

## Civilization 301

### Chapter 301 - The Vanguard of the Northern Route Army\_2

Xiulote pondered for a moment, his expression growing solemn. Alisa suddenly grasped the young man's hand.

"Xiulote, um, I wanted to tell you that my uncle is very kind to everyone here but harbors animosity solely towards you. You need to be careful," she said.

Xiulote, touched by the girl's concerned gaze, silently lowered his head.

"I can feel your emotions. Xiulote, you are downcast with a hint of guilt, always reluctant to meet my eyes. Why is that?"

Xiulote found himself speechless. He sat beside Alisa, watching a small golden eagle flutter its wings to take off, and breathed in the floral scent from the girl, which purified his heart. After a long while, he softly said,

"Alisa, I'm fine. I must go now."

Alisa tilted her head, examining Xiulote for a moment, then pulled out a clumsily made cotton sachet and placed it in the young man's hand.

"Xiulote, this is a sachet I sewed; I've put nice-smelling herb pods and invigorating peppermint inside. Um, you might find it useful when you go on campaign," she said.

Xiulote received the sachet, examined the crooked stitches on it, and then held the girl's hand to look at her fingers. Standing in silence for a moment, he gave Alisa a hug, then turned and quickly walked away.

Witnessing this, Aweit descended from the second-floor window. He sat cross-legged in the great hall, picking up the newly printed book again, his expression calm.

Xiulote entered the great hall and indeed did not see the Intelligence Officer. Following the King's gesture, he seated himself cross-legged opposite him.

"Respected King, the vanguard is set to depart imminently. I need more Longbow Warriors for the Naval Forces' campaign," he said.

Aweit nodded slightly.

"Xiulote, Longbow Warriors require foundational archery skills. Out of all warriors in the Lake Region, after selection, only just over five thousand qualified, and all have been conscripted. I will give you two thousand Longbow Warriors, each equipped with two bows. Cherish these elites when you use them!"

Xiulote bowed deeply in gratitude.

"I shall obey your will," he declared.

Aweit pondered for a moment before issuing his orders again, slowly.

"I will assign an eight-thousand man group to the Northern Route Army. Apart from the two thousand Longbows, following your suggestion, three thousand Royal Warriors will be handed over to Balda to join the vanguard immediately. The remaining three thousand warriors should be mobilized by October at the latest and will be under the command of the esteemed noble Tepopolo from the Battle Group, joining the main force of the Northern Route Army. You will control the Northern Route Army, and for any additional forces you require, you will need to negotiate and levy from the city-states of the Northern Land yourself."

Xiulote nodded respectfully, recognizing this was his duty. When the Alliance's core issued the call to war, each city-state had the autonomy to decide the scale of their response and could not be directly conscripted.

Afterward, the young man recalled the geography along both banks of the Lerma River and made his request aloud.

"Respected King, I need a contingent of elite nobility troops. Jaguar Warriors can serve as the elite scouts of the army, assisting in coordination between the units. Eagle Warriors will act as the sturdy backbone within the battle formations, unifying the warriors from various units," he stated.

Aweit took a long time to consider before finally speaking.

"I will grant you an additional five hundred Jaguar Warrior Brigade. The army cannot march without eyes and ears. However, I cannot give you the backbone Eagle Warrior Battalion, as they are to be the core of the Southern Route's hundred-thousand-strong army. Regarding these nobility of the Alliance, you must be exceedingly cautious and avoid substantial casualties!"

Xiulote was aware of the influence of these samurai nobles and believed in the combat effectiveness of these elite battle groups. He nodded respectfully in obedience.

In Aztec culture, the eagle is a symbol of the sun; Eagle Warrior Battalion is the guard of the Sun God, selected from the true nobility class. They are only to be used in the most critical moments, their status equivalent to the Divine Feather Force of the Celestial Empire, their formations strict, inclined to defense, not to be easily compromised. The Jaguar Warrior Brigade is the guard of the Rain Divine, open to the lower class of warriors for greater expendability.

Aweit watched the young man before him and ordered with an authoritative, deep voice.

"Xiulote, my student, the direct army of the royal family is about to deploy. The Alliance will advance on two fronts, north and south, threatening and pressuring the Tarasco people to mobilize during the spring plowing. I entrust the Northern Route Army to you, and I have high expectations for you; do not let me down!"

Upon hearing this, Xiulote prostrated himself in deep respect, loudly affirming his commitment. He took the cold cocoa handed to him by the maid, drank it in a gulp, allowing the bitter, sweet, and spicy taste to linger in his mouth, letting the bright red cocoa drip from the corners of his lips. Then, he took a deep bow and bid farewell.

