

Civilization 981

Chapter 981: Dark Snake

Jade belt encircles, mountains surge and roar. Seven oar-sailed longships, against the late summer current, slowly sail towards the shoals several miles away.

The leading longship stands with two masts fore and aft. On the top of the foremast, the flag of the Sun Hummingbird is hoisted, while atop the aft mast, some Feathers of the Quetzal bird are attached. The mountain wind blows, and the vibrant feathers sway with the wind, like birds hovering in the sky.

Beneath the flying birds, a group of crew members are gathered, staring at a spot on the deck. There lies a youth, shirtless, with disheveled hair. His eyes are tightly shut, his left cheek swollen and bruised, and water dribbles from his mouth, looking utterly embarrassed.

"...Old Pu, weren't those slaps you gave just now a bit too heavy?"

Chiwaco crouches on the deck, looking at the battered youth who was just fished out of the river, feeling his own left cheek aching.

"Ha? If I don't hit hard enough, how do we beat the water monster out of his belly?"

Puap stretches out his hand, looks at his reddened palm, and rubs it in pain.

"This is the Three Gods... cough, the old Priest taught me this method. First, hit the belly hard, then smack the face vigorously. As long as you can make him spit out the water, the person can be saved!"

"..."

Chiwaco is at a loss for words. He looks at the youth's disordered hair and naked upper body, unable to find any items indicative of identity.

"Where did this kid come from?"

"Surely a southbound Telascallan captive! Fell into the water, got dazed, drifted a while, before running into us. Time probably hasn't been long, maybe from the last batch of ships that passed by."

Puap squints and ponders for a moment. Then, he smacks his lips, glances at Mountain Bird Cavado, and scolds.

"The fight upstream is so fierce, so many have drowned. Telascallan captives aren't worth much, is it really worth spending this effort to save? The fleet itself still needs to keep on schedule!"

"Cough, cough. Old Pu, this easy task won't hold us up. The ship is always moving! Cavado meant well, just wanted to save a person; even the Chief Divine would bless such an act!"

Old militia Chiwaco smiles warmly, pats Puap's shoulder. Cavado jumping into the water to save someone was ultimately under his approval.

"...It doesn't take much trouble, why watch a person drown without doing anything..."

Chiwaco murmurs to himself, checks the youth's body again. He first looks at the youth's palms, only seeing newly formed calluses, and frowns. Then he checks the youth's teeth, finding no apparent wear, even a bit white.

"..."

Seeing this, Chiwaco and Puap exchange a glance, each considering a possibility. The old militia immediately waves, calling to the gathered crew.

"Go, go, why are you all gathered here? We'll soon reach shore, hurry and get prepared!"

"Yes, Captain!"

Soon, the crew disperses upon command, busying themselves across the longship. Chiwaco raises an eyebrow, squats back down. This time, he meticulously inspects inch by inch.

"Eh? A tattoo?"

"Is that a snake?"

Puap eyes widen, looking at the underside of the youth's left armpit, where a small black snake faintly hides beneath dark armpit hair, quite inconspicuous.

"Old Chiwaco, I seem to recall Telascallan nobles like to call themselves Serpent Descendants?"

"...How would I know about these things."

The two exchange looks with subtle expressions in their eyes.

"Cough, cough cough!"

Just then, the youth on the deck coughs painfully. He slowly opens his eyes and sees two large faces gazing intensely at him.

The youth is dumbfounded, his pupils gradually gather focus, finally noticing the two men's attire is indeed Mexica green War Clothes.

"Ah!... Don't, don't kill me! Please!..."

The sharp shouting causes the old militia's head to spin. Puap's eyes flash fiercely, reaching out with a slap.

"Slap!..."

"Ah!... Don't!..."

"Slap!..."

After a while, the deck finally quiets down. The youth, bruised and swollen, carefully eyes the fierce Huitu guard, not daring to make a sound.

The old militia signals, prompting Puap to retreat a few steps. Then, he smiles kindly, speaking warmly.

"Cough! Child, don't be afraid. We mean no harm; we saved you."

"...?"

The youth's face filled with confusion. Only then does Chiwaco remember to switch to Navajo.

"We saved you, don't be afraid!"

"..."

The youth presses his lips, his expression slightly changes, still remaining cautious.

"Child, who are you, what's your name?"

"..."

"Child, where are you from, are you a Telascallan?"

"..."

"Old Chiwaco, why nag so much? Once we're ashore, just hand him over to the stationed Mexica Warrior and that's that!"

Puap shows impatience, speaking loudly in fluent Navajo.

"Once in Mexica Warriors' hands, no matter what they do, it has nothing to do with us!"

Hearing this, the youth trembles, deeply frightened. He finally speaks, pleading softly.

"Please don't hand me over to Mexica Warriors!... Who are you? Why are you wearing Mexica War Clothes?"

Hearing this, Chiwaco's mouth turns up in a smile, becoming increasingly friendly.

"We are Prepetcha, from the Kingdom of the Lake, serving the Alliance. And you?"

"I... I'm from Atlixco, part of the Four States Alliance."

The youth answers timidly, anxiously.

"Please, please don't hand me over to the Mexica."

"Atlixco? Where's that?"

Chiwaco feels perplexed. He looks at Puap, who shakes his head in confusion too. The old militia thinks for a moment, then smiles again.

"Divine bless! Being saved from the water clearly favored by the Rain Divine. We always heed Divine omens, won't harm your life... Hmm, I'm called Chiwaco, and you?"

"..."

The youth hesitates for a long time. He looks at Chiwaco's kind old face and finally whispers.

"I... I am called Dark Snake."

"Dark Snake? Named after a snake, could it be..."

Hearing this, Puap's eyes flicker. He looks at the youth on the deck, as if seeing valuable Sacrifices, and can't help but reach out his hand.

"Slap!"

Chiwaco raises an eyebrow, tapping Puap's hand with the spear shaft in his hand.

"Old Chiwaco? You!..."

"Old Pu, shut up! Put away your thoughts!"

The old militia glares, Puap becomes silent, halting his voice. Then, the old militia's eyes twinkle, observing the youth Dark Snake for a long time, making the latter anxious.

"Eighteen or nineteen... If Chipawa were alive, it'd also be this age... No, perhaps even older..."

Chiwaco mutters quietly, unclear about what he's saying. After a while, he sighs softly, speaking gently.

"Dark Snake, this ship takes no idlers. Can you row?"

"..."

The youth Dark Snake is at a loss, not responding.

"Can you cook?"

"..."

"None of it? No worries, if you can't, you can learn. Very fast. Hmm... You can first stay with Mountain Bird Cavado as a deck Apprentice, starting from the simplest task of cleaning the deck..."

Chiwaco gives a gentle smile, appearing relaxed. He looks at Mountain Bird Cavado next to him, ready to make arrangements.

Listening to the old militia, seeing his amiable expression, the youth Dark Snake presses his lips, somewhat disgruntled. He thinks for a moment, then spontaneously responds.

"I... I know numbers and calendars, can stargaze, and also draw!"

Chapter 982: Very Fast

The mountain forest is sparse, and the waves are turbulent. The wind rushed through the night, with the cries of apes resounding, as faint wails echoed. The kingdom's exploration fleet anchored at Eight Hundred Town for a day, finally awaiting the chief commander here, who oversees a thousand pike warriors, the military noble Pimeng.

"May the Chief Divine protect! Honored hereditary noble Huitu, Exploration Captain Chiwaco."

Pimeng's war clothes were bloodied, mud clung to his feet, and his face still bore unwashed dust, clearly indicating his hurried arrival. He wore the Eagle Crown of the Prepecha, carried a greatbow at his back, had a bronze axe at his waist, and held a copper spear in his hand. Seeing the two waiting, he slightly bowed, first saluting Puap, then nodding to Chiwaco.

Two years ago, though Puap was exiled, he still retained noble rank — notably higher than the old militia.

"May the Chief Divine protect! Honored military noble Pimeng. May Your Majesty be blessed, and may the Eastern Expedition proceed smoothly!"

Huitu Puap greeted with a rare pleasant demeanor.

The military noble Pimeng before them was a true Warrior Camp Chief, leading a thousand pike warriors, also responsible for prisoner transport in Eight Hundred Town, controlling the fates of thousands of Telascallan prisoners.

It's said that during the Southern Expedition, Pimeng once managed the transport of Tekos people from the mountains, meeting with the touring Your Majesty, leaving a favorable impression. This time, it was Your Majesty who personally appointed him, transferring him from under Ezpan to handle crucial transport matters here... In other words, the opposite party's future prospects were limitless!

Since the Eastern Expedition began, tens of thousands of Telascallan have been captured. Puap had heard that these prisoners were mainly to be settled in the southern kingdom, Apa and Zicao Counties. Currently, the midpoint Six Hundred Town was managed by Zicao County warriors, whereas the upstream Eight Hundred Town was entrusted to Apa County's spear legion, naturally reflecting some sort of gaming equilibrium...

"Between the two County Magistrates, Ezpan and Etalik, there might be hidden competition. But Eight Hundred Town is more crucial; holding the primary prisoner disposal rights would mean Apa County could allocate more population... Both being Prepecha natives, it would be wise to maintain closeness with Ezpan Legion Commander."

Puap's mind spun, contemplating the kingdom's internal dynamics. Through exile and revival, he increasingly gained some intellect, understanding to think diligently.

"May Your Majesty be blessed! Whether Telascallan or Mistek people, they are merely cowardly chickens, how could they contend against the kingdom's Divine Eagle!"

Pimeng sincerely prayed for Your Majesty. Then, he wiped the dirt from his face, smiling as he pointed behind him. Behind him were hundreds of equally dusty Prepecha warriors holding long spears, many clutching blood-dripping heads.

"Yesterday, between the northern Cloud Mountain Village and here, a prisoner revolt erupted, with dozens to hundreds of Telascallan escaping, killing and injuring over twenty escorting militia..."

"What, prisoner revolt?"

Upon hearing this, Puap was somewhat startled.

