

## Civilization 311

### Chapter 311 - Reconnaissance (Added for Alliance Leader Xian Qilin)\_3

Ospai shook his head, his tone calm, tinged with faint mockery.

"Kukuna, you have already proven with your own achievements, the Wooden Fort on the North Coast is indefensible. The Kingdom's control over it is just a pointless depletion of troops. Moreover, our primary task now is to defeat the Mexica vanguard, to prevent the enemy from gathering in greater numbers! As for the promises made at this time, of course, they should be decided upon after the war is over."

Kukuna pondered the proposal, feeling it somewhat feasible. The commander's willingness to dispatch troops seemed even more resolute. He quickly pointed his finger at the small Mexica boats in front of the water gate, shouting loudly.

"Commander, look, there is the Mexica Longbow!"

Ospai was slightly startled. He turned his head, his eyes widened, observing the Mexica boat carefully. The gaze of the round-faced nobility passed over the young boy on the bow, resting on the tall, quiet, weathered samurai, then moved to the huge longbow behind him.

"To have such a Greatbow? I wonder what kind of power it holds!"

Based on the height of the samurai and the length of the boat, Ospai gestured with his fingers. Then, he looked again at the most conspicuous weathered samurai, his eyes gleaming.

"This samurai's posture is steady, standing on the rocking boat, unmoving. He must be a warrior skilled in martial arts! Dressed as a commoner, without a family crest, he seems not to be nobility, but can be persuaded to defect. Leather armor, greatbow, well-equipped, demeanor strong, he is likely a commoner-born Warrior Camp Chief!"

The round-faced nobility showed a belligerent excitement. His robust body suddenly stood up, striding forth, leaving a casual yet commanding order.

"Kukuna, secure the water gate, I will be right back! It has been months since I've fought, and today I shall properly exercise my limbs, capturing this samurai. It's also a good opportunity to ask about the situation on the North Coast and see what this longbow can really do!"

Bertade stood alert at the center of the small boat. He carefully guarded against Cuitzeo Lake and Lerma River, on the lookout for any approaching Tarasco fleet. Should the enemy's naval forces come within two kilometers, he would not hesitate to take his highness back.

Xiulote glanced at the top of the fortress, where a round-faced warrior suddenly stood up, looked down momentarily, then disappeared from view. The Young Commander paid no heed and continued to observe the water gate more than fifty meters away.

The water gate was quite large, about seven or eight meters wide, and about three or four meters high. Below it was a water channel, also seven or eight meters wide, allowing two three-meter-wide outrigger canoes to exit side by side. This channel extended forward, its connection to the fortress unclear, as was the nature of its internal defense. Indeed, this water gate was a broad passage for troops...

As Xiulote pondered, suddenly, he heard the "creak, creak" sound of wood friction. The Young Commander was momentarily startled as the usually closed water gate suddenly flung open! Hundreds

of enemies, aboard their boats, surged out. The warriors from Tarasco waved their weapons, their faces filled with murderous intent.

The first dozen small boats shot forth like arrows, reaching them in the blink of an eye. Each was loaded with two sailors, six warriors, their gleaming Copper Spears already raised, ready to thrust. Following them were two side-by-side large boats, each carrying ten sailors, thirty warriors. One of the large boats was particularly ornate, with a platform adorned with a crocodile head built on top, where a robust, round-faced warrior sat, his Spear Flag directly aimed at His Highness's boat.

Bertade turned pale with shock. He reacted the fastest, pressing His Highness down onto the small boat, and turned his head to shout urgently to the rowing guards.

"Go, let's go!"

#### Chapter 312 - Pursuit

The rain drizzled, and the shouts shook the heavens. The water gate of the Rivermouth fortress, like a hive of wasps, still relentlessly spewed forth large and small boats, and in the blink of an eye, nearly a hundred vessels appeared.

Upon the gorgeous large boat, the round-faced noble Ospe grinned, revealing the excitement of a hunter. He pointed with his Spear Flag and bellowed.

"Speed up the charge, capture that tall warrior with the longbow! The captor will be rewarded with five chests of copper, and their rank will be raised by half a grade!"

Hearing the command, the paddlers on the large boat's faces turned red as they rowed with all their might. The large boat picked up speed once more, surging forth like a pouncing crocodile. Ahead, a pack of more than ten small boats, like wolves, had already pounced on the edge of the Mexica skiffs.

On the Mexica skiff, the trusted aides rowed fiercely, and the slender canoe gradually sped up. Bertade quickly moved to the bow, protecting His Highness behind him. Then, he stood tall, took his war club from behind his back, and unblinkingly fixed his gaze on the three Tarasco skiffs that had closed to within five meters.

On the nearest skiff, a Tarasco captain stood at the front, his face breaking into a grin at the thought of capturing wealth. He held a three-meter-long copper spear high with both hands, and as the skiff drew close, he stabbed downwards with all his might, aiming straight for the tall warrior's chest.

It was hard to dodge on the cramped boat. The Head Warrior's eyes blazed as he instantly struck out with his war club in his right hand, accurately hitting the wooden shaft and deflecting the incoming copper spear to the left. Then, he reached out with his left hand, as quick as lightning, and grabbed the deviated shaft, before letting out a mighty roar, and forcefully pulling it.

"Come!"

The two small boats, mere meters apart, shook violently at the same time. The Tarasco captain found himself without a weapon, his balance off-kilter. Next, as he stumbled, an irresistible force hit him, accompanied by a soul-shaking bellow at his ear. His spirit jolted, and he was pulled into the water, the raging river hitting him square in the face. Before he could release his grip, the copper spear dragged him towards the edge of the Mexica skiff. In his panic, he looked up to find himself in the last moment of life, only to see a heavy war club coming down on his head, followed by a burst of severe pain and the sound of bones "cracking."

Bertade crushed the enemy's neck with his club in the water, then raised his hand and hurled the war club forward viciously. With a "bang," a Tarasco warrior fell backward face-up. Then, the Head Warrior gripped the three-meter-long spear with both hands and thrust it swiftly forward. The spear pierced through the left chest, straight into the heart, instantly killing another enemy who was poised to attack.

Bertade yanked back his spear, the blood spurting, staining the golden tip. He slightly sidestepped, evading the incoming copper spear, allowing it to tear a gash into his high-quality leather armor. Next, he thrust his own weapon at the enemy's chin, then sliced with precision. That warrior instantly went limp, his long spear clattering to the deck as he fell overboard, hand to his throat, his blood quickly dispersing in the turbulent water.

In mere moments, four warriors lay dead, and the enemy on the first boat had lost their nerve. The remaining two warriors hastily turned to retreat, urging the paddler to depart with frantic shouts. Bertade stabbed again, plunging deeply into the back of the closest warrior. With a muffled cry of agony, the warrior fell forward with the long spear still embedded in him, the weapon stuck in his ribs, unable to be drawn out. The Head Warrior frowned slightly, then let go with both hands and stooped to pick up the backup war club on the skiff.

The paddler bent low to row, and the first skiff escaped quickly. The last Tarasco warrior fell back seated in the boat, gasping raggedly as he looked at his fallen comrades before him, heartsick. When he looked toward the Mexica skiff again, he saw the second and third Tarasco skiffs already speeding up, charging towards the boat full of "wealth."

The two skiffs collided with force, the canoe shaking violently, the Mexica boat on the verge of capsizing. Then, the third Tarasco skiff coming from another direction hit with a "bang," fortuitously propping up the small boat. The three boats shook together for a moment, but amazingly all stabilized shortly after. Then, the warriors on all three vessels suddenly engaged in fierce combat.

Xiulote crouched on the boat, tightly gripping the gunwale, riding out the worst of the shaking. Then, he picked up his war club and stood up to face the onslaught of enemies. The young warrior, holding the club in both hands, slightly tilted his body and unleashed a powerful side blow! The club, aided by the

rotational force of his torso, struck precisely on the head of the nearest Tarasco warrior. One second the warrior was grinning like a predator seizing its prey, and the next second came a "bang," and his smile, along with his face, was smashed to pieces, as he toppled over, head twisted to the side.

Xiulote had no time to watch his enemy die. He moved up close to the next aggressor, ducking slightly to avoid the short spear. Then, the young warrior hefted the war club and roared.

"Die!"

