

## Civilization 921

### Chapter 921: The King's Cold Fury

"Ah! Ah! I gaze at the sun in the sky, I see the cocoa trees crashing down, I see the reversal of noble and base! Sacred blood flows everywhere, the humble moth people rise high!... Ah! Ah! The end of the cycle approaches in darkness, it is the twilight of all gods, the doom of the Divine Descendants! Demons of the volcano rule the land, without the sacred priest's guidance, the world of death is about to arrive! Endless crimson, endless sacrifice, skulls piled into hills, corpses converge into an ocean..."

"Oh! The world of death?"

Xiulote gave a cold laugh, the killing intent in his eyes was terrifying.

Watching the dying struggles of the priests of the Holy City, he felt a sense of pleasure arise in his heart, and a smile curled at his lips. However, it was far from enough, far from enough!

"That was my dearest relative, the person who personally taught and raised me in this world... Now, he is dead, dead here... All of you must be buried with him!"

The king's heart was now firm as blood-red corundum, cold and hard as the glacier of the Divine Mountain. He glanced at the nearly sinking sunset, unwilling to wait, eagerly waving the command flag.

"Longbow trusted aide, move in and shoot!"

A thousand Longbow Warriors donned Copper Armor, holding longbows, quickly marching to within sixty steps of the Inner City wall. Sparse Feathered Arrows shot down from the city towers, but hardly pierced armor. The Bow Samurai slightly lowered their heads, tilted their Greatbows, aimed briefly, and suddenly shot!

"Swoosh swoosh swoosh!"

The fierce rain of arrows whistled away, falling among the Defending Army on the city towers, bringing forth a chorus of wails. Dozens of Cholula Warriors fell dead with arrows on the spot, several priests also died instantly.

The Elder Priests became instantly chaotic, retreating hurriedly from the city towers under the escort of family warriors. The priest leader Petl also stopped the sacrificial dance, was lifted by family warriors, and escorted away. Amid the crisscrossing arrows on the walls, only the war elder Wezil remained. He wore Leather Armor, held a Great Shield, and tried hard to stand firm on the city towers shielded by numerous warriors.

After ten rounds of arrow rain, the sunset fell behind the mountains, signaling the end of the day. Xiulote ordered a thousand Imperial Guards to seal off the walls, patrolling through the night, wary of the Holy City priests' escape. The remaining warriors lit fires, encamped to rest outside the city. Hundreds of Tekos vanguard began constructing ladders, restless even for a moment.

The long night swiftly passed. On the Great Pyramid, the priest sanctuary remained bright through the night, first filled with the laughter of Elder Priests, the giggles and cries of young girls, then suddenly the screams of women, the wild laughter of elders, without knowing what happened.

Xiulote remained calm and indifferent. Regardless of desperation, whatever these so-called "All Gods" indulged in, the only greeting for them was destined death!

The next day, the Yu Yan Legion and the Guajili Legion simultaneously sent envoys to report to the throne. The vanguard of both armies had entered Cholula's outer city, capturing hundreds of fleeing City-State Nobles and priests.

The king coldly waved the red flag, and beneath the pyramid walls outside, hundreds of "noble" corpses were added. Then, Longbow Warriors immediately stepped out, shooting at the seven-meter-high city towers. Imperial Guard Warriors erected a few ladders and began the first day of siege.

Two thousand Cholula Warriors shouted slogans of the Divine, shooting arrows, throwing javelins, hurling stones, fighting, dying. Their numbers rapidly dwindled, with five to six hundred perishing on the first day. Yet, under the baptism of lifelong faith, the Defending Army's will remained tremendously tenacious, showing no sign of collapse.

The king's face was like an iceberg, continuing to reorganize legions, strengthening arrow suppression, working day and night to craft ladders. More and more Mexica legions gathered, and most areas of the outer city had been pacified.

All Elder Priests except for the war elder had not appeared on the city towers. The colossal and towering Great Pyramid had Divine Smoke wafting day and night, constant revelry resounded like a Divine Kingdom detached from the secular world.

On the third day, three Mexica legions simultaneously stormed the city from three sides. Cholula warriors held on bitterly for half a day, finally losing the fiercest South City at sunset. Shortly after, the East City's Defending Army also crumbled, Black Wolf Toltec, with reddened eyes, personally put on armor, charged into the city, headed for the Great Pyramid.

Over ten thousand Mexica Warriors flooded into the Inner City, and brutal slaughter ensued. Horrified cries erupted into hopeless wails, wails transformed to wounded screams, screams became dying groans, groans eventually fell silent... Another long and cold night descended, merciless darkness surged from all sides, covering all corpses, drowning boundless crimson.

Xiulote lowered his eyes, sitting cross-legged outside the city. He quietly gazed at the slaughter within, the death he yearned for in his heart finally satisfied by life. It wasn't until the fourth day at dawn, when morning light illuminated the sky, that he stood up tall.

#### Chapter 922: The King's Sacrifice

The noon sun ascended to the zenith, casting down a scorching blaze. The sky was half clear, half cloudy, like death burning with fierce fire. And within the inner city of Cholula, charred and crimson traces were everywhere, as were the corpses of the Divine Descendants and the scattered noble Feather Crowns.

Tens of thousands of Mexica warriors poured into the inner city, cleansing all resistance throughout the night. Xiulote donned armor and helmet, walking along the wide and desolate streets of the inner city, guarded by two hundred Armored Personal Guards, toward the towering Great Pyramid marvel.

On the Avenue of Heaven, he tramped over the bones of the Divine Descendants; before the Temple, the dust of melted gold and silver burned. The King did not glance sideways, marching step by step, over the corpses and blood, through gold, silver, and ash, ascending the nearly sixty meters high Cholula Great Pyramid. Behind him, twenty Jaguar Warriors with bowed heads carried a newly crafted wooden coffin, cautiously climbing to the summit.

On the wide summit of the pyramid, flames still burned. The once magnificent sanctuary of All Gods had been mostly consumed by fire, and the majestic statues of the gods were fragmented and dilapidated. The pavilion's stone columns tilted and collapsed, gold and silver gems hung in tatters upon the ground, decorated feather tapestries burned to ashes. In the corner of the sanctuary, dozens of Saintess corpses, bearing the marks of elder abuse, were piled to one side, thrown into the fire by warriors one by one.

The pungent smell of burning wafted on the wind, like the elegy of souls. And the glaring bloodstains permeated the summit, resembling sketches of the dead. Amidst the songs and drawings of death were the Divine Descendants of the Holy City, the captured sacrifices, over ten venerated Elder Priests.

"Your Highness! I, Black Wolf Torc, have captured Petl, the priest leader of Cholula City! It was he who plotted against the High Priest!"

Black Wolf Torc's eyes were red, like a killing hound, swinging his right fist forcefully, fiercely striking Petl's face.

"Ah! Ooh..."

The noble priest leader's elegant clothes were tattered, the Feather Crown askew, knocked to the ground with a punch. Writhing in pain, he groaned in distress, like a fox caught by a hunting dog. Blood oozed from his lips, several teeth fell out, and he pleaded miserably and hoarsely.

"I am the noble... divine... priest leader!... I am a descendant of Toltec nobility... do not disgrace me!..."

"Bang!"

Upon hearing this, Black Wolf Torc flew into a rage, delivering another punch that knocked out Petl's front teeth.

"Pah! How dare you call yourself Toltec, tarnishing my name!..."

Petl's Feather Crown fell to the ground, revealing disarrayed graying hair. His nose and mouth were skewed, his face bloody, all traces of his usual noble demeanor vanished, as disheveled as a plucked turkey. The priest leader glared venomously at the sturdy Black Wolf Torc, his swollen old face twitching.

"You? You are not the civilized Toltec, but a barbaric Chichimec!... Ah!"

Torc glared wide-eyed, delivering another punch. His roar was like thunder.

"Ha? You shameless old thief! You wretched old dogs! When I caught you, you were still disgracefully reveling, sucking down Divine Smoke on women! Pah, you are the real barbaric Chichimec! No, you are worse than the Chichimec, lacking even the slightest warrior courage, resorting only to poisons and intrigue behind others' backs!"

"Hah!... Nava gods!..."

Upon hearing, Elder Priest Wezil closed his eyes and sighed deeply.

Of all the Elder Priests, only he wore Leather Armor, fought bravely at the city wall, exhausted and captured. But most of the elders around him were dressed shabbily, even some unclothed, fighting bravely on the bed and caught without resistance. With such behavior, one can hardly blame the Mexica for their disdain. After centuries of hereditary indulgence, corruption had spread from top to root.

Xiulote stood at the summit, carefully placing his grandfather's coffin at the most sacred altar.

The ancient altar stones were mottled, extending from the Toltec Era, inherited over six centuries, as the foundation of the Nava Faith. Today, this sacred altar shall host the most esteemed sacrifice, offering the last Toltec Divine Descendants to commemorate a laughingly deceased elder.

The sun was fierce, clouds partly shrouded, the sky a changing wonder, the earth a desolate fading. The King removed his face-covering helmet, revealing a cold and hard face akin to a glacier, with still blood-red eyes. He slowly opened the wide coffin, silently watched the reposeful grandfather. Then, he grasped the Obsidian Sacrificial Dagger, stepping before the Cholula priest leader, old fox Petl.

"Xiu... lote! I didn't, kill your grandfather! Xutel, committed suicide..."

Petl with disheveled hair, blood at the corner of his lips, looked toward the approaching King, filled with bitterness, desperately cried out.

"This is a conspiracy, no, an overt plan! Mexica's overt plan, causing the High Priest to die here! You, you! So malicious!..."

"Suicide?... You say, grandfather abandoned me, and committed suicide here?... Haha!"

Upon hearing, Xiulote coldly stared at Petl, his lips gradually curved. Then, he burst into laughter, hearty yet mournful, even shedding tears.

"Petl, at this moment, are you still thinking of living?"

"..."

Old fox Petl fell silent. After a while, he stood up arduously, staggered toward the sacred altar, reluctantly demanded.

"No! Let me take a look, just take a look, if you are truly dead!..."

Torc drew his Bronze Axe, reversed the blunt side, about to swing. Xiulote, however, raised his hand to stop him, merely following quietly behind the priest leader.

