

## Civilization 351

### Chapter 351 - October Siege, Shaking the World Part 2

The King's garrisoned stone fort sat atop a hill nearly a hundred meters high, in an extremely perilous position that was the core of the southern defensive line. The watchtower atop the fortress was the highest point in the region, offering a commanding view that laid the entire battlefield bare.

The clear sunshine bathed the lofty summit of the stone fort, where samurai stationed there saluted their supreme King. A fresh breeze swept through the wooden watchtower, the flags of the three gods unfurled in the wind, and the royal Eagle Banner fluttered boldly in the sky. In the very center of the watchtower stood the royal standard, passed down for a hundred years, from the hands of the predecessor monarch, Tariacuri, to this day.

Su'angua stood beneath the great flag, silently looking up. The royal eagle, its wings spread, soared gloriously on the flag. Then, he gazed toward the frontline of battle, his chest swelling with emotion. Before him lay rolling hills covered in lush, tall forests, stretching towards the majestic mountains of the East. Among the hills and beside streams, there were stone forts and wooden fortresses dotting the mountains. The Kingdom and Alliance's banners alternated and drew near each other, fluttering mercilessly on the battlefield.

At this moment, the sounds of fierce combat carried on the distant wind, occasionally mixed with the piercing screams of agony, proclaiming the cruelty of war. In front of the hillside stone fort at the very front lines, one could vaguely discern the earthen ramparts where archers from both sides exchanged arrows and fell in succession. From time to time, warriors fell from the high ground, twisting into bizarre shapes on the ground, adding new stains to the earth.

On the ground, the Mexica samurai held their shields high, braving the storm of stones and feathered arrows from the city walls, hoisting long wooden and bamboo ladders before suddenly slamming them against the battlements again. Immediately, the samurai wielding war clubs charged up with a ferocious cry, clashing with the teeming militia at the top, then falling silently. Usually, a Mexica samurai could rely on his shield and cotton armor to forcibly slay several militia before being pierced by a copper spear from an unknown assailant and returning his soul to the Divine Kingdom.

When a concentrated volley from the longbows outside the fort struck, dozens of Tarasco militiamen died instantly, tightening the breached defenses. With the Mexica nobility's Eagle Banner war group taking the lead, the Mexica samurai seized the opportunity to climb up, gathering more and more behind their shields. Faced with this critical moment, the Kingdom's military-service nobility set an example, leading the ready Tarasco samurai with their copper spears into the fray, striking the first blow against the elite enemy forces. Then, the vassal chieftains followed suit, leading the face-tattooed Tekos warriors with their stone hammers and copper spears, roaring as they joined the battle group.

These warriors, clad in war armor, fought fiercely, invoking the names of the gods, heading off to different Divine Lands. The clubs from both sides crushed heads, copper spears pierced through chests and bellies, stone hammers snapped shoulders, as they embraced each other and fell together. Dead bodies kept rolling off the ramparts, some landing within the fort, where alert militia would step forward. They would pry open arms that were still warm to strip off blood-stained armor and don it themselves, in hope of gaining the slightest chance of survival.

However, in the King's eyes, these tiny figures desperately struggling in battle were no more than tens of thousands of ants struggling beneath his throne. Their fate was already sealed!

"The southern line originally had over ten thousand samurai and thirty thousand militiamen. I've brought two thousand Copper-axe Guards, five thousand elite spear-wielding militiamen, and five thousand ferocious barbarian mercenaries. The Tekos from the South have sent ten thousand tribal warriors. Then the Lake Region sent another twenty thousand militiamen. This amounts to twenty-three thousand samurai, ten thousand elite militiamen, and fifty thousand defending militiamen!"

Swells of emotion surged within Su'angua's heart, for this was a tremendous army, capable of dominating the world.

Suddenly, a thunderous "bang" resounded in succession, along with the cheers of the Mexica people. The King looked up again, to see the enemy's massive siege engines hurling a volley of heavy stone projectiles. The wildly flying stone shots lacked precision, yet those that by chance struck the battlements felled several of the defending enemy. The actual lethality of the stone shots was not significant, but under the weight of stones that could be dozens of kilograms, the dead were horrifically mangled. The morale of the militiamen plummeted in the face of the siege engines' roar.

The thought of the opposing forces weighed heavily on Su'angua's mind again, a mountainous pressure settling upon his shoulders.

"Since fighting began in June, nearly a fourth of my forces have been lost, with five thousand samurai and fifteen thousand militiamen dead on the southern front! The Mexica have constructed siege engines capable of hurling stones and earthen platforms for stationing longbowmen. The small wooden fortresses can't hold out for long, only the stone forts in advantageous terrain can staunchly defend."

"Surrounding a few key forts, the Kingdom has deployed thirteen thousand samurai and thirty thousand ordinary militiamen, fighting the Mexica on all fronts. Hundreds die or are wounded daily, and the consumed supplies are counted by the hundred thousands of kilograms!"

The young King's expression was grave but resolute. In his eyes was a steadfast confidence, fearless of all combat.

"My battle flag stands here, and the southern line is as stable as the towering Chololo Volcano! Even with new weapons, the Mexica warriors' casualties cannot be few, such an offensive cannot continue for much longer! The first batch of imitated longbows has already been deployed to the battlefield, letting the Mexica taste their own medicine."

With this thought, Su'angua emitted a long howl, gazing towards the distant East. From his vantage point, he could vaguely make out another vast stone fort, where the Mexica King's banner waved proudly.

King Aweit sat calmly in the great hall of the stone fort, flipping through the pages of a book. His demeanor was composed, indifferent to the brutal combat taking place outside. The specifics of frontline combat were planned by the skilled Commander-in-Chief Iskali and executed by the loyal Great General Stanley. The King needed only to wait patiently.

Chapter 352 - The Siege of October, The World Trembles Part 2

"The Royal Banner is here, that alone inspires the Samurai to fight forward, to live and die by the sword!"

The King watched the booklet, silently tallying the casualty numbers of each Samurai battalion, and thought to himself in a low voice.

"At the beginning of the war, Iskali's advance went smoothly. After June, the battles became increasingly difficult. With the enemy's Royal Banner arriving in August, the front lines could no longer progress—it was like a repeat of history!"

Aweit smiled faintly, the past drifting away with the wind. Now, he finally controlled the immense power of the Alliance, the party with absolute advantage.

"Two thousand Samurai of military nobility's Battle Group, thirty thousand Royal Family Samurai, thirteen thousand Militia from the southern City-States. The Southern Army had a total of forty-five thousand Samurai! After the autumn harvest, twenty thousand Militia were conscripted to the front lines to build siege engines and Archery platforms. Forty thousand Militia transported food and built successive fortifications, securing the supply lines as solid as the towering Husko Volcano!"

"Even more importantly, with the divine war's call, the support of the Elder and the High Priest, and the joining of Great Nobility eager for their own fiefs! The Samurai could sustain higher casualties while always maintaining high morale. Even though we've already lost six thousand Samurai and eight thousand Militia, the Alliance will continue the war until the final victory!"

"With the support of new-style weaponry, the casualties in assaulting the fortresses will remain at an acceptable ratio. How much longer can the Tarasco Kingdom now withstand?"

At that thought, the King finally looked westward, gazing at the barely visible Tarasco Royal Banner, and smiled faintly.

At that time, Aweit was still unaware of the Northern Route Army's situation, nor had he heard of that grand naval battle. He was planning the battle operations in the south, dealing with countless mundane affairs, and also contemplating surprise attacks through the waterways.

Not until several days later did the Messenger from the Lake Capital City arrive in haste. The King rose in shock, asking aloud.

"A great victory in the naval battle?!"

"Yes. In the battle at Lake Yuriria, the Tarasco Naval Forces ceased to exist; the Lerma River up and down is all owned by the Alliance!"

"Truly such a great victory?"

Aweit repeated, disbelieving. He well knew the might of Tarasco's Naval Forces and the hundred-year legacy of the "Crocodile" family."

"The Naval Commander personally narrated it in the Capital City! Your Highness fought bravely and commanded the battle while wounded by arrows, and the new incendiary Fire Arrows worked wonders!"

"Xiulote was wounded? How serious is the injury?"