The meter-long club shot out vertically, carrying immense power, smashing directly into the enemy's face and shattering the nasal bones. The second warrior let out a pitiful howl, dropped the short spear, and covered his burst eyes with both hands as he stumbled back into his comrade.

Xiulote swung again, crouching. Utilizing martial arts practiced over many years, he struck sooner than expected, accurately hitting the opposing warrior's knee. The enemy's copper spear missed its mark, and his left knee throbbed from the hit, buckling instantly. The young warrior didn't pause and smashed the other knee. The enemy lost all his balance, screaming in pain as he fell into the water, followed by a club striking his head.

Xiulote took a deep breath, his strength temporarily spent from killing three men. A Tarasco warrior spotted an opportunity and snarled, his spear stabbing diagonally towards the young warrior, aiming fiercely for the vital area of the chest.

## Chapter 313 - Chase\_2

The sound of the approaching wind buzzed in his ears, and Xiulote's extensive training kicked in. Instinctively, he sidestepped and raised his left arm to block. A copper spear skewered through the leather armor, slashed across his left arm, then grazed his chest before stopping at his right shoulder.

Xiulote paid no attention to his wound. With his right shoulder, he pinned the copper spear, preventing the enemy from withdrawing it for another stab. Then, gripping the wood shaft with his left hand, he roared fiercely.

"Come on!"

The samurai opposite him wobbled, nearly toppling over. Then the samurai half-sank his body and exerted force simultaneously. For a moment, the two were caught in a stalemate across the long spear.

Hearing their prince's angry shout, the trusted aides felt an urgent desperation. Three battle-hardened trusted aides, despite their injuries, finally took down their opponents. They then surged forward, swinging their weapons simultaneously, and smashed the enemy grappling with their prince into a bloody pulp.

Finally, Xiulote could breathe a sigh of relief. Clutching the long spear, he collapsed onto the boat and glanced at Bertade. The Head Warrior had knocked down the remaining foes. Then, the Young Commander turned his head to look at his trusted aides who wanted to come closer to bandage his wounds.

"Don't mind me! Keep paddling, don't stop!"

In a brief moment, the attack by three small boats was dispersed, and the Mexica craft picked up speed again, fleeing towards the Lerma River to the north. Seeing the fate of the warriors in the lead, the more than ten Tarasco small boats behind hesitated, nudging closer at a slow pace. Several other Mexica boats also approached, fighting desperately to protect the royal vessel on either side.

On the splendid greatboat, awe shone in Ospia's eyes. He watched as Bertade, armed with a spear, successively slew four men, then switched to a war club and swiftly killed three, loudly praising him.

"Such an exceptional samurai! He should belong to me! Hurry, faster, all warriors paddle! Capture this longbow strongman and everyone will be rewarded with ten boxes of bronzed vessels!"

The samurais on the boat cheered loudly and then obeyed the order, moving towards the sides of the boat, gradually joining the paddling ranks. Only two guards, holding shields and Short Spears, protected their Legion Commander on each side.

The Legion Commander's greatboat surged forward, like a rampaging bear, mercilessly shoving aside the small boats entangled in battle, charging straight towards the Mexica craft at the forefront.

Hearing the cheers, Xiulote looked in the direction of the sound and saw an exceptionally massive boat carrying thirty Tarasco warriors quickly closing in. He spotted the round-faced Nnobiity waving the Spear Flag, trying to make out the shouts carried by the wind, faintly hearing, "exceptional, capture, archery, reward, bronze vessels..." Rage suddenly flared in the eyes of the Young Commander.

Bertade scanned his surroundings; the Mexica boats were picking up speed, but some time was still needed to reach their maximum velocity. The large boat behind had already breached the rear defense line, rushing ever closer. Once the large boat collided with them, the thirty Tarasco warriors would surge aboard, leaving no chance of survival for those on the small boat.

Bertade quickly surveyed the scene, his gaze eventually resting on the central part of the greatboat, where the round-faced Nnobiity, wearing a purple helmet and waving the flag, had his eyes fixed on



him, sparkling fiercely. The Head Warrior's gaze sharpened, then he tossed away his war club, drew his longbow from behind, and swiftly notched a copper arrow.

Next, Bertade's eyes, as sharp as an eagle's, locked onto the enemy leader's helmet. He quickly and steadily pulled back his longbow, then suddenly released an arrow as swift as lightning.

Ospia had been watching the actions of the greatbow warrior. As he saw him draw his bow, and notched an arrow at lightning speed, he sensed trouble. The "Crocodile" Nnobility glanced around and quickly crouched down, pulling over the closest guard to use as a shield.

With a "whoosh," the long arrow emitted a sharp whistle as it shot through the air. It followed an almost straight trajectory, covering a distance of thirty meters, and with a "chit," impaled the terrified face, then with a "hiss," burst out from the back of the skull. Finally, with a crisp "bang," the bronze arrowhead struck Ospia's helmet, nearly puncturing the inlaid copper.

Felling the impact against his helmet, the round-faced Nnobility was shocked to his core, terrified beyond belief. Years of battlefield experience made him instinctively pick up his shield to protect his face. Then again, with a "thud," a long arrow pierced the Wooden Shield, lodging in his shield-bearing left arm and fastening the arm to the shield.

With the greatboat now within twenty meters of the small craft, the might of the Longbow was nearly unstoppable. Before reaching grappling distance, the greatbow warrior could still loose two more arrows! In rapid succession of thoughts, Ospia finally bellowed.

"Escort! Escort! Raise your shield!!!"

At the Legion Commander's shrill, hoarse scream, the rowing warriors quickly dropped their paddles, grabbed the shields from the ground, and hurriedly protected the esteemed noble in front of them. The greatboat's speed visibly decreased.

The Head Warrior hesitated briefly, then gave up targeting the enemy leader hiding behind shields and human shields. Shifting his aim, he drew three arrows quickly and pulled the Greatbow only halfway. Then, the sharpshooting Head Warrior released a rapid trio of arrows at the lightly-clothed Paddlers, sending three tumbling to the sound.

Xiuluo reacted swiftly. Ignoring his still-bleeding left arm, he too drew his Longbow, loosely pulling and aiming at the rowing Paddlers. At a distance of twenty meters, even on a swaying boat, the young samurai could still hit the enemy accurately. Long arrows penetrated the light clothing, either embedding in the Paddlers' chests or their paddling arms, causing them to howl in pain and tumble over.

Xiuluo only loosed three arrows, and already ten Paddlers lay on the deck; the rest were the doing of the Head Warrior.

Ospia hid behind the samurais' shields, peering through the gaps in the human wall, stunned by what he saw ahead. The Longbow sang out a trembling "hum" as the deadly arrows "swooshed" in, neatly taking lives, their heads embedding in the wooden deck, feathers still quivering.

Chapter 314 - Chase\_3

"To think such a powerful longbow exists! In its presence, the life of a samurai is like a cave-dwelling blind fish, dead from the swish of the tail before even seeing the target. Terrifying, truly terrifying!"

The legion commander, enduring the pain, muttered to himself. He hid behind the samurai's shield, allowing the speed of his boat to slow down as it gradually pulled away from the smaller boat in front.

Then, he suddenly came to his senses, raised the Spear Flag with his good right arm, swiped half-circles to each side, and then pointed forcefully towards the small boat in the front.

Behind the magnificent large boat, dozens of boats received the command. They accelerated, abandoning their entangled opponents, and rushed towards the foremost Mexica small boat. The remaining two or three Mexica small boats could not attend to their opponents either and quickly went to aid their lord.

A red falcon, attracted by the shouts, soared through the wind and rain. It scanned with its sharp eagle eyes, seeing a small boat floating in the front, dozens of boats in hot pursuit, and two large boats, at a distance, following behind. It lowered its altitude, carefully watching the oars moving on the boats, staring at the shining spear tips, and the occasional falling figures.

A sharp arrow "whooshed" under the falcon, startling it. Its dynamic vision traced the arrow back to the bow of a small boat, where a bipedal beast covered its throat, swaying as it fell into the river. The falcon smelled the blood in the air, sensed the deep danger, and flapped its wings, soaring into the high clouds.

On the river surface, the foremost Tarasco small boat immediately slowed down, its samurai onboard scrambling to check their fallen captain. When they confirmed the location of the arrow, a deep chill arose in their hearts. The messenger of the Moon Goddess on the boat ahead could easily take the samurai to the Netherworld! Soon, the sailors and samurai slowed down, quietly retreating behind the other small boats.

