

## Civilization 302

### Chapter 302 Foothold

The fierce wind blew hard, fluttering the large yellow flag. The great river roared, reflecting the beast-shaped helmet. Xiulote, adorned in brightly patterned Leather Armor and wearing a terrifying Beast Helmet, carried a commanding flag that stood three meters tall behind him. Thousands of dazzling Feathers swayed on the canopy of the flag, boldly proclaiming the position of the Supreme Commander.

Surrounded by many, Xiulote stood majestically at the prow of the boat, scanning his surroundings like a tiger. The command flag was both tall and heavy, and he struggled against the strong winds to keep his stance stable. With the flag of the Commander on his back, all distractions were dispelled, leaving only the strong will and ruthless resolve of the Supreme Commander.

On the southern bank of the river, urgent plumes of black smoke rose continuously, accompanied by Messengers who ran to spread the news of the Mexica troops' arrival in all directions. The Mexica fleet, moving smoothly with the wind and current, far outpaced the speed of the Tarasco messengers. Wherever Xiulote looked, farmers in Akanbaro territory on the southern bank still tilled the hills. They bowed their heads to clear the fields and sow seeds, then raising their heads in astonishment and shock at the sight of the imposing fleet on the river.

In the mountains, the green smoke from burning weeds and trees rose as well, mixing with the urgent black smoke to form mysterious patterns in the sky. Under the envelopment of these patterns further south, there lay a series of stone fortresses of the Tarasco and many wooden camps. The fortresses and camps echoed each other, forming a complete defensive line.

"The northern coast is far from the Alliance, and the Tarasco people are busy with spring plowing. Their military preparations are not sufficient. There will likely be a few days for the vanguard to establish a foothold."

Xiulote nodded, deep in thought.

His initial plan had been to go to Xilotepec to meet with the northern Commander Osellor to discuss borrowing Otomi Warriors and recruiting Chichimeca Canine Descendants. But the Messenger had reported back that General Osellor had just returned from procuring provisions in Vastec and had hurriedly marched to the northern frontier after appointing the overseers of spring plowing. He had already deployed troops to sweep the Chichimeca Canine Descendants, and he would be gone for at least two months.

Since a meeting was momentarily impossible, Xiulote sent Envoys to discuss the recruitment of the Canine Descendants, then led the army directly west. Whether General Osellor was deliberately avoiding them or not, as long as the Northern Route Army gained sufficient strategic advantage, the attitudes of the various Lords would change.

Xiulote looked towards the north, his gaze lingering on the long grass along the riverbank where vague mounds protruded. This area was the battlefield of the Lerma River battle; beyond it, one or two hundred li to the north through the mountain forests, lay the exceptionally strong Otapan Mountain City. And several tens of li to the west was the river mouth leading to Cuitzeo Lake and the fort controlling this critical passage.

Xiulote cast his gaze towards the mountains, where the Wooden Fort was clearly visible. The fort, supervised by Aweit and built under his personal direction, was thoroughly familiar in layout and arrangement—chosen as the first foothold.

The flag of the Tarasco Kingdom, marked with symbols of the sun, earth, and moon, flew above the Wooden Fort. Outside, Craftsmen and laborers could be faintly seen hastily retreating, with bricks, stones, and wood piled up like mountains. Clearly, the Tarasco people were fortifying the area.

"Speed is of the essence in war—we must secure a stable stronghold before the Tarasco Naval Forces gather."

Xiulote made his decision. He loudly ordered, and the mighty fleet steered towards the northern bank. The canoes, which drew very little water, could approach the riverbank closely. Thousands of Warriors leaped directly onto the riverbank, carrying Longbows and War Clubs, surging violently towards the shore.

Soon, the gates of the nearby Wooden Fort opened again, and a small squad of twenty Tarasco Warriors rushed out. They came to a nearby mound, cautiously stopping about fifty meters away from the landing army. Then, they waved their Copper Spears and shields, shouting something loudly at the Mexica Supreme Commander's flag.

Aboard the large boat, Xiulote listened intently. The language of the Tarasco people was only partially similar to that of the Mexica. He vaguely heard "Leave!... God bless... Prepetcha!... Powerful... War!"

The Young Commander smiled slightly. He quietly gave an order, and the Commander's flag was waved forward. Hundreds of landing Mexica Warriors, holding War Clubs, ferociously charged towards the mound. The Tarasco Warriors, after a brief observation, immediately turned and ran towards the mountain camp.

Bertade spoke softly.

"Your Highness, shall we shoot?"

Xiulote shook his head.

"No hurry just yet."

As he spoke, a Jaguar Warrior ran at the forefront of the chase. While running bent over, he took a Javelin from his back and raised it high. Then, he suddenly accelerated and with all his might, threw it. A sharp Javelin soared out, making a "whizzing" sound as it aimed for a Tarasco Warrior some fifteen meters away.

Hitting a swiftly moving target was immensely challenging; the Javelin grazed the leather hat of the rearmost young Warrior before thudding into the ground. The Warrior, dazed, instinctively dodged the imagined blow from behind. His steps faltered, and then he fell to the ground with a splash. As he struggled to stand, a sudden pain hit his back, followed by a hard strike to his head. Dizzy, a pair of strong hands then seized his neck.

After subduing the Tarasco Warrior with two clubs, the Jaguar Warrior laughed heartily. He knelt on the captive's back and squeezed the neck hard; the other struggled like a dehydrated fish, flapping momentarily before his eyes rolled back and he collapsed. The Jaguar Warrior then let go, quickly stripped the captive of his weapons and Cotton Armor, ensuring he was no threat. He then took out a rope he carried and tightly tied the prisoner's hands, leaving him breathing heavily. Once proficiently bound, he slapped the captive awake, pointed towards the riverbank, and the other nodded in terrified agreement.