

## Civilization 122

### Chapter 122 Negotiations

On the second day, the noonday sun illuminated the hills in the mountain, and the rustling autumn wind stirred the distant leaves. The sky was high and the clouds sparse, making it a suitable time to meet with friends upon the heights.

In the rare open spaces among the mountains, the scouts from the Mexica and Otomi explored and watched in all directions, the surrounding area fully visible for several miles. The trees were distant and sparse, with no sign of any ambush. After confirming the safety of the location under the escort of hundreds of elite warriors, the commanders of both armies finally ascended the hill to formally meet.

For this meeting, Xiulote had deliberately brought along the Longbow Guards and Jaguar warriors. The former was to take the initiative in case the negotiations went poorly, focusing fire on the opposing commanders. The latter was to ensure they could break out in case of an ambush.

Dressed in two layers of Leather Armor, Xiulote climbed the high hill and his pupils constricted sharply. At first glance, he saw in the opposing Otomi guard, a hundred warriors armed with Tlaxcala bows and copper arrows.

The commanders of both sides looked at each other briefly, smiled awkwardly but politely, mutually understanding and cautiously wary of each other. Living through an era of unceasing warfare, the warriors always prioritized pragmatism to achieve their goals, unbound by moral dogmas.

Xiulote took the shield passed to him by Bertade and under the protection of a group of shield-bearing warriors, he observed the Otomi commander opposite him. Although they had clashed before, this was the first time Xiulote saw him face-to-face.

Jiowar, nearing forty, was robust in build and distinct in appearance, like a nodding coyote, with a pair of narrow, sharp eyes. He wore thickened Leather Armor, moved with steady steps, gently swaying his lower body, maintaining a posture ready to exert force, obviously also an outstanding warrior.

Seeing Xiulote with a masked face, Jiowar squinted his eyes and loudly mocked,

"The great commander of the Mexica Legion, hiding his face like a squirrel in a den, afraid to let the warriors see his appearance!"

Xiulote ignored him, as such mockery was mostly a deliberate test to gauge his opponent's psychology. He carefully observed the other team, and unexpectedly found an acquaintance beside Jiowar, an old Priest from the City-State of Guamare, roaring like a groundhog. The priest looked much older yet still fierce, wearing a black and white interwoven priest's robe, glaring fiercely at the Mexica across from him.

Xiulote glanced around for a moment and saw only one priest in the opposite forces, clearly of special status. Guessing in his mind, he loudly proclaimed, "In the name of the Sun God, Huitzilopochtli! I, the commander of the Mexica Legion, Xiulote, on behalf of the new King of the Mexica Alliance, Ahuizotl, negotiate with the children of the gods of day and night to discuss peace terms!"

Jiowar also responded formally, "In the name of the Primordial God, Omoteotl! I, the commander of the Otomi Legion, Jiowar, on behalf of the City-State of Otapan, this is Chaos Priest, Olte, representing Guamare, Pamus, and Xilotepec City, negotiate with the children of the War God to stop the war!"

Both sides acknowledged each other's divine roles but did not agree on the supreme divinity of the other's main god. This religious distance indicated that although the Mexica and Otomi people were part

of the same cultural sphere, they had distinctly different mainstream cultures. The two legion commanders then exchanged ceremonial bows, and the hostile atmosphere subsequently eased.

The old Priest Olte was also unusually quiet. He did not roar deliberately, clearly showing peaceful sincerity.

Xiulote gestured for Jiowar to state the terms first, and the Coyote Commander did not hesitate.

"Children of the War God! You face a united and vast alliance of Otomi City-States! You cannot conquer the impregnable City of Otapan! Your new king has slain the old king; your kingdom is in civil war! You cannot stay long on this land! Leave! Let there be peace talks on both sides, withdraw from all our land, compensate with food for ten thousand people for ten months! In the name of the Primordial God, we will also return a thousand captured Mexica warriors!"

Xiulote nodded and then shook his head. He responded pointedly,

"Children of the gods of day and night! Otapan City only has food for three or four months; you simply cannot wage a prolonged war! The Tarasco people in the south are eyeing you greedily, ready to march on Otapan City at any moment! The Chichimeca Canine Descendants are invading the north, and Guamare and Pamus cannot support you! You are already out of soldiers and food! Let there be peace talks on both sides, using these mountain forests as the boundary, and release each other's captives! By the name of the Sun God, I promise a generation of peace!"

"Damn Aztec people! Hand over the food, withdraw from our land! Otherwise, the twenty thousand Otomi people here are all prepared to fight you to the death!" Jiowar roared loudly.

"Then let there be war! Cowardly Otomi curs! Even if ten thousand Mexica warriors die here this year, next year there will be even more warriors coming to turn the Otomi land completely to ashes!" Xiulote did not hesitate and fiercely threatened.

The atmosphere suddenly became tense, with archers drawing their bows and aiming at the opposing commanders. Melee warriors raised their war clubs and shields, slightly bending their bodies, ready to strike with limitless murderous intent.

The initial brief exchange quickly ceased, and both sides fell silent for a while. It seemed both had already thoroughly scouted each other's situation, leaving little room for deceit or threats. The old priest and Jiowar briefly exchanged a few words, then the old priest spoke on behalf of the Otomi people.

"What do you want?" asked old Priest Olte, his face stern and his tone icy.

"Xilotepec City," Xiulote stated directly.

"Xilotepec City is part of the alliance, we cannot give it up," Olte affirmed, shaking his head firmly.

"But separated by these forests, you cannot possibly hold it," Xiulote looked into the old priest's eyes.

The old priest fell silent, glaring angrily at Xiulote. After a long while, his expression gradually disappeared, and finally, he lowered his gaze, calmly responding.