The elderly priest leader grasped his last thread of hope, looked toward the coffin close at hand. At once, he saw the familiar face with closed eyes and a smile in the coffin. At that instant, a myriad of emotions surged within him, finally manifesting as a grim smile and a lamenting shout.

"Xutel... you are so ruthless!..."

"Petl, before the sacrifice, do you have any last words to leave?"

Xiulote stood next to Petl without expression, adhering to the sacrificial tradition, awaiting final words.

"I..."

Facing death, old fox Petl glanced around, tears trickling from his eyes. Reluctantly bitter and resentful, he raised his head, gazing at the peculiar sky, whispering in despair and plea.

"I want to live, I still want to live another ten years!..."

Xiulote shook his head lightly. He waved his hand forcefully, and five Imperial Guard warriors strode forward. They grabbed the Priest leader's limbs and head, pinning him onto the Sacrificial Stone on the altar. Then, the King pulled open the old fox's clothes, aimed at the heart, and raised the dagger with merciless steadiness.

"Wait, wait a minute!"

The old fox, Petl, turned deathly pale. He struggled weakly but was firmly held by the warriors, crying out in vain.

"Your Highness Xiulote! King Aweit promised me! He promised to spare my life!... Ah! Ah..."

Xiulote squinted his eyes and fiercely brought down the dagger. At this moment, his resolve was so steadfast, his hatred so deep, that not even the northern King could stop him!

"Rip..."

Bright red gushed instantly, warm and splattering, even reaching the King's face, entering his mouth. He lowered his gaze, savoring the sweet taste of revenge, his heart filled with indescribable satisfaction! Then, he raised his left hand, grasped the old and throbbing vibrancy, and forcefully cast it into the fire.

"Ha ha! Hahaha!"

The smell of charring mixed with bloody air rushed in, leaving one in a daze. The King stared at his bright red left hand, gazing at Petl's suddenly dropped head, and burst into hearty laughter.

"Ha ha! Come, next one!"

The Imperial Guard warriors bowed their heads in salute, dragging the dead Priest leader beside the High Priest's coffin, positioning him in a kneeling posture. Fresh red quickly spread, soaking the black coffin as if it were a blood ritual. Subsequently, they moved towards the desperately wailing Elder Priests, dragging one out again, just like dragging a turkey to be slaughtered.

"Ah!..."

The dying scream was terrifying and piercing, like a copper pin piercing through a throat, making one's scalp tingle. But soon, that sound abruptly ceased, leaving only the gurgle of flowing water and the crackle of vibrant flames.

"Ha ha! Good! Next one!..."

The King's laughter was fierce and joyful. The solid jasper drank blood, becoming ever more dark red and brilliant; the cold glacier, drenched in life, finally began to melt slowly. His eyes red, he kept swinging his arm, bringing down the sacrificial dagger, ending noble lives, savoring the marvel of revenge!

"Again! Next one! Haha!..."

One by one, the esteemed Elder Priests were brought to the altar, in the ancient sacred ground, to meet their destined fate! Whether they pleaded, remained calm, cursed or roared, there was only one outcome, and that was the sacrificial death!

Xiulote no longer questioned, only laughed as he performed the sacred sacrifice. Each time he brought down the dagger, he would glance at the elders' faces, seeing their shifting expressions freeze and

settle, witnessing the true arrival of death's verdict. He watched as the bodies in front of the coffin grew in number, prostrating beside his grandfather's remains, bowing in penitence with their lives. And the black coffin had already been stained thoroughly with blood, turning into the darkest crimson...

"Ha ha! Ha ha! Come, only three left!"

Xiulote laughed freely, as if savoring the sweetest spring water. Soon, the elderly Yoluowa knelt before the coffin, followed by the Elder Priest, Queo, brought in from the prison. Lastly, it was the War Elder Wezil. He fought bravely until capture, earning the Mexica warriors' admiration for his courage, thus he lived till the end.

Seeing familiar acquaintances, Xiulote paused slightly. The redness in his eyes had faded significantly, and his stern face showed slight change. He gazed softly at the calmly awaiting Wezil, asking solemnly.

"Wezil, do you have any last words?"

"..."

Wezil opened his eyes, pursing his lips. With a final hint of hope, he inquired softly.

"Your Highness Xiulote, the city's twelve Priestly families, the thousands of noble offspring... can their bloodline continue?"

Xiulote was silent for a moment, then shook his head calmly and mercilessly. He spoke lightly, yet it was the final judgment.

"...When the God of Death descends, everything will fall into dead silence. The old ancient tree has completely decayed; it's time to burn it away."

"...Alas!"

Wezil's face turned ashen, closing his eyes. Before the sacrificial dagger came down, he opened his mouth one last time, praying quietly.

"Oh Nava Gods high above the clouds!... Ah..."

The prayer abruptly ceased, just like the lifeforce of the Cholula divine descendants, dissipating in the early summer wind. The last Elder's body was dragged to the front of the coffin, kneeling before the dreaming High Priest. In this sanctuary of all Gods, the twelve Elder Priests finally all took their places, surrounding the dark red coffin, like a confession for the fall of the divine!

"Hahaha! Hahaha! Grandfather, did you see it? I avenged you!"

Xiulote stepped before the coffin, treading the bright red path, laughing aloud! His laughter was like unbridled thunder, echoing throughout the Great Pyramid, reaching the skies above, carrying majestic martial prowess!

At this moment, behind him was the blazing sanctuary, tens of thousands of bowing warriors, and thousands of fallen stiff corpses. Before him was elders' bones and blood, the High Priest's corpse and coffin, the cloud-covered sky, the blood-covered earth, and the extraordinary spectacle spanning millennia!

He gazed at the doomsday scene, his eyes gradually clearing, revealing a trace of unquenchable sorrow. And his hands finally turned red, just like his hardened heart! In front of his deceased grandfather, he finally took the last step, severing the ties of youth and childhood, becoming a colder yet stronger King!

Beneath the overcast sky, the High Priest lay quietly inside the coffin. He faced Xiulote, his expression gentle and gratified. Bright red soaked into the coffin, staining his robes, forming mysterious patterns, like final whispers.

"...Xiulote, my child. My life has reached its end... and you are fated to carry on, crowned as king!..."

Chapter 923: The King's Ritual Dance

The red sun sinks in the west, dyeing the clouds at the zenith, descending upon a crimson realm. The Samurai gather, kneeling on the blood-stained soil, awaiting the final sacrificial rites. The accompanying

Priest plays the clay flute, and the desolate, distant music echoes between heaven and earth. Xiulote solemnly dons the ceremonial dress, chanting clearly and melodiously, guiding his grandfather's spirit to the Divine Kingdom.

Moments later, the blazing Sacred Fire ignites at the pinnacle of the Great Pyramid. The flames gradually grow fierce, licking at the High Priest's coffin, and thin blue smoke rises. Dozens of priests sing in unison, praying for the Chief Divine's guidance and bestowing the blessing of the living.

The Mexica Alliance retains ancient tribal traditions, similar to the Tribes of the Wilderness, venerating holy cremation. The smoke and ash from the burning body signifies the soul's journey to the Divine Kingdom. Naturally, in this era, due to the lower burning temperature, all cremations leave bones, for the bereaved to lay their grief.

Having finished his prayers, Xiulote stands solemnly before the High Priest's coffin. He watches his beloved kin slowly vanish in the fire. The fierce flames devour his grandfather's silver hair, consuming the High Priest's robe, then everything fades into a blur. His grandfather's smile silently departs, living on only in his memory...

The King's calm face reveals intense reluctance and sorrow.

Parting in life and death, life's inevitabilities, always rend the heart. His heart is suddenly gripped, feeling an unprecedented palpitation and pain. Two streams of clear tears slowly flow from his eyes, soaking his garments. Intense emotions surge in his heart, yet unlike the laughter and shouts he used to express, they are a profound lamentation and yearning. At this moment, he finally accepts his grandfather's departure, but there are many words yearning to be spoken.

"Thud... thud... thud..."

The forlorn flute sound echoes, like the long wind of the Wilderness, like an ancient call. Xiulote raises the obsidian stone dagger, in front of the burning coffin, in the blood pool of the deceased, dances the funeral sacrificial dance, and sings the plaintive farewell song.

"I see the world as falling leaves, drifting with impermanence, impossible to retain!..."

I see love like the morning dew ascending, the moon reflected in water, untouchable!..."

Piercing yearning, bearing long memories, surges onto the King's heart, moistening his eyes. He gazes at the ascending blue smoke before him, as if watching the departed soul silently ascend to the Nine Heavens. He dances the sacrificial dance, shouting passionately, cries of blood and heartbreak.

"...Time is like water, gone never to return,

the departed are like the wind, turned to smoke in an instant,

a single departure, never to meet again!..."

At this point, the King slightly bows his head, tears streaming non-stop. Hearing the mourning sound, all the generals weep. Black Wolf lies prostrate, wailing loudly without end. Nashu covers her mouth, sobbing softly. Bertade closes his eyes, tears slipping past the corners. Yu Yan sighs with grief, bowing his head tearfully in tribute...

"...Burdened to travel mountain roads, hesitating falls to the valley floor..."

Xiulote's voice gradually lowers. The path of the King is destined to be both perilous and lonely, can only be climbed alone. He had long understood, but always hoped these days would come a little later...

"...Sitting in the valley, gazing at the sky, stars splendid, wind whispering..."

Drizzling rain falls from the sky, hitting the King's face, mixing with tears, like blessings from the Divine Kingdom. And the merciless fire burns, a pillar of black smoke rises, connecting with the darkened sky, like a stairway into the netherworld. Amongst water and fire, smoke and cloud, the King raises his head to the sky, dancing the final sacrificial dance, bidding farewell to the departing spirit.

"...Plum rain tears like dew, maple leaves laugh knowing decay.

Cherry blossoms return late, not seeing the other shore call.

Call to the other shore, the sky dark-dark. People restless, insects fly.

Mayflies morning and evening, cicada cries mournfully. Lanterns in the reeds, clouds high on the moon..."

The burning pyre gradually dwindles, nearly burnt out, only a few remnants of bones left. Xiulote steps forward, silently gazing at the last traces left by his grandfather. In his heart, there is endless desolation, with the sorrow of eternal parting intertwined, transforming into a final soft chant.

"...Clouds high and indistinct, moon descends to bury in fire. Childhood dreams warm the heart, seen only again in dreams..."

