

# Aztec Civilization: Destiny to Conquer America!

## Chapter 26: Chapter 25 Otapan

The summer on the Mexican Plateau was warm, even though the rain was constant, there was not a hint of cold.

Rainwater joined to form lines on his body. Xiulote was simply draped in a cloak and wore shorts. He stood by the river, watching thousands of small boats, like migrating flocks of birds, rowing in from the heavy rain.

The boatmen, bare-chested, exhaled as they unloaded the grain. Then, the fleet first transported the City-State Ritual Plates most valued by the king, followed by various luxury tributes. After that, came disassembled wooden parts of manual catapults. Xiulote inspected the waterproofing details by the riverbank, and lastly, three thousand Otomi people escorted by the Samurai.

Be it the Divine Stone, tributes, weapons, or captives, they would all travel up the Tampen River to the grand Lake Capital City.

The Tampen River was the lifeline of the army. Over a distance of two or three hundred kilometers, depending on the convenient river, just twenty to thirty thousand militia and boatmen were enough to sustain supplies for twenty battalions. The ratio of troops to logistics support was eight to one.

The same distance, if reliant on the dirt trails of the highlands with neither carts nor oxen carts, just manual labor, the required laborers would quadruple, making the troop to logistic support ratio two to one.

If the dirt roads changed to mountainous forests, the number of laborers needed for logistics would double again, making the ratio of troops to logistics a frightening one to one.

As for a two or three hundred kilometers journey through the tropical rainforest on land, at the technology level of any country in the world at that time, no matter how many laborers there were, the army's logistics line could not be maintained. The laborers would consume all the transported food on the road.

"River and sea transportation are the lifelines of ancient empires," Xiulote thought, "It's a pity that the army will soon have to leave this lifeline."

The City-State of Xilotepec expressed its submission to the utmost extent, with the nobility of the city-state striving to scour the city, moving supplies outside the city to meet all the demands of the Mexica army.

However, the stubborn nobility and priests did not surrender the city, and the samurai and militia remained stationed on the city walls. Because the city contained everything for them, without being utterly desperate, they were unwilling to give up easily.

King Tizoc was satisfied with Xilotepec's submission and had no interest in spending another ten months besieging this wealth-draining city.

The army's next target was the core of the loose Otomi Alliance in the west, the Mountain City of Otapan, the legendary northern homeland of the Otomi. Once Otapan City was conquered, the Otomi would lose their political, cultural, and military center and could only submit to the empire.

Six battalions of troops were left at the encampment on the west bank of the Tampen River. Two direct battalions were responsible for maintaining the large camp by the river. The supply line would here switch to a land route, winding west through the mountains and forests.

The remaining four City-State battalions were tasked with monitoring the City-State of Xilotepec and maintaining the terrestrial supply line.

Then, on the first day of September, the king led more than twenty thousand direct samurai, twenty-five thousand direct village warriors, twenty-five thousand City-State warriors, and nearly forty thousand City-State militia. A total of eleven thousand troops, fourteen battalions, moved like a vast swarm of ants toward Otapan two hundred kilometers away.

The rolling highlands, dark forests, continuous rain, deer and wolves scared away by the army, and the deserted Otomi villages were the scenery along the way.

Xiulote passed the battlefield once again, with Bertade guarding him. The two stood on the hilltop of the commander, looking together at the vast forest under the drizzle. On the blood-nourished land, the grass had grown lush enough to cover all former traces, except for the memories in people's hearts.

The army was merely passing through.

Along the march, Supreme Commander Totec established four encampments on the highlands, turning forty thousand City-State militia into logistics support, responsible for transportation and guarding the supply line, also conveniently conserving food consumption.

Eventually, after over half a month of arduous trekking, nearly fifty thousand Mexica warriors, along with twenty-five thousand direct village warriors, a total of nine battalions, finally arrived at the foot of Otapan City.

Though significantly reduced in number, the core combat strength of the Mexica army remained. Among the fifty thousand Mexica warriors were nearly three thousand Jaguars and Eagle Warrior Battalions, and over ten thousand Fourth Level veteran warriors.

King Tizoc was confident of victory.

Even if all the Otomi City-States united and fully mobilized, drafting hundreds of thousands of militia, he could win the battle.

The king longed for a hearty and decisive grand battle, a battle that could be carved onto a Ritual Plate. He was ready to craft a Ritual Plate for his own coronation, as grand as the Aztec Sun Stone. It would bear the deeds of fifteen predecessor monarchs, and he would be the sixteenth,

and the name of the Ritual Plate would be the "Tizoc Stone", establishing the king's incontestable divine right and throne.

The king's confidence lasted until the moment he saw Otapan City. At that moment, his smile froze.

"Heavenly Divine above!" Xiulote struggled out of the rainforest, and the first thing he saw was the mountain city in the distance. "Is this Otapan City?!"

Xiulote turned his head to exchange a glance with Aweit beside him, both of them breaking into a wry smile. They had long heard that Otapan was easy to defend but hard to attack, yet they had not anticipated such terrain. No wonder even a hundred years later, the Spanish could only maintain a semi-autonomous form of rule here.

Both men were covered in leaves and dust from their journey through the forest; their guards beside them helped to tidy up their gear. Behind them was the large army, equally weary from the long trek.

The elevation of Otapan City seemed to fall between Japan's mountain city and Ping Shan City. Looking up, it sat on a plateau nestled in the mountains, the relative height of which was about forty to fifty meters.

