

Civilization 289

Chapter 289 Black Wolf

Thousands of troops bowed their heads, tens of thousands fell silent, and the wooden fortress was engulfed in tranquility. His Highness' voice, like a summons from the Heavenly Divine, echoed in the ears of all the samurai.

Upon hearing the summons, a young samurai strode out from the ranks managing the tribespeople. He was in his early twenties, of average stature, broad-shouldered and narrow-waisted, his eyebrows angled upward like swords, and his eyes shone like stars. Within two or three steps, he arrived before Xiulote, knelt on one knee, offered a loud and respectful greeting, his spirit soaring.

"Your Highness, Toltec from Tepanecapan salutes you! May you soar high like a golden eagle, hunting the world!"

At these words, Xiulote laughed heartily. Although he had grown more somber over the year, the youthful spirit within him remained undimmed. Seeing such a vibrant and spirited demeanor among his followers pleased him greatly.

Once the young samurai had finished his greeting, Xiulote stepped forward, personally helped Toltec to his feet, and laughed loudly.

"Toltec, my valiant Black Wolf, how fares this camp?"

The young samurai stood tall and proud, responding loudly.

"Your Highness, I manage the camp as if it were my own limb. Presently, there are a thousand hunters from the villages and two thousand from the tribes! Additionally, eight hundred from the Longbow Camp are stationed here to assist with management."

Xiulote nodded slightly, as the Longbow Camp, his trusted aides, were loyal to him alone, with the Head Warrior serving as the Camp Commander. After a moment of consideration, the young man asked with a solemn voice.

"Toltec, you are in charge of recruiting soldiers. Why are there only a thousand village hunters, yet so many from the tribes?"

Toltec bowed his head slightly, yet responded in an equally loud voice.

"Your Highness, the village hunters are of little use, but the tribal hunters are excellent! Following your standards, they must hit the vital points on a straw man within thirty steps. Even after scouring through the villages of the Lake Region, I found only a thousand suitable candidates. However, with a little persuasion, the hunting and fishing mountain tribes flocked here in droves, many of whom were exceptional. According to the standards, I selected over two thousand, from whom you can make a finer selection!"

Xiulote laughed heartily.

"You certainly know my mind. With the Alliance's campaign imminent, as long as their archery is up to standard, the more the merrier! Where do these tribal hunters hail from, and how did they come to pledge their allegiance?"

"Your Highness, there are over twenty small fishing and hunting tribes here, each with at least fifty to sixty qualified hunters, some with over a hundred. Most are from the western mountain regions, Tepanec and Otomi tribesmen, while a few come from the southern highlands, the Jontal tribesmen."

"The Alliance has waged war for two years, and even the mountains have known no peace. The Tonsured Guard Camp has campaigned against the rebellious tribesmen in the mountains. Major Tepanec tribes with lineage have been annihilated, fields burned, and the smaller tribes have scattered in terror. The Otomi have experienced successive wars, with many tribes moving deeper into the mountains. The Jontal were expelled from the Valley by emerging southern City-States, also retreating into the forest."

Toltec's eyes gleamed as he spoke of war and carnage, much as one might savor a fine wine.

Xiulote was momentarily taken aback, these wild mountain tribes had all been expelled by the Alliance, struggling to survive in the barren mountains and forests.

"With the forests so poor and game so scarce, how can they accommodate so many wandering tribes?"

"You've said it, Your Highness. The mountains are indeed barren, and agriculture yields very little; they all rely on hunting and trade to survive. Now, with a massive influx of tribes, the mountains have begun to experience food shortages, leading to incessant fighting amongst themselves. Your Highness' prohibition against luxury coupled with the samurai's strict regulation of traders meant that the mountain tribes had nowhere to sell their hunted Feathers at a good price. Military supplies were also controlled, preventing the sale of bird and beast hides. Moreover, with the Alliance's conscription underway and a significant requisition of grains, there was no surplus in the surrounding villages... Within a few months, almost no corn made its way into the mountains; the tribes began to run out of food and even resorted to cannibalism."

Toltec laughed out loud, his eyebrows quivering, revealing a wolf-like ferocity.

"To prevent the tribesmen from affecting the Holy Mountain and plundering the villages, the local Great Nobility were ready to send several hundred samurai to thoroughly purge the mountain region. However, when they heard of Your Highness' intention to recruit, they held off. I've been stationed here for more than a month, blocking the mountain passes, capturing passing traders, and shooting those who went out to gather salt, allowing not a speck of salt or grain into the mountains!

Since the large salt mines were requisitioned by Your Highness, salt has been in high demand everywhere and can be sold freely. Traders are reluctant to risk coming here. Although many tribes have reserves of food, without salt for a month, they become utterly weak. At this point, by offering salt and food, they all came out to pledge their allegiance!"

With just a few words, Toltec laid bare the dire situation in the mountains. He analyzed the causes accurately and responded effectively, thanks to the teachings he had received from His Highness.

Upon hearing these words, Xiulote's face showed approval; the lessons he had given his followers had not been in vain. He then looked around at the two thousand kneeling tribal hunters, observing their generally emaciated faces, slightly swollen bodies, lifeless eyes, and the fear emanating from their bones... After a moment, the young man's mood became somber, and he nodded calmly.

"Very well. Toltec, you have the wisdom of a wolf! Now, how about the archery skills of these hunters? I wish to test them myself!"

"Please observe the shooting, Your Highness!"

Toltec bowed respectfully. Then, turning around with a fierce glint in his eye, he shouted loudly at the hunters.

"Don't delay, come forward and demonstrate your archery to His Highness! Each tribe shall send ten people for the contest, each to shoot five arrows. The tribe with the best archery will receive an extra bag of salt and ten bags of grain! Those who do not meet the standard will be expelled and return to the forests to await death!"

At the chilling and ruthless words, the tribal hunters stirred. With many times their number of relatives behind them, standing here they represented the hope of life. After a brief and frenzied argument, representatives from each tribe's hunters stepped forward. They crawled on the ground terrified, clumsily paying their respects to His Highness, then took out their Longbows and aimed at the human-shaped straw targets twenty steps away.