"Grandfather, I will be well. You in the Divine Kingdom, also must be well... Should you have leisure, come to your grandson's dreams, once more to meet me..."

Having spoken, Xiulote kneels, respectfully, and bows nine times towards the remains. Then, he carefully collects his grandfather's remains, placed into an imperishable silver box.

The sunset gradually sets, casting the last faint light through the clouds on the horizon. The King holds the silver box, gazing at the dim dome, then glancing at the largely burnt sanctuary of All Gods, giving a deep and calm order.

"Royal Decree: Imperial Guard Legion, search the entire city. Count the commoners in the city, escort them back to Water Valley City in groups of a hundred! All captured Divine Descendants, Nobility and Sacrifices, sacrifice them all on the spot! Order defectors to bury bodies to prevent plague. Deploy veteran warriors, search Priest Mansion, take the legacy and Divine Objects..."

"The rest of the generals, count the legion, gather the Samurai, set out tomorrow. Within fifty miles outside the city, all villages and townships, burn to the ground! All able-bodied men and women, relocate them! If there is resistance, kill them all!!"

"As you command! Your Highness, your will is the life of mortals!"

All generals prostrate, salute in unity, show utmost respect, not daring to show the slightest disobedience.

Xiulote slightly nods, takes one final look at the burning sanctuary of All Gods. Then, holding the silver box, stepping on the blood-red sunset, descends the towering Great Pyramid, never looking back.

A day later, the Mexica legion moves out in force, conducting a large search of the whole city of Cholula, then splitting forces to spread out, sweeping the entire Cholula region. Soon, columns of black smoke rise under the dim sky, merging into a single line on the horizon. Dozens of villages and towns blaze fiercely, tens of thousands of Telascallan wail, driven by Mexica warriors, migrating fifty miles southwest to Water Valley City.

Black smoke billows into the sky, boundless blood red descends. The Black Wolf's royal banner moves again, escorted by thousands of the Imperial Guard Legion, returning to the southern stronghold. And behind the southward marching army lies the fiercely burning City of the Gods, the Holy City of Cholula.

"In early June, the High Priest died in the Holy City of Cholula, murdered by the city's priests. The King, grieving and angry, attacked and destroyed Cholula City, set it ablaze. Slaughtering the Divine Descendant Nobility, warriors, along with militia and able-bodied men, totaling twenty thousand. The bloodlines of twelve priestly families were extinguished. Subsequently, the Southern Army ravaged a fifty-mile radius, capturing the population for half a month, then killed a total of ten thousand nobility, warriors, and militia. Burned the Cholula Federation, and captured able-bodied men and women, totaling one hundred and twenty thousand..."

Within half a month, from Cholula Federation's two hundred thousand populace, thirty thousand were slaughtered, one hundred and twenty thousand captured, leaving only four or five thousand old and weak scattered. The once prosperous and affluent Cholula Federation was emptied, transformed into a desolate, lifeless territory..."

The news of the Holy City of Cholula's destruction, like a meteor falling from the sky, suddenly strikes beneath the Smoke Peak Divine Mountain, raising a sky full of dust. Countless messengers from various nations run swiftly, carrying terrifying reports, spreading like waves. And all the Nawa Departments upon hearing this are all panic-stricken and terrified! The name of the God of Death spreads across the world, even known eastward to the Rainforest, by the Maya tribes.

## Chapter 924: Imperial Decree

The sky hung low, heavy clouds of the rainy season shrouded the heavens, obscuring the midday sun. Lake Texcoco lacked its usual shimmering waves, only small boats hurriedly departing, evading the possible downpour. In the expansive Lake Capital City, there was neither wind nor rain, as if frozen in the deep, silent earth. The magnificent Great Temple cast its shadow over the Heavenly River, standing still like the mountains, silently floating like the Dark Sea.

The towering Chief Palace was located next to the magnificent Great Temple. The divine drapes hung low without wind, twisting the figure of the Chief Divine, leaning against the wall. The divine murals were dull and dim, blurring the visage of the Chief Divine, sinking deeply into the corners... Everything today seemed to carry a dark omen.

"Has the sky...darkened?"

No one knew how much time had passed when the Elder, sleeping in the Dark Sea, slowly opened his cloudy eyes and gazed at the dim, stagnant sky. Although he lay on the soft, warm cotton bed, he felt no comfort, no temperature. This body was too old, almost departing from his soul; it was only barely held together by his last breath.

Shadow Cevali stood silently beside the Elder, holding a ceramic pot, rare worry etched on his face. The Great Hall was silent, only the breath of impending death and the whispers of decay lingered. Only after a long while did clarity return to the Elder's eyes, and he noticed the shadow beside him.

"You...are back?"

"Yes, Elder."

The shadow bowed his head, saluting his master, hiding all expressions.

"How is it?"

"The High Priest in Cholula City drank the potion...some trusted aides escorted his body southward to His Highness Xiulote's camp. The remaining trusted aides raised troops in Cholula, setting fires for revenge."

The shadow replied solemnly, without any emotion. This was the last news he received before leaving.

"The High Priest...has left, huh..."

The Elder nodded slowly, his expression changing slightly. With the shadow's service, he sat up slowly, gazing at the ominous and majestic Great Temple. This marvel, barely a century old, the center of Alliance divine authority, once again lost its ruler sitting high on the Throne of the Gods, and was about to lose its master who was nearly of the same age.

"Hmm, not bad...Little Xutel, according to agreement, you left a few days before...now, you should have arrived, right? Did you greet everyone for me? I'll be coming soon too..."

The Elder lowered his eyes and muttered softly for a while. Then, he looked at the shadow and extended his hand.

"Cevali, give me a bottle of Vitality Potion."

"..."

Cevali was silent for a while, then took out a potion with a red ceramic cover, tremblingly handing it to the Elder. This kind of potion, using potent herbs, overdrew vitality to maintain a period of wakefulness and acuity. But with the Elder's body, drinking such a potion...

"Shadow, send some envoys to summon the Elder Priests of the High Priesthood, as well as my son Cacamatzin. Hmm, notify Elder Uguel first."

The Elder held the potion without drinking it, a faint smile appearing on his face. He calmly gave a few orders, then lowered his old eyelids, closing his eyes to gather his spirit.

Soon, the envoys left the palace hastily with the most urgent decree, scattered far and wide. In about three or four quarters, Elder Priest Uguel was the first to arrive, panting heavily, with a bamboo basket on his back. His bamboo basket contained towels, fans, and some attendant items.

"Elder, Uguel greets you!"

Uguel prostrated on the ground, respectfully kowtowing several times to the Elder. His heart was pounding, and sweat adorned his brow.

The Elder's expression was calm, quietly watching the slightly chubby Elder Priest for a while. Only when the other cautiously raised his eyes to sneak a peek did he smile faintly.

"Uguel, stand up! Put the bamboo basket aside. You are to become the leader of the High Priesthood; carrying these things doesn't quite fit the image."

"What...Elder? I am to...lead the High Priesthood?"

Upon hearing the second half, Uguel was shocked, his mouth opening wide. He looked up dazedly at the smiling Elder, his words stuttering entirely.

"This...I...You...High Priest?...This, ah?!"

"High Priest Xutel has already been murdered by the Elder Priests in Cholula City."

The Elder lowered his eyes, calmly narrating the facts.

"The affairs of the Capital City High Priesthood will be entrusted to you from now on."

"Ah! I, no, I, that, I..."

Uguel stammered, completely unaware of what to say, but the Elder seemed to understand. He shook his head expressionlessly, speaking blandly.

"This is my decree. Soon, when all the Elder Priests arrive, I will formally announce it. You should prepare yourself..."

"...Understood, Elder."

Uguel prostrated himself on the ground, kowtowing several more times before standing up, putting down the bamboo basket, and standing confusedly aside. High Priest Xutel suddenly died, and he was chosen by the Elder to be the next High Priest?

"...Uh, am I not dreaming?..."

Uguel was detached, dazedly thinking for a while, increasingly doubtful. He reached out with his chubby hand and pinched his large thigh hard. Then, his face suddenly twitched, letting out a low, painful cry.

"Ah..."

Ten-some pairs of eyes simultaneously turned over. Uguel looked at everyone, blinked, and promptly closed his mouth without speaking.

The spacious Chief Great Hall, where everyone originally bore sorrowful expressions and held tears in their eyes, was now disrupted by Uguel's cry. The Sun God faction's Elder Priest Tonaltliu raised his eyebrows, the Fire God faction's Elder Priest Tekuis widened his eyes, the War God faction's Elder Priest Azar gritted his teeth, the Chief God faction's Elder Priest Acap lowered his eyes, the Royal Family branch's Elder Priest Como's lips curled, and the elder Cacamatzin looked at him before worryingly looking at the Elder...Apparently, at some point, all the dignitaries wielding actual power in the Lake Capital City had arrived.

"...Yes, that is it. The High Priest has already gone to the Divine Kingdom."

The Elder's expression remained unchanged, but his face was unusually flushed, his eyes gleamed with vigor. He gazed around at everyone, his weary yet heavy gaze lowering, pressing all the Elder Priests into respectful bows. And beside him, there lay an unnoticed empty ceramic pot with a red cover.

"Elder Priest Uguel has presided over clerical affairs for many years, experienced, and meticulous, never having any blunders. He achieved great feats in pacifying the Texcoco City-State rebellion. Subsequently, he went north to spearhead the conversion ceremonies at Xilotepec with notable success...I feel assured entrusting the High Priesthood of the Alliance to him."

The Elder spoke many words indifferently and then glanced at the slightly trembling Uguel, nodding calmly and affirmatively to issue the decree.

"Starting today, Elder Priest Uguel will assume the position of High Priest!"

The Chief Great Hall fell into silence, a pin could be heard. The Elder Priests looked at one another, with shifts in their expressions.

The esteemed Sun God Elder Tonaltiliu deeply furrowed his brows, almost knitted into a single line. The straightforward War God Elder Azar turned red, wanting to speak but fell silent under the Elder's gaze. Meanwhile, the young Chief God Elder Acap lowered his head, concealing all desires behind a gentle face.

Sun God, War God, Chief God, these are the three most important divine offices. The three Elders were also the strongest contenders for High Priest. At this moment, none dared to voice objections, and the position of High Priest was thus ordained!

"Very well."

Moments later, the Elder faintly smiled and ordered solemnly.