"These prisoners were underfed, lacked weapons, and didn't have armor—how could they revolt?"

"Hmm. May the Chief Divine protect! For months, the transported prisoners, mostly tribespeople, were very compliant, with no major issues. They feared the name of Your Majesty's God of Death and dreaded the custody of the large warrior forces, seldom resisting."

Pimeng answered solemnly.

"However, yesterday's revolting prisoners were not ordinary tribespeople! They were skilled in battle techniques, organized and led, they were concealed Telascallan noble warriors! Facing these dangerous serpents, a strong counterattack is necessary, thoroughly hunting them down!"

"Concealed noble warriors?"

Upon hearing this, Puap was astonished. He turned and exchanged a glance with the old militia, both contemplating.

"These Telascallan warriors lurked for months; why revolt now?"

"Ha! These serpents always hid, harboring rebellion, unwilling to submit to Your Majesty's rule. Relying on the so-called Cloud Serpent Bloodline, they had the ability to incite the tribe captives. But now,

they're being transported here, soon to board the ships. Once aboard, sailing downstream a hundred miles a day, heading to the distant west, reaching the kingdom's heartland...That would mean a thousand miles from home, losing the people and geographical advantage, never having the chance to escape again!"

Saying this, Pimeng clenched his fist, pounding his sturdy chest.

"Your Majesty sent me here, with so many warriors, to uproot these serpent threats early, handling them cleanly!"

"Ah, Your Majesty is wise! You are also a valiant warrior!...Pimeng Camp Chief, were all the revolting prisoners resolved?"

"Ha, praise the Chief Divine! I led the warriors, chased for a day and night, except for a few fish who jumped into the water to seek death, all others were resolved!"

Pimeng grinned, genuine joy on his face. Then, he turned around, smiling as he called out to the warriors behind him.

"Come, Prepecha eagles! Erect tall poles in the town center, impale the heads of these rebels at the top! Then gather all warriors, surround and count the number in each small group of captives! I want these Telascallans to know the consequences of rebellion and escape!..."

"Yes! Praise the Chief Divine!"

The pike warriors roared in agreement, scattering immediately. Pimeng turned again, bowing sincerely, apologizing to the two exploration captains.

"Not long ago, Your Majesty left me a decree, instructing me to prepare for the kingdom exploration team's northbound journey, as the highest priority!... I've already dispatched scouts, exploring the upstream waterways. Along the way, the terrain is steep, the water flow swift, requiring mobilization of at least a thousand strong captives to drag against the current along the river..."

"However, a revolt just happened yesterday. Over ten thousand strong captives gathered here, like autumn dry grass, igniting with just a spark... Urgently, I must first manage the captives, etching the Chief Divine's majesty deep into their bones!...Then I can arrange manpower to tow up stream..."

"So, I ask the two captains to wait a little longer...It shouldn't take long, half a day will suffice."

Speaking at this point, Pimeng pursed his lips, a flash of killing intent in his eyes.

"Good! Pimeng Camp Chief, the exploration team has a hundred warriors, two hundred sailors. If needed, we can assist."

Puap gripped his spear, smiling in response, equally exuding a murderous aura.

"No need, thank you for your kind offer! The Chief Divine witnesses, soon, very soon!"

Soon, hundreds of blood-dripping poles were erected by the Chief Divine's altar in the town center. And the entire small town's ten thousand captives were plunged into frantic cries and turmoil. Thousands of armored warriors wielded weapons, driving all captives into the central square, then blocked all pathways. The verdict of death would come swiftly.

Chapter 983: Suppression

The sun hung high in the sky, shedding its scorching light; heads dangled, dripping with beads of blood. Beneath the brilliance and the crimson, more than ten thousand Tlaxcalan captives, anxious and uneasy, were forced to gather at the village center. Sharp spearheads closed in from all directions. Fierce Samurai showed merciless killing intent. Even the moist air seemed to be filled with the scent of death.

"Tlaxcalans! The Divine Power of the Chief Divine is the sun, is the flame, is light! He shines upon everything on earth from the highest cloud! And all resisters, rebels, non-believers, and wicked ones are on a path to death!"

Holding a long spear, Pimeng stood before hundreds of Samurai, facing tens of thousands of fearful civilians. He spoke coldly, in a not-so-fluent Navajo language, hissing each word.

"His Majesty relocates you to the kingdom's south! There, you will gain new fields, new huts. You will have plenty of food and receive the protection of the Chief Divine! And as long as you dare to fight, bravely kill, even the lowly civilians have the chance to rise as warriors, even become part of the nobility!... Such a bright future is the gift of His Majesty, also the promise of the War God!"

Upon hearing this, the Tlaxcalans fell silent, with complicated expressions on their faces. Most were accustomed to obedience, feared the Mexica's force, and dared not hope for too much. Likewise, the Mexica's invocation of the God of Death brought them a lingering reverence.

Yet, when the noble Cloud Serpent Divine Descendant called for a prisoner uprising, quite a number of the young tribesmen, confused, joined in... The divine rules of the nobility lasted so long, how could they be wiped clean in a day?

"His Majesty is so merciful, the Chief Divine so majestic, yet some are so reckless!"

Speaking of this, Pimeng glared angrily. He angrily raised his long spear, pointing at the central wooden pole, and roared.

"Yesterday, a group of captives rioted and fled! Today, their heads are all here! Watch closely!... The supreme His Majesty is the embodiment of the God of Death. If you dare to defy, the only result is death!"

A mountain wind blew, and over a hundred fresh heads swayed on the high wooden poles. Most were filled with fear. Their eyes, fixed and unmoving, stared intently at the equally terrified Tlaxcalan captives.

"Now, I give you a chance! Did anyone participate in yesterday's riot? Stand forth! In front of the Chief Divine, I will give you an honorable death!"

The icy words echoed in the field. The lively Tlaxcalan captives instantly fell into a deathly silence. Many lowered their heads, not daring to meet the gaze of the Prepecha Warriors around them. The entire center of the square was almost silent enough to hear a pin drop.

"Ha! Is this the cowardice of the Cloud Serpent's descendants? Ha! Like field rats, only knowing to hide in cracks and shiver!... Pah! What noble Serpent Descendants? Just grass-eating lowly ticks!"

"Ah! Damned!"

Hearing such insults, a young noble warrior could not bear it any longer. He shouted sharply, suddenly stood up, and strode out from the hiding crowd.

"Damned western barbarians! The Cloud Serpent's descendants are naturally noble breeds! Even if I go to my death, I will make you pay for your insults in blood!"

"Good! Worthy of being the noble breed of Tlaxcala, a true warrior!... Who else? Is this the only warrior among the Tlaxcalans? If you dare not stand forth now, then prepare to be a tiller among the civilians a thousand miles away!"

"Me too! From the noble Sen Aides of Cholula!"

Roused by this, another sturdy man leapt out of the crowd. His movements were agile, and even though barehanded, he carried a forceful aura, clearly a well-trained warrior.

"To make me toil like a civilian for the eternal Aztecs is better to fight to the death here and have my soul return to the Divine Kingdom!"

"Good! Such is the dignity of a dahlia-like warrior! Who else?"

"Me! From Mountain Peak City, noble Flower Python!"

"Me! From Water Valley City, noble Viper!..."

Soon, eight or nine young noble warriors no longer hid their identities, stepping forward from among tens of thousands of young captives. Each of them bore divine blood and had inherent charisma among the noble-believing Tlaxcalans.

"Good, very good! Truly admirable warriors!"

Pimeng nodded continually with respect. He surveyed the thousands of captives, patiently waiting.

"Any more? Any more noble Cloud Serpent descendants, any more true brave warriors?"

The calls that feared not death were always few. Soon, the field fell silent once more. The captives clamped their mouths shut, tense expressions on their faces, watching the dozen noble warriors who had stepped forth, awaiting the spectacular and destined end.

"Then, witnessed by the Chief Divine!"

Pimeng reached out, gripping the Sun Amulet around his neck. His expression solemn, he bowed slightly to the opposite warriors.

"This is a revered battle, a battle offered to the Divine! The souls will go to the Divine Kingdom, death is not the end, glory belongs to those who die in battle!..."

"Give each of them a long spear!... Then, kill them!"

The sacred battle began quickly, fiercely, cruelly, and briefly. The dozen or so Tlaxcalan nobles fought valiantly and roared fiercely, only to be submerged by the forest of spears. In less than a quarter-hour, another dozen or so wooden poles rose, hanging with open-eyed heads.

"This is a sacred battle! The supreme Chief Divine will guide the souls who died in battle, allowing them to enjoy eternal beauty!..."

Pimeng cast down the broken long spear, lifted the blood-dripping hand axe, and prayed loudly. Then he looked at the grim-faced captives, sternly intoning.

"All noble descendants of the Cloud Serpent have courageously stood up and died here! Those remaining are unworthy of being Serpent Descendants!"

"..."

There was no response, no one dared to stand up anymore. At this moment, it was as if a heavy hammer fell, fiercely smashed the captives' hearts, shattering some final remnants.

Pimeng held the hand axe, gazing around. He sensed the captives' spirits, feeling that something was still lacking. Lacking what?

"Over ten thousand captives, yet only over a hundred executed... How can the majesty of the Chief Divine be etched into their bones and remembered by all?"

Pimeng's gaze hardened, and after a brief thought, he announced again.

"The noble warriors who stepped forward just now, came from seven migrating groups, totaling a thousand people!"

With tens of thousands of captives being transported southwards, they would naturally be divided into many teams. These teams were remnants of tribes, family groups, or self-organized entities, ranging from dozens to hundreds.

In this era, with the administrative capabilities of the Tribal Warriors, it was impossible to delve deeply and clarify everything. In fact, even the leaders of these groups might not be entirely clear on their numbers.

"The Alliance has long had a military order: any who hide noble divine descendants and conspire to rebel are to be sacrificed and executed!"

Hearing this, the old face Chiwaco trembled, shuddering all over. He smelled the strong scent of blood, a forewarning of death, so clear.

