender, will be sacrificed!"

On top of the South City wall, a dozen city-state nobles, eyes red and faces blackened from smoke, shouted and commanded the defenders like vengeful spirits. Their resolve was as unwavering as the stone walls themselves, beyond question. For this time, the enemy was the powerful Mexica Alliance, their deadly neighbors and adversaries for decades, notorious for their love of noble sacrifices! If Water Valley City fell, commoners might have a chance to escape, but the nobility would certainly face death!

"The Divine Mixcoatl is protecting us! We, Water Valley City, are the ancient and enduring Atlitxco, a fortified stone city unsacked for two hundred years! The Tarsus Mother River flows past our city, bringing us warriors and food from the Alliance constantly!... Honorable warriors, we are the southern gateway of the Alliance, guarding the fertile heartland, and protecting the Holy City of Cholula behind us! Today, fight for the God of the Hunt, for the Four States of the Tlaxcala Alliance... for the sacred Holy City, but also for your wives and children... resist the demons, fight to the death!!"

A priest of the God of the Hunt stood atop the wall, fervently waving a ceremonial short arrow. He passionately proclaimed, using the same dialect of Nahuatl as the Mexica, to boost the warriors' morale!

The priest wore a long feather crown and attire similar to that of Mexica priests. However, his robe bore the divine runes of the God of the Hunt, with a jade disc hanging from his neck. Naturally, the jade disc depicted an abstract engraving of Mixcoatl, the legendary father of the Feathered Serpent in Tlaxcalan myth, the holy "Serpent Among the Clouds!"

"For the God of the Hunt! Cough, cough... Resist the demons! Cough, cough... Fight to the death!!"

Seven to eight hundred Tarasco warriors, weapons in hand and cloths covering their noses and mouths, guarded the wall tightly. They coughed violently as they struggled to shout but did not dare leave the walls. Several Mexica regiments were stationed outside the South City, ready to launch an assault at any moment.

"Excellent! The enemy can barely hold the wall."

Black Wolf Torc nodded slowly, a fierce battle intent gleaming in his eyes. Holding a command flag, clad in copper armor, and carrying a longbow on his back, he stood solemnly on a hill, with the red and black legion banners rising behind him. At this moment, he lifted his gaze, with smoke swirling below the mountains, shouts echoing through the valley, and flames burning in the city!

"Relay the order to the Artillery Camp. Divine Eagle Cannon, fire!"

The Messenger Officer sprinted down the hillside to the battlefield outside Water Valley City. Six Divine Eagle Cannons, over a meter long each, were ready and aimed at the South City wall two hundred paces away. Surrounding the Divine Eagle Cannons, besides the gunners, were two hundred elite Mexica warriors, holding shields and guarding the precious cannons.

"Order: Divine Eagle Cannons, fire!"

"Yes! Divine protection!"

The gunners lit the fuses in unison, then covered their ears and crouched beside the copper cannons.

"Fire!"

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

Six terrifying explosions echoed sequentially through the valley, like world-ending thunderbolts! Six enormous stone shells, each weighing two pounds, roared with tremendous force and blasted into the city tower.

"Whoosh... Hiss..."

"Highest God of the Hunt, Mixcoat! Please, unleash your divine power, strike down the Western evil... Ah! Ugh!..."

Bloody mist instantly splattered across the wall. Then came inhuman shrieking screams and uncontrollable terrified cries!

Two stone shells accurately struck the defenders, grinding over bodies and trailing brutal blood mists. Other shells hit the city tower, smashing the shields; or slammed into the city wall, causing slight tremors. After this barrage, several hundred soldiers defending the South City wall were left with at least a dozen casualties and a chilled fear gripping the survivors!

"Excellent! The Sun Divine Eagle Cannon is indeed a godsend weapon!"

Black Wolf nodded in satisfaction, gripping the command flag tightly. He yearned to strike again but had to wait for the cannons to reload.