Observing the enemy struck by the arrow in the neck, watching the enemy ships being repulsed again, Xiulote set down his longbow, nodding in satisfaction. In the instants of life and death combat, he gradually calmed his mind, and his archery unexpectedly made a breakthrough. The young samurai's left arm had been bandaged. It was merely a superficial flesh wound and, despite being painful, did not affect the fighting. He looked ahead and behind, his trusted aides' faces flushed, having rowed vigorously for over a half hour, estimating that they had covered about ten miles. The rendezvous fleet should be just ahead.

Soon after, another small boat approached rapidly, coming within twenty meters in an instant. Xiulote spat, ready to notch an arrow again. "Whoosh, whoosh", two successive arrows flew past him, each striking a samurai in the cheek, making them flip over and instantly die. Bertade turned around, nodded with a smile at the young samurai, his lips curving into a serene confidence.

Xiulote paused for a moment, then continued to notch an arrow. This time, he aimed at an enemy boat thirty meters away, waited a moment, and in the brief steadiness of the small boat, he released the arrow, hitting the enemy's chest. The samurai incredulously looked down, watched as blood seeped from the pierced Leather Armor, then uttered a few words before collapsing backward.

The young samurai looked toward the Head Warrior, and both burst out laughing. At the edge of life and death, they displayed immense fighting spirit, their pride burning in their chests! True samurai never fear death but blossom fearlessly!

Sixty meters away on the large boat, the round-faced noble burst out in admiration as he watched the two Longbow Warriors on the small boat, who were laughing loudly.

"Excellent, very excellent! To think you killed dozens of my men, truly extraordinary samurai! Indeed fitting for my Crocodile family crest!"

The round-faced noble's wound had been dressed, and although his left arm was in extreme pain, his heart was filled with exhilaration from witnessing the splendid battle, filled with a longing for outstanding warriors. While he was still marveling, another large boat had already drawn near.

A blood-covered Tarasco captain bent close, kneeling on one knee, and presented a longbow with both hands.

"Respected commander, this is a longbow taken from another small boat. These Mexica samurai are incredibly tenacious! Most fought to the death, a few jumped into the water to escape, and two captives even killed themselves. We did not capture any alive."

The commander nodded, continuing his praises.

"Excellent, indeed only brave samurai can lead troops that fear not death!"

Then, the legion commander took the longbow, placing it across his lap. He then carefully stroked it with his right hand, lost in thought.

Shortly after, a scouting small boat hurriedly returned, bringing new information.

"Commander, the Mexica reinforcements have appeared on the Lerma River to the northeast, far in the distance, about a hundred boats."

He looked toward the northeast river. Amid the rocking wind and rain, many black dots flowed down, rushing towards them, estimated to engage in quarter an hour. He then looked at the front sixty meters away, where the Mexica small boat's samurai were still notching and shooting arrows, rowing desperately, even faster than fishermen from Michoacán!

Regretfully sighing amidst the surroundings, he noted the few boats docked in the fortress, with only about a hundred boats at his disposal and many warriors lost. The "Crocodile" commander pressed on his wounded left arm, feeling the stabbing pain to the bone, and finally declared loudly.

"Sound the conch, all forces retreat!"

The magnificent large boat slowly turned around. The round-faced noble leaned against the Crocodile's ornament, his eyes widened, taking one last look ahead. The two Mexica samurai, one big and one small, still fiercely engaged in battle, their arrows shooting like meteors. He watched with admiration for a long time, leaving a remark in the wind.

"To have such fierce warriors among Mexica commoners! Someday, I shall have you all under my command!"

Chapter 315 - The Monarch and His Loyal Subject Get Along Well

The heavy rain poured down, washing the blood-stained leather armor, wiping the damaged small boats, and falling into the merciless river water, stirring up faint red ripples.

The world dimmed for a moment. The somber skies made the birds take cover, silencing the forest. Only a robust red falcon soared in the heavy rain, beating its powerful wings, alone in the vast sky. It circled the battling bipedal beasts and flew to the wooden fort on the north coast, surveying its territory. When it took flight again, riding the long wind beneath it, the skirmish on the river had subsided, and the sound of rain faded into silence.

Hundreds of Mexica boats hurriedly approached, surrounding the central revered figure, standing solemnly in the dwindling drizzle, waiting in silence.

Xiulote stood at the prow, his left arm wrapped in a bleeding bandage, watching the departing Tarasco fleet. His eyes were a restrained crimson, the boiling intent to kill surging in his chest, filled with the determination to avenge his trusted aides. The young commander surveyed the number of small boats, glanced at the blood-soaked Bertade, then stared toward the large group of enemies to the southwest. The desire for battle and the realism of strategy fiercely clashed in his mind, like the wind-beaten river water.

After a long pause, the wind and rain gradually lessened. Xiulote raised his head, looked toward the incoming red falcon, let out a hearty long howl to the sky, and then suddenly raised his hand and fired an arrow.

The war arrow "whooshed" through the sky, like lightning racing forth, piercing the overcast clouds and descending abruptly. The red falcon, proudly circling, startled by the howl, briefly hesitated. Then, the arrow soared above, grazing its gray-red feathers, plucking a long plume. The red falcon cried out in pain, "Ki!". Then, it swiftly spread its wings, abandoning the territory it had held for many years, fleeing hastily toward Cuitzeo Lake to the southwest, away from these dangerous beasts.

Xiulote watched the departing raptor, the shot only a hair's breadth away, almost missing the title of a master archer. Moments later, he looked toward his samurai awaiting orders and suddenly burst into laughter.

"The red falcon escapes to the southwest, it is the will of the Chief Divine! The Tarasco people will lose their fortress, frantic like birds abandoning their homes! Glorious, glorious, to slay twenty warriors in one battle, a samurai should indeed be like this! Bertade, you killed about forty Tarasco warriors, didn't you?!"

Xiulote laughed heartily. He looked at the Head Warrior, his war armor soaked in blood, recalling the fervent battle just moments before.

Bertade was taken aback. He had intended to explain that among the enemies he shot, there were a dozen paddlers in simple clothes, and that the victory relied on the shooting advantage during the pursuit. Then, the Head Warrior caught the Young Commander's gaze, pondered for a moment, and a look of realization appeared on his tranquil face.

"Your Highness, exactly so! I have slain forty warriors, and still have strength left in my hands! Before the mighty Mexica Eagle, Tarasco men are nothing but wild rabbits awaiting slaughter, bowing their heads to death, easily defeated!"

Hearing this, the Young Commander laughed out loud. He looked around at the smiling faces of the samurai, then again at his loyal Head Warrior, and proclaimed loudly.

"Bertade, you are the Sun God's sacred eagle Cuauhtli, the foremost warrior among tens of thousands! This battle, the War God has blessed you, granting you divine power when fighting against the followers of foreign gods! From now on, you are the 'Eagle Head Warrior,' anointed by the divine, a status as venerable as the Divine Descendants!"

Hearing the King's words, the Head Warrior showed a shocked expression. He was overwhelmed with turbulent emotions, and a flood of feelings rushed to his heart, overwhelmed by a mix of emotions. He understood what those words meant. If the King's reward was acknowledged by everyone, with the anointment of the chosen by the divine, he would no longer need to care about his commoner origins, having the qualifications to command the nobility's armies.

Training in Martial Arts for thirty years, on the battlefield for twenty, his childhood dreams have been realized in this moment!

Bertade's mind raced, touched by the King's timely and clever choice. Immediately, he knelt on one knee, bowed his head, and saluted deeply.



Xiulote laughed again. With a clear gaze, he swept over all the samurai present, observing their faces showing respect, surprise, contemplation, or envy. The Young Commander took note in silence. Then, he looked at the dissipating clouds and slowly raised his longbow.

"In the name of the Chief Divine Huitzilopochtli! I, the Divine Bloodline of Mexico, the Fourth Level High Priest of the High Priesthood, the foremost heir to the King, Xiulote, on behalf of the Chief Divine, reward the most devout warrior of the gods, Bertade from Tenochtitlan, conferring upon him the title of 'Eagle Head Warrior!' From now on, he shall be the bravest sacred eagle under the Chief Divine, fighting until death for the glory of the Chief Divine!"