The north side was the steepest, faintly connecting to the nearby mountain range, with a small stream trickling down. The other three sides had gentler slopes, with simple roads formed by the passage of people.

The area of the city-state was estimated to exceed five square kilometers. The city walls, built along the mountain's contour, were likely four to five meters high, enclosing the entire plateau. Xiulote faintly noticed figures moving on the city walls atop the mountain and flags fluttering, probably because they had spotted signs of the large army.

"This city is a difficult nut to crack. The terrain is treacherous and it doesn't lack water sources. Plus, it's still the rainy season."

"Very tough to breach. No wonder the Otomi, despite being weak, have managed to establish roots here in the north amidst turbulent wars for over two centuries."

A familiar conversation, the two looked at each other, speechless.

After a while, Supreme Commander Totec hurried over, his face stern. As soon as he arrived, he grabbed Xiulote, "Xiulote, can your catapult hit the city on the mountain?"

Xiulote shook his head, "The whole plateau, from the edge to the base of the slope, lies under the maximum range of their city walls. Stones rolled down from the mountain top could completely destroy the catapults. Even without considering long-range attacks, it's difficult to set up a catapult on such a steep slope. Finally, even if we miraculously succeeded in setting it up, firing at the city walls twenty to thirty meters above would be utterly ineffective."

Totec furrowed his brow, "Is there really no other way? Like using wooden ladders, or that sharp metal-headed, wheeled cart you mentioned last time?"

Xiulote and Aweit both shook their heads.

"Elite samurai carrying wooden ladders up the mountain for forty to fifty meters. They would need to withstand unilateral attacks from stones, wood blocks, spears, arrows, and boulders from above the city walls for nearly thirty minutes, exerting tremendous physical effort, and then they still need to forcefully enter the city for combat. Especially during this relentless rainy season, the casualties among the samurai would be too heavy. It's just not possible," Aweit said, his face losing its smile.

"Not to mention the difficulty of constructing a battering ram. Given this terrain, it would be nearly impossible to push a ram onto the plateau, and the rocks from above could completely destroy it," Xiulote added helplessly.

"There's really no way at all?" Totec asked, still not giving up.

Both shook their heads again.

"We should lay siege," Aweit suggested.

Otapan City was a castle established in the mountains. In truth, there were ways to fight in this era. Xiulote thought, first use a large number of cannon fodder troops to exhaust the city's rolling stones and logs.

Then, with the Spanish's large caliber, short-barreled cannons, they could bombard the walls until they collapsed, or use the advantage of archers to suppress the defending

army's ranged attacks from the city walls, then pushing forward the battering ram to breach the gates. Finally, rely on elite assault troops to storm in through the breach or the gates for close combat.

Regardless of the method, both required a superiority in ranged suppression, and massive casualties among the elite troops were inevitable.

But for now... "We should lay siege," Xiulote also said.

Soon, over seventy thousand Mexica troops set up camp on three sides of Otapan, blocking the easily traversed roads, building makeshift fortifications, and dispatching elite squads to patrol the treacherous north.

Totec tried various methods to provoke the defending army inside the city. According to the last intelligence report, after gathering some reinforcements from Guamare and Pamus, the city now had over ten thousand samurai, thirty thousand militia, and thirty to forty thousand able-bodied civilians, with enough food to last for a year.

Perhaps they were scared by the last battle, or perhaps they had decided to turtle up completely. No matter how the Mexica samurai provoked and tempted them, the Otomi remained immobile, staunchly defending Otapan.

The lengthy siege began.

## **Chapter 27: Chapter 26 Creating Characters**

The warm monsoon, carrying moist vapor, rose from the tranquil Caribbean Sea.

It passed through the still wild islands, through the fierce rainforest, across the Vastec plains, and then rose along the Mexican Plateau, caressing the flourishing Mexican Valley before turning into a gentle drizzle.

The drizzle drifted across the sky and fields, over mountains and forests, past the sturdy mountain city of the Otomi, and reached the camps of the Mexica samurai nestled in the mountains.

Then, it gently fell, dampening the cloth of a log cabin, drops tracing soft arcs that caught the eye of a young boy.

The boy lifted his pen in contemplation, then drew a pictograph of water: five curving blue lines, and below them he wrote the character for "water".

The youth, Xiulote, looked at the wooden board in front of him, which was filled with blue drawings and characters. The content was split into two lines, the first line consisting of various pictographs similar to oracle bone script, the second being traditional Chinese characters.

Seeing that the board was full, he took it from the clay stand in front of him and placed it into a neatly arranged pile of boards beside him.

Next, he picked up a brush made from hair, dipped it in indigo Maya blue ink, and before he could start deeply contemplating, noticed that there was not much ink left.

He then called for Bertade to go to the rooms of the priests and fetch some more Maya blue dye. If that was not enough, he was to mix some on-site with leaves from the wild blue tree and clay from the slopes.

After Bertade left, Xiulote sighed deeply, feeling all his wisdom had been drained, and knew he needed a break to regain some energy.

The siege had already lasted two weeks, and he had finally found some free time. Xiulote began an endeavor he had long contemplated and which was of great importance: "creating a script".

In Xiulote's eyes, the Aztec, and indeed the whole of Central America, were still in an era of graphical record-keeping, the sprouting of hieroglyphs just beginning, like the "war" figures he had once learned with his father—a shield and a club, and "death", a white cloth wrapping a corpse.