"Go, Eagles of the Prepetcha! Capture all the able-bodied men from these seven groups, a total of more than a thousand!"

Pimeng's gaze was icy and firm as he swung his bronze axe forcefully. Red blood beads splattered from the ax blade, piercing into people's hearts.

"Have them point out and denounce noble breeds among the tens of thousands of captives, expose able-bodied men involved in the rebellion! Denounce one able-bodied man, forfeit one life; expose a noble breed, forfeit ten lives!... When time is up, sacrifice all remaining to the Chief Divine, spare not a single one!"

Chapter 984: Execution, Formation, Deer and Wolf

The setting sun painted the sky red, warmth permeating the earth. Between heaven and earth stood tall wooden poles, tied with hair, and countless heads. Over eight hundred pairs of wide-open eyes gazed intently in midair, clustered together. From afar, they resembled 'dandelions' fluttering in the breeze.

The dandelions cast the gaze of the deceased, unwillingly looking upon the heavens and earth. These gazes fell upon the sky, transforming into a deep crimson glow all over the sky, and fell upon the ground, manifesting as tens of thousands of prostrate figures. Those figures cowered, trembled, hunched, sobbed, and had once desperately exposed each other.

Now, the hierarchy, order, and traditions of all the tribes had been shattered by the Prepecha Warriors' bronze axes, leaving only terror etched into their bones and utter compliance.

The brutal denunciation lasted for half a day, followed by extremely swift executions. Over twenty noble warriors who had been in hiding were finally exposed by the desperate Moth People, along with over a hundred able-bodied men who participated in the uprising. Then, under the witness of the sunset, the remaining over eight hundred prisoners, whether Telascallan nobility, warriors, or Moth People, were all pinned to the ground by Pike Warriors and executed one by one!

The bronze axes swung, heads hung aloft, vivid red flowed freely, and the wails pierced the air only to vanish. When the sun set in the west, the center square of Eight Hundred Town fell into a dead silence, with no more potential resistance remaining.

Camp Commander Pimeng lifted his chipped axe, slightly panting. His nose was thick with the smell of blood, his eyes bloodshot, like a wolfhound of the God of Death, scanning across hundreds of headless corpses and lingering at the fearfully whimpering captives. After a long moment, Pimeng exhaled, turning toward the Divine Emblem of the Chief Divine, and bowed his head.

"Praise the Chief Divine! He casts his dark eyes from the blood-red sky! He takes the sacrificial souls, conducts the final judgment, and blesses the devout!"

The loud chant resounded before the altar of the Chief Divine. The Pike Warriors, with blood-stained war clothes, full of murderous intent, prayed toward the Divine Emblem of the Chief Divine. They had just carried out judgments and executions, with eyes tinged with blood and filled with firm devotion, as if ready to sacrifice themselves for the Divine at any moment.

Moments later, the warriors completed their sacrificial prayer and the solace of the soul. Pimeng straightened his back once more. He looked at the shivering, fearful tens of thousands of captives and ordered sharply.

"Disband them, abolish all original group leaders! Reorganize into teams of twenty people. Conduct contests within the teams, selecting a team leader and deputy based on valor!"

After the prisoner uprising, Pimeng pondered for a long time. He resolved to thoroughly break apart the captives, dismantling the tribal structure and all traditional hierarchies.

And a team of twenty is precisely the capacity of a new-style twin-hulled canoe. The two leaders, primary and deputy, correspond to the two boats of the twin hull. More importantly, "twenty" is the total number of digits on hands and feet, the largest number ordinary tribespeople can comprehend!

Not long after, under the orders of the Pike Warriors, the fearful, compliant captives were divided into teams of twenty. Then, within each team, simple wrestling contests began to select the two strongest individuals.

"The team leader and deputy leader are responsible for managing their contingent. Regardless of origin, they are the leaders of the twenty! They are also recognized leaders of small teams by the Kingdom, able to speak directly with the Kingdom's warriors!"

Pimeng watched for a moment, nodding in satisfaction. Once the team leaders were chosen, the captives had new teams. The Kingdom's Warriors no longer needed to handle individual tribespeople, only needing to interact with the team leaders. In fact, during the prior escorting, the warriors' internal management of the captives was virtually nonexistent.

"Very good! Tattoo the Divine Emblem of the Chief Divine on the foreheads of the team leaders!"

Hearing this, the accompanying War Priests stepped out of the ranks. They took out sharp obsidian daggers, deeply etching the Sun Hummingbird motif on the chosen captives' foreheads, then applying a blue dye capable of killing bacteria. Tattooing is a treatment usually reserved for veteran warriors within tribes, and not just anyone is qualified to bear the sacred Divine Emblem of the Chief Divine.

In the northern highlands' tribes, this kind of tattooing ceremony has no insulting meaning, and instead is a rare honor. This ritual of tattooing cannot be compared to the tattoo branding of the Celestial Empire.

The red sun slowly set, and the mountain wind blew powerfully. Under the supervision of the Pike Warriors, the selection of team leaders and the Priests' tattooing both advanced continuously. Pimeng stood before the altar of the Chief Divine, looking at the sacred symbol, lost in thought. After thinking for a moment, he turned around, walked to the two captains of the expedition team, and bowed slightly.

"Honorable hereditary noble Puap, expedition captain Chiwaco, may the Chief Divine bless you!"

"May the Chief Divine bless you! Honorable military noble Pimeng!"

The two respectfully returned the salute in unison. Having witnessed the execution scene earlier, the attitude of the Huitu Puap, that's an unprecedented improvement.

"Captains, you saw just now... I executed those rebels, and cut off all the hidden venomous snakes cleanly. Now, the captives have been disbanded, and new small team leaders have been selected. These methods, I learned from following Legion Commander Ezpan all these years."

At this point, Pimeng paused. There was still some concern within his steadfast expression.

"However, breaking up the captives and dismantling the tribes might reduce resistance. But the road ahead is long, so how can we reduce the escape of captives?..."

"Hmm..."

Puapu touched his chin, pondering silently. He instinctively looked towards Chiwaco, who had his eyes lowered and said nothing... Puapu shook his head inwardly.

"Hey! This old guy is too soft-hearted! It's clear he can't be counted on for this kind of issue. However, after all that I've experienced on this journey, I've got some ideas myself..."

With this thought, Puapu grinned and confidently responded.

"With the Chief Divine's blessing, Captain Pimeng, this is easy to handle!"

"Oh? Honored Gray Soil Noble, please enlighten us!"

"On the way here, I heard that the supreme Majesty set a limit on prisoners' deaths, no more than twenty percent?"

"Yes! His Majesty, enlightened by the Divine Revelation, is always merciful... but these rebels initiated the uprising and must be strictly punished! The Chief Divine bears witness! The warriors have been very restrained..."

"The Chief Divine bears witness! Camp Commander Pimeng, the journey is long and there are limited warriors to guard the captives. To reduce escapes, you need to have the prisoners turning against each other, like training dogs! Choosing a leader for each group of twenty, that's a good start. Next, it's best to also impose the power and threat of execution on them!"

"Hmm? What do you mean?..."

"There are four inauspicious days in a month. A group of twenty prisoners is allowed to have four die! The two strongest chosen as leaders are the alpha wolves among the twenty. The alpha wolf manages everything of the pack, and so should these two team leaders!"

"Give the two fiercest leaders each a Stone Spear and a Dagger so they can easily suppress their subordinates! From now on, they not only control their subordinates' food and wealth but also their life and death! And no matter how they exploit, bully, beat, or even execute their tribespeople, the warriors will turn a blind eye and tacitly allow their actions!"

Saying this, a wolf-like fierce glint flashed in Puapu's eyes. This is the most naked jungle law, letting the two chosen Telascalan leaders hold power over life and death over their subordinates, from now on becoming the warriors' lapdogs in management.

"Ah?! The chosen leaders become the alpha wolves controlling the life and death of their subordinates?"

Pimeng froze for a moment, asking in surprise.

"But His Majesty said, at most only twenty percent casualties are allowed..."

"Then tell them! No matter how they deal with it, at most only four can die! Each time resting at a village or town, the warriors will count last. For every team that loses more than four on the road, both leaders will be executed by beheading!..."

"Tell the leaders, if the numbers don't suffice, they should capture escaped prisoners, capture encountered wild people, or find a way to borrow from other surplus teams!... No matter what, the Kingdom's Warriors only count heads! As long as they bring back the number of prisoners... all the leaders can become Militia in the prisoner settlements first, or even become tent leaders of banner teams, standing high above others!"

Puapu's words, like a low wolf howl, echoed in Camp Commander Pimeng's heart. And around them were the cries and sobs of the prisoners, like the low murmurs of deer.

"Wolves and deer, warriors and captives... A wolf among deer, capturing the fleeing deer..."

Pimeng frowned and pondered for a long time, then nodded in admiration.

"Honored Gray Soil Noble, your suggestion makes a lot of sense! By creating new hierarchies among the captives and making the leaders the alpha wolves, we let them watch over the prisoners for the warriors. However, for the final part about preferential resettlement, I don't have the authority and must let the Legion Commander decide. As for the previous points about the power and threat of execution..."

Camp Commander Pimeng gripped his Bronze Axe firmly and grinned, sincerely thanking him.

"I'll go handle it right away. Once the matter of the captives is settled, I'll host a banquet tonight to welcome you!... Not to mention, the Serpent Descendant noble lady among the captives, as slippery as a snake, will surely satisfy you!"

"Haha! Thank the Chief Divine, thank you!"

Saying this, both warriors from Patzcuaro grinned widely, filled with joy. On this blood-red evening, they were deciding the life and death of tens of thousands of Telascalans, and determining the fate of over a hundred thousand prisoners. In their hands, they held blood-stained Bronze Axes and tightly clutched the Chief Divine's Amulet, standing above others.

On this fertile land, the loyal warriors of the Prepetcha, following His Majesty's footsteps, have finally become the new conquerors. Continuous streams of wealth, land, and population brought through conquest provide abundant fuel for the Kingdom's military machine. And as long as the war continues with victory, the loyalty of the various warriors will remain unwavering!