With the proclamation of the young priest, the drizzle came to a halt. The first ray of sunlight broke through the layers of fog, falling from the darkened sky as if the Sun God had revealed itself, eliciting exclams from all the warriors.

Xiulote observed the brightening sky, nodded to himself as the timing was perfect. Then, he lifted his longbow above his head, letting the sunlight fall upon the Greatbow, as if blessed by the Chief Divine. The young priest called out the god's name three times, then solemnly handed the longbow to the kneeling Head Warrior.

"With the Chief Divine's blessing! Bertade, you are now a divinely chosen warrior, to battle for the Sun God!"

Xiulote spoke thus.

"To dedicate everything to the Chief Divine! Your Highness, I will protect the deity of my heart and ensure the sun rises to its zenith, forever shining upon the world!"

Bertade responded thus.

The sunlight fell, illuminating the faces of the two men, outlining the smiles at the corners of their mouths. Between the young King and the veteran Samurai, the allegiance ceremony took place for the second time, on a small boat by the Lerma River.

With the oath-taking complete, they skipped certain rituals. Xiulote stepped forward, raising the Head Warrior's right hand that held the bow, facing the many Samurais and officials.

"My brave Samurais, the Chief Divine blesses the courageous! The war of the gods is destined to triumph! The Mexica are fated to conquer the world!"

Under the Young Commander's inspirational speech, the Samurais witnessing the miracle in their eyes regained their morale and cheered in unison. They raised their thunderous chants to the clearing skies once more.

"Divine war, conquest! Divine war, conquest!..."

Xiulote smiled, listening to the passionate shouts of the Samurais, and nodded slightly.

His mind raced with thoughts, contemplating the right person for the task. How could he spread the legendary battle record of Bertade and the divine manifestation of the Sun God throughout the army... After a while, he thought of Etalik, the commander of the Temple Guards, an experienced old warrior.

The sunlight enveloped the boat, forming a sacred halo around it. Xiulote nodded and whispered a few instructions. Immediately, a dozen small boats broke away from the fleet and headed towards the fort near the Rivermouth, cautiously searching for any possible survivors. Then, the Young Commander raised his hand high and pointed northeast; the Samurais roared in response. The fleet set sail once again, heading towards the Wooden Fort on the North Coast.

Before departing, Xiulote took one last look at the direction of the Rivermouth fort, making up his mind in determination. He recalled the height of the stone walls of Stone City, the width and design of the water gates, and his thoughts grew clearer. Then, he remembered the round-faced nobleman from the Tarasco's great boat who had relentlessly pursued them, and anger rose within him once more. The young warrior swung his War Club fiercely, making a silent oath.

Nearly a hundred boats sped along, leaving the deadly battlefield behind, sailing toward the Commander-in-Chief's Wooden Fort. Bertade stood by the monarch's side with a complex expression, his thoughts tumultuous. After a long pause, he spoke softly.

"Your Highness, as you said. The battle between Samurais is but a mere splattering of blood three feet away, bloodshed five steps apart. Although filled with lofty aspirations, experiencing the thrills of life and death, what is decided is merely the fate of a moment, of a place, of a few dozen people at most. Even with the bravery of the Great General Totec, it is impossible to turn the tide.

Nevertheless, battle between Commanders stretches across a hundred miles, spanning the heavens and the earth. To capture one city in battle, to annihilate one country in ten wars, to lead thousands into battle, this is the making of a hero.

And when Monarchs clash, their gaze spans thousands of miles, their hearts encompassing a century. Every word and deed become the law of the land, every plan sets the great trends of the world. To embrace all like the earth, to hang high like the sun in the sky—this is your true destiny!"

Hearing Bertade's advice, Xiulote paused briefly, closely observing the Head Warrior's weathered face. After a moment, he burst into laughter and grasped the Head Warrior's arm affectionately, then began to speak warmly.

"Bertade, you have always been by my side, yet you still manage to impress me! Today, your rescue has taught me to recognize your ability; I can entrust you with great matters... I admire your bravery, but I cherish your wisdom even more!

The eagle soars high, its ambitions grand, needing strong and full feathers, but also clear eyes to see everything. Between us lies a bond of monarch and subject, as harmonious as the wind and the dragon!"

Bertade looked into Xiulote's eyes, as if trying to peer into the young monarch's heart. Although he did not comprehend the meaning of the last sentence, he could feel the sincerity and esteem in the words. He knelt silently on his knees for a moment, offering his hair once again, completing the final step of the allegiance ceremony.

Xiulote's expression was solemn. He took out the Short Dagger he carried, gripped the Head Warrior's hair, and gently cut off a lock, tossing it into the surging river.

"Bertade, I have heard your counsel! I am now the Commander-in-Chief of the great army, and will no longer act with the valor of a mere foot soldier. The Samurai Xiulote has already been carried away with the great river!"

With that, Xiulote swung the Short Dagger fiercely, cutting off half of his own hair and casting it into the mighty Lerma River. The tumultuous river waters flowed westward, taking away the symbols of the young warrior, towards the endless Pacific Ocean. It would also return to the distant homeland one day.

Then, the Young Commander raised his right hand to the westward-flowing river, and swore aloud to the heavens.

"Bertade, I swear by my ancestors' names! Should I one day become King, you shall be Marshal! The waters of the Lerma River shall not run dry, nor shall the bond between monarch and subject ever end. In this life, we shall stand by each other with loyalty and integrity, and never betray one another!"

Hearing this, Bertade stood in a daze, his eyes unexpectedly moist. Suddenly remembering the moment Totec died, he reached out and took the King's Short Dagger. Then, the Head Warrior, above the great river, slowly cut off all his black hair, deeply slashed both sides of his cheeks, and calmly handed back the Blood Dagger, remaining solemn and silent throughout.

This was the tradition of the Mexica. To cut off one's hair for loyalty, to mark one's face with an oath, to serve the Divine King, so it was!

#### Chapter 316 - Sand Table and Preparation

The June rain was like the rapid beat of drums, urging on the busy work among the fields. The corn had grown a foot tall, the green beans were stretching out their tender branches, and the pumpkins were sprouting new shoots, slowly spreading across the ground. The ample rainfall nourished the crops' root systems, and the warm sunshine gave the plants the energy to grow. Thus, when the scorching sun first appeared in the sky after the rains of July, the earth was already a scene of flourishing life.

The sweltering sunlight shone over both banks of the Lerma River. Mexica samurai emerged from their narrow dwellings, joyfully praying for the grace of the Sun God. They took out their long-damp clothes

and blankets to hang in every corner of the camp, allowing the sun to dry them. Garments of different ranks in red, yellow, black, and white turned the simple wooden fort into a colorful street. The quartermasters also took out wet corn cakes and grains, spreading them out in the open area at the center of the fort, trying to minimize the loss of food during the rainy season. The solemn fort turned once more into the grain society of a village.

Outside the open wooden fort was a fence set apart for a specific purpose. Under the strict guard of the samurai, the gunpowder craftsmen accompanying the army set up wooden tents in the shade to dry the damp gunpowder. The faint smell of the volcano drifted with the wind, and amidst the swaying grass, many grass snakes avoided and fled far away.

In the spacious wooden cabin at the center of the fort, Xiulote sat with his legs hugged, closely examining the sand table before him, the result of his efforts over several days.

The sand table was small, one meter in length and width. A "river" made of fine sand traversed it from east to west, and at the southwest, it branched into a "lake." Between the river and the lake was a "fortress" fashioned from clay, adorned with little wooden gates, with a shallow stream on the eastern side, representing the Rivermouth Fortress.

The young commander pondered, first pinching out a camp on the level ground east of the "fortress" and then contemplating filling in the castle's moat. He measured the distance from the fortress walls to the riverbank and frowned. Next, he made another camp in the open space south of the fortress, thought for a moment, and placed two more strongholds even further south as a precaution.

Xiulote then turned his gaze west, looking at the miniature wooden "water gate" and the narrow channel between the river and the lake. He again corrected the positions of the channel and the fortress's western wall based on his memory. After that, he placed a tiny wooden boat on the channel, measuring the distance from the wall to the boat, and fell into silent contemplation.