"Since this is the case, you all, here, should pay grand tribute to the new High Priest!"

The Great Hall fell silent again. The slightly chubby Uguel stood before everyone, expressionless. The Elder Priests glanced at one another and finally knelt down in succession, bowing their heads in salute to the new High Priest.

"Chief God bless! Greetings to you, High Priest Uguel!"

Seeing the many Elder Priests kneeling before him, Uguel's entire being was shaken, as an unprecedented feeling enveloped his heart, making all his pores relax and open. At that moment, he gazed at the somber sky, feeling that the low-hanging clouds were gifts from the Chief God, adding confection to the black pudding!

In mere breaths, Uguel's face showed a joyful blush. He wanted to raise the Divine Staff to respond, but hadn't brought it. Thinking quickly, he slowly raised his chubby hand, drawing the 'Round' character of the Sun Hummingbird, and shouted loudly.

"Chief God bless!!"

#### Chapter 925: The Elder's Arrangement, The High Priesthood's Checks and Balances

The skies hung low and heavy, and the grand hall was solemn and expansive. The light of the sun was swallowed, leaving only a faint halo. The slightly chubby Uguel's face was flushed, he raised one hand high, looked at the saluting crowd, and a wide grin spread across his lips. Then, with a flicker of expression, he looked towards the calm Elder, praying devoutly.

"May the Chief Divine protect us! May the Elder stay healthy and forever shield the Alliance!"

In the Chief Great Hall, praising the immortal elder is a duty. All the Elders bowed their heads and prayed together to the long-lived man who was like a divine spirit.

"May the Chief Divine protect us! May the Elder stay healthy and forever shield the Alliance!"

The Elder nodded lightly, a slight smile appearing on his exceedingly rosy face. His gaze was calm and profound, witnessing the vicissitudes of the world and countless rises and falls.

At this moment, he gazed at the many Elders with diverse thoughts, pausing on each face as if he could completely see through every person. This elderly man who had held the Alliance for more than half a century was quietly contemplating the situation after his death. After pondering for a moment, recalling a story he had heard from someone, he spoke again, deciding the new power structure of the Alliance.

"Uguel will be the High Priest, with an additional title as Elder Priest. Three additional Deputy Elder Priests will be appointed, together with the High Priest, forming the Elder Priest Council to cast votes and decide the major affairs of the Alliance! The Elder Priest will have two votes, and the three Deputy Elder Priests will each have one vote, requiring three votes to carry forth a matter!"

Upon hearing this, the expressions of many Elders suddenly changed. To add Deputy Elder Priests on top of the Elder Priest and cast votes to decide the major affairs of the Alliance? Such a method is common in the tribal elders' council but unprecedented in the Alliance's High Priesthood.

To achieve three votes means a united front of the three Deputy Elder Priests, or the High Priest plus one Deputy Elder Priest. These pivotal positions of the three Deputy Elder Priests...

"The three Deputy Elder Priests are..."

The Elder pondered for a while, casting his gaze over the breathless crowd. His arrangement left a plan for the ambitious Elders to share the power of the High Priest, assist in handling religious affairs, and try to resolve conflicts openly.

"...Elder Tonaltiliu of the Sun God, Elder Azar of the War God, Elder Acap of the Chief Divine!"

Upon hearing this, Elder Tonaltiliu of the Sun God raised his brow, glanced at everyone, and then saluted the Elder. Elder Azar of the War God showed joy on his face, straightened his back, and loudly responded affirmatively.

Meanwhile, Elder Acap of the Chief Divine pressed his lips together, suppressing the excitement in his heart, bowed deeply, and respectfully lowered his head in greeting. Getting this position was completely unexpected for him, a critical step ahead!

In this round of power allocation, Tonaltiliu had a prestigious status, Azar was always known for his bravery in battle, and both were as expected and accepted by everyone. Only Acap was young with a shallow background, managing to find a foothold in the High Priesthood purely due to the Chief Divine heritage brought by his wife and support from King Aweit. This arrangement by the Elder was indeed an exceptional promotion!

After paying their respects to the Elder, the three Deputy Elder Priests each stepped forward to stand behind the new Elder Priest. Among the Twelve Elder Priests, three distinct levels were noticeably established. The upper two tiers concentrated the most critical decision-making power, while the remaining eight Elder Priests...

The Elder thought for a while, and everyone bowed their heads waiting. Until the aged voice was heard again, weak yet bland in deciding the realm.

"Regarding the Alliance's major affairs, if there are two Deputy Elder Priests adamantly opposing, a High Priesthood meeting can be convened, where the Twelve Elder Priests will vote together. The Elder Priest will have three votes, while the other Elders will have one vote each. If the number of opposing votes reaches seven, which is half, the matter will be dismissed and reconsidered."

Uguel blinked, squeezing his fingers. According to the new system, if seven Elder Priests oppose, the High Priesthood would not be able to implement any new decisions. This way, it would be difficult for the High Priest to suppress the other Elders and forcefully push major reforms, unlike before. To him, such an arrangement truly was...

"Good! Excellent!"

Uguel nodded with satisfaction, a smile appearing on his plump face. After being nominated as High Priest, he was somewhat uneasy and nervous. After all, the previous two Priest leaders were busy and personally involved, but their endings were not good! Now, with the Elder's arrangements, he could finally relax and shift the responsibilities to others.

"When major issues arise, Elders will deliberate together. If issues occur, it's the collective fault, not just mine!..."

The Elder's instructions entered everyone's ears like a light breeze yet carried the weight of mountains, which was the true power. The three Deputy Elder Priests exchanged glances, each lost in thought. Meanwhile, the other eight Elder Priests finally smiled, pondering how to unite and genuinely participate in decision-making for the major affairs.

In the solemn Chief Great Hall, silence reigned once more, save for the weak breaths. Amid the deepening sky, a sudden wind stirred the Divine's curtains. A spring rain, long anticipated, seemed imminent.

After speaking for so long, the Elder gasped a bit, feeling somewhat fatigued. His arrangement ensured mutual restraint within the High Priesthood, preventing major issues and avoiding a singular controlling leader, likely maintaining stability for several years. He knew that no matter how power is arranged, it can only restrain temporarily, and ultimately, supreme power distribution still depends on people.

"...So, which one among you will it be?"

The Elder squinted his eyes and glanced at the assembled Elders one last time. Everyone kept their heads bowed, revealing a loyal and sincere demeanor. After a moment, he chuckled with relief, lowered his eyes, and waved his hand gently.

"All of you may leave!... Hmm, Cacamatzin, stay and chat with me for a while... May the Chief Divine protect us!"

"May the Chief Divine protect us!"

The Alliance's Elder Priests bowed in unison, nurturing different thoughts, and gradually turned to leave. Uguel glanced anxiously at the Elder, paused for a moment, and then departed slowly. He traversed the dark corridors, descended the towering stairs, passed through the slanted passage, and bypassed the axe-wielding guards, finally leaving the Chief Palace.

The dim sky greeted him, appearing filled with brightness to Uguel's eyes. A slight breeze brushed his face like a lover's caress, making him feel entirely at ease. The slightly plump Elder Priest felt victorious and buoyant, as if treading on clouds. He looked at the towering Great Pyramid Temple and laughed in exclamation.

"Haha! Human destiny, truly unpredictable! Even I, Uguel, have the day to sit high atop the Great Temple and become the High Priest!... Thinking back, Quetzal was incredibly clever, always overshadowing me, yet he died at the Elder's hands, taking with him Texcoco's nobility, and hundreds of esteemed Divine Descendants perished... And Xutel, ruthless and decisive, destroyed tribes and families

countless times, but met his end in the Holy City of Cholula, dragging the priestly family with hundreds of years of heritage into the grave... Hmm?!"

Thinking of this, Uguel suddenly froze, having a realization. He murmured to himself, a chilling coldness enveloped his heart, causing a shiver down his spine, his hairs stood upright, and his body trembled.

"Quetzal... Xutel... Elder..."

It took a while for the new High Priest to recover, wiping cold sweat from his forehead. He turned back fearfully, looking at the dim Chief Palace, akin to gazing at a beast's lair, staring into the silent and devouring Abyss. His face full of suspicion and chaotic thoughts, he speculated how many times he brushed past death.

"Phew!... Frog God Sochipili once said, a mortal must learn humility, must have self-awareness. I am but a rotten log and a pile of fruit remnants, how could I be material for a High Priest?"

Uguel watched for a moment, sighed, shook his head. His heart surged with emotions, rolling over and over, surprisingly composing a couplet of poetry.

"The egret rests atop the Holy Mountain, the eagle gazes from the Great Temple, they both dwell high above, yearning to spread their wings and fly! They both loudly cry, wishing to make their sound resonate across the fields!... The thunderbolt of the rainy season arrives with the storm, they soar and call in the storm, then they all disappear!..."

Pausing slightly after the chant, Uguel spoke again, yet now with a hint of self-mockery, narrating a story.

"After the rain, a plump turkey comes from the mountain base, swaying its hips, ascends to the pyramid top... Then, it looks at the sunlight in the sky, flaps its wings twice, clucks loud, and lies down! ... Simply perfect, simply perfect! This place is high and flat, perfect for sleeping under the gods' statues!"

"Uh... a plump turkey..."

Standing ten or so steps away, Acap stood outside the palace, in the corner shadows, secretly listening to the new High Priest's recitation. He stood here for a long time, hoping to have a private conversation with High Priest Uguel. But at this moment, after listening to Uguel's poetry, he pursed his lips, held his breath, put away his former disdain, and quietly retreated.

It wasn't until Acap departed that Uguel slightly turned to glance at the recent spot, shaking his head gently.

"Young bobcat, truly energetic, always thinking of climbing higher! ... Enough, enough, letting them jockey back and forth with worldly affairs. After all, I am merely a rotten log, having enjoyed a lifetime, no need to rush to learn more, let's enjoy again!... Chief Divine protect us!"

Having said that, Uguel once more extended his hand, drawing the Sun Hummingbird's "lun" in the air, leisurely returning home.

Chapter 926: The Immortal Sun Has Set...

The gentle breeze blows across the sky, the fog slightly disperses, revealing the setting sun. From the towering Chief Palace, the silent sunset emits a magnificent glow, slowly sinking behind the western mountains. And the shadows of dusk come from all directions, resembling endless waves.