Chapter 985: The Secret in the Song

The stars gleamed in the night sky, and the bonfire illuminated the earth. In the stationed military camp, Camp Commander Pimeng gathered dozens of trusted aides to host a welcome feast for the Kingdom expedition team that came from afar.

There were large plates of black bean paste to fill the stomach, baskets of tortillas in abundance. Additionally, there were plentiful tropical fruits, delicious fish soup with added spices, and a special treat for the leaders, a whole roasted venison with an enticing aroma.

Everyone ate the tortillas heartily and drank the soup in big gulps, feeling immensely joyful. Pimeng recounted the stories of His Majesty's invincible campaigns since the eastern expedition. Puap also boasted about the sights and experiences during the exploration of the Northern Continent. The two were spirited as they talked about half the world and drank a jar of fruit wine, becoming intoxicated and then singing the songs of their homeland.

"Oh ya, oh ya! Mother Goddess in the water, She is the mother by the lake!

Her milk drops, breeding delicious fish in the vast Lake Patzcuaro~..."

"Oh ya, oh ya! Mother Goddess in the water, She is the mother in the sky!

Wandering alone in silence, searching for her flying children until dawn~..."

"Oh ya, oh ya! Mother Goddess in the water, She is the mother of the Prepecha!

She never distinguishes, doesn't care about the appearance of the children, wherever they are~..."

Singing up to this point, their cheerful voices echoed in the military camp. All the Prepecha Warriors sincerely raised smiles, and even the usually silent old militia also smiled on his old face. Everyone echoed loudly, singing out the songs from the memories by the lake of Patzcuaro.

"...Oh ya, oh ya! That is the light of the Mother Goddess, shining on our feet, shining on our faces. She is our mother, no matter what we are! Whether it is dripping with sweat, covered in dust, or with blood~"

The simple yet warm banquet peaked. Pimeng drunkenly stood up, waved his hand heartily, and shouted loudly.

"Bring them in, bring them all in! Two for each warrior! Four for each captain!... I, Pimeng, host, surely provide enough!"

Before he finished speaking, a group of graceful Tlaxcala noble ladies, bare-chested, were brought in by the trusted aides. The small wooden barracks were immediately filled to the brim. The swaying feminine aura rushed in, making the youthful warriors with boiling blood stare straight, instantly reacting.

Seeing this, Pimeng laughed heartily. He stretched out his big hand, made a perfect demonstration, and shouted again.

"Come, eagles of the Prepecha! Stretch out your sharp claws, seize the noble ladies of the Serpent Descendants, and sing freely on their smooth bodies!..."

"Hoo! This is going to be the end of me..."

A while later, the old militia Chiwaco struggled to crawl out of the barracks, looked at the stars in the sky, and sighed softly. He turned aside, glanced at the swaying shadows by the bonfire, listened to the passionate and hurried eagle cries, and shook his head helplessly.

"Can't take it, really can't take it! Better slip away early..."

The old militia slowly wandered through the bustling military camp, walked past the deathly-still market town, stepped on the watery stars, and boarded a longship for a distant journey. His gaze became profound, looking at the boundless brilliant night sky, like a lonely gazing old mountain goat.

However, in this era, there were no mountain goats. Chiwaco glanced around the bow of the ship, only seeing the young captive Dark Snake curled up in the corner of the deck. Dark Snake, wearing a sailor's short robe, hugged his legs, raised his head, and also looked at the stars in the sky. Hmm, just like a coiled little snake lifting its head.

Chiwaco remained silent for a while, adjusted his clothes, and sat next to Dark Snake. Dark Snake tensed up, curled up a bit, until he recognized the person's face, then relaxed a little. He could keenly sense that the old captain opposite him was someone he could trust.

"Perhaps, the only one on this entire ship he could trust..."

"Have you eaten?"

Chiwaco spoke softly, his eyes always looking at the sky. The tropical highland Milky Way was so rich that one could see thousands of star points, even more than the people on the ground.

"I have eaten."

Dark Snake answered softly. He never wanted to land ashore, nor dared to. Fortunately, the old captain tacitly allowed him to stay on the ship.

"What did you eat?"

"I ate some tortillas."

The conversation ended there. Both the old and young remained silent for a while, then Chiwaco stood up, brought out two clay jars from the cabin, filled them with fruit wine, and sat back again. By His Majesty's instructions, the Kingdom's expedition fleet always carried a large amount of mild wine to substitute for fresh water.

"Drink up."

"Mm."

Dark Snake sipped the wine in small gulps, quickly blushing. He turned his head slightly, cautiously peeking at Chiwaco. The latter was looking up at the starry sky, his old face slightly intoxicated, seemingly muttering something softly. Seeing this, Dark Snake leaned slightly closer to barely catch his words.

"Blind Heavenly Divine!... A deer in wolf's skin becomes a real wolf, eating people..."

"Is this still the warrior of Lepecha?... In the old Kingdom times, the nobles were also harsh to plebeian commoners like weeds, but they were just grass-eating deer...Now, after following the Mexica, they're no longer the same; even their core has changed, with a red gleam in their eyes..."

"Ha! I can understand their language, recognize their faces, but they always seem like fierce Mexica... This Kingdom has an increasing number of core Mexica!... All wolves."

"Being a wolf is good! This world is full of wolves. Either I eat you, or you eat me. Eating others is naturally better than being eaten!... But, I don't want to be a wolf..."

"?... Wolf? Eat?..."

Dark Snake widened his eyes, trying hard to listen. Unfortunately, he couldn't understand the old militia's dialect, only sensing the emotions behind it. Mm, the feeling was like stars, high and distant, yet vast and luminous.

"Um... Do you want to hear a song?"

"Hm?"

Upon hearing this, Chiwaco was taken aback. He drank wine, face flushed, turned his head to study the young man for a while before curiously asking.

"What song?"

"The song of the stars. It's sung by the priests of the Holy City, very beautiful, a very, very old song. I heard it when I was young, and I remember it."

Dark Snake pursed his lips, his face revealing nostalgia.

"This song is about a star, the origin star... In the Sun Calendar, a year has 365 days, that's the cycle of the Sun's change. In the Holy Calendar, a year has 260 days. Actually, this is also a cycle of a star. But, long, long ago, that star suddenly disappeared."

"..."

The old militia didn't understand Dark Snake's words either. He just observed the young man's earnest face for a moment, smiled, and nodded.

"Well!"

Dark Snake cleared his throat, looking at the location between Mars and Jupiter in the night sky, and began to sing serenely.

"... You are the origin of all gods, floating for thirty-seven million years in the desolate and ancient Stellar Realm. ..."

Thirty-seven million years? How much is that? The old militia thought for a while, couldn't figure it out, and didn't care. He just quietly listened, drinking wine, with a smile.

"... The Jaguar of the Stellar Realm, treading on the footsteps of the wind. It came to the boundless river and the tree of life, sitting on the withering treetop, watching the origin star... like a seed."

In Mayan mythology, the Milky Way is a divine tree of life, with stars situated in various corners of the tree. The Jaguar of the Stellar Realm, one of the four creation gods in Mayan records, is an astronomical representation of Mars. In the poem, the location of the origin star corresponds to Mars.

Cholula City, with a heritage spanning hundreds to thousands of years, has many myths resembling those of the Mayans, originated from the ancient Olmec Era.

"A seed sprouted in the sea of stars, nurturing the gods in the sky... The Stellar Realm is a beautiful garden, where gods stroll under the tree, everything is so wonderful... until the deathly darkness came rushing from deep shadows, like lightning falling from the sky, shattering the gods' home!"

Dark Snake sang to this point, and for some reason, tears flowed from his eyes. His face was tear-streaked, and his voice carried a sorrowful elegance.

"... Everything shattered, the divine tree toppled. The origin star fell, gods died in the darkness, the flood roared across the star river!..."

"Many years later, the survivors built tall towers. They prayed, they offered sacrifices, they waited on the earth, waiting for the return of the gods~"

Chiwaco pursed his lips, his gaze softening. He didn't understand what the young one was singing about, comprehend the origin of stars, nor did he care about any possible astonishing secrets hidden in the poem.

"Phew! Also a child of misfortune."

The old militia sighed. He could understand the boy's unspoken feelings; a foreign noble, perhaps even a divine descendant, who in the turbulent era among wolf packs, had lost his homeland, lost his family, lost all status and became a humble captive.

Once the song ended, the ship fell silent again, with only the sound of rushing water. The old and the young sat together, saying nothing more. They gazed at the Milky Way in the sky, thinking of someone far away, with thoughts drifting far and hearts drawn close.

Chapter 986: The Upper Stream of the Long River, Encounter of the People in the Rain

Sparse raindrops fell from the deep sky, not too fast, not too slow, landing silently. The sparse long wind blew along the Long River, neither cold nor hot, just right. It was late summer and early autumn harvest season; in the deep mountain forest, there was no fragrance of mature grains, only the ever-blooming Huashu attracting flocks of hummingbirds and flower butterflies.

The exploration fleet stayed in Eight Hundred Town for two days before setting sail again. Camp Commander Pimeng personally led two hundred warriors and eight hundred captured able-bodied men to follow along the Tarsas River. The expedition fleet, fully loaded with the team's food, went upstream. After traveling forty miles, they encountered the first obstacle, the first three-forked rivermouth.

"This is the eastern rivermouth."

Pimeng, leaning on a spear, stood on the rocky shoal by the river. He pointed to the upstream in the North of the rivermouth, then to the southern fork of the rivermouth.

"North of the rivermouth is the upstream flowing from the mountains. Next, we need to turn north and continue upstream. The mountains in the North are steep, the river courses steep; from here on, the able-bodied men will have to tow the boats."

Chiwaco stood on tiptoes, gazing at the layered mountains in the North, watching the eagles circling the mountain tops, his face showing amazement.

"What a vast mountain! One after another, winding endlessly!"

Then he looked southward, seeing the equally rugged mountains and narrow tributaries, and asked.

