

## Civilization 341

### Chapter 341 - Battle of Lake Yuriria Part 2

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"Whoosh!" A shrill arrow whistled past Xiulote's head, awakening his long-buried memories. Another "whoosh" followed, as an arrow flew towards him, then the "rip" as it tore through the Leather Armor, and the "thud" as it buried itself in flesh. Hurried footsteps mounted the commander's platform, several trusted aides quickly shielding the front, and then the sound of arrows sinking into shields with two "thwacks."

Watching the enemy's shield wall that completely blocked his view, Osprey regretfully lowered his Longbow. He and Kulucha shot one after another. These four unexpected sneak-attack arrows only managed to wound the tall Samurai who threw himself in the line of fire to protect his master.

Then, he remembered the tall Samurai's appearance and physique, feeling an inexplicable familiarity. Wasn't that the very commander he had been chasing for half a day, determined to recruit as a fierce archer under his command? Next, his thoughts went to the enemy commander: that vaguely familiar average stature, the delicate young face beneath the Feather Crown... Was the Mexica Marshal himself scouting in person?!

A flash of realization struck him, and the "Crocodile" nobility twitched with surprise. He clasped his arm in frustration, stamped his foot with force, filled with regret.

"It's you! It was actually you! It was you that day!!!"

Protected by his trusted aides, Xiulote struggled to get up from the ground. Smelling blood in the air, he anxiously checked Bertade's breathing. The Head Warrior lay on his side in severe pain, unable to move. His eyes widened as he saw the young commander's look of concern and managed a painful smile.

"Your Highness, continue commanding the rear! I am not going to die!"

Xiulote acted as if he hadn't heard. He carefully searched the Head Warrior's body and finally found the arrow wound on his back, just two inches from his neck. The Young Commander finally breathed a sigh of relief, nodded to his loyal Head Warrior, then turned to his trusted aides.

"Take the esteemed Eagle Warrior to the stern, treat him well! Be careful, gently!"

Xiulote then stood up again, peered through the gaps in the shield, and observed the nearby battle. Nearly a hundred enemy ships charged fiercely and were already within forty paces of the flagship, clashing with the frontline Mexica large ships. Many Tarasco big boats approached on fire, burning as they collided.

The "bang bang" of huge impacts continued as dozens of boats crashed into one mass. The Tarasco Samurai didn't wait to stop, leaping onto the enemy ship amidst flames. They swung their Copper Spears and Wooden Shields at the Mexica Samurai wielding War Clubs and vine shields, and a bloody melee ensued.

The lighting of Fire Arrows took time. Facing the enemy's resolute assault, they couldn't manage more than three volleys before they lost the chance to shoot again. The Young Commander looked out to see more and more boats colliding on the lake's surface, both sides' warriors becoming completely entangled in battle!

A loud "boom" resounded as two large ships collided violently, tilting at steep angles. Several warriors from both sides couldn't keep their balance and "plopped" into the water. The captains of both ships then roared loudly in different languages, rushing to engage in personal combat.

A Mexica Samurai just discarded his Longbow and grabbed a War Club when a Long Spear stabbed at him. With no time to pick up a shield, he dodged to the side and raised his club to block, quickly losing his balance. At that moment, another Long Spear came slashing in at an angle. Hearing the sound, the Mexica Samurai glanced out of the corner of his eye but couldn't move in time. His side chilled sharply, and he immediately lost strength.

The Tarasco Samurai, successful with his strike, showed excitement. He vigorously stirred the Copper Spear, rupturing the soft innards, then forcefully yanked it out, bringing forth a spray of hot blood. Looking at the fallen enemy, he laughed triumphantly, only to be stealthily struck from behind by a War Club. In the blink of an eye, with no time to react, the club mercilessly chopped at his neck, the sharp Obsidian edged slicing through skin and severing the left carotid artery.

"Sshhh," blood sprayed wildly, splattering more than a meter away, covering the face and head of the veteran Samurai Necali standing behind. Necali immediately squatted down, raised his shield in defense with his left hand, and quickly wiped his face with his sleeve. Then, he stood up, alert, spitting out the warm liquid that had splashed into his mouth.

"Pah, damned followers of the false gods, their blood is even choking!"

Necali looked around angrily, his pupils constricting sharply. The Tarasco Samurai had already fallen, but three coordinated Militia Long Spears were already stabbing towards him. With little room to dodge on the narrow boat, he barely managed to fend them off several times with his shield before being forced back to the stern of the ship. Then, furious, he threw his War Club and "bang," struck down a young Militia, before reluctantly jumping into the lake.

The young Militia Wei Zi had bloodshot eyes, ready to continue pressing forward, intent on spearing the struggling Mexica warrior swimming away in the lake. But behind him, a pair of calloused hands suddenly yanked him backwards.

"Wei Zi, you blockhead! What time do you think it is, and you're still mindlessly fighting!"

The aged Militia Chiwaco scolded him, his wrinkled face quivering. Then, the old Militia crouched down quickly to check on the young Militia who had been knocked down.

The whistling War Club struck the young Militia who had neither a shield nor Cotton Armor and didn't know to block with the less vital parts of his body. The club hit him square in the chest, its edged pieces cutting through his chest and neck. Unstoppable blood flowed freely, soon covering the old Militia's hands.

Chiwaco shuddered, hurriedly pulled out his bag of Herbs, and took a deep breath. He then stood up, barely regaining his composure, and looked around the troubled lake.

Fire Arrows still rained terrifyingly from the sky, turning into several-meter-long Fire Demons on the water's surface, successively igniting the rear ships. Beyond the burning rear, the Kingdom's Naval Forces were still in chaos. Small boats ran around headlessly, haphazardly fighting with the Mexica small boats. Some large boats were spinning in place, some crashed into each other, and a portion seemed to be turning around?

Chapter 342 - Battle of Lake Yuriria Part 3

The old Militia gazed ahead once more, where the center of the fierce battle raged, with hundreds of large ships crashing into each other, Samurai lords shouting the names of the spirits as they fought in a frenzy. Then, like pumpkins harvested in autumn, the lords tumbled and fell in strings, or split open like

ripe beans, painting the surface of the lake with spreading bright red. Only the flags of the two opposing Commanders-in-Chief were nearly touching, still standing tall like cornstalks.

Chiwaco shivered again and hastily took a puff from his herb pack.

Behind him, Weizti still aimlessly stabbed at the Samurai in the water twice more. Unfortunately, his martial arts skills were inadequate, and he didn't hit the mark. It was only after watching the enemy swim away that he came back to his senses, turned to the fallen Militia, and asked urgently.

"Chiwaco, can he be saved?"

"Save what! He's a goner. Look out for yourself first!"

The old Militia continued searching over the lake, his hoarse and trembling voice calling out relentlessly.

"Woodheads, look carefully! Most of the Samurai lords leading on the boats are dead, what's the point in fighting now! The lords behind haven't caught up, the Mexica are way too many, we can't win this battle!... Quick, call the other woodheads, let's find the nearest small boat. If we wait any longer, it'll be a dead end!"

