

Civilization 871

Chapter 871: Siege of Water Valley City, The Determined Charge!

Fire burned again and extinguished, poisonous smoke rose and dispersed, and the projected fireballs seemed endless, painting the clouds in the sky gray.

The Mexica have been using wooden beasts to project for ten days, and everywhere inside and outside the South City is marked by scorch marks. Hundreds or even thousands of able-bodied men have died from the flames and poisonous smoke.

However, the priests of the Holy City found a way to use the divine power of the Water Serpent to resist the evil power of the Volcanic Demon: by soaking clothes in water and covering the mouth and nose to withstand the invasion of the volcanic gases. The Samurai were inspired, firmly believing in the divine protection of the God of the Hunt, still holding onto bows and arrows to steadfastly guard the city walls.

But the good times didn't last long. By late March, when the Mexica's Thunderous Bronze Beasts arrived, the situation drastically turned. These bronze beasts could spit thunderous roars, emitting irresistible stone projectiles. Even the thunderbolt of the demons was not something ordinary people could resist!

The Thunderous Bronze Beasts bombarded continuously for three days, shaking the morale of the warriors and militia in Water Valley City, rapidly decreasing their spirits. The priests in the city held blood rituals day and night to soothe the hearts of the people, pleading for the divine power of the God of the Hunt!

Soon, the God of the Hunt responded. One of the bronze beasts outside the city suddenly exploded, the bronze barrel flying over ten meters away, crushing four or five gunners into mince. The priests were ecstatic, offering crazed prayers with facial incisions, holding even grander blood rituals. The defending army was also invigorated, devoutly praying to the God of the Hunt. Unfortunately, such divine blessings did not happen again.

Subsequently, the Mexica reduced the frequency of the thunder bombardment, no longer continuing the relentless strikes day after day. The bronze beasts would bombard for half a day before pausing. Next came barbarians pushing shield cars forward, advanced close to the vicinity of the city walls. Once the shield cars were in position, elite warriors in copper armor wielded longbows, using the shield cars to exchange shots with the defending troops on the city walls.

Further on, ladders were set up, driving some barbarians to climb the city walls and engage in lethal combat with the defenders. The longbow warriors in copper armor would seize the opportunity to shoot, focusing on killing the defending warriors to deplete the elite forces of the defending army. This siege lasted five or six days, resulting in two or three thousand casualties among the defenders, while the attackers lost one or two thousand barbarians. Most of the defenders' casualties were caused by the highly skilled copper-armored warriors!

"Damn copper-armored warriors! Damn their hard copper armor!!"

"Black Serpent" brandished his war club, cursing angrily. He watched the shield cars' occupants, vaguely seeing platinum-colored figures, feeling full of helplessness and fear in his heart.

These copper-armored warriors stayed fifty to sixty paces outside the city, impervious to stones, javelins, or lime pots, only reachable by archers. But their copper armor was extremely solid, and with shield cars covering their bodies, even if shot full of arrows like a sieve, they could still shoot at the defenders atop the walls!

On Water Valley City's walls, a dozen to twenty Tlaxcalan bowmen often had to die to luck out and kill one copper-armored warrior.

Days ago, "Black Serpent" tried dispatching five hundred elite warriors for a raid outside the city. Unexpectedly, the copper-armored warriors remained formidable in close combat, swiftly dispersing the elite forces, nearly recapturing the city gate. In the end, "Black Serpent" had to choose to block off the city gates, erecting more great shields atop the walls to resist the Mexica's attacks.

"Boom, boom, boom!..."

The third round of war drums sounded, the Mexica's forces moved again. Under the cover of the longbow warriors, a thousand Tekos vanguards carried dozens of ladders, lowered their heads, and charged fiercely toward the city walls of Water Valley City! They were originally defectors, wearing gray-yellow vine hats, thickened paper armor, bronze short spears, and inexpensive wooden shields on their backs.

Among the thousand defectors were two hundred Tekos warriors, holding wooden shields in one hand and bronze short axes in the other for the decisive assault once the ladders were set up.

"Boom, boom, boom!..."

The war drums' deep sound pounded on hearts, akin to the warriors' running footsteps. A thousand Tekos vanguards carried dozens of ladders, quickly charging within twenty paces of the city walls, the most dangerous distance! The tribal warriors quickened their steps, shouting eagerly to erect the ladders and hook them onto the walls.

"Chief Divine protect us!..."

"God of the Hunt protect us! Throw stones, throw lime pots! Hurry!"

The Tlaxcalan aristocrats on the walls yelled fiercely, their expressions savage and crazed. Hundreds of defending militia popped their heads out, raising stones and clay pots, desperately throwing them towards the walls below.

"Bang! Bang, bang!"

Fist-sized stones fell like raindrops, heavy gravity smashing onto the heads of Tekos warriors. Instantly, the continuous "bang bang" sounds resembled dozens of watermelons bursting, painting the bottom of the walls red and white!

The gray-yellow vine hats were dented inward, along with the equally deformed skulls, stained with glaring red. Hundreds of Tekos warriors didn't even have time to scream before collapsing beneath the blackened stone walls. But what terrified the tribal warriors even more were the lime-filled clay pots. Once these pots fell, large swathes of white lime scattered, followed by heartbreaking screams and dozens of pairs of lost eyesight!

"Swish, swish, swish!"

Longbow warriors rapidly fired, focusing on the defenders holding clay pots. Several clay pots shattered and exploded on the walls, causing piercing screams!

The commanding Tlaxcalan aristocrats ruthlessly drove the militia to continue throwing. "Black Serpent" watched the casualties on the walls for a while, then waved his flag, reinforcing the walls with another wave of militia. In his view, the vast number of militia were merely consumable in the cruel war, useless in field battles, meant for use at this moment!

Close-range throwing lasted only a moment before a third of the thousand Tekos vanguards were down. A squad of dozens of Tekos troops, with half their numbers killed or injured, collapsed. Twenty or more Tekos defectors cried out, abandoning ladders and running back to camp. Triggered by this squad, many squads began showing signs of disarray. The number of ladders successfully hooked onto the walls was less than half.

"Beat the war drums! Don't stop! Supervisory troops ready, behead deserters, hang their heads on long spears!"

Black Wolf remained stoic, issuing the cold order.

"Swish, swish!"

Hundreds of red-haired hunters fired their arrows accurately, taking down deserters without letting any escape. After, they apathetically beheaded the deserters, mounting their heads on long spears high above. Soon, the war drums beat more fervently, urging the Tekos defectors to erect ladders swiftly and charge valiantly to conquer!

"Stern Chief Divine!"

"Merciful Mother of the Serpent Divine!"

"Please bless us!..."

Vanguard troops had no retreat, facing nine deaths to one life. Under the watchful gazes of dozens of deserters' severed heads, the remaining Tekos defectors cried out their final pleas, desperately erecting ladders. Many invoked the "Mother of the Serpent Divine," the traditional belief of the tribes of the Snake Basin. Unfortunately, the Tlaxcalans, who also believed in the Cloud Serpent, did not understand the cries beneath the walls. Even if they did, they would not hold back!

Black Wolf Torc remained indifferent, unmoved. Battlefield combat inherently required life as fuel, to burn forth the crimson of death. Moreover, this was a brutal extinction divine war! To him, these thousands of Tekos defectors recruited during the Southern Expedition were merely burning kindling!

"Yes! Over these days, the enemy's lime pots are finally depleting."

Black Wolf General carefully observed the situation on the walls, soon revealing a smile. Under the urging war drums, most ladders hooked onto the walls, and the first batch of Tekos warriors were already biting their short axes, climbing and jumping atop the walls. In less than half a cup of tea's time, fierce sounds of combat erupted from the southern walls of Water Valley City!

"Good, excellent! The first batch of warriors actually set foot on the walls without being pushed off immediately! It seems the enemy's morale has fallen, the city will be breached today!

Torc uttered an exhilarated murmur. His eyes flashed coldly, suddenly turning to the long-prepared vanguard forces waiting for orders.

"Order the Imperial Guard Legion and Vanguard troops to attack! Ignite the Divine Power Globes for a desperate charge!... Heavy armored warriors, don your armor and prepare to follow up the attack!... Break Water Valley City, and you shall be the first honored!"

"Sacrifice for the Chief Divine!"

Vanguard troops grabbed their neck-bound Sun Amulets, shouting their final prayers! Then, they took the ignited Divine Power Globes from the hands of the War Priests, running desperately toward the ladders against the walls.

"Charge for the prince!"

Heavy armored warriors donned their bronze heavy armor, grasping giant bronze axes with both hands. They were the elite of the Imperial Guard Legion, possessing the most skilled battle techniques and the fiercest killing intent.

Boundless killing intent surged within the army ranks, reaching a certain peak. It burst forth from their blazing chests as the fiercest roars, echoing across the entire Water Valley City!

"Kill! Kill! Kill!!"

Chapter 872: Siege of Water Valley City, Breaching the City!

"God of the Hunt, bless us! Neca, you lead the warriors of the family and charge up there!"

The city walls were trembling, the situation was critical. Black Serpent Teuctli stood high, shouting angrily. He waved the command flag hastily, summoning his trusted Head Warrior Neca, leading five hundred elite family warriors to support the walls.

"Charge! Drive the enemy off the walls!"

"Kill! Cut down those defending rats!"

Ladders were propped against the walls, bronze hooks dug into the bricks. Soon, a hundred or so Tekos axe-wielding warriors climbed up in two strides, leaping into the melee on the battlements. They blocked with shields in one hand, swung their bronze axes in the other, hacking ferociously at the militia like coyotes slaughtering rabbits.

These tribal warriors were selected from thousands of defectors, renowned for their bravery among the Tekos tribes. They were promised that as long as they survived as the vanguard, they would be formally incorporated into the legion and promoted to the kingdom's third level warrior! And if they could kill a Tlaxcala leader, they would be elevated to the kingdom's Military Merit Nobility!

At this moment, behind them were the red-haired hunters monitoring the battle, certain death if they retreated. Ahead was the wavering Water Valley City, their only chance of survival lay in climbing the walls and fighting desperately. The promise of great rewards spurred them forward, death loomed behind. The tribal warriors had no choice but to summon their remaining courage and fight fiercely on the walls!

"Screech!"

A tattooed Tekos warrior swung his one-handed axe, smashing brutally into the chest of a Tlaxcala militiaman. A large spray of red blood splattered, covering his head and face. He grinned, quickly wiping his eyes, then pounced on another young militiaman.

The young militiaman trembled, clutching his stone spear, thrusting it wildly twice, both strikes hitting the opponent's shield. The tattooed warrior, without hesitation, closed in and raised his bronze axe to strike again with force.

"Screech! Thud!..."

Warm spurts, a mist of blood rose before his eyes, the artery in the neck had been severed. The Tekos warrior squinted, took a step back, and just as he was about to wipe his face, a fierce wind struck from the side.

"Bang! Crack!"

A heavy obsidian club smashed into his head, producing a bone-crunching "crack." The tattooed head twisted halfway, like a ripened mamey fruit being twisted. The Tekos warrior fell to the ground silently, dead on the spot.