"Where does this tributary lead to?"

"I haven't walked through it personally. Local guides say that many branches of the Atoyac River flow south into the lands of the Lowland Mistek people, and some flow southwest into the lands of the Tepanec people... In fact, the South is a vast expanse of mountain forests mixed with various wild people and villages."

"Hmm? Atoyac River? Great Water River?"

Hearing this, Puap was somewhat surprised. The name Atoyac coincided with the Atoyac Lake in the South of the kingdom, and its meaning was actually a large body of water, "Great Water River."

"Yes! The upstream of the Tarsas River is very torrential and large. So locals call it the Atoyac River."

Pimeng smiled and explained.

"The further northeast from here, the deeper into the Mistec people's heartland you go. Sometimes, you can even encounter their tribal scouts. Warriors have fought them, captured populations, and suffered losses. But this mountainous terrain doesn't allow for force deployment and it's also hard to pass a large troop of warriors, so there's no need to worry."

"I see."

Chiwaco squinted his eyes, gazing at the mountains and flying birds for a while, nodded his head.

"Chief Divine bless! Let the civilians prepare to tow, let's set off as soon as possible!"

Soon, the chant of towing resounded beside the river and echoed between the mountains on both sides. The vast majority of the expedition's manpower got off the ship, traveling with the Pike Warriors. During the day, the able-bodied men, bare-chested, hauled the coarse stiff hemp ropes, towing the longship slowly northward. At night, the warriors formed a circle, dispatching patrol teams, overseeing the entire party.

Thin cooking smoke rose in the silent desolate valley, bringing the aroma of food, even attracting jungle wolves. The guarding Prepecha Warriors' eyes lit up immediately, carrying spears and greatbows, chased them. After a brief skirmish, Chiwaco's earthen bowl received a few pieces of fragrant wolf meat that evening.

Most of the team's food was controlled by the warriors and stored in the longship's hold. With warriors tightly guarding the food, there was no fear of the civilians escaping. Everyone waded through the streams and trekked through the deep mountain forest, marching eighty miles northeast until they reached the second three-forked rivermouth.

"Here, the Great Water River splits into two. Northeast is the upper stream, southeast is the lower stream tributary. We need to continue to the upper stream in the northeast."

Speaking of this, Pimeng paused, his expression turned serious, gripping the spear in his hand tightly.

"We are already in the Mistec people's territory. Moving forward, we will encounter their mountain tribes. Moreover, if we travel along the lower stream tributary, heading southeast for one hundred and fifty miles, we will reach the Mistec people's Ye Guo City. Another hundred miles along the river is Xianggou City. There are two fertile valleys, and the gathered tribes number in the tens of thousands."

"Ye Guo City, Xianggou City?"

"Yes! Both are the heartlands where numerous Mistec Tribes gather! The Most High, Your Majesty, will sooner or later lead us to conquer these mice nestled in the mountains, one by one!"

Pimeng straightened his body, looking at the southern mountains, instinctively grasping the amulet on his chest.

"Chief Divine bless, the Kingdom is invincible!"

"To conquer the tribes in the mountains..."

Chiwaco squinted his eyes again, looking southeast. The mountains there seemed a bit more gentle, yet still undulating endlessly. And the river at his feet, though it required towing against the current, was the only smooth link.

"These hundred thousand mountains are not easy to march through. To travel smoothly, we must rely on these rivers!"

Chiwaco squinted his eyes, his thoughts wandering far. He knew the difficulty of the southern mountain roads, and couldn't help but feel a bit worried. However, at this moment, he glanced at Pimeng's fervent and devout expression and said nothing.

"Hey hey, yo! Keep going!"

The mountain road was tough, and towing was not easy. The team of over a thousand people wound along, covering only over twenty miles in a day. Until dusk, amid a flurry of crows, they finally stopped by the riverside.

"Here is the third forked river mouth, dividing into due east and northwest. The east is the main upstream, with abundant water. The northwest is another upstream tributary, not much water, barely navigable."

At this point, Pimeng's vigilant expression slightly relaxed. He took a deep breath and pulled out a deerskin water pouch, drinking a few gulps.

"We will turn northwest here and won't go east anymore. If we go further east, we might run into the Mistec people's great tribes. A hundred miles northeast is the swamp fort in the mountains, garrisoned with thousands of Mistec militia and an uncertain number of warriors."

"Swamp fort?"

Chiwaco scratched his head, mulling over the name.

"It sounds like there should be water, and the terrain is low to form a swamp. Mountain forest swamps, undulating unevenly, this southern land is truly a vast stretch of wasteland!"

"...I don't know why that damned Majesty has summoned us for miles to toil in these mountain gullies and streams? Ahead is where the great river sources in the mountains, dangerous and desolate, what good could it be? ...Oh, God of Destiny, I always have a bad premonition! It's definitely, definitely not good news!..."

The old militia's premonitions have always been miraculous. And this time, it was even miraculously over the top. Moments later, a Mistec scout with painted skin appeared on the high mountains on the east riverbank. He stared at the crowd of small dots by the river and gaped at the large ship he had never seen before. Then he raised the conch horn at his neck, puffed up his cheeks, and blew intensely with all the strength he could muster.

"Dee, dee dee! Dee dee dee!"

The sharp and piercing conch horn rang out on the high mountains, flew over the boundless clouds, crossed the southern mountain forest, and transmitted far into the distance!

"Quick! Quick! Put on armor, grab shields! Archers board the ship, prepare to shoot! Distribute stone spears to the captives, and line up on either side of the warriors! Tell them, without food, escaping in the mountain forest will mean certain death. And if they fall into the hands of the Mistec people, they will also be sacrificed by heart extraction!"

Hearing the Mistec warning horn, Camp Commander Pimeng shivered in an instant. He immediately dropped the water bag in his hand, gathered the surrounding warriors, and put on the bronze medium armor awarded by the majesty.

Soon, with the help of teammates, more than forty elite soldiers also donned copper armor, holding big axes, ready for combat at the front line. During marching, to save strength, they usually did not wear armor. The heavy and hard armor worn on their bodies transforms the warriors' morale, a real and powerful divine blessing!

Unfortunately, there were only a total of fifty sets of copper armor in the thousand-strong long spear camp, almost all brought out.

As for the remaining 160 warriors, after distributing the simple stone spears, they drove the unarmored captives to the left and right wings. They switched to spears and longbows, overseeing the able-bodied men on the wings while guarding the central commander-in-chief.

Puap's expression turned stern as he led a hundred warriors of the fleet onto the long ship docked at the shore. They stationed themselves between the shields on the sides of the longship, also setting up the great bows. The sight of a team moving slowly through the water was a perfect target.

Chaotic shouting rose by the river, and the captive able-bodied men with the army were a bit flustered, some trying to stir, but were suppressed by the fierce team leaders. The fear of executions more than ten days ago was still fresh in their minds. As long as the warriors' team did not collapse, the captives would not flee for the moment.

"Dee dee dee!"

The piercing conch horn became increasingly urgent. After another half an hour, finally a large group of Mistec people marched out from the mountain forest on the opposite side of the long river. Over a

thousand tribal warriors grasping stone spears, carrying javelins and hunting bows, gathered on the broad riverbank. Thirty or forty canoes, also carrying a hundred or so elite tribe members, emerged from the tributary within the forest.

These lightweight canoes, weighing only hundreds of pounds, each could carry only five or six people, similar to rafts. But with very shallow drafts, they could easily be dragged ashore. They moved swiftly in the mountains downstream and had to rely on manpower to carry them against the current.

"Rain Divine Zavi, shelter the people in the rain, drive away the tiger men from the North!"

Hundreds and thousands of tribal warriors shouted across the river, brandishing their weapons, intimidating the enemy several hundred paces away. Amidst the boiling shouts, a Mistec divine descendant, wearing a feather crown and carrying a feather bundle, also appeared on the banks of the Great Water River, holding a sharp copper spear.

Chapter 987: Charging Ship

"O mighty Rain Divine!..."

Amidst hundreds of samurai, the military leader of Ye Guo City, Yunshi Kawa, stood on the Eastern bank of the Great River. Squinting his eyes to avoid the blinding Western sunset, he carefully examined the longships on the river.

"What exactly are they...?"

"Leader Yunshi, those should be the boats of the Aztec Tiger Men."

Veteran scout Qiaoao inclined his head and replied respectfully.

"Two days ago, I saw these boats being dragged across the water."

"What? They have boats so large!"

Yunshi Kawa's eyes widened, and he gestured in front of him, estimating the length of the longship.

"At least twelve men long! Ten times a canoe!"

The length of one person is roughly 1.5 meters. Twelve men long would be 18 meters, while the Mountain Tribes' canoes are smaller, usually just two meters, for ease of landing.

"Ears, aren't the Northern Aztec Tiger Men good at land battles? How can they build such sacred large ships?"

Yunshi Kawa tightly grasped his spear, astonished. Among the Rain People, waterborne vessels are important symbols of faith, just like the Rain Divine.

In the myths, after the Feathered Serpent Father Divine and the Rain Divine Mother Goddess committed a great folly, they sailed a serpent boat to the Great Lake in the East. The Maya, who also have large ships and worship the Feathered Serpent, have always had good trade relations with the Southern Coast's various Mistec city-states. In the flourishing Black Altar City, coastal Mayan trade ships would often bring precious superior-quality turquoises and jade, traversing the expansive Southern Great Lake.

"...Leader, they might not be Tiger Men."

Ear Qiaoao scratched his head, speaking uncertainly.

"I've heard them singing; that doesn't sound like Navajo. Their accent is akin to the nobility who escaped here years ago; they should be the Divine Eagle Tribe's Eagle Men... Eagle Men are adept at shipbuilding and have traded copper vessels with the city-states. These large ships were likely made by them."

"Qiaoao," this name in Mistek Language means "ears." It's typical for scouts with excellent hearing to acquire such a name.

"Tarasco's Eagle Men?"

Upon hearing this, Yunshi Kawa's mind flashed back to unforgettable memories.