"Alas, Divine Eagle Cannons are hard to cast, and too few! The Southern Army has only six cannons, and after one volley, they need half a quarter to reload. Though there are many Rain God Tiger Squat Cannons, they aren't suited for sieges... Haha, the cowardly Tlaxcalan curs only dare to defend their fortifications, not daring to field battle with the legion!..."

"Again! Divine Eagle Cannons, fire!"

"Yes! Divine protection!"

The so-called divine protection was a plea for divine favor, aiming the siege weapon to strike true.

"Fire!"

"Boom, boom, boom!..."

Terrifying thunderous booms echoed once more through the valley, drowning the desperate cries of the Tlaxcala people. The unstoppable bombardment spewed from the mouths of the giant golden beasts! The warriors and militia on the city walls trembled, praying and quaking on the ground, having seen many lives lost to verify this: if these divine monstrous weapons struck, nothing could stand in their way!

"Ah!! Ah! Western Mexica! They have delved into the abyss, consorting with the volcanic demons!...  
Ugh! Ugh!..."

An elderly corpse, wearing a feather crown, bearing a feathered arrow in his throat, suddenly fell from the city wall. Within moments, he smashed to the ground with a loud thud, and his blood spread out. Even amid thunderous echoes, an outburst of extreme fear erupted from Water Valley City wall.

"Ah! Elder Priest Xilo!!"

"Hmm?!"

Witnessing the extraordinary shot, Black Wolf tightened his grip on the longbow, his hand tingling with excitement. The thirst for battle danced in his heart, inciting a desire to shout, to roar, to cast aside his command flag, and lead a direct charge! Alas, His Highness was encamped just ten miles behind the legion. The royal banner stood on the rear hill, overseeing the entire legion and keeping him in check...

"Ah! The life of a Legion Commander..."

Black Wolf took a deep breath and then exhaled slowly. He then asked with notable interest,

"Who shot that arrow?"

"Boss, it was your former trusted aide, the Artillery Camp Commander, Tupa!"

"Ah? That lad! Not bad, his archery has improved! Better than..."

Black Wolf clapped his hands sharply, then paused, a smile spreading across his face. Moments later, his expression grew stern and he bellowed loudly,

"Prepare to storm the city! Longbow Camp, Vanguard Camp, take your positions! In a quarter, one thousand Tekos defectors from the Vanguard Camp will push shield wagons to transport the scaling

ladders! One thousand Longbow Warriors will advance to within sixty paces, freely aiming, and shooting at the wall! After ten volleys, mount the ladders and let the Vanguard's Death Warriors charge!"

Pausing momentarily, Black Wolf's face was a fearful mask of a killing intent, like that of a wolf, making one shudder with fear.

"Remember! Retreaters from the Vanguard shall die, die, die! The first warrior to mount the wall will be promoted three levels, to the rank of warrior nobility! Once the key city, Water Valley City, is breached, the entire army will sack the city for two days, and all vanguards will receive their due rewards!"

Chapter 868: The Siege of Water Valley City, The Fall of the South

"Whish! Whish! Whish!..."

A dense crowd of able-bodied men with bamboo baskets, like moths to a flame, gathered below the burning South City wall. Soon, large heaps of mud and sand smothered the fiery flames, yet the pungent toxic smoke continued to spread. Occasionally, some "moths" fell to the ground, writhing futilely without immediate death.

Seeing the death of the commoners, the Tlaxcala samurai overseeing the battle remained indifferent. They drove the commoners from a distance while nervously looking toward the top of the city wall. Hundreds of corpses lay all over the wall, with blood flowing and solidifying, resembling a dark red swamp.

"Boom! Boom! Boom!"

The golden giant beast roared again, striking the wavering hearts at the top of the city wall, hitting rows of wooden shields. The solid wooden shields shattered like fragile pottery in an instant with a "Bang"! Countless sharp wooden shards sprayed backward, shooting towards the warriors and eliciting a chorus of screams.

