

Civilization 961

Chapter 961: Discussing Generals While Drinking Tea, Monarch and Ministers Determine Rankings

The fragrant wind curls around, stone lotuses open and close, and fresh dew slides between the grass. Singing birds chirp joyfully, foxes wave their tails lightly, Jaguars roar lying down... The moon sets and the sun rises, after a night of sparse rain and sudden wind; in search of mystery, until backaches; picking flowers is invigorating, drunkenly unaware of returning home~~

The next morning, Xiulote walked slowly, stepping on the drizzling raindrops, returning to the great hall to discuss matters with the waiting Head Warrior. As for Nashu, who usually stood by his side, well, she was unable to move conveniently today and did not appear.

"The rainfall this month is still so abundant!"

Xiulote stood by the window, looking at the low-hanging clouds, reflecting on the wind and rain of the previous night. A slight smile appeared on his lips.

"Late summer's high temperatures and heavy rains are the critical period for corn's rapid growth. As long as it's adequately watered, this fall should see a good harvest."

"Indeed. Blessings from the Chief Divine! The corn in the fields looks promising."

Bertade nodded calmly. He picked up a purple clay teapot, brewed a cup of hibiscus tea, and handed it to his Highness. Then, observing his somewhat fatigued Highness, he gently advised.

"Your Highness, high temperatures and heavy rains may make the corn grow tall, but there's a risk of excessive growth, requiring ample sunlight... While this cloud and rain are good, one shouldn't overindulge."

"Indeed! If there's too much rain without sunlight, the corn stalks will grow excessively and may lodge, damaging the harvest... hmm?"

Xiulote sipped the floral tea, savoring the rich floral aroma, and nodded in agreement. He then noticed the clear gaze of the Head Warrior, paused for a moment, and somewhat awkwardly replied.

"... After the hardships of war, a little rest now and then..."

"Your Highness, it's been a long time since you practiced martial arts in the morning."

Bertade smiled slightly, stopping just short. He too took a sip of the floral tea, naturally diverting the topic.

"As a warrior, one must hone a strong body, concentrate steadfast will, and nurture the energy of 'Ihoter'... Your Highness, perhaps tomorrow morning, I shall accompany you in practice!"

"Rise early, practice martial arts?"

Upon hearing this, Xiulote's eyes flickered. Memories of ten years surged into his mind, causing some daze. Since he was ten, he followed Jaguar Olosh for warrior training. And from the age of thirteen, the sparring partner had become the loyal Head Warrior, until he married at nineteen last year. Unknowingly, warrior training had been left aside for a year...

"Alright!"

The young King pondered for a moment, then his expression became solemn as he decisively nodded. He gazed at the calm Head Warrior and expressed his gratitude.

"Bertade, at my current position, there are increasingly fewer people who can advise me... If you leave in the near future, who in the kingdom could take your place?"

"Your Highness, Jaguar Olosh, with his rich experience and keen insight, can oversee the kingdom's major affairs. His loyalty to you is unwavering, and among the generals, he should be foremost after I depart."

"Yes. Jaguar Olosh was the Great General left to me by my father, and also my teacher in youth. I have always trusted him greatly. It's just that he needs to command the kingdom and cannot accompany me always."

Xiulote pondered for a while, drank more tea, and asked with a smile.

"Besides him?"

"Old General Etalik, steadfast and composed, with a robust style. He hails from your family's warriors, with deep qualifications, loyal beyond question. Among the generals, he should be second."

"Old General Etalik was the Great General left to me by my grandfather. Though he is old, his strength remains, capable of being entrusted with significant duties, holding the South for me. However, despite his robust health and ability to fight, he is already over fifty..."

"Your Highness, your family's warriors are numerous, loyal for generations, with loyalty proven. The High Priest has already gone to the Divine Kingdom, and the Legion Commander of the Eagle Corps is next to the King; you are their only master of allegiance... Temple Guard Captain Elvi, High Priest's Guard Commander Ecatl, High Priest's trusted aide Eva, all can fight fiercely for you!"

Bertade thought for a moment and emphasized his recommendation.

"Guard Commander Ecatl, his martial arts are no less than mine. Your Highness, you can have him by your side for protection, continuing to practice martial arts."

"Guard Commander Ecatl?"

Xiulote closed his eyes in thought, and a steadfast and composed figure appeared. He was also a family warrior familiar since childhood.

Ecatl had protected his grandfather for many years; his loyalty was beyond doubt. On the night of his grandfather's passing, he led the Death Warriors, setting great fires in Cholula Holy City, charging back and forth, fighting a bloody battle for a day and a night, creating a good opportunity for the southern army to enter the city.

"Very good! Bertade, your reminder is excellent!... Hmm, any other suggestions?"

The Head Warrior hesitated for a moment, then cautiously spoke.

"Your Highness, your kin siblings have all grown older... perhaps you could train a few."

"Hmm? My kin siblings? You mean..."

"All will be at Your Highness's discretion!"

Bertade bowed his head in salutation, saying no more.

Xiulote pursed his lips, pondering silently. In this era of noble birth, where family stands above the state, the relatives of a ruler often hold great power. Even if there are some unspeakable risks, they are, in most cases, the monarch's most crucial support, with loyalty certainly surpassing that of other Divine Descendants.

Elder Trakel Er is the brother of the predecessor Montezuma, who consecutively supported three of Montezuma's grandsons to serve as the King of the Alliance.

"Counting, Xiuwali is four years younger than me, this year sixteen; Xiujigao is three years younger than me, this year fifteen. Both of them have completed the basic warrior training... The elder brother is like a father, my father entrusted me with two brothers, always hoping they would achieve something. By now, the eastward expedition will likely have no major changes... So be it!"

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Xiulote thought for a moment and then made a decision.

"Send out an envoy, summon those two from Qinchongcan Capital to the army! Let them start as guards in the Personal Guard Camp, without any preferential treatment."

In Navajo, "cuahtli" means White Eagle, and "galgo" means greyhound. Hmm, eagle and dog are names favored by the Mexica. Therefore, the meanings of the names Xiuwali and Xiujigao are "Repair White Eagle" and "Repair Greyhound."

"As you command, Your Highness!"

Bertade bowed respectfully, Xiulote nodded thoughtfully.

The family Samurai of fathers and ancestors, the brothers of the Royal Family, are loyal forces that can be relied upon. Besides them, the rest are the trusted generals he has personally selected and nurtured.

"Bertade, among the generals, who can be third?"

Upon hearing this question, the Head Warrior's expression became solemn. He thought for a while and carefully responded.

"Your Highness, the Hereditary Noble Kuluka is intelligent, thoughtful, and loyally honest. He can win the hearts of Samurai and Militia, is full of respect for Your Highness, clear in his affairs, and possesses flexibility... among the generals, he can be third!"

"Ha ha, Monkey Kuluka! Over the past few years, he has guarded the North for me, managed the Canine Descendants' banner teams, and steadily suppressed the Chapala Lake Region and the Otomi Three States... A truly skilled Commander-in-Chief will neither achieve surprising victories nor win fame for wisdom and valor. Because when everything is prepared, there is no need to risk."

Xiulote chuckled, took a sip of tea, and said meaningfully.

"The monkey, after further honing for several years, can become the Marshal! I once considered sending him for the major events in the East. However, I worry that he might be too agile and not suitable to be sent too far. After all, some loyalty should not be tested by time and distance..."

Upon hearing this, Bertade felt his heart constrict. He immediately kneeled, bowing to the King.

"Your Highness! Witnessed by the Chief Divine, I am unwaveringly loyal to you!..."

"Bertade."

The young King raised his gaze, looking at the kneeling Head Warrior. Then he reached out both hands to personally lift him.

"Between us, though as monarch and subordinate, we are in fact like teacher and student. I trust you as I trust my own kin. Regarding the affairs of the Eastern islands, I will entrust all of them to you. If the lands of the Taino in the East are suitable, you may be granted lands and become a King..."

"Your Highness! Please do not say more."

The Head Warrior's forehead sweated, his calm face showing anxiety.

"You are revered like the Sun, surpassing all in this world!"

"Hmm."

Xiulote chuckled, not saying much more. He changed the topic, asking gently.

"I heard that you're planning to marry your niece to Black Wolf Torc?"

"Yes, Your Highness! My niece, 'Pearl' Axiuli (acitlalin) is already sixteen, of marriageable age. Torc is a junior I have always valued..."

Bertade's expression remained a bit tense.

"Your Highness, if you feel it's inappropriate, the marriage can be canceled..."

"No, this marriage is very good."

Xiulote nodded with a smile, having no objections towards the trusted Great General's alliance.

"Among the generals, following the monkey, comes Black Wolf Torc. He is exceedingly brave, unparalleled in sharpness, has outstanding military achievements, and acts very decisively. Although he has some minor faults of being a bit fond of killing and fighting, his character is indeed straightforward and honest, even somewhat simple... entrusting your niece to him, you were not mistaken!"

Saying this, Xiulote paused, his lips curling.

"Bertade, as for you, you're already past forty, yet neither married nor with heirs. I have already instructed Nashu, that tonight, two girls from Tlaxcala will be sent to you. While there's still time, before heading to the East, leave descendants in the Kingdom!"

"Your Highness! This... I..."

Bertade was awkward, wanting to speak but hesitated, showing a rare blush.

Xiulote's smile faded, giving instructions solemnly.

"Bertade, this is a Royal Decree for you, it must be followed!"

"No, Your Highness... I... I already have heirs."