"Spit! Damn barbarian children!"

The Black Serpent Head Warrior Neca revealed himself, walking out from the militia. He wore finely crafted cotton armor, a thickened leather cap, covered by a sleeved war coat. The coat was brightly colored with the Black Serpent family crest, marking him as a veteran Tlaxcala warrior.

The traditions of various Central American tribes were quite similar; the higher the rank of the warrior, the more ornate their clothing, often adorned with fur and feathers. On the battlefield, they served as the pillar of military morale and the most conspicuous targets.

"You, push down those ladders!"

The Black Serpent Head Warrior Neca looked at the militia on the battlements, giving the command. He then scanned the walls, identifying the next ladder's location.

The fighting there was more intense, with several Tekos warriors holding their ground, creating a breach. A continuous stream of enemies climbed through this gap, while the few Tlaxcala warriors defending this section could only raise their shields passively, barely holding off the enemy's advance.

"Damn! These City-State warriors on the walls, every one of them scared witless by the bronze beast!"

Neca cursed, then crouched again, leading a dozen warriors toward that part of the wall. Feathered arrows whistled past, brushing his back, sending chills down his spine.

"For the Chief Divine!..."

Vaguely, a voice came from the south, quickly drowned in the cacophony on the battlements, drawing little attention.

"Spit! Damn those copper-armored archers!"

Neca held up a shield, cautiously advancing towards the enemy position. The copper-armored archers used sharp bronze arrows, posing a significant threat to the warriors. Without their robust cloth-covered copper armor... As he pondered this, Neca glanced enviously at the archers' armor. Suddenly, hundreds of sprinting vanguards came into view.

"Huh? What is this?..."

Neca was puzzled. He looked down at the figures running below, noting they were weaponless but holding strange clay tribulus balls. Smoke seemed to be faintly rising from these balls?

"For the Chief Divine!..."

The sprinting vanguard drew closer, their fervent cries becoming clearer. Some were shot by arrows from the walls, causing the clay tribulus balls to drop and roll away. Upon seeing the smoking balls, nearby copper-armored archers showed fear, hurriedly moving towards shielded vehicles on either side.

"Huh?"

Neca felt a sudden dread. A clay ball that could terrify copper-armored archers?

"For the Chief Divine!..."

Within moments, the vanguard reached the base of the walls. They quickly climbed up, holding the clay balls with one hand, and as they reached the top, they unhesitatingly threw the balls!

"Bang, bang!"

Dozens of clay balls scattered across the battlements, rolling beneath the feet of the gathered defenders, still emitting faint smoke.

"Ah?!"

Neca's eyes widened as he stared at a clay ball six or seven meters away. An intense sense of danger surged, making his heart clench. Without time to shout, the Black Serpent Head Warrior squatted down on the battlements, raising his shield in front of him.

"Hmm?"

Neca held his shield, tensely waiting for several breaths. The clay ball emitted smoke but made no sound. The battlements were still in chaotic battle, with shouts and cries filling the air. The vanguards who had thrown the balls jumped back down, quickly running a few steps before crouching in the corners, practically curled into a ball.

"You! Check it out!"

The Black Wolf Head Warrior ordered. A young warrior raised his shield, approaching the clay ball. He hesitantly reached out and touched the hot clay shell.

"Neca, Head Warrior, it's hot!"

The young warrior turned, beaming. Then, a terrible thunderclap suddenly erupted on the battlements!

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

The smoking clay balls exploded, spewing countless sharp fragments. The fragments were like the sharpest blades, slicing down the gathered warriors and militia. Billowing black smoke rose, huge blooms of blood sprayed out, only to be vaporized by the heat into a blood mist.

"Ah!!"

Neca's eyes widened, his heart pounding. He almost saw with his own eyes a young warrior turned into a tattered rag bag by countless fragments!

Thunderous explosions, life slipping away. Within a three-meter radius of the clay balls, three Tekos warriors, along with more than ten defenders, were struck down by fragments. Further away, a large number of militia lost their footing, toppled by the thunder, rolling off the battlements in waves. Even Neca himself fell heavily, unable to get up for a long time.

The noisy battlements fell silent, only the echoes of thunder remained. At that moment, neither Tlaxcala nobles, warriors, nor militia could speak.

Explosions boomed, chilling hearts. Black Serpent Teuctli stood dazed at a high point, his obsidian club unknowingly dropped to the ground. Unknown fear surged, like an endless abyss, swallowing his reason. After a long while, he dryly asked in a hoarse voice.

"What... what is this?"

"Ah!... Evil demons! It's evil demons! The Mexica have summoned evil demons!"

After a moment, terrified cries finally rang out on the battlements. Hundreds of militia dropped their weapons, stumbling and jumping off the walls. Even if they broke their limbs, they needed to flee the terrible walls. After consecutive blows, these defending militia finally collapsed, unable to continue fighting.

Large gaps appeared in the south city walls. The defending Tlaxcala warriors also showed panic, shouting meaningless phrases, unsure of what to do.

"God of the Hunt, have you abandoned us?..."

Neca sat dazed on the battlements, narrowly escaping the God of Death. Before him was a scene of chaos, bright red everywhere. Even his resilience was shaken, his faith wavering, questioning the battle.

"The Mexica indeed have the help of evil demons!... How can we resist?..."

"Charge for His Highness!!"

Deafening shouts came from nearby, awakening the despairing Neca. He looked down in horror, seeing hundreds and thousands of copper-armored warriors, wielding sharp double-handed battle axes, charging fiercely at the walls!

Soon, these heavy-armored warriors reached the walls. Amid the chaos on the battlements, they immediately began climbing. Their sharp bronze great axes swung ferociously, instantly slicing any defender attempting to stop them in half!

"It's over!"

Seeing the Mexica elite scaling the walls, Neca's heart filled with despair. A heavy-armored warrior raised a great axe, hacking fiercely. He ignored the spears' thrusts due to his solid armor, killing three Black Serpent warriors with just two strikes!

A warm splash of blood landed on Black Serpent Head Warrior Neca's face. The stench filled his nostrils. Neca shuddered, flipped over, and fled down the walls. He sprinted over the slippery, sticky steps, past panic-stricken militia, straight towards the stunned family head.

Behind him, hundreds of Mexica warriors climbed the south city walls. They swung their great axes, thrust their long spears, spreading along the walls. The defending army on the battlements rapidly dwindled, either dead or fleeing. The reserve warriors and militia below, demoralized and in disarray, couldn't reinforce in time.

In less than fifteen minutes, Water Valley City's south city walls were filled with Mexica warriors. Platinum-armored copper warriors slaughtered down the walls, while green-leather-armored warriors hurled javelins from above. Soon, the defending army in the south city couldn't hold, starting to retreat.

"Roar! Roar!"

Heavy-armored warriors roared like tigers atop the walls, raising their war clubs! Then, a path was cleared through the blocked gate, bursting open! Large groups of warriors surged into the city, like a green flood, roaring in victory. In that moment, countless roars merged like the roar of giant beasts, with an unyielding will, proclaiming loudly!

"Water Valley City! Is breached!!"

Chapter 873: Siege of Water Valley City, Black Serpent Flees

"Water Valley City! It's breached!!"

Red covered the city walls, blood flowing and spreading everywhere with the smell of death. Boiling shouts echoed under the South City wall, accompanied by the cheers and howls of the samurai. Soon, large groups of copper-armored archers flooded into the city, followed by thousands of canine warriors, taking complete control of the entire city wall.

"Kill! Kill these samurai! Leave none of the Tlaxcala nobility!"

"God of the Hunt bear witness! I shall die in this battle!"

Within the South City, fierce fighting continued. The heavily armored samurai were like unstoppable arrows, continuously pushing into the city! Meanwhile, the scattered Tlaxcala warriors, in groups of dozens, formed small formations and still resisted stubbornly. Most of them had noble bloodlines, inheriting the honor and hatred of their families, unwilling to surrender to the Mexica.

In fact, given the blood-deep hatred between the two sides, even if the warriors surrendered, they would hardly survive and would likely end up sacrificed.

"War... War God supreme! Lords of the War God, we surrender!"

The Mexica legion kept flooding in, and while the Tlaxcala warriors were still fighting desperately, the militia in the city began to surrender. Thousands of militia dropped their weapons, powerlessly kneeling on the ground. They were either praying, wailing, crying, or numb, all waiting for the judgment of fate.

After a month of siege, with fireballs, poisonous smoke, thunderbolts, and arrows continuously hitting, coupled with the terror of evil power, the morale of the city's militia had dropped to the lowest point. Now with the South City breached and the fall of Water Valley City imminent, most of the militia in the city had lost the will to resist, merely bowing their heads to await death.

"Drive the surrendered militia to the corner of the city! Don't block the legion's advance route!"

The leading heavily armored warrior captain harshly ordered and then continued to kill into the city without stopping. Promoted to a noble position due to military merits, he had reached the pinnacle of military merit nobility. To go further, he had to capture enemy generals and nobility!

"Haha! I, Black Wolf Torc, have finally taken Water Valley City!"

Thick smoke rose once again from Water Valley City. Among the sounds of fighting in the wind were shouts of victory. Seeing the scene before him, Black Wolf laughed heartily, feeling proud and satisfied. Then, he waved his hand, instructing his trusted aide.

"Go! Tell His Highness in the rear this good news!"

"At once, sir! ... With this, you have taken the first merit of the Southern Expedition!"

"Haha! Go quickly, stop wasting time!"

Black Wolf cursed, but his voice was full of laughter. Then, his expression turned serious, and a murderous intent flashed on his face as he looked at the red-haired hunters beside him.

"The opportunity for reward has come! Red-haired hunters, come with me!"

Upon hearing this, the surrounding red-haired hunters were all delighted, gripping their great bows tightly.

"Sir, where are we going? Are we going to scour the city? I heard the Tlaxcala nobility are filthy rich, filled with valuable jade artifacts..."

"Shut up!"

Black Wolf cursed angrily, then grabbed his longbow and strode down the hill. Starting to run, he shouted sternly.

"Chief Divine protect us! Let's hurry into the city, hunt a few heads of the divine descendants before His Highness's envoys arrive!..."

"... Family Head, the Mexica have breached the South City! Water Valley City cannot hold!"

Neca, gripping a war club, knelt before Black Serpent Teuctli, shouting urgently.

"I'll protect you, hurry out of the city, and escape to the north!"

"Get out of my way! The ancestors' graves are here, the divine descendants of the family are here!"

Black Serpent Teuctli, with eyes wide and bloodshot, roared in anger.

"God of the Hunt bear witness! This is my land! This is my city-state! How could I escape?!"

"Family Head, let's go! If we lose the land, we can take it back; if the divine descendants are lost, they can be reborn!..."

Neca, covered in dirt and disheveled, turned to glance at the Mexica flooding into the South City, his face full of urgency.

"If we don't go now, we really won't be able to leave!"

"..."

