

Civilization 305

Chapter 305 - Luring the Enemy and Inviting Battle

More than half of May had passed, and the moist east wind blew in from the distant Great Lake, warming the fertile lands beside the Lerma River. A gentle drizzle fell from the gloomy sky, soaking the fields where corn seeds had been sown. This was the season for the farmers to till the land, as the spring breeze brought warmth and the light rain was like oil, filling the eye with shades of burgeoning green vitality.

Among the fields on the south bank of the river, a corn seedling had already sprouted a fine tip. An inch of new sprout parted its delicate leaves, raising its slender stem and stretching toward the hopeful sky.

A pair of calloused, bare feet ran past in panic, accompanied by frantic shouts, violently trampling the tender sprout into the dust and mud, bringing its season of growth to an abrupt end. Then, more pairs of bare feet, in their wild, staggering flight, trampled over the fields they had painstakingly cultivated, carrying cries of impotence and howls of terror as they fled southward.

Moments later, countless pairs of straw sandals marched over the burgeoning fields with forceful steps. The war clubs that hung low brushed against the roadside grass, crossing over lands that began to go fallow. In accordance with the prince's orders, the figures in straw sandals did not hurry to pursue, nor did they kill without purpose. They simply kept driving the farmers away, setting aflame the gathering villages, and creating wave after wave of refugees.

The figures in straw sandals continued their march to the south. Only when the stone fortress became remotely visible, and the Samurai with copper spears knocked their shields atop the wooden fortress, sounding the warning conch throughout the southern fields, did the Mexica warriors slowly and methodically retreat amidst the enemy's curses and shouts.

On the great boat in the Lerma River, Xiulote, bearing the Commander's flag, calmly gazed southward.

Around him, three hundred large boats lined up in succession, like arrayed beasts, displaying their massive force to the Tarasco people and inviting an ultimate showdown between the two naval forces. Thousands of smaller boats were divided into two groups. Half of them patrolled on the outer perimeter, like agile schools of fish, constantly scouting and patrolling. The other half were laden with Samurai, shuttling back and forth non-stop, moving the forces from north to south.

"Plant corn and beans in May, and squash in June, leaving July idle, while harvesting occurs in August to October. The Alliance started the war at this time, deploying full-time Samurai to invade the enemy's agricultural areas. With the enemy's forces insufficient, unable to defend, they must abandon spring plowing and re-mobilize warriors and Militia. This is using the alignment of human resources to fully leverage the Alliance's manpower advantage."

Xiulote thought dispassionately, as life began to be reduced to mere numbers, and actions were executed solely for victory. He observed the Tarasco camps, waiting for the enemy Commander-in-Chief's response.

The Mexica vanguard had not been on the north bank for long before they made a major move with an earth-shattering momentum. Although the vanguard presented the posture of a massive invasion, in reality, only two thousand Samurai from the western City-States crossed the river to infiltrate the south. These warriors split into squads of a hundred, spreading havoc over the lands of the Akanbaro State. They burned down settlements on the southern bank of the Great River and drove the Tarasco farmers southward, right up to the enemy camps, a dozen miles away.

Their task was threefold: to destroy, probe, and lure—to destroy this year's spring plowing for the enemy, probe the current state of the enemy's mobilization, and lure enemy warriors into striking out.

Xiulote's gaze lingered on the southern bank of the river, revealing a confident smile.

On the beaches along the southern bank, five hundred Jaguar Warriors and a thousand Temple Guards waited leisurely. These elite Battle Groups appeared relaxed and well-equipped, their combat power beyond doubt. At that moment, they sat cross-legged on the ground, resting and ready to launch sudden raids on large enemy groups.

Above the Great River, Xiulote's fleet, carrying the real main force, waited solemnly. The most elite three thousand Samurai strung their Longbows, with quivers slung across and thumb rings tightly fitted. They sat quietly aboard the boats, conserving their strength, ready to rain arrows down upon the enemy from either the water or the shore. The imposing boats also carried an additional two thousand club and shield warriors, ready for potential boarding battles.

Each large boat had more than ten Paddlers, while the smaller ones had two to three. The Mexica Naval Forces' sailors and Militia totaled eight thousand, all in a state of battle readiness.

Xiulote looked up at the sky where fine drizzle slid softly, stirring circles of ripples on the water's surface. The first rain had already lasted for three days, from the initial sporadic drops to the current rain like silk threads, and it looked set to intensify.

The Young Commander stood expressionless, deeply contemplative.

This was the Mexica vanguard's last baiting of the enemy and the Naval Forces' final invitation to battle. Eight thousand Samurai were fully mobilized from the main force, while the north bank's Wooden Fort retained only a thousand city-state and a thousand full-time warriors, who were scattered around, overseeing eight thousand prisoners. Under the covered tarps on the great boats lay bundles of Fire Arrows, and the Longbow Warriors had replaced their bowstrings.

If the Tarasco Naval Forces engaged in battle, the Mexica Naval Forces would give them an unforgettable "surprise," thereby establishing absolute dominance on the Lerma River.

Xiulote looked again toward the southwest Rivermouth, where the towering Rivermouth fortress loomed in the distance, yet only a few scattered Tarasco boats plied the waters. These boats probed from afar, occasionally passing through the fortress to report on military intelligence. The main body of the Tarasco Naval Forces remained hidden in Cuitzeo Lake, under the tight protection of the Rivermouth fortress, it was unclear if they were fully assembled yet.

"If a few more days pass and the rain intensifies again, the rainy season will truly begin. Then, Gunpowder Weapons will no longer function, and the Longbow's power will be greatly diminished. Under such natural conditions, the Mexica Naval Forces will lose their absolute long-range advantage, and it will no longer be the right opportunity for a major battle."