A twinge of rare concern showed on the King's face.

"It is said to be nothing serious. His Highness has already led the troops southward, surrounding the Rivermouth fortress!"

Hearing this, Aweit's expression relaxed, and he then laughed heartily, feeling utterly exhilarated.

"Excellent, most excellent! My young eagle has finally grown, flapping its pitch-black wings, soaring in the vast skies! The land around the lake, the City of the Hummingbird, will belong to the Alliance!"

Together with the King's laughter, many Nobles bowed to offer congratulations. The Samurai showed longing and admiration, thinking of the Prince in the north and the victorious future. In the shadows of the throne, only the silent Intelligence Officer remained.

Several hundred miles away in the East, a real young eagle flapped its wings for the first time. It circled in the sky for a moment, looking down on the magnificent Lake Capital City for the first time with a proud "yoohoo" call. Moments later, the small golden eagle swooped down, returning to the King's palace, landing on the shoulder of the girl in white.

Little Aviloztli "yoohooed" again with delight. It cocked its head, glanced at the various Herbs in the girl's hands, uninterested in the strangely scented plants. Then, the little golden eagle tilted its neck, rubbing the girl's cheek with its soft down feathers, its eagle face showing innate pride.

"That's great. Little Aviloztli, you've finally learned to fly!"

Alisa's eyes curved in a smile, she set down the Herbs she was mixing, and reached out to scoop the delightfully chirping eagle into her arms. The eagle did not resist, instead snuggling into the girl's embrace, occasionally continuing to cry out joyfully.

"Alright, alright. I know you are very capable! Just as capable as Xiulote!... He, he has just won a great victory in the North. Little Aviloztli, you fly so fast, when can you help me go take a look at him?"

The girl in white gently stroked the carved bird's small head and turned to look in the northwest direction. Longing flew like a bird, crossing thousands of waters and mountains, wondering when it would reach him and quietly fall into his heart.

In the nearby Temple District, the High Priest showed a smile, exuding rare ease. The Northern Route Army had pressed all the military forces of the Holy City lineage and also deployed half of the Temple Guards, immense pressure that had him restless night after night. At this moment, he gathered the

elders of the Priesthood's twelve groups and members of the Royal Family supporting the Northern Route Army for a hearty feast in the magnificent Priest Grand Hall.

"May the Chief Divine bless the devout King, promising the ultimate victory! Honorable Elders, esteemed Nobility, let us raise our glasses together to celebrate the great victory of the Northern Route Army!"

After delivering the profound toast, the High Priest looked around at everyone with a smile, waiting for their public endorsement.

"Chief Divine bless, and to the King, congratulations!" This was the Elder Priest siding with the King.

"Chief Divine bless, and to His Highness, congratulations!" This was the Elder Priest leaning towards His Highness.

"Chief Divine bless, and to the King, congratulations!" Those were the fickle fence-sitters.

"Chief Divine bless, and to the current King, congratulations, as well as to the future King!" These were the true members of the Royal Family lineage.

The sounds of congratulations gradually drifted away, coming to the ship fleet by Lake Texcoco. The Naval Commander Annatri stood proudly at the prow, with the new banner of the commander flying behind her. On the banner, a Long River rushed westward, and several characters were inscribed on the East, precisely "the source of the Lerma River"!

The female Samurai waved her hand, parting from the tall and thin quartermaster, Begire. Then she swung the Spear Flag again, and shouted loudly.

"Naval Forces, set sail! Head to Xilotepec City!"

More than a hundred large boats and several hundred small boats then started moving slowly. They were filled with food, heading to the important town in the North to join the promised reinforcements of half a year.

Within the palace of the former Otomi Divine Descendant in the important northern town, General Jaguar Osellor paced back and forth silently with his hands behind his back. On him was the aura of a recent battle in the North, seemingly carrying an indelible scent of blood.

The Northern general pondered for a long time before he finally sighed softly.

"Since the water battle is won, the siege is just a matter of time, His Highness's great momentum is already established! Considering the situation... the Northern Route Army lacks siege troops and has no risk of major battle losses... Rushing there now is reasonable and justifiable. Both branches of the Royal Family would then have an account to settle!"

Upon this thought, Osellor finally called out loudly.

"Guards at my side, go call the Messenger of the Northern Route Army to come, to discuss the matter of reinforcements!"

The wind traveled a thousand miles, passing through the shaking world, and once more returned to the Rivermouth of the Lerma River, only to see a solemn and grim scene.

The morning light fell on the sturdy Rivermouth Fortress, illuminating tired Samurais and Militia on the ramparts, along with a new "Crocodile" banner. Atop the walls were signs of damage and burning, and a silent stillness pervaded. Only when food transporters climbed to the top were sparse greetings suddenly heard.

Outside the Rivermouth Fortress, defensive wooden barricades were riddled with breaches, the moat to the East had been partially filled in, and scattered earth platforms were erected outside the southern walls. The new siege camp built by the Mexica Army had already tightly surrounded the Eastern and Southern land.

Within the vast siege camp, Mexica Samurais prepared for another day's battle, laborers began repairing damaged shield carts, Craftsmen replaced parts of small catapults, and Gunpowder Craftsmen carefully made flammable Paper Fireballs. Siege preparations unfolded methodically, with the Mexica legion holding an absolute tactical initiative, without concern for attacks from the Defending Army.

Some time later, wisps of cooking smoke gradually rose. The camp was filled with the bustling noise of boiling commotion, and the aroma of food wafted through the air. It was the pre-battle breakfast, not intended to fully satiate the Samurais.

In the middle of the camp, Xiulote erected the Black Wolf's banner, standing on the Marshal's high platform. He gazed at the stone walls, recalling recent battles, and stood in solemn contemplation without a word.

Chapter 353 - Fortress Siege, Corpses Rain Down - Part 1

The faint morning light gradually brightened, making the blue-stone city walls more distinct. From afar, the walls were covered with sooty char and the dark red of coagulated blood. Under the sunlight, the morning dew gathered into glistening droplets on the ramparts, slowly meandering downward. The droplets slowly fell into the deep red, then darkened into black, silently dropping to the soil. Following this trail, one could discern the true color of the walls—the sturdy, blue-gray stone bricks.

Xiulote gazed at these impenetrable city walls and sighed inwardly.

The massive army had marched south and now, obstructed by these six-meter blue-stone walls, had been besieging the city for a month.

At the onset of the siege, he was full of confidence, believing that, buoyed by their sweeping victories, they could directly storm the city and the Rivermouth Fortress would easily fall. The Young Commander's prestige was high at this time, and Bertade was healing on the North Coast, making all the generals submissive and unquestioning. It was then that the distinguished teacher, Olosh, spoke up and advised caution, prompting Xiulote to act prudently.

Heeding the advice, he first set up large camps to the south and east of the fortress, and built a water camp by the Cuitzeo Lake. He then dispatched Samurai to patrol and control all passageways, effectively isolating the Rivermouth Fortress as a lone city, with all land and water routes cut off. Subsequently, under the cover of shield-carts, the Otomi Militia began to fill the eastern moat and dismantle the wooden palisades outside the city. They also constructed shooting mounds about a hundred steps from the south of the city, reaching seven to eight meters high, from which Crossbowmen could shoot from an elevated position. Only after all these preparations were the proper assaults on the city launched.

The Rivermouth Fortress was in an excellent position, easy to defend but difficult to attack. Surrounded by rivers, and with soft, waterlogged soil, it was impossible to dig tunnels or to collapse the walls. The fortress gates were blocked, and with insufficient metal tools, they could not ram or dig under the walls. Conquering such a fortress relied only on traditional methods of scaling the walls, but if the Defending Army was numerous and resolute, the casualties from such attempts were unacceptably severe, as demonstrated by their recent attempts.

Recalling the ferocity of the siege, Xiulote shook his head slightly. This had been his first real encounter with a strong city as the commander-in-chief of a large army.

On the first day of the attack, the Mexica Northern Army mobilized its full force. Behind the cover of shield-carts, Crossbowmen suppressed the enemies' firing, and trebuchets moved close to launch projectiles. Then, with high morale, the Holy City Samurai approached the city walls, climbed ladders, and fell one after the other. The brutal fierce battle lasted only for a quarter but cost five hundred Samurai lives!