"What? What did you say?"

Bertade gritted his teeth, lowered his voice, and reported quietly.

"It's a girl, just turned two. Beside the Alliance's Naval Commander, Annatri... as per the Anna Family's customs, girls belong to her..."

"Ah?! You and Annatri have a two-year-old girl?"

Xiulote's eyes widened, scrutinizing the awkwardly bowed Head Warrior, genuinely impressed. This matter was hidden so well that there were no rumors in the Kingdom of the Lake.

"Bertade, why don't you bring the girl here, to raise by your side? Or I could send out an envoy to propose to King Aweit on your behalf."

"Your Highness... there's no need."

Upon hearing this, Bertade shook his head, calmly and resolutely.

"The Naval Forces family of the Alliance independently inherits and does not lean towards any side of the Royal Family. If Annatri were to marry me, she would be unable to continue leading the naval forces... she does not wish to leave."

"As for the child, if she is trained within the Naval Forces family, there's a great chance she may succeed the title of 'Annatri' the Mother of the Lake and become the next Naval Commander... whereas I am by Your Highness's side, bearing great responsibility, unable to teach the child."

"..."

Xiulote looked at the composed Head Warrior, and after a while, sighed softly.

"Bertade, you have worked hard."

"Your Highness..."

The monarch and his subordinate were momentarily silent, raising their cups to drink tea. After a while, the low conversation began again in the hall.

"After Black Wolf, how are the generals ranked?"

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"The hereditary noble Ezpan holds you in awe. He guards the southwest, with a ruthless style and decisive actions, steadfast as a wolf. After the Black Wolf, he ranks fifth."

"And then?"

"The Eagle Warrior Balda is loyal to the Royal Family and respects you. He has deep experience, is a Great General of the Imperial Guard Legion, and conducts affairs calmly. Although he lacks the renown of brilliant strategy or courage, he is not prone to mistakes... among the generals, he ranks sixth."

"Hmm... continue."

"After that, there is the Poet Commander Balamo, who guards the northern wilderness. He has a way with people, is meticulous in thought, and unafraid of hardship, without excessive ambition... The Director of the Mining and Metallurgy Bureau, Necali, oversees the copper and iron mining districts. He is battle-hardened, decisive, diligent, and strict, with a devout faith... The Artillery Camp Commander Tupa is sharp and eager to learn, loyal and obedient... As long as Your Highness holds power, the Kingdom's generals will remain loyal and reliable!"

"Very good! Is there more?"

"Besides the seasoned generals of the Kingdom, there are the surrendered generals of Tarasco, and the battle-proven generals of the Canine Descendants... Red Frog Kaka, resilient and courageous in battle. Red Monkey Ozoma, agile and clever. Red Deer Masate, skilled in raids. Red Salamander Arno, proficient in military organization..."

"The Canine Descendants generals..."

Xiulote's eyes flicked, deep in thought. The Canine Descendants generals are flexible in their beliefs, have a simple dialectical thinking, and quickly embrace new ideas. These characteristics are well-suited for facing the impending European colonizers...

"Bertade, if you could choose one of the four Canine Descendant generals to accompany you at sea, whom would you choose?"

"Ah?"

Bertade appeared surprised. He glanced at the serious expression of His Highness and, after a brief moment of thought, confidently gave his answer.

"Your Highness, I would choose Red Salamander Arno."

Xiulote looked at the calm Head Warrior with interest.

"Why?"

"Because, the Chieftain Red Salamander Axolotl is dead, and only Arno remains in the Kingdom."

Bertade smiled and explained in detail.

"Arno once lived anonymously, farming in a village. Compared to the other chieftains, he lacks excessive ambition... The islands of the East are thousands of miles away, and if the generals harbor too much ambition, they may become a hidden threat to the Kingdom."

"... Hmm."

Xiulote pondered for a long time, looking at the earnest Head Warrior, and nodded heavily.

The family generals left by his father and grandfather, the royal relatives cultivated by the Royal Family, the trusted commanders from commoner backgrounds, and the conquered and subjugated chiefs from various tribes... They all jointly control the military power of the Kingdom of the Lake, with cooperation and checks and balances. And uniting them all is the supreme and sole King of the Kingdom!

"No, there is also a naval force. Although currently small, it holds endless potential for the future!"

The young King's eyes flickered with fluctuating thoughts. After a few moments, he straightened his back, looked westward, and spoke solemnly.

"Where are the Kingdom's exploration fleets now, and how long have they rested?"

"Your Highness, the Kingdom's exploration fleets returned half a year ago. Currently, the two leading Captains are resting at the Southern Naval Forces base in Zicao City."

"Resting for half a year, that's enough!"

Xiulote's lips curved into a smile as he issued a Royal Decree, admitting no refusal.

"Send an envoy to command the two Exploration Captains to sail their longships, navigate the Tarsas River upstream, and reach the main camp in Water Valley City within one month to await new deployments."

"Your Highness, the midsection of the upper Tarsas River is extremely dangerous and difficult to navigate..."

"The rainy summer season raises the water level of some tributaries, allowing small boats to pass. Yes, send local fishermen to guide them. Additionally, arrange for Tlaxcala civilians along the upper reaches. In particularly impassable sections, mobilize a thousand men to haul overland!"

"What... navigating overland?"

Upon hearing this, Bertade was surprised. He pondered for a while and then nodded.

"Indeed, although long, the longships are not excessively heavy. With sufficient manpower, hauling overland is feasible. And currently, with the Southern Army holding many captives, the least thing we're lacking is manpower."

"Haha!"

Xiulote laughed aloud, making a firm decision. He gazed at the statue of the Chief Divine, with the determination and resolve of a King, and prayed aloud.

"Oh Chief Divine, grant us your blessing! Navigating overland is to expand our grand plans and head towards the vast East!... I shall wait here for their arrival!"

Chapter 964: Teotihuacan Valley, Divine Stone City and Cloud Temple

The wind blows southeast, rain falls in the valley, bright red saturates the earth, and corpses lie across the fields. Vultures descend on these lush farmlands, pecking without fear of passing people; the summer's flies gather, lured by the scent of blood, feasting in swarms.

Thick black smoke billows from the Mistek people's villages, fires burn fiercely, only to be extinguished by the rain. Yet, when the sunny days return, the flames of destruction reignite, burning for days without end.

This is the prosperous Teotihuacan Valley, located over five hundred miles southeast of the Lake Capital City, three hundred miles southeast of Water Valley City, and one hundred twenty miles southeast of Flower Grove Fort, the most important northern gathering place for the Mistek Tribe.

To the south, the Río Salado originates from the mountain ranges in the valley's east, winding its way southwards, irrigating the fertile lands of the three hundred-mile-long valley, flowing through the heart of the Mistek Alliance, reaching the perilous Cloud Mountain Holy City (Yanhuitlán).

Then, the Río Salado joins other streams, merging into the more southern Río Verde. The Río Verde continues south, winding six hundred miles through the Western Madre Mountains, near Huitzoctli where it finally flows into the vast North Pacific. Of course, the Río Salado and Río Verde bear colonial names; in this era, the Mistek people unify them under the name, "Life-giving Mother River bestowed by the Rain Divine."

Mountains gather clouds and rain, valleys nurture fertile land. Rivers hydrate the fields, drawing people to settle. From the northernmost Flower Grove Fort to the southernmost Huitzoctli, stretching nine hundred miles north to south, and two to three hundred miles east to west, lie the valleys in the mountains suitable for farming, home to over eight hundred thousand Mistek Tribe members. Among these valleys, the northern Teotihuacan Valley is the most prosperous!

Over one hundred fifty thousand Mistek Tribe members have settled in this fertile valley, founding the ancient Divine Stone City (Tehuacán).

Countless villages scatter around the Divine Stone City like beans around corn, serving the cloud-revered priests and nobility. East ten miles from Divine Stone City lies the more ancient Cloud Temple, one of the two holy sites of the Mistek people, towering in the mountains with the Teotihuacan Pyramid!

The "Cloud Temple," Teotihuacan Pyramid, isn't in the Divine Stone City. Like the Sun and Moon Pyramids, it's a classical wonder built in the Teotihuacan Period, located in a mountain favorable for stone quarrying. Divine Stone City sits on a riverbank hill, occupying vast fertile lands alongside the river.

In the hearts of the Mistek people, who revere the divine across various tribes, the northern Teotihuacan Pyramid is the dwelling place of the ancient gods, while the more southern holy site, Cloud Altar, is the sanctuary of the Rain Divine Zavi.

Clouds drift from the south, covering the valley plagued by slaughter. To the east of the towering Divine Stone City, a fierce battle rages on.

Produced by various Mistek tribes is the "Maya Blue" dye, and they revere the blue of the sky. Three thousand Mistek Warriors don blue cotton armor, wear pointed cloth caps, spread across the fields, embroiled in combat with two thousand white cotton armor-wearing Tlaxcala Defectors. Thousands of battling warriors wield obsidian clubs, clashing on wet red soil, where every minute, dozens perish.

At this moment, the honorable life of warriors wilts like weeds in the field, insignificant.

"Rain Divine Zavi, protect us!"

"Kill, scatter them, go to rescue the Mountain Temple!"

"The enemy can hardly hold on anymore!"

The brutal fight lasted just two quarters, and the Tlaxcala warriors were beginning to struggle. They were fewer in number and mostly newly recruited defectors, with extremely low morale. They managed to hold the line through dense formations and the courageous leader.