These figures were still in the budding phase of hieroglyphs, much more primitive than the full "six scripts" of the Yin Dynasty's oracle bone script, and were estimated to be on the same level as the Seal Script from the legends of the Xia Dynasty. This also suggested that the forebears of America, when they separated from Eurasia, were still in a pre-historic era without any script.

According to Xiulote's experience, the Aztec's current pictographs were too arbitrary, with their writing and interpretation changing according to the user's whims, with cultural power firmly locked in the hands of the priests.

Script is the foundation of a nation, and culture is its backbone.

For the ambitious Xiulote, he could not tolerate the Empire's current lack of a writing system and resolved to personally rectify this flaw.

At first, Xiulote was ambitious, planning to emulate mythological legends to create a complete script system of his own. However, this idea only lasted for ten minutes before stopping dead at the first character.

Then, Xiulote turned to the script system he was most familiar with and loved the most: Chinese.

After a long contemplation, he thought that a Mexica Empire using Chinese characters wouldn't be too bad either, "Huaxia Aztec Celestial Empire unifying America" just thinking about it made his blood surge.

Next, he encountered a dilemma, "The development of writing does not happen overnight."

For the nascent Mexica, it was impossible for them to start using simplified characters right away. A Mexica samurai could understand "the universe was vast," yet had not learned about "Vast Universe," could see "the sun and the moon waxing," but did not understand "the arrangement of constellations." For him, abstract terms like "science," "economy," "culture," had no foundational concepts established yet.

Chinese characters themselves represented a recognition of the world and society, originating from pictographs and from the simplest perception of the world, then through various eras, with the integration of thoughts and cultural transformations, they moved from the pictorial to the abstract. Each explanation in explaining characters and words was an understanding of the world by the ancestors.

Xiulote did not just want to introduce Chinese characters as tools, similar to how modern Mexico used Spanish. He wished to integrate the mature Han culture that relied on script. This way, on one hand, it would accelerate the development of the entire Aztec civilization, and on the other hand, it would mitigate the excessively bloody human sacrifice culture. Simultaneously, using the complete framework of Chinese characters as the main body, integrating existing pictograms, then introducing the phono-semantic characters of the Nava language, thus saving thousands of years of evolutionary time. Then, he would rely on script to swiftly undergo reforms in the Alliance's politics, religion, and culture.

"When King Wen taught and transformed, ladies-in-waiting behaved as dignified as dukes and ministers. Passing by, they dared not slacken, they stood and straightened their caps and tassels." Xiulote recited a few lines of poetry, then feeling that comparing himself to King Wen and the samurai to ladies-in-waiting was a bit too pretentious, he chuckled and continued to meditate deeply.

Now, Xiulote already had a specific template for the script: traditional Chinese characters.

What he had to do was to use semi-pictographic traditional Chinese characters as a basis, to deduce even more pictographic Oracle Bone Script, Seal Script, or invented pictographs, and establish a logical process from concrete objects->pictographic Oracle Bone/Seal Script->semi-pictographic traditional Chinese characters. Finally, from the semi-pictographic traditional Chinese characters, he derived the abstract concept meanings.

After a short while, Xiulote heard someone lift the cloth covering the door and saw Bertade entering with a pottery jar of dyes, followed by Aweit, whom he hadn't seen in several days.

"Xiulote, what have you been busy with lately?" smiled Aweit. "There have been quite a few banquets at the camp these past few days, but I haven't seen you there."

"Banquets are just eating some roasted deer and drinking some tequila. Our supplies have been tight lately, and there hasn't been much good food," Xiulote also smiled. "I've been busy with a big project lately, Aweit. If you have time, you could help me."

The two then sat cross-legged at the edge of an earthen platform, with deer skin blankets laid out on the ground.

"Take a look at these wooden boards," Xiulote pointed at a stack by his foot.

"What is this?" Aweit looked at the two rows of figures and text on the wooden boards.

"This is writing. The top row consists of various images, many of which we have studied on the Ritual Plates. The line of text below summarizes the meanings of the images and has a fixed writing style and text construction structure. You can try to guess the meaning of the text based on the images," explained Xiulote.

Aweit grew interested and began to study carefully.

"This wooden board, does the top row of images show a person, an eye, a mountain, a river, a tree, two trees, three trees, a fish?"

Xiulote glanced at it, the line of text underneath read, "man, eye, mountain, water, tree, woods, forest, fish."

"Right, the text below is a standardized writing form and a condensation of the meanings of the pictures above. See, a single 'tree' character represents one tree, whereas two 'tree' characters represent a large grove, and three 'tree' characters represent the forest beyond us. The stacking of the 'tree' character doesn't refer to the quantity of one, two, three, but rather an expansion of the meaning in a larger spatial sense," explained Xiulote.

"Then this wooden board, are the images a person holding something round, a river with land in the middle, a tree bearing fruit, an eye with hair above it, a person looking up at the sky? Are these images derived from the previous wooden board?"

"Exactly, so the text below is related to the previous images as well. In order, they are melon, isthmus, fruit, eyebrow, sky. 'Melon' comes from the character for person, 'isthmus' from the character for water, 'fruit' from the character for tree, 'eyebrow' from

the character for eye, and 'sky' also comes from the character for person," Xiulote detailed.

"Aweit, take a look at this one. The one that grows on the ground with round fruits is called 'bean'; when the beans are flourishing with lots of sprouts and leaves, it's called 'abundant', meaning a bountiful harvest; this shape of a skeleton represents 'bone' in our bodies. 'Abundant' derives from the idea of being large and full from harvest, 'bone' combined with 'abundant' expands to represent your body, which is 'body'..."