"The day floats... Spring mist... Sunset... Dusk... It's going to be dark..."

The elder lies quietly on the bed, gazing at the western sky. The red hue on his face gradually fades, and the brilliance in his eyes flickers like a candle in the wind, on the verge of going out. The elderly Cacamatzin kneels by his bedside, watching his father, whom he has revered all his life, inevitably step into decline, unable to hold back his tears.

"Cacamatzin..."

"Respected elder, I am here!"

Cacamatzin raises his graying head, looking at his silver-haired father, listening to his teachings for the last time.

"After I'm gone, according to tradition, you will succeed the position of Chief Minister. However, you are different from me; you should remain low-key and restrained, refrain from participating in Alliance politics, and avoid associating too much with the nobility..."

The elder reaches out, stroking Cacamatzin's head. He looks at his simple and honest eldest son, a smile appearing on his face.

"Of course, I trust your disposition."

"Respected elder, I will heed your teachings!"

"The future situation of the Alliance is nothing but a compromise between Divine Authority and royal power, the King's conquests and reforms, and much later..."

The elder pauses to ponder, wanting to say something more, make more arrangements. But when he sees his equally aged son, he sighs deeply and refrains from continuing.

"The Jaguar hunts in the woods, the eagle fights in the sky, the Mexica's royal power is always inherited in blood and fire. The child who is different must cross the final barrier to truly be a King. Everything shall be left to fate~"

The elder lowers his gaze, reaching out to retrieve a paper document from beneath the bed, marked with both images and text, stamped with his jade seal.

"Keep this inheritance document carefully... Aweit has always respected you; as long as you do not interfere in Alliance affairs, you can enjoy peace... Do not reveal it until Aweit goes to the Divine Kingdom. And if... you shall take the document and personally hand it to Xiulote. As the witness to his marriage, along with the document I left, he will always regard you as an esteemed guest..."

"Ah?! Respected elder..."

Cacamatzin opens his old eyes wide. He looks at the contents of the document, genuinely surprised.

"Hmm, there is no other arrangement apart from this..."

The elder's face shows a hint of tenderness. Such emotion is rare to appear on him. He carefully considers the arrangements after his departure and looks at the nearby shadow.

"Cevali, you have followed me since childhood, for over twenty years now?"

"Yes, elder, I have followed you since I was fifteen years old, for twenty-eight years now."

The shadow bows his head, his expression, usually as stoic as a sculpture, now shows deep sorrow.

"Twenty-eight years... At that time, I was just sixty-four years old..."

The elder's eyes show a trace of bewilderment. Countless memories surge in his mind with the weight of time and age, causing a bit of confusion. After a while, he shakes his head and smiles gently.

"I can't remember clearly; I have lived for too long... Cevali, after I'm gone, you shall follow Cacamatzin! You need not do anything else, just enjoy wealth and peace. In these last years, I have been old and exhausted; it is all thanks to you..."

"...Elder..."

Cevali presses his lips tightly, observing the elder's features, giving a low bow. His face returns to its sculptural stiffness, as if hiding a heart as solid as ironwood.

"The time is almost here!"

The elder senses the change in his body, looking at his son beside him with a gentle smile.

"Kaka, I am leaving; call me father one last time."

"Yes, respected... father."

Cacamatzin bows deeply, tears streaming down his face in grief.

The elder smiles and nods, touching Cacamatzin's forehead before retracting his frail old hand. This simple gesture seems to exhaust all his strength. Afterward, he quietly watches the dim sunset fall, slowly transitioning from dusk to the deep sea night.

"In this life, the Alliance was established under my witness, the Divine rose from my hands, the King ascended under my declaration, and the great unity of the Alliance has been achieved... This life, I have no regrets!"

With a smile on his lips, the elder slowly closes his eyes, softly muttering.

"Brother, I am coming... On the family's Divine Tree, my position will be before yours..."

The last gleam fades from the horizon. Deep darkness rolls in like the sea, completely engulfing the towering Chief Palace. At this moment, eternal repose envelops the elder, and the immortal sun, after shining for ninety-two years, finally sets!...

"...Ah! Woooooo..."

A moment of deathly silence witnesses the arrival of death. Soon, heartfelt cries echo through the Chief Palace. A dozen trusted aides of the elder, tears on their faces, carry torches and rush to every part of the Capital City, conveying the mournful announcement of the sunset to all elders and nobility!

"Father..."

Cacamatzin lies on the bed, tears flooding his face, unable to stop sobbing.

"Elder..."

The shadow Cevali bites his lip, almost drawing blood. He kneels heavily on the cold ground, bowing strongly to the elder's body with closed eyes. Then, with a determined look, he slowly sets down a clay pot and draws out the dagger from his waist.

"Being a shadow means there is no longer a self... Elder, this is my only act of disobedience to your command..."

Cevali's face shows sadness, but soon returns to tranquility. He raises his dagger, aiming at his fiercely beating heart, steadily and resolutely piercing it.

"Ugh..."

An intensely painful groan escapes from the shadow's mouth. Bright red blood quickly gushes from his chest, and his heart ruptures instantly. In just a few breaths, before Cacamatzin can react, the shadow falls beside the elder's body, taking his own life!

He carries with him many secrets of the elder, the secrets of the High Priest's death, eternally following the elder to the red kingdom.

"The immortal sun has set! Darkness rolls in like the deep sea, and the sun's shadow must also leave the world..."

Crying echoes through the palace, lingering without ceasing. Before long, wailing sounds rise from all corners of the Capital City, like

Chapter 927: The Envoy's Plea, The King of the Northern Route

As June approaches its end, the rainy season is in full swing. The pitter-patter of raindrops falls from the low-hanging dark clouds, soaking the eastern and western fields of the mountain ranges. To the west of these mountains, within the Texcoco Lake District, lush green farmlands stretch endlessly, teeming with vibrant life.

In May, spring plowing began, and corn planting has been underway for over a month. At this time, with ample rain and heat, it's the perfect moment for the corn to reach its growing peak. The corn stalks in the fields grow visibly taller and sturdier each day. The bean vines climb the stalks, reaching skyward together, while the pumpkins spread beneath, persistently covering the ground. Occasionally, weeds pop up in the fields, only to be uprooted by calloused hands!

The farmers are equally busy during this time. Day after day, they traverse the fields, weeding the early summer crops to prevent nutrients from being depleted. The nobility and samurai, who hold control over the manure and lake mud, also sternly oversee their agricultural slaves, meticulously enriching the Chinampa floating fields with fertilizers.

"By invigorating the fields during the corn's growing season, the yield for the entire season can be effectively increased. For corn is the earth's inhabitants, it hungers during this peak growth... "

The Chief God Priest of the village thus instructs everyone. These claims on farming methods partly come from the experience passed down by the ancients and partly from the summaries of the Western Kingdom, both serving to increase crop yields and fortify the alliance's foundation.

The Envoy from the Lake Capital City runs northward, carrying mournful news of death, passing through the thriving fields. He traverses the Holy City of Teotihuacan in the northeast, arriving at the Avenue of the Dead and the pyramids of Sun and Moon, bringing news of both the Morning Star and Sun having fallen together.

The High Priest Family, having ruled the Holy City for decades, is deeply rooted here. The elders serve as spiritual pillars for four generations of Mexica. Upon learning of their deaths, the sorrow in Teotihuacan is thunderous. The priests and nobility within the city weep in mourning, promptly gathering the populace, presenting the sacrifices brought back from the eastern expedition, and conducting a grand sacrificial ritual to send the great spirits off to the Divine Kingdom!

The Envoy stays for one night before continuing northward. He crosses the northeastern mountain pass to arrive at the Atotonilco State. Beyond lies the land of the Telascalcan, recently conquered by the Northern Route Army during the brutal eastern expedition. Carrying the news of death, he runs past desolate farmlands, through abandoned villages, encountering patrolling samurai, and finally reaching the sternly guarded and solemn Hot Spring City.

Hot Spring City serves as a crucial stronghold for the Northern Route Army's rear, a necessary point for food transportation, housing thousands of Texcoco Lake District samurai and militia. Upon the Envoy's

arrival, he speaks a few words with a gloomy expression, causing the samurai to show sorrow, weeping profusely, crying out in anguish, and even cutting their cheeks!

Subsequently, the Envoy continues southeast, through even more desolate wilderness, passing several patrols of samurai, ultimately reaching the Northern Route Army's command center at Feathered Serpent City.

King Aweit is in Feathered Serpent City, discussing the next strategic move with his trusted lieutenant, the Female Snake, over the map on the table.

"Gillim, since the initial capture of Feathered Serpent City in early May, a month and a half has passed. The various legions have besieged the three Snake Cities, pillaged the rich Tlaxcala Valley... now, with over fifty miles of surrounding tribes cleared, it's time to proceed with the next siege!

After the fall of Feathered Serpent City, the entire northern gateway of Tlaxcala is wide open, unable to resist the Northern Route Army. The seven Northern Route legions, numbering over 50,000, gradually spread out over several dozen miles. With murderous intent, each legion sowed fire along the way, executing martial prowess, sweeping through the heartlands of the Tlaxcala State, home to 400,000 inhabitants!

Tens of thousands of samurai surged forward, engaging the Tlaxcala army in two battles, causing the loss of two thousand warriors, leading to a complete strategic contraction. The Divine Descendant Nobility of the Cloud Serpent abandoned all fields and villages, concentrating their samurai, able-bodied men, and food as much as possible, determined to defend the three strategic Snake Cities to the death. As for the various Tlaxcala tribes in the open, they could only scatter, avoiding the army's onslaught by fleeing into the mountains.

At the end of May, almost coinciding with the High Priest's departure from the Capital City. The seven Northern Route legions officially arrived beneath the three Snake Cities, surrounding the ancestral lands of the Tlaxcala. Subsequently, Aweit personally led the Eagle Warriors to inspect the easternmost hill city, White Snake City, furrowing his brows deeply.

White Snake City's north and west are surrounded by towering mountains, while the south and east comprise slightly flatter plains.

"Flanked by mountains on both sides, it can only be attacked from the flatlands. The city is not large, its walls seven to eight meters high, almost like a fortress. But the most troublesome is... it's a hill city, perched atop a hill more than ten meters high!"