Black Serpent Teuctli stood still for a moment. He looked at the already fallen South City, at the still fighting warriors, and at the continuously surrendering militia, finally letting out a howl like a wounded beast.

"Ah!! I am not resigned to this!..."

"Go! Take the Family Head, and go now!"

Seeing the Family Head's reaction, the Black Serpent Head Warrior Neca immediately understood. He quickly signaled to the surrounding family bodyguards, and they surrounded the Family Head and ran towards the North City. While running, he tore off his bright war clothes. Several bodyguards also hurriedly discarded the Family Head's conspicuous feather crown and tore off his luxurious war clothes.

Moving quickly and familiar with the routes, they encountered no obstacles from the defending army along the way. Moments later, the sounds of fighting in the South City temporarily faded. In front of them were only the black smoke billowing and the mob of fleeing militia.

Black Serpent Teuctli hung his head low, allowing the family warriors to change his clothes. Moments later, the noble lord of Water Valley City had turned into an ordinary Tlaxcala warrior. Only then did Black Serpent raise his head, staring vacantly at the apocalyptic chaos when the city fell.

"My land, my family, my city-state... and my honor..."

"Family Head! The remaining warriors in the South City won't last long. We have two hundred warriors; we need to leave through the North Gate quickly!"

"But... how do we go? The Mexica's canine squads have already penetrated to the northern part of Water Valley City, attacking and plundering everywhere. If they entangle us and the pursuers catch up from behind..."

"Family Head, we will take a boat! On the Tarsas River outside the city, the naval forces of the city-state are waiting to pick us up. We just need to follow the Great River north to escape the pursuit!"

"Ah? Take a boat!"

Hearing this, Black Serpent suddenly shook. Indeed, this was an escape route. Moving out of immediate danger, he gradually recovered from the shock of the city's fall, his mind beginning to operate.

"Neca... then what about the Water Serpent Clan Leader in the West City?"

"We can't worry about him! Family Head, Water Valley City has fallen, there must be divine descendants sacrificed to appease the anger of the God of the Hunt..."

Speaking thus, Neca squinted towards the direction of the West City and lowered his voice.

"With the divine descendants and warriors of the Water Serpent Family attracting the Mexica's attention, you will be safer..."

"..."

Black Serpent stood still, lost in thought for a few breaths. Then, tears welled in his eyes as he looked into the sky and let out a long sigh in the presence of many family warriors.

"Oh, God of the Hunt! I failed the brave ancestors, I failed the fighting warriors, and I failed the honorable Actotl of the Water Serpent Family!"

Seeing the Family Head's true feelings, hundreds of family warriors around him were all moved, their eyes moist. Neca was also moved by the Family Head, squeezing out two tears and urging loudly.

"Family Head! These are the trials of the God of the Hunt, the arrangements of the Mother of Destiny! You are the last hope of the Black Serpent Divine Descendants, you must preserve your useful body! We, all family warriors, will give our lives for you!"

"Good! As long as you are here, there is hope for the family!"

Black Serpent clenched his fists and nodded firmly. He scanned all the following warriors and concisely promised.

"The Black Serpent Divine Descendants will not become extinct... From today, you are all my people!"

Hearing such a promise, the warriors' low morale was immediately lifted. Being people of the Black Serpent meant having the status of divine descendants, the entry point to the ruling class of the Tlaxcala Alliance.

Yes, unlike the Mexica Alliance, which promoted through capturing, the Tlaxcala people valued bloodlines and the origins of warriors. Commoners were regarded as moths, and ordinary warriors as just lizards. Only those with noble blood, the divine descendants, were esteemed as sacred "serpents"!

After Black Serpent's tearful promise, he did not stop but continued to flee with the warriors. He swiftly advanced, and after escaping through the North Gate, he did not send an envoy to warn the Water Serpent Family.

"You stay here and gather the warriors at the North Gate! If you see the Mexica coming, don't stay, lead people to flee north! We will leave people to support you on the riverbank to the north!"

Neca left a few warriors, gave some instructions, and hurried to chase the fleeing Black Serpent Family Head. With Water Valley City falling, the Black Serpent Family became rootless, and it was good to gather more warriors at this time.

The sound of water roared, and the sound of fighting gradually diminished. The Tarsas River quietly flowed south, passing through the burning Water Valley City, and then further south. There, mountains intertwined, the land of the Mistec people. And beyond the layers of mountains, the river turned west, flowing thousands of miles away, passing through the rising kingdom, eventually rushing into the sea!

"It's terrible!"

Black Serpent stood by the Tarsas River, finding the city-state's naval forces' large canoe. He was about to board but suddenly stopped and looked south with regret.

"Family Head, what's the matter?"

Neca, panting heavily, caught up. He carefully asked, also looking south towards Water Valley City.

"We fled too hastily just now, and didn't leave anyone to burn the food in the warehouse! Now if we send death warriors back to the city warehouse to set a fire... I don't know if it's too late?"

"..."

Neca pursed his lips, thought for a moment, then said softly.

"Family Head, I heard that the Mexica prince... might be someone who can be reasoned with."

"Hmm?"

Black Serpent frowned, contemplating, and understood Neca's meaning. He sighed, shaking his head.

"Things have come to this point, thinking too much is like autumn flowers, leaving no trace... Forget it, leaving this food might be like planting seeds of flowers..."

Both looked sorrowful and fell silent. Black Serpent boarded the large boat, looked towards the large city in the south, took a deep breath, and slowly exhaled. After experiencing such a blow, he seemed to become as tough as a roasted old vine.

"Neca, let's go!"

"Family Head, are we heading to the Holy City of Cholula?"

"Holy City of Cholula?"

"Yes. It's the nearest big city, only fifty Li away! In the Holy City, we can mobilize thousands of temple warriors and tens of thousands of devout militia!"

"..."

The family warriors paddled the large boat, heading north against the current, not daring to stop. Black Serpent fell into thought and did not speak for a long while. After a long time, he shook his head firmly.

"No, we will not go to the Holy City of Cholula! At this point, the elders of the Holy City cannot be relied upon. They still have a way out... With the Mexica's army pressing down, the Holy City's position will surely waver... Going there is a dead end!"

"Ah? The Holy City sent warriors and priests to join our fight against the Mexica. They also sent envoys to the various states, asking for troops... Having done so much, do they still have a way out?"

Neca was puzzled. He struggled to row while looking at the calm Family Head.

"Hmph! They will foolishly think they still have a way out! Those arrogant elders of the Holy City, worshipped for too long by the moth people, always think of themselves as more than mortals, even surpassing divine descendants! So, they will also believe that the Mexica, who believe in the gods of Nava, would not dare to touch the Holy City no matter what."

"Ah... Arrogant elders of the Holy City!..."

Neca nodded, thought for a while, and asked.

"Then, where will we go?"

"Where?"

Black Serpent looked at the evening sun on the horizon, sighed deeply.

"We will go directly to the ancestral land of the Tlaxcala people, the Mountain City that never falls, the most fortified of the four cities, the capital of the Cloud Serpent, Tepeticpatl, City of Tlaxcala!"

"What? Going to the Cloud Serpent's capital? Family Head, the divine descendants of the Cloud Serpent are not easy to get along with..."

"We are going to the capital of the Cloud Serpent!"

Black Serpent's expression was serious, making a firm decision. Then, looking at the setting sun and the growing night, he spoke in a low, chilling voice, like the cold wind of the deep night, making one shudder, or the low croak of a raven, carrying ominous signs.

"... As for other places, I'm afraid they can't be defended~..."

Chapter 874: The King's Eyes, A Radiant Glow in the Setting Sun

The sun set in the west, casting thousands of rays of twilight that dyed the military camp between the mountains red. The magnificent red color filtered through the side curtains of the main tent, adding a touch of grandeur and a few shimmering streaks to the simple tent.

"The twilight shines brilliantly..."

Xiulote sat cross-legged in the main tent, set down the brush he was holding, and gazed at the extraordinary scene in the sky. A smile appeared on his face as he recited half a verse, but he couldn't find a satisfactory continuation.

"Hmm... How should it continue..."

"Your Highness, are you tired? Let Yingnu give you a massage to relax..."

Nashu, dressed in leather armor and looking like a samurai, was grinding ink beside him. Observing Xiulote's actions, she gracefully stood up and came behind the king. The graceful female samurai then knelt on the ground, carefully supporting the prince's neck and laying it on her soft lap. Her nimble hands soon began gently massaging the king's face.

"Ah..."

Xiulote closed his eyes and took a long, comfortable breath, inhaling the familiar fragrance.

Since the expedition in December, his hands have been full of complicated military and civilian affairs. Reports from all corners of the army poured in, all needing his decisions, leaving hardly any time for rest. Behind these decisions was the significant authority of the Southern Army Corps, which could not be handed over lightly.

Xiulote had thought of having his father take the role of Deputy Marshal to handle the complex logistics as he did during the western expedition. However, his father had only smiled and declined, choosing to follow the king closely in the Northern Route Army's conquest.

"I wonder how my father fared in the Northern Route Army. Have they broken through the Divine Pass, advanced into the heart of Weisoqinke? After the king subdued the Vastek people, did he divide his forces again to besiege Feathered Serpent City, one of the four cities in the northern part of Tlaxcala?"

Xiulote pondered with his eyes closed, and the entire eastern campaign's situation unfolded in his mind. This eastern expedition saw the alliance mobilizing almost every city-state military, vowing to sweep away the archenemy Telascallans! The scale of the forces dispatched from the north and south was enough to shock the entire world!

The Northern Route Army, led personally by King Aweit, advanced from the northern mountains of the Mexican Valley, attacking the most rugged northern territories of the Telascallans.

The Northern Route Army's frontline strength was a full eighty thousand troops. Among these were the main forces of five samurai corps and one elite militia corps, totaling forty-eight thousand, all from the king's directly controlled Texcoco Lake District. To wage war against their old enemy, every samurai from the lake region was fully mobilized. Additionally, the alliance's northern four states each fielded an eight-thousand-strong contingent, totaling thirty-two thousand troops, with about half being city-state warriors.

Behind the eighty thousand troops of the Northern Route Army were another roughly forty thousand conscripted militiamen, responsible for transporting food and supplies. The supply route for the army started from the lake capital city, going northeast to the Atotonilco State, then another hundred miles to the front. Although the route lacked convenient waterways and required crossing mountains, the total distance was relatively short, around two hundred miles.

In reality, the alliance's and Telascallans' territories were separated by the steep eastern mountains, almost within arm's reach, essentially an internal battle within the Celestial Empire.

The Southern Army Corps' frontline strength was fifty thousand troops. The Kingdom of the Lake contributed an eight-thousand-strong Guajili Legion, a seven-thousand-strong Imperial Guard Legion, and five thousand defectors from Tekos, totaling twenty thousand. The Texcoco Lake District contributed one Royal Legion with a solid six thousand samurai. The alliance's Southern Three States each fielded an eight-thousand-strong contingent, with city-state warriors accounting for slightly less than half.

Clearly, the Kingdom Legion formed the main force of the Southern Army Corps, supported by the Royal Legion, while the various city-state legions only handled peripheral directions, assisting the main force's offensive.