The six-meter Stone Fort walls were nothing like the three-meter Wooden Fort walls. When the Samurai got within twenty steps, a rain of spears and stones fell, piercing Leather Armor and helmets. At five steps, lime and soil were continuously thrown down, obscuring vision. The moment the ladders were fixed, rolling logs and huge stones smashed down, breaking bones of those they hit.

More troubling was the Tarasco people, who had somehow replicated over three hundred Mexica Longbows, plus over a thousand Tlaxcala Wooden Bows, shooting from inside the city and killing any approaching Samurais. Under the deadly power of the strong bows, the Samurai were as fragile as autumn flowers, withering as quickly as the Militia. And when a few brave Samurai reached the ramparts, they were immediately met with dense Spear Formations of Tarasco men and quickly overwhelmed and killed.

After watching the battle for a quarter-hour without seeing any hope of breakthrough, Xiulote decisively blew the conch shell, ordering a retreat. The Holy City Samurai, carrying their shields, withdrew awkwardly while the Crossbowmen shot rapidly, suppressing the enemy on the city walls. Afterwards, he briefly tallied the numbers, and his heart ached. These were the most loyal Holy City Samurai, his family's most reliable force!

The Young Commander immediately had the nobles captured during the naval battle brought forward to inquire about the source of the Longbows. These Longbows had been the first batch of new weapons transported from the Capital City at the beginning of September. If not for the rapid southern advance of the Mexica army in October, an even larger second batch of Longbows would have reached them.

"The Tarasco people are already mass producing Longbows in the Capital City, prioritizing supply to the southern front line where the fighting is definitely more brutal. War, a matter of survival, truly is the fastest pathway for the spread of technology! After this battle at Lake Yuriria, spies from various states eager to learn about Gunpowder will probably swarm from all directions, like flies drawn to the scent of blood. Fortunately, the craftsmanship of Gunpowder is complex, and there's little chance of it leaking out in the short term."

Thinking this, Xiulote tilted his head slightly, his thoughts drifting to the distant future.

Olosh, dressed in the grand uniform of a Legion Commander, strode forward. The Commander was promoted to Deputy Marshal, holding command at the North Coast Wooden Fort. He now temporarily took over as the Legion Commander, leading the Holy City Legion, fulfilling his long-held desire.

"Your Highness, the Samurai are ready. Shall we feign an attack to lure the enemy as we did in the previous days, engaging them from a distance?"

Looking at his close mentor, Xiulote smiled faintly, shaking his head.

"The craftsmen have just made about a dozen simple nest carts, which will allow the Archers to shoot from a closer range. Today, we really attack again! Call Jiowar forward."

Since the first day of the siege, the Young Commander had realized that attacking a fortress was a lengthy process. Unwilling to lose too many core Samurai, he could not rush. Recollecting historical battles, he reformulated his plans. First, he aimed to exhaust the elite and combat-ready Samurai of the Defending Army, then gradually demoralize the Militia inside the city. Only once the fighting spirit and manpower of the Defending Army had significantly weakened would he launch a real total land assault and a surprise naval attack!

Under this new strategy, subsequent sieges mainly focused on ranged depletion. The Otapan Samurai were responsible for feigning attacks, making constant threatening moves toward scaling the walls to force the Defending Army to expose themselves. Next came the exchanges of fire between Archers, with the Northern Route Army leveraging its long-range advantage, occasionally launching burning Paper Fireballs. If the Defending Army completely took shelter behind the rampart's shielded platforms, then a real scaling attempt would follow, forcing a redeployment.

Chapter 354 - Fortress Siege, Corpses Rain Down - Part 2

Thus, life gradually became fuel, burned steadily in the collision of the war machine in a ratio that the Mexica legion could accept. The morale of the defending army was also gradually decreasing, from the initial inspiring shouts to today's exhausted silence.

Soon, Jiowar, the commander of the Otapan Legion, hurried over. After the water battle, the "Coyote's" fierce expression was replaced by respect, and he knelt on one knee in compliance.

"Respected elder brother, Your Highness, what are your orders?"

Xiulote nodded, his gaze tightly fixed on Jiowar, and he ordered sternly.

"Jiowar, the feint attack you conducted a few days ago was well done. Today, you are to lead the brave Ottopan Warriors in a real assault on the city! I'm giving you a batch of additional Leather Armor, let the warriors wear Double Armor, and the Crossbowmen will continuously suppress the enemy atop the

walls. Go and select your elite, boost their morale, and lead the vanguard when the battle drums sound! Do not allow a retreat until the conch sounds!"

Hearing this harsh military order, Jiowar remained silent. In the feign attacks of the past few days, the Otapan Legion had already lost four to five hundred men. This real assault on the city would only result in even heavier losses. After a moment, feeling the Young Commander's intense gaze, he bowed his head again and accepted the order.

"Your Highness, I obey your command and am willing to die in your service!"

Quickly, with the military order issued, the Mexica camp truly boiled over. Thousands of warriors successively left the camp, and arrayed themselves hundreds of steps away, in front of the southern wall of the Rivermouth fortress. The Ottopan Warriors were positioned at the forefront, followed by the Temple Guards, the Holy City Warriors, and the Spear Legion. Once the vanguard could firmly establish their position on the walls, the following legions would join them. Meanwhile, on the eastern side of the fortress, more than two thousand warriors from the western City-States also launched diversionary feint attacks.

Confronting the major movements of the Mexica legion, the Tarasco defending army on the walls became visibly nervous. Warriors patrolled and shouted on the battlements to boost morale. The Militia worked hard to reinforce the Great Shields on the walls, thicken the piled earth platforms, and prepare all available wooden and stone materials to throw, including sand and lime.

Xiulote calmly walked down from the high platform, leaving the commander's banner behind. In this advantageous siege battle, he no longer needed a flag to encourage his troops' morale. Then, under the protection of his trusted aide's shield, he moved to the front line, more than two hundred steps away from the walls, to better grasp the siege situation. Olosh also put on Leather Armor, holding a shield and a club, guarding beside him.

Soon, the commander's signal flag swung mercilessly, and the guard's horn blew fiercely, announcing the beginning of the assault!

Four hundred strong and colossal Temple Guards, frenzied in demeanor, holding massive Stirrup Crossbows, advanced to about one hundred and forty steps. There were dozens of small earth platforms, at the edge of the enemy Longbows' lethal range. With the help of rope ladders, nearly half of the Temple Guards climbed the nearly eight-meter-tall platforms to ready the heavy crossbows. The people of Tarasco on the walls could not make any counterattacks and desperately reinforced shields and platforms, hiding their bodies behind cover.

Shortly afterwards, the solemn horn sounded again, and the Crossbowmen suddenly fired. "Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!" Hundreds of Crossbow Arrows launched from a superior height, tracing a slightly descending arc, and abruptly pinned on the walls.

In an instant, several piteous screams arose, more than ten militia with inadequate protection were pierced by arrows. The bolts penetrated their frail bodies clad in cloth, knocking them down immediately. The lucky militia were killed instantly by vital shots without a struggle. Unlucky ones were pinned against the wooden shields next to them, struggling in place as blood profusely flowed from their ripped wounds.

The "Crocodile" banners fluttered in the wind as the Tarasco Samurai, overseeing the battle, did not hesitate. They brandished their daggers, executing the grievously wounded militia who screamed in agony, granting them relief and preventing any further demoralization. The dead bodies were thrown outside the city to prevent decay within the city walls. Only the lightly wounded militiamen were simply bandaged so that they could continue to serve as fodder in the defense of the city.

After what seemed like dozens of breaths, the second volley of crossbow arrows whooshed through the air, this time claiming only three or four militiamen. With the enemy maintaining a state of evasion, this round of shooting caused minimal casualties. The crossbow arrows used in the heavy crossbows were more expensive, and the crossbowmen maintained long intervals between their shots, merely serving to suppress those atop the ramparts.