"Ah! It's the evil beast of the Mexica, it's the evil thunderbolt!..."

"Quick! Quick! Bring the Elder Priest of the Holy City Cholula! Perform the sacrificial rites, request the divine power of the God of the Hunt to suppress the enemy's evil beast!"

The Lord of Water Valley City, the honorable Tlaxcala noble, "Black Serpent" Teuctli, roared in anger. Draped in luxurious leather armor and wearing a feathered crown, he stood on a high platform behind the city wall with hundreds of personal guard warriors. From this position, he could clearly see the situation outside the South City and remain out of the enemy's shooting range, though he had to be cautious of the terrifying thunderbolt bronze beast.

"Quick! Warriors fill the gaps! Militia bring up shields and arrows! Everyone take the lime stone pottery!... The Mexica are organizing their ranks, they'll soon attack!"

"Black Serpent" Teuctli swiftly commanded. Gazing at the tens of thousands of Mexica legions, his heart was filled with regret. He pressed his lips tightly together, suppressing his intense unease, all while monitoring the enemies outside the city and pondering the current situation.

"Too many! Too fast! How did the Mexica come in such numbers, so quickly!..."

The formal eastern expedition of the Mexica began last December. Actually, the four Tlaxcala states received intelligence about their old adversary's massive mobilization from the priests of the Holy City Cholula as early as July and August.

To prepare for war, the states completed their harvest early October and promptly began a thorough mobilization. All tribal warriors were called up, and border fortresses filled with samurai and militia. Moreover, the esteemed "Cloud Serpent" divine descendants of the Tlaxcala sent envoys in four directions seeking aid: northern Vastec tribes, eastern Totonac tribes, southern Mistec Alliance, and southeastern Zapotecs Alliance.

By late October, Mexica scout teams began activities along the border. Early December, the Mexica Great Tlatoani, King Aweit, held a grand sacrificial ceremony in the capital city, proclaiming an expedition of a hundred thousand warriors to launch a divine war against the Tlaxcalans!

Regarding the Mexica King's proclamation of "a hundred thousand warriors" and "divine war," "Black Serpent" Teuctli initially dismissed it as mere bluster and threats.

The "Flower Battle" between the two sides continued annually, with bloody combat lasting half a century. The Mexica had launched several grand eastern expeditions, all failing to break the Four States

Alliance. Moreover, guarding the southern stronghold Water Valley City, nestled deep in the long valley of Tepeyacac state, the city was a fortress built of stone!

Water Valley City was over a hundred Li from the border fortresses, its walls towering and terrain rugged. Surrounded by mountains to the east and west, with the Tarsus Long River flowing north and south, it was resistant to long sieges and extremely hard to attack. For the past half-century, the Mexica repeatedly invaded Tepeyacac state, stalling beneath Water Valley City's walls, helpless against the stronghold.

Back then, upon first hearing the news of the Mexica's grand invasion, the Elder Priest Xilo in the city laughed heartily, leaving bold words: "Offer the hearts of ten thousand warriors to the God of the Hunt at Water Valley City's gates!"

"Ah! Elder Priest Xilo!..."

Thinking of this, "Black Serpent" Teuctli sighed. He looked toward the enemy camp in the south, where a feathered crown head with white hair had just been added to the long spears. Elder Xilo's body had fallen outside the city, as a slain high priest, he naturally received the "honor" of being hung.

"Oh God of the Hunt! How can you bear to watch the Cloud Serpent's citizens fall into despair!..."

Teuctli's heart was in despair. He looked outside the city at the mysterious Black Wolf royal banner, flying high on distant mountains, and the unfamiliar hunting dog flags planted in the besieging camp outside the South City. On the east and west sides of Water Valley City were different Mexica city-state flags, representing the familiar old foes from various states. Only the northern route to the interior remained unblocked.

Early December, the Mexica went on the offensive with southern and northern route armies against the Four States Alliance. The northern route army was led by King Aweit, while the marshal of the southern route army was the Mexica's "God of Death," Xiulote.