The remaining days of April were spent organizing the army and gathering food and supplies. Xiulote set up a large camp at the source of the Lerma River, to the west of the Capital City. A thousand trusted aide

camp bearing longbows took their position first. This was followed by a thousand Temple Guards and a group of over a hundred Priests. Finally, two thousand royal. Longbow Warriors, three thousand Club and Shield Warriors, and a brigade of five hundred Jaguar Nobility joined them.

In the midst of organizing the army, Xiulote went again to the Divine Revelation Place and brought back two hundred stirrup crossbows, entrusting them to his trusted Temple Guards. The stirrup crossbow did not require high expertise in archery, but still needed a certain foundation. Then, without going in person, he had someone head to Heavenly Fire Island to pick up urgently made ten thousand fire arrows and several hundred clay tribulus, enough for the consumption of a great battle.

With the settlement of additional craftsmen and warriors, Heavenly Fire Island had become a large-scale arsenal, where the craftsmen were busy day and night. Of course, the production of gunpowder weapons needed time, just as the raw materials of gunpowder required accumulation; this batch of weapons was all that was in stock.

As April came to an end, the air grew increasingly humid. When the first swathe of clouds from the East assaulted the sky, bringing the moisture from the vast sea, the rainy season was upon them.

Xiulote went out with his escort from the great camp, visiting the nearby villages for inspection, witnessing the vibrant vitality and rejuvenation.

The arrival of the rainy season was always accompanied by the busy work of spring plowing. On the lands of the Alliance, tens of thousands of farmers began their arduous labor. They burnt the dense forests and wild grasses of the fields, dug into the earth with stone tools, sowed the seeds of maize, nurturing the hopes of the year's harvest.

The priests of the Alliance villages erected altars. They no longer used the emblems and rituals of the Maize Divine, instead adopting the Hummingbird and Sun, symbols of the Chief Divine.

"The Chief Divine commands the sun, shining upon the earth. He has eaten the Maize Divine, the Feathered Serpent, and from now on, He governs the harvest of the world!"

Facing the apprehensive villagers, the priests from the capital city explained this way. They lit the Sacred Fire, offering various grains, praying for the descent and grace of the Chief Divine. Everything was the same as in previous years, save for the change in divinity, fashioning an all-powerful supreme being.

The farmers remained anxious. They would plead quietly with the priests, conducting private rituals for the Maize Divine, even making requests to Xiulote dressed in priestly garments. The young priest shook his head in refusal, watching the anxious farmers with a calm gaze.

"This is an era of myths and legends. Only when the new year's harvest proceeds normally will the stubborn farmers begin to accept the Chief Divine. Only after several years of sustained bountiful harvests will the farmers be completely convinced. And once the most traditional farmers have accepted the Chief Divine, the new monotheistic belief will truly take root in this fertile land."

Facing the vast fields, Xiulote thought to himself. Then, he looked toward the eastern horizon where clouds carrying wind, thunder, and torrential rain were gradually moving westward. The young man felt the moist easterly wind and nodded slowly.

Two days later, a vast fleet arrived continuously. Three hundred large boats accompanied by thousands of smaller ones, loaded with supplies for the Northern Route Army, docked at the riverside camp. Xiulote, along with seven thousand elite warriors, boarded the impressive fleet and officially proclaimed the western expedition!

The Lerma River spanned thousands of miles to the west, its torrential waters carrying the powerful fleet. The Mexica army moved westward, carrying the resolve of warriors to conquer, the glory of priestly spirits, and the desire for the King's independence, towards the lands of the Tarasco people.

Days later, Xiulote met with the representatives of the Great Nobility in the western City-States. Everyone indulged in a lavish banquet, drinking merrily together. Afterward, he met privately with nobles who had already agreed to terms, discussing the camaraderie of his grandfather and the promises of the future, securing the support of the City-States. An additional three thousand City-State Warriors joined the vanguard of the western campaign.

The army set off again, with the fleet of the western expedition crossing the border of the western City-States. On the most luxurious boat, Xiulote gazed along the banks of the great river, watching the waters rush by and the scenery gradually come into view. His gaze swept across the northern coast's Otomi people's river-adjacent forests and wilderness, over the southern coast's faintly described hills and villages of the Tarasco people, until after two weeks, he saw the beginning point once more.

By the Lerma River, the sturdy wooden fort stood as before, the old battlefield now covered in fresh grass.