Hearing the word "death," Weizti was startled and quickly summoned those around him. Five more Long Spears Militia came over, some sober, some cowardly, but they could still hear the summons. The other villagers' Militia, under the lead of the Samurai, were still fighting with red eyes, deaf to anything else. Two Mexica Samurai were attracted by the shouting but were blocked by several Long Spears in formation at the stern of the boat, unable to approach for the moment.

"Right, over there! It's the closest, let's swim to that small boat!" Chiwaco suddenly brightened, pointing to a forlorn small boat floating about twenty steps away, with the bodies of Mexica Militia lying atop it.

The young Weizti stared, and the hundreds of small boats on both sides were still locked in a deadly grapple, with screams occasionally marking another's fall into the water. Once the small boats of either side made contact on the water, the Militia would fight mercilessly until one boat's crew was entirely slain. Many unmanned boats thus drifted on the lake, strewn with fresh red in their wake. After watching for a moment, Weizti finally saw the narrow, fragile boat, and the red dripping from its hull set unease within him.

"Chiwaco, are we going to abandon the sturdy large boat for that shaky little one?!"

The other Militia, while confronting the increasingly numerous Mexica Samurai, turned their heads to look.

"Weizti, are you stupid? Large boats are the Mexica's target, from afar a bulls-eye, up close a battlefield, you can't escape quickly enough, of course, we should get on the small boat!"

"Ah, Chiwaco, are we to become deserters?!" Weizti's voice trembled, fraught with alarm.

The old Militia hissed in exasperation, no longer paying attention to the fool. He glanced around at the surrounding Militia and called out softly.

"Woodheads, if you want to live, follow me when the time comes!"

Afterward, Chiwaco crouched down and carefully searched the deck, finding two unlit Fire Arrows. He curiously felt the round paper casings; how could something the size of a mango turn into a Fire Demon of several meters?

The old Militia didn't have time to ponder further, hastily tucking one Fire Arrow into his bosom. Then he stood up, mimicked the motions he had seen from a Mexica Archer using a Fire Igniter, and abruptly hurled the other Fire Arrow towards the confronting Mexica Samurai.

"Into the water! Go!" Having thrown the Fire Arrow, the old Militia didn't pause at all, diving into the lake and then swimming desperately towards the small boat twenty-odd steps away. The Militia hesitated for a fraction, then hurriedly discarded their encumbering Long Spears and dived into the water as well. As natives of the lake, their swimming ability was unquestioned; they resembled young fish chasing the old lead fish, quickly heading away from the battlefield.

Seeing the thrown Fire Arrow, several Mexica Samurai showed terror and quickly retreated. They were well aware of the destructive power of burning Gunpowder Arrows. After a moment, though, the Fire Arrow lay still, not even sparking. The warriors exchanged glances, then looked at the rapidly swimming Tarasco Militia, too ashamed to speak.

Weizti closely followed Chiwaco, furiously dog-paddling through the water. He looked up to see a clumsy figure still struggling and swimming ahead, and anger surged within him again. So, the young Militia dived powerfully towards the Mexica Samurai and kicked him fiercely twice.

Hit hard, Necali cried out in pain and then "glug glug" swallowed several mouthfuls of lake water, drifting away from the center due to the kicks.

Weizti felt around his body, too poor to even possess a Dagger, and had to let him be. Turning his head back, he saw the old Militia had already reached the edge of the small boat and probably wouldn't wait for him alone. With that thought, he turned around, casting one last glance at the furiously burning lake, and engraved the nightmarish scene deep in his mind.

The tranquil Lake Yuriria was dyed red, countless large and small boats floating silently like coffins. Beneath them drifted numerous bodies, along with spreading blood. Fresh corpses continued to fall from the embattled large boats. In the front, where the fighting was fiercest, thousands of Samurai were battling bravely, their roars shaking heaven and earth. And at the very center, the Naval Forces' flagship was still beating war drums, the Kingdom's Commander-in-Chief still calling out fiercely in the fight!

Confronted with the intense scene, Weizti was momentarily transfixed, letting out a deep sigh. Then he briskly turned and, without further pause, swam straight toward the hope of escape.

#### Chapter 343 - Battle of Lake Yuriria Part 3 (Added for leader Green Vine Cloud)

The sky-shattering war cries echoed across the lake's surface, drowning out the howling wind. The drifting smoke from the flames rose into the sky, obscuring the brilliant sunlight. Between the sky and the lake, there was now a somber darkness.

Xiulote once again stood tall on the high altar, greeted by the cheers of his trusted aides. Ters, holding a man-sized Great Shield, took the position of the Head Warrior, shielding him at the front. The Young Commander surveyed the noisy battlefield with his gaze, assessing the progress of the battle.

Directly ahead, the squadron led by Ospei had charged within thirty to forty steps, clashing violently with the Mexica Naval Forces' front line. The flag of the Crocodile Marshal flew high, with dozens of desperately rowed sturdy boats carrying the elite family samurai, breaking through barriers fiercely charging towards Black Wolf's flagship once more.



The frontline Commander, Annatri, looked back again, gazing at the stable flagship in the rear. Seeing His Highness standing once more, her heart settled slightly. Not seeing the tall and calm Head Warrior, she was filled with worry.

Suddenly, the female warrior glared ahead, remembering the stealth attack of the enemy's flagship, her anger erupting like a volcano.

"Shameful ratfish releasing hidden arrows!"

Annatri pointed with her spear, leading the dozens of surrounding big boats to speed forward, violently colliding with the Tarasco flagship. As the two huge boats collided sharply, the nimble female warrior let out a loud yell and charged forward with her spear. On the shaking deck, she moved as if on flat ground, her three-meter spear cleverly avoiding shields to stab a blocking Tarasco samurai to death. Then, identifying the enemy's leader, she again raised her spear to press forward.

Ospei half-knelt to stabilize himself on the swaying big boat. With a quick glance, he identified the leader of the opposing big boat, the spear-wielding female warrior. The "Crocodile" Nobility did not hesitate to pull out an expensive Bronze Axe from his waist, stepped forward heavily, and hurled it with all his might.

Annatri moved forward quickly, always watching the opposing commander. Her pupils suddenly contracted. She jumped back like a butterfly, her body swiftly tilting to the side, and then forcefully swept aside the whistling thrown axe. The Bronze Axe, spinning, "crack" struck the side of the big boat, embedding half an inch into the wood. Carried by this force, the female warrior lightly landed back on her own boat.

Annatri's eyes widened, staring at the expensive hidden weapon throw axe, utterly furious.

"Ratfish! Still ambushing!"

Ospei fiercely spit out a bloody spittle. Without responding, he again drew a Bronze Axe.