Military leader Koo (Koo), clad in cloud-pattern leather armor, head adorned with a tiger-headed wooden helmet, neck adorned with golden ornaments, stands at the rear of the Mistek military formation. In the Mistek Language, "Koo" means blue serpent, denoting divinity amongst the clouds. This name alone indicates his esteemed status.

Koo's left hand is bound with a blue feathered wooden shield, and his right hand grips a delicate silver-inlaid club, with a vibrant cluster of feathers behind him. The feather cluster stands two meters high, filled with gorgeous bird feathers of green, blue, and white, resembling a cluster of reeds in summer, swaying high within the warrior formations, very eye-catching.

The feather cluster is a typical emblem of a Mistek leader, like the grand flag of an alliance commander. Just like the northern Mexico and Tlaxcala people, the leading Mistek commander of the legion will wear more splendid war clothes, don more feathers, and bear even more conspicuous emblems.

In the armies of Central America, to be a commander is to ensure every warrior can see you at a glance!

"Strike! Fight for the almighty God of Death! Those who achieve battle merit will be promoted to warriors, gaining land in the kingdom!..."

The skirmish at the front continued, the Telascallan warriors staggered but refused to collapse. The incomprehensible cries in Navajo echoed from afar, carrying the names of the Divine, seemingly infusing them with extra courage.

Military Leader Koo squinted, standing on high ground, carefully observing the battlefield ahead. Soon, a middle-aged samurai brandishing a copper spear and fighting fiercely came into his view. This middle-aged samurai, clad in leather armor and wearing a bronze feathered helmet, stood at the forefront of the army formation. Each time the formation swayed, he would shout loudly, boosting the morale of the warriors of Tlaxcala.

"Warrior of the Rain Divine, Rich! Take a hundred hunters of the Rain Divine and kill that Feathered Warrior! The noble Mountain Temple cannot hold out for long under the Mexica's siege. We must support quickly!"

"Yes, Leader!"

The warrior of the Rain Divine, Rich, knelt on the ground, bowing heavily like a woodpecker. In fact, his name means "woodpecker" in Mistek Language. The Mistek people claim to be the "Cloud People," favoring things close to the sky and naturally respecting birds. Their most revered divine is the Chief Divine, Zavi, who governs the sky and rain.

"Charge with me, kill that chieftain!"

"Woodpecker" Rich bellowed, wielding his war club, and reached the frontline of the battlefield. Over a hundred elite hunters of the Rain Divine carried shields, gripped war clubs, and surged forward. Behind the hunters were two obsidian javelins. They steadied themselves, emitted intimidating bird calls, then drew out sharp javelins, aiming at the enemy's leader!

Witnessing this scene, Defector Camp Captain Tetica's brow twitched; he did not hesitate and immediately turned to flee. In Navajo Language, the name "Tetica" holds no divine significance; it merely means "stone," akin to the names in the Celestial Empire like "pillar, stone."

With such an ordinary name, "Pillar" Tetica naturally did not have a high-ranking background. In the venerated nobility of the Tlaxcala Alliance, he had no chance of attaining leadership over thousands. However, under the new order brought by the Mexica, he was promoted to Defector Camp Captain, surviving several fierce skirmishes by being fearless in the face of life and death, daring to fight, and being able to seize the opportunity and adapt flexibly.

"Whoosh!"

The fierce javelin shot through the air with great force, breaking the samurai's shield. Dozens of warriors from the front line of Tlaxcala were pierced by the javelin, pinned to the soft mud, emitting an eerie, non-human-like wail. Then, in just a few breaths, a second round of deadly javelins struck again!

"Whoosh!"

"Ah!..."

The military leader turned to flee, causing heavy casualties among the front-line warriors. The Telascalla defectors could no longer hold out, letting out frightened cries and instantly collapsing. Over a thousand remaining defectors discarded their shields, threw away their war clubs, and fled hurriedly towards the forest in the East.

"Ha ha! The reputed Mexica legion doesn't seem that formidable after all! Quick, swift pursuit to the east!"

In just moments, thousands of warriors who had persistently resisted transformed into panicked turkeys fleeing in all directions. Military Leader Koo laughed heartily, filled with satisfied ambition.

Today's skirmish, defeating thousands of warriors, was a rare triumph in the Mistek Alliance. If they could successfully support the Cloud Temple, then in next year's election of Divine Stone City's Main Tribe, victory was in his grasp!

Yes, compared to the relatively centralized northern tribes, the political structure of the southern Mistek Alliance was more relaxed, still maintaining an outdated tribal election system. From time to time, elections were held by various tribal chieftains to decide the highest leader of the valleys. Of course, only noble Divine Descendants warriors could participate in such leader elections.

Hundreds of Telascallan warriors fled eastward without resistance. Three thousand Mistek warriors cried out bird calls excitedly, pursuing and slaughtering. And the brightly conspicuous leader's feathered bundle, surrounded by hundreds of hunters of the Rain Divine, moved continuously eastward.

The Mistek warriors indulged in the joy of victory and slaughter, stepping over the corpses of the Telascallan warriors, chasing into the undulating forests. This sacred forest was the dwelling place of the Mistek people's spirit; how could they allow the evil Mexica legion to occupy it for long?

With this mindset, the pursuing Mistek warriors showed no mercy and fought desperately. Soon, the towering Cloud Temple appeared a few miles away, adding a sacred excitement to the joy in the

warriors' eyes. The blue-armored Mistek warriors pursued, excited, until a particularly sharp eagle sentinel suddenly rang out amidst the deep mountains!

Chapter 965: Ambush and Assassination

"Yo!"

The mountains loom vast and covered in dense forests, the Teotihuacan Valley is lush with greenery, and an ancient temple is faintly visible atop the mountain. The high-pitched cry of an eagle echoes in the mountain forest like the omen of the God of Death, suddenly overwhelming the hearts of the Mistek Warriors!

"Awwwooooo! Kill! Kill them!"

Ferocious wolf howls rise and fall, accompanied by shouts boiling with murderous intent. Thousands of Canine Warriors with painted faces and dyed hair, all clad in cotton armor, wielding copper spears, leaped out from the hidden undergrowth. Many of the red-haired Canines held cheap bamboo greatbows. Standing on high ground, they took brief aim and unleashed a fierce volley of copper arrows towards the scattered Mistek front lines!

"Swish swish swish!"

A storm of sharp arrows rushed from dozens of steps away, bringing the whistle of death. Mere breaths later, came the tragic wails of the wounded Mistek Warriors!

"Damn it! Despicable northern barbarians, setting up an ambush for a sneak attack!"

Upon seeing the large number of northern Barbarian Soldiers emerging with bows and spears, the Rain Divine Warrior Rich's expression changed. He immediately crouched low, hiding behind the tall trees as the sharp wind of arrows brushed past his hair.

A huge wave of arrows swiftly attacked, so precise and powerful. In an instant, the hundreds of courageous Mistek vanguards suffered heavy casualties. A good fifty or sixty warriors leading the charge perished in the first round of attacks, and what followed was the second and third waves of arrows.

"Such powerful arrows!"

The Rain Divine Warrior Rich pressed his lips tightly, gripping his javelin, feeling powerless in his heart. He raised his shield and cautiously looked around the forest. The Mexica legion had long prepared for the ambush, occupying the high ground of the forest. At such a short distance, facing the mighty greatbows, the warriors' cotton armor couldn't resist at all!

"Damn it! We must lead the elites, attack from both sides, and crush the archers on high ground!"

"Whizz, whizz whizz!"

Arrows flew and javelins fell, piercing through flesh and blood, unleashing vibrant life. The Rain Divine Warrior Rich crouched low, gritting his teeth, pondering the battle tactics. But soon, he no longer needed to worry about it: an even fiercer cry of battle exploded suddenly from his rear side, the position of the Central Army Commander-in-Chief!

"Whiz!"

A copper arrow came flying with immense power. In the midst of the Central Army, a Mistek personal guard holding his shield fell with a thud. A large spurt of blood splashed from his neck and poured into his vainly open mouth, like a fish spitting foam on the sand.

"No! Waka! My nephew!"

The military leader of Divine Stone City, Blue Snake Koo, was filled with rage and grief as he looked at his fallen nephew, his heart swelling with extraordinary pain; this was his intended heir!

The Mistek factions have an ancient heritage, ranging from hundreds to thousands of years. Their power structure has long been solidified, noble birth by divine authority through hereditary succession, adhering to a decentralized tribal democracy. The leaders of each faction were elected by chieftains, taking turns being the governors of important City-States. Family tribes were their power foundation, and the loosened tribal power was inherited among family warriors who could impress the populace...

In other words, they were still at the late tribal stage, having not developed into the feudal capabilities of 'Fatherly Sons' or 'Brotherly Friends'.

"Oh Rain Divine!"

Blue Snake Koo, biting his teeth, hurriedly raised his shield and ducked while shouting in fury and fear.

"Quick! Stabilize quickly! Personal guards, transmit messages to the rear-line warriors, get them to support fast, fight for the Rain Divine!"

"Whiz!"

Black Wolf Torc stood high up, lifting his hundred-pound greatbow, aiming at the Mistek's large banner. He squinted over a hundred paces away and shot another arrow. This time, it went seven to eighty steps, straight pinning into the branches. Black Wolf frowned at once.

"Damn it! This southern forest is really dense!"

The southern mountain forest obstructs, unlike the open spaces of the northern highlands, the bow's power is only effective for dozens of paces. This ambush ultimately depends on the warriors' weapons to decide the victor!