"...He is the most esteemed divine descendant, capable of receiving the enlightenment of the Heavenly Divine, wielding the divine power of the War God! He summons the power of thunderbolt and flames, personally destroyed the mighty Tarasco Kingdom..."

"Black Serpent" Teuctli recited lowly, from the westward expedition song of the Mexica Alliance. Soon, another round of fireballs rose from the enemy formation, bringing burning dense smoke, falling toward the city!

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

Teuctli lowered his eyes, unmoved. He firmly believed that under the "Cloud Serpent's" protection, these fireballs could not strike him. Indeed, fireballs whizzed past him from both sides, crashing into huts tens of meters away, igniting large patches of toxic smoke. Once again, the commoners were driven by warriors to extinguish the burning toxic fires.

Chapter 869: The Siege of Water Valley City, The Fall of the South\_2

"Cough, cough! The aura of volcanic demons... The priest of the Holy City of Cholula was right... What a pity!..."

Teuctli coughed as he continued to reminisce.

From December of last year to March of this year, the enemy's situation had become fairly clear. The southern army of the Mexica, estimated at fifty thousand men, comprised five legions, all composed of battle-hardened Samurai. Among these legions were the most elite Royal Warriors of the Mexica, City-State Warriors conscripted from the South, conquered Prepetcha Warriors, Chichimeca Canine Descendants from the Northern Land, and even Tekos Warriors from the distant West!

Thousands upon thousands of warriors from different origins gathered together, loyally serving under the Black Wolf's royal banner, surging towards the East like a tide!

In December, the canine squads of the southern enemy were the first to cross the western mountains and infiltrate the valley where Water Valley City was located.

However, the Tlaxcala Four States Alliance was a genuine city-state alliance, where the city lords of each city-state held actual military power. "Black Serpent" Teuctli, as the lord of Water Valley City, was the most powerful tribal leader in the southern state of Tepeyacak. Together with the honorable nobility "Water Serpent" Actotl and the elder priest Xilo, they controlled seventy percent of the military and manpower of Tepeyacak, ruling over nearly three hundred thousand citizens!



In order to resist the Mexica invasion, the entire state of Tepeyacac was mobilized. By December, around Water Valley City, a total of twelve thousand Tlaxcala warriors, three thousand Cholula warriors, and thirty thousand tribal militia had gathered!

Yes, after the Mexica Alliance announced their eastern expedition against the Tlaxcala Four States Alliance, the Holy City of Cholula formally decided to join the Tlaxcala side.

At the end of December, the envoys of the Holy City sent out messages to all directions, requesting support from the various Navarrean divisions. At the same time, the priests of the Holy City began to take action, preparing to join the Tlaxcala army to boost the warriors' morale.

Faced with the cruel divine war of their old nemesis, the Mexica Alliance, the noblemen of Tlaxcala had no possibility of surrender. The blood feud between the noblemen of both sides meant that the defeated would only face sacrificial offerings... Their only choice was to gather all warriors and militia, and fight to the end against their deadly adversaries who had fought for decades!

The Tlaxcalans mobilized their entire tribe for a stubborn resistance. The canine squads that first entered the area of Water Valley City achieved no significant results. Subsequently, thousands of canine warriors appeared in the western mountains, engaging in fierce battles with the tribal defenders, staining the mountains with blood. Meanwhile, the southern enemy's main force, carrying the Black Wolf's royal banner, appeared before the Mountain Pass Fortress group, more than a hundred miles south.

At the beginning of January, tens of thousands of the Mexica legions built large camps, gathering outside the Mountain Pass Fortress group on the border.

After a discussion, "Black Serpent" Teuctli, "Water Serpent" Actotl, and elder priest Xilo decided to have "Water Serpent" personally lead reinforcements to the Mountain Pass Fortress group. Along the southern border, using the mountainous terrain and fortresses, seven thousand Tlaxcala warriors and fifteen thousand tribal militia were deployed.