Years ago, Prince of Tarasco, Southern Route Commander Quiyus, had landed along the Tarsas River, from a spot not far southwest, fleeing into Ye Guo City. As one of Ye Guo City's military leaders, he hospitably entertained them for several months.

However, when the Aztec King personally led military forces to defeat the Tlaxcala Serpent People's troops, the elders of the various tribes' attitudes changed instantly. The leader of Divine Stone City, Yun Chen, also sent a message. In the end, he personally acted to send the brave Prince Quiyus off with a cup of exquisite poison wine.

"Ha! The elders are cowardly, and the leader Yun Chen is equally indecisive. Now, the Eagle Men have become Tiger Men's claws, and the Serpent People are nearing extinction! Aztec's vicious tigers come charging in, devouring the Cloud Temple in one breath... The sacred Rain People have no other choice! We must fight!"

Thinking of this, Yunshi Kawa's gaze turned fierce, and battle intent burned in his chest. He looked around, watching the gathered tribal warriors and loudly encouraged them.

"Warriors of the Rain Divine! The vicious Tiger Men and Eagle Men have appeared here, near our city-state! They sail on large ships, intending to ambush our forts and destroy our temple... Just as it's happening right now in the Teotihuacan Valley!"

At this point, Yunshi Kawa paused. He had led his troops here because he received news that Divine Stone City was besieged and urgently retreated from Mire Fort, preparing to return to defend Ye Guo City.

"The Rain Divine is furious, the Rain Divine roars! This is the Divine Realm of the Rain Divine Zavi, also our land! We are descendants of the Rain Divine, blessed by the Divine for a millennium!"

Yunshi Kawa, emotionally charged, raised his spear; even the feather bundle on his back fluttered in the wind.

"Warriors of the Rain Divine! To defend our home, go forth, fight to the death, defeat the invading enemy! For the supreme Rain Divine is watching over us!"

"Roar! The Rain Divine watches over us!..."

More than a thousand tribal warriors, filled with fanaticism, collectively shouted like thunder before a storm. Then, forty small canoes carried nearly two hundred tribal warriors, rushing downstream toward the longships on the Western bank!

"...The Mistek people are coming!"

A sharp shout spread across the riverbank, and the Prepecha Warriors standing in ranks instantly became tense. Camp Commander Pimeng climbed a mound, watched the incoming boat swarm, and adjusted the position of the army formation. Only when the Mistek people's boats came closer, within two hundred paces, did he unambiguously shout the command.

"The enemy's target is the longship! Archers, advance fifty paces, support the kingdom's fleet, shoot freely!"

The boat swarm approached the longships for a naval battle; the heavy-armored warriors and able-bodied captives on the bank momentarily lost their function. Only the archers stationed in the camp could provide prompt assistance.

"One hundred paces, eighty paces, sixty paces! Archers on the boats, quick, shoot!"

Puap drew the greatbow, targeting the tribal warriors on the small boats, and shot an arrow.

"Whizz!"

Undoubtedly, this precise arrow... brushed past the enemy's hair, plunging into the water.

"Damn it! With the favorable wind and water, the enemy's small boats are incredibly fast!"

Puap gritted his teeth, squinted at the ever-approaching enemy boats, and again drew the bow and released arrows.

"Whizz, whizz, whizz!"

The boat swarm entered forty paces; the second wave of feathered arrows quickly struck. Almost immediately, the Mistek warriors on the opposite side erupted with screams. Several tribal warriors tilted their bodies and "splash" fell into the water. The rushing boat swarm suddenly started to scatter.

"Whizz, whizz, whizz!"

Within twenty paces, the third wave of feathered arrows was fired simultaneously from both the bank and the ships. The Mistek people's cries suddenly turned shrill! More than a dozen elite warriors were killed, and many others wounded, causing several small boats to collide with each other. However, the remaining Mistek warriors drove their speeding boats ever closer with raised javelins, howling fiercely as they drew aim, aided by the speed of the water and boats.

"Rain Divine protects! For the tribes! Shoot!..."

"Whizz, whizz!... Uh!..."

"Oh blind Heavenly Divine!"

Old militia Chiwaco trembled all over, instinctively crouching down. A heavy and sharp stone spear screeched past the top of his head and then "thud," pinned the solid wooden deck. Another sailor on the ship managed only a scream before a vicious javelin shot him down. The plummeting stone spear pierced the cotton armor, creating a massive wound, with blood and viscera spilling immediately beyond saving.

The Mistek people's javelins, although slightly inaccurate, struck seven or eight men. But these javelins, bolstered by the boat speed, proved extremely lethal, a single hit meant death!

"Chief Divine protects, only twenty paces remain! Ten paces! Damn it, they're not slowing down, absolutely insane!!"

With roaring river currents and spreading crimson, the small boats charged like javelins. Huitu Puap dropped his longbow and raised his shield, yelling in anger, his expression slightly distorted.

"Quick! Quick! Warriors raise spears, sailors hold javelins! Brace the shields on both sides, prepare for the impact!... Ah!"

"Boom!... Bang! Bang!"

Chapter 988: Clash, Divine Descendant Yun Shi

"Bang!"

The violent sound of collision echoed repeatedly on the seven longships, accompanied by the ear-piercing sound of splintering wood, leaving one dizzy and nauseated.

The warriors on both sides paused for several breaths before recovering slightly from the fierce impact. Then, the boiling shouts of battle suddenly erupted around the longships.

"The Rain Divine is roaring!"

"The Chief Divine is supreme!"

"Kill! Kill them! Roar!"

"Sacrifice for the Divine!"

The Mistek warriors shouted, holding stone spears, clutching the low gunwale of the longship, and jumped aboard. The Prepecha warriors, meanwhile, with cold and fierce expressions, shouted as they thrust out their spears. On the ship, in the brutal melee, both sides were rarely armored. Face-to-face

clashes, spear tips piercing chests, spear heads tearing through throats, life and death were decided in an instant!

"Stab! Hit!"

The old militia half-crouched, squinting his eyes, fiercely thrust his copper spear into a tribal warrior's thigh. The warrior was in the midst of swinging his weapon, and his leg suddenly gave out, causing him to stumble. A blood-stained bronze axe instantly sliced across his neck, releasing a mist of blood.

"Sizzle!"

Blood gushed like a mountain spring, soaking the narrow deck. Just as the Prepecha warrior who had killed an enemy was about to give thanks, the old militia silently moved away. He hunched his body, focused on another pair of bare feet, and thrust again...

"Kill!"

Puap, with a ferocious expression, swung a bronze axe, fiercely striking a Mistek warrior on the shoulder. The axe was so brutal, it cut too deep; the opponent groaned and fell onto the deck with the bone along with the bronze axe. Puap's hand was briefly empty and slightly dazed when a long obsidian spear was thrust toward his throat.

"Hiss!"

The Huitu warrior broke out in a cold sweat and, leaning backward, sat on a corpse in the ship. The sharp stone spear paused slightly, then unhesitatingly continued forward. Then, using all its force, the stone spear pierced the chest and abdomen of a young sailor, and brought it downwards.

"Ah!"

"Thud!"

The young sailor died instantly, and the owner of the stone spear fell back onto the ground. Puap sat on the deck, his hands covered in blood, clutching a copper spear he had just picked up.

Boarding battles, close-quarters combat, the slaughter was extremely intense, and death was exceedingly cruel. In just a short quarter of an hour, dozens on both sides were killed. Over a hundred corpses piled in the seven longships, warmth gathered into pools, making the entire upper deck sticky and slippery.

"Blind old gods! These Mistek people are truly insane!"

The old militia Chiwaco gritted his teeth, crawling through the chaos. Suddenly, he saw Dark Snake in a corner, full of terror, facing an older Mistek warrior. The warrior had a sinister grin, showing no mercy, raising a sharp obsidian war club, ready to strike down.

"Splurt!"

A bright spear tip emerged from the older warrior's chest. Precise, forceful, just right, deadly. Then, the old militia exhaled a long breath, pulled the spear out from the warrior's back, and gave the curled-up Dark Snake a warm, fatherly smile.

"Ha! After two years, I haven't forgotten the craft of killing..."

"Toot! Toot! Speed up, support the ship!"

Camp Commander Pimeng blew his bone whistle, urging the warriors on the shore. The Prepecha archers swapped in spears, wading through the water to support the nearby ships. Moments later, as the first batch of reinforcements boarded the longship, stabbing with their long spears, the previously rampant Mistek warriors seemed to be awoken from their fervor, suddenly realizing the heavy casualties.

"Damn Eagles! They're guarding the ship, we can't break through!"

"No rain, the Rain Divine's power can't help us!"

"It's unwinnable, retreat, retreat quickly!"

"Wakahahaha ka wa!..."

The chaotic shouts emerged from the mouths of the Mistek warriors, then grew louder and more disorderly. In just over a dozen breaths, the remaining hundred enemies let out hysterical cries and then scattered. Many tribal warriors turned around, disregarding the copper spears behind, and jumped into the icy water, desperately swimming towards the opposite bank.

"...What?"

Chiwaco, hands bloody, gripping a copper spear, stood in front of Dark Snake. Watching the sudden collapse of the enemy, he felt momentarily bewildered, as if it was unreal.

"Oh Heavenly Divine! They fought so fiercely just now...now they just fled? These Mistek people are truly insane!"

A quarter of an hour ago, both sides were fighting to the death, evenly matched, warriors piling up dead. A quarter of an hour later, the reinforcements had just boarded, and the enemy completely collapsed, desperately jumping ship to escape.

"Bah! Shouting about the Divine, stirring morale, only a moment of mad courage, not enduring long battles! Once time drags on, faced with a slight adversity, they reveal the nature of mice and fish!"

Puap straightened up, spat out bloody phlegm. He wore leather armor but had been stabbed twice by the Mistek people, injuring his shoulder and arm. But at this moment, he couldn't check his wounds, just glared with reddened eyes, carefully surveying the river.