"And look at this one, a single line is 'one', two lines are 'two', three lines are 'three', a short line with a long line is 'above', a long line with a short line is 'below'..."

The two conversed more and more in tune with each other until the evening fell and the room grew dim.

"Xiulote, these characters are fascinating. At first, they all represent things that can be seen and touched. Then, by combining them, they transform into things that can't be seen or touched. Yet, despite not knowing these things, looking at the characters you've talked about, I somehow feel like I can understand them," Aweit remarked.

"That's because you're very clever," laughed Xiulote. "What do you think of these characters?"

"They're really good," Aweit praised happily.

"How about I tell you the meanings of the characters, then you draw the corresponding images?" Xiulote suggested enticingly.

"Sure. I've been relatively free these days. I'll play along with you for a while," Aweit agreed.

"Imagine, just imagine. If this isn't just play, I would like to use these characters with fixed meanings to replace the priests' pictographic records, what do you think?"

A moment of silence.

Then, Aweit smiled and said, "I'd like to live a bit longer, and I'd like you to live longer too."

## **Chapter 28: Chapter 27 AD 1481**

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Before his eyes, it was already mid-October, and the siege of Otapan had been going on for a month.

The long rainy season finally showed signs of departing, making way for the long-missed clear sunshine in the sky.

During this period, Xiulote and Aweit had organized nearly a thousand commonly used Chinese characters and had drawn the corresponding pictograms. At the same time, Xiulote had also taught these characters to the samurai who followed him.

These characters, starting from everyday objects, were connected to each other through their radicals, explaining each other's meanings, and then gradually extended to form basic abstract concepts. For instance, the formal government office "temple" was constructed using "inch" and "earth," followed by the concept of "time" derived from studying the sun "sun" in the "temple."

Then, inspired, Xiulote began working with craftsmen to create the simplest and clearest timekeeping device, the sundial, and proudly presented it to Aweit.

Aweit only laughed and told him that such toys had already been invented by the ancient Maya two thousand years ago. It was simply because Xiulote had not yet undergone a long and formal priestly education, so he knew very little about astronomy.

"According to the calendar we learned from the Maya, a year has twenty months, with eighteen days in each month. There are five unlucky days at the end of the year, with an additional unlucky day added every four years," Aweit explained.

365.25 days a year. Xiulote thought, I knew that too.

What came next, however, Xiulote did not know.

"The world was created by the gods, who come from the starry night sky where the Big Dipper converges, a distant place with no known whereabouts," Aweit said, as he began to sing a song for sacrificial rites.

"Twenty years make a Katun, twenty Katuns make a Baktun. After 64 and a half Baktuns, all things come to an end, and the Sun God returns to the origin of the Big Dipper."

An era is 25,800 years? Xiulote silently calculated. Convergence of the Big Dipper? No, it must be the Pleiades the Maya observed. The Sun God returns to the Big Dipper? The sun takes roughly 25,800 years to orbit around the Pleiades!

Xiulote, unable to help himself, held his forehead in his hand, thinking how such an advanced civilization in terms of their calendar could be without a writing system. Such a strangely prioritized tech tree.

"The sun is reborn, the sun dies, one cycle consists of five eras. The first era was ruled by giants who ate acorns during the age of four Jaguars. The second era was mankind

who ate pine nuts during the age of four Winds. The third era was mankind who ate lotus seeds during the age of four Rains. The fourth era was mankind who ate bullrush during the age of four Waters."

What is all this? Xiulote rubbed his forehead, listening to tales of astronomy and mythology.

"The fifth era is now, with mankind as the protagonist again, eating corn, in the age of four Movements. At the end of the era, everything returns to nothingness, the world is destroyed by earthquakes, living beings perish in floods, the Sun God returns to the Divine Kingdom, signaling the end of the world," Aweit chanted solemnly and mysteriously.

"End of the world?" Xiulote felt oddly familiar with this term, "The Maya's end of the world? 2012!"

Jumping up excitedly, Xiulote grabbed Aweit, who was immersed in the mythological prophecies: "How many years are left until the end of the world?"

"Let me calculate. Don't worry, the end of the world is still far off," Aweit smiled, slightly surprised at Xiulote's reaction. "There is one Baktun, plus six Katuns, plus eleven years left until the end of the world."

Four hundred plus one hundred and twenty plus eleven, five hundred and thirty-one years? The year is 1481 AD!

Xiulote felt so moved that he was on the verge of tears; he finally knew the current year, and his memories of history (Europa Universalis) could finally connect with this era.

It was the year 1481 AD, eleven years before Columbus would discover America, thirty-eight years before the Spaniards invaded Mexico.

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In this era, the center of the world still lay in the Far East and the Near East, where the densest populations, the most majestic cities, the most bustling marketplaces, and the most powerful empires resided!

In the Far East, the Ming Dynasty was at its zenith, still in the prosperous times of the Chenghua Renaissance, having defeated the Mongols to the north and the Jurchen in Jianzhou to the east, pressing down on East Asia, undoubtedly the protagonist of this world; the Kingdom of Korea was in the midst of intense internal strife, with the advent of the Four Major Disturbances sparking waves of factional conflicts; Japan had just experienced the Ōnin War, and the Warring States Period had begun, heralding an era of chaos;

In Southeast Asia, the Ayutthaya Kingdom was in a period of prosperity under the rule of the White Elephant King, embarking on a series of reforms; in the Java islands, the Hindu Majapahit Empire began to decline while the rise of the Islamic Sultanate of Demak was emerging.

