

Civilization 35

Chapter 35 War and Peace

The dry season, the mild sunlight, the lush forests, the rolling mountains. Otomi villages were always nestled in the valleys among the mountains, gathering flowing springs that moistened the barren bean fields. A shallow fence circled around the village to fend off the attacks of coyotes outside. Inside, small enclosures were made to rear turkeys and native dogs.

These simple defenses were meaningless to the samurai. The villagers, trapped by their hamlets like birds tethered by their feet, could only emit powerless cries under the pounce of a cat.

Soon, both the village and the fields turned into flames, with women and children being driven away, leaving only the black smoke that screened the sun. Such was the cruel nature of war.

Xiulote followed with a troop of two hundred men, silently observing everything before him. His weltanschauung, like blocks of iron, was continuously hammered, changed, and forged into steel.

He did not know how Aweit had persuaded the Supreme Commander. It might have been food, perhaps efficiency, possibly friendship, or maybe even the future. The next morning, Totec changed the plan. He divided the samurai into squads of two hundred men, burned down villages, executed the males, but spared the women and children, aiming to drive them toward Guamare City as much as possible.

The pace of destruction swiftly accelerated, and after several more days, all villages within a two-day distance from Guamare had vanished, and the camp was overwhelmed with thousands of starving women and children, constantly eroding the Otomi's potential for warfare.

Aweit sent envoys to negotiate with Guamare City; the scene turned chaotic, reaching no agreement whatsoever.

At night, Xiulote saw envoys stealthily arrive at the camp; then, sacks of food were hoisted down from the city walls. After receiving two weeks' rations for eight thousand people, Totec nodded in satisfaction.

The next morning, the army prepared to break camp. Before leaving, Xiulote took one last look at Guamare City. The priests in black and white robes were also on the city walls, watching the withdrawing Mexica legion below.

From afar, the young coyote priest and the old black and white priest looked at each other but could only see vague dots and hear no sounds, their emotions complex and swirling.

Xiulote shook his head and turned to leave but then saw a young follower samurai, using a wooden shovel, dig a small pit in the ground. He then placed a small cotton bundle into the pit and buried it. Something was vaguely wrapped inside the bundle.

Finally, the young samurai knelt on the ground, prayed toward the sun, and chanted the name of "Huitzilopochtli."

Looking surprised, Xiulote asked the young warrior, "My warrior, what ritual is this?"

The follower respectfully replied, "Honored priest, this is not an official ritual. Before joining the war last year, I had just had a son. The bundle contains his umbilical cord, which I have been carrying with me."

"This might be the farthest battlefield I reach. According to the custom of warriors, I've buried my son's umbilical cord here to seek the War God's protection. This way, when he grows up, he can become a mighty Mexica samurai, follow the Mexica legion, and once again step onto this land to completely conquer the Otomi people."

"The custom of warriors, huh..." Xiulote murmured, then nodded to the samurai, "The great Guardian God shall bless you and your son! We shall return."

The legion then set out, burning down the camp outside Guamare City, releasing the useless captives, and heading toward Otapan City.

The returning Mexica legion turned into a squid, with samurai squads extending like tentacles and returning continuously; along the way were burning flames, fields turned to ash, and scattered women and children.

"Within twenty years, the Guamare City-State will no longer pose a threat," Aweit said while walking and watching the fires along the way, unable to stop himself from exclaiming, "As they can neither gather enough food for war nor enough manpower for logistics, even if they still have samurai, they can only stay in the city."

"But there are other Otomi city-states farther west," Xiulote pondered.

"That's too far away. Even if they send samurai, the food supply must come from Guamare," Aweit laughed, "Not to mention, seeing the plight of Guamare, the smaller city-states of Tlacaelel might not dare continue to wage war."

Xiulote nodded; this was also a form of deterrence.

"How's the situation on the King's side?" Xiulote asked curiously.

"It's the same old story," Aweit shook his head. "The people of Otapan just won't come out. The King was a bit impatient and tried attacking once, shooting up from the base of the mountain. The ladders didn't even reach the top of the walls before the stones were hurled down continuously. They managed to climb once, but the ladders were quickly pushed over, and the leading Samurai were gone. It's estimated that over 400 Samurai and 500 Militia fell, with even more injured."

Xiulote also shook his head, "Another battalion gone. These mountain cities can't be taken by force, the King has gone mad this time."

"Ha ha," Aweit chuckled softly. "Without Totec, just the King alone is not good at waging war. Casal is too greedy for merits, not a qualified Commander-in-Chief in a siege."

"Indeed," Xiulote pondered the King's religious fanaticism, and his grandfather's song offering.

"After all, it's a problem of the supply lines. The efficiency through the forests and mountains is too low," Xiulote stated.

"I remember that to the west of the Capital, there is the Lema River, following the highland and flowing west past the Mexica City-State of Tepanecapan, then further west past the border of Otomi and

Tarasco people, and it can reach the southern border of Otapan City-State, and even to the southern forests of Guamare City-State."

"This river is, at its shortest, less than a week's journey through the mountains from Otapan City. If we could utilize this river, then the Otomi people wouldn't be able to threaten our supply lines," analyzed Xiulote, pondering a potential breakthrough.

Aweit turned towards the south, where mountains and rivers lay, beyond which was the territory of the Tarasco people.

"This route is indeed the shortest," agreed Aweit. "But the Lema River runs right under the noses of the Tarasco people. Their legions could arrive at any time."

"We cannot place the critical nodes of our food supplies here, otherwise once the Tarasco declare war, the army would be cut off from its supplies."

"What if we maintain two supply lines simultaneously?" Xiulote mused.

"That's the current crucial factor, we can't ascertain the stance of the Tarasco people, we don't want to provoke them," Aweit tapped his forehead lightly. "Scouts found that Tarasco legions are rallying on the northern borders with the Otomi people. Most likely they plan to invade the weakened Otomi, but we also need to stay cautious."

"Actually, more than the movements of the Tarasco people, I'm more concerned about the actions of our archenemies in the Alliance, the people of Tlaxcala. This war has lingered far too long now. All the nearby powers have been mobilized, always ready for battle."

Xiulote was also concerned, but such worries couldn't change the overall situation.

"Perhaps, retreating is the best option."

The return trip of more than half a month passed quickly. Accompanied by black smoke along the way, the Mexica legion relentlessly destroyed the roots of the Otomi people and plundered the food supplies en route.

When the formidable mountain city was once again in sight, Xiulote's body and spirit were both tired. The legion swiftly returned to the siege camp, and Totec ordered its disbandment.

Xiulote, dragging his weary body, returned to his familiar hut with Bertade's assistance.

The moment he entered the hut, he finally relaxed, threw off his Feather Crown, and yawned heavily. Then he took out a wooden board, drew and wrote on it. Afterward, letting go of the pen, he lay back on the deer skin rug and fell into a deep sleep.

Bertade gently lifted Xiulote onto the bed, gazing at the young boy's sleeping face, he smiled gently. He then covered the young boy with a thin cotton quilt.

Then he picked up the wooden board from the table. On the left was a drawing of a black Tengu, and on the right, a tri-colored Feathered Serpent, with a line of text underneath.

"War... and... peace," Bertade read the characters one by one, then couldn't help but exclaim with a sense of admiration, "Priest truly is a studious person."