Black Wolf shook his head, lowered his greatbow, straightened his spine, and looked at the battle unfolding in the woods. Just after a moment's look, a confident smile emerged on his face.

"Not bad! The deceiving Tlaxcala defectors are caving in well!"

In front of him, the suddenly ambushed Mistek Warriors were like a turbulent deer herd, colliding left and right in the woods, unable to align themselves. They were so chaotic in the chase that they had no formation to speak of. Several hundred vanguards were directly suppressed by arrow rain, with more than a thousand rear guards several miles away.

At this moment, a thousand personal guard warriors led by Black Wolf split into two teams, attacking from the left and right flanks. They were dressed in armor, simultaneously entering the enemy's central army, targeting the towering Mistek banner!

"Kill! Kill them!"

"Charge in! The one with the feathered bundle is the Mistek's commander!"

"Chieftain Black Wolf said! That head is worth 800 acres of fertile land and 40 fertile women!"

Before the battle, Black Wolf informed the entire legion, promising the reward of a first-level Military Merit Nobility. Whether you were a Canine Warrior, Prepetcha Warrior, Tekos Tribe Warrior, or a Tlaxcala defector, as long as you could decapitate the Mistek commander in battle, you would be directly promoted to first-level nobility, granted land and slaves!

Black Wolf's Guajili legion served as the military's edge, always being the vanguard in every battle, claiming the most captures, and suffering the greatest casualties. This legion maintained a formidable strength of eight thousand warriors and also had several thousand defector regiments.

Constant battle loss and replenishment rapidly changed the composition of the legion's soldiers. By today, it had transformed from a purely Canine Legion into a hybrid legion where warriors from various factions gathered, judged only by valor, not by origin.

The brave legion commander, seasoned officer backbone, plentiful spoils of war, and generous military merit rewards, only these gathered the fierce and brave warriors who experienced life and death, originating from a jumble of backgrounds to form the wild and tough Guajili Battle Group!

"Tssssh!"

Two hundred Mexica Warriors, serving as the vanguard of the two flanking forces, clad in sturdy bronze medium armor and wielding sharp bronze axes, cleaved through the obstructing Mistek Warriors like chopping persimmons, cutting a direct path into the enemy's formation.

Over a thousand Canine Warriors, donned in leather armor, thrusting short spears, roared into battle fervently. They bypassed the armored warriors, swiftly breaking through, directly attacking around the Mistek feather flag, surrounding the despairing Enemy Commander, Blue Snake Koo with no room for escape.

"No! I am the revered Blue Snake Divine Descendant! I am the descendant of the Rain Divine! You brutal northern barbarians, the Rain Divine will bring corrosive rain, like the poison of the arrow frog, to destroy your faces, destroy your souls... ugh!!"

"Ha! At the doorstep of death, what's the use of saying so much?"

Red Deer Masate swung his bronze axe, striking Blue Snake Koo down to the ground. The symbols of divinity, the leader's feathered bundle, scattered on the ground, the vibrant feathers covered in dust and mud vanished from all Mistek Warriors' eyes. Then, Masate chuckled foolishly, knelt on one knee. He pressed one hand on the Divine Descendant, raised his bronze axe with the other, and struck fiercely!

"Crack! Splash!"

The blood of the Divine Descendant dyed Masate's war clothes, as well as the deer head on his battle attire. Moments later, he grinned widely, stood up, raising a discontentedly open-headed head in his right hand, full of smugness towards the direction of Black Wolf, and declared victory, watching the late Red Frog and Red Monkey arrive.

"With the Chief Divine's blessing, I ran the fastest! The first credit of this battle, along with the forty fertile women, all belong to me!... Haha!"

Chapter 966: Rain Divine is Dead!

The pursuit encountered an ambush, the Commander-in-Chief was killed, and the Mexica trampled the divine feathers. A large group of Barbarian Soldiers continuously emerged from the mountain forest, encircling from both flanks. The army formation of the Mistec people only held out for a quarter before collapsing under the fierce assault. Thousands of Samurai let out frantic and fearful cries, scattering in the ferocious raid.

The battle thus entered a new phase of pursuit and northern retreat, and the true intense casualties began here!

"Chase! Chop off their heads, capture their Samurai! This is all military merit! Awooo!"

The Canine Warriors excitedly growled and howled. They ran and pursued through the mountain forest with great speed, like a pack of hunting dogs, knocking down the lagging enemies onto the ground. They wielded Copper Spears, slashed with Bronze Axes, and then pulled out agave ropes, skillfully binding the limbs of the captives, wantonly looting the possessions of the Nobility Samurai.

Each Mistec state was located in the geologically active Southern Madre Mountains, a region also rich in Gold and Silver. Their Goldsmiths and Silversmiths possessed high craftsmanship and could forge various exquisite Gold and Silver Necklaces and ornaments. The faith of Rain Divine Zavi also revered the colors of Gold and Silver. Hence, the necks of Mistec Nobility were always radiant, shimmering with soul-stirring light.

Victory was assured, and Black Wolf Toltec smiled at the corner of his mouth. He watched the fleeing and slaughtered enemy troops and enjoyed the moment of triumph before gradually calming down. He had experienced such scenes too many times, and today's battle was hardly difficult.

Black Wolf slightly lowered his eyes, pondered for a while, then called for the Camp Commander of the Tlaxcala Defector Camp, "Stake" Tetica.

"Tetica, your Tlaxcala camp performed well in luring the enemy!"

"Honorable Black Wolf Legion Commander, it is all thanks to the protection of the Chief Divine!"

Tetica respectfully knelt down, lowered his head, a trace of bitterness appearing on his face. The three thousand Temple Warriors dispatched from Divine Stone City were the elite among the Mistec people. They fought bravely to rescue the Temple in the mountains. However, this lure and defeat also cost the Defector Camp eight to nine hundred casualties. These once high and mighty Samurai fell into captivity, burnt like firewood, dying alongside the humble Militia. Alas! Who knows if their souls in their heart could go to the Divine Kingdom of the God of the Hunt after dying in the southern mountain forest...

Thinking of this, Tetica's heart shivered. He carefully raised his eyes to glance at the terrifying Black Wolf Legion Commander, clasped the Hummingbird Talisman around his neck, and prayed right in front of him.

"Praise the Chief Divine! He has granted us victory!"

"Haha!"

Black Wolf laughed loudly. He looked slantwise at Tetica, gave a deep glance, then waved his hand generously, and declared.

"Tetica, the blessings of the Chief Divine fell only on those Samurai who fought devoutly! Hmm, the Tlaxcala Samurai are still capable!"

Saying this, Black Wolf extended his finger, pointing to the vaguely visible Pyramid Temple in the mountains.

"The Cloud Temple, the Teotihuacan Pyramid still has several hundred Temple Warriors defending it. Go! Take the Tlaxcala warriors and capture the Temple for me! Once the Temple falls, the side halls, the Samurai residences, and the subsidiary villages, can be yours to plunder!"

The Cloud Temple is the dwelling place of All Gods, the northern Holy Land of the Mistec people. It is naturally not just a grand pyramid but also includes hundreds of Priesthood, several hundred Temple Warriors, and villages with thousands of people that support priests and warriors. In this era, every large inherited Temple has accumulated hundreds or even thousands of years of tribute. The quantity of precious metals in them would make any European Monarch envious.

"The Cloud Temple... free to plunder?!"

Upon hearing this, Tetica's eyes suddenly turned red. With shattered faith, he no longer held the former reverence for the Divine, seeing only reality. The Defector Camp Captain immediately lowered his head, s good number of bows.

"Generous and dignified Legion Commander, the Tlaxcala warriors are willing to fight for you!"

"Haha!"

Upon hearing this, Black Wolf laughed heartily. But soon, he furrowed his brows and sternly corrected.

"No, you fight for His Highness, for the Chief Divine!"

"Yes, yes! For the Legion Commander, His Highness, and the Chief Divine!"

Tetica respectfully saluted. Then, he raised his War Club, leading the consolidated Defector Camp towards the towering Cloud Temple.

As the sun sets, the moon rises, as the sun rises, the moon sets. The verdant earth is dotted with solidified crimson, and rigid corpses are covered by dense vegetation. Meanwhile, blazing flames rose from below the mountain Temple village, burning all the way up, accompanied by shouting, killing, and desperate wails!

One-sided pursuit continued for full two days. Under the pursuit of Canine Hunters, of the three thousand elite Mistec warriors, only about two to three hundred escaped. The Canine brought back two thousand severed heads and seven to eight hundred pale-faced, capable-of-walking defectors.

According to the tradition of the Guajili Legion, all warriors unwilling to surrender were executed; injured enemies incapable of walking were all executed; noble captives with influential power were directly sacrificed. This cruel combat custom stems both from the Alliance's traditional human sacrifice practice and the harsh natural laws of the wilderness, striking fear into all enemies.

"Pile up all two thousand severed heads to build a pyramid of skulls!"

Black Wolf coldly issued the first military order to the surrendered Mistec warriors. He then smiled faintly at the corner of his mouth, holding the Bronze Qin Sword at his waist, and asked blandly.

"Among you warriors, who is the most capable? Stand out before me!"

The Mistec warriors looked dispirited, exchanging glances. Soon, their gaze focused on a warrior robust like a leopard.

"Damn it!"

Rain Divine Warrior Lichi cursed inwardly. Bound at the hands, he lowered his head, tiptoed, walking on the ball of his foot as he cautiously stood out.