With the launch of the second round of crossbow arrows, thousands of Longbow Samurai slowly advanced towards the city walls, pushing over two hundred small shield carts. The Samurai had grim expressions, fostering lethal intentions. As they entered within ninety paces, the longbowmen on the ramparts started to shoot. The "whoosh" of feathered arrows from above lodged deeply into the thick wood of the great shields. Occasionally, two or three arrows, by chance, would shoot through the openings in the shield, striking the Longbow Samurai behind who immediately fell, the arrows piercing their chests and bellies, draining their strength.

At this point, the rudimentary yet sturdy shield carts would pause momentarily. The remaining Samurai would bend down, checking on their comrades, as ordered by the Marshal. If their teammate was dead, they would continue to push the cart forward. If there was still hope, they would stop in place, administer quick first aid, and then exchange fire with the city walls from there.

Most of the shield carts advanced to about fifty paces before stopping together. This was the maximum distance at which a Tlaxcalan bow could penetrate leather armor, a distance measured with lives. Only then did the Samurai draw their bows and release a volley of arrows. The dense shower of arrows, flying over tens of paces, struck precisely into the eyes, mouths, or throats of the Tarasco archers, penetrating inches into their skulls. Several enemy archers peering out to shoot instantly fell dead, and about a dozen militiamen also perished silently. At such close range, to be hit by an arrow was to face death.

The battle flags on the ramparts waved, and at the noble commander's behest, the reserve Tarasco Samurai didn't pause. They quickly picked up the precious longbows and continued to exchange fire with those below, taking extra care to shield their bodies.

As the Longbowmen began to further oppress, about a dozen basic siege towers, carrying nearly a hundred archers and pushed forward by two hundred militiamen, targeted the left section of the city wall to exert intense pressure.

This was the latest siege equipment designed by Xiulote. Drawing inspiration from ancient siege towers and nest carts of the Celestial Empire, while maintaining the functions of carrying and defense, the design was simplified according to the era's manufacturing capabilities. The nest cart was relatively simple, consisting of two rows of eight solid wooden wheels, a stable base, and one upright log reinforced on each side. Between the two towering logs, a platform built nearly ten meters high could accommodate six or seven archers firing simultaneously. The sides and bottom of the platform were reinforced with wooden boards to ward off arrow fire. On the rear hung a rope ladder, allowing the Samurai to climb up, replacing complex and fragile stretching mechanisms.

At this moment, the dozen nest carts gradually approached to within sixty paces, and the archers above started firing continuously. "Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh," the feathered arrows, with the advantage of height, mercilessly shot past the shields and earth embankments of the wall segment toward the backbone of the Tarasco defense. In a targeted barrage, nearly ten commanding Samurai were struck with arrows simultaneously, and deep, agonizing groans echoed continuously. The militiamen suddenly lost their repression and command, causing immediate chaos on this section of the wall.

The thunderous beat of drums finally sounded at this moment! With a fierce howl from Jiowar, the awaiting Ottopan Warriors shouted together. Clad in Double Armor and raising their shields, with dozens of seven-to-eight-meter ladders carried in the center, they rapidly charged toward the city walls. Along with the intense beat of drums, the earth embankments, shield carts, and nest carts, more than a thousand bowmen and crossbowmen fired at the same time. The dense shower of arrows brought a piercing howl, instantly pinning the peeking Tarasco archers. Then, the ruthless arrow shower continued without pause, exerting all efforts to suppress all life on the ramparts. "Thud, thud, thud," the sound of arrows hitting wood merged into a symphony of death!

The Ottopan Samurai rapidly moved within a hundred paces of the city walls, now engulfed in the shadow of death. Jiowar howled again as the Samurai hunched and ran, striding desperately. They crossed the increasingly perilous distance at maximum speed. The Tarasco longbowmen also fought back desperately, the "whoosh" of feathered arrows not needing to aim, simply falling directly into the mass of Samurai. Those struck by arrows immediately fell to the ground. The surviving Samurai bled profusely, struggling weakly on the ground, yet no one cared. At this moment, whether gravely wounded or dead, all met the same fate.

Hundreds of paces away, Xiulote's expression was steely as he watched the battlefield before him. He watched as the Ottopan Samurai began to die in groups, his heart as hard as iron. For this was merely the beginning.

When the Ottopan Samurai finally charged within forty paces, the real slaughter arrived!

Chapter 355 - Siege of the Fortress, Corpses Fall like Rain

With the shrill sound of a conch horn, samurai and militia on every section of the wall suddenly leaned out, releasing their deadly arrows with ferocity. Drawing their modern longbows, they shot sharp copper arrows that pierced the cotton armor of the charging samurai. They fully extended their traditional single-piece wooden bows, unleashing bone arrows with jagged points, penetrating the heads and faces of any samurai who had halted.

Jiowar, holding up his shield and looking up, saw his pupils suddenly contract as his body instinctively crouched down to raise his shield overhead. Thousands of Tarasco archers released their arrows simultaneously, and a deadly barrage showered down from the ramparts, whistling through the air. Jiowar's shield clanged repeatedly, followed by a sharp pang in his shoulder, clearly having been struck by an arrow. Several of his trusted aides tumbled to the ground like gourds, screaming as they clutched their heads and faces, struggling as they were turned into hedgehogs.

At almost the same moment, hundreds of Tarasco militia half-rose, shouting. Raising their arms for a brief aim, they hurled javelins the length of their arms and fist-sized round rocks down towards the city walls. Blunt wooden javelins descended from above with a dull rush of wind, showing no mercy as they punctured the bodies of samurai, pinning them to the ground, while heavy rocks, picking up speed, slammed into the leather helmets of the samurai with an unstoppable force, knocking them down along with their helmets.

Jiowar crouched on the ground, hiding his body completely behind the great shield, no longer caring to observe the battle. The harsh clanging sounds "bang bang" rang out, cries of agony from the trusted aides were ceaseless yet swiftly weakened. In that moment of siege warfare, his leather armor seemed pitifully thin. Even for the mighty samurai, death could come at any time, and to wither was but an instant.

Not far away, Xiulote watched unblinkingly, seeing the scene even more clearly. This long-prepared volley had immediately cleared a void, nailing hundreds of Otomi warriors to their place!

The young commander quickly waved his flag, and the piercing sound of a conch horn rose again, and over a thousand Mexica archers and crossbowmen simultaneously fired towards the city rampart. Feathered arrows and crossbow bolts, like a surging torrent, knocked over the weeds atop the battlements in an instant.

A fierce Tarasco samurai clutched a longbow, his expression savage. Across a distance of forty paces, he shot an arrow that struck an Ottopan warrior in the cheek and immediately became a target for the archers below. The fierce samurai was about to notch another arrow when his movement abruptly halted, then he let go weakly, his copper arrow falling from his grasp.

A bone arrow penetrated his unprotected chin with a "plop" sound, skewing through his mouth from below. The excruciating pain hit him instantly, yet the samurai did not die at once, vainly attempting to open his mouth. Then another crossbow bolt whistled in, piercing through the samurai's chest. He immediately fell to his knees, hands still desperately flailing until a freakishly precise arrow pierced his eye, embedding two inches deep. Only then did he find final relief, falling backward onto the battlements.

A group of four or five Tarasco militiamen stood closely. Wearing cloth garments, they squeezed between the narrow gaps in the shields to shoot arrows, yelling with each enemy they struck down. More than twenty feathered arrows accompanied the yelling, mostly deflected by the shields, producing a continuous "bang bang" sound.

Only four or five long arrows, passing through different gaps, penetrated without hesitation into fragile bodies. At close range, the long arrows held formidable power, unabated by cloth or flesh, piercing straight through and "hissing" as they skewered the militiamen together. Their blood instantly mingled,

and the militiamen screamed in agony, struggling fiercely, but could never separate. They only tore their wounds wider, spilling more crimson, then solidified into a silent sculpture group.

Other brave Tarasco militiamen raised their right arms, hurling powerful short spears. As soon as the short spear left the hand, a strong crossbow bolt struck his exposed chest cavity, and he fell silently towards the wall below. In the last moment of his life, he only saw his short spear hit the target, stabbing into an advancing Ottopan warrior. The warrior staggered a few steps and then toppled, burying his face in the mud. Soon after, the valiant militiaman crashed into the dust, just two steps apart from the spear-stricken warrior, head to head, silently perishing together.