As for the Southern Army's supply route, it also started from the lake capital city, passing through the southeastern Vats teppek State, then another two hundred miles to the frontline, totaling about four hundred miles. This supply line was longer, passing through the mountains and only reaching Tarsas River before encountering the Telascallans' mountain pass fortress system. Approximately forty thousand conscripted militiamen were needed to maintain the Southern Army's logistics.

And between the north and south routes lay the continuous barrier of mountains. Within these mountains, only a few narrow passes allowed transit into the Telascallans' heartland. King Aweit did not overlook these strategic passageways and ordered trusted aides Iskali and Tepopolo to lead four thousand warriors to penetrate the middle route, raiding and harassing everywhere.

"To the north are mountains, to the south are mountains, and to the west are mountains... The Telascallans hide in the Tlaxcala Valley, surrounded by mountains on three sides, with a river flowing through. The only relatively flat terrain is their border with the Tototanak people to the east, which is also undulating hills... To completely conquer the archenemy Telascallans, one must attack from the north and south, break through the four mountain states, clear out the mountain tribe settlements! Finally, they would besiege the mountain city and capture the four snake cities of the Tlaxcala territory, thoroughly seizing the enemy's homeland!"

Xiulote's expression was solemn as he silently pondered with his eyes closed. The great military campaign had been ongoing for over three months, and he had personally witnessed the treacherous terrain occupied by the Telascallans. A faint sense of worry crept into his heart.

"Besieging fortified mountain cities and clearing out mountain settlements... this is not an endeavor that could be accomplished in the short term! And if the campaign drags on, the reaction of various tribes under heaven..."

Nashu tenderly massaged, but the prince's expression remained stern. Her beautiful eyes gazed at the young and handsome yet resolute face, and they became moist.

"No... I shouldn't be like this. The prince is still at war; I need to help him conserve his energy..."

With this thought, Nashu bit her lip to suppress her inner desires. She then shifted her gaze to the book in front of the prince, noticing only a few vague characters.

"Migration... sentry post... food... ship?"

"Your Highness!"

The Head Warrior Bertade stood outside the tent, reporting in a low voice.

"An envoy from Black Wolf has arrived to report military intelligence to you!"

"Oh?!"

Hearing this, Xiulote's spirits lifted. He opened his eyes abruptly, left Nashu's service, and sat upright in the tent.

"Let him in!"

A red-haired hunter soon rushed in. He glanced at the tent's situation, then directly knelt before the king, loudly reporting.

"Mighty God of Death, Great Chief! Just as you were conquering the female warrior, the Black Wolf Chief has captured Water Valley Great Tribe! Now, all women of the Great Tribe shall prostrate at your feet, awaiting your conquest!"

"..."

Upon hearing the envoy's words, Xiulote was momentarily stunned, unable to react for a few seconds. Then, overjoyed, he leaped up.

"Good! Good! Black Wolf did not disappoint me! Water Valley City has finally fallen!!"

At this, a smile also appeared on the composed face of the Head Warrior.

"Your Highness, with Water Valley City fallen, the southern two states of the Telascallans are completely exposed to the Southern Army's attack!"

"Indeed! The southern two states are now open to raids! We can even take the opportunity to merge with the Northern Route Army and jointly besiege the four snake cities!"

Xiulote felt joyous, nodding in satisfaction. He eagerly unfolded the map of Tlaxcala. In his eyes, a bright gleam appeared. He focused on a spot fifty miles behind Water Valley City and pressed it heavily, poking a hole.

"Next is... the Holy City, Cholula!"

At the end of March, Water Valley City, a strategic stronghold of the southern part of the Tlaxcala Alliance, fell. The various tribes were all shaken. The honorable nobility, Water Serpent Actotl, was slain in battle by Black Wolf and beheaded. The City Lord of Water Valley City, Black Serpent Teuctli, fled by boat to the north.

In Water Valley City, over six thousand Telascallan warriors mostly perished, and more than ten thousand tribal militiamen surrendered, while others fled to the northern heartland. The southern two states of Tlaxcala were thus laid open, and the holy city of the Nava religion, Cholula, now lay exposed before the Southern Army!

Chapter 875: The Old Foxes of the Holy City

The boat gently drifted, heading north against the Tarsas River, and within just over half a day, it could travel fifty li. Meanwhile, messengers hurried across the flat basin, covering an equivalent distance in about the same time. As for the army's mobilization, they would march across the pre-spring tilling fields, taking at most two days to reach the same destination.

Fifty li, the distance from Water Valley City to Cholula City! From a desolate, scorched land with burning flames, fallen corpses, and dispersing smoke, one would arrive at the flourishing holy city bursting with flowers, vibrant streets, and thriving temples!

The morning sun rose, its brilliant rays falling on the Great Pyramid of Cholula, as if descending on a sacred mountain built by mortals. Divine smoke curled, and the delightful aroma spread through the sanctuaries of all gods, bringing the breath of divine blessings. At this very moment, atop the towering sacred mountain, within the open sanctuary, over ten esteemed elder priests sat cross-legged, facing each other in silence, their eyes lowered without uttering a word.

"Oo oo!"

In the sky, the white egret called, stretching its long neck, curiously observing these feathered bipeds as it hovered, gazing around.

"Ooo, oo?"

"Yesterday afternoon, the Mexica Southern Army captured Water Valley City."

After a long silence, Petl, the leader priest of the holy city, was the first to speak. He was draped in official ceremonial dress, holding a jade prayer dish, and wore an obsidian pendant around his neck. His once kindly smile was now withdrawn, his expression turning gloomy, even somewhat stern.

"Actotl, the Water Serpent Clan Leader, was killed by the Mexica. His head was hung at the gates of Water Valley City. The Black Serpent Clan Leader fled by boat, without even informing us. Of the three thousand samurai and over a hundred priests sent by the holy city to reinforce Water Valley City, only two-thirds escaped back. Now, the fifty thousand-strong Mexica Southern Army is merely fifty li away."

Upon hearing Petl's chilly declaration, the atmosphere in the sanctuary grew even more silent, as if a pin drop could be heard. The elder priests remained seated, their eyes cast down, motionless, lost in their thoughts.

"Everyone, discuss now, what should be done!"

"What should be done?"

Quyo, the vice leader of the holy city and elder priest, snorted coldly, replying in a deep tone.

"The fortified Water Valley City, with walls six or seven meters high and over twenty thousand defending troops, held out for just one month in total!"

Petl lowered his eyes, as if falling into deep thought. Hearing this, he knew what this damned old man was suggesting.

"Twenty thousand defenders, yet lasted only a month!!"

Quyo stood up, his graying eyebrows twitching. He asked sternly.

"How exactly did Water Valley City fall?!"

"The Mexica employed catapults to hurl fireballs into the city. They followed up with copper cannons, launching stone bullets at the ramparts. Then, with longbowmen in armor providing cover, they set up long wooden ladders and threw explosive clay balls. Finally, their heavily armored ax-wielding samurai assaulted directly, capturing the South City."

Wezil, the elder of war, opened his eyes and replied calmly and accurately. As the elder of war, his understanding of military affairs was the deepest among the elders. As a high priest, he wasn't intimidated by illusory evil god powers, nor was he fooled by superficial divine forces. He could clearly grasp the battle situation, pinpointing the critical information.

"Discussing the fall of Water Valley City now is pointless."

In a confident tone, Wezil answered.

"If the Mexica launch an attack, the holy city of Cholula will unquestionably perish. Even if we mobilize all five thousand samurai, conscript ten thousand militia, and store enough food for a year, we couldn't hold out for a month. Moreover, the holy city only has the inner city of the temple district, without any strong outer defenses."

"Damn it!!"

Upon hearing this, Quyo cursed in fury. He slapped the cotton rug with his hand, shouting out his buried resentment.

"If we knew earlier, why did you rush to join the Telascallans?! Now, the land promised by the Telascallans is all but a fantasy, while the threat of the Mexica legion is at our doorstep! The great holy city, with a legacy spanning four to five hundred years, is about to be destroyed by you greedy fools!..."

"Cough, cough!..."

Petl, the leader of the holy city, coughed heavily twice, interrupting Quyo's furious roar.

"Quyo, joining the Telascallans' war was the unanimous decision of the holy city's priesthood, not anyone's personal assertion. Our decision was forced by the rapidly expanding threat of the Mexica Alliance, compelling us to make a choice!"

Petl paused, his eyes glinting coldly.

"Do not forget, months ago, we negotiated with the Mexica envoy, seeking to join the alliance while retaining the elders' positions... What were the conditions offered by the Mexica then?!"

"... Alas! The terms back then... looking now, they aren't completely untenable."

Upon hearing this, Quyo sighed as well. After a while, he responded in a low voice.

"As long as Cholula City could maintain its autonomous independence, even accepting the Mexica King from Tloquiditlan wouldn't be unreasonable. As long as we could tax passing merchants and accept worshippers, even giving up some land and population wouldn't impact our lives much... Regarding acknowledging the Great Priesthood of the Lake Capital City as paramount, elevating the Mexica holy city as the foremost holy city, and even raising the Mexica War God to the chief divine... those are merely empty titles!..."

"Nonsense!"

Upon hearing this, Petl, the leader of the holy city, was enraged. He abruptly stood up, resembling a skeletal raven, and shouted furiously.

"Submitting to the alliance king, wouldn't he intervene and place elders within the holy city?! Giving up land and population, where would we recruit samurai to defend?! In these chaotic times, without samurai protection, and with others meddling unchecked, how could we preserve our power and wealth?! And about those so-called empty titles..."

At this point, Petl was shaking with rage. Extending his hand, he flung the expensive jade dish in his hand to the ground, shattering it into several pieces!

"Empty titles, empty titles! Without these empty titles, how could our holy city of Cholula guide all tribes and earn the reverence of followers? Quyo, you fool, remember this well! We enjoy our high status for generations, without labor, indulging in divine smoking herbs, fine clothes, gourmet food, beautiful maidens... living a life incomprehensible to ants, because of these lofty, mysterious empty titles!!"

"..."

Facing the leader's rebuke, Elder Quyo's face turned blue and white, yet he couldn't utter a word for a long while. After a while, he sighed again.

"Petl, I know, you're right, it's all for the sake of the elders. However, given the circumstances, the brutal Mexica barbarians wielding war clubs are at our gates. A single mistake, and if the war club falls, it will all be over! ... What do you say we should do?"

"Hmph! What panic! The gods protect the holy city!"

Petl took a few breaths, then responded confidently.

"This is the holy city, the sacred land of all Nava gods, the place of belief and reverence for followers worldwide! No matter how brutal the Mexica are, they wouldn't dare massacre here! Otherwise, they'd

be against all tribes and lose the people's support within the alliance! Furthermore, the Mexica aren't a solid rock without cracks..."

"Makes sense! The revered holy city is unlike other cities that can be compared."

"Chief Petl is right! The Mexica also must have concerns."

"Hmm. Now, you should take the lead!..."