The clash between both sides' Naval Commanders was but a moment. As the two splendid big boats stabilized slightly, the samurai on board immediately rushed into battle together. To support their commander, nearly a hundred nearby big boats converged and collided, forming a connected battleground on the lake's surface, immobile. Then, nearly two thousand samurai from both sides, dressed in different war clothes, entangled in a deadly struggle using spears and clubs.

These were the elite warriors from beside the commanders, mostly loyal and valiant, fighting agilely and fiercely. At this critical moment in the battle, their combat carried a hint of madness.

Six or seven Tarasco samurai formed a small formation with alternating Copper Spears, successively stabbing three Mexica samurai to death. Another Mexica samurai, seeing this, his eyes turned bloodshot. He fiercely threw his War Club forward and then, holding a shield, rushed forward desperately. The War Club struck, throwing the frontline Copper Spear into disarray; then the charging shield knocked it aside. The spears behind continuously stabbed randomly, finally circling the edge of the shield and "puch" plunged into the thigh of the samurai. The samurai cried out in pain, using his free right arm to forcefully wrap around several Copper Spears, refusing to let go.

The opposing Spear Formation was immediately halted, and the Mexica samurai behind quickly closed in. In close-quarter combat, the Tarasco Copper Spears could no longer be effective. The Obsidian Clubs swung powerfully, striking precisely at the opponents' heads and necks, with a practiced simplicity. In but a dozen breaths, the faces of the opposing Tarasco samurai were struck, their throats slashed, each one falling backwards in death.

As the warriors looked back again to check on their comrade in the middle of the spears, they saw that he had already died, eyes open and skewed, lying in a pool of blood, unmoving. His right arm was still wrapped around several Copper Spears, refusing to let go. The warriors paused in silence for a few moments, then turned again, charging into the chaotic heart of the battle.

In the center of the melee, more elite Tarasco warriors formed a Copper Spear Formation, unleashing powerful force on the narrow big boats. A Mexica Longbow Warrior, seeing his comrades continuously being stabbed to death, his eyes red, lit the Fire Arrows in his hand and hurled them into the dense Spear Formation. A moment later, the Gunpowder quickly ignited, setting several Tarasco warriors in the center alight; the Spear Formation abruptly dispersed. The burning warriors screamed terribly, sounded nothing like human cries, and then leaped into the lake.

After being burned multiple times, the Tarasco warriors finally grasped the mechanism of the Fire Demon. They followed suit, finding the Fire Igniter and Fire Arrows on the opposing deck, mimicking the lighting of the paper-wrapped gunpowder bag exteriors, then hurling them towards areas crowded with Mexica people. Some Copper Spear warriors hesitated slightly, turning themselves into torches. More warriors hurled them preemptively; the Gunpowder Arrows delaying in exploding, rolling about, then igniting indiscriminately between friend and foe.

Soon, towering flames arose everywhere, gradually spreading across the tightly connected hundred boats. Then, the remaining Fire Arrows on the decks sequentially exploded, slowly igniting an immensely huge torch. Denser smoke soared even higher, entirely blackening the flags of both sides' Naval Commanders.

#### Chapter 344 - Battle of Lake Yuriria Part 2 (Extra for Alliance Leader Green Vine Cloud)\_2

Watching the spectacular fireworks in front of him, Xiulote stood solemnly on the high platform of the great vessel, constantly issuing instructions. The flag bearers waved their flags, and the short horn sounds conveyed the orders to disperse to both sides, while the flag signals circling forward directed the path ahead.

Black Wolf's flagship slowly retreated, commanding the longbow trusted aides on dozens of large vessels behind him to steadily lob arrows at the distant enemy, igniting the Tarasco great vessels that were arriving in succession.

Then, the center group of dozens of Mexica great vessels further spread out to both sides, avoiding the increasingly grand torches. The wings of over a hundred large vessels enveloped the front, dispersing the opponent's randomly charging small boats. Afterward, the slender warships accelerated all the way, circling to the rear of the enemy, and used fire arrows to ignite the Tarasco great vessels still in chaos.

Over five hundred Mexica small boats followed closely behind the large vessels, gradually unfolding from the chaotic wings. The fleet moved as nimbly as a school of fish, gracefully weaving through. The longbow militia on the boats used their exquisite archery to shoot the samurai close range.

Under Xiulote's command, two battlefields gradually formed on the lake surface, one in front and one behind. The battlefield in the front was surrounded by flames, and both naval forces engaged in a fierce slaughter, with the Naval Commander personally fighting on the front lines. In the rear battlefield, flames blazed brightly, the Tarasco Naval Forces unilaterally suffered the shooting, unable to recover from the chaos.

As for the small boats fighting on the outer perimeter, they had no impact on the overall situation of the battlefield, and no one paid them any attention at this point, completely lacking command. The Militia gradually slowed down the brutal fight, Mexica small boats circled in place, while Tarasco small boats began to scatter and flee south. Among the southward fleeing, a blood-stained small boat was inconspicuous, yet it paddled swiftly, accurately escaping toward the rivermouth upstream.

On the rear battlefield, as the calls of the trusted aides of Ospie passed from one to another, the Chapala Legion Commander Pengguari finally woke from his fearful stupor.

He looked toward the distant battlefield, where the flag of the Crocodile Marshal was submerged in thick smoke, seemingly in dire straits. He observed the large vessels burning all around, with the Mexica Naval Forces rapidly closing in from both wings, launching Netherfire in succession. He looked again at the anxious face of his trusted aide, his own expression fluctuating, with murder in his eyes.

The trusted aides of Ospie were visibly agitated, urgently pleading once more,

"Respected Chapala Feather, the Marshal is engaged in a death struggle just a few dozen steps from the enemy's flagship. The rear army of the Chapala Legion still has over a hundred great vessels! Please, lead the rear army in a charge immediately, we still have a chance to achieve victory!"

Hearing this, the Chapala Feather looked dignified, silent in thought. He looked around him, the samurai of the legion controlling their large vessels, morale low. Their expressions were panicked, waiting in unrest for the Legion Commander's orders.

On the outer perimeter of the ships, Mexica small boats continuously attacked swiftly, firing "whooshing" long arrows, then turning to flee. These long arrows were shot at tricky angles, occasionally piercing shields, fatally shooting exposed Chapala samurai. On both front sides, Mexica large vessels of similar numbers gradually approached, firing terrifying volleys of fire arrows that ignited the outermost vessels. And in the far front, there were still hundreds of enemy large vessels, spread out in a loose formation.

"Where is there any chance of victory? And where lies a chance for survival? The Chapala Legion cannot be completely destroyed here!"

Pengguari thought rapidly. He too was a commander seasoned in battle, and as long as he suppressed the fear of the unknown in the legends, he could make a wise decision.

"Escaping southwards upstream against the current will take three to four days, and we will inevitably be pursued by the Mexica Naval Forces, with the slower large vessels not knowing how many will be lost! Yet if the Marshal survives, and returns to the northern defenses, the retribution for the aftermath is unavoidable... Therefore, the chance for survival lies downstream, to the north!"