Xiulote, expressionless, gave a slight nod. The shooting Tarascans were hard to fully cover, and this wave of close-range arrow rain had taken away nearly a hundred of the defending army. The firepower from the ramparts stalled momentarily, and the archers once again hid their figures, their accuracy greatly reduced.

The intense drumming never ceased, as Ottopan warriors charged forth in roars, finally reaching the base of the ramparts. A dozen warriors desperately set up a heavy wooden ladder, leaning it against the stone wall, nearly ready to scale the city.

The Tarascans on the battlements leaned out again. Under the urgent urging of the militant samurai, militia hurled down ceramic jars of various sizes, along with heavy planks and stones. The jars shattered upon impact, scattering a white powder explosive. The Ottopan warriors underneath erupted into inhuman screams, clutching their eyes and writhing in agony on the ground—that was quicklime, commonly seen in the volcanic regions, used for years in construction and agricultural production.

The warriors below, blinded, loosened their grip and stumbled in confusion. The ladder then tilted, crashing down and crushing two warriors beneath it. The timber and stones from the ramparts followed with a "crash," squashing some warriors into tangled heaps on the ground, which soon turned into a mix of red and gray hues.

Chapter 356 - Siege of the Fortress, Corpses Fall Like Rain Part\_2

Witnessing such a brutal scene, the nearby archers quickly adjusted and began to prioritize shooting the militia hurling clay pots. On the city walls, a Tarasco militiaman, fervently shouting the name of his god, raised a clay pot high, ready to smash it down. Then several feathered arrows "swooshed" in, striking him from top to bottom. The militiaman violently jerked backward, no longer able to lift the clay pot filled with lime, which then silently slid off.

Behind him, several fellow villagers, pale with fright, didn't hesitate to push fiercely from behind. The fervent militiaman, along with the falling clay pot, plummeted from the six-meter-high wall, then "bang," burst upon the ground, spreading a cloud of white dust in all directions. Agonized screams then arose below, coming from several newly-blinded Ottopan Warriors.

The militia on the walls had just breathed a sigh of relief when the whizzing feathered arrows attacked once more, nailing most of the militia to death, leaving only one to escape by fluke. The surviving militiaman, terrified out of his wits, lay motionless in a pool of blood atop the ramparts, unwilling to rise and defend the walls again. The Samurai overseeing the battle saw this breach and waved his copper spear, driving another group of militia to mount the walls. Then, without hesitation, he ordered the last militiaman, along with the bodies of his fellow villagers, to be thrown down from the walls. Soon, a final scream added to those below.

Putting intense pressure were crossbowmen on the earthen ramparts and shield carts, while archers in the sally ports performed targeted clean-up. Quickly, several stretches of chaotic wall appeared on the left side of South City. Hundreds of Ottopan Warriors finally steadied their ladders and began to climb through these chaotic breaches. In less than a dozen breaths, dozens of Samurai had reached the top and cried out excitedly. They swung their shields to fend off the oncoming copper spears, then struck out with their war clubs, engaging in fierce combat with a large troop of Tarasco militia.

Xiulote's eyes lit up, his face filled with anticipation. He waved his command flag, and the large, strong Temple Guards formed ranks, ready to provide reinforcement at any moment. Then, crossbowmen on the raised platforms gradually received instructions, concentrating their shots on both sides of those sections of the walls, pinning down a swath of militia.

On the ramparts, a Tarasco militiaman was suddenly struck in the head by an arrow and fell facing upwards, dropping his Tlaxcala wooden bow to the side. Two steps away, a young militiaman named Weizti, his eyes bloodshot, reached for the bow. Then a "thump" resounded as he was struck hard on the forehead, abruptly interrupting his action.

"You blockhead! Don't go grabbing that wooden bow; you'll be dead if you do!"

The familiar accent of his homeland came from behind Weizti, snapping him out of his combative impulse. Crouching, the young militiaman turned around and saw the familiar old militiaman, Chiwaco. Equally crouching was the old militiaman, with a rock the size of his chest in hand. He wore a sturdy wooden shield on his head, tightly bound under his chin with henequen rope, resembling a turtle with its shell.

"Uncle, where'd you get that shield? Isn't there a helmet from the lords over there?"

Weizti shook his slightly dizzy head, taking a closer look at Chiwaco's appearance. The last time, the old militiaman had led them to escape the battlefield, rowing for three days straight and arriving at the fortress even before the Marshal. Since then, the old militiaman had been regarded by everyone as a leader, a convincing Uncle.

The intense sounds of combat echoed wildly, "swoosh swoosh" as arrows flew overhead. Chiwaco shivered, looking around, not seeing any of the lords. He then whispered.

"Don't wear the helmets of the lords, nor their leather armor; the Mexica are targeting those outfits to shoot at! Go find a shield, or cover your head with a clay pot. Then join me, crouch down and push rocks off!"

Weizti vaguely grasped the idea. He ducked down, placed an empty clay pot on his head, and then joined the old militiaman in pushing rocks off.

Soon, supporting Samurai lords arrived with nervous expressions, carrying long spears up to the ramparts. Rushing past, they headed towards the walls by the river, loudly driving the militia they met along the way. The howling arrows from below were aimed at that part of the walls, occasionally bringing down a group of Defending Army soldiers.

Chiwaco, his hands pressing on a rock, watched cautiously.

He observed the grim combat nearby, where dozens of skinny Samurai continuously rushed to the top of the walls, clashing in a scramble with the supporting lords. People cried out in pain, either falling off the wall or collapsing onto it. It was as if there was a boiling cauldron of soup there, with the lords from both sides thrown in like firewood, continuously bringing the walls to a boil and causing blood to splatter like bubbling soup.

The old militiaman shivered again. He pulled out his blood-stained bag of herbs, inhaling deeply from it twice. The scent of the herbs was fading, while the stench of blood grew stronger. However, for some reason, this act calmed him.

When the old militiaman came to his senses, he saw Weizti had gotten ahead of him, almost ready to push a large rock off the wall. Furious, he grabbed the young militiaman's trousers and pulled him to the ground.

"Weizti, come back here! Are you dumb?! Are you really going to throw that big rock down? Look around; this is the only big rock nearby. Once you push it off, the lords will force you to shoot arrows and throw javelins... Push it back now!"

The young militiaman hesitated. He looked around; chaos reigned everywhere, with lords hastily passing by, paying no attention to this place. Afterward, he obediently pushed the rock back and, together with the old militiaman, resumed a crouching position ready to push the stone.

Chapter 357 - Siege of the Fortress, Bodies Rain Down Part 3

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"Uncle, the Mexica are fierce today; do you think we can hold on?"

In the midst of the brutal hand-to-hand combat on the city wall, the old militia crouched, pretending to be busy while surveying the surrounding situation. He replied offhandedly.

"Now it's all the young masters who are new to this, with hundreds of the old masters not yet engaged, waiting below the wall. Given the circumstances today, I reckon we can hold on. But given the ferocity of the Mexica, we might not last much longer!"

Having said this, the old militia sighed and muttered to himself.

"Why can't the fire arrow I picked up transform into a Fire Demon? If it could, I'd beg the nobility for a chance to guard the water gate, where I might have a shot at survival in a critical moment!"

Not long after the last return, a noble lord came down and reorganized the militia. The old militia, Chiwaco, took the opportunity to present the fire arrow he had found.

The nobility were overjoyed and took the fire arrow to study it repeatedly, taking apart the round paper casing to identify the charcoal powder inside, along with something called "Stone of the Dead." They then dried the damp powder and carefully ignited it. However, it burned like regular charcoal, producing a choking smoke and no sudden burst of flame.

Chiwaco couldn't understand it, nor could the nobility. The promised reward was never given, and the old militia was merely promoted to a small squad leader, in charge of a dozen or so militiamen. He was then thrown into the most intense fighting at South City, becoming part of the kindling. In just over ten days, most of his militiamen had died; now, only a few obedient fellows from his hometown were left, loafing together on the city wall.

The old militia was contemplating carefully when he heard Wei Zi's terrified call amidst the whizzing of arrows.

"Uncle, Uncle! The Mexica are coming up!"

