

## Civilization 123

### Chapter 123 - The Divine Tree and the Golden Eagle

In the highlands of Central America, October brings an autumn that is not cold, devoid of rustling and falling maple leaves, with evergreen pines and cedars instead. The autumn breeze gently caresses the cheek, the air filled with the refreshing scent of pine and cypress, also faintly carrying the fragrance of flowers.

Xiulote stood on a hill, looking at the army formation not far away where prisoners were being exchanged. The news of the ceasefire, like the warm sunshine, put relaxed smiles on the faces of the warriors from both sides. The Mexica warriors talked about their plans to return home, while the militia breathed sighs of relief. No longer would they combat the guerrilla Otomi in the mountain forests with their lives at stake.

Under Bertade's command, nine hundred Otapan prisoners and enough food for a thousand people for five months were delivered in turn to the other side. Jiowar was nowhere to be seen, a stranger Otomi officer with an unchanged expression, took on the duty destined to be infamous. He did not look at the released prisoners but meticulously checked the quantity of food, afterward, with a wave of his hand, a thousand disarmed Commoner Warriors were escorted over and handed to the Mexica.

Xiulote carefully observed the Commoner Warriors from the Xilotepec City-State. The faces of the warriors at first filled with the bafflement of disarmament, then the disbelief of being traded, and finally the anger and despair of betrayal. Satisfied, the young man nodded. These people would be handed over to Bertade, later to be recruited and treated favorably, becoming the first group of Otomi to submit to the Alliance.

Next to Xiulote, "Monkey" Kuluka watched the Head Warrior's figure with envy. Clearly, these Otomi would be put to important use by the Alliance, forming the governing foundation for the Mexica's Xilotepec City-State in the future. Now, Bertade, managing them and exerting influence, signified having the qualifications to be the ruler of a city-state.

The young man didn't look any longer. He sniffed the scent of flowers in the air and strolled through the lush pine forest, searching for the source of the fragrance. After a while, he stopped in front of an extraordinarily tall and majestic tree, where the comfortable scent diffused on the breeze, accompanied by the distant, faint call of an eagle.

This was a majestic Mexican ahuehuete, ancient and standing by the stream. It stood 50 meters tall, with a diameter of nearly 4 meters. The straight trunk seemed to stretch endlessly upwards, as if reaching into the clouds, and the full tree's leaves drooped down like the sacred green feathers of the Feathered Serpent Divine. Amidst the gracefully swaying foliage were light green and white buds, harboring seeds that would mature next year, releasing a pleasant freshness.

Xiulote nodded, confirming the source of the smell. The huge tree stood tall and silent in the forest, listening to the melody of the stream, having lived through a thousand long years, becoming a spirit from legend, the slumbering primordial forest.

"What a splendid redwood!" exclaimed the youth staring at the beauty of the giant tree.

"Priest Commander, this is the Ahuehuete, the upright drum in the water, also the old man in the water, it's a symbol of authority! Ever since the great Montezuma passed away, we also call it Montezuma cypress, because this kind of tree inherently possesses a divine spirit," said Culuka, who had at some point come up beside the youth, explaining with a smile on his face.

"Ahuehuete? Divine spirit?" The youth was slightly taken aback, then nodded his understanding. Ahuizotl, means "spirit in the water like a pine," so naturally, Ahuehuete would be "pine and cypress in the water."

"Exactly! In the myths of the southern Mistec and Zapotecs, they share the same noble ancestors, which are the tree spirits of Ahuehuete.

"They call themselves people of the clouds, and claim to descend from above the clouds, falling down with the rainwater. Those who merge with the towering Ahuehuete become the most noble priests, those who merge with the mighty Jaguar become the esteemed warriors, those who merge with the ordinary soil become commoners, and those who fall into caves become...

Culuka suddenly stopped, cutting off his words.

"...they become the lowliest slaves?" the young man inquired instinctively.

"No, then they would turn into goblins of animals and humans, wearing masks with pointed horns, becoming the death-spreading vampire bats Camazotz!" Culuka thought hard before he managed to depict the image of a bat creature.

Xiulote stared, dumbfounded, then laughed amusedly. "Death Bat" Camazotz was, after all, the origin of the image for the future superhero "Batman."

Xiulote smiled slightly, patted Culuka on the shoulder, considering the "Monkey" to indeed be intelligent and well-informed, and Culuka laughed in happiness for the youth's contentment. Then the young man's ears twitched.

"Monkey, did you hear that sound? Is that an eagle crying?" The youth looked up as he heard the sound, peering towards the top of the tall trees where the leaves, like falling feathers, obscured all prying eyes.

Culuka cocked his head and blinked his eyes. Then, it seemed he discovered something, cast the weapon behind him away, and hugged the gigantic trunk of the Ahuehuete with both arms like an agile monkey swiftly scaling up, disappearing amidst the beautiful foliage.

A moment later, Culuka appeared from the top of the tall tree, fifty meters up. His legs were coiled around the trunk, his left hand clinging to a branch, his right hand supporting something. As he craned his neck backward, he shouted to the youth below in surprise, "Sir, there's a golden eagle chick up here!"

Next, "Monkey" shifted slightly, protecting his right hand carefully, and realigned his upper body. Then he alternately released his left hand and legs, sliding down "whoosh, whoosh," from the fifty-meter-high treetop.