Thinking this, Chapala's "Feather" nodded, smiling as he looked at Marshal's trusted aide.

"Good, we charge north!"

The Legion Commander's bird flag finally waved, rapid beats of the war drums sounded, relaying the order to accelerate north. Pengguari's flagship gradually picked up speed. The remaining fleet, now with a newfound backbone, swarmed together, surrounding and heading north with it. Over a hundred large vessels, more than three hundred small ones, laden with the Chapala Legion, raced toward the northern battlefield. This was the last force of the Tarasco Naval Forces!

Xiulote's pupils shrank as he saw over a hundred large vessels pouncing forward.

"The Tarasco people are really so desperate!"

The Young Commander still had command of two hundred large vessels, and although he could fight and win, many warriors would likely be lost. He waved the battle flag again, and the large vessels on the wings folded back, while those in the center gathered behind, forming a tight formation.

Xiulote stood resolutely, waving the flag once more.

"Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh" thousands of trusted longbow aides drew their bows and let fly arrows, and a sky full of fiery rain shot toward the incoming enemy ships, igniting over a dozen large vessels. Moments later, another round of explosive fire shower claimed an equal number of enemy vessels.

Nearly a hundred Tarasco large vessels rushed swiftly like the wind, quickly approaching the front line. The Mexica Naval Forces speeded up their withdrawal, clustering into a group, ready to engage the enemy at any moment.

Just then, the piercing sound of the conch horn came from the enemy fleet, and a flag with a painted bird rotated half a circle, pointing slightly off to the northwest. And on the large boat below the flag, Ospie's trusted aide clutched his chest, staring incredulously at the revered Chapala Legion Commander, before being thrown into the lake by several samurai.

Pengguari's gaze was deep, his expression cold. He took a somber glance at the "Crocodile" flag a hundred steps away, lowered his gaze, his emotions complex. The tall flag fluttered amidst the blood and fire, the northern Marshal still battling on the field. Standing quietly for a moment, the Chapala Legion Commander continued to wave his flag, once again pointing toward the northwest rivermouth.

Chapter 345 - Battle of Lake Yuriria Part 3 (Additional Chapter for the Alliance Leader Green Vine Cloud)\_3

Under the Legion Commander's direction, the charging fleet slightly adjusted their course without any pause. Following the diagonally pointed flags, they veered away from the Mexica's main force of large boats and in an instant, burst through the enemy's defense line, continuing forward with an arc. Soon, the vast fleet swept past the frontline battlefield like the wind, accelerating towards the downstream of the Lerma River.

Xiulote was taken aback for a moment, then quickly understood.

"With the wind and water at our backs, speed up to the fastest, straight downstream... they're fleeing!"

The Young Commander swiftly waved the signal flag, and the third volley of Fire Arrows was launched, taking another ten-plus large boats with them. But the remaining Chapala fleet didn't linger, escaping into the Rivermouth leading downstream with the speed of a charge.

Xiulote watched the fleeing fleet, out of reach, and then turned his gaze back to the still raging battlefield. His eyes then settled on the lake surface not far away, where many Samurai were struggling to swim, many others with only light injuries. The Young Commander also thought of the unknown complex hydrology downstream and made the decision not to divide his forces to pursue any further.

More than eighty large boats carrying half of the Chapala Samurai, and over three hundred small boats with less than two thousand Militia, thus escaped from the blood and fire of the battlefield. Ahead of them lay the Lake Region, their homeland.

Xiulote once again commanded the fleet, with Black Wolf's flagship gradually moving forward, and the large boats on both wings closing in towards the burning battlefield. His gaze pierced through the drifting smoke and refocused on the center of the battle.

Encircled by flames on the outskirts, Ospai swung his Bronze Axe and Great Shield, colliding with Annatri's Spear. The Naval Corps Commanders clashed again fiercely in battle.

The female warrior used her Spear with precise thrusts; the "Crocodile" Nobility half sank his body, accurately blocking with his Great Shield. Then, Ospai's eyes bulged as he steadily advanced, continuously chopping at the spear shaft with his Bronze Axe. Annatri carefully withdrew her spear to



evade, occasionally countering with a stab, forcing the opponent back. Both Commanders were equally skilled in Martial Arts, and for a time, neither could do much against the other.

Seeing no breakthrough, Ospai roared loudly.

"Green Vine, Spear!"

At the call, Green Vine Kulucha let out a low growl. He sidestepped forward, taking a blow from a Mexica Samurai's War Club, his Leather Armor ripped open with a "tear." Then, clutching the spear shaft halfway, he quickly jabbed two short thrusts, deeply penetrating his opponent's side, who immediately cried out in agony.

Kulucha hesitated not a bit, turning around without concern for his foe's life or death. He took a quick glance, then lunged two steps forward, rear-holding the spear shaft, stabbing at the female warrior from behind and the side.

Annatri was forced to retreat rapidly, her trusted aide coming to her aid, only to be successively slain by Kulucha. Caught between the pincer attack of the "Crocodile" and "Green Vine," the female warrior quickly found herself at a disadvantage, beset with danger at every turn.

Watching this unfold, Xiulote's expression turned grave atop the high platform. He took out a Longbow, pulled it open, and placed a Copper Arrow upon it, squinting towards the front. After a moment, as the female warrior was forced to retreat again, the Young Commander suddenly released his hold, and the arrow flew like lightning!

Ospai cried out in pain as the Bronze Axe in his right hand fell to the ground. He was pouncing forward when a Copper Arrow suddenly struck. The precise arrow penetrated the shield's gap, breaking through the armor on his right arm, deeply embedding nearly a quarter. Having been wounded in the left arm by an arrow previously, which took months to heal, he now suffered an arrow to the right arm and was momentarily unable to continue fighting.

Thinking thus, the "Crocodile" Nobility turned towards the direction from which the arrow had come, bellowing in anger.

"Ratfish! How dare you launch a sneak attack!"

Seeing their Commander injured, several nearby trusted aides immediately took up their shields, stepping forward to cover their Commander's retreat. A few Samurai formed a Spear Formation, holding off the nimble female warrior.

Kulucha heard the shout, looking around for the sneaking enemy, and then his face drained of color. He recognized the retreating Chapala fleet and saw the Mexica's large boats pressing in from the wings, quickly returning to the side of his wounded Commander.

"Commander, the situation is critical, we must retreat quickly!"

Ospai glared with wide eyes, turning to his beloved general.

"How can we retreat! We still have the Chapala fleet, and there's still a chance to win!"

"Legion Commander, the Chapala Legion has fled! We have lost the battle!"

The "Crocodile" noble incredulously rose to his feet. He looked behind, where only countless burning large boats and a few scattered small boats remained. He then looked to the front and side, seeing a line of ignited large boats that marked an expensive path of escape. At the end of that path, at the rivermouth, the last silhouettes of ships could be made out, flying bird banners vaguely visible.