A few elder priests who had been silent finally spoke, expressing agreement. Quyo nodded as well, with a bit more confidence on his face.

Only Wezil, the war elder, opened his mouth, wanting to say something. But seeing the elders' reactions, he lowered his eyes and silently closed his mouth.

"The gods protect the holy city!..."

Everyone discussed, their emotions gradually calming. Chief Petl beckoned, and over ten pure priestess apprentices came forward. They approached with reverence, first lighting large bundles of herbs for the elders, then extending their arms to gently hold the aged elder priests in their soft embrace.

Elder Quyo tilted his head back, exhaling comfortably. As he inhaled the relaxing divine smoke, his worries remained unresolved.

"Chief, the Mexica are at our gates, how exactly should we respond?"

Chief Petl straightened up, frowning, still unsure. But matters could not be delayed and must be addressed promptly. After pondering for a while, he looked at the elders, issuing a solemn command.

"The Telascallans are likely no match for the Mexica. And the threat of the Mexica can only be dealt with by the Mexica."

"What do you mean?"

Quyo was stunned, leaning forward to look at the chief.

"Mexica?"

On the other side, Wezil's eyes opened abruptly, deep in thought.

"I pondered, and the key to the holy city's crisis lies with three Mexica individuals."

Petl contemplated, explaining more clearly.

"One in the north, grasping royal power, seeking to surpass divine authority. Another in the south, holding military power, seeking royal power. And another in the west..."

"Seeking divine authority to surpass royal power?"

Hearing this, Quyo tentatively asked.

"No! Not that person. That one is near death, holding a murderous blade, too dangerous to approach. Nor the even more terrifying one..."

Petl squinted his eyes, smiling meaningfully.

"It's another, perhaps two, coveting divine authority."

"We'll have to send three people to meet each of them..."

Chapter 876: Death in Water Valley City

The lingering fire was burning in Water Valley City, rising wisps of black smoke. At the center of the city, atop the Temple Pyramid, there were still fresh bloodstains. This was the aftermath of the final

resistance of the Tlaxcala warriors. Around the pyramid, in the residences of the hereditary nobility, signs of axe chops and club strikes were everywhere, alongside fallen male corpses.

On the main road running through the city, it was divided into two sections with different colors. One section was charred black after the fierce fire, and the other was dark red with coagulated blood. Between the two sections were broken long spears, bent feathered arrows, shattered leather armor, and uncleared remnants of limbs.

Everywhere was deathly silent, occasionally mingled with distant hollers. After an uncertain period, a small squad of over ten warriors appeared from the north side of the main road, slowly heading south. Leading them was a Mexica Warrior Captain, followed by three to four Prepetcha warriors, and behind them were six to seven lightly armed Canine Warriors.

In the center of the team, there was a thin old man wearing a feather crown and a luxurious robe. He was surrounded and seemingly held captive by a dozen warriors. He observed the scenes of the aftermath as he passed, his gaze gliding over familiar buildings that no longer looked as they did in his memory. He recalled the past prosperity of Water Valley City, and a sense of unease and fear crept into his heart, dissipating only into a voiceless sigh at his lips.

"Barbaric Mexica brutes!"

"Honorable Wezil Elder Priest, we shall go this way!"

The Mexica Warrior Captain respectfully turned aside, pointing in another direction.

"When the city was breached, there was a brutal fight ahead, with hundreds of Tlaxcala warriors dying. There hasn't been rain these days, leaving the ground covered in a sticky layer of blood that sticks to your feet while walking."

"Hmm. Praise the War God! Thank you for your effort."

Wezil smiled kindly, nodding his head. He didn't want to dirty his cotton boots either.

A gentle breeze blew through, carrying a thick scent of blood, mixed with a hint of rot. In the sweltering spring, corpses tend to decompose quickly.

The honorable Holy City Elder Priest momentarily halted, squinting his eyes as he looked at the thick bloodstains ahead. He remained silent, only pursing his lips and carefully following the Warrior Captain's footsteps along another small path.

The winding path meandered through low sheds and thatched huts, leading to the southern city gate. This was the commoners' district, usually crowded with a vast number of lower-class residents. But at this moment, as Wezil looked around, he saw that most of the huts were empty, devoid of any human presence, with only scattered bloodstains.

Wezil felt a chill in his heart, lowering his gaze. He continued walking silently, while the Canine Warriors on either side appeared curious, sizing up this thin yet esteemed "tribal priest" from time to time.

"Huh? It seems like he can't fight at all... How could someone like this, didn't look like he could even fend off a wolf, become the priest of the Great Tribe?"

"Hush! Maybe he knows some powerful spells, summoning thunderbolts or fire... Hmm. I can even smell herbs from him."

"Herbs? Could he be a witch doctor?"

"Doesn't seem like it. When he smelled the blood, he seemed uncomfortable."

"What? A tribal priest who can't stand the sight of blood?..."

Wezil slightly bowed his head, suppressing the displeasure in his heart. Facing a sacred Holy City Elder Priest, the gazes of the Canine barbarians held no reverence. They even pointed and whispered, almost spitting onto his priestly robe.

"Ignorant barbarians, irreverent Canine descendants!..."

Wezil cursed silently in his heart. However, after the anger subsided, an inexplicable fear surged, causing him to shiver slightly.

"In the army of the God of Death, there could be so many barbaric northern Canine descendants?... "

"Alright! Honorable Elder Priest Wezil, we will exit the city from here!"

The Mexica Warrior Captain smiled, pointing to the southern city wall not far off, then to the wide-open southern gate, proudly saying.

"It was right here! The heavy-armored warriors swung their axes, breaking through the wall and conquering the southern part of Water Valley City! The battle was exceedingly fierce, with more than a dozen hereditary nobles of the Tlaxcala falling in this very place!"

Upon hearing this, Wezil was slightly stunned, looking towards the city wall in the distance.

From bottom to top, the entire green stone city wall was almost blackened by flames. Among the charred blackness were the dark red marks of dried blood. Near the South City, most of the wooden structures had been burnt to ashes, leaving only broken remnants that testified to the bloodiness and brutality of the battle. Looking closely, even the solid stone walls had pockmarks, likely the result of strikes from those copper cannons.

"The seemingly sturdy Water Valley City... could be defeated so easily..."

After several breaths, Wezil regained his composure, forcing a smile as he replied.

"Blessings from the War God! It indeed was a... glorious battle."

"Haha! The supreme Chief Divine always blesses us, the Mexica Alliance, promising us the world!"

Hearing the Holy City Elder's praise, the Warrior Captain's face beamed with pride, laughing heartily. Then, he clasped the sun amulet around his neck, praying devoutly.

"Worship our god Huitzilopochtli! He is the supreme and omnipotent! He grants us sunlight and rain, abundance and food!..."

"..."

Wezil bit his lip, lowered his head, and concealed his changing expressions. A strong sense of anger filled his heart, mixed with increasing unease.

"Such prayers! ... How can the gods of Nava stand?!?..."

"Elder, look!"

After praying, the Warrior Captain's expression became friendly, and his look towards Wezil seemed more like kinship. He brought the group to the dark red southern city wall, smiling as he pointed to the gate, addressing the esteemed Holy City Elder.

"To display the glory of the vanguard warriors, to spread the radiance of the Chief Divine, the valiant Commander-in-Chief Black Wolf personally ordered the severed heads of the Tlaxcala nobility to be hung on the city gate!"

"Ah!"

Wezil looked up, and with just one glance, he could no longer suppress the shock and fear in his heart! Trembling, he let out a low cry.

"These! These!... These Divine Descendants, they've been..."

"Indeed! They were the Divine Descendants among the Tlaxcala people. I even personally executed one! Before he died, he could hardly utter a word, let alone leave behind any moving poetry."

Recalling the Divine Descendant he killed a few days earlier, the Warrior Captain shook his head disdainfully. Then, with a look of admiration, he pointed to the old head hung at the forefront. The head had its eyes wide open, mouth agape, displaying a set of sparkling white teeth, as if still roaring in rage.

"Look! The one at the front is Actotl, the Water Serpent Clan Leader! He was truly a brave soul who dared to face death, piercing his own heart to release the bound spirit within, the Teyolia! Such a warrior, even as an enemy, surely ascends to the Divine Kingdom of the Chief Divine! ... Moreover, before dying, he left behind a poem of bravery!"

"Actotl, his... poem before death?"

For some reason, Wezil's voice turned hoarse, and his words became stuttered. He stared blankly at the heads of his old acquaintances, memories of their past conversations flooding in, bringing with them an intense, deathly threat that he hadn't felt in a long time!

"Yes! Let me think, what it was..."

The Warrior Captain scratched his head, looking at the pale-faced Holy City Elder. After a while, he smiled brightly, showing his sharp yellow teeth.

"...The Water Serpent will swim in the Heavenly River, the Black Serpent will sink in the Abyss! The distant ancestors will take my soul, but the gods close by cannot save you!!..."

"Ah!"

Wezil let out a low cry, unable to stand firmly any longer. Gazing up at the deaths above the city gate, he staggered and fell into the blood. Then, reaching out to steady himself by pressing on the ground, all he got was a handful of fresh red blood!

Chapter 877: Military Council

Red spreads under the city walls like the deepest dye. Heads hang over the city gates, becoming the most vivid symbols of death.

"In the eyes of Mexica, the divine descendants with noble blood are just sacrifices to the War God... So, is there anything different about the priests of the Holy City?"

The Elder Priest Wezil tightly shut his mouth, and with a dark expression, he stood up. Without saying a word, the journey ahead was filled with silence.

Everyone walked past the heads of the divine descendants of Tlaxcala and came to the outskirts of the city. The view suddenly expanded, mountains undulated in the distance, and the fields were full of green grass. Near the city walls, the battlefield was being cleared. Traces of the gruesome battle were everywhere, yet the vitality of spring was budding amidst the busy work.

Under the supervision of four or five hundred Mexica warriors, thousands of Tlaxcala militia kept their heads down and busied themselves outside the city. They dug several large pits and threw the stripped bodies of warriors into them. It was already warm late spring, and the bodies would quickly decay, so they had to be buried quickly.

Wezil stopped beside a large pit, silently watching for a while. The dense death before his eyes deeply etched into his mind, sending a chill down his spine.

In just this one pit, there were probably at least three to four thousand bodies! More shocking was that among these bodies were not only the despised moth people but also strong warriors and those with serpent tattoos, the divine descendants!

"Despised moth people, ordinary warriors, and the revered divine descendants... All stripped naked, thrown into a deep pit, buried together..."

Wezil's heart trembled, his face turned pale, and he stood motionless for a long time.

"Ha! This cowardly tribal priest is frightened by the heaps of corpses!..."

"Oh? How could such a timid person serve as a priest for the supposedly great tribe of Cholula?"

"Looks like a weak tribe! But I heard they are extremely wealthy, with countless spices, gold, silver, jade... and thousands of fertile women!"

"Ah! Is this tribe here to surrender? If not, we should loot them!..."

The murmurs of the Canine Descendants continually reached his ears, their gazes toward Wezil were filled with obvious contempt.