After a while, he mimicked the movement of the boat. The wooden boat slowly moved forward from the start of the firing range until it reached the water gate. He calculated a time in his head, then introduced another boat to protect the water gate under the support of the castle, countering the first boat. The young commander again calculated for a moment and then deeply furrowed his brow.

At that moment, the voice of a guard rang out from outside the wooden cabin, along with an equally courteous reply.

"To the valiant Head Eagle Warrior, Ters extends his greetings!"

"Ters, there's no need for such formalities. The light of the Sun God shines upon us all! I have a matter to report to His Highness."

The wooden door creaked open, and the sunlight from outside penetrated in, illuminating the dimly lit cabin. A tall figure wearing Leather Armor and a Beast Helmet walked in.

Xiulote looked up and waved at Ters, who was smiling goofily. The young samurai from the Holy City bowed his head in earnest respect and carefully closed the wooden door behind him. The once young boy had now become His Highness, and he was now the guard at His Highness's door.

The young commander then smiled warmly at the fully-armed Bertade.

"Bertade, the weather is so hot, hurry up and take off that outfit!"

The Head Warrior nodded, removed his Beast Helmet, revealing a shorn head and a face with tattooed features, fearsome as a fierce beast. Next, he took off the Leather Armor to display the long robe underneath, completely soaked in sweat.

"Your Highness, these past two days I have taken a squad of Jaguar nobility warriors to investigate Otapan City to the north. The Otomi have nearly completed their spring plowing, and it seems they are mustering their forces, starting to mobilize the militia."

Xiulote pondered for a moment and spoke slowly.

"The Otomi cannot be neglected; the warriors must be on high alert. Have two envoys sent again to condemn the Otomi for their breach of trust. They accepted food from the Alliance and agreed to a peace treaty, but they were only going through the motions. They didn't truly move south to plunder the Tarasco villages before spring plowing! Let's see how they respond.

Furthermore, invite Otapan City-State separately to join the campaign against the Tarasco. Land, as well as luxurious Featherwear, Gold and Silver, gemstones, and even trade in foodstuffs can be offered to them.

I am thinking about whom I met during the last negotiations, Jiowar from Otapan City, wasn't it? Have the envoys visit him personally in my name. Also, I wonder if the old Priest Olte is in Guamare or Otapan. If he's in the Ototpan Mountain City, they could gauge his opinion as well."

Bertade nodded in obedience. He pondered for a moment, then spoke.



"Your Highness, I will arrange for the envoys immediately after my return. However, the Otomi are like grass in the wind, faltering and unpredictable. They always give lip service to the Alliance. I fear it will be difficult to reach a genuine agreement. Even if an agreement were reached, the army must not relax its vigilance. They are like lurking Coyotes, ready to pounce and bite at a vital spot."

The young Commander laughed heartily.

"Bertade, you're quite right. After the spring plowing is finished, the Otomi have the ability to mobilize for war, and they can no longer be trusted. I am only trying to delay for two weeks, hold the wooden fort, and wait for the eastbound fleet to return, bringing a large force of reinforcements from the Holy City.

"Once Annatri's Naval Forces return, cutting off both banks of the Lerma River, the Tarasco will find it difficult to attack from the north. And when the new Legion arrives, the Alliance will take advantage in military strength, with the autumn harvest also approaching. At that time, we can use the army to threaten the Otomi's harvest, forcing them to demonstrate their sincerity in peace with the Alliance with tangible actions!"

Bertade smiled knowingly, his tattooed face trembling with a touch of solemnity. Then, he glanced toward the southern window and continued speaking.

"The Tarasco Naval Forces to the south are very active. Their scouts have repeatedly appeared around the three wooden forts, often making provocative and aggressive gestures. The samurai within the forts are eager for battle, finding it hard to restrain themselves."

Xiulote thought for a moment and then nodded slightly.

"Ever since the rumors of the Sun God's blessing spread, the samurai's morale has been boosted, and they are eager for battle. Such fighting spirit should not be suppressed but guided. Our current strategy is to maintain a defensive stance; we should not actively move southward...

Therefore, let's send different squads of a hundred men each day to engage with Tarasco's scouts in battle. For scout warfare, there's no need to take prisoners; military achievements will be judged solely by the heads they bring back! Then, evaluate the performance of all squads involved in the skirmish and reward the leading teams, bestowing upon them honorable titles for their valor in combat!

Yes, this could serve as a psychological refuge for the samurai. Perhaps I should also modify the rules of the ballgame courts to provide some daily entertainment activities."

At this point, the Young Commander took out paper and pen and jotted down the words "basketball" and "football." He thought for a bit and added "horn push" and "tug of war," and with the existing games of javelin throwing, archery, and martial combat, these would make up the Mexica's heptathlon.

Bertade nodded and accepted the order. He looked at the sand table on the ground, and a flash of admiration crossed his face once again. Sometimes, he would wholeheartedly thank the Sun God for blessing the Mexica with such a divinely enlightened king, who possessed wisdom in all things and inventiveness in all aspects.

"Your Highness, the rivermouth fortress has a western water gate, and the western wall controls the rivermouth, blocking the Navigation Forces' move south. This fortress cannot be besieged. It can receive a continuous flow of reinforcements and supplies from along the shores of Lake Cuitzeo."

Watching the sand table, the Head Warrior analyzed slowly, waiting for His Highness's far-sighted strategy.

Xiulote nodded in agreement.

"That's true! The rivermouth fortress can only be assaulted, not besieged. If we strike, it needs to be swift, the quicker the better. The site has crisscrossing rivers, soft soil, and abundant groundwater. The main army can't dig tunnels, nor use gunpowder to blast the walls. Of course, we don't have miners skilled in excavation."

Faced with the concept of new warfare tactics, Bertade seemed enlightened. He was often by His Highness's side, able to constantly learn and keep up with the young thinker's intellect, providing timely suggestions.

"Digging tunnels, using gunpowder to blast walls... Your Highness, Tarasco's seasoned miners can excavate copper mines; Ezpan is one such experienced miner. Once the main army advances into the Patzcuaro Lake region, we can gather civilians, pooling together the experienced elderly miners to perfect Your Highness's tunnel warfare tactics."

Hearing this suggestion, Xiulote laughed heartily; his thoughts briefly drifted before he refocused on the topic at hand.

"Before we attack, three preparations are necessary. The first is to find an opportunity to severely damage the main force of the Tarasco Naval Forces, aiming to destroy as many enemy ships as possible."

At this point, the Young Commander paused briefly, his train of thought becoming clearer. He chose not to elaborate and continued speaking.

"Second is to concentrate our forces to establish a significant advantage and achieve a breakthrough as soon as possible. The autumn harvest is a critical juncture; we cannot delay past harvest time and give the enemy a chance to muster on a large scale. Hmm, I will send another envoy to the northern general, Osellor, requesting reinforcements. And the military forces from the Capital City must also be transported here as quickly as possible. It takes a month for the ship convoy to make a round trip, able to bring tens of thousands of samurai and three months' worth of provisions for ten thousand men. I need to plan the transportation schedule meticulously."

Xiulote pondered in his mind and noted "transportation" on paper, then smiled faintly.

"Third is the preparation of siege machinery, forging the appropriate siege equipment. Bertade, how is the manufacturing of the three devices I previously ordered coming along?"

The Head Warrior took a moment to reflect, recalling what he had seen at the craftsmen's before his patrol, and slowly nodded.

"Your Highness, the movable light catapult has been researched for nearly a month and has just been completed. We have yet to test the load and range of its ammunition. The light shield car, which covers the archers, is relatively simple and can now be deployed in battle. As for the seven-meter wooden water gate which you requested to be built after the reconnaissance, the craftsmen have only partially reconstructed it; more work is needed."

Upon hearing this, Xiulote laughed with satisfaction.

"Excellent! The light catapult launches paper fireballs wrapped with gunpowder, not requiring high demands for load and range. The light shield car can be as simple as possible; the key is mass production. There's no need for the water gate to be fully reconstructed; I just want to test how it can be effectively destroyed!"

Saying this, the Young Commander stood up tall. He patted the Head Warrior's shoulder affably and exclaimed with a loud laugh.

"The sun shines brightly today, a rare auspicious day indeed. Come, accompany me to see these siege engines!"