Ospia flew into a furious rage, then suddenly felt a pain in his chest and a sweet taste in his throat, spitting out a mouthful of fresh blood.

"Ratfish! Ah, pff...the ones who were supposed to fight fled first... Crocodiles and Ratfish, how can they scheme great affairs together!"

The "Crocodile" noble was still furiously shouting with a face blackened by smoke and fire. A few more cries of agony were heard not far away. Ospia focused his gaze and saw the relentless female samurai had already stabbed several samurais to death and was charging at them once again.

"Legion Commander, retreat quickly! Remove the Marshal's Battle Garb, switch to a light boat, and leave the battlefield to the south. The rivermouth fortress can still hold; I will cover your retreat!"

Kulucha knelt on one knee, with the resolution of death on his face. He saluted one last time, then once again lifted his spear to meet Annatri.

Ospia extended his painful arm, but could not catch the departing samurai. Kulucha courageously charged forward, leaving him only a rear view.

"Green Vine...you..."

The loyal samurais exchanged glances, quickly stripped the "Crocodile" Family Head of his war clothes. Then, pushing and shoving, they placed the commander onto a small boat specifically prepared for the flagship, accompanied by a few trusted aides to row. The remaining family samurais saluted one last time, saying goodbye to the lord they had served for generations, and then turned back into the fray.

The fire blazed furiously, enshrouding the central battlefield in smoke, and while the departure of the small boat drew attention, its trail was quickly obscured. Sharp conch sounds arose from the "Crocodile" bannered large boat, two consecutive blasts, relaying two contradictory orders. One was for a full retreat; the other, to cover the rear in battle!

On the battlefield, the remaining Tarasco Naval Forces paused upon hearing the signals. The large boats and small boats hesitated for a moment, then made different choices. The loyal family samurais continued to control the large boats, sacrificing themselves to hold the rear. The conscripted Militia rowed their small boats, hastily fleeing south without hesitation.

Hundreds of small boats fleeing southward like a panicked school of fish, chaotically crisscrossing, constantly weaving paths. Amidst the chaos, a brand-new small boat sped into the southbound fleet. Under the cover of countless small boats, this boat disappeared from the watchful eyes, no longer distinguishable.

On the escaping small boat, Ospia, with a face blackened with soot and a heart torn with grief, took one final look toward the northern battlefield. He saw the century-old "Crocodile" banner collapse, three

thousand family samurais perish, the two hundred-year legacy of a glorious family destroyed in an instant! At this thought, he couldn't help but have wet eyes, shedding "Crocodile" tears.

As he escaped toward the southern rivermouth, the "Crocodile" noble turned back and committed the Black Wolf's banner to memory.

"We will meet again!"

Ospia declared solemnly, his expression shadowed.

Below the banner, the Young Commander seemed to sense something. He wore a victorious smile, gazing towards the southern rivermouth of Lake Yuriria, and beyond to the rivermouth fortress a hundred miles away.

"We will meet again!"

Xiulote, full of self-confidence, laughed out loud.

The long wind swept across the burning lake, engraving all vows and laughter in the winds of history, just like this decisive naval battle for the realm!

Chapter 346 - Great Victory! The Finale of the Naval Battle

The setting sun bled into the lake, equally stained with fresh blood, creating a grand tapestry that shook the soul. The warm breeze, like fire, swept across the lake, itself ablaze, composing a passionate melody that stirred a bold spirit within.

At this moment, the battle neared its end, its outcome already sealed! This unprecedented conflict brought together Central America's two most formidable naval forces. The result of this battle would determine the strategic initiative along the Lerma River and the fate of both sides in their westward conquests!

In preparation for this fight, Xiulote had made his greatest effort. He amassed three hundred large vessels and nearly a thousand smaller boats, bearing twenty thousand warriors. He brought along his loyal trusted aides, the elite troops directly under the Royal Family, and the sharpshooting Militia Longbowmen. He awaited the right moment, chose the battlefield for the grand conflict, and deployed new weapons that had long been kept secret. The Mexica had always favored their land forces, so this was the largest fleet he could gather!

For this battle, the Tarasco people had made their greatest preparations as well. As inhabitants of the Lake Region well-versed in naval warfare, they possessed an even stronger Naval Force. The "Crocodile" Nobility called in every warship from the Cuitzeo Lake Region, the Chapala Lake Region, and along the Lerma River. They gathered a whopping four hundred large vessels and over a thousand smaller boats, filled with twenty-five thousand Samurai and Militia skilled in naval combat. They held the advantage in ships and manpower, descending rapidly from upstream, mobilizing the might of their nation!

As a Naval Commander with decades of battle experience, the Tarasco leader made no strategic errors. He concentrated his most advantageous troops, launched the swiftest assault, and even prepared defenses against the Longbows, achieving his very best. In his calculation, the advantageous Tarasco Naval Forces would secure victory in this decisive battle, which was his primary reason for engaging in the conflict.

"It was only when the new age's weapons brought raging inferno, and the Tarasco Naval Forces fell into protracted chaos from their fear of myths, that we truly gained our chance at victory!"

Xiulote stood on the high platform, the Black Wolf banner flying fiercely in the wind. As a Young Commander fresh on the scene, he reflected on the entire course of the war, learning from the experience of the enemy Marshal.

"Even against the epochal Gunpowder Arrows, he made the correct response without hesitation, ordering his entire force to charge. He is a foe worthy of respect! This battle, I must admit, I won by luck. If the enemy had been acquainted with the Gunpowder Arrows beforehand, if the Chapala fleet hadn't fled, if that one arrow had hit me... But in war, there are no 'ifs,' and in the end, I won!"

As he thought this, the Young Commander laughed heartily, spirits soaring, victory over a formidable opponent echoing joyfully in his heart. Before him lay the toppled "Crocodile" standard, the desperately fighting enemy warriors, and the scattered, fleeing Militia boats. After the grand and cruel struggle, a dazzling victory had finally arrived!

"The strategic goal of this battle has been achieved, the Mexica Naval Forces will henceforth control the Lerma River. The Tarasco's painstakingly built navy over decades has been destroyed in an instant, its elite forces utterly decimated!"

Xiulote looked all around, of the mighty four hundred Tarasco vessels that once sailed, now less than ninety truly escaped.

These large vessels, which could carry forty fighters, were no mere canoes given their complex craftsmanship. They required large timbers for their keels, careful treatment of durable wood, and the affixing of various wooden components on the exterior. In an era of limited production capabilities, even with bronze tools, the Tarasco people couldn't rebuild a single large vessel in just two or three months. They also lacked the manpower for shipbuilding. In other words, the Tarasco Navy's losses were irrevocable during this war.

Moreover, along with their fleet, perished the Samurai and Militia adept at naval combat.

With a cursory glance, the Young Commander mentally tallied. The over three hundred large vessels and numerous small boats Tarasco abandoned on the battlefield signified the loss of more than thirteen thousand Samurai and Militia, along with three to four thousand proficient sailors. Post-battle, the Rivermouth fortress would fall into utter vacancy, an excellent opportunity for conquest!