In Central Asia, the empire founded by the limping Tamerlane was falling apart, while the founder of the Mughal Empire, Babur, was about to emerge, set to conquer the Delhi Sultanate amidst its turmoil in North India; and on the Deccan Plateau in South Asia, the historically penultimate Hindu empire of Vijayanagara was in the final period of its first dynasty, with internal strife looming and the last chance to unify South India slipping away.

In the Near East, another protagonist of the world, the resplendent Ottoman Empire, was about to enter its golden age. This year, Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror, who had conquered the Eastern Roman Empire, had just passed away. He already conquered half of the Balkan Peninsula, controlled the Khanate of Crimea and had invaded northern Iraq.

Over the next hundred years, the crescent moon's expansion would never cease; the Ottoman Empire would continue to conquer Iraq, Syria, the Holy City of Palestine, Mamluk Egypt, the entire coast of the Red Sea, until it gained full control of the East-West trade, forcing the exploration and development of new routes by Europe.

The waves of Ottoman western conquest kept pressing forward, subjugating Romania, Wallachia, until they held the entire Balkan region. Then, conquering Hungary, invading Austria, and laying siege to Vienna, bringing a long, unstoppable fear to Europeans.

On the grasslands of Eastern Europe, at this time, the Grand Duchy of Moscow had just gained independence from being a vassal state of the Golden Horde, and the Slavic people were finally welcoming the dawn of rebirth. After assimilating the culture and blood of the Tatars, the Slav's expansion eastward would continue for half a millennium, crossing the boundless grasslands of Central Asia, and over the vast expanse of Siberia, all the way to the frigid Sea of Japan.

In Central Europe, the Kingdom of Poland was in the "Golden Age" of the Jagiellonian Dynasty; the prosperity of nobility manors along with the development of the noble Sejm would maintain the kingdom's loose strength; in the Holy Roman Empire, the great Maximilian I was about to become Emperor, planning cumbersome and protracted imperial reforms, and also skillfully laying out political marriages paving a vast future for the Habsburg Dynasty.

In Western Europe, the Spanish Empire was born from the union of Castile and the Kingdom of Aragon, with the devout Catholic, Ferdinand II, becoming its first king. The Reconquista, lasting for eight hundred years, was nearing its end, with the Moors being expelled back to North Africa. The gaze of the Spaniards, together with Columbus, was

about to turn towards the primitive and rich America, filled with an insatiable greed for gold.

Even though Prince Henry had already passed away, the Portuguese exploration continued forward; they were about to discover the Congo, pass through the Cape of Good Hope, colonize South Africa, establish trading posts in East Africa, and eventually, upon encountering the Ottomans again in the Red Sea, they would reach the rich and fragmented India, setting up a colonial empire with a population of only two million.

At this time, after the meticulous efforts throughout his life by Louis XI, the Kingdom of France had finally annexed the Duchy of Burgundy, completing a hard-earned unification. The Spider King was about to pass away, leaving the French the rudiments of absolute monarchy.

As for the English, as far removed from the continent as they were, the thirty years' War of the Roses was not yet over, and England's unification still seemed distant. On this small island, there were still Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, and no one anticipated that an empire of the future would arise here.

In West Africa, after the Songhai people conquered Timbuktu from the Mali Empire, they finally established the empire of Black Africa along the Niger River, and subsequently met the Portuguese explorers for the first time on the West African coast.

In East Africa, the Ethiopians were still ruled under the Solomonic dynasty, their long reign set to continue for another five hundred years, sustaining the only cross amongst a sea of crescent moons.

"This year is 1481, an era where nothing has yet happened, an era full of possibilities!" Xiulote thought, "At this time, the center of the world is in the East. Europeans have not yet obtained the wealth and land of America, nor have they started the counter-attack routes to America, Africa, India, Southeast Asia, and even China. They have not yet become powerful!"

"I still have thirty years, to unify Central America and welcome the colonizers from afar." Xiulote finally let go of his fear of the unknown, the spark of conquest burning into flame. "Since I have come here, I am destined to change everything!"

"Xiulote?" Aweit looked at Xiulote, who had been standing for a while, with some confusion.

The young man finally returned to reality after a long reverie and then let out a happy laugh. He excitedly hugged his teacher, unable to contain his enthusiasm.

Aweit's smile froze instantly, and he disdainfully reached out to touch Xiulote's forehead – no fever. "You, what's gotten into you all of a sudden? That's just a myth; the end of the world is not coming."

"Yes, teacher." Xiulote leaned his face against his teacher's chest and mumbled indistinctly, "The end of the world is not coming, we shall change all this..."

## **Chapter 29: Chapter 28: Guerilla**

The rainy season departed on an inconspicuous night. The next morning, as sunlight pierced the darkness and the sky cleared, people erupted in warm cheers.

The besieged camp quickly buzzed with activity; the samurai could finally air out their moldy garments. Also laid out to dry were heaps of slightly moldy corn cakes at the storage room entrance.

Meanwhile, on a nearby hill, the imposing samurai were sitting cross-legged among lush grass, enjoying the comfort of the sun's rays while they gazed at wooden boards in their hands with furrowed brows, struggling to learn the fearsome "script" with Xiulote.

Glancing at the number of people on the grass, Xiulote sighed softly.

He said to Bertade, who was beside him, "Lately, the camp's food supply has been insufficient, and due to the rain soaking everything, it seems many warriors are sick in bed."