In the eyes of "Black Serpent," the southern defensive line, supported by the terrain and with the aid of Water Valley City, had warriors with high morale, sufficient food supplies, and equipped with many of the latest longbows. Though not invincible, it was at least as stable as a rock, able to hold for over six months!

Initially, the situation was indeed as "Black Serpent" estimated. The Mexica dispatched thousands of city-state warriors to attack some of the mountain pass fortresses, only to lose hundreds of corpses in vain. However, by mid-January, as the Mexica constructed wooden siege engines that hurled fireballs, many low-lying fortresses could no longer be held. And by the end of January, when the heavy copper cannons from the Lake Texcoco region arrived, roaring thunderously, they shattered the wooden encampments...

"Boom! Boom! Boom boom!"

Deafening thunder sounded once again from the south, bringing unstoppable bombardments!

"Black Serpent" Teuctli closed his eyes in pain and devoutly prayed to the God of the Hunt.

"O supreme God of the Hunt! Please bestow boundless divine power, so that the enemy's copper cannons may be silenced, stripped of their roaring might! Your faithful descendants will offer blood sacrifices in your name..."

The first appearance of the Thunderbolt copper cannons was awe-inspiring and fear-inducing. The most crucial mountain pass fortresses, even those robustly constructed with stone on high mountains, fell in a single day!

The Tlaxcala warriors, terrified by the roar of the thunder, knelt before the divine might of the War God, losing all will to resist. Thousands of warriors laid down their weapons and, together with more militia, walked out of the mountain pass fortresses to surrender to their mortal enemies, the Mexica.

By mid-February, the mountain pass fortress group, which the Tlaxcalans had built over three to four decades and stretched for tens of miles, was mostly fallen, leaving only a few stone forts held by the noblemen. Of the seven thousand city-state warriors and fifteen thousand tribal militia guarding the defensive line, at least three to four thousand had died, and over ten thousand had surrendered.

In just one month, the reinforced mountain pass defensive line was breached, and tens of thousands of the Mexica legions poured in. "Water Serpent" Actotl was forced to lead seven to eight thousand remnants in a stubborn retreat along the Tarsas River.

The Tlaxcalans worshiped the God of the Hunt as their chief divine, regarding "Cloud Serpent," the god's incarnation, as the noble bloodline of divine descendants. Every revered honorable nobility was associated with the "serpent."

"Water Serpent" Actotl had never considered surrender. With his identity as a divine descendant, surrendering to the Mexica would certainly mean death. Along his retreat, he gathered able-bodied men from the tribes, using his noble divine identity to command the mountain tribes in guerrilla resistance, delaying the Mexica's advance.

By late February, the high priests of the Holy City of Cholula quickly arrived, timely comforting the wavering spirits of the warriors.

"...The War God of the Mexica has fallen, colluding with the darkness of the underworld! Those fire-spewing wooden beasts and thunderous copper cannons are not divine powers of the War God but the evil powers of volcanic demons! Look, warriors of the God of the Hunt, those vile beasts still exude the scent of the volcanic craters! They will spread disease and darkness, making the God of the Hunt's descendants forever doomed! ... Fight, warriors! You must fight for the Cloud Serpent, and for the land beneath your feet!"

The priests' words eventually calmed the warriors' spirits but could not change the disparity in strength between the two sides.

The "Black Serpent" dispatched the main force of city warriors to assist the retreating "Water Serpent." Eight thousand Tlaxcala warriors fought a fierce battle with seven thousand pursuing canine legionnaires, only to have their central army shattered by a hidden thousand-strong copper-armored Imperial Guard, losing over half of their forces, with the "Water Serpent" nearly perishing...

By early March, the "Water Serpent" was forced to retreat into Water Valley City and reunite with the stationed "Black Serpent." Together, including the remaining reinforcements from Cholula, they had only six to seven thousand warriors left, completely losing their capability for field battles. However, they still had plenty of militia for defending the city, amounting to fifteen thousand.