Wezil pressed his lips together, offering no response. Although he had never been on the battlefield, he had sacrificed hundreds of offerings. What he truly feared was not the thousands of bodies, but how these bodies were treated - it showed the Mexica's attitude towards the divine nobles!

"Revered and despised, noble and humble... In this barbaric war, there is no distinction, all buried together... Oh, Nava Gods!..."

Wezil closed his eyes, praying silently. He could vaguely perceive the change brought by the war, becoming more brutal, more disrespectful, and even more destructive. The age-old traditions and orders of Cholula Holy City, maintained for hundreds of years, were being completely dismantled and buried.

"The era of upheaval is accelerating its arrival, like stars falling from the sky... Is this the Fifth Epoch the Mexica speak of? The rewriting of nobility and humbleness, the melding of all people..."

The elder priest of the Holy City had no answers. He just felt that Petl, the chief, should see this with his own eyes. The Mexica had changed drastically, from their beliefs and ideas to their warfare, completely different from a decade ago...

"Elder Priest Wezil, we should go!"

The Mexica captain waited for a while before speaking up.

"Yes. Okay."

Wezil nodded, taking one last look at the mountainous piles of cotton armor, leather helmets, and obsidian weapons beside the huge pit.

These tattered and broken equipment were stripped from the fallen Tlaxcala warriors. In this era, it was impossible to abandon these resources and bury them with the corpses. And the busy Tlaxcala militiamen, what changes would they undergo after witnessing the deaths of their noble warriors?

"Let's go!"

Wezil did not want to think further. He turned and followed the Mexica captain's footsteps towards the southern military camp. For him, the most important thing now was to maintain the status of Cholula Holy City and persuade the Mexica's "God of Death" His Highness!

The breeze blew along the mountains, coming to the expansive camp. It swept through the outer fences, passed over open grassy beds, brushed over extinguished campfires, and finally reached the stern large tent. Outside the tent, dozens of armored guards were on constant alert.

A young aide hurried over, examined the jade talisman at the tent entrance, and was allowed inside. He lifted the tent door carefully, stepped in, glanced at the legion commanders, and reported in a deep voice to the high-ranking figure.

"Your Highness, a messenger from the Holy City of Cholula has arrived. It is Elder Priest Wezil!"

"Oh? An elder from the Holy City?"

Xiulote's expression was serious as he frowned slightly.

"I am holding a military meeting. I will not see him today. Let him wait in the camp and rest patiently for two days!"

"As you command, Your Highness!"

The young aide nodded respectfully and was about to leave.

"Wait, also send two warriors to show him around the camp and see the Imperial Guard Legion!"

"Yes, Your Highness!"

Xiulote smiled, his eyes subtly shifting. He indeed had been busy the past few days and did not want to see the Holy City envoy for now. He had certain plans for the Holy City that required gradual pressure... Soon, the king put aside the matter of the envoy and looked back at the people in the large tent.

"In the past few days, the remnants of the enemy in Water Valley City have been completely cleared, and the surrounding tribes have been mostly eliminated. Your legion's battle losses should have been tallied, right? Black Wolf, you first!"

"As you command, Your Highness!"

Black Wolf Torc raised his head, glanced confidently at the various city-state legion leaders, then loudly responded.

"Since the eastern expedition in December, the Guajili Legion has led the way in every battle, breaking the enemy several times! The scouts have been dispatched everywhere, mastering the intelligence of the Tlaxcala people! Even the fortified Water Valley City was breached from the South City under my command!"

Hearing Black Wolf's words, the three southern city-state legion commanders, "Yu Yan" Mixcoatl, "Huashu" Huochiku'a, and "Coiled Python" Moyahualo, all showed awkward expressions, not knowing how to respond.

The Mexica Alliance's traditional territory consists of Eleven States. Based on their distance from Lake Texcoco, they are divided into the Northern Four States, the Lake Region Four States, and the Southern Three States. The Lake Region Four States are now directly controlled by the royal family.

As for the other Seven States, although affected by centralization reforms, gradually losing the autonomy of priest appointments, tribute collection, and nobility succession, they still maintain independent city-state armies. These city-state armies are made up of the private soldiers of various great nobility, and their commanders usually come from the most powerful Glory families within the states.

"Yu Yan" Mixcoatl comes from the largest southwestern Raziko State among the Southern Three States. "Huashu" Huochiku'a hails from the wealthy southern Sarco State. As for "Coiled Python" Moyahualo, he is from the alliance's southeastern border with the Tlaxcala people, the poor and desolate Vats teppek State.

During the war, they responded to the king's call but still retained the command of their respective city-state armies.

Chapter 878: Battle Damage and Enemy Casualties

The spring sunlight fell from the top of the tent, illuminating the simple interior. The King sat cross-legged at the head, smiling gently. The Black Wolf stood proudly at the center. The light dimmed slightly, falling behind the King. Head Warrior Bertade's expression was calm, and the close servant Nashu remained silently low-key.

Behind the Black Wolf, in the dimly lit edges of the tent, stood the burly "Yu Yan" Mixcoatl, the slightly chubby "Huashu" Huitzilopochtli, and the lean "Coiled Python" Moyahualo.

In the tent, there were seven people, who controlled the six legions of the Southern Army, totaling fifty thousand troops. Xiulote personally led six thousand Royal Legion, Bertade was in charge of seven thousand Imperial Guards Legion, and the Black Wolf commanded eight thousand Dog Clan Army, plus five thousand Tekos defectors. These twenty-six thousand men were directly under Xiulote's command, allowing for full operational control. As for the remaining twenty-four thousand, they were divided among the three eight-thousand-men legions of the Southern City States.

The "Yu Yan" Legion came from the largest Raziko State, with five thousand warriors and three thousand militia. The "Huashu" Legion came from the wealthy Sarco State, with four thousand warriors and four thousand militia, some equipped with bronze weapons. The "Coiled Python" Legion came from the nearby Vats teppek State, a frontline state that had been in bitter conflict with the Telascallan people for decades and was relatively devastated. They had only two thousand warriors and six thousand militia but had the deepest hatred for the enemy and the strongest will to fight.

"...In the three months of the eastern expedition, the Guajili Legion acted as the army's spearhead, being the first to break into the Tepeyacac Basin. The Guajili warriors suffered nearly two thousand casualties, killing two thousand Telascallan warriors and six thousand enemy militia! In the siege of Water Valley City, we assaulted the city for ten days... The longbow guards, throwing vanguard, and great axe guards given to me by Your Highness sustained three hundred casualties..."

At this point, the Black Wolf paused and carefully glanced at the Highness. During this siege, he had employed the guards only in critical moments, greatly minimizing casualties. Yet, the number two hundred still made his heart skip a beat.

"Mmm."

Xiulote slightly nodded, his expression unchanged. He pondered for a moment and ordered.

"Bertade, handle the compensation. Grant each household of a fallen guard one hundred acres of land and five agricultural slaves, and exempt them from tribute for three years!"

"As ordered, Your Highness!"

Bertade respectfully saluted, took out pen and paper, and recorded the royal decree. Most of the warriors in the Imperial Guard Legion were of the third level or higher, granted land by the kingdom, and had family members or descendants. They were the backbone of the kingdom and the most loyal supporters of His Highness.

"...Tekos warriors were first to breach the defenses multiple times, losing over four hundred men, with about fifty survivors. They have proven their loyalty to the kingdom and have been incorporated into the Guajili Legion! According to my previous promise, they should be promoted to third-level warriors..."

The Black Wolf paused again, looking towards the King.

"Excellent! The vanguard warriors, regardless of their origins, should all receive generous rewards!"

Xiulote nodded with a smile, expressing his approval.

"All fifty or so survivors will be promoted to third-level warriors, granted one hundred acres of land, and five agricultural slaves! Since they were selected from the Tekos defectors, it is likely that their families are either in the Tekos camp or as agricultural slaves in the kingdom. Allow them to choose their relatives or friends for these five positions!"

"Thank you, Your Highness! The Tekos warriors will certainly be willing to fight to the death for you!"

The Black Wolf's face lit up with joy. Such rewards would provide a path of advancement for the Tekos defectors, greatly motivating them to fight. He then raised his head and reported in a loud voice.

"...In the battle for Water Valley City, we sacrificed one Telascallan honorable nobility, over a dozen hereditary nobles, and more than two hundred noble descendants! No one could withstand the might of Your Highness's legion! We also killed six thousand Telascallan warriors and four thousand militia, and captured another eight thousand militia!"

"Hmm? This number..."

Upon hearing this, Xiulote paused slightly and looked at Nashu. The other nodded lightly and made a sacrificial gesture. He immediately understood and, with an unchanged expression, praised with a smile.

"Not bad! My Black Wolf General has never disappointed me!"

"Ha ha! It's all thanks to your protection, Your Highness!"

The Black Wolf laughed, saluted, and glanced back at the three city-state legion commanders. Lastly, he added lightly.

"As for the Tekos defectors in the Tekos Legion, in the battle for Water Valley City, about two thousand of them were injured or killed. Now, there are less than half of the five thousand defectors remaining... Can we replenish them from the captured Telascallan warriors?"

"Hmm? So quickly, they've lost half?"

Hearing this, Xiulote was somewhat surprised.

"Your Highness, after all, Water Valley City is a major stronghold in the south, fortified and dangerous, with ample defending troops and strong resistance..."

"Yes. As we've fought onward, the resolve to resist among the Telascallan people has been beyond my expectations!"

Xiulote nodded. The enemy's will to fight was steadfast, with resistance from nobility to commoners. To besiege a stronghold like Water Valley City, even with the help of trebuchets and copper cannons, it would be impossible without incurring significant casualties. Using defectors as siege cannon fodder could greatly reduce the casualties of the legion warriors.

"Bertade, when we captured the mountain pass fortresses, I recall a batch of Telascallan troops surrendered?"

"Yes, Your Highness. There were over two thousand Telascallan warriors and more than eight thousand militia."

"Mmm, good!"

Xiulote pondered for a moment, then looked at the Black Wolf again.

"Black Wolf, your Dog Clan Army has suffered significant losses. Replenish it with two thousand Tekos defectors from the defector camp."

"Your Highness? The Tekos defectors..."

"These people surviving this great battle are somewhat usable. Incorporate them into your legion and give them an identity! The kingdom will treat them equally, promoting those with military accomplishments!"

Xiulote raised his hand, making a decisive gesture.

"As for the defector camp, I'll give you two thousand Telascallan warriors and select over two thousand skilled militia to make up the five thousand along with the remaining Tekos!"

"Praise Your Highness! You are my supreme Wolf King!"

The Black Wolf was overjoyed and immediately knelt in salute. Thus, his legion would again number thirteen thousand. After incorporating the captured Telascallan warriors, he would first execute a few troublemakers to establish authority, then promote a dozen capable ones as officers...

"After a campaign, the Southern Army's main force lost two thousand legion warriors and three thousand Tekos defectors, but replenished five thousand from the Telascallan defectors. We killed eight thousand enemy warriors and ten thousand militia, and captured over two thousand warriors and about twenty thousand able-bodied men. Combining the captives and the killed, we eliminated forty thousand Telascallan fighting men."