Bertade nodded, "In the royal camp alone, two to three hundred warriors have fallen ill due to acclimation issues. The other two camps are likely in worse shape. Luckily, only two of the warriors following us have upset stomachs, probably from eating the moldy corn cakes."

Xiulote nodded and then looked worriedly towards the distance, where the camp of the city-state warriors was located. His father was leading Teotihuacan's legion there; he did not know how they were faring.

"The priest truly had a divine revelation. The ritual of boiling water before drinking is indeed effective," said Bertade, admiringly to Xiulote.

Xiulote could only give a wry smile. Initially, he had told the warriors following him that they should boil their drinking water to reduce illnesses during the rainy season.

In that era, without metal tools, gathering wood and making fire was a very arduous task. The warriors were unwilling to spend hours just to have some hot water to drink.

In the end, he had to use mythology, telling his followers, "The God of Death Xiulotel has a duty to protect the sun and will turn a blind eye to those who pray with fire." Only then could he barely instill the habit of drinking boiled water.

"The rainy season has finally ended. Now, the transport and loss of grain will improve a lot, and everyone can eat their fill of corn cakes," Xiulote said with a smile, encouraging the followers beside him who were looking pale but still persisting in their studies.

"Come on, continue learning, you all are the pillars of the nation!"

However, the arrival of the dry season did not make things better. Normal grain transport only lasted less than two weeks, and by late November, there were repeated reports of grain transport teams being ambushed.

Aweit and Xiulote sat cross-legged opposite each other in a hut, with Bertade sitting behind Xiulote.

"Two days ago, a hundred-man grain transport team was attacked. One hundred militiamen, not a single one escaped," Aweit said somberly. "The militiamen's clothes were all stripped off, it must have been the Otomi highlanders."

"This is the second time this week. Last time, the militiamen's heads were chopped off and piled into a pyramid as a display of defiance. Their clothes were left intact, indicating it was likely an Otomi warrior squad," Bertade added calmly.

"It seems a large number of Otomi have infiltrated the forests behind us," nodded Xiulote. "Are there enough food reserves in the camp?"

"The camp's food can last three months at the normal rate of consumption," Aweit replied with a slight smile, "The situation with the food is not urgent for now. It's impossible to maintain a large force in the forests for an extended period. The small groups of Otomi can only disrupt our grain transport; with their current capability, they are temporarily unable to cut off our food supply lines."

Xiulote nodded again; the rear guard of over one hundred thousand had effectively maintained the logistics supply line for seventy thousand elite troops.

"But this is a very bad omen. Where are these attackers coming from?" Xiulote asked seriously.

"Most of the warriors and nearly all of the militia seem to come from Guamare and Pamus. Scouts discovered recent conscriptions in the villages of that region," Aweit, who had recently taken charge of the army's intelligence work explained, while the security work was still jointly carried out by Totec.

"A small number of warriors might come from the far west of Tlacaelel and the mountainous regions near Coahuila to the north. Although the Otomi city-states there are weak and remote, they can still dispatch squads of warriors a hundred strong."

Xiulote nodded. Tlacaelel was to the west of Otapan, more than a month's journey away. Further west lay the territory of the Tescos, where the Tarascans were currently on a campaign.

Coahuila was almost two months' journey north of Otapan, a place full of desolate Gobi and barren highlands, home to a semi-nomadic people known as the Chichimecs, practically the edge of the Central American world. Beyond Coahuila to the north lay the Texas plains, where wild bison could be caught.

"After more than two months of siege, the Otomi from various places have finally reacted." Then Xiulote asked, "Does the Supreme Commander have any plans to respond?"

"It's over two weeks' march from Xilotepec City to Otapan. The forty thousand militia encamped in between are fine for maintaining logistics, but they're not strong enough for combat. Totec is preparing to draw two thousand warriors from both ends, divided into forty squads of one hundred men each, to search for and attack the assailants."

After pondering for a moment, Xiulote looked up at Bertade beside him and said, "Bertade, can you lead a squad of twenty to join the battle against the Otomi squads? We need to grasp the specifics of Otomi mountain warfare. Be careful in battle and gather more information."

Bertade then bowed his head quietly in salute: "I am honored to fight for you. Leave it to me!"

So, the cruel forest melee began quickly. Most of the warrior squads returned from their search empty-handed, while a few that did encounter the enemy were locked in do-or-die brawls in the woods. Beneath the towering pine trees' shadow, the bodies of warriors and militia lay fallen, indistinguishable from one another. Blood nourished the soft earth and fostered lush plant growth.

In a month of mountain forest raids and hunts, more than ten Jaguar warriors were lost, over four hundred warriors died, and another five or six hundred were wounded, while the Otomi's casualties were only twice this number, most of whom were militia.

This kind of mountain forest attack suffered losses comparable to a large-scale battle, making King Tizoc both furious and uneasy. The rage of the Mexica warriors was burning fiercely, most directed at the enemy, with a small portion reserved for the King.

When Xiulote saw Bertade again, the Jaguar-strength warrior still had a serene expression, but now there was a bandaged mark on his shoulder.

Xiulote was quite surprised; apart from Totec, Bertade and Olosh were almost the strongest warriors he had ever seen. He was nervously concerned about his top warrior.

"It's nothing serious, just caught an arrow in a sneak attack from an Otomi Hunter's bow. I've already applied healing powder," Bertade shook his head, "The situation is not optimistic; the mountains give the Otomi too great an advantage."