Hundreds of large vessels blazed fiercely on the lake, countless enemy boats fled south in panic, and the Naval Forces' smaller boats on both flanks initiated pursuit. The longwind brought facial warmth, and amidst the wind were the faint sounds of battle and cheering.

Xiulote admired the magnificent scene. At this moment, he felt unbounded exhilaration, as if he were drinking strong liquor, galloping across the battlefield, commandeering his troops to crush the enemy. Nothing could be more thrilling for a man!

After a while, the sounds of intense fighting up ahead gradually waned, the warriors' cheers suddenly grew loud. A bit later, Annatri proudly arrived by boat. Holding a broken half of the enemy standard in one hand and dragging a bound Samurai prisoner with the other, she strode up to the Commander's platform.

"Your Highness, we've won a great victory! I, 'Source of the River,' Annatri, present you with the enemy Commander's flag!"

The female warrior saluted with her head held high. Then, stepping forward, she threw the broken "Crocodile" Commander's Flag onto the Commander's high platform.



Xiulote looked down slightly, observing the tattered "Crocodile" banner, the withered long feather on the flag's tip, and the bloodstained dark patterns, clearly the flag from the large ship that had pursued him! He watched for a moment, didn't pick it up, but instead burst into laughter.

"Excellent! Annatri, my valiant Naval Commander, our forces will henceforth rule the river, unchallenged. Now, you truly are the 'Sole Source of the Lerma River!'"

## Chapter 347 - Great Victory! The Finale of the Naval Battle\_2

Upon hearing this, Annatri hesitated slightly and respectfully bowed her head. She gladly accepted the title bestowed by His Highness and tacitly agreed to a closer affiliation. Then, she stood up and dragged the samurai captive in front of His Highness. Subsequently, the female samurai accurately landed two kicks on the captive's hind knees, causing him to kneel down with a thud, temporarily unable to stand up.

"Your Highness, this is the enemy's family Great General and Head Warrior, named something like Green Fish! He is very capable, having led the family samurais to fight to their deaths behind you, allowing the enemy's Commander-in-Chief to narrowly escape... Right, the arrow that wounded the Head Eagle Warrior was shot by him!"

At these words, the female samurai angrily lifted her foot again, swiftly kicking the captive on his side. This part of the human body is vulnerable, and at once, Green Fish clenched his upper body in pain, bit his lip, and did not utter a sound.

Xiulote nodded slightly; there were intermittent plumes of smoke on the battlefield in front. He had noticed the small boats fleeing from the enemy ships, but the vanguard was blocked by the family samurais fighting desperately behind, and soon lost track of the "Crocodile" nobility. He ordered the small boats on both flanks to pursue and search, but he was actually indifferent to the outcome.

The Chapala fleet fled downstream without engaging in battle, clearly having lost all morale, and was incapable of supporting the rivermouth fortifications for some time. As Oste discarded the flagship and fled alone, it had no impact on the battle situation. Having lost both the Naval Forces and the elite warriors, the "Crocodile" nobility, even if they successfully escaped back to the rivermouth fortifications, could no longer assemble a naval force that posed a threat to the Mexica's supply routes.

Xiulote didn't think further, examining the samurai captive before him. Although his face was smudged with soot, one could still see the inherent fierceness and ferocity in him.

The Young Commander looked toward the lake, where a few big Tarasco boats were still fiercely resisting, likely manned by the most loyal family samurais. He pondered for a moment and then spoke unenthusiastically.

"The Alliance highly values brave warriors. Since you are a skilled Head Warrior of the family, would you consider surrendering?"

Upon hearing this, Kulucha raised his head, staring intensely at the Mexica Marshal who had defeated his family head. He was surprised by the opponent's youth and reminded again of that nearly successful pursuit. His expression changed many times, and finally, he sighed in agony.

"It was you! Had it continued that day... how could it have come to this..."

Xiulote gave a faint smile.

"Green Fish, the Alliance aspires for the world! This western campaign shall completely conquer the Tarasco Kingdom. If you surrender now and distinguish yourself during the campaign, you could establish your own renowned family!"

Upon hearing this, Kulucha felt a chill in his heart, yet his expression grew even more resolute.

"The kingdom has stood for hundreds of years; the Prepetcha people have upheld their lineage for thousands, and we will not perish at the hands of Aztec barbarians! I will never betray the family head I faithfully serve, nor shall I submit to an envoy of a foreign god!"

Xiulote remained calm, gently shaking his head. The Prepetcha people and the Mexica descended from the same line, both are in fact descendants of the northwestern Canine Descendants branch, with very similar languages. He watched the opponent's expression, and only after a long moment, he asked in a deep voice.

"The Alliance values bravery above all. Before proceeding to the Divine Kingdom, do you have any last words?"

Kulucha nodded affirmatively, speaking gravely.

"Your Highness of a foreign god, please allow me to compose a poem to offer to the deities."

Xiulote nodded slightly, waiting calmly. Annatri also showed admiration. The samurai facing death composedly was in line with the Mexica's aesthetic.

After some time, Kulucha straightened his back, looking at the sky with a faint smile.

"A warrior's body is like a tasty whitefish, which should die at its strongest, in the most glorious way. Oh, supreme Sun God, I will offer myself to you, please savor my delicacy!"

Upon hearing this poem, the surrounding warriors all showed admiration.

Xiulote then nodded again and calmly gave the order.

"Grant him an honorable death!"

Immediately, two experienced warriors came forward and dragged Kulucha to another ship. Then, one warrior firmly held him down while the other drew out the sacrificial Obsidian Dagger. Moments later, the executioner respectfully returned, kneeling on one knee before His Highness, holding the calm head in his hands.

Xiulote cast one last glance at that serene face, softly reciting an ancient poem.

"A warrior is like a fading flower, calmly and serenely heading to the Divine Kingdom."

Subsequently, the Young Commander's expression turned serious, and he exclaimed loudly.

"Place the severed head on the enemy chief's flag, call on the still-resisting enemy warriors to surrender, and intimidate all the Tarasco captives!"

The executioner respectfully bowed, grabbing the tattered "Crocodile" flag, and hurriedly departed.

Following this, the Young Commander again waved the command flag, issuing loud orders.

"Flank boats sail upstream, pursue the fleeing enemy boats! Frontline boats surround the resisting enemy boats, shoot down those unwilling to surrender with arrows! Rear boats retrieve fallen warriors, extinguish major fires on Tarasco boats, and treat our wounded and lightly injured captives! Remainder of the flagship, follow me to assess the battle situation!"

As Xiulote ordered, the clarion call of horns sounded again, heralding victory. Numerous messenger boats dispersed in all directions. Soon, the Mexica Naval Forces, like a huge Feathered Serpent, spread its wings, roaring upstream to pursue.

Only then did Annatri slightly bow her head, softly asking.

"Your Highness, how is the condition of the Head Eagle Warrior?"