Xiulote stroked his chin, calculating rapidly. Just the main force alone, in reality, according to Nashu's intelligence, over ten thousand militia in Water Valley City had surrendered. Whereas Black Wolf claimed to have killed four thousand and captured eight thousand... Undoubtedly, at least two thousand able-bodied captives had been executed by the rampaging troops.

"These butchers!"

Xiulote frowned, cursing inwardly. He then looked towards the three city-state commanders.

"Yu Yan, Huashu, Coiled Python, what about your situations?"

"Cough. Praise the Chief Divine, praise Your Highness, for protecting the legion to victory!"

The three glanced at each other, and it was the strongest, Yu Yan Mixcoatl, who stepped forward first.

"In the three months of the eastern expedition, Yu Yan Legion's eight thousand warriors only lost one thousand militia. The number of Telascallan warriors we killed exceeded five thousand!"

"Hmm... Killed five thousand..."

Xiulote squinted his eyes, casually glancing at Nashu. According to Nashu's intelligence, the Yu Yan Legion was responsible for suppressing local areas and various villages, with likely around three thousand Telascallan militia killed and more than a thousand lost. As for this five thousand enemy killed figure..."

"Your Highness, the Chief Divine protects the Alliance! The warriors fight for the Chief Divine, fearless of death. Killing five thousand enemies, we have the heads to prove it!"

Seeing the Highness's doubt, the burly Yu Yan commander confidently patted his chest and responded.

"Good. The Chief Divine protects the Alliance!"

Xiulote thought for a moment, bypassed further mentions, and looked at the other two.

"Respected Your Highness, the Huashu Legion's eight thousand warriors similarly lost one thousand militia. The number of Telascallan fighting men we killed reached seven thousand, with heads as proof!"

"Hmm. Not bad."

Xiulote's expression did not change, smiling as if in praise, while internally feeling a surge of anger. The Huashu Legion, besieging the west gate, faced multiple sorties by the Water Valley City warriors. The militia camps collapsed twice, likely losing two thousand men. As for the seven thousand enemy killed..."

"Respected Your Highness, the Coiled Python Legion's eight thousand men lost one thousand..."

Xiulote gave Coiled Python a cold look. He immediately changed his tone, trembling.

"Lost two thousand militia... In killing Telascallan fighting men, we have full ten thousand heads as proof!"

"Nonsense!!"

The King could no longer bear it, his face turning reddish with anger, rising abruptly. He slammed his scepter so hard against the table that he shattered the purple clay teapot!

"Ha! Killed six thousand, seven thousand, ten thousand!... Exactly how many heads in your hands are warriors, how many are militia, and how many are just ordinary villagers!!"

Chapter 879: Slaughter, Capturing Prisoners and Trading

"Ah, this?!..."

Seeing the exalted Highness' anger, Coiled Python Moyahualo trembled all over. With a "thud," he fell to his knees, anxiously explaining repeatedly.

"By the Chief Divine as witness! Highness, the Coiled Python Army fought day and night, losing three thousand militiamen, to kill ten thousand Tlaxcala warriors. These Tlaxcala able-bodied men are not any good; they're all enemies of our Mexica Alliance! They've been our foes in battles for decades, the blood feud is inexorable!..."

"Against such archenemies, according to the Alliance's decree, all males should be slaughtered, and any taller than a short spear must be killed! Then, leave the women to reproduce, sending the children to the community military school to be raised, completely changing the population! Only then will this truly become the land of us Mexica people!"

"Indeed, the Coiled Python Commander speaks rightly! Highness, this is the Holy War of the East! It's the supreme King who announced the Alliance's eastward holy war, a Divine War declared jointly by the Eternal Sun and the exalted High Priest!"

Huashu Huochiku's chubby face twitched, and he too knelt down. Watching the Highness' expression, he cautiously spoke, though his words were still full of murderous intent.

"The Tlaxcala are proud and unruly; every single person is a soldier. The tribe's men are all skilled with bow and arrow, and they have the mountain forest as cover! Once the army advances north, the food supply route will pass through this basin. If we don't kill them all, how can we ensure the safety of the supply route? If the enemy ambushes, how many forces will it divert? For the sake of victory in this Divine War, we have no choice but to do this!..."

"Precisely! Esteemed Highness, please calm your anger."

Yuyan Mihuoti surveyed the situation in the tent and slowly knelt on one knee, still holding his back straight. The Yuyan Legion hailed from the southwestern Raziko State, situated farthest from the Tlaxcala people, therefore the hatred had not run deep. The samurais disdained killing commoners for war merits; thus, their spoils were minimal. Mihuoti had a clear conscience, but having to proceed along with the other two City-State Commanders, he came forward to offer advice.

"Highness, when facing archenemies in a Divine War, the wicked Tlaxcala, how could you show mercy? Given the chance, they would kill us Mexica with equally ruthless means!..."

"... fighting for land leads to war, and bloodshed fills the fields... Cities and nations are destroyed in an instant; such is the Warring States Period..."

Upon hearing the defense of the three commanders, Xiulote's gaze lowered. Many past memories surged into his heart, some starting to blur. His once tender heart seemed distant and nearly unreachable.

Central America is only about a million square kilometers, yet there are at least tens of millions of people. Compared to the two thousand million people during the Celestial Empire's Warring States Period, the states' populations are even more crowded. Tribes fight incessantly and have even developed the cruel tradition of human sacrifice.

The Eastward Holy War is a war of annihilation, targeting the archenemy Tlaxcala people. When the various state armies engage, they will show no mercy. The Northern Route Army's campaign will be even more brutal. In reality, if given a chance, the Tlaxcala would also show no mercy. In later years,

when they followed the Spaniards and took the Lake Capital City and Texcoco Lake District, they killed for months, almost exterminating the Mexica men in the Lake Region. The slaughter was so horrific that even the usually cruel conquerors were shocked.

"Phew!..."

After contemplating for a long time, Xiulote finally let out a deep sigh. His visage returned to calm; he gazed at the three kneeling commanders in a line and asked in a deep voice,

"Are all the heads you've taken of men?"

"Yes, Highness."

The three exchanged glances and responded affirmatively. Captured young women, capable of weaving, working, and bearing children, were usually considered part of the wealth. They weren't far from the southern states either, so the captured women could be taken back to the states to be given as rewards to the warriors. Only the able-bodied men, who could take up arms and fight, were to be completely eliminated...

"Phew... you may all rise now!"

Xiulote's expression remained unchanged; he did not reproach them further, only shook his head gently. Then, with a composed demeanor, he conveyed information unknown to the three commanders.

"... according to the High Priesthood's estimate, the Tepeyacac State has about four hundred thousand Tlaxcala people. Among them, less than one hundred thousand are in the eastern Tepeyacac City, which is the area around Mountain Peak City. In this fertile basin of two hundred li, there are more than three hundred thousand people."

Tepeyacac, in the Navajo language, is spelled Tepeyacac. "Tepe" is a shortened form of "tepetl," meaning "mountain," and "yacac" is a variant of "yacatl," meaning "mountaintop" or "nose tip." Combined, it means "mountaintop." Thus, Tepeyacac State's Tepeyacac City is the mountainous state's Mountain Peak City. The name indicates the terrain: towering mountains on either side surrounding a basin.

"The thirty thousand plus Tlaxcala people, calculated with three able-bodied men for every ten people, amount to just over ninety thousand able-bodied men, among whom only a little over ten thousand are warriors. The Southern Army, adding your spoils, has killed forty to fifty thousand able-bodied men and captured over twenty thousand! Considering unrecorded ambush killings, plunder, those who starved, and those who fled into the mountains... the remaining Tlaxcala tribes in this area are at most ten thousand able-bodied men, and no more than one hundred thousand women, children, and elderly..."

At this point, Xiulote gave the three commanders a profound look. The path of the army was blood-soaked. After three months of campaigns, the "Mountain Peak State" of four hundred thousand has at most only half its population left, and nineteen out of twenty able-bodied men are gone. This year's great battle means farming is impossible. During next spring's famine, thousands more will die...

Ephemeral thoughts flashed by. Xiulote gripped the scepter in his hand, issuing a faint command.

"As the army crosses this area, the slaughter is already extreme. The remaining Tlaxcala tribes are no longer a threat. Return and inform your city-state armies to cease the killings!"

"Ah? Highness, these wicked Tlaxcala..."

Coiled Python Moyahualo wanted to speak further, but Huashu Huochiku'a squinted, subtly pulling him back. Coiled Python was still too straightforward, why confront the esteemed Highness face-to-face? Once the armies disperse, each pacifying different regions, how they specifically act would depend on the commanders' decisions.

Yuyan Mihuoti lowered his head slightly, no longer speaking. The three city-state commanders rose, bowed to the Highness, and remained silent. A tense silence enveloped the tent.

Xiulote, with a stern face, looked at Coiled Python Moyahualo for a moment. His gaze seemed almost tangible, as if wanting to completely see through the other.

The Coiled Python Army hailed from the Vats teppek State, meaning "on the high mountain," thereby also called the Highland State.

The Mexica Highland State and the Tlaxcala Mountain Peak State directly shared the same mountain range, closely connected. Their conflicts had lasted nearly half a century, indicating profoundly deep hatred.

"The Kingdom of the Lake was recently established; the warriors possess land but lack agricultural slaves and concubines. The Tlaxcala speak a similar language to us; they are a good addition."

Xiulote pondered for a moment, softening his tone.

"Here's what we'll do! The Eastward Holy War will last a long time. The state armies' warriors, if they capture Tlaxcala prisoners, can bring them to the central camp to trade with the Kingdom of the Lake... and for every adult male Tlaxcala warrior, the kingdom is willing to give one quachtli in exchange, with no limit on the quantity!"

"Highness, is that true?! An adult warrior can be exchanged for one quachtli? No limit on quantity?!"

Huashu Huochiku's chubby face twitched, his voice slightly trembling, utterly incredulous.

Quachtli, a type of fabric standardized across the Alliance, was similar in size to a bolt of cloth from the Celestial Empire. The price of one quachtli ranged from 65 to 300 cocoa beans, averaging 200 cocoa beans. The purchasing power of cocoa beans was roughly three cocoa beans for a turkey egg or one tortilla. Ordinary common warriors had only two meals a day, each consisting of two tortillas. As for the price of one jin of gold dust, it was under 400 cocoa beans, usually no more than two bolts of cloth.

An adult warrior exchanged for one quachtli equaled half a jin of gold dust!

Even in the high-priced Lake Capital City, a serving female slave could only fetch two or three bolts of cloth, and demand for them was very limited. When war starts and large numbers of prisoners flood the capital, slave prices plummet, sometimes even lower than one quachtli. If unsold, slave owners had to bear the daily food cost for the slaves. If they starved to death, the owners wouldn't recoup any costs; they might even lose money.

Now, with the Eastward Holy War, Tlaxcala people were everywhere. City-state warriors could spend just two days capturing prisoners and bring them to the central camp to exchange for tangible wealth!