Black Wolf narrowed his eyes, observed Lichi's walking pace, and slightly nodded. Then, he tightened his grip on the Copper Sword and strode closer.

"I am Black Wolf Torc! Mistec Warrior, tell me your name!"

"I am the Rain Divine Warrior from Divine Stone City, Woodpecker Lichi!"

Lichi slightly squatted, nervously replied. He has heard of the Mexica tradition, which favored pitting captured enemy warriors against the Alliance's warriors under unfair conditions, using the lives of outstanding warriors to please the belligerent and bloodthirsty War God.

"Riki, Woodpecker Lichi? Good!"

The Black Wolf slowly nodded, smiling. Then, he stepped forward, suddenly drawing the bronze sword from his waist and slashing toward the unarmed Lichi!

"Ha!"

"Ah..."

Lichi was abruptly attacked, his body instinctively dodging. His steps leaped like a leopard, shifting one step to the right. Then he painstakingly evaded, dodging two consecutive sword strikes until he was out of breath. Following that, a sharp sword blade came hacking down, the fierce sword wind scattering his hair, with cold death looming in an instant!

"Ah!"

At the brink between life and death, the Black Wolf suddenly twisted his wrist, transforming the sharp blade into the thick sword spine. He turned the slash into a smack, using skilled capturing techniques, heavily pounding on Lichi's shoulder.

"Pop!"

"Ugh!"

Lichi, the Rain Divine warrior, groaned, losing balance, and was directly knocked to the ground. His pupils shrank then expanded abruptly, sweat pouring from his forehead like a waterfall, even his knees trembling slightly. Seconds later, a red line appeared on his forehead, a faint trace of blood seeping out. In that instant, he had been only half a finger's breadth away from death.

"Haha!"

Looking at the fallen Lichi, the Black Wolf laughed heartily, nodding with satisfaction.

"Not bad, with hands bound, yet able to dodge my three strikes. Truly an outstanding warrior!"

After speaking, the Black Wolf stepped forward again, raising the Qin Sword once more, slashing down mercilessly!

"Screech!"

Lichi's mind shuddered, his gaze losing focus, his spine electrified. As he came to his senses, he realized the rope binding his hands had been cut by the fearsome samurai before him.

"Lichi, from today, you will be the head of these over 700 defectors!"

The Black Wolf sheathed the bronze sword, stretched out his hand, lifting Lichi from the ground as a coyote would grasp a lynx. He looked into Lichi's eyes with chilling black eyes, commanding without room for refusal.

"Remember! You must fight for the Chief Divine, for His Highness! The bravely fighting warriors will attain wealth, women, land, even titles, becoming nobility of the Alliance! But cowardly warriors will be as lowly as ants on the ground. As for traitors..."

The Black Wolf squinted, grinning, revealing sharp teeth as he spoke word by word.

"I will personally decapitate them!"

"..."

Lichi pressed his lips tightly, hesitating for a moment. He looked at the Black Wolf's harsh face, as though facing a beast from the jungle. After a while, the surrendered Rain Divine warrior slowly lowered his head, his voice weak yet clear.

"Yes. I obey you..."

"Louder!"

"Yes! I obey you!"

"Say to me, praise the Chief Divine!"

"...Praise the Chief Divine!"

"Good!"

The Black Wolf nodded in satisfaction. He released his hand, instructing.

"Take your people and start building the mound of heads! Remember, place the heads of the Divine Descendant Nobility at the top!"

Lichi nodded silently. At this moment, something seemed lost from his heart, yet also as if something was freed. He turned around, glancing instinctively at the nearby Cloud Temple, where flames were igniting beneath the pyramid.

Moments later, a wave of frenzied wolf howls emanated from the Divine Mountain of the Temple, accompanied by nearly insane shouts. It was the cries of the Tlaxcala defectors, now also like Canine Descendants, full of the wilderness's ferocity and coldness.

"Haha!"

The Black Wolf listened for a moment, then laughed aloud, like a Wolf King from the wilderness.

"Not bad, what a bunch of wolf cubs!"

Lichi paused, his knees somewhat weak. He breathed heavily a few times, stabilizing his trembling spirit, yet his mind was blank. He had learned the Navajo dialect of the North, able to understand the calls in the wind. This calling seemed like the advent of doom, causing the nearby Mistec defectors to reveal genuine despair.

"The Rain Divine is dead! The Chief Divine reigns supreme!... Cloud Temple has fallen!"

Chapter 967: Land of the Rain God, Legacy in the Cloud

The long wind blows and scatters, the fine rain trickles down. Blood spreads across the sacred valley, the corpses of the Mistec people lie everywhere. The flames of the temple burn faintly, then extinguish in the wind and rain, like the protection of the Rain Divine, or like the tears of all gods, witnessing the war and conquest.

Black Wolf walks through the blood-colored valley, steps over the lush farmland, passes through the charred village, and climbs the grayish-brown hillside. Finally, the ancient Teotihuacan pyramid clearly appears in front of him.

The Cloud Temple, the Teotihuacan pyramid, or rather the group of pyramids, is a sacred mountain sanctuary. It's located on the high northern point of the Teotihuacan Valley, smaller in scale compared to the Holy City of Teotihuacan in the Alliance, or the Holy City of Nava Cholula. Among the pyramids before him, the most important Rain God Temple is only thirty meters high, while the surrounding temples of other gods are even smaller.

The construction of these pyramids might be even older than the Teotihuacan Period. The deep green stone bricks have endured two thousand years of wind and rain; the ancient temples are mottled and worn by the elements, splendid in the Classical Period before Christ, yet fallen by the end of the seventh century.

And now, they have been piously worshiped anew by the various tribes of the Mistec. The temple walls are covered with snake-shaped patterns, and sculptures of jaguars and skulls. The ancient Feathered Serpent, the Rain Divine's jaguar, along with the undead of two thousand years, silently watch the Mexica people's conquering army once more.

Black Wolf's steps are steady, he crosses the corpses of temple warriors and steps into a grand hall adorned with gold and silver. Immediately, a lifelike golden statue of the divine catches his eye, nearly two meters tall!

Rain God Zavi wears a wide hat open at the front, sitting poised on the high Throne of the Gods. He has eyes covering half his face, a flat nose, and tightly pressed wide lips. In the eyes of later generations, he would resemble an elderly scholar wearing deep-framed glasses. At this moment, the ancient divine has a solemn expression, motionless, overlooking the insignificant visitor as if in contemplation.

"Is this the Rain Divine of the Mistec people?"

Black Wolf squints his eyes, slightly raises his head, and directly meets the gaze of the divine. The Mistec craftsmen have likely spent immense effort to carve such a realistic statue on relatively soft gold. Their metal craftsmanship truly stands out in the world.

Faced with the query from the Mexica Commander-in-Chief, the Grand Hall of the Temple is shrouded in dead silence. On the surrounding walls, fresh bloodstains have yet to coagulate, with red handprints still visible. The resistant temple guards and priests have just been dealt with. In the vast temple, only dozens of Mexica warriors in armor holding weapons remain, along with a dozen captive Mistec priests.

"Hmm!"

After a while, no one responds. Black Wolf furrows his brows, looks at the captive temple priests, and a murderous intent arises in his heart.

"Bring them over!"

Red Frog Keka nods. He grins, reveals his teeth, extends his rough large hand like a mountain leopard catching a bird, and grabs an elderly priest wearing the most ornate feather crown with feathers on his head. Seeing the pale-faced Mistec old priest, the once chieftain of the wilderness feels disdain in his heart.

These southern priests are really too weak! Thin arms, slender limbs, not even decent muscles on their body. Not to mention any spells, probably can't even wield weapons properly, a chieftain of the wilderness can easily defeat ten of them!

"Is your Rain Divine perhaps the great Rain Divine of the Alliance, the incarnation of Tlaloc?"

Black Wolf looks at the old priest and asks the first question with seriousness. In the Alliance's traditional beliefs, the Rain Divine Tlaloc's status is second only to the supreme Chief Divine, and he has always been revered by the Mexica people. If the Mistec's Rain Divine is related to Tlaloc, he would show some respect.

"What? The supreme Rain Divine Zavi, how could he be the incarnation of the northern Rain Divine!"

Upon hearing the words of the Mexica warrior, the old priest's color changes drastically. Despite shaking all over, he still can't hide his raging anger, and rebukes vehemently.

"Chief Divine Zavi, has guarded the Mistec people for thousands of years! The land under our feet is the sacred Land of Zavi, Nuu Dzahui! ...The supreme Rain Divine controls wind and rain, drought, disease, and harvest, being one of the oldest gods in the world. He shines upon the valley, shines upon the jungle, eastward all the way to the Maya Lands, to the waves of the Great Lake. And when he blesses the world, your Aztec ancestors were still eating sand in the distant wilderness!"

"Ignorant Mexica, the Tlaloc you worship was merely the incarnation after being enlightened by the Rain Divine a few hundred years ago, appearing among the northern tribes!"

"Is that so?"

Listening to the old priest's narration, Black Wolf gazes with eyes wide open, showing a trace of confusion. He has not received priestly tutelage, knowing little about the origins of the divine. However, as he glances around, the Mistec captives all show expressions of natural conviction.

Upon seeing this, Black Wolf nods slightly. He looks at the old priest, who stands defiantly with his neck straightened, and smiles with judgment.

"Hmm, you probably didn't lie."