"The Otomi militia and hunters set different traps, such as a prepared pitfall with sharpened stakes at the bottom, covered with a frame of branches and a thin layer of soil and turf. Once stepped on, if the weight exceeds the limit, the branches will snap and the Mexica warriors will fall, injuring their legs and feet, or even dying on the spot."

"Another trap is a fork made of wooden spikes hidden in the leaves and grass, one end tied to a bent large branch or small tree, then the Otomi lure the warriors into a chase. Once the warriors touch the rope laid on the ground, the mechanism is triggered, then the branch snaps back with the fork, like a strike with the full force of a Jaguar, powerful enough to pierce through the body and Leather Armor."

"Comparatively speaking, I'd rather face the Otomi warriors," said Bertade frankly, "The Otomi militia can be considered half a warrior in the mountains, while the few hunters are as dreadful as Jaguar warriors."

"The mountains dispersed our strong formations. The heavy Obsidian Clubs drained too much energy while the militia's Stone Spears turned out to be more agile. Various traps could circumvent the protection of Leather Armor and narrow the martial arts gap. Terrain familiarity also allowed the Otomi to conserve more energy and find more suitable opportunities."

In conclusion, Bertade said: "We can't keep depleting against the Otomi in the mountains, the sacrifice of warriors is too cheap. Once we fought on flat ground in a large-scale head-on battle, a Mexica warrior group could easily defeat five times the Otomi militia, with the casualties being ten times fewer than in the forest."

Xiulote nodded, realizing that the army had effectively fallen into the most primitive form of guerrilla warfare.

This kind of mountain guerrilla warfare would wear down elite enemy forces while providing a significant combat power boost to the terrain-familiar highlanders, much like the historically formidable Swiss highlanders and South African Boers. Guerrilla warfare allowed the weaker side to inflict disproportionate casualties against a vastly superior opponent.

"The location of the war must change," agreed Xiulote.

As the two were seriously analyzing tactics, they saw Aweit hurriedly approach.

He reached out and naturally took hold of Xiulote. Then, smiling, he said, "The King has convened a council; let's hurry over."

### **Chapter 30: Chapter 29 Martial Prowess**

On the way to the King's tent, Xiulote looked up at the sky. The deep sky, high clouds, no longer warm sunlight, carried a cold wind.

"It is already the end of December, and soon it will be the ominous final days of the year," Xiulote thought.

Inside the tent, the King still sat high upon his throne, appearing like a deity, with his eyes half-closed, his demeanor unflappable. Today's meeting, the War Priests had not attended. To the right of the tent stood the Central Army Commander, draped in a Sun Stone cloak, and to the left were the Legion Commanders of the City-States, each adorned in different cloaks, head crowned with feather crowns.

Xiulote saw his father too standing at the front left of the tent, his face a mix of resolve and worry. It wasn't until he saw the two who entered that Xiuxoke smiled joyfully, exchanged a glance with Xiulote, and then nodded to Aweit beside him.

Following that, Xiulote moved to stand beside Aweit to the right. He looked around, most generals in the tent were anxious, the familiar leaders couldn't help whispering among themselves, momentarily creating a somewhat restless and uneasy atmosphere.

A moment later, once the Commanders and the heads of all the battalions had arrived, Tizoc opened his eyes and scanned the room with a piercing gaze, gradually silencing the noises until there was complete quiet.

Xiulote recalled past scenes of the King holding court, observing people's expressions and the silence. It seemed that the King's prestige had declined.

"I have called you here for two reasons," Tizoc addressed the City-State Legion Commanders, "first, to understand the casualties of the various legions, and second, to discuss our next steps. How are your casualties?"

The generals reported the losses of their warriors in turn, cursing the cunning of the Otomi people and simultaneously complaining about the insufficiency of provisions, hoping the King would distribute another batch.

Xiulote saw Tizoc's brow furrow slightly.

The siege had already lasted over three months, and the casualties during this period were indeed much higher than anticipated. The rainy season's inhospitable conditions, coupled with guerrilla warfare in the mountains and forests, had resulted in over six hundred dead from disease, more than four hundred killed in action among the fifty

thousand Mexica warriors, nearly two thousand more suffering from illness and injuries, and even twenty of the elite Nobility Jaguar warriors had perished.

Over three months, and the elite warriors had suffered casualties numbering three thousand. Xiulote was surprised by this figure. The fifty thousand Otomi Warriors alone would hardly have inflicted such losses on the army.

From this, it was evident that logistics and environment sometimes dealt more damage to an army than large-scale battles.

The Commanders were indifferent to the militia, so there was no precise tally of their losses. Xiulote only knew that the camp and rear-guard militias had also lost three to four thousand men, mostly among those tasked with maintaining the mountain forest transport. Half of them died due to the harsh conditions of the jungle during the rainy season, and the other half fell to guerrilla attacks by Otomi squads.

Tizoc's frown deepened.

"What are the Otomi casualties?" the King asked Totec.

Totec hesitated briefly, then stepped forward and declared, "We have found over two thousand five hundred bodies of Otomi Militia, and as for the warriors... less than a hundred bodies."

A commotion spread throughout the tent. The Otomi Militia had inflicted casualty ratios of two to one, or even three to one against the Mexica warriors, an utterly unacceptable figure. It seemed the Otomi had finally found a way to counter the Mexica warriors, Xiulote thought.

The King struggled to calm his emotions and commanded silence from the generals in the tent.

Then, Tizoc asked Aweit in earnest, "Where did these Otomi come from? And how many are left?"