The remaining Mistek soldiers abandoned the small boats that could only go downstream, struggling against the rushing river to swim to the opposite bank. They were perfect targets.

"Switch to longbows! Shoot, shoot these mad mousefish!..."

"Yes, Captain!"

Across the Long River, Yunshi Kawa pressed his lips tightly. Watching the rapidly retreating warriors and the gradually reddening river, regret gnawed at his heart. He seemed to have made a mistake, yet could think of no better way to avoid it.

"Not enough ships! Across the river, only over two hundred soldiers could be dispatched at a time...the Eagles and Tiger Men on the opposite bank are not like the Jungle Tribes we fought before. They're very resilient, hard as stone...Two hundred warriors rowing to charge, as fierce as thunder, but failing to break the Eagles in one go, immediately ran out of strength. And when their reinforcements arrived..."

"If we let the large group of warriors cross the river from the shallow water, all go to the opposite bank? Put all the force on them at once; if we can't topple the stones, we'll be crushed by stones!...No, not knowing the enemy's strength, such action is too risky..."

"Leader? Leader?!"

"Hmm?"

Yunshi Kawa was deep in thought when his trusted scout Qiaoao approached, cautiously asking.

"What should we do next? The Eagles on the other side haven't moved, nor have they pursued across the river."

"Haven't moved?"

Hearing this, Yunshi Kawa looked across the river thoughtfully.

"Hmm, across the river, attacking is difficult for us, attacking is also difficult for them...It seems the ragtag militia on the other side's flanks aren't very able to fight..."

"Leader?"

"We will retreat!"

Yunshi Kawa made up his mind and ordered decisively.

"Retreat to the east, encamp in the village ten miles away."

"Ah! Leader, we're retreating now?"

"Hmm."

Yunshi Kawa nodded. He gazed at the setting sun in the west, and the gradually darkening land. His voice was low, but his face carried the confidence of a Divine Descendant of the Mistec people, not yet conquered, still firmly believing in their divinity.

"It's getting dark! This is our familiar land, our familiar river! At night, we'll send small teams of hunters to cross the river from the shallow water and harass them!"

As he spoke, Yunshi Kawa looked at the opposite side of the Great River, at the three different groups, his mouth gradually curling into a smile.

"Eagles soar high at night, tigers hunt at night, but grass mice hide at night. Are they Eagles, Tigers, or Grass Mice? A trial in the night will reveal the truth!"

Chapter 989: Observations Along the Way, The Importance of the Thousand-Mile Long River

The enemy retreated as night fell. Seven longships docked on the shore, and the kingdom's expedition team of over two hundred set up camp on the west bank of the Great Water River. Pimeng led two hundred pike warriors, quickly treating the wounded and interrogating prisoners. The samurai also supervised the burial of the dead from both sides by the eight hundred able-bodied men.

Soon, small campfires were lit along the flat riverbank. The aroma of food, mixed with a faint smell of blood, spread with the night wind in all directions.

"I personally interrogated the prisoners... The leader on the other side is called Yunshi Kawa. He is the military leader of Ye Guo City and has always maintained close ties with the Great Chief Yun Chen of Mountain River City, serving as his supporter and ally."

Pimeng, holding a spear, approached two captains. He sat down on the ground, took a roasted soft corn cake, and began gnawing on it while recounting the enemy's identity.

"Yunshi Kawa? Military leader of Ye Guo City, ally of Great Chief Yun Chen?"

Upon hearing this, Puap appeared confused.

"What does this represent?"

"In short, the leader on the other side is among the most firm opponents of the alliance among the Mistec people."

Pimeng put down the corn cake, extended his hand, and gestured to the southeast.

"Since the eastern expedition, the Mistec initially maintained neutrality. Ye Guo City, the closest to here, is nominally a subject of the alliance. If the scouts from both sides encountered each other, although they watched each other cautiously, they wouldn't directly engage."

"This relationship persisted for several months. But when Your Majesty swept through the two southern states, the attitude of the lowland Mistec tribes here gradually turned hostile. Under the rallying of leaders like Yun Chen and Yunshi, more and more Mistec tribes opposed the alliance..."

"The Mistec subsequently garrisoned forces in the marsh, secretly threatening the army's rear. Your Majesty also stationed troops to confront them. Three months ago, when the news of Your Majesty burning the Holy City and sacrificing the Cholula Priestly Family reached them, the attitude of the

lowland Mistec completely changed! Many devout tribes in the lowlands started to oppose the alliance. The kingdom's scouts also engaged in more than a dozen skirmishes with the nearby tribal warriors..."

"This river delta is within the control range of Ye Guo City. The eighty or ninety thousand Mistec tribes there have become enemies of the alliance and could reinforce at any moment!... And across the river, Yunshi Kawa is also a seasoned forest warrior. He just fought a battle with us, leaving behind two hundred corpses, and retreated. But I think he might just be retreating temporarily..."

"What! In a hundred miles, there are eighty to ninety thousand hostile tribes? They could muster at least ten thousand able-bodied men!"

Upon hearing this, Puap's expression changed, and he spoke solemnly.

"Commander Pimeng, we can't delay here; we need to head quickly to the northwestern upstream tributaries... You know, if there are too many horseflies in the mountain forest, they can be deadly!..."

"Yes. We'll leave first thing in the morning! As for now, I'll go arrange the able-bodied men's camp and the samurai's night patrols."

Pimeng clapped his hands, stuffed the last piece of cake into his mouth, and then, shouldering his spear, turned and walked away to organize tonight's defense.

"May the Chief Divine bless the kingdom!"

The late summer breeze was warm, the forest deep and vast. The long river flowed eastward, winding along its course. Chiwaco gazed at the dark and dangerous night, looking at the main river course upstream to the east, his eyes growing pensive.

"Old Pu. Why do you think His Majesty made us travel over a thousand miles upriver to come here?"

"Why?"

Puap scratched his head, pondering for a long time without a clue. He recalled the journey, and based on his understanding, speculated.

"Perhaps he wants to test whether the upstream waterway of the Tarsus River can be navigated? We came from the southwestern estuary, traveling upstream for two months before reaching here. And the upstream waterway ahead is said to go straight into the heartland of the Mistec, though it's unknown how much farther it goes... Anyway, this is the first great river of the South, over two thousand miles long!"

"Yes, a two-thousand-mile-long river! From the land of the Tekos to the heart of the Kingdom of the Lake, then to the southern city-states of the alliance, and finally the chaotic city-states of the Mistec tribes, even extending to the Trascal Land in the north... This long river connects all the southern tribes together..."

Upon hearing this, the old militia nodded in agreement and gently sighed.

"Along the way, we saw so many ships, so many captives! Without this waterway, escorting tens of thousands of captives a thousand miles overland back to the kingdom would cost countless lives! And these fleets that can transport captives can naturally also ferry warriors, food, and strange stones mined from the mountains..."

At this point, the old militia paused. His old eyes gleamed with contemplative insight and practical wisdom.

"The kingdom controls the lower and middle reaches of the Long River. Now, we've been tasked with traversing this difficult upstream passage... I think His Majesty is like a greedy giant anteater! The entire Long River is like his extended red tongue, ready to devour the lands and tribes along the way like ants, one bite at a time!"

"Oh! You old man, what nonsense are you spouting? How dare you speak ill of His Majesty!"

Hearing these words, Puap shivered all over. He nervously glanced left and right, seeing no one else, he finally sighed in relief. He pursed his lips and lowered his voice.

"...However, you do have a point... To the east of the Kingdom of the Lake is the Mexica Alliance, and to the north is the desolate Northern Land. King Aweit of the alliance is also a robust jaguar. He controls the Mexica Alliance, continually waging wars all around, blocking the kingdom's path for eastward expansion... If His Majesty wishes to extend his reach to the prosperous southern city-states, to the abundant eastern tribes, he can only rely on this Long River!"

"And if the upstream of this Long River can be fully navigated with large ships, then the kingdom's tens of thousands of troops... might even bypass fortresses and appear in the alliance's..."

At this point, the two fell silent, their words going unsaid. In the hearts of the Prepecha Warriors, there was no thought for the alliance's king.

The night wind blew, the campfires flickered. After a while, the old militia sighed softly.

"The southern mountains are as numerous as the leaves on a tree. The southern rivers are the trunk of the great tree. As for these southern tribes, they are the stinging bees hidden in the leaves... You never know when they'll emerge, ready to sting you!"

"Kill!... Ah!... Uh... Huh-huh..."

A sudden burst of fighting broke out from the northeast corner of the riverbank, right where the samurai were patrolling. Across two miles, the sound was sharp and urgent, like a mountain cat tussling and biting in the forest at night.

The two captains looked towards the sound, but in the pitch-black night, they couldn't see clearly, only noticing a vague, dark shadow. Puap drew out his bronze axe and gripped it tightly in his hand. Then, he turned his head, grinning.

"Old Qi, the bees have come out to sting us now!"

Chapter 990: The End of the Voyage, The Last Pea

The long night stretched on, layers of clouds piling up, with no lamps nor any sight of stars or moon. The Mistecs' harassment began from the north of the riverbank, and then emerged at the western side of the camp. Wave after wave of skirmishes took place in the darkness. Initially, there was the sound of

arrows flying, followed by footsteps running, then cries of struggle, groans of the injured, death rattles, and the splashing sounds of bodies falling into the water.

Chiwaco and Puap boarded the longship, looking into the indistinct distance, listening to the sounds carried by the wind. The two gripped their weapons tightly, rallying the members of the expedition, patiently waiting on the ship. On such a night of slaughter, numbers could be a disadvantage.

"Hmm, it seems that the enemy doesn't have many men."

Chiwaco raised his palm, placing it by his ear, frowning as he listened for a long time.

"As long as the camp on the shore remains orderly, such a night raid won't cause too many casualties..."

"Kill! With the protection of the Rain Divine!"

"Ah! O mighty Cloud Serpent!..."

Just as the words fell, a sudden burst of shouting and killing erupted at the edge of the Telascallan prisoners' camp. Then, in less than a quarter, sporadic urgent cries turned into waves of panic shouts.