"The supreme Rain Divine witnesses everything! This is the Rain Divine's Holy Temple, it is not to be desecrated...uh! Hehe..."

The old priest's face suddenly shows extreme pain. He trembles violently, yet cannot utter a complete sentence. Blood begins seeping from the corner of his mouth, pupils rapidly dilate, and then his body collapses to the ground, chest facing up. A large patch of bright red spreads, soaking the ancient stone bricks, seeping into the cracks fractured by the wind, and merging with the ancient temple.

"Ah!"

The captive Mistec priests scream in terror. A sacrificial obsidian dagger is firmly embedded in the old priest's heart, buried up to the hilt!

"Disrespect to the supreme Chief Divine, insult the Alliance's Rain Divine, and this is the result of sacrifice!"

Black Wolf's expression is cold and he sternly pronounces the judgment. He then waves a hand, looking at Red Frog Keka.

"Next one!"

Very quickly, a young priest is brought forward. His face is handsome, also wearing a splendid feather crown, revealing a distinguished status. However, at this moment, he is trembling, his legs weak, glancing at the elder's corpse on the ground, then at the Mexica Commander-in-Chief with bloodstained war clothes, almost too terrified to speak.

"How much do you know about Divine Stone City?"

"Divine...Divine Stone City? It...it is the largest city-state in the valley, with a population of two to three thousand. The walls are six to seven meters high, divided into inner and outer cities. The inner city might have been built by the highland ancestors; it's a cloud relic from two thousand years ago, has undergone several apocalyptic events. And the outer city was built by the immortal unifier, the ancestor Tiger Claw King, four hundred years ago..."

"Hmm? Highland ancestors? Cloud relics? Apocalyptic events? And what's this Tiger Claw King?"

Upon hearing this jumble of incomprehensible terms, Black Wolf's eyes widen, feeling puzzled again. The young priest shivers inside, feeling cold all over, drops to his knees, "poof."

"Ah! Great Mexica General, please...please don't kill me! I am the descendant of the High Crocodile Priest, flowing with the immortal bloodline of Tiger Claw King, possessing the Cloud's legacy..."

"Haha!"

Seeing this, Black Wolf bursts into laughter. Compared to the stubborn old priest, such a high-ranking young person is much easier to break. He lowers his head, stares at the crying young priest, and tries to smile as "kindly" as possible.

"It seems like you know a lot! Come, tell me all the details about the Mistec Alliance, and I'll give you a chance for conversion to the supreme Chief Divine!"

Chapter 968: Mistek Tribes, Highlands, Lowlands, and Coast

"...The Primordial God emerged from chaos, embodying dual aspects in one form, resembling the visage of a deer, known as the Deer Day God. He divided the heavens and the earth, delineated mountains and rivers, separated light from darkness, and created the origin of the world! Subsequently, his two manifestations procreated with each other, giving birth to the four Creator Gods, namely the Rain Divine Zavi (Dzahui), the Sun God Tonatiuh, the Feathered Serpent Divine Cohuy, and the God of Death Mictlantecuhtli..."

"Beyond the four Creator Gods, there are also the Fire God Hueheteotl, the God of Fertility Nitoayuta, and the God of Wealth Yozotoyua... In fact, the origin of the Mexica deities is quite similar to that of the Mistek deities. Both belong to the Nava Faith, perhaps they are manifestations of each other..."

Upon hearing this series of convoluted Mistek deity names, Black Wolf felt utterly disoriented. His gaze showed some impatience as he cast a cold glance at the young priest.

"Get to the point!"

"Yes, yes."

The young priest nodded repeatedly. He licked his dry lips and carefully recited the inherited epic.

"...The four gods created all things in the world. The Rain God and the Feathered Serpent Divine copulated in the cavern of the Tree in the Cloud, giving birth to our Mistek ancestors! The exact location is approximately two or three hundred miles south of Divine Stone City, at the sacred Cloud Altar of Cloud Mountain City..."

"The Mistek ancestors of divine descent needed land for procreation, but all lands belonged to the Sun God Tonatiuh. So, the ancestors of divine descent confronted the Sun God, wounding Tonatiuh with bows and arrows. The Sun God Tonatiuh, severely injured and on the brink of death, hid behind the great mountains of the West, and thus, the sunset came into being!..."

"Hmm? The divine descendants wounded the sun, bringing about the sunset?"

Upon hearing this, Black Wolf was somewhat surprised. In the Mexica Alliance which revered the Sun God, such irreverent myths would never be circulated.

"Yes, yes! The bow and arrow were weapons invented by the Mistek ancestors, which were later learned by the southward advancing Tlaxcalans. The nobilities of the various city-states customarily collected a few bows and arrows to use in sacred sacrificial rites. In the past two years, the longbow of the alliance has also started to circulate among the nobility..."

Speaking of this, the young priest proudly puffed out his chest, then quickly bowed down, showing a sheepish smile.

"Of course, the Sun God is also a deity we revere... The Feathered Serpent Divine governs corn and imparted the knowledge of planting to the ancestors; the Rain Divine controls wind and rain, bestowing us with rain and dew. Thus, the corn fields were cultivated between the highlands, lowlands, and coasts. The ancestors multiplied for thousands of years, enduring four eras and apocalypses, giving rise to today's Mistek Tribes!"

Black Wolf's eyes flickered. He keenly captured three keywords.

"Highlands, lowlands, and coasts?"

"Ah! Wise Mexica General..."

The young priest nodded respectfully. He glanced at the corpse of the old priest on the ground, not daring to conceal any information.

"The Mistek tribes, according to their gathering locations, can generally be divided into three categories: highland Mistek, lowland Mistek, and coastal tribes."

"Highland Mistek reside in the mountains amidst the clouds, possessing the oldest traditions, and worship at two sacred sites, one in the north and one in the south! Among them, the northern Divine Stone City worships the Cloud Temple and is the leader of all tribes. The entire Teotihuacan Valley, based on the number of mobilized samurais, has at least one hundred and sixty to seventy thousand tribes! And Cloud Mountain City (Yodzocahi), two or three hundred miles due south, where the Cloud Altar Sanctuary is worshiped, has an extremely high terrain, with about sixty to seventy thousand people."

"Highland Mistek has Divine Stone City and Cloud Mountain City, with a total population of over two hundred thousand."

Black Wolf looked towards the south, seeing only lush mountains before him. In his heart, he silently mouthed these precious pieces of information.

"Continue!"

"Lowland Mistek, overall, are in the west and south of the highlands. The core of the lowland is naturally the prosperous capital of the alliance, Mountain River City Huajuapán! Mountain River City is over two hundred miles southwest of Divine Stone City, located in the Huajuapán Valley, which also has about one hundred and thirty to forty thousand people. There, it is also a rich land for the production of Gold, Silver, and Turquoise, and home to the world's finest gold and silver craftsmen. In fact, during the Classical Period of the Second Epoch, it also had another name, known as Mine Hill City!"

"Mountain River City!... Over two hundred miles southwest... Gold and silver mine hill..."

Upon hearing about the capital of the Mistek Alliance, Black Wolf's eyes were filled with intense fighting spirit. Meanwhile, the canine descendant generals around showed desire and greed without hiding.

"..."

The young priest shrank his neck and felt a chill down his spine. He paused for a moment and continued softly only after the Mexica Commander-in-Chief looked over.

"Lowland Mistek covers a vast area. Two hundred miles west of Mountain River City is Ye Guo City (Huamuxtitlán), a place that flourishes with fruits. This settlement has about eighty to ninety thousand tribes. Three hundred miles southwest of Mountain River City is Xianggou City (Ahuatepec), which has oak trees and rivers that run through. The valley along the river also hosts more than eighty thousand tribes."

"Ye Guo City and Xianggou City both follow the tributaries of the Tarsas River, moving along the river; they can reach the coast. As for three or four hundred miles directly south of Mountain River City, it is the boundary of the lowland and coast, River Bean City (Puctitlán). Similarly, this place also hosts eighty to ninety thousand people."

"Lowland Mistek, Mountain River City, Ye Guo City, Xianggou City, River Bean City..."

Black Wolf frowned, trying hard to envision the positions of the city-states in his mind. After a while, he bit his teeth sharply and clutched the young priest's collar viciously.

"You, explaining such a mess, can't remember any of this. Quickly, draw it for me!"

"...Yes."

The young priest lowered his head, not daring to retort. He took out a long pen made of feathers, dipped it in Maya Blue dye, and began drawing on a wooden board in the temple.

After a moment, Black Wolf looked at the drawing and finally realized.

From the Water Valley City under our feet, marching south and capturing Swamp Village, below them is Ye Guo City and Xianggou City. The path there is filled with undulating mountains, and the terrain is challenging. The army's logistics can only rely on rivers, winding southward. And that so-called River Bean City is five hundred miles from here at Divine Stone City, and the route is also mountainous, far from reachable.

The entire lowland Mistek consists of four major cities, nearly four hundred thousand mountain tribes, spread over forty to fifty thousand square kilometers of land. Based on the ratio of one warrior per thirty thousand people, it can produce about thirteen thousand warriors, with at least twice as many militiamen.

"Damn it! These southern Mistek territories are all rugged and treacherous forests and mountains, truly poor lands and cursed territory!"

Black Wolf glared at the priest's map, cursing in his heart. However, even more treacherous lands lay ahead.