Chiwaco shuddered, looking forward. Out of nowhere, another group of lean samurai advanced, lifting the wooden ladders that had fallen and heading toward this side of the city wall again. As the samurai moved, a barrage of arrows preceded their actions, whizzing over the heads of the militia where Chiwaco lay and shooting several of the men behind him dead.

The old militia's limbs went cold, his face pale. In the dire moment, he displayed a nimbleness that was hard to imagine, scampering backward on all fours and shouting, "I'm going to get some rocks; everyone, start throwing them down!"

Wei Zi, obedient, was the first to shove a large rock down, crushing an Ottopan Warrior into the mud. The wooden ladder wobbled and then again approached the city wall.

Other militiamen rushed forward and threw a Short Spear at the ladder; right after, a bolt took them down with a whoosh. Another militiaman quickly picked up a Wooden Bow from the ground and fired fiercely downward, killing a samurai. Moments later, a Feathered Arrow struck him accurately, passing through his throat and protruding from his neck.

Wei Zi trembled and crawled to get more stones. The commanding samurai rushed forward to drive the militiamen to the forefront, then took up their Long Spears to hold the line. The wooden ladder was finally secured at the city head, with the copper hooks latching onto the wall. Two militiamen tried to push it over but were pinned together by an arrow like stringed gourds. Then, a dozen or so Otomi Warriors, agile as spry monkeys and with an air of chilling killing intent, began to ascend the wall.

The warriors in front made a fierce charge, forcing the militiamen to retreat several steps. Soon after, more samurai climbed up, swinging their sharp-edged War Clubs, slicing through the fragile bodies of the militiamen. A dozen Copper Spears thrust forward, accurately blocked by the militia's shields, their years of Martial Arts training kicking in like instinct. Tarasco Warriors led a charge from behind, and the militiamen followed; Spear clashed with War Club, and bodies fell on both sides.

A kneeling corpse suddenly moved; Chiwaco peeked his head out from behind, quickly taking in the situation. He saw the enemy's samurai forces growing and his own militiamen being killed, and a chill went through his heart. If things continued this way, even if reinforcements arrived to drive the enemy from the city wall, he wouldn't last that long!

Chiwaco racked his brain, staying frozen for a moment before shouting to someone nearby.

...

"Men, grab your Spears and crouch beside me!"

Hearing the familiar voice, Weizti felt like he had found his anchor. He picked up a Long Spear from among the corpses on the ground, a weapon that was readily found everywhere, and joined up with five or six Militia from his village.

"When I give the chant, you all follow my lead and stab at the legs in the center!"

"Uncle, we can't tell our people from the enemy in the center, how are we supposed to stab?"

The young Militia asked, bewildered.

"Stop your blathering! It doesn't matter which side they're from. We're not going to hold out much longer anyway, just stab them all down!"

Chiawaco, the older Militia, showed a rare ferocity on his face as he shouted angrily.

"One, two, three, stab!"

Six or seven Spears thrust through the tangle of legs, aiming simultaneously towards the center. Fighters from both sides immediately fell, half of them Ottopan Warriors, half Tarasco Militia. They clutched at their legs, struggling until they were trampled underfoot by the crowd, silenced in moments.

"One, two, stab again!"

Several more fell, and the fight briefly stalled. The Tarasco Militia began to push the vanguard of the Ottopan Warriors towards the ladder.

"Stab! Stab again! And again!"

Continuous cries rang out, and new Militia joined in. A dozen men crouched down, jabbing at the legs and feet that the warriors left unprotected by shields. These wounds were not fatal but were enough to rob the injured of their ability to fight.

The Tarasco Militia continued thrusting their Long Spears, forcing the newly arrived Warriors to halt and crouch behind their shields for protection below. Finally, the supporting Tarasco Warriors surged atop the battlements, coordinating with the Militia to drive the Ottopan Warriors back down.

"Huff, huff!"

Old Militia Chiawaco slumped to the ground, still wearing his shield on his head. He managed a smile, about to say something to the Militia around him, but a piercing barrage of arrows struck again. In an instant, several Militia by his side were shot dead, and the Nobles on the battlements also fell, screaming in agony.

A "thump" on the old Militia's head sent him sprawling into the pool of blood on the ground. Moments later, he reached out with blood-covered hands, feeling the Feathered Arrow stuck in his shield, and muttered to himself.

"With days like these, there's just no way to live..."

Chapter 358 - One Hundred and Eighty-Two: Maple Leaves and Reinforcements

Ruthless volleys of arrows whistled above and below the city walls, like the piercing autumn wind sweeping across the battlefield. Samurai and militia on both sides fell like leaves in that wind by the tall city walls, wilting away. The wilted leaves fell into the mud, the nourishment from their bodies seeping out and staining the cobblestones and earth a deep red. Thus, the city walls became like maple trees, and the fallen leaves became maple leaves.

The mournful beauty of the battlefield reflected in the eyes of the young commander, as well as mirroring his calm, lake-like demeanor. On the left side of the city walls, Ottopan warriors continuously scaled the ramparts only to be driven back down by the Tarasco defending army, unable to secure a breach. The surrounding militia also gradually gathered, hurling logs, boulders, javelins, and arrows as if they cost neither money nor life.

Soon, with a piercing blare of conch shells, hundreds of Tarasco samurai reinforcements surged to the top of the walls. They formed a dense and powerful spear formation, thrusting alternately, making it impossible for the Ottopan warriors to hold their ground. The lean warriors clung desperately to their shields as they retreated down the walls in a disheveled rout, showing the beginnings of a collapse.

Xiulote's gaze sharpened as he scrutinized the supporting Tarasco samurai. They had resolute expressions, tightly gripping wooden shields and copper spears, with crocodile or turkey totems on their leather armor, exhibiting a high level of combat discipline and being extremely wary of longbows.

"This must be the enemy's most elite reserve troops! With the continuous depletion, there are only ten thousand fort defenders remaining. If we launch a full assault now, even with additional casualties of three thousand samurai, we should be able to take the fortress in one fell swoop!"

Xiulote hesitated in his heart. He looked around at his loyal Holy City samurai, the fanatical Temple Guards, and the stringent Spear Formation army. These were his direct pillars of support and the core strength of the Holy City lineage. The young commander then made up his mind and waved the command flag.

"Sound the horn, retreat!"

The fierce drumming came to an abrupt halt, and the sharp conch signal finally sounded—a moment's clash as long as a century. Hearing the signal, the Ottopan warriors, who had been desperately holding on, retreated swiftly. They jumped down from the walls, raised their shields for cover, and fled towards the rear without hesitation. The severely wounded who could not move were ruthlessly left behind, along with the ladders that had been placed against the city walls.

The Tarasco on the walls erupted into a cheer. Then came another volley of arrows, pinning the exposed enemy defenders, and the walls quickly became quiet again.

It wasn't until then that Jiowar emerged from a corner below the city, retreating with the attacking trusted aides. As the Commander-in-Chief of the legion, he led the charge but did not ascend the walls himself. He simply found a corner difficult to shoot into and, under the protection of the Great Shield, directed the nearby battle situation.

Xiulote waved the flag again. Dozens of small stone-throwing machines were moved to the front lines, and from a safe ninety paces away, they launched a round of flaming Paper Fireballs. The Fireballs

traced inaccurate arcs, mostly landing inside and outside the walls, burning the buildings within. A few that landed on the ramparts burst into large flames, igniting over a dozen Great Shields and turning scores of defending soldiers into screaming torches. Thick smoke soon rose, and the gas from burning sulfur spread continuously, enveloping the top and bottom of the walls in toxic fumes.

Seeing the launch of the Paper Fireballs, the fortress defenders breathed a sigh of relief. In this choking smoke, it was difficult for anyone to fight, and today's siege had come to an end. The supporting Tarasco samurai withdrew to the rear again, entering buildings beyond the reach of bowfire. The overseeing samurai crouched down, covering their faces and mouths with several layers of cotton cloth. Under their stern commands, the militia coughed while chopping off the wooden ladders and used sand and earth prepared on the walls to extinguish fires and smoke.