There was virtually no risk, no need to provide food, and only immense benefits. For the state commanders, selling prisoners at this price was hugely profitable!

Hearing such a promise, Coiled Python Moyahualo's eyes widened as he looked at the generous Highness. His eyes sparkled with greed.

"If prisoners could be sold for profit, the hatred between the state and the Tlaxcala could be set aside... after all, the Tlaxcala would be enslaved in the Kingdom of the Lake, with no chance to become enemies with the state again. The state has been in hardship for too long..."

"Yes! With this deal, it's entirely possible to recruit several thousand additional militiamen from the state to capture prisoners and sell them..."

Chapter 880: Chief Divine Witness, A Fair Exchange

"Indeed, witnessed by the Chief Divine!"

Xiulote glanced around at the three men and nodded affirmatively. The main force under his command was limited in strength, needing to besiege enemy fortresses and continuously launch attacks. The camp for defectors required heavy guards, and the samurais could not be dispersed everywhere, chasing after the scattered Tlaxcallan people in the mountains. Furthermore, the main force needed to remain pure to maintain discipline and combat power. Such security wars were best handed over to each of the city-state legions.

"...An able-bodied male, exchanged for a Cuauhtli. A woman of suitable age also for a Cuauhtli. As for children and elderly who can still farm, they are exchanged for half a Cuauhtli each. Just bring the captives to the logistics camp, and you get paid on the spot, with no limit on the number!"

"What! You even take children and the elderly?! The Kingdom of the Lake is indeed so wealthy!"

This time, even Yuyan Mihuoti was astonished. In the villages of this era, the so-called "elderly" naturally did not mean "old by sixty and exempt from duties" as in the Ming Dynasty of the same period. In Central America, the lifespans of commoners were extremely limited. The "elderly" in the village referred to those over thirty years old, who had the qualifications to drink alcohol. Therefore, Chiwaco, living past forty, was already a true "old militiaman."

"Yes, we take them all! Children are raised to farm at twelve, and though the elderly cannot fight, they can still farm for a few years."

Xiulote smiled slightly, generously promising once again.

"Certainly, the Kingdom of the Lake has traveled a thousand miles east, with not much Cuauhtli cotton cloth, but plenty of gemstones for exchange. According to the market price of the alliance, a Lake Gem is worth six to seven jins of gold dust, equivalent to twelve Cuauhtlis, or twelve able-bodied men... If we exchange gemstones, I can even offer you a discount, one gem for only ten people!"

"A Lake Gem for ten able-bodied captives?..."

Upon hearing this, Huashu Huochiku'a squinted his eyes, thought for a while, and shook his head.

"Your Highness, your price is not fair! So many Lake Gems flowing into the market would certainly lower the price of the gems..."

"Oh? Not fair?"

Xiulote laughed upon hearing this, looking at Huochiku'a's chubby face, and asked in a deep voice.

"Then won't so many slaves entering the market also lower their price?"

"...Uh!"

Huashu Huochiku'a's expression froze momentarily, not knowing how to respond. After some calculation, he stammered with a keen intuition.

"This, this is different! Slaves can work, even the commoners in the village need them. Only the nobility and priests appreciate gemstones..."

"Oh?"

Upon hearing this, Xiulote showed great interest, focusing on Huochiku'a as if discovering rare talent.

"Then, Huashu, let me ask you. Do commoners have the means to purchase and use slaves? Is not the wealth of the alliance controlled by the nobility and priests?... How is this unfair?"

"Ah! This..."

Huashu Huochiku'a was at a loss for words again. After a while, he managed to reply.

"No, Your Highness, it's still different. Slaves can work, producing food and fabrics, so the more the better... But gems don't reproduce! Their value is in their rarity..."

"Ha! Excellent, Huochiku'a, excellent!"

Xiulote laughed heartily, observed Huashu carefully for a while, and spoke with a smile.

"Then, you calculate, how many slaves for one Lake Gem is fair?"

"Hmm... um..."

Huochiku used his short, chubby fingers to calculate seriously for a moment, then hesitantly replied.

"Exchange... eight able-bodied men?"

"Fine! Let it be so. Witnessed by the Chief Divine! One Lake Gem for eight Cuauhtlis, exchanging for eight able-bodied men and women!"

Xiulote generously nodded. He looked at the other two and asked in a deep voice.

"Yuyan, Coiled Python, do you both agree?"

"Sure! Your Highness, thank you for your generosity!"

Coiled Python Moyahualo smiled and nodded repeatedly.

"I have six thousand captives, women and children, ready to trade with the kingdom! Once the trade goes smoothly, I'll immediately send people back and gather thousands more militiamen!"

"Very good! Take the captives directly to the logistics camp. These matters are managed by Quartermaster Begire, the hereditary noble of the Kingdom."

"Thank you, Your Highness!"

Years passed in the blink of an eye, the kingdom expanded rapidly, and the early followers rose in status, each holding high positions. Even the quartermaster Begire, who came from commoner samurai, had become a hereditary noble of the kingdom, surpassing a threshold that would normally take generations to break through!

"Your Highness, the Yuyan Legion currently has four thousand women and children to exchange. Going forward, we can capture more... However, we do not need so many gemstones."

Yuyan Mihuoti's expression flickered, gazing calmly at His Highness.

"These gemstones are merely adornments for nobles, even if they hold the divinity spoken of by the priests, it's only a solace after death. We Mexica warriors have always built our lives through battles! What we truly need are sharp and durable bronze weapons, and indestructible bronze armor!"

"Honorable Your Highness! The Kingdom of the Lake produces bronze equipment. Yuyan Legion is willing to trade sixty percent of the captives for weapons and armor!"

"Indeed, what the Yuyan commander said is reasonable! Our Huashu Legion also has five thousand women and children to exchange. We wish to trade half of the captives for bronze equipment!"

Huashu Huochiku's expression shifted, immediately following suit.

"Um... This..."

Coiled Python Moyahualo glanced at the two of them and gritted his teeth.

"Your Highness, the Coiled Python Legion wishes to trade forty percent of the captives for bronze weapons!"

"Hmm?"

Upon hearing the three's words, Xiulote raised an eyebrow, pondering silently. After all, the Mexica revered military achievements and martial prowess, emphasizing practicality. From the leaders' perspective, upgrading equipment and enhancing warrior combat power should be paramount, far above luxuries. Trading bronze equipment for captives also benefited the eastern expedition. However, the exchange price...

"Lords, you are all honorable nobles of the city-states, the most distinguished. You naturally know the scarcity of alliance bronze production..."

Xiulote's expression became serious, responding earnestly.

"The Kingdom of the Lake's bronze production, most must be tributed to the King. The majority of the remaining production is used to forge Thunderbolt's Divine Power Weapons. The process is very wasteful, with a success rate of one in ten... Only a small part is left for making weapons and armor..."

"..."

The three city-state commanders exchanged glances, showing disbelief. The Kingdom of the Lake had formed three to four copper armor warrior battalions, equipped with thousands of bronze great axes, yet claiming a bronze shortage?

"Ahem, Your Highness."

Huashu Huochiku's chubby face twitched, smiling as he replied.

"We are all members of the Southern Army. Our legions are warriors under your command! Enhancing legion combat power is to better follow your orders, to fight for the Chief Divine... The exchange price can be well negotiated..."

"Witnessed by the Chief Divine! Your Highness, Commander Yuyan is willing to fight for you. Please bestow some bronze equipment to each city-state!"

"Indeed! The Coiled Python Legion also begs..."

"Hmm... the three commanders all beg of me..."

Xiulote looked pained. After pondering for a long time, he finally sighed and reluctantly agreed.

"In that case, the kingdom will trade with each city-state! I always act fairly, a bronze long spear contains four to five taels of bronze, approximately half a jin of gold dust, equivalent to a Cuauhtli... So, one bronze long spear for an able-bodied captive!"

In fact, the kingdom's bronze production was rapidly increasing, not only for bronze armor and bronze cannons but even for some bronze farming tools. This could be seen from the continuous shipments of tin into the kingdom. Yet much of this bronze barely entered the alliance market, maintaining the exchange rate of bronze to gold at around one to one.

"Ah! Thank you for your generosity!"

Upon hearing this, Coiled Python Moyahualo nodded repeatedly, being the first to agree. Yuyan Mihuoti also nodded solemnly, bowing in salute.

"..."

Huashu Huochiku pursed his lips, nodding reluctantly. He originally wanted to argue that there was a margin of difference between half a jin of gold dust and one Cuauhtli, trying to secure more benefits for everyone.

"Oh! These people who don't understand arithmetic..."

"Your Highness, how would the exchange be for bronze cloth armor?"

Yuyan Mihuoti's eyes shined brightly, eagerly asking. He had long envied the bronze armor of the kingdom's legions, recognizing its importance as any warrior would!

"Hmm... bronze cloth armor..."

Xiulote pondered for a while, then answered with a smile.

"The kingdom's standard medium cloth armor uses sixteen jins of bronze and nine jins of cotton, totaling twenty-five jins. The raw materials alone are worth forty to fifty Cuauhtlis. Moreover, crafting armor is not easy, requiring skilled artisans thirty days of hard work... All considered, one set of medium cloth armor, for a hundred able-bodied captives!"

"One set of medium cloth armor, for a hundred able-bodied captives?"

Hearing this price, Huashu Huochiku's pupils contracted. By this count, his five thousand captives could only exchange for fifty sets of bronze cloth armor?

"Your Highness, this price..."

"Yes. That's the price, non-negotiable!"

Xiulote smiled faintly, calmly and unequivocally.

"In reality, the kingdom has only five hundred surplus sets of medium armor to exchange for fifty thousand able-bodied captives. Once traded, there'll be none left!"

Joking aside, bronze armor was a monopolized commodity of the kingdom, with the capital city's craftsman camps just starting to imitate. If not for them being alliance legions under his Southern Army command... Xiulote wouldn't even consider trading them bronze armor.

"Alright! Your Highness, it's settled! I will immediately send captives to exchange for bronze weapons and armor!"

Yuyan Mihuoti bowed his head, fist to chest, and made a deep salute.

"Praise the Chief Divine! May the alliance's eastern expedition succeed, and may the Chief Divine bless us!"

Huashu Huochiku opened his mouth, sighed, then joined Moyahualo, bowing respectfully.

"May the eastern expedition succeed, and may the Chief Divine bless us!"

"Very well! The eastern expedition will surely succeed, and the Chief Divine will bless the Mexica people!"

Xiulote's expression was solemn. He straightened his back, fist to chest, and bowed in return.

"The military council is concluded! Unite and crush the Tlaxcallan people!"

"Praise the King, praise Your Highness!"

The three commanders responded in unison, then hurriedly turned and left the tent, heading for their respective camps.

Xiulote watched their figures gradually disappear outside the tent, and a smile slowly curled up at the corner of his mouth. Then, the king extended his hand, unrolling a huge map of the world from the desk. He leaned forward, tracing a long line amidst the dense markings with his finger, spanning a thousand miles of mountains and rivers!