The entire south of Water Valley City had fallen. Vast townships and villages, numerous tribes, and warriors were all swept clean by the Mexica's army. Billowing black smoke arose from the south, countless citizens strung together with hemp ropes, herded towards the southern horizon, heading to unknown distant places.

"...The cruel Mexica, where are they taking them? Do even the lowly citizens deserve to be sacrificed to the gods?"

The roar of cannons drowned out the cries of despair. The warriors lined up, prepared to charge up the city's walls. In this besieged and sorrowful time, a strange question suddenly flashed through "Black Serpent" Teuctli's mind. Moments later, he shook his head, dismissing the fate of the citizens. For now, even the noble divine descendants were struggling to survive!

"O supreme God of the Hunt! Your descendants once again implore you to silence the enemy's copper cannons, strip them of their roaring might!..."

As if hearing the prayers of the Black Wolf, the cannon operators outside the southern city wall finally ceased their actions. They carefully touched the scorching cannons, using all their strength to push the wooden cannon frames, pulling the copper cannons to the rear of the army formation. Moments later, the fierce sound of war drums echoed outside the southern city, mingled with faintly audible devout shouts!

"Boom boom boom! Boom boom boom!..."

"Praise the Chief Divine!..."

"Sacrifice for the gods!..."

"Roar! Roar!"

Chapter 870: Siege of Water Valley City, the Divine War of Siege!

"Dong, dong, dong!..."

The sound of fierce war drums echoed outside Water Valley City, accompanied by the shouts of the Mexica legion, announcing a more brutal siege!

Soon, over a thousand warriors from the Tecos Tribe, bending low, pushed two hundred heavy wooden shield carts, slowly approaching the southern city wall. These Tecos warriors were the surrendered army

incorporated during the kingdom's southern expedition. They wore hats made of vines, carried short spears on their backs, and wore loincloths around their waists. The most valuable equipment they had on them was their cheap paper armor. The cost to equip them was astonishingly low.

"Creak... creak..."

The heavy wooden shield carts rolled over the trampled, solid ground, gradually approaching the south wall of Water Valley City, getting within eighty paces. By this point, the elite longbowmen defending the city could accurately hit the shield carts.

"God of the Hunt, bless us! Shoot the enemies!..."

On the southern city wall, the gaps left by the fallen were quickly filled. The commanding hereditary nobles gripped their longbows tightly, letting out fierce shouts.

"... Whirr!..."

Upon hearing the command, the densely packed warriors and militia of Tlaxcala raised their longbows, short bows, and hunting bows, nocking copper arrows, bone arrows, and even stone arrows with reed shafts, and fired continuously towards the enemy below!

"Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!... Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!"

Large waves of feathered arrows flew like rapid wind and sand. Dozens of Tecos warriors instantly let out screams of agony, their heads and faces hit by arrows as they fell to the ground, leaving fresh bloodstains.

The Tlaxcalans revered the God of the Hunt, Mixcoatl, claiming to be the descendants of the "Cloud Serpent". And according to myth, the weapon of the God of the Hunt was the "dishonorable" bow and arrow. Thus, unlike the Mexica who favored close combat and capturing enemies, the Tlaxcalans were especially fond of using bows and arrows. Nearly everyone practiced archery, and many bowyer families passed down their craft.

Years ago, when news of the Mexica's invention of a new longbow arrived, the Tlaxcalan nobility were astonished and incredulous. They immediately began replicating the longbow across the Four States Alliance, quickly producing the first batch of new greatbows.

Of course, the Tlaxcalans soon discovered that using longbows to enhance arrow power meant substantially higher costs for bow making. They had to use more robust bronze tools, spend more labor, use better wood, and make larger bow frames and sturdier arrow shafts. Behind all this lay the need for abundant, ample food and the constant labor of able-bodied men!