Aweit maintains a calm demeanor, shaking his head, finding it quite challenging. The samurai would have to attack from below twenty or thirty meters to reach the top of White Snake City. Assaulting such a fortress means catapults are hard to use, and archery exchanges are significantly disadvantaged. Only six Divine Eagle Cannons can barely reach the city top. If the defenders resist to the end, attempting to capture the fortress won't come without significant samurai casualties.

"Huadio, Dead Dog, take the Armored Personal Guards and follow me to see Cloud Serpent City!"

Then, King Aweit took the two trusted Great Generals, along with three thousand armored elites, bypassing White Snake City, and delving seven to eight miles into the northern mountains. He climbed a small hill within the mountains, raised his head, glanced several hundred meters away at Cloud Serpent City, and his expression dramatically changed. Shocked, he forgot to breathe, only able to utter painful groans.

Chapter 928: The Envoy's Plea, The King of the Northern Route\_2

"...At the head of the ancestral City of Four Snake, the impregnable mountain fortress, built on the mountain of Tepetícpac-Texcallan, Tepeticpac-Tlaxcala, Cloud Serpent City!..."

The Kings' trusted aides looked at the Cloud Serpent Mountain City, even though they were all warriors of the alliance, their faces showed great trepidation, and they were silent as the grave. The Cloud Serpent City before them was located on a treacherous mountainside nearly two hundred meters high. The mountain terrain stretched long, the first half steep beyond measure, the latter half suddenly softened, forming several gentle terraces atop the mountain. These terraces had springs, where fortresses could be built, a few terraced fields grown, along with nearby mountain camps, accommodating ten to twenty thousand people. At the edge of the terraces, stone walls could be erected leveraging the mountain terrain, sealing the passageways, forming complete defenses.

The Ancestors of the Tlaxcala people, to resist the Teopanek people's attack, had chosen this spot among the mountains to establish the perilous Cloud Serpent Mountain City!

Cloud Serpent Mountain City, surrounded on all sides by high mountains, with only a narrow southern path for ascent. This mountain city, from its completion, has never fallen. To strike this place, the

alliance's bows, catapults, and Divine Eagle Cannons are hard to deploy. Warriors must brave the falling arrows above, deadly stones and wooden blocks, arduously climb the mountain, then use grappling hooks to scale the pass, attacking upwards layer by layer...

"This Cloud Serpent City is even harder to conquer than Ototpan Mountain City. Even if one were to deploy a hundred thousand warriors... one might still..."

Aweit gazed at the cloud serpent flag atop the mountain city, along with the faintly visible Tlaxcala warriors, lost in thought for a long time. He recalled Tizoc's siege of Ototpan Mountain City, failing in prolonged assault, leading to betrayal and estrangement among the people, his heart suddenly chilled. Then he barely calmed his emotions, with a confident smile, loudly laughed to the surrounding confidants.

"Haha, these damned Tlaxcala Divine Descendants, claiming to be the flying Cloud Serpent, turn out to be mere ground-dwelling rodents hidden in the mountains! Let them guard the mountains, while we sweep the Tlaxcala tribes outside the mountain clean! The Chief Divine blesses the alliance, and victory is assured for the eastern campaign!"

"The Chief Divine blesses! Victory for the eastern campaign!"

The trusted aides, encouraged by the King, loudly echoed in unison. Then, Aweit proceeded down the little hill, leading the warriors back, not mentioning the attack on Cloud Serpent City. He continued south, traversing more than ten li, going to observe the final southwestern Snake City, Tree Snake City.

Aweit ran all the way, saw Tree Snake City on the plain, and finally breathed a sigh of relief.

Tree Snake City was located in the heart of the Tlaxcala Basin, with fertile lands, extremely prosperous. Among the four snake cities, this city was the most extensive, the population most abundant, strength also the strongest. Tree Snake City's walls were eight or nine meters high, with an area of close to five square kilometers, which could be considered the capital of the Tlaxcala Alliance.

Of course, behind the four snake cities of Tlaxcala, each had a Divine Descendant of the God of Hunt, each controlling one side, equal in status, with no hierarchy. And the system of the Four States Alliance was also joint rule by the leaders of four cities, along with the Divine Descendant Nobility of each region, jointly deciding the major matters of the Four States Alliance.

"Tree Snake City to the north is the winding Texcoco River, the other three sides are plains suitable for cultivation. The city wall is eight or nine meters high, the defending army numbers in the tens of thousands. Though still considered perilous, it is only akin to Feathered Serpent City..."

Aweit's face slowly revealed a smile. He deeply observed the Divine Descendant flag atop Tree Snake City, then led the armored warriors back to the camp of Feathered Serpent City. Following this, the northern army left three legions to blockade the three snake cities. The remaining four legions, thirty thousand Mexica troops, were split into more than ten camps, surging forth in a scattered formation.

Wherever the northern army passed through, it was as if a sieve sifting through grains, igniting villages, destroying tribes, capturing and killing tens of thousands!

In just one month's time, several tens of rural villages and towns north of Tlaxcala were burned to ashes. The Tlaxcala people were the bitter rivals of the alliance for decades, and the tribes within the Tlaxcala Basin here were the ruling core of the Four States Alliance, the most stubborn primary tribes.

King Aweit executed martial prowess decisively, the various northern army legions did not hold back in the least. Any tribe in the basin that resisted even slightly would face total annihilation, the able-bodied sacrificed, women taken as spoils!

According to Gillim's estimate, in this month's time, approximately twenty thousand able-bodied men were captured, along with an equal number of women of suitable age. As for the Tlaxcala tribes that were exterminated, they should exceed a hundred thousand. Counting the enemies executed during the Feathered Serpent City battle, from the forty thousand primary tribes of Tlaxcala, eighteen to nineteen thousand had been eradicated, nearly half annihilated!

"Your Highness, the three snake cities are perilous and difficult to attack, mutually reinforcing each other. To minimize the loss of the Royal Legion, we should focus on a siege and not rush the matter."

Gillim solemnly bowed, respectfully advising.

"Once the Holy City of Cholula formally surrenders, the Southern Army can advance north by eighty li, reaching outside Tree Snake City. By then, the northern and southern armies can merge, besieging the

perilous Cloud Serpent Mountain City and White Snake Hill City, building catapults and shield vehicles, primarily attacking the Tree Snake City on the plains, then attempt attacking White Snake Hill City..."

"By then, with catapults, bows, and copper cannons, the siege can be pressured; with numerous City-State Army corps acting as siege vanguard; and the armored Kingdom Legion acting as siege main force... Your Highness only needs to command the Royal Legion, reinforcing from the rear, directing the various army divisions to eradicate the eastern old enemy and establish eternal glory!"

Upon hearing this, Aweit's expression flickered, falling into contemplation. His gaze turned profound, and his face slowly broke into a smile. By eradicating the Tlaxcala enemies, weakening the City-State alliances across regions, and upon returning to the capital, he could again push through reforms for the next step of centralization!

"Hmm..."

King Aweit slightly nodded, just about to approve, but the tent suddenly opened.

Two newly formed Tonsured Guards bowed and entered the tent, bringing in a dust-covered and sweat-drenched capital envoy. That envoy's body was drenched in sweat, his face streaked with tears, and upon entering the tent, he prostrated on the ground, sadly crying out.

"Supreme King, I come from the capital, bearing the grievous news of death..."

"Hmm?"

Upon hearing this, both Aweit and Gillim exchanged glances, a sense of foreboding rising in their hearts simultaneously. The King suddenly furrowed his brows and looked at the prostrated envoy.

"What has happened? Quickly, speak!"

"Half a month ago, the brilliant Morning Star, the sacred High Priest, perished in the Holy City of Cholula, cruelly poisoned! And a few days later, the eternal Sun, the esteemed Elder, passed away in the Lake Capital City, heading to the Divine Kingdom!...Both the Morning Star and the Sun have fallen!!"

"Ah!! Elder, Uncle Grandfather!..."

"What?! The High Priest is dead?!"

Astounded cries instantly burst forth from both Aweit and Gillim's mouths, like the roar of a Jaguar. Such shocking news arrived like the collapse of Smoke Peak Divine Mountain, rendering disbelief and blankness of mind.

Both, normally deep and inscrutable in thought, were now wide-eyed, mouth agape, completely losing control over their expressions, even shaking bodily!

Subsequently, the tent fell deathly silent, not a breath of wind. Tens of Mexica warriors stood rigidly in place, unmoving, their breaths halted. Within the tent remained the city envoy's low sobbing, like the mourning song of death, entwining the hearts of all Mexica, forever etched into their bones, unable to disperse~~

Chapter 929: The King's Decision, An Unprecedented Grand Sacrifice!

"The immortal sun has set... The uncle who shone upon me since childhood for thirty-seven years has fallen!"

Cries echoed in the grand tent, and sorrow spread among the crowd. After a moment, Aweit came to his senses, with grief appearing on his face and tears streaming down.

Upon hearing of the fall of the immortal sun, it was as if witnessing the collapse of the Divine Mountain, his heart suddenly emptied, losing a towering Divine Tree he could rely on. He recalled Uncle Trakel Er's dignified teachings, reminiscent of Grandfather Montezuma's appearance and smile, and the reverence from childhood, unable to restrain the sorrow...

The mature King suddenly turned around, facing away from the crowd. He cried out angrily, like a Fierce Tiger mourning the loss of a parent!

"Wuwu! Roar! Wuwu!..."

The mournful sorrowful cry was heard from the tent of the Northern Route Army, carrying the low growl of the Jaguar, yet like the lament of an eagle, both painful and majestic!

"Ah!..."

Gillim's eyes shimmered, silently sighed. He looked at the envoy from the capital crying on the ground, asked in a deep voice.

"What kind of last wills did the Elder leave before passing?"

"Wu! The Elder's last will... Elder Priest Uguel is appointed as the new High Priest; Tonaltiliu, Azar, and Acap, the three Elder Priests, are appointed as Vice High Priests. Henceforth, all major matters in the High Priesthood are decided by vote between the High Priest, Vice High Priests, and the other Elders..."

"Hmm? Uguel as High Priest? Establishing three Vice High Priests? voting decision in the High Priesthood?..."

Gillim was stunned, this is truly an unexpected arrangement, surely containing the Elder's profound intentions.

"...A weak, mediocre new High Priest, ambitious Vice High Priests, vote decision in the council of Elders... Well! The strong power of the High Priesthood is completely divided from now on, no longer a threat! And the King, young and strong, with great prestige, just right to be above all, governing the divine authority and kingly power of the alliance!..."