The able-bodied Telascallans wildly waved stone spears, running chaotically between darkness and campfires, even colliding with each other. Then, the dreadful cries of the injured rose and fell continuously, like the call of a wounded and despairing deer, echoing across the river.

"...The camp of the able-bodied men is in chaos. Some enemies got in."

Puap's eyelids twitched. He wished he could reach out and tightly cover the old militia's mouth.

"I say, Old Qier! Can you shut that doomsday salamander-kissed mouth of yours?!"

In traditional mythology, the incarnation of the God of Death, Xiulotel, is a black dog with a red tongue. However, He also transformed into a salamander to avoid the Sun's sacrifice. That salamander foretold the death of All Gods and was also called the doom.

"Huh? Doomsday salamander? Puap, you're also speaking ill of His Majesty... Besides, His Majesty kissed the princess..."

The night raid, the fighting, and the chaos lasted the entire night. The shouting and wailing, like the croaking of frogs in the rainforest, constantly disturbed people's minds. Fortunately, the Prepecha Warriors' formation never fell into disarray.

Camp Commander Pimeng, leading a large group of warriors, both tangled with the elite night-raiding Mistecs and suppressed the fleeing Telascallan able-bodied men. Until the dawn lightened the horizon, the enemy raiders retreated, and long-lost silence finally descended on the riverbank.

As the sky gradually brightened, Camp Commander Pimeng pursed his lips and ascended the small hill by the shore. He surveyed the devastated camp, looked at the corpses of able-bodied men sprawled along the riverbank, then glanced at the scattered Telascallan prisoners, an anger burning in his chest.

"Damn it! They're like eight hundred stupid turkeys! Go, the Prepecha's eagles, round up these runaway turkeys for me!"

Two hours later, the "turkeys" returned to the camp by the shore once more. However, only a little over six hundred were left. The rest were either dead or had escaped. Camp Commander Pimeng stood grim-faced for a long while under the fearful gaze of the able-bodied men. Several times he tightened his grip on the copper spear, words of coldness on the tip of his tongue, but he swallowed them back.

"The turkeys' courage has already been broken. If a few more are killed, I fear they would collapse at a touch... Damn it! Marching to war with teammates like turkeys is no better than going without them!..."

However, the "turkeys" did have their uses. When the morning sun rose high, hundreds of able-bodied men, their morale low, dragged the longship along the riverbank, heading into the northwest tributary. To speed things up, two hundred sailors from the expedition also joined the towing team. As for the remaining hundreds of warriors, they donned armor and took up arms, fully equipped, vigilantly watching the opposite bank of the Long River.

On the opposite bank of the Long River, Yunshi Kawa's face bore a self-satisfied smile. He was still carrying his feather bundle, leading several hundred tribal warriors, gazing across the river.

"Haha! It turns out there are two hundred eagles, two hundred tigers, and eight hundred are grass mice!..."

"Exactly, the Leader is right."

Eared Qiaoao came closer. He still bore blood on him, but his face shone with excitement.

"I led the hunters to pester them all night. The armored warriors are hard to deal with, and the archers are also tough. Only those spearmen militiamen collapsed after just a couple of charges!"

At this point, Qiaoao paused, grinning as he spoke.

"Leader, should the hunters go again tonight?"

"Of course, they should go!"

Yunshi Kawa rubbed his chin, the corners of his mouth lifting.

"Facing the Northern Tiger Men, many of the tribal elders in the city are terribly frightened!... If we can defeat this group and capture the sacred large ship, my prestige among the lowland tribes... Ahahaha!"

The exuberant laughter echoed along the rushing Long River, reminiscent of a smug Mountain Cat. As the night fell once more, and a dark night arrived, the night-riding team encountered trouble.

"Hmm? Where did those able-bodied men with stone spears go?"

Eared Qiaoao looked perplexed. He looked at the warrior camp on the riverbank, heavily guarded, but could no longer find any sign of the "grass mice."

"Seems? They're in the ship?"

Another seasoned hunter, Soyi, squinted his eyes, using the faint moonlight to peer toward the ship two hundred paces away, at the dense throng of figures.

"There are many people on the large ship, many, many people. There are spearmen militiamen and also archers with bows."

"...Damn it!"

Eared Qiaoao frowned deeply, cursing in anger.

"Sooner or later, the Rain Divine will pour down heavy rain, unleash mountain torrents, and drown them all to the riverbed!"

"Otherwise, shall we try attacking the samurai on the shore again and then ambush the ship?"

"..."

Qiaoao hesitated for a long time before nodding.

"Then let's try once more!"

As it turned out, without the burden of the "grass rat", it's hard to deal with the mighty eagle of the Prepetcha. When the morning sun rose, the "lynxes" who carried out the night raid left over thirty bodies, while the samurai on the other side suffered a dozen casualties. In the whole tribe, there were few hunters who were well-nourished and strong enough to see and fight at night, making it unsustainable to endure such losses.

"...What exactly is this sturdy thick skin made of?"

On the riverbank, Yunshi Kawa looked serious. In his hands, he held a damaged bronze-faced medium armor, which he turned over and over, examining for a long time. The front of this fabric-faced medium armor had more than a dozen stabbing marks, but these stabs only pierced the fabric surface and did not penetrate the inner hard plates. The entire medium armor had only one lethal breach at the weaker back side.

"...We surrounded a squad under the cover of night. As a result, six elite hunters died before we managed to kill the armored squad leader, just as the enemy's reinforcements arrived."

Qiaobao, pursing his lips with a face full of grief and anger.

"Soi hit the opponent three times in a row! Yet, the enemy, without a care, swung back with an axe and killed him! ...Leader, let me take more warriors to avenge Soi!"

"...Oh highest Rain Divine!"

Yunshi Kawa looked across the river, silently counting. There were still over forty armored eagle warriors on the other side. And from the current position, it was just a day's journey to the front outpost Lin Shui Village occupied by the Tiger Men. He pressed his lips together and after a long silence, sighed deeply.

"We retreat!... Return to Ye Guo City!"

A day later, the exploration fleet sailed along the Long River and reached Lin Shui Village. This was a Tlaxcalan village, now abandoned and occupied by the Southern Army as an outpost for the Mountain Pass Fortress group.

The small village was built on the riverbank highland, surrounded by a new fence. A battalion of two hundred Mexica Warriors was stationed here, along with twice as many stationed militia.

The exploration team rested for a day at Lin Shui Village, replenished some food and water, and then set off again. Here, the tributary of the Great Water River turned into the Small Water River. The Small

Water River was only three meters deep but enough for navigation. Following the river course upstream, first heading north for fifty Li, then turning northeast for thirty Li, they reached the major town for food transit of the Southern Army, a group of mountain fortresses housing thousands of troops.

Upon reaching this place, the terrain flattened, and the water flow slowed. The fleet no longer needed to tow and could row upstream. Camp Commander Pimeng bid farewell to Chiwaco here.

"May the Chief Divine protect you! From here, two captains, travel along the Great River for about eighty to ninety Li to the northeast, and you will reach the encampment at Water Valley City where His Majesty is stationed!... I must return quickly to Eight Hundred Town, so we part ways here. May the eagle of Prepetcha soar high in the Western sky!"

"Haha! The eagle spreads its wings, flying not just to the West, but also to the East and South!"

Puap laughed heartily, pounding his chest with a fist.

"When we meet His Majesty, I will definitely speak well of your loyalty and bravery before the King!"

"Great, I am so grateful! May the Chief Divine bless us!"

"May the Chief Divine bless us, bless our Kingdom!"

The three prayed together, and then parted ways. The longship continued its journey, traveling twenty Li each day. Four to five days later, they finally reached an expansive and fertile valley.

The broad river flowed slowly through the valley, crisscrossing. Vast endless farmlands suddenly unfolded before their eyes, painting a picture of a bountiful harvest. Tens of thousands of able-bodied men of the tribes were bent over, carrying bamboo baskets and grass sacks, wielding stone sickles, working hard in the fields. After waiting for five months, the hundreds of thousands of acres of cornfields were finally reaped!

"How beautiful!"

The old militia stood at the bow in a daze, gazing at this scene of harvest, like seeing the most beautiful dream. This was his deepest yearning, firmly anchored in his heart, entwined in his dreams no matter how perilous the waves or how far from home.

"How beautiful!"

The old militia murmured again, repeating. Then he lowered his head, silent for a long time. Years of memories surfaced in his mind, gradually changing his thoughts. Like a pea, rooted and sprouting deep inside him.

"This blind Majesty, at last, can do something good... Ah~~"

The old militia exhaled a long breath. Then he reached out with his aged hand, fumbled in his pocket for a while, and indeed pulled out a shriveled pea...

Long wind blew, fragrance wafting miles away. The old militia looked at the pea in his palm with clear old eyes, smiled in relief. Then, he reached out, facing the golden fields under the evening sun, and gently tossed the long-kept pea into the soil by the riverbank.

Young Dark Snake, pursing his mouth, wrapped his clothes tighter around himself. He looked at the familiar land where he had grown up, now seeming somewhat foreign, his eyes gradually moistening. Then he turned and looked at the equally teary-eyed old captain, carefully speaking.

"Old Chiwaco... what... are you doing?"

"...I am, farming!"

Chiwaco smiled cheerfully, like the most common old farmer in the countryside. Despite all the waves and storms, he never changed.

"Dark Snake, let me tell you... my farming skills are really great! ~"

In early October, the kingdom's exploration fleet finally reached the riverbank Water Valley City. From the Pacific Ocean's Tarsus estuary to the Small Water River outside Water Valley City, the fleet sailed for months, covering nearly two thousand Li, encountering countless tribes and witnessing innumerable mountains and waves!

"All the way here, if such a long river can be fully navigated, what changes would it bring to the entire world?"

No one could answer this question yet, not even His Highness of the Divine Revelation. For now, he was already armed and armored, carrying a greatbow, standing beneath the towering and perilous Cloud Serpent City.