"Food for thirty thousand people for ten months."

Hearing this, Jiowar's face changed dramatically, he walked over excitedly, wanting to say something to the old priest, but the priest firmly shook his head.

"Jiowar, do not interfere with the negotiations from now on, I will handle today's talks alone! I will bear all the consequences alone!"

Jiowar's narrow eyes widened, he silently stared at the old priest's aged face for a while, finally nodded, and silently bowed and stepped back.

"This is impossible! Even if you disagree, we can still surround Xilotepec City through the mountains and forests." Xiulote firmly shook his head.

"Without this food, this year we would starve thirty thousand militia, and perhaps even half of the Samurai," the old Priest calmly stated the fact.

"I would let all thirty thousand die in the war with the Mexicas. How many casualties are you prepared to accept, and how many people would you retain under Xilotepec City?"

"You cannot expend all thirty thousand in our war. Otherwise, once the Tarasco head north, you simply won't be able to stop them. Otapan City, with no defensive forces, will not hold!" Xiulote also responded calmly.

"Without food, we would be unable to stop the Tarasco heading north anyway. Once they take Otapan City, they will become a threat to you Mexicas!" The old Priest now grimly sneered.

Xiulote fell silent; everyone was stating facts, and facts could not be changed by words.

"Food for thirty thousand people for five months, half of which can be traded with equivalent valuable luxury goods. This winter won't be too cold. Plant a season of beans and sweet potatoes now and five months should be enough to sustain you until the harvest," the young man finally promised after a while.

"If the Tarasco attack you from the north, the Mexica naval forces will raid their supply lines."

A desolate, bitter smile spread across the old Priest's face. "That's acceptable! When will you deliver? We are willing to pay double the price for more food! Over the past year, we have a total of two thousand Mexica Samurai prisoners, all of which can now be handed over to you."

Xiulote nodded solemnly, the old Priest evidently still held back half of the prisoners as a bargaining chip.

"We will deliver in installments; we can't produce too much food at once. The total amount of food will only be so much! As for prisoners, I have nine hundred Otomi warriors in my possession, and we can exchange them now."

"That's impossible!" the old Priest shook his head emphatically in refusal. "Food for prisoners. We only want food! We don't want your captured warriors nor can we afford to keep them."

Xiulote sighed. He thought for a moment and then looked at the old Priest again, "Then change the terms. How many warriors from Xilotepec City are in your army? I'll exchange prisoners for them."

The old Priest pondered for a moment and then nodded, "That could also work. Xilotepec City has a thousand warriors in the allied forces; all will be handed over to you, but in addition to the nine hundred prisoners, I also want food for a thousand men for five months!"

"Done! We will exchange today!" Xiulote immediately agreed.

For the Mexica Alliance, these one-thousand Xilotepec City warriors were crucial, intended to be recruited as guides. Thrown into the allied forces, most of them were surely of minor nobility or commoner origin. Subsequently betrayed by the Otomi Alliance, they naturally leaned more towards the Mexicas, facilitating the alliance's assimilation.

The two men then agreed on the details of the food delivery. From the time the negotiations concluded, the Otomi would withdraw all guerrillas, leaving only five hundred warriors and three thousand militia in the mountains to transfer the food delivered by the Mexica. Both sides would call a truce with the mountain forest as the border.

Otapan City would not harass the Mexica besieging Xilotepec City. The food would be delivered over five months, transferring once each month. Food for thirty thousand people for one month would be exchanged for three hundred Mexica prisoners and items valued at half in gemstones, gold and silver, feathers, or exquisite clothes, with the final transfer expected to occur after the fall of Xilotepec City. The Otomi would hand over the last eight hundred prisoner warriors.

The old Priest afterward repeatedly entangled, requesting the Mexica additionally provide rations for two thousand Mexica prisoners.

Xiulote did not quibble; after securing the old Priest's promise of good treatment for prisoners, he nodded his agreement. He felt a grim laughter coming on, yet also sensed a profound desolation. Famine, lack of food, death. The disappearance of these Otomi lives was already planned by the greater Mexica forces. Now, the results of their schemes came as scheduled, and two generations of Otomi people were being mercilessly erased; yet the young man felt no joy.

The negotiations began at noon and did not wrap up until evening. The prolonged one-and-a-half-year war finally ended, and Xilotepec City was completely abandoned in exchange for enough food to sustain Otapan City. At their parting, Jiowar and Xiulote looked at each other but could not utter any ceremonial blessings.

Xiulote then looked at the old Priest Olte, noticing the man's suddenly stooped silhouette and felt an unusual emotion. He recalled the conversation beneath Guamare City.

"Olte, even if burning all the green grasses, is it not better than preserving a sacred cocoa?" the young man removed his helmet and repeated an old saying.

Hearing this familiar phrase, Olte's eyes widened. He scrutinized the young man for a moment, finally recognizing the once-met Coyote Priest.

"What is the green grass, exactly?" the young man looked at the elderly Priest, observing his now lackluster face.



"...Green grass is the commoners, the warriors, the nobility, the priests, Xilotepec City...and me," after a pause, Olte slightly turned his head, avoiding the young man's gaze, and responded in a faint voice.

"In that case, what exactly is the cocoa?" the young man pondered and continued looking into the old Priest's eyes.

"That is the hope for the continuation of the Otomi people." Olte answered accordingly.

This time, he calmly looked into the young man's eyes.

After a moment of eye contact, the young man solemnly nodded. He slightly bowed as a sign of respect, thanking the old Priest for his answer and then turned to leave.

The truce negotiations had ended. Soon, the setting sun dipped below the horizon, plunging the world into darkness. And in that darkness, hope was taking root.