The retreat signal sounded again. Under the cover of the thick smoke, the rearguard Ottopan warriors took away those with less serious injuries. Longbow warriors fired a final volley of Feathered Arrows, and hundreds of shield carts stationed fifty paces from the city began to slowly retreat. Then came several slow-moving nest carts, with the cart-pushers suffering heavy casualties. Finally, the Stirrup Crossbowmen gradually descended from the platforms.

After the besieging legions had all retreated, Xiulote looked back at the city walls once more. Many of the small fires had been extinguished with earth, and the exhausted Tarasco militia lay collapsed behind the Wooden Shields and earth mounds on the ramparts.

The Tarasco were skilled at building pyramids and equally adept at constructing fortifications. The city ramparts originally had simple battlements meant to fend off the relatively low-powered traditional Wooden Bows. Over the months, under the threat of Mexica bows and crossbows, nearly two-meter high Great Wooden Shields were erected on the walls to block arrows, many still bearing the outlines of doors and windows.

In places where there were not enough Wooden Shields, mounds of earth over a meter high were piled up. These earth mounds served not only to protect against bows and crossbows but also to extinguish fires. After Mexica Paper Fireballs continuously ignited the Wooden Shields, the Tarasco merged the

earth mounds and Shields and raised their height even further. In fact, these rudimentary but practical defensive measures could also protect against Matchlock Guns and small-caliber cannon.

"In wars of survival, people will fully exert their initiative to build fortifications and modify equipment, adapting to the conditions of war. Especially in this era of prolonged strife that has lasted for hundreds of years."

The young commander gazed thoughtfully at everything on the ramparts. He never underestimated the wisdom of his ancestors. People of the times simply could not see the direction of the future, but they were not without experience in production and warfare.

In the confrontation among various powers, the advantage brought by advanced weapons can only last for a short time. Samurai will always find ways, from the lore of spiritual beliefs and practical equipment, to gradually adapt to emerging weapons. But the real advantage of a nation must be built on the innovation of systems and productivity, based on the strength of national power, and this is also the case with the confrontation with Europeans.

Chapter 359 - The Maple Leaf and Reinforcements\_2

Xiulote's thoughts scattered among the pervasive smoke. His gaze was as elusive as a deity's. When he collected himself, Jiowar was already covered in blood, kneeling respectfully before His Highness.

"Jiowar, the Otapan Legion fought well! You have shown devotion to the Chief Divine, and also proven your loyalty to the Alliance!"

The Young Commander showed a warm smile, stepped forward, and lifted the "Coyote" Legion Commander. He was very satisfied with the performance of the Otapan Legion; the "Coyote" had been completely tamed.

"I am ready to die for Your Highness!" Jiowar clenched his fist over his heart and bowed his head in a salute.

Xiulote nodded and inquired.

"What are the casualties for the Otapan Legion?"

A redness appeared in Jiowar's eyes, his voice hoarse and trembling.

"A thousand injured, among them six hundred have fallen in battle."

Xiulote fell silent for a moment, then patted the "Coyote" forcefully on the shoulder.

The Otapan Legion was but three thousand Samurai. Previously, four to five hundred had already perished. Today, as the vanguard in the siege, under the pressure of the army's supervision, another six hundred had died, leaving less than two thousand. Facing such a crippling blow, the Otapan Legion could only turn to recuperation, unfit for use in the short term.

"Jiowar, the siege by the Otapan Legion was arduous, go and rest well now. I will have the High Priest of the Chief Divine hold a grand funeral for the legion!... Today's battle, under the suppression of crossbows, the enemy's casualties should be twice ours. The day the city falls is not far off, the Alliance will not forget your merits!"

Afterward, the Young Commander lowered his voice and whispered into Jiowar's ear.

"I will not forget your loyalty either!"

Hearing His Highness's acknowledgment, Jiowar was moved; the Otapan Legion had finally proven themselves with their sacrifice. He abruptly knelt down, once again performing a solemn salute.

This time, Xiulote nodded slightly, without further comment. He stood solemnly, accepting the "Coyote" Legion Commander's homage.

The November autumn wind freely swept through, constantly plucking fresh maple leaves from the fortress walls. The brutal siege came to a halt, but the attrition of feigned attacks continued daily. The warriors from the western City-States became the new troops for the feigned attacks.

The Mexica crossbowmen became more frugal with their arrows. They drew ever closer to the battlements, taking precise shots, daily claiming the lives of dozens of defenders. With the bloodletting gradually worsening, the morale of the riverside fort's defending army grew more and more weary, plummeting to rock bottom. Enduring became an ordeal, with no hope in sight. The "Crocodile" Marshal's banner still flew over the battlements, but many different emotions were rising in the hearts of the city's defenders.

In the blink of an eye, another two weeks passed, and November was already more than half over. The clear, dry season arrived. At last, Mexica's fleet appeared again on the Lerma River, bringing the last batch of support from the Alliance.

Xiulote returned to the North Coast port, displaying the ceremonial guard, to welcome the arriving reinforcements.

This time, the naval forces' journey was rather long, taking more than a month. Annatri first went to the Lake Capital City, carrying a large supply of food, conveying the news of the great victory. Then, she sailed north along the Tampen River to the outskirts of Xilotepec City, dropping off some food and picking up the promised reinforcements. Lastly, she led the reinforcements down south, turning from the western City-States into the Lerma River, traveling westward to this place.

Annatri, holding a Long Spear, once again leapt down from the gorgeous large boat. She looked much thinner, but her eyes were filled with vitality.

"Your Highness, two thousand warriors from the western City-States, three thousand from Xilotepec, four thousand Chichimeca Canine Descendants, and enough food for two months for twenty thousand people, all have arrived on schedule!"

Xiulote was momentarily stunned, a look of joy spreading across his face. After more than half a year, the reinforcements from Xilotepec City had finally arrived! To his surprise, there were also two thousand warriors from the western City-States. The Young Commander pondered for a moment, then realized.

"After the news of the great victory in the naval battle spread, the situation for the Northern Route Army greatly improved, and the various City-States finally started to add frosting to the cake, increasing their investments!"

With this thought, Xiulote laughed aloud. He glanced at the new flags on the large boats, and laughed heartily.

"Very well, Chief Divine's blessing, 'Head of Lerma River', my Great General of the Naval Forces! Annatri, you have worked hard on your journey; now go and rest!"

The female samurai bowed respectfully and then, without any reluctance, walked away with her head held high. She was headed to the northern wooden fort to check on the Head Warrior's injuries and martial arts skills.

The reinforcements continued to come ashore. Led by the Great Nobility, two thousand warriors from the western City-States made a noisy entrance as they disembarked first. These City-State Warriors were the private armies of the Great Nobility—well-equipped and with decent morale, but their command left much to be desired, and they were not suitable for battles with massive casualties.

Xiulote had already assessed these legions from the City-State. At this moment, with a sincere ritualistic smile, he chatted briefly with the leaders of the Great Nobility, exchanging greetings about each other's glorious ancestors and mentioning the friendly relations that had spanned generations. Afterward, the nobles proceeded to the northern wooden fort to attend the welcome banquet hosted by the Deputy Marshal.

Then, three thousand Xilotepec samurai disembarked in silence, with strict formation. Seeing this legion, Xiulote was momentarily stunned. He observed carefully; the once-familiar Otomi Warriors, now acting with concise order, with somber and calm faces emanating a chilling killing aura, quite looked like an elite military force.

Soon, on the riverbank's sandy headland, squad leaders from the legion and accompanying Priests began to line up. The Legion Commander and Vice Legion Commander then approached together to greet His Highness.

"Poet" Commander-in-Chief Balamo wore a melancholic smile as he looked toward His Highness, whom he hadn't seen for quite some time. He bowed deeply, expressing his sincere admiration.

"Radiant Highness, you are like the midday sun, providing me with scorching warmth. Your increasingly authoritative demeanor, like the proud Divine Eagle lifting its head, drenches my soul with its black eyes. I prostrate under your wings, praising your triumphant soaring victory!"

Xiulote pondered for a moment and confirmed that the "Poet" was genuinely praising him. He then stepped forward and affectionately patted Balamo's shoulder.

"The newly ennobled Balamo, long time no see! You are like the sacred cocoa, spreading your graceful branches, becoming increasingly expansive, a delight to behold."

