

Civilization 33

Chapter 33 - Rescue

The morning sunlight illuminated the entire world, and the gentle breeze woke the sleeping people. It was as if the Feathered Serpent Divine had bestowed light and wisdom, promising peace and prosperity to all things.

Xiulote knew that today was an auspicious day. According to the Aztec Calendar, it was the twelfth day of the first month of the new year, representing herbs and salvation, symbolized by the herbs in a bone basin, belonging to the divine jurisdiction of the Feathered Serpent Divine Quetzalcoatl.

Xiulote rose early. He was dressed in the formal attire of a priest, and his feather crown once again covered his forehead, this time additionally adorned with blue, red, and green feathers.

The Feathered Serpent Divine is one of the four most important deities, the Wind God, the god of peace and prosperity, of light and wisdom, lord of the West. On the first divine day of the new year, a sacrificial rite had to be held for him. And in the prosperous city-states, this sacrifice often evolved into a New Year's celebration.

In accordance with his priestly duties, Xiulote constructed an altar in the west, then placed a golden disc with a diameter of one foot in the center to symbolize light. Around the disc, he arranged a neat circle of turquoise to symbolize wisdom.

Afterwards, he placed silver bowls at the four corners of the altar, each containing herbs to symbolize healing and salvation. Finally, he inserted blue, red, and green feathers below the golden disc, to signify the embodiment of the Feathered Serpent Divine.

Thus, a simple altar for the Feathered Serpent Divine was completed.

In times of war, all is simplified; in the city-states, the ceremonies were much grander. Xiulote had once attended the New Year's celebration in Teotihuacan. On that day, Moon Plaza would be covered with gold, silver, gemstones, and bright feathers, thousands of people dancing and singing songs of blessing together, old and young, in a scene so beautiful and memorable.

Afterward, the warriors would gather below the stage, laying down their weapons and shedding their leather armor to pay their respects to the Feathered Serpent Divine. They prayed for the wounded to recover and the dying to be saved.

Then Xiulote ascended the stage, chanting the song of the sacrificial rite, his voice passionate and clear, drifting into the distance, like the waves of the Eastern Great Lake:

"...Ultimately, the Feathered Serpent Divine left the crying people,

aboard a raft of green snakes,

carrying the devout priests,

sailing into the endless Great Lake,

towards the distant East.

He bestowed upon them a sorrowful promise:

The flowers of prosperity will return every spring,

just as I, who bless you, shall.

Parting is but a brief withering,

I shall return from the waters of the East,

bringing back peace and prosperity,

bringing back light and wisdom,

to save you once more!"

Not until the chant was finished did the warriors collectively turn eastward and kneel to the ground. They softly called out the name "Quetzalcoatl," praying for the return of the Feathered Serpent Divine. Then, the rite came to an end in silence.

Xiulote wiped the slight sweat from his forehead and took a drink of water. The ceremony had a peaceful, almost mass-like quality to it.

The Feathered Serpent Divine was one of the rarer benevolent deities in the Aztec mythology, disliking bloodshed for his sake and expressly opposing human sacrifice. Hence, the Mexica warriors did not drag out the Otomi captives from the day before and offer them directly to the deity.

But in the eyes of Supreme Commander Totec, the fate of these captives was already sealed. The Mexica warriors had only wandered in a peaceful and serene spiritual world for a morning before they were brought back to the bloody world of war.

Totec first assembled the warriors in formation, prepared to fight at any moment. Then he had a thousand warriors escort over five hundred captured Otomi Warriors to a location an arrow's flight away from the city of Guamare, where they were executed in front of the defending army. A distant wail and a scream arose, soon giving way to silence.

Xiulote lowered his eyes; his principles had already retreated a great deal. He could accept the execution of enemy warriors without a change of expression. As his father had said, once on the battlefield, it was up to fate to decide the life and death of the samurai.

Totec's face hardened, and his brows furrowed slightly. Though the city ramparts were briefly in chaos, the enemy troops did not sally forth. So, the plan to lure the enemy was over, and what followed was the destruction of all the villages.

The commander then instructed a thousand Jaguars and two thousand warriors to continue garrisoning the camp. This force of three thousand would be led personally by him to watch over the city of Guamare.

Xiulote watched as Totec settled into his tent, detachedly pulling out the wooden map board marked with red circles, dividing the remaining five thousand warriors and two thousand militia into seven camps. He pointed to seven positions on the map, and the warriors, with a cruel determination, nodded and left.

As if a great deal of time had passed, Xiulote saw smoke rising in the distance; no sound came on the wind, and the world seemed still peaceful. After a very long while, the warriors returned one by one in formation, with a slight sweat on their faces, as if they had simply gone out for a run.

Their expressions were unchanged, replacing the worn obsidian blades on their war clubs, as blood trickled out from the weapons' crevices.

From the rise of thick smoke to the return of the warriors, not a single figure had fled towards the city of Guamare. Everything was like a silent pantomime; lives vanished in the aftermath, without causing the slightest ripple.

Totec drew red crosses over the seven red circles, conversed briefly with the warriors, glanced through a gap in the tent at the midday sun, and then divided the seven thousand into fourteen groups of five hundred. The warriors dispersed once again.

Seeing all this, the young priest finally grew restless.

Xiulote mustered the courage to walk into the tent and stand before the cold Totec, grabbing the Supreme Commander's strong arm, as a pair of merciless and icy eyes stared back at him.