Xiulote pondered for a moment, then smiled slightly.

"Bertade is behind us, with no life-threatening injuries. Annatri, you may go visit him on my behalf."

### Chapter 348 - Great Victory! The Finale of the Naval Battle\_3

The Samurai graciously accepted, bowed her head, and then hurried away. On the swaying deck, she moved swiftly and soon found her target.

The Head Warrior lay stiffly on a cotton blanket, his robust upper body partially exposed, with a white cloth wrapped around his back that had been struck by an arrow. The white cloth bore slight bloodstains, indicating that the wound had been treated, and the bleeding had been stopped.

Annatri carefully examined the location of the wound before changing her expression to one of pride and loudly asked,

"Eagle Warrior Head, His Highness sent me to visit you. Are you severely injured?"

Hearing the familiar voice, Bertade slowly raised his head and looked solemnly at the female warrior.

"Annatri, I am not severely hurt. The Priest with the army has already checked it. The arrow went deep into the flesh, but the damage to the tendons and bones is minor. I have not coughed blood, nor have my organs been damaged, do not worry... Anna, you are Commander-in-Chief of the Naval Forces, quickly go command the naval forces to fight and pursue the remaining enemies!"

Hearing about the damage to the tendons, Annatri stepped forward to examine Bertade's back more closely. The Head Warrior grimaced with pain, gritted his teeth, and slight sweat appeared on his forehead.

After a while, the female warrior stood up resolutely and spoke loudly.

"I have herbs passed down in my clan, I'll have someone bring them to you later. You are one of the few warriors who can match me, and your wound needs to heal completely so that you won't lack strength in future battles!"

Then, with a slight smile and narrowed eyes, Annatri left an illusion-like cheerful face for Bertade and turned away without hesitation.

"Once your injury heals, I will come and assess your martial arts skills!"

As the wind howled and boats raced swiftly until dusk fell, hundreds of Mexica boats headed south, still chasing the enemy and lighting torches in the distance. And on the dark Lake Yuriria, there were still boats burning on the water surface. The flickering torches and burning boats, in conjunction with the stars above, reflected the most resplendent night scene of the Middle Ancient Times.

Xiulote sat cross-legged on a high platform, watching the night's fireworks. Warriors continuously came to report, bowing respectfully, as enemy nobles of various ranks were brought in and subsequently imprisoned en masse. As Commander-in-Chief, all military intelligence convened here, and all decisions were made from this location.

The Young Commander smiled and nodded graciously as he praised the valiant efforts of his generals, calmly decided the fate of the prisoners, and openly accepted the respectful gazes of the warriors.

Only by the next day's dawn were the final results of the battle tallied. In this battle, the Mexica Naval Forces captured nearly a hundred damaged ships of Tarasco, while the other more than two hundred large ships became torches burning all night. The Naval Forces themselves lost about forty to fifty large ships, now counting a total of three hundred and fifty ships, half of which needed to return for repairs. The smaller boats were relatively well-preserved, capturing several hundreds, now totaling twelve hundred.

As the morning light faintly gleamed, Lake Yuriria was tinged with a pale red, with bodies in Leather Armor or cloth floating on the water surface, numerous carnivorous large fish drawn by the scent of blood, and crocodile-like creatures tearing at sinking bodies in the water. The casualties of the enemy in this great battle was indeed hard to calculate.

Xiulote could only estimate from the escaping enemy forces. The Tarasco army, along with the Naval Forces, totaled about twenty-five thousand people. The escaping Chapala fleet consisted of eighty large ships, several hundred small boats, approximately five thousand people, half warriors and half Militia. Those who escaped south were only several hundred small boats, estimated to be over three thousand Militia. The captives taken included about five hundred warriors and two to three thousand Militia. Thus, the enemy had lost a total of fourteen thousand warriors, militia, and sailors—essentially the entire army was annihilated!

In the naval battle, apart from the Commander-in-Chief who was sacrificially protected by many, ordinary warriors had virtually no way out. Once ships engaged in combat, it always ended with one side completely perishing, hence the extreme cruelty. The Mexica Naval Forces also suffered significant casualties, mainly concentrated in the desperate assault of a hundred large ships. The Naval Forces lost nearly a thousand Longbow Militia, over a thousand sailors, and more than two thousand Royal Warriors directly. Additionally, several thousands were injured and needed significant recovery.



After learning the casualty numbers, Xiulote was silent for a moment. He spent half a day, according to Mexica traditions, conducting a grand water-based sacrificial rite.

Amid the ethereal singing of accompanying Priests, dozens of Tarasco nobles were sacrificed to the highest Chief Divine, and dozens of freshly caught crocodiles were sacrificed to the water's Rain Divine. Thousands of Mexica warriors knelt on the deck, loudly praising the victory given by the Chief Divine and praying for the gates of the Divine Kingdom to open. In the young Priest's main prayer, the Chief Divine would guide the souls of the fallen soldiers to the peaceful and beautiful Red Kingdom!

After soothing the soldiers' spirits, Xiulote did not pause. He left the severely injured warriors and Militia in the nearby Otomi Village, leaving a detachment of Naval Forces to assist with the plundering Otomi Legion. Immediately, the army marched day and night, returning to the Wooden Fort on the North Coast.

On the ramparts of the main fort, the flags of the Holy City still flew high. Xiulote and his father held a private meeting, making firm decisions. He left his war-weary direct-command warriors in the Wooden Fort to recover, asking his father to handle the follow-up rewards and reorganization, and to expedite the repair of the damaged large ships. Afterward, he requested that Annatri, undaunted by hardship, lead a portion of the intact Naval Forces to transport the next batch of food eastward and then meet the reinforcements promised by the northern general.

Soon after, Xiulote mobilized ten thousand rested Samurai and eight thousand Longbow Militia, along with five thousand Otomi laborers, to launch another attack. The main army was strictly organized, carrying Longbows, Powerful Crossbows, War Clubs, and Copper Spears. The laborers worked diligently, dragging small catapults and straightforward shield carts. The Craftsmen were tense, carrying new weapons sealed for freshness and un-embarked Gunpowder materials. The Young Commander wasted no time, concentrating all his forces, giving the Tarasco no time to gather their forces!

In just a few days, over twenty thousand Mexica troops crossed the river southward, besieging the fortress at the Rivermouth, causing a full-scale disturbance on the northern front!

## Chapter 350 - The Siege of October, The World Trembles Part 2

"Before departure, the Marshal slashed his palm to swear an oath! He would tenaciously defend the fortress to the death, until the provisions were entirely depleted, until the very last soldier, vowing to share fate with the Rivermouth Fortress!"

Jinjinni carefully observed the Envoy for a while and nodded slightly before falling into deep thought.