The "Poet's" slightly plump face paused. Having spent several months idle at the northern stronghold, indulging daily in fine wine and women and dealing with local Nobility, he had unknowingly lost the lean, distinct lines of his once handsome visage, becoming rounder and much broader in figure.

Balamo looked at His Highness's seemingly smiling expression, thought for a moment, and then suddenly understood. He immediately kneeled down respectfully and offered deep obeisance.

"Your Highness, your loyal Commander-in-Chief Balamo has returned to your command, ready to serve you unto death!"

Xiulote looked calmly for a while. Balamo's demeanor was solemn as he knelt unmoving on the ground. A moment later, the Young Commander laughed heartily, tousled the "Poet's" hair, and then helped him to his feet by the hands.

"Well done, Balamo, my 'Desolate Highland', welcome back! Who is the Legion Commander of the Otomi Legion of Xilotepec?"

Balamo cautiously glanced at His Highness's expression before replying with a smile.

"The Divine Blessing Legion is led by Natali as the Legion Commander, with me as the Vice Legion Commander! Natali was among the first Otomi Warriors to surrender and was one of the Xilotepec prisoners exchanged during your first negotiation. He was the first to pledge allegiance to the Chief Divine and is the most devout warrior leader, having made great contributions in the northern campaign against the Chichimeca Canine Descendants!"

Hearing this, Xiulote nodded. He looked at the young Legion Commander Natali with a smile.

"The Chief Divine is supreme, omnipotent! He blesses us and watches over our sacred conquest to the west. Legion Commander Natali, under the Chief Divine's blessing, victory in the west is assured! As long as you fight for the divine, you will gain new honors and establish a glorious family!"

Natali's face was austere, like a hard sculpture. Upon hearing His Highness's words, a genuine faint smile surfaced on his face. Then, grasping the Sun Amulet on his neck, he replied with devotion.

"Praise to the Chief Divine Huitzilopochtli! He has saved us, and we shall fight for Him, spreading His glory! The Divine Blessing Legion will throw itself into the great divine battle, offering up our lives to the Divine unto death. His faith shall spread across the land!"

After what almost seemed like a chant, Natali then kneeled on one knee and bowed solemnly to His Highness.

"Sacred 'Divine Revelator', High Priest of Teotihuacan, Priest Xiulote, I, Natali, on behalf of the Divine Blessing Legion, offer our reverent regards to you! We bask in the light of the Divine Blessing and shall fight for You!"

Watching the unmistakably sincere demeanor of Natali and listening to his heartfelt praise, the young Priest was momentarily dumbfounded, his heart thundering, before he quickly regained composure.

"Praise to the Chief Divine Huitzilopochtli! I pray to the most high, honoring the souls of the converts, this is the loyalty observed by the Chief Divine!"

Chapter 360 - Prelude

Warm sunlight cascaded down, shining upon the Divine Blessing Legion by the river's edge, also illuminating their somber faces. Gold, silver, wooden, bone, and stone sun amulets twinkled around the Samurai's necks, as if the Sun God's protection was always with them.

Xiulote and Natali prayed together for a few moments, then allowed each other to lead the Samurai away to rest. The youthful Priest closely observed the passing Divine Blessing Legion, nodding slowly but firmly.

The final batch of reinforcements to land at the river was the disorderly Chichimeca Canine Descendants. Dozens of chieftains from the Canine Descendants Tribes shouted loudly, calling warriors of varying numbers to gather into groups of different sizes. Then, under the guidance of General Osellor's Envoy, the chieftains approached in disarray, paying their respects one by one to His Highness.

Xiulote bore a commanding presence as he received the loyalty of the Canine Descendants chieftains.

Most of the Canine Descendants chieftains wore only simple robes, their faces weather-beaten, marked by the wear of wind and sun, their skin burnt to a reddish-brown hue, painted with tattoos of various reverent designs. They first introduced their tribe's name and their own heroic deeds with proud chests and raised heads, striving to reveal their fearless and wild bravery. Then, at His Highness's inquiry, they respectfully lowered their heads and replied with broken Mexica words, fearfully observing the thousands of elite warriors. Occasionally, their eyes briefly betrayed their greed, yearning for sturdy leather and cotton armors, powerful longbows and war clubs, as well as shining gold and silver ornaments.

The young Commander watched calmly, without emotion. These Canine Descendants chieftains displayed complex traits: reverent of the Alliance's military force yet compelled by the need for livelihood, forced to join the vast Mexica army. But deep within the Canine Descendants' bones lurked a greed for power and wealth, along with a disregard for life and order. In short, the Canine Descendants were fierce and untamed, fearing authority but devoid of gratitude.

After musing for a moment, Xiulote gave a resolute wave of his hand. Thousands of Personal Guard Warriors then came forth swinging their war clubs, forcing all the Canine Warriors to kneel. The chieftains' mouths were filled with disordered shouts, but they knelt without hesitation. Immediately after, several Priests stepped forward, setting up a makeshift altar, lighting a ghastly blue flame that emitted unpredictable divine smoke.

Mysterious chanting filled the air as the Priests began a frenzied dance. The trusted aides cut off the chieftains' hair and then cast it into the blazing Sacred Fire. Amongst the swirling smoke, the youthful Priest danced last, singing an ancient and strange language, before loudly proclaiming.

"The Chief Divine controls everything, and also dictates the life and death of people! As the strands of your souls burn away, your lives are held in the palm of the Chief Divine. Those who defy the orders will suffer Divine Punishment, painfully burning away, becoming but a fleeting blue smoke in the wind!"

The accompanying Translator shouted fiercely, spreading the young Priest's decree. The chieftains' faces filled with horror as they watched the strange, unknown flame, listening to the foreign Divine Priest's curse, feeling a heavy shadow rise in their hearts. After a moment, the chieftains erupted with submissive cries, laying down their trembling bodies in prostration.

"Great Sorcerer of the Sun God!"

Hearing the Translator's words, Xiulote nodded. He gestured again, having the Priests prepare the sacred Mushroom Water with the psilocybin mushrooms they carried. He then emotionlessly ordered the chieftains to drink it.

Facing the color-changing concoction, the Canine Descendants chieftains shivered. They looked torn as they slowly drank it down, filled with fear and under the duress of the Mexica warriors.

In mere moments, the chieftains began to tremble in their hands and feet, unable to control their dancing. They roared, calling out unknown names, their faces a mix of tears and laughter, as the world before them turned uncanny and bizarre, as if under the scrutiny of spirits' gaze, bringing an irresistible force! Watching this chaotic scene, the Mexica Priests were indifferent, while the Canine Warriors felt a chill in their hearts.

The frenzied dance continued for a full half-hour. Completely exhausted, the chieftains finally collapsed, their eyes glazed over, minds blank.

Xiulote then once more loudly declared.

"The Chief Divine controls everything, and also dictates the life and death of people! When the holy water flows into your innards, your lives are held in the palm of the Chief Divine. Those who disobey the orders will suffer Divine Punishment, rotting away, their souls eternally devoured by darkness!"

Hearing the Translator's words, the Canine Warriors screamed in fear, completely prostrating themselves on the ground.

"Great Sorcerer of the God of Death!"

Xiulote surveyed the Canine Descendants once more, observing their expressions. The hidden defiance had finally vanished, replaced by a genuine fear. The young Priest nodded; the rituals' intimidating effects would not last long, but they were enough to last until the end of the siege. Only through the dual control of mind and body could these Canine Descendants withstand the cruel casualties and persist longer in battle.

Finally, Xiulote waved for the Canine Warriors to take their weak chieftains to the Wooden Fort for rest. Then, he turned around and looked towards the Rivermouth fortress to the southwest. The siege was ongoing there, but the outcome was nearing.

Two days later, nine thousand reinforcements boarded the Naval Forces' fleet once again, heading for the large camp outside the fortress. The majestic reinforcements proceeded through, drawing the watchful eyes from the city walls. Under the "Crocodile" banner, Osellor, independent in the Watchtower and wearing the Commander-in-Chief's uniform, looked much older. He silently watched the enemy's reinforcements merging into the siege encampment, murmuring a faint, somber laugh.