"Coastal Mistek is relatively narrow. Following the tributaries of the Tarsas River southwards until reaching the vast Great Lake, is the most western great city, Ometepec. Ometepec is seven or eight hundred miles from Divine Stone City, and there are actually no real mountains nearby, just two small hills. The city-state is surrounded by coastal lowland rainforest, likely gathering over eighty thousand Lin Zhong Tribe. Seventy miles south of Ometepec is the coastal River Bean City (Cuajinicuilapa), known for producing all kinds of delicious beans."

"And from Cloud Altar City going south, following the extremely steep Yun He (i.e., Río Viejo), traveling six hundred miles, is the eastern major city of coastal Mistek, gathering over a hundred thousand tribes. It is the city-state from which the immortal unifier, the ancestor Deer Eight Day Tiger Claw King, rose to power, the great Black Temple City, Tututepec!"

At this, the young priest seemed somewhat excited. He temporarily forgot the intimidating Mexica Commander-in-Chief, his eyes full of longing and reverence.

"It was the most influential southern Mistek City-State before the apocalypse descended during the Fourth Epoch! And the immortal Tiger Claw King is the only monarch in the three-thousand-year epic of the Mistek to unify the highlands, lowlands, and coasts!"

"...Unfortunately, the apocalypse of the Fourth Epoch arrived mercilessly after the Tiger Claw King went to the Divine Kingdom. Drought enveloped the land, food production failed, and the city-states fell into division once again! As for today's Mistek Alliance, it bears the name of alliance but harbors disparate thoughts and disunity... Alas! You, beautiful-colored and enchanting-winged lark in the clouds, are nothing more than prey to be captured before the fierce Jaguar!"

Chapter 969: Mistek Land, the Guiding Yellow Bird

The clouds rolled, the eastern sea breeze carried moist vapor; the mountains layered, the southern rainforest was particularly lush and dense.

At this moment, the faint scent of blood lingered among the towering temples. Most of the once exalted Rain Divine Priests had turned into fallen corpses, their souls journeying to the Divine Kingdom in the clouds. In the ancient temple, the tall Rain Divine sat on the Throne of the Gods. He silently gazed with deep golden eyes at these heavily armored northern warriors and the barbarian soldiers from the wilderness they had never seen before.

"Over eight hundred miles north to south, more than five hundred miles east to west, with treacherous eastern highlands, undulating western lowland valleys, and dense southern coastal rainforests, this is the vast expanse known as the Mistec Land!...Two cities in the highlands with over two hundred thousand tribes; four cities in the lowlands, close to four hundred thousand people; three cities on the coast with three hundred thousand each...altogether, these make up nine large city-states, over nine hundred thousand tribes!"

Black Wolf's eyes gleamed as he watched the genuine expression of the young priest, pondering silently. He considered the situation of the eastern campaign, analyzing the southern invasion, accumulating experience for the inevitable southern expedition in the future.

Tlaxcala's four states were small, but populous, with relatively flat terrain. Most Tlaxcalan tribes were concentrated in the core Tlaxcala Valley and the Holy City of Cholula. As long as the alliance army conquered the northern and southern gateways, it could directly penetrate the enemy's heart, sweeping through the major cities both north and south. Thus, each Tlaxcalan tribe had to rely on checkpoints and city-states to hold ground, willing to fight for every inch, with no room to maneuver.

However, the nine Mistec tribes were vastly different. Their alliance was looser, the land area extensive, the terrain fragmented and rugged. Even the population was scattered across various mountain valleys. Within the entire Mistec Alliance, the nine city-states were independent, with no capital city ruling over them that could easily accomplish everything. To conquer all the city-states, the journey from north to south would be a daunting nine hundred miles of mountain road!

Black Wolf had fought wars from north to south, west to east, for many years. Coupled with the patient teachings from the prince, his insight had significantly improved.

"Although Mistec Warriors aren't formidable, if they were to engage in a head-on battle formation, the kingdom's army could easily break them with one strike! But if they hid in the mountains, relying on one city-state and village after another, dispatching small squads of warriors and militias to harass the army's route..."

Thinking of this, Black Wolf frowned and fell into deep thought. If each city-state had to be cleaned out one by one, who knows how many troops would be needed or how many years it would take. He vaguely felt that the Mistec tribes might resemble the Tekos people from the southwestern mountains.

"Against opponents like this, military battles aren't the biggest challenge. Steep mountainous terrain, long marches, arduous mountain supply routes, and enduring military presence are the real difficulties!...Well, such a problem should be left to the wise prince or the king!"

After a while, Black Wolf shook his head vigorously. As his status rose, he thought more deeply and increasingly felt his mind lacking knowledge. But now, he had to return to the southern expedition task given by the prince.

"...Gather intelligence from the south, intimidate the Mistec tribes, preventing them from moving north. If possible, weaken their war potential as much as possible..."

Black Wolf's gaze turned cold again. He reached out with his left hand, grabbing the young priest's collar, staring into the evasive eyes.

"Tell me your name?"

"...Respected commander of the Mexica, I am the High Priest of the Cloud Temple, descendant of the Tiger Claw King, Sky Divine descendant Andiwei!"

The young priest Andiwei was somewhat fearful, but when speaking his name, he still carried his habitual pride and dignity. In the Mistec language, andivi means cloud, sky, descendant of the sky. It's a sacred name, only those with noble blood, the Divine Descendants, have the right to inherit it.

"You, so young, are a High Priest?"

Hearing this, Black Wolf was a bit surprised. He recalled the alliance's elder priests, each one experienced and cunning, accustomed to martial prowess and blood sacrifices. Yet, these ancient Mistec people allowed such a young Divine Descendant to hold a High Priest position...

He gently shook his head, continuing to press.

"In Divine Stone City, how many warriors and militias are there? When can the other Mistec tribes send reinforcements? How many reinforcements will each state send, and how long will it take to arrive?"

"...This, this...I...I don't know..."

"Hmm?"

Black Wolf's expression turned cold. He extended his right hand, receiving the Obsidian Dagger handed to him by Red Frog Kaka. The sharp blade shimmered with sacrificial black light. Then, he smiled grimly, and the black light pressed against the young priest's neck, bringing real death pressure.

"Last chance."

"This, I..."

Andiwei sweated heavily, his face pale. His gaze dropped again, seeing the corpse of the old priest leader, his fingers trembled.

"I'll count to three! Three! Two! One..."

"Ah! I'll tell!"

The cold blade applied slight pressure, slicing the skin on the neck, oozing faint red blood. Andiwei could no longer endure this torment, his shout carrying a sobbing tone.

"In Divine Stone City, there are about five thousand warriors and ten thousand militias stationed! Plus, the able-bodied men from various tribes who fled into the city, might recruit a few thousand more!"

"Hmm..."

Upon hearing this, Black Wolf raised an eyebrow. Besides the three thousand Mistec warriors ambushed and eliminated, Divine Stone City still had twelve thousand warriors and militias. Such a force, relying on sturdy walls, if they held fast...

"Unfortunately! This time marching south, the mountainous terrain is rugged and hard to traverse, and it's the rainy season, so we can't carry copper cannons to blast the walls..."

Black Wolf sighed inwardly. The Guajili Legion's light infantry advanced rapidly, ambushing the Mistecs during the rainy season, with only one month's food supply carried.

To maintain logistics, the eight thousand-strong legion split into three, dispersed throughout the valley in raids. The army's supply lines were difficult, dependent on raided provisions along the way, with even arrows being scarce, let alone the heavy copper cannons that couldn't be used in the rainy season. And Divine Stone City's walls were six to seven meters high, the defending army was sufficient in numbers, and their morale in defense was relatively high. If the opponent's commander doesn't make serious mistakes, it's very difficult to conquer.

"And what else?!"

"...The highland Mixtec are closely knit, and the nobles of Cloud Mountain City in the south have surely received the news. Although their reinforcements are few, just about a thousand or two, they should arrive in a few days."

"Cloud Mountain City? Two or three hundred miles to the south?..."

Obsidian's eyes flickered as he glanced at the map on the wooden board. Then, his finger pointed southwest.

"Then, how will the Lowland Mixtec, Mountain River City, react?"

"This... how would I know..."

"Hmm?"

"...Ah! Esteemed General, this time the various tribes have gone north, each diverting the forces of the Mexica Alliance, to rescue the Tlaxcalans, precisely at the call of the Mountain River City leader, the nominal Mixtec leader, Divine Descendant Yun Chen (Yuchi)."

At the brink of life and death, Andiwei's thoughts raced rapidly, bursting with intelligence and wisdom never before seen.

"With the Teotihuacan Valley under attack and Divine Stone City in danger, Mountain River City more than two hundred miles southwest will also face a threat. Moreover, with Cloud Temple lost, all the priesthoods of the various states will be shaken with fear! Leader Yun Chen will surely gather the warriors of the tribes in Mountain River City, retracting the Mixtec legion that has moved forward..."

Upon hearing this, Obsidian nodded slightly. The Mixtec legion that moved forward would fully contract, with each major city-state consolidating its forces for self-defense, naturally nullifying their restraint on the Southern Army.

"The warriors gather in Mountain River City, and mobilization takes time. And before gathering enough forces, the Mixtec warriors of the lowlands and coasts are unlikely to take the enormous risk of rushing to aid..."

At this, Andiwei felt despondent. The Mexicans from the north grow ever stronger, conquering in all directions, invincible in battle. Facing the fearsome northern Fierce Tiger, when will the divided flock of the Mixtec unite as one?

"Oh? In a short time, no massive reinforcements..."

Obsidian squinted his eyes, thoughts flashing through his mind. Subsequently, with a murderous intent on his face, he coldly asked.