The Female Snake Intelligence Officer frowned, pondered for a moment, then gradually relaxed, even with a hint of a smile. After a while, he pursed his lips, and softly remarked.

"The Elder's arrangement for the King, truly... thoughtful and earnest."

"Uncle..."

Aweit's sobs slowly subsided, his voice choked. He was immersed in grief, still unable to extricate himself. Gillim looked at the sorrowful King and showed sadness on his face too. Then he sat up straight, solemnly inquired.

"Did the High Priest die in Cholula City, poisoned by the priestly families of the Holy City?"

"Indeed! The High Priest commanded the Elders of Cholula to select two people to sacrifice to the Chief divine! But the Elders of Cholula carried resentment in their hearts, sending poisonous Divine Smoke and potions. After the High Priest used them, on the same night, he was poisoned beyond treatment and went to the Divine Kingdom!..."

The envoy from the capital glared fiercely, reported back in a deep voice. When mentioning the Elders of Cholula City, he couldn't help gritting his teeth, with anger in his voice.

"Cholula City dared to do this! This is a great insult to the Mexica Alliance, an irreconcilable blood feud!..."

"Hmm..."

Gillim showed a solemn expression, nodded approvingly. He remained indifferent, thoughts raced, yet unable to sort them out.

"Cholula Holy City, probably lacks the audacity to assassinate the High Priest... But if it was impulsive by an Elder, it might be possible... However, the Elder and the High Priest almost fell one after another? ...Something is fishy... No, there must be a hidden truth!..."

The Chief Intelligence Officer frowned deeply, pondered silently. The intuition from years in intelligence work told him, behind the High Priest's death, surely concealed something. But as the envoy said, since the High Priest died in Cholula City, it's an insult to the strong alliance, a blood feud that must be avenged! The Elders of cholula cannot defend themselves, likely unable to escape death. He thought for a moment, steadied his mind, carefully inquired further.

"After the High Priest went to the Divine Kingdom... what was His Highness Xiulote's reaction with the Southern Army?"

"His Highness was both sorrowful and angry, personally donned armor, led the Imperial Guard Legion, attacked Holy City Cholula... when I arrived, I heard the city of Cholula was breached, the Southern Army paid blood for blood, massacring twenty thousand from top to bottom in the Holy City, completely annihilating the twelve priestly families!"...

"What?!"

Hearing this, Aweit turned around. In his eyes still held tears, he exclaimed.

"Xiulote destroyed Holy City Cholula, massacring twenty thousand in the Holy City? Is this what that child would do?..."

After the Western expedition and fiefdom, Xiulote was stationed at the Kingdom of the Lake, Aweit didn't have many opportunities to meet him. In the King's heart, still remained the image of that clever, determined, yet innocent, soft-hearted youth.

Gillim raised his eyebrows, with growing fear. The young tiger has grown, carrying fearsome murderous intent, roaring fiercely in the mountain forest. And compared to him, the young Highness is just a fledgling, which needs to grow quickly!

"Indeed! His Highness avenged his Grandfather, personally sacrificed twelve Elder Priests on the Great Pyramid of Cholula! After the sacrificial ritual, His Highness raised a dagger, performed the sacrificial dance, chanted incomprehensible divine words, bidding farewell to the cremated High Priest! All present were moved, tears flowed with sorrow..."

"Ah!..."

Seeing the envoy's sure nod, Aweit sighed deeply. He imagined the scene, slightly shook his head.

"The child will be so angry as to massacre the city; it shows just how heartbroken he is over the High Priest's death!... Very well, let's give him some time. Once his grief has subsided, we can summon the Southern Army northward!"

"Your Majesty!..."

Hearing this, Gillim was immediately shocked. Delaying the Southern Army's move northward would affect the attack on the Three-Snake City Fortress... He opened his mouth, observing the King's expression, hesitated, and decisively changed the subject.

"...The elders of Cholula City have promised to surrender. The divine objects and population within the city..."

"Hmm. I will send an envoy to have Xiulote bring the divine objects to be enshrined in the Great Temple of the capital. As for the tens of thousands of people in the Cholula territory..."

Aweit pondered for a moment, feeling a bit of relief mixed with genuine sadness. He had always greatly respected and feared the old fox of the royal branch, the decisive and ruthless High Priest.

Years ago, it was their joint plan that toppled the rule of his brother Tizoc and successfully seized power over the Alliance. Over the years, the High Priest managed the High Priesthood in the capital, with increasing prestige and proximity. Without a word, he eliminated the nobility and priests of various territories; during morning and evening prayers, two hundred thousand citizens of the capital responded in unison! Such formidable power made Aweit feel constantly on edge, unable to sleep peacefully...

Now that the High Priest has gone to the Divine Kingdom and no longer holds the divine authority, the urgent threat to the throne from the Holy City's faction has vanished instantly.

"Phew!..."

The middle-aged King let out a breath, letting down his guard against the Holy City's faction. He thought of Xiulote, his distant maternal nephew, personally cultivated student, and the son-in-law he watched grow up... His heart suddenly softened, filled with much tolerance and love.

"The Kingdom of the Lake has risen for a short time, desperately needing population replenishment. Let Xiulote handle the tens of thousands of able-bodied men captured by the Southern Army!"

"Your Majesty?..."

"So it is decided!"

Aweit regained his composure, making his decision. He waved his hand, ordering the samurai and envoy to leave the tent, then coldly began speaking, his words as chilling as a glacier.

"Gillim, with the expansion of the Great Temple completed and both the Elder and the High Priest fallen... The passing of these two venerable figures who once suppressed the Alliance dictates that the Lake's capital must hold an unprecedented grand sacrificial ceremony! Only in this way can we consecrate the Chief Divine and the Ancestors, honor the deceased with respect, and once again subdue the hearts of the people across various territories of the Alliance!"

"...An unprecedented... 'grand sacrificial ceremony'?"

Upon hearing this, Gillim immediately stood upright. He solemnly saluted and quietly inquired, slightly pausing on the King's emphasis on the term "grand sacrificial ceremony."

"Exactly!"

Aweit nodded coldly, his expression filled with murderous intent, without a trace of mercy.

"At least six thousand Tlaxcalan divine descendants and nobles, along with five times as many samurais and militiamen, a total sacrifice of thirty-six thousand five hundred and sixty-five people! Invite envoys from all parts of the world and all territories of the Alliance to witness. The Great Temple in the capital will conduct sacrifices for thirty entire days, sacrificing two hundred noble bloodlines and one thousand common war captives daily! I want every city-state and tribe under heaven to bow their heads in awe and fear!"

The King stopped speaking at this point, not revealing everything. For the devoutly divine and warrior-eager Mexica people, victories in war and grand sacrifices best enhance the King's prestige. And after the grand sacrificial ceremony following the conquest of the East, he would replace the Elder and become the new immortal blazing sun!

"Ah! Six thousand divine descendants and nobles?!"

Gillim was stunned and cried out softly. Thirty thousand able-bodied men were easy to acquire; the Northern Route Army captured as many Tlaxcalan able-bodied men after six months of eastern expedition. But six thousand noble divine descendants and nobles? That is a number that would make everyone in the world shiver!

One must know that the Tlaxcalan's four-state total population of 1.2 million, with a noble proportion of 1%-2%, amounts to at most just over twenty thousand noble bloodlines, including the old and young! And in today's brutal campaigns, the Otomi, Tarasco, and Tlaxcalan have all suffered nearly half losses, leaving only eight to nine million people and just over one hundred and ten thousand noble bloodlines!

"Indeed! This grand sacrificial ceremony must annihilate the Tlaxcalan Cloud Serpent divine descendants, sacrificing half of the noble bloodlines in the world!"

Aweit lifted his head, gazing at the overcast sky, eyes filled with coldness as harsh as the Divine Mountain, with a will as firm as adamantine.

If the Alliance seeks to unify the world, the greatest obstacle is the noble bloodlines possessed by the cities and tribes within it. In this era, where divine descendants are born, the noble bloodline holds a deeply rooted appeal for the samurais and commoners of various territories!

The history of the Mexica Alliance is firmly recorded. Over seventy years ago, the City of Texcoco was conquered by the Teopanek Alliance. Prince Nezahualcoyotl wandered across various territories for over a decade yet managed to return to the City of Texcoco, rallying the noble and samurai submitted to the Teopanek Alliance to rise, and forge alliances with the city-states of Tloquiditlan and Tlacopan.

Thus, the Mexica Triple-Alliance was formed, raising the banner in the heartland of the Teopanek Alliance. Taking advantage of the Teopanek forces being deployed externally, they quickly captured the Teopanek capital of Azcapotzalco, sacrificing the Teopanek Royal Family. With that, the Alliance

achieved success, establishing dominance in the Mexican Valley. The exiled Prince Nezahualcoyotl also restored his royal glory, becoming the renowned poet king.

It was for this reason that the Elder decisively killed, exterminating the royal family and nobility of Texcoco with the death of Quetzal. During the Western Campaign, he issued severe orders to eradicate the Tarasco royal family without leaving a single survivor. Likewise, after the High Priest's death, the annihilation of the Holy City's twelve priestly families was in his plan. As for this Eastern Campaign, the Tlaxcalan divine descendants must also be exterminated!

"All divine descendants under heaven must be utterly severed! Only the Mexica Royal Family shall continue to reign and unite the world for eternity!"

Upon hearing this, Gillim, the Female Snake, passionately prostrated herself, heavily kowtowing. She raised her head, looking at the King's cold demeanor, her heart full of reverence and a surge of murderous intent in her chest.

"I am the King's dagger, safeguarding the King's legacy! I will tirelessly, regardless of gains or losses. For the Mexica Royal Family's rule, the divine descendants of all the tribes under heaven must either be publicly sacrificed by priests or secretly executed by the Secret Guard!..."

"...Only, decades later, which royal branch should ultimately succeed?... Man proposes, fate remains undecided!"

#### Chapter 930: The King's Heart, Firm and Incomprehensible

The continuous layers of clouds rolled and unfolded, while the pattering raindrops fell. The moist and warm air current rose from the distant Caribbean Sea, majestically advancing westward, reaching the Mexican Plateau at an altitude of two thousand meters. The sea breeze from the East met the dry and cold mountain wind, heralding the onset of the long rainy season on the plateau, transforming into showers falling from the sky and scattered like stars on the King's tent.