#### Chapter 317 - Siege Weapons and the Southern Kingdom

The sun blazed fiercely as Xiulote, wearing a lightweight robe, passed through the alley where clothes were hung to dry, headed toward the north gate of the Wooden Fort. Bertade donned his Leather Armor again, summoned Coles and other guards, and followed closely behind His Highness. Along the way, samurai continuously saluted, shouting "Your Highness" and "Holy Eagle Head Warrior."

The Wooden Fort was limited in size, so the Young Commander had recently established a new camp outside the north gate for the research and development of siege machinery, which also served as a support for defense. As he stepped into the camp, the busy craftsmen saluted in turn, each presenting their latest progress.

The Light Catapult was about two and a half meters tall, and its rotating barrel was correspondingly shortened. It had a triangular stable support at its base, with a width of less than two meters and a length just over two meters. Generally, it was a proportionally scaled-down version of the Human-Powered Catapult Type One, with the overall weight being only about four or five tenths of the original. As such, it could be carried by several civilians and easily loaded onto a large boat and transported to the opposite side of the Lerma River.

Xiulote stood by quietly observing. The craftsmen quickly secured the Light Catapult to the ground, taking only a quarter of an hour. Then, they loaded a pumpkin-sized paper ball filled with ten kilograms of sand into the pouch on the long axis of the barrel. Six or seven gunners took their places, grasping the ropes connected to the short axle with both hands, looking towards His Highness not far away.

With a wave of His Highness' large hand and a command, the gunners shouted in unison, pulling forcefully. The tip of the barrel rose, and the paper ball instantly reached a height of four meters, then was thrown at a slightly inclined angle, tracing a long parabola, and landing beyond the 120-step mark.

Xiulote personally went to check the landing spot of the paper ball, memorized it, then ordered everyone to continue. The more than ten-kilogram paper balls traced varying arcs, with the range remaining stable between 110 and 140 steps. The Young Commander pondered for a moment, then used a wooden stick to draw the parabola on the ground, calculating the height of the paper ball's flight.

A moment later, Xiulote erased the drawings on the muddy ground with his foot, nodding slightly in satisfaction. As long as the Light Catapult could be advanced within ninety steps of the city wall, the Paper Fireballs could be thrown onto the six-meter-high walls. At this distance, as long as the operators wore sturdy Leather Armor and helmets, the enemy's stone bows and arrows could not cause serious injury. The only problem was that the accuracy could not be guaranteed, and the landing points were all up to divine blessing.

The Young Commander praised the craftsmen a few times, ordering them to accelerate production. He then turned his attention to the Light Shield Car.

The front end of the Light Shield Car was a thick wooden board used as a shield, the middle was a small wooden platform for Archers to stand and shoot, the rear end was a long wooden handle for pushing, and at the very bottom were two simple wooden wheels. The front wooden shield was finger-thick, about two meters wide, and about the height of a person. The upper part of the wooden shield had three shooting openings, which could simultaneously protect three Longbow Warriors shooting. The long handles had four grips, and by bending their bodies slightly, two people could push the manned shield car forward.

Overall, this type of Light Shield Car was essentially a two-wheeled cart loaded with shields.

The Shield Car was a long-established siege weapon. Even a hundred years later, in the face of light cannon fire, the Heavy Shield Car still performed reasonably well. The Tarasco people had neither heavy crossbows nor firearms, so the front of the Light Shield Car did not need to be reinforced with leather or metal, nor needed to be filled with bulletproof mud.

Xiulote took out a Longbow and shot several times from forty steps away. Afterwards, he carefully examined the depth to which the War Arrows penetrated the wood, nodding in approval.

"Mass produce the shield cars, the shields do not need to be so thick, they can be slightly simplified. I will allocate a batch of captive civilians here, we must produce at least two hundred cars within a month!"

Upon hearing this, the head of the craftsmen knelt on the ground, nodding in agreement.

Lastly, Xiulote checked the replica Water Gate. The wooden Water Gate was only half completed, and its thickness was increased according to the standard design. He first let the samurai chop at it with Bronze Axes, and the dull "dut dut" sound followed. After a while, the Young Commander slightly shook his head. Then, he had the samurai take out chisels and Stone Hammers to destroy key joints, calculating the time in his mind, yet still shaking his head repeatedly.

After a moment of contemplation, the Young Commander called over the steward of the Gunpowder, giving a few instructions. Soon, the Gunpowder Craftsmen brought hundreds of kilograms of well-

preserved Gunpowder, sealed it beside the Water Gate, and carefully ignited the long fuse before quickly running away.

After a long moment, under the tense gaze of everyone, a loud "boom" of an explosion suddenly occurred, shattering wood and mud flying about. Fierce flames rose from the exploded Water Gate, sending plumes of black smoke into the air. The heat wave swept over, bringing a pungent smell, forcing everyone to step back. The fiery blaze of the explosion continued for a full quarter hour, finally beginning to diminish.

Two quarters of an hour later, Xiulote called over five brave Samurai, instructing them to wear water-soaked Cotton Armor and wield huge Stone Hammers to approach. The "bang bang" of loud impacts was followed by the "snap crack" of breaking sounds, as the still burning wooden door abruptly completely fractured, then collapsed into pieces.

Seeing this, Xiulote let out a hearty laugh. As he watched the charred wood pieces flying about and sparks scattering, he finally felt somewhat confident! Behind him, Bertade also displayed a joyful smile.

The five samurai then reported back. Their faces were blackened with soot, and even their hair had been singed by the flames. The Young Commander loudly praised them a few times, then instructed the samurai to rest in the southern Wooden Fort. Afterward, he turned around, gazing towards the southern bank of the Rivermouth Fortress, his thoughts drifting far away.

Chapter 318 - Siege Weapons and the Southern Kingdom\_2

"The Naval Forces will not return for another two weeks, bringing with them reinforcements and supplies, as well as the latest news from the Capital City. The Southern Army must have already set out, but who knows what their situation is now..."

Xiulote's gaze remained to the south, over the vast Lerma River, beyond the unknown Lake Region, all the way to the heart of the southern Kingdom.



The golden sunlight poured down from the sky, casting brilliant ripples on Lake Patzcuaro. From the villages around the Lake Region, thousands of canoes arrived in a ceaseless flow, transporting the conscripted supplies and Militia. Then, the massive fleet split into two groups, one heading north and the other south.

The sunlight fell on people's faces, revealing varied expressions. The Tarasco Samurai, in charge of management, barked out orders, urging the sailors and Militia to quicken their pace, their faces stern and detached. Upon hearing the commands, the sailors rowed with all their might, their faces unable to conceal their exhaustion. They had been called upon by the Kingdom, busily transporting tens of thousands of soldiers and accompanying supplies for a whole month.

The Militia on the boats clutched their newly issued Copper Spears, their faces filled with the unease of the unknowns of war, and with worries about the future of their villages. The Kingdom had issued strict conscription orders, and the Lake Region near the Capital City had been urgently mobilized. They had no choice but to leave behind their newly sown fields, following the fearsome Samurai to board boats bound for unknown destinations.

"Where are we going to fight? When can we go home?" Weizti, with his head wrapped in a turban, asked in a low voice when the overseeing Samurai wasn't looking.

On the rocking small boat, the young Militia faced each other, showing puzzled expressions. Chiwaco, a Militia in his forties, pulled out a yellowed cloth bag, deeply inhaled the fragrance of the herbs, and a satisfied smile appeared on his face. Then, his expression calmed, and he replied in an equally deep voice,

"We're heading north, to fight against a detachment of the Mexica. There aren't many enemies there, and their stone fortresses are very hard, better than going south. As for returning, at the earliest, it'll be a year!"

"A year?!" Turban-wrapped Weizti exclaimed in shock, drawing the fierce gaze of the overseeing Samurai. All the Militia simultaneously bowed their heads and shut their mouths, like obedient turkeys. After a while, when the Samurai's gaze shifted, Weizti again spoke in a low voice,

"In a little over a month, it will be time to harvest the pumpkins, then the corn and beans. Relying solely on the women and children at home is not enough. Are we really going to be gone for a year?"

Old Militia Chiwaco scoffed, took another sniff of the herbs, and slowly said,

"You're still thinking about the fields and harvest at home? Survive first! Militia like us are just fuel for the fire on the battlefield. The Samurai don't care about the lives of the Militia; they'll throw us where it's easiest to die. If you're captured by the cruel Mexica Jaguar, just wait to have your chest cut open and be sacrificed to the spirits!"