To this day, the proportion of longbowmen in both the Mexica and Tlaxcalan legions remained very limited. The difference was that the Mexica were constrained by the number of elite archers, while the Tlaxcalans were limited by a lack of manpower and resources.

"Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!..."

The rain of arrows flew, death whistled through the air. The Tecos warriors bent their bodies even lower, continued pushing the shield carts forward. In just a moment, the shield carts were already covered with bent feathered arrows. Tribe warriors constantly groaned or screamed, hit in their exposed vitals, falling to the ground dead.

Fortunately, the front of these shield carts was all covered with large crude shields, providing a sheltered space. It wasn't long before a large number of shield carts were pushed to within sixty steps of the city wall, gradually coming to a stop to form protected shooting positions. The surviving hundreds of Tecos warriors curled up on the ground, trying to make themselves as small as possible, creating more space.

"Good!"

The Black Wolf Torc looked at the battle situation with satisfaction and nodded. The deaths and injuries of the hundreds of Tecos surrendered troops were insignificant. On the contrary, they successfully depleted the Tlaxcalans' arrows and pushed the shield carts to their designated positions.

"Give the order to the Imperial Guard Legion's Longbow Warriors' battalion, advance and shoot!"

"Dong, dong, dong!... Longbow Warriors' battalion, charge!"

"Chief Divine's blessing!"

The drumbeats grew more urgent. The Longbow Warriors' battalion let out a uniform shout, then lowered their heads and ran in small steps to the shield carts.

Compared to the Tecos surrendered troops, the equipment of the Imperial Guard Longbow Warriors was much more luxurious. They all wore bronze medium armor, bronze helmets, had bronze hand axes at their waists, held sturdy longbows, and carried two quivers of copper arrows on their backs. These thousand elite Imperial Guard Warriors were handed to Black Wolf by His Highness as the key force to suppress the city walls. The Tecos surrendered troops pushing the shield carts were meant to minimize their casualties to the greatest extent.

"Whoosh!... Whoosh, whoosh!... Whoosh!"

The Longbow Warriors charged under the rain of arrows, their pace unbroken. In the span of a few breaths, they had already reached the shield carts, about sixty steps from the city walls, and prepared their shooting positions. Soon after, they raised their greatbows in unison, aiming at the Tlaxcalan warriors on the battlements who were shouting and shooting arrows, firing back accurately in a wave of precision shooting.

"Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!..."

"Ah!..."

The city walls were suddenly filled with screams of pain, and hundreds of Tlaxcalan warriors were hit and injured, with many falling off the walls, their heads smashed and bleeding. The defending army on the walls immediately came under suppression, not daring to reveal themselves wantonly. The barrage of arrows from the city walls became sparse, and archers from both sides began shooting at each other.

Below the shield carts, the crouching Tecos surrendered troops let out sighs of relief. The most dangerous moment had passed; they should be able to survive today.

"Damn it! It's these archery bronze-armored warriors again! Next, they'll definitely set up wooden ladders and send in the lowly barbarian soldiers to scale the walls and fight!"

"Black Serpent" Teuctli angrily swung his war club, smashing it hard against the wooden shield in front of him. His force was so great that he shattered the obsidian sharp fragments on the club!

The Four States Alliance of Tlaxcala lacked sources of copper, making bronze weapons extremely scarce. However, they also had large obsidian mines and mature obsidian craftsmanship, so they mainly used obsidian weapons.

In early March, the Mexica Southern Army arrived at Water Valley City and began the siege immediately. They established a main camp outside the southern city walls, clearing outposts between the eastern and western mountains in succession, then set up two small camps. In just a few days, Water Valley City was surrounded on three sides, leaving only the northern route open as a "lifeline".

At the beginning of the siege, "Black Serpent" Teuctli remained confident.