According to the King's orders before he left, Jinjinni had sent ten thousand Militia from the Lake Region to the north a month ago, five thousand to the Rivermouth Fortress and to the Northern Stronghold each. These urgently conscripted ordinary Militia were not adept at open-field warfare but could be used for defending the city. The Mexica siege troops numbered just over twenty thousand. With the robustness of the Rivermouth Fortress, one thousand five hundred Samurai and thirteen thousand Militia should at least be able to hold out for half a year!

The problem now was that the north was extremely lacking in Samurai, losing the ability to sortie from the city. The connections between different defensive lines were left for the Mexica to cut off. Each fortress fighting its own battle would only lead to the fall of each one by one.

Based on his thirty years of experience in directing wars, to defend the cities over the long term, there must be a force to defend the countryside! Only with a capable Samurai legion ready to sortie and attack the enemy's weak points at any time, could they prevent the enemy siege from advancing smoothly. Now, with the Rivermouth Fortress unable to provide support, the only option was to support the weak northern line of strongholds.

With this in mind, Jinjinni waved his sleeve and pointed at the Envoy.

"Take this down."

The Envoy opened his mouth, wishing to say something more on behalf of the Marshal. The guards had already quickly stepped forward and taken the Northern Envoy away.

Afterward, the Chief Minister closed his eyes and furrowed his brow while fiddling with his fingers inside his sleeve to calculate.

"Since my last discussion of military affairs with His Majesty, the Lake Region has conscripted thirty thousand more Militia. Ten thousand to the northern line, twenty thousand to the southern line. Since the war began, the Lake Region has contributed a hundred thousand able-bodied men to the war effort, nearly half of whom have already died in battle!"

Thinking this, Jinjinni shook all over. With less than a million people at the heart of the Kingdom's rule in the Lake Region, such a proportion of able-bodied men conscripted was nearly catastrophic for agricultural production. At this rate of consumption, two whole generations were being erased, along with the Kingdom's future!

What made Jinjinni even more desperate was that he had only three thousand Samurai at hand, and he still needed to further conscript able-bodied men to maintain the situation in the north and south.

The long wind blew into the magnificent Palace of Wind, driving a mournful toll of wind chimes, like the ominous sound of a nation's demise. The Chief Minister's fingers trembled violently, and he could no longer continue calculating. After a long moment, he finally opened his eyes abruptly, revealing a cold and intimidating gaze, and hoarsely shouted.

"Conscript all able-bodied men of the Lake Region, those of Nobility who resist shall die! Those fourteen years old and above, below fifty, who are taller than half the length of a Spear, all shall be enlisted in the military! Conscript the robust farmwives, those who can wield a Spear, all shall be enlisted in the military!"

"Deploy a thousand Samurai to support the strongholds of the north, be vigilant in harassing the Mexica Northern Army!"

"Send Envoys to the west, to console the Chapala Legion! Promise a fiefdom to the 'Feather' family Prince, to quickly reorganize and come to the aid!"

"Send Envoys to the south, to the mountain state of Weytamo, and order them to support from the north, also promising a Prince's fiefdom!"

"Send Divine Descendant Envoys together with the Tlaxcala envoys, to escort the Predecessor Monarch's princesses to the East, to immediately complete the alliance through marriage!"

"Send Divine Descendant Envoys to urge the southern Tecos Tribe. The Kingdom has agreed to their conditions for autonomy, but they must send more Samurai or Militia. The Tribes will be granted noble titles based on the number of troops provided, with the one who contributes the most being named Prince of Tecos, a rank above all others. The Royal Family will also grant princesses and noble daughters in marriage to the Prince of Tecos!"

"Dispatch the Envoy discreetly, inform His Majesty on the southern front!"

Following the Chief Minister's command, the guards scattered to fulfill their orders. Soon, in the august hall of the Royal Palace, only the aged statesman in ornate attire remained, his expression solemn, his silence imposing.

Jinjinni was motionless for a moment, then slowly removed the Feather Crown from his head, revealing a full head of white hair. He looked up at the ancient murals on the ceiling. The Hummingbird of his family accompanied by the Royal Eagle, and thirty years had flown by in the beating of their wings.

"Your Majesty, I have served the Royal Family for thirty years. Should we emerge victorious in this battle, I shall use my life to be accountable for today's decision!"

A gentle breeze scattered the elder's white hair which no longer held the stern dignity of before. Then the breeze travelled a thousand miles, and a new round of running Envoys once again started from the Capital City.

The Envoy of the Capital City dashed out from the city gates. He saw thousands of conscripted Samurai, soon to drain the last of the Lake Region's manpower as they spread out to eighty-one villages. He then sped southward, passing halfway harvested fragrant fields, and catching up with a large troupe of laborers transporting grain. All along the way, he saw nothing but exhausted and numb faces. He crossed the last of the supporting Lake Region Militia, men without Leather Armor and armed only with Stone Spears. Soon, the fields before him lay desolate again, for he had reached the frontier of the Xitaqualo state.

Without hesitation, he passed the sparse rear camps, heading for the Stone Fort where the Royal Banner flew. He ignored the calls from patrolling Samurai, entering the sturdy stone citadel. He passed the ill-disciplined Barbarian mercenaries, walked by the Formations of the Long Spear Legions, pausing only briefly on the fortress's drill ground. There were hundreds of bowmen getting accustomed to the massive Mexica Longbows, the sound of Feathered Arrows piercing the air like the roar of a fierce beast.

The Envoy lowered his head, continuing to move stealthily. He walked calmly past the neatly arranged Samurai, silently surveying the stern-faced Nobility, finally approaching the Imperial Guards who wielded great axes, finding a Guard Captain adorned in Feathers.

"A letter from the Capital City, the Moon Goddess blesses us."

The Envoy from the Capital City spoke gravely.

The Guard Captain's expression tightened. The Moon Goddess, a symbol of death, was surely no good news! He nodded slightly and turned away. Moments later, the Guard Captain returned without a word, leading the Envoy to a side hall where the august King awaited.

Then, the Guard Captain turned and walked away. He had not gone far from the side hall when he heard the King's angry muffled roar.

"Damn!"

That was followed by the crashing sound of metal on stone. Hearing the noise, the Guard Captain's heart skipped a beat. He dared not look back and quickened his pace, hurrying away from the danger.

Within the stone house at the back, the buzzing of Bronze and the clinking of Gold Ornaments could be heard rolling on the stone floor. King Su'angua, clad in military attire and wearing an ornate Bronze Leather Armor, donned a Copper Helmet with an eagle and Feathers, as majestic as the embodiment of a Heavenly Divine. At that moment, his eyes filled with murderous intent, glaring at the Envoy prostrate on the ground.

After a long silence, the King's expression softened, and he began to speak slowly.

"You are not to blame, it's not you who should die! The 'Hummingbird' Chief's actions have been prudent; I will endorse his orders afterwards. You may leave!"

Only then did the Envoy climb to his feet and retreat.

With no one else in the side hall, the young King yanked out the Bronze Axe and severed the wooden table before him with one strike. After pondering for a moment, he took the Bronze Axe with him as he made his way to the highest Watchtower.