Hearing the name Mexica Jaguar, the young Militia shuddered. Those terrifying figures wearing Beast Helmets and yellow Leather Armor had been spoken of in the Kingdom for a long time, equated to the Evil Demons in the legends from the western volcanoes.

After a while, Weizti asked, trembling,

"We have the protection of the Chief Divine of the Sun, the Earth Mother Goddess, and the Moon Goddess! We should be able to win this battle, right?"

The many young militiamen all looked toward Chiwaco, the only old militiaman in the village who had survived the previous war.

Chiwaco sighed and carefully put away the package of herbs in his hand. This was his treasure, which kept him calm on the battlefield and helped him find the most suitable escape routes. The old militiaman stood up, looked at the vast fleet to the north and south, then at the clearing sky, and heaved another deep sigh.

"Alas! The pumpkins have just been planted, and the elders have mobilized so many militiamen that they can't even think about this year's harvest. Just look at the expressions on these samurais' faces—they look as if they're no different from dead men. This battle, I fear, is doubtful!"

The sighs of the militiamen dissipated into the wind, their voices gradually inaudible. The breeze, however, never ceased; it drifted over the busy Lake Patzcuaro and into the rich and strong Copper Capital, Qinchongcan City. It blew past thousands of craftsmen forging weapons, over a thousand swordsmen wielding bronze axes, and through hundreds of nobles discussing in low voices, finally arriving at the religious center of the city—the magnificent and awe-inspiring circular pyramid, "House of Wind" Akatla.

The five circular Akatla Pyramids were each several dozen meters high, built mainly of different sizes of granite stones, bonded together with corn mortar, standing upon the earth like Divine Mountains. The arrangement of the five pyramids roughly took the shape of a keyhole; their rear ends were stair-stepped pyramid platforms, connected by stone steps to facilitate the movement of priests back and forth.

These platforms extended and converged to form a simple and solemn large platform. Above and below the large platform were complex stone longhouses, sacred dwellings where the Kingdom Priests lived.

At the heart of each pyramid was a core pile of stones, around which layers were stacked to thicken the exterior. The outermost layer was decorated with spiral, circular, and square stone slabs, each engraved with exquisite murals of deities. At the top of the pyramids, different divine symbols were painted, encircled with vibrant patterns, in homage to the five gods that ruled the world.

The three central Akatla Pyramids were the tallest and most ornate, with the additional height of their earthen bases making them forty to fifty meters high, symbolizing the Thrones of the Gods of the three Chief Divinities. They represented the sun's supreme deity of light, Curicaveri; the compassionate and protective Earth Mother Goddess Velavaperi; and Haratana, the Goddess overseeing life and death.

Above the Akatla were temples for venerating the deities, along with pure gold statues, similar to the Great Temple in the Lake Capital City. But unlike the Great Temple, these temples housed many relics of former kings and nobility, and even some mummified remains, like burials on the ground, praying for eternal life after death—a notion somewhat similar to that of Ancient Egypt.

At this very moment, in front of the five temples on Akatla, huge bonfires were lit. The burning Sacred Fire, day and night unceasing, could be seen from the ninety-one towns and villages of the Lake Patzcuaro region—signifying the highest level of war mobilization!

Under the magnificent temple's expanse, hundreds of priests of all ranks bustled before the circular pyramids, setting up awe-inspiring altars. They were preparing to hold a large-scale prayer ceremony, using captured Mexica sacrifices to seek Divine Revelations from the gods, praying for victory in the war.

Near the sacred "House of Wind" Akatla were the sublime Royal Palace buildings, constructed on the hills of the "Palace of Wind" Akatlas. Akatlas, standing several stories high, was surrounded by over a dozen connected stone buildings. Inside these stone buildings were the loyal Royal Warriors, as well as tributes from various City-States. On the outermost side was a small house for spoils of war, storing the heads of fallen enemies and the weapons of these brave foes. In a corner of the house, a few black daggers glinted with cold light.

From afar, the wind's symbolic Palace, expanded multiple times, was now as tall as the divine emblematic House of Wind. And on the overhanging viewing platform in front of the Royal Palace, the King of Tarasco, Su'angua, was draped in yellow regal garments, his head adorned with a heavy Feather Crown, surrounded by gold and bronze decorations, an Envoy of the gods on earth.

The Supreme King bowed his head slightly, his eyes flickering with contemplative light. He paid no attention to the priests' consoling prayers that filled the hearts of the people but looked gravely at the Mexica longbows in front of him and the matching Copper Arrows scattered on the ground.

These formidable weapons, seized from battlefields in both the north and south, were like messengers of the moon Goddess, causing the valiant warriors of the Kingdom to die with ease!

#### Chapter 319 - Tarasco's Response

After the rain cleared, the dazzling sunlight poured down, bringing the Sun God's blessing. The golden dome of the Palace of Wind shone brightly, and the silverware in the great hall glittered with reflected light. On the viewing platform, a series of pleasant copper bells hung. A breeze blew by, and the golden bells swayed with the wind, playing a crisp bell tune.

The sound of the bells awoke the King in contemplation. "Cazonci" Su'angua lifted his head, revealing a young yet resolute face. He had ascended the throne just four years ago, and was only in his twenties this year. The young King looked behind him, where an elder in elegant garments held a wooden tablet, his expression solemn.

"Jinjinni, have you tested the power of this Longbow?"

In the Prepetcha language, Jinjinni means "Hummingbird," and the Capital City Qinchongcan is the "Land of the Hummingbird." The elegant elder, carrying such a noble traditional name, was clearly a member

of the illustrious Nobility. In fact, he had been serving as the Chief Minister for over twenty years, under three generations of Kings.

Chief Minister Jinjinni nodded seriously and responded in a grave tone.

"Your Majesty, I have personally observed. The Mexica's new Longbow is extremely powerful, at least twice that of the Tlaxcalan Bow! Within a hundred and forty paces, it can lob projectiles and wound Light Armor Militia; within ninety paces, it can shoot and kill Leather Armor Samurai!"

Hearing this result, Su'angua's face showed shock as he abruptly stood up. As a Monarch who had been to battle, he calculated briefly and exclaimed in astonishment.

"The stone forts in the North and South are mostly only three to four men high. To effectively kill enemy Leather Armor Samurai, Archers and stone-throwers must shoot at least from within fifty paces. Given the range and power of this Longbow, in front of the Mexica Longbow Warrior, won't the flatland fortresses be completely defenseless?!"

Jinjinni watched the young King and nodded earnestly.

"Yes, Your Majesty. Under the onslaught of the Mexica Longbow Warriors, the wooden forts along the northern bank of the Lerma River held out for only six or seven days before they all fell. And in the southern state of Xitauqualo, the outermost ring of stone forts has already been lost, and now they are struggling to defend the second ring of mountain forts. Under the attack of the fierce fish from the East, the lives of the Samurai and Militia are dying off like freshly spawned fish eggs."

King Su'angua's face was as somber as water.

"What's the latest situation on the southern and northern fronts?"

The elegant elder pondered for a moment before handing over the wooden tablet in his hand, and then began describing the terrain in detail.

"The Mexica's main army on the southern front has nearly thirty thousand Samurai, which is the enemy's main force. Being able to mobilize at this time of the year, they must be direct vassals of the Texcoco Lake District's Royal Family, the true core troops of the Mexica Alliance. Their Commander is Mexica's 'Twilight of the End' Iskali, a seasoned old general. However, with the increasing size of the army, the southern front's Supreme Commander will inevitably be the new King 'Water Sprite' Ahuizotl, who is also your defeated foe."

Su'angua lifted his head in recollection and nodded slowly after a long pause.

"Four years ago, shortly after my ascension, Ahuizotl led an attack. I personally led the army to defend the state of Xitacualco for months. Using the Naval Forces and Militia to repeatedly harass their supply lines, we finally repelled the Mexica. Then taking advantage of the momentum, we defeated several legions and secured a glorious victory! In fact, it was a tough battle; 'Water Sprite' is no easy adversary!"

At that, a wry smile appeared on Su'angua's face.