At this moment, the rainy season had just begun, barely over a month, and it was not yet the peak rainy period. The King's tent was coated with a layer of rubber, not drenched by the rain. A gust from the tent's top blew down, swaying the feather crowns of the two, bringing the heat and humidity of early summer.

Aweit looked at the cloudy sky, with traces of tears still at the corners of his eyes, yet he had stepped out from the sorrow. The heart of the King was indeed impenetrable, nor would it easily waver. At this moment, he harbored a grand ambition of world conquest within his chest, a burning fighting spirit in his heart, and an icy cold killing intent in his eyes!

After a long while, the King frowned, watching the rainwater dripping down between the tents, and murmured in a low voice.

"Gillim, the heavy rains of July are approaching. There are not many days left to siege the city!..."

Upon hearing this, Gillim's expression turned serious, his heart vigilant. He was familiar with the climate of the Trascal Basin and naturally understood the unspoken intent of the King.

The Trascal Basin is adjacent to the Texcoco Lake District, with a similar climate, both located near the annual 1000 mm precipitation line, and the rainfall amount is similar to between the Yangtze River and Huai River in the Celestial Empire. The rainy season here concentrates most of the annual precipitation, starting from the spring plowing in May and continuing until October's autumn harvest, which is entirely synchronized with the rain and heat.

During the entire hot and humid rainy season, if there were no dry stone granaries, stored food would easily spoil, and transportation losses would increase. The maintenance of the army's supply line would become progressively costly and consume extensively. By the time of the peak period in July and August, the continuous rain would fall from the sky, turning the terrain into mud, with walls becoming slippery. Attacking and slaughtering would become extremely difficult, and bows and firearms could no longer be used...

In other words, the Northern Army only had over twenty days left to attack the Three Serpent Cities. Then, during the peak two months of the rainy season, no large-scale military operations could be undertaken by the Alliance, north or south. Each army would be best stationed in the city or in sturdy camps, with dedicated granaries for storing food. And by mid-September, when the rain gradually receded and sunny days increased, could they organize another siege.

"Your Majesty! The Telascallan stubbornly defend the three cities to the end. They occupy the city walls and advantageous terrains, with ample food supplies in the city, making it difficult to plot against them in a rush..."

Gillim solemnly saluted and earnestly advised. He planned day and night for the northern road's war situation and had deep knowledge of the conditions in the Three Serpent Cities. As the Chief Intelligence Officer, he sat upright, narrating calmly, with complete planning already prepared.

"The Four States of Tlaxcala have a combined population of 400,000, with approximately over 100,000 surplus. And the Trascal State where the Four Serpent City is located is the most crucial, the core of the entire Four States Alliance. Facing the invasion of the Northern Army, the other three states have one to two thousand tribal warriors coming in support."

"The Alliance marched south from Hot Spring City, capturing Feathered Serpent City, capturing and killing over 10,000 guards and militia before and after. Then, four army corps were dispatched, clearing for a month, capturing 20,000 surplus, and killing 30,000 surplus, totaling over 50,000 surplus. Counting the Telaccala tribes fleeing to the wilds, the remaining three Serpent Cities have, at most, over 30,000 surplus!"

Upon hearing this, Aweit nodded slowly. Both were old hands in military affairs and familiar with the tribal alliance's system. Although these numbers were estimates, they were roughly accurate to reality.

"Your Majesty, among the three cities, the Cloud Serpent Mountain City is the most perilous and smallest in area. Such a fortress mountain city cannot accommodate too many people. The mountain road for attack is narrow, requiring not many to defend. The Scouts have repeatedly spied and gathered some intelligence..."

Gillim pondered for a little, reached into his chest, drew out a roll of paper, carefully unfolded it in front of the King, revealing a sketch of the Cloud Serpent Mountain City.

"The Cloud Serpent Mountain City, along with several surrounding mountain camps, holds approximately five to six thousand people, half are warriors, and half are militia. Including the relatives and weak of the nobles and warriors, there should be slightly more than ten thousand. The southern side of the mountain city is the main mountain path, and the northern side has a few narrow animal trails leading into the vast mountains. There are also a few springs in the mountain city and some barren thin fields for growing pumpkins for sustenance... As for the grain stored in the mountain city, it should be sufficient for at least a year. And if they abandon the old and weak, they can sustain even longer..."

Upon hearing this, Aweit furrowed his brows, face as somber as water. He had seen the terrain of the Cloud Serpent Mountain City with his own eyes, truly perilous and elevated, not something humanly possible to conquer.

"Gillim, you just mentioned, the narrow animal trails on the north side..."

"Your Majesty, the Telascalans have been operating here long and have early preparations. These trails allow only one or two people to walk side by side, easy to descend but hard to climb."

Gillim shook his head and spoke sincerely.

"The Cloud Serpent Mountain City can only be besieged, not forcibly attacked... This mountain city is even more daunting than the Ototpan Mountain City!"

"Ototpan Mountain City... Brother Tizoc..."

Aweit's expression turned serious, heart trembling. Tizoc's forceful assault on Ototpan Mountain City had cost him warriors, yet was unsuccessful. Then, after a prolonged siege, the army's morale faltered, and withdrawal wasn't pursued. Ultimately, the futile assault and lengthy siege bred discontent among tens of thousands of warriors, inciting dissent across the army corps, granting him a chance to gamble everything on a single throw!

"If the lynx ahead fell into a pitfall, then the tiger at the back must cautiously avoid it... Besieging the mountain city requires sufficient patience and time, but not necessarily many army corps..."

Gillim waited for a moment until the King finished pondering and gazed over. Only then did he continue speaking.

"Among the three cities, the White Snake Hill City is half mountainous and half on the plain, located atop a small hill. The plains south of Hill City are all farmlands, while the north, in the mountains, also holds several strategic camps. White Snake Hill City is slightly larger in area, including the defending army in the camps, estimated at eight to ten thousand, with warriors and militia each making up half. Including the elderly, weak, women, and children, Hill City is estimated to have 15,000 population, with food stores for a year."

"Hmm... White Snake Hill City, bows and catapults are not very useful there. However, the Divine Eagle Cannon, with the farthest range, can directly bombard the city walls!..."

Aweit pondered for a moment and asked in a deep voice.

"Gillim, how is the imitation of the Divine Eagle Cannon of the Kingdom of the Lake progressing? With several dozen Divine Eagle Cannons, White Snake Hill City wouldn't be hard to capture!"

"Royal Family, the imitation of the Divine Eagle Cannon is difficult..."

Gillim pressed his lips together and prostrated himself in apology.

"The craftsmen in the capital city's main camp have been testing for almost a year, with over a hundred clay molds, yet only four or five are usable... Perhaps another batch of Divine Eagle Cannons can be requisitioned from the Kingdom of the Lake..."

"Nearly a year and only four or five usable?"

Upon hearing this, Aweit's expression showed slight anger, and he spoke in a deep voice.

"Cannon casting is a major affair for the Alliance! If any supervisor is incompetent or corruptly delays, they must be sacrificed to the Chief Divine!"

Afterwards, the King's eyes moved, and he coldly asked.

"With so few cannons cast, could it be that the craftsman who came from the Kingdom to guide the casting meant to withhold secrets?"

"...There is no withholding of secrets. Even for the Kingdom of the Lake, cannon casting is similarly difficult, often with only one usable out of ten, which can be considered a blessing from the Chief Divine."

Gillim prostrated himself in salute, his thoughts racing, but he spoke no falsehoods on this matter. Before the King, to whom he was wholly loyal, he would never lie or conceal, which was why he had the King's trust.

"Hmm... They must be strictly supervised, to ensure the main camp hastens the casting!"

Aweit lowered his gaze and nodded. He thought for a while, carefully instructing.

"The Kingdom of the Lake is far away, at a distance of a thousand miles. The Divine Eagle Cannons are very heavy and extremely difficult to transport; it's likely that the requisition cannot be timely... Just have the capital city's main camp send the newly cast Divine Eagle Cannons as quickly as possible. Even one more during the siege is good!"

"As you command!"

Gillim respectfully complied. Then, he looked southwest and spoke of the last towering Tree Snake City.

"Among the three cities, Tree Snake City is the most prosperous and vast, the strongest in power and highest in status among the Four Snake Cities. In some respects, it can also be seen as the capital of the Telascallans..."

"To the north, Tree Snake City faces the river, with fields on the other three sides, making it convenient for a siege. The defending army in the city is estimated at fifteen thousand, along with several thousand family members, bringing the total to about twenty thousand. As for grain storage, the nobility of Tree Snake City have invested heavily in planting and conducted spring planting, but they cannot leave the city for autumn harvest... It is estimated they have only a little over eight months of supplies, at most able to hold out until next spring."

"Hold out until next spring?"

Aweit's mouth curved up as he shook his head and chuckled. Then, stroking his chin, he listened carefully to Gillim's plans while deep in thought.

"Royal Family, to conquer the three mutually supporting cities, one cannot rush it! It should be done from hardest to easiest, attacking Tree Snake City first, then capturing White Snake City, and finally surrounding Cloud Serpent City."

Gillim took out a map and gestured at the three Snake Cities in succession, explaining his prudent strategy.

"The Northern Army will establish a strong camp outside the three cities, completely blocking surrounding passages and mountain paths. Each division will deploy in turn. As the September rainy season fades, the Southern Army will move north, and the siege can begin..."

"Drive the surrendered army and militia to expend the defending army's stones, timber, ash jars, bows, and javelins. Use catapults, Divine Eagle Cannons, and crossbows to wear down the enemy's elite warriors and lower the defenders' morale. Then, deploy the City-State Warriors for combat until the Telascallans are exhausted of resources, their elite forces lost, morale depleted, and utterly worn out, at which point the Kingdom's Armored Guards can storm the walls and capture it in a single assault!"...

Aweit squinted, his gaze icy as he listened to the Chief Intelligence Officer's narration, staring at the map of the Trascal Basin. His mind was filled with various complex thoughts, not only of bloody battles but also of bloodless scheming and the kind of politics that become indifferent to bloodshed through constant exposure. After a long while, the ruthless King shook his head and replied soberly.

"No, Gillim, I can't wait that long! Within twenty days, I want Tree Snake City captured and the Telascallan capital taken!"