"The militia came from Guamare and Pamus, while the warriors, in addition to these locations, included a small part from more distant western or northern City-States," Aweit replied gravely, "The number of warriors is estimated to be over a thousand, and the militia is countless, as these villages can still mobilize tens of thousands more."

Hearing the number of tens of thousands, the generals once again grew noisy. Everyone clamored for a chance to crush the Otomi. Xiulote listened for a while, noting that no one yet suggested a retreat. The perceived weakness of the Otomi in direct combat gave everyone a false sense of a victory within reach.

Even the King found it difficult to quiet the clamor in the tent this time, and he seemed disinclined to try.

Tizoc waved Totec forward, and the two of them whispered briefly. Then, Xiulote saw Totec's face harden, he nodded firmly, his eyes shone coldly, and then he struck his chest hard with his left arm as a sign of commitment.

After a long while, the tent finally quieted down. Tizoc nodded, and Totec walked to the center, stood behind a chest-high stone platform, and announced the King's decision to the generals.

"The King has decided to deploy two auxiliary forces to campaign against the Guamare and Pamus City-States. One force will be directly under the Royal Family, the other given to the City-State Alliance. Each force will dispatch eight thousand warriors, with at least a thousand Jaguar or Eagle Warrior Battalion members, all disguised in regular warrior attire."

"Each force will additionally carry two thousand village warriors to transport provisions and spoils of war, prioritizing food among the spoils." Totec's gaze focused on the faces of the city-state leaders, fierce until each leader nodded in agreement.

"There are three objectives for this military campaign. First, to march directly to Guamare and Pamus City, demanding the city-states to submit tribute and sever alliances with the people of Otapan, and to withdraw the harassing militias. We demand their withdrawal primarily; the tributes are negotiable."

"Second, if Guamare and Pamus are unwilling to withdraw their reinforcements, or to sever alliances, then our detached force will feign weakness to lure them out for battle."

"Thirdly, if the Otomi people still cling to their burrows like rats," Totec paused, scanned his generals once more, then removed the obsidian war club from his back, "Macuahuitl," and then he raised it with both hands, muscles bulging, and forcefully swung it downward.

Xiulote heard a loud boom as the stone platform in front of Totec suddenly exploded into fragments, dust rising into the air, shattered by a single strike.

The generals were shocked, looking at Totec with eyes filled with fear and obedience.

The dust clouded the form of the supreme commander. Xiulote couldn't see his reddened eyes, but heard his biting voice distinctly enunciate, "Let the samurai obliterate all the villages, burn everything! Do not spare men, women, children, or elderly; this battle will not take prisoners, not a single person shall be left alive!"

The generals looked at each other, speechless for a moment, then thunderously agreed, their intent to kill boiling over.

Xiulote was horrified in his heart, as if seeing boundless blood rushing towards him.

Since arriving in this world, Xiulote had found that, despite bloodthirsty sacrificial rites, the Aztec military never engaged in senseless killing.

The Mexica samurai only captured sacrifices they could take away, then release the old, infirm, and non-threatening young to allow the villages to continue thriving and propagating.

This was like Jaguars hunting; they only capture food necessary for survival and don't needlessly kill for amusement like domestic cats. That would be a waste of sacrifices.

The promotion of samurai also follows this rule, counting only the number of living warriors captured and opposing mere slaughter.

Theologically, sacrifices are owned by the gods. Only lives offered in sacrificial rites could satisfy the gods' demands. The world needs a continuous flow of sacrifices as fuel to maintain the movement of the sun.

The Mexica samurai needed villages to continue thriving, needing a continual flow of sacrifices, it's a realistic jungle law, where sacrifices are the food for survival. Unlike the armies of the Ming Dynasty, they do not massacre villages for wealth, avoiding the pressures of civil officials and leaving behind no survivors.

On the other hand, sacrifices also have different levels. Sacrifices from divine descendants please the gods most, followed by the blood of nobility, ordinary warriors are acceptable, while lowly militia are just trivial additions.

This was also why Xilotepec City would rather give up all its wealth than open its gates: offering three hundred noble divine descendants was far more valuable than three thousand commoners.

Until now, the wars Xiulote experienced were low-intensity tributary wars, not like the brutal wars of cultural conquest seen during the rise of Yuan and Qing dynasties.

He was already capable of facing war, yet he was not ready to face true brutality.

But now, due to the threat to the supply line, the great army faced an existential crisis. The Mexica warriors, like hornets poked in their nest, burst out fiercely. They had to discard the principle of capturing sacrifices and adopt the cat's utter brutality to confront the mice's attacks.

The generals dispersed from the tent, rallying elite warriors, shouldering gleaming war clubs, and taking enough obsidian blades for the fight.

Xiulote was somewhat dazed. He was led forward by Aweit, his steps unsteady. In his daze, he saw his father striding towards him.

Then, Xiuxoke hugged Xiulote tightly, and then lowered his head to his ear, "Xiulote, I know you have always been soft-hearted, but being soft-hearted is pointless, my son. You must embody the strength of a samurai!"

"Life is merely a blossoming flower; all things will silently perish, and you will always witness bloodshed. The blood of commoners, blood of warriors, blood of nobility, blood of priests, even my blood, and your own!"

"Samurai, are calm, considering death as their return journey," after saying this, Xiuxoke lowered his head, kissed his son's forehead tenderly. Then another tight hug followed, before he turned and left. Nearby, Olosh looked at Xiulote worriedly but also turned and left.

Finally, only Aweit remained; he glanced at Xiulote sideways, smiled faintly, and continued to stride forward, half-dragging the young man with him.