"Two years ago, Tizoc ascended the throne, and I was pleased for quite some time. Tizoc's coronation war chose the Otomi people, and our Kingdom was poised for action, halting the extermination campaign against the northern Tekos. I then led the troops again and clashed with Ahuizotl by the banks of the Lerma River, feeling profoundly the difficulty of the opponent. However, I did not expect that, just

a few months later, Ahuizotl would murder his brother and ascend the throne in the Lake Capital City. The civil strife had barely ceased, and with barely half a year of recuperation, he had mobilized a huge army to attack. The Mexica people are indeed a bloodthirsty and warlike nation!"

Upon hearing this, Jinjinni saluted with grave respect and spoke earnestly.

"The Mexica people inherit chaos, honor strength above all, and revel in slaughter every day. They are the barbaric tribes that the Chief Divine, the Sun God, abhors, the evil demons from the western volcanoes! Not long after the Mexica's failed expedition against the Otomi, with heavy casualties, they only managed to take Xilotepec City. Logically speaking, the various City-States of the Mexica should not be this enthusiastic about war. As long as we resist this sudden attack during the busy farming season, and once all the Warriors and Militia from the regions are fully mobilized, victory will eventually be ours!"

Su'angua pondered for a moment, nodded slightly, and continued to wait for the Chief Minister's analysis.

"The Mexica army on the northern front has only ten thousand Samurai, among which there are many Longbowmen. Their commander is 'God of Death' Xiulote, said to be a teenager of just over ten years. He is a branch of the Mexica Royal Family, the grandson of the current High Priest Xutel, and also the fiancé of Ahuizotl's eldest daughter. Both commanders of the southern and northern fronts are Ahuizotl's confidants, and they have united the Priesthood and the Nobility."

Hearing this, Su'angua asked in surprise.

"Defeats on the northern front keep coming in, first losing the wooden fort outposts, then suffering ambushes by the river. A couple of thousand Samurai and tens of thousands of Militia have been lost... I thought we were contending with an experienced veteran, but to think it was just a child!"



Chief Minister Jinjinni shook his head and explained cautiously.

"Your Majesty, this is no ordinary child. Spies lurking in hiding report that shortly after the death of Montezuma I, 'God of Death' Xiulote was born. At the time of his birth, there was an omen in the sky, the morning star shone brightly, and he was born with ancient wisdom. Later, he personally killed the old King Tizoc and was named as the heir to the Royal Family. There are rumors that he is the reincarnation of an ancient Toltec craftsman, able to craft various extraordinary devices, and the Mexica Longbow is his invention!"

#### Chapter 320 - Tarasco's Response\_2

Upon hearing the Chief Minister's words, King Su'angua looked solemn and skeptical. As a youthful monarch, though not deeply devout, he still found it difficult to fully comprehend matters of the divine.

"In that case, we must still be vigilant and cautious. It seems we should send another contingent of reinforcements to the northern route."

Jinjinni hesitated for a moment before speaking softly.

"Your Majesty, the enemy to the north is not too numerous. The lands on both sides of the Lerma River have been temporarily abandoned, and the kingdom has retreated to fortresses along the rivermouth and the line. In the defenses of Akanbaro State, there are already six thousand samurai and twenty thousand militia stationed. Provided we do not rashly engage in combat, they are sufficient to withstand twenty to thirty thousand Mexica samurai... In half a month, the kingdom can allocate another ten thousand militia to the northern route, but the samurai must wait for support from the Chapala Lake Region."

Su'angua paced back and forth, recalling the kingdom's military deployments. He had always personally controlled the most crucial military mobilizations.

"With Lake Patzcuaro region as the core, the samurai in the hands of the royal family number twenty-five thousand. Other well-trained spear militia number five thousand, and five thousand reconstructed barbarian mercenaries. Now, with months of fighting, the samurai on both southern and northern fronts have suffered a staggering loss of over three thousand. The capital must retain at least two thousand samurai, leaving only twenty thousand samurai and ten thousand elite militia available for deployment.

In the face of Mexica raids, over twenty thousand militia have fallen, and around fifty thousand have been committed to combat. Militia are being urgently mobilized from all over, with massive conscription of village adults, temporarily setting aside the autumn harvest."

Su'angua bore a bitter smile. He had painstakingly managed for a long time, been undefeated in the conquests of the west and north, yet he still found it difficult to withstand the vast forces from the East. This year's busy farming season lacked sufficient manpower, and the autumn harvest was bound to be significantly less productive.

"Now, in the northern state of Akanbaro, there are six thousand samurai and twenty thousand militia stationed. In the southern state of Xitaqualo, over ten thousand samurai and thirty thousand militia have been deployed. The remaining three thousand samurai..."

The King pondered for a long time, recalling the kingdom's topography of the north and the south, before he finally asked.

"What do the marshals of the north and the south say?"

Chief Minister Jinjinni thought for a while and then replied earnestly.

"The latest letter was a report from a week ago. The southern Commander-in-Chief Quiyus said the battle is extremely fierce, with ceaseless combat day and night at the stone forts in the mountains. Mexica forces, counting their longbow warriors by the thousands, have besieged several key forts, attacking them daily. Their archers even approached within sixty paces, shooting under the cover of shields at the castle's bowmen. They also constructed a roaring wooden beast that hurls huge stones into the stone forts, immediately deciding life and death upon impact."

"Quiyus" means eagle, a sacred hereditary title. Southern Commander-in-Chief Quiyus is the descendant of Tariguri, the first king of the Cazonci, and also King Su'angua's uncle, a trusted member of the royal family.

A look of confusion and shock reappeared on King Su'angua's face.

"What is this roaring wooden beast?"

After thinking for a moment, Jinjinni answered.

"It appears to be some kind of siege weapon, reportedly an invention of the 'God of Death' Xiulote. Quiyus has already dispatched a large number of samurai and militia to harass the Mexica's rear. However, the enemy's supply line is not long and they were prepared early, having built several intermediate supply forts. Daily casualties include a hundred samurai from both sides, and double that for the militia."

Su'angua looked exceedingly grave. Since the war had begun, he had seldom heard any good news.

"And the northern commander, Ospai? What does he say?"

Jinjinni slightly smiled and shook his head.

"Naval Forces Legion Commander Marshal Ospai reports the situation is optimistic, facing little pressure. His enemies are few, and the Mexica naval forces have already returned to the east. Now, with a large-scale deployment of our naval forces, the northern enemies are confined within wooden forts. He has requested to redeploy troops from the southern defense line to besiege one or two wooden forts. He also invites you to deploy the grand army to utterly eliminate the Mexica offshoots in the north!"

Hearing of the advantage in the north, Su'angua's expression slightly relaxed. He shook his head and chuckled softly, rebuking.

"This belligerent crocodile! Tell him, do not redeploy the defense line troops. Our strategy for the north is to wait at ease and hold firmly, not to venture out. The enemies to follow will only increase, and he must hold the rivermouth fort and southern forts resolutely! Furthermore, I have no grand army for him, and it's of little matter if we temporarily yield the lands along the Lerma River. Let him fully leverage the naval forces' power and harass the enemy's supply lines!"

The Chief Minister bowed his head to accept the command, a prudent strategy. He made a note on a wooden board, then continued to watch the king.

Su'angua pondered for a moment and finally made a decision, issuing a loud command.

"The focal point of this war is the south! I will personally lead two thousand Copper-axe Guards, five thousand spear militia, and five thousand barbarian mercenaries to support the southern front! Leave three thousand samurai directly under me in the capital, you assess the situation and arrange accordingly. Likewise, the mobilized militia will primarily support the south, with the north supplemented as needed!"

The king paused for a moment, his face displaying a majestic expression.

"Jinjinni, when can the reinforcements from outside the Lake Region arrive?!"

The Chief Minister bowed slightly.

"The western Chapala Lake Region has mobilized, and all the great nobility there have declared loyalty to the king. However, due to the busy farming season, they have temporarily promised to deploy ten thousand samurai and twenty thousand militia, planning to split them into two groups, transported consecutively by water to the north. The first batch of fifteen thousand reinforcements will arrive within a month, the second batch in two months."

Anger flashed across Su'angua's face.

"The Chapala Lake Region has a population of over six hundred thousand. The local nobility possess two thousand samurai, and if all able-bodied men are conscripted, they could mobilize up to eighty thousand militiamen! Send an envoy to rebuke them, demanding that the reinforcements be doubled!"