The walls of Water Valley City stood six or seven meters high, built with stones and corn mortar, exceptionally sturdy. It was the most fortified stronghold in the southern part of the Four States Alliance! The city had already driven out the elderly and weak civilians, leaving fifteen thousand defending troops behind with enough food to last two years. There were also five thousand militia guarding the outposts in the mountains on either side, capable of counteracting the Mexica's advances. For decades, Water Valley City had been besieged by the Mexica multiple times, but it had never fallen!

"Black Serpent" had sent envoys to call for reinforcements from the northern states. The Tlaxcala River flowed past the eastern city walls, and its upper reaches in the north were still controlled by the Tlaxcala naval forces, which could continuously provide support.

"God of the Hunt bless us! We can defend these walls until we die of old age!"

Teuctli answered in this way when faced with the envoy sent by His Highness Death to demand their surrender. He even ordered the envoy's ears cut off and eyes gouged out as a message to the Mexica that they would fight to the death!



For the next ten days, the Mexica made no large moves, seemingly helpless against Water Valley City.

The Mexica legion outside the southern city walls remained silent, continuously building equipment in their camp. The east and west sides were guarded by the city-state armies of the Mexica, old adversaries over many years of warfare. They carried wooden ladders and tried two assaults on the city, only to leave hundreds of warriors' corpses under the rain of feathered arrows, stones, and lime pots.

"Black Serpent" Teuctli grew more confident, even organizing over a thousand warriors to launch a counterattack under the cover of darkness.

However, the enemy camp outside the southern city walls was extremely solid, and the outpost was meticulously built. The warriors couldn't break through and instead were met with a volley of arrows, leaving behind hundreds of bodies. Meanwhile, on the east and west sides, they achieved small victories, defeating four militia camps of the city-state armies on the outskirts, inflicting over two thousand casualties!

A large number of militia perished or fled, something the Mexica city-state armies were accustomed to. Their morale remained intact as they spent a day re-assembling the scattered militia. The way these city-state armies conducted warfare was to have numerous militia camps spread far apart, stationed at the outskirts of the warrior camps, without even needing fences. Meanwhile, the central warrior camp would be well-fortified with wooden fences, bonfires lit, and meticulously guarded.

If a night attack ensued and the militia were scattered, the warriors wouldn't come to their aid. They'd simply hold the camp until dawn. Any militia that dared rush into the camp would be treated as enemies and killed. The militia wouldn't even dare flee towards the center, scattering instead to avoid being chased. Once dawn broke, if the attackers had not retreated in time, they'd face a fierce counterattack from the warriors!

"Black Serpent" Teuctli conducted two raids outside the city but couldn't shake the Mexica main force and lost some elite troops. He had no choice but to retreat back into the city and patiently hold out, waiting for reinforcements from the north.

However, by mid-March, the situation had changed dramatically! The Mexica built more than a dozen wooden catapults outside the southern city walls, hurling burning pyres into the city from one or two hundred paces away! These fireballs burned on contact, even igniting stones and releasing billowing toxic smoke. They couldn't be extinguished with water, only smothered with sand, and emitted an evil volcano-like aura.

The priests of the Holy City of Cholula observed this and quickly concluded.

"This is indeed the power of the demon, evidence of the Mexica's fall!"

However, in the face of the formidable power of the Volcanic Demon, the priests were powerless. It seemed the God of the Hunt had abandoned his divine descendants, as boundless darkness surged from the south, gradually swallowing Water Valley City.

In the following days, the blockade on three sides of Water Valley City grew tighter. The power of the demon continued to show, one fiery ball after another shot into the city, toxic smoke wafting everywhere. In the volcanos of Central America, sulfur was far more abundant than saltpeter, and the cost of sulfur paper fireballs was much lower than refined gunpowder.

Toxic smoke spread, fierce fire raged, and Water Valley City turned into a desperate land, like the battlefield of a divine war. The morale of the defending army constantly fell, and the priests exhausted their efforts to stabilize the city's spirit. Even "Black Serpent" Teuctli dreamed of the wicked lava of the volcanoes from the south haunting him every night!