"In the Teotihuacan Valley, which tribes have large populations, with villages on flat terrain? Where are they located?"

"This... I..."

Andiwei shivered. At this moment, he seemed to see endless fires and blood in the eyes of the Mexica commander.

"Speak!"

"Ah! In the Teotihuacan Valley, villages with more than a thousand people, there are probably a dozen or so. The largest villages even have several thousand to ten thousand people. Their locations, are, are..."

"Andiwei! You treacherous yellow bird of the tribe!"

At this, a middle-aged priest prisoner could no longer bear it, roaring in anger. He knew that in Andiwei's ensuing words, his tribe's name would be revealed. And knowing these villages' names, the cruel Mexicans would certainly take ruthless actions. As for the yellow bird, in traditional mythology, it symbolizes an ominous sign.

"Think of your glorious ancestors! The immortal Tiger Claw King is in the Divine Kingdom, protecting our tribes! Look here! This is the sacred Cloud Temple, the holy place observed by All Gods! ...Andiwei! Before the supreme Rain Divine statue, how can you act thus, shaming your ancestors and bloodline?! Are you not afraid of endless storms and Divine Punishment after death?!"

"Hmm?"

Obsidian's gaze turned harsh, looking towards the exceedingly agitated middle-aged priest. The priest wore a blue feather crown, appearing to hold a significant position. The surrounding priest prisoners seemed to regard him as their center.

Hearing the middle-aged priest's rebuke, shame appeared on Andiwei's face. He lowered his head, trembling all over, unable to speak for a while.

"Heh heh!"

A murderous intent emerged on Obsidian's handsome face. He drew a bronze longsword from his waist, taking a step towards the middle-aged priest, then suddenly stopped. Subsequently, he looked at the young Mixtec priest again, examining his fearful and ashamed expression, gradually curling his lips into an amused smile.

"Who is he?"

"...Temple Elder, Divine Descendant of the Mountain, Flower Ita (ita)."

"Oh? Another High Priest. It seems he's quite dissatisfied with you."

Obsidian smiled, nodding and patting Andiwei's shoulder. Then, his expression became severe, and he threw a sharp obsidian dagger with a "ding" at the young priest's feet.

"I told you, I would give you a chance to convert to the Chief Divine! And now, this is your test of faith in the Chief Divine!"

Speaking, Obsidian extended his hand, mercilessly pointing at the opposite, roaring elder Ita, whose hands were bound.

"Andiwei! Right here, in front of the Rain Divine, go over there, and kill him!"

Chapter 970: Killing and the Wolf

"Oh great Rain God, with your wise eyes, you see through the soul, discerning all black and white! ... Andiwei! You betrayed your family, betrayed the Alliance, betrayed the revered Divine, and led the Mexica people here! You have shamed your ancestors, destined to fall into the deep Abyss, your body corroded by rain, to endure endless storms as Divine Punishment! ..."

Elder Priest Ita cursed angrily. Andiwei remained silent, his head bowed, his expression unclear. He stumbled forward, his fingers trembling slightly, yet firmly gripping the Obsidian Dagger.

"The Rain God will bring down disasters! Punish you... Ah! ... Ugh... Hahaha! ..."

Elder Ita's eyes suddenly widened, his face twisted with intense pain. He could no longer utter a word of rebuke, only using his dying, unyielding gaze to deeply curse the young and revered betrayer.

"Puff, tsk! ... Puff tsk!"

Andiwei gritted his teeth, thrusting the sacrificial Obsidian Dagger vigorously into Ita's chest, then forcefully withdrawing it. His hands trembled, stabbing and pulling, causing blood to splatter, reddening his face, blurring his vision, and soaking through the Rain God Sacrificial Robes of both...

Only after several dozen breaths did Ita fall with a "thud," no longer breathing. Andiwei, his whole body weak, collapsed beside the corpse, his face showing pain and shame. Unknowingly, tears flowed from his eyes.

"Ah! Merciful Rain God, please... please forgive me! How could I do such a thing?!"

Black Wolf watched calmly, nodding slightly. He knew that the heart of this young captive was already riddled with wounds, shattered. The faith of the old gods and the family's honor, all shattered like pottery hitting the ground. And the new god's idol and the Alliance's majesty would be rebuilt in the emptiness of his soul. However, a little more was needed...

"Haha! The Rain God can never forgive you! In the gaze of the Rain God, you've betrayed him thoroughly!... Now, only the supreme Chief Divine, only the War God who values combat, can forgive you! Compared to the Chief Divine of the Alliance, what is your Mistek people's Rain God?"

"... The great Chief Divine will bless the sacrificial warriors, saving their souls, as long as you fight for the Divine..."

Hearing this, a bit of confusion appeared in Andiwei's guilty eyes.

"Conversion to the Chief Divine? He can save my soul?..."

"Ah! Andiwei Elder Priest! You... you are insane!"

The captured priests were stunned for a moment, then started shouting in panic. Their cries were filled with incredulity and hatred for the traitor.

"Andiwei! You... you are corrupted by the Volcanic Demon, even death cannot save you!"

"... Even death cannot save?"

Andiwei's expression fluctuated, guilt and sorrowful moans mixed together. Black Wolf's words lingered in his heart like soul-devouring volcanic smoke. He closed his eyes, murmured, his face filled with confusion, and hidden within was a hint of murderous ferocity.

"... Chief Divine... forgive me..."

Seeing the struggling young priest, Black Wolf nodded slightly. The beast within this person was about to be summoned. So, he coldly ordered again.

"Andiwei! They have witnessed everything, they know of your betrayal. Go, for the Chief Divine, and for yourself, kill them! ..."

"..."

Andiwei's expression was dazed, like a puppet on strings. Holding the bloodstained dagger, he slowly advanced again.

The captured priests were all bound, unable to resist, only able to let out cries of panic. Quickly, the screams turned into wails, accompanied by eyes full of blood. The sharp dagger drove into bodies, sliced throats, and even pierced eyes!

The desperate pleas echoed in the Great Hall, turning into dying groans under the silent watch of the Rain God until the last survivor was left.

"Clang!"

Black Wolf drew his bronze sword, a precise strike cleaving the worn Obsidian Blood Dagger in two!

Andiwei, eyes reddened, turned his head, instinctively glaring fiercely. Then, he lowered his head, fear and involuntary submission rising once more in his heart.

"Haha! Enough, well done! You are a qualified little wolf cub now!"

Black Wolf grinned, satisfactorily nodding.

"Andiwei, you have proven your loyalty! The last priest captive will be sent back to Divine Stone City, as a messenger, to inform the terms of the Alliance!"

"What! This, this!"

Andiwei was shaken, the remaining dagger in his hand clanged to the ground. The Rain God Sacrificial Robe he wore was soaked with blood, seemingly extremely heavy.

When this captive returns to Divine Stone City to report everything that happened today... his honorable family, revered ancestors, and beloved wife and daughters will be severed from him! This was to cut off all his retreat!...

"Honorable Mexica General! I beg of you..."

"Enough!"

Black Wolf waved his hand, his eyes slightly cold, making a firm decision.

"Now, pray to the Chief Divine! Praise the mighty Wezi Lopochtli! He is supreme and omnipotent! ..."

"Praise the mighty Wezi Lopochtli! ..."

Andiwei's mind was blank, his heart empty. At this moment, he only prayed to the Chief Divine, feeling a slight and peculiar comfort. The new faith was the only hope, sprouting in the void of his heart.

Black Wolf smiled, quite pleased.

"Such a high-status, weak-willed young Divine Descendant is actually rare. Andiwei knows much, familiar with the internal affairs of the Mistec tribes, and well-versed in geography and epics, making him the best guide! Hmm... severing all his thoughts would be best when bringing him along in the army ..."

Thinking it over, Black Wolf felt a bit proud. This maneuver had been learned from his Highness; it should bear some resemblance now! Then, he looked at the last, trembling priest captive.

"You, go and deliver a message! Tell the nobility in Divine Stone City: submit to the great Alliance, pay homage to our valiant Highness! ... As long as they comply with the Alliance, we won't burn the Rain God Temple... Hmm, if the conditions are right, we might even give it back to you!"

Before setting out, His Highness had specifically instructed to preserve the murals and carvings in ancient temples as much as possible, avoiding rampant destruction. This was to preserve more cultural heritage and also leave some leeway with the various Mistec tribes.

In this era of supreme Divine Authority, killing thousands of captives was negotiable. However, burning the sacred temples meant not to die!

The last priest, dazed, stumbled and was led away by the guards. In the Great Hall of the Rain God, only the noble corpses and the proud-standing Mexica warriors remained.

"Chief, are we going to negotiate with Divine Stone City?"

Red Frog Kaka looked somewhat surprised.

"This southward expedition ends like this?"

"Haha! How could it be!"

Black Wolf laughed heartily. He drew his bronze sword and swiftly hacked through the sacred blackwood offering table in front of the Rain God's statue. Boundless killing intent surged within his chest.

"Inform the entire army! Divide into units of a thousand to plunder! Burn the villages, capture the able-bodied men, disperse the elderly, women, and children, and destroy the soon-to-be-harvested fields completely ruining their autumn harvest!"

"... Anyone who dares to resist, execute on the spot, piling the heads to build Jingguan! ... His Highness said, losing food and population means losing the ability to wage war. Haha! I want the Mistec tribes to tremble in terror and weep in fear at the mere mention of my name, Black Wolf!"

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