

Civilization 381

Chapter 381 - Deliberation on Battle and Troop Organization (Part 2)

The red sandalwood smoldered slowly in the white jade furnace, twinkling with bright specks, rising in a faint mist, emanating a mellow woody fragrance. The gentle aroma lingered in the great tent, refreshing the spirit. All the officers stood silently in awe, waiting for His Highness's decision.

In the midst of the pure fragrance, Xiulote observed quietly, gently touching. The warm sandalwood had an even hue, the material delicate, carved into a beautiful hummingbird; and the slightly cool jade furnace was crystal clear, smooth and lustrous, polished into a pure sun. The sun's hummingbird burned intensely, radiating light, heat, and fragrance, altering the surrounding environment. It was just like the Mexica legion, with the light of faith, the zeal of conquest, and the stench of slaughter, reshaping everything in the Michoacán region!

Xiulote reflected for a long time, until the tent's curtains were once again drawn back, and a brisk breeze swept in. Black Wolf Torc entered resolutely, his fighting spirit high, and then with a "thud," he kneeled on one knee.

"Respected Highness, your Black Wolf, Torc, presents himself before the king of the wolf pack!"

Seeing the spirited Torc, Xiulote smiled. He reached out to pull the "Black Wolf" up, asking with a smile,

"Torc, have you taken care of everything I assigned to you?"

"Of course! Your Highness, I dragged that spineless ratfish, waving his Marshal flag, around among the newly surrendered Tekos Militia! Seeing the seemingly submissive northern Marshal, the Tekos troops

were inexplicably shocked, their expressions changing, and they will definitely be much easier to manage afterward!"

Torc laughed aloud, his disdain for the opposition evident.

Hearing this, Xiulote laughed heartily.

"The opposition is neither willing to face death bravely, nor to surrender promptly, after all, they cannot let go of their pride, nor swallow their vanity. Since that's the case, keep them well-fed and well-cared for, dragging them along in a public display! Once his pride is worn away, and his face lost, with a proper reason, he will naturally align with the Alliance!"

With some confusion, Torc looked up at His Highness.

"Highness, the opposition's Samurai have all died in battle, their fief taken by the Alliance. What's the use of investing so much effort in dealing with such a spineless ratfish?"

Xiulote smiled, patting his beloved general's shoulder.

"My Black Wolf, to conquer a kingdom, one must use both the war club and the hearts of men! You must divide the entirety of the enemy into sections, dealing with them bit by bit. Just like a skilled Samurai, who will not confront multiple enemies bunched together, but instead create opportunities for individual combat, easily defeating each opponent one by one!"

With that, Xiulote surveyed his trusted personnel in the tent, the moment perfectly fitting, and spoke again.

"Come closer, everyone, listen carefully! This is the lifelong experience of a certain Marshal, skilled in both warfare and governance. The first question in war, who is our enemy? Who is our friend?"

In the Tarasco people, those who wield power include the Royal Family, Priests, Great Nobility, and Nobility; those who wield arms are the Samurai, Militia, and foreign mercenaries; those ruled over include ordinary merchants, Craftsmen, commoners, and slaves from various regions. These groups are distinctly different! There are contradictions within and among the classes, some of which even exceed the conflicts with us!"

Xiulote looked around, the teacher Olosh pensive, the lively Kuluka's eyes twinkling, the old warrior Etalik showing understanding, but only Black Wolf Torc remained bewildered. The Young Commander noted the reactions and spoke again.

"As the army marched on, initially, Otapan's Otomi, Tarasco's Royal Family, Priests, Nobilities both great and small, Samurai, Militia, and foreign mercenaries, they were all our enemies. Tarasco's merchants, Craftsmen, commoners, and slaves, all served those enemies. But as our forces cut a path southward like a juggernaut, the situation gradually evolved!"

"After forming the Alliance, the Otapan became our allies, sending troops to fight alongside us. After the naval battle at Lake Yuriria, a few Tarasco Samurai began to surrender, and some of the Militia too. By the time we captured Rivermouth Fortress, more Militia and some of the Nobility surrendered, along with some Marshals who didn't openly surrender. After taking Huayamo Fortress, the foreign mercenaries put up little resistance before joining the Alliance. Between the two fortresses, hundreds of miles of land saw many villages and towns surrender."

"At this moment, numerous Tarasco commoners and slaves are beginning to appear on the lands controlled by the Alliance. I have ordered Ezpan to organize a Tarasco legion from the surrendered troops. In the future, the numbers of the Tarasco legion will further increase, their training will intensify, and they might even surpass the current Mexica legion!"

Hearing this, the faces of the officers showed worry, Olosh started to speak but hesitated, Kuluka's expression shifted, and Etalik grasped the Sun Amulet around his neck. Hmm, Torc continued to look puzzled.

Xiulote smiled and then his expression turned serious.

"Next, is the second statement. The changing situation is divided into different stages. In each stage, we focus on destroying the most stubborn groups, increasing our friends, and decreasing our enemies!"

"The first stage, we aim to take over the Tarasco capital, eliminate the lake region's kingdom government. At that time, the Tarasco capital's Royal Family and Great Nobility will be the enemies to be eliminated! Due to the divine nature of the war, the capital's Temple High Priests will also be the enemies to be eliminated! And along the path of the legion's march, all the territories we conquer, all the Great Nobility with arms, are the enemies to be eliminated!"

Chapter 382 - Deliberation on Battle and Troop Organization (Part 2)

Beyond the capital and its controlled districts, the varied ranks of the Great Nobility, the lesser Nobility, vassal tribes of the Tekos, and even the Samurai and Militia from the capital, were all parties we could negotiate and compromise with. We needed to keep them as neutral as possible, or even turn them into our friends.

Among them, the power of both the high and low Nobility in the regions was the strongest. Thus, the Alliance would promise autonomy to the mountainous Weytamo State, persuading the lesser nobility of

Xitaqualo State to defect. After that, once we have repelled the reinforcements from the Chapala Lake Region, I shall send Envoys to them, temporarily promising them autonomy and peace. As for the Akanbaro State in the east, if we can't find an opportunity to crush them in one fell swoop, we can also send Envoys, promising to preserve the fiefs of both the high and low Nobility."

"At this moment, I keep Ospai by my side as an example of obedience, to divide these Nobles of all sizes and give them a chance to surrender. Once Ospai formally surrenders, he will become the best channel of communication, helping the Alliance to persuade various Tarasco Lords to defect!"

Hearing this, Toltec finally understood and slapped his thigh, laughing aloud,

"So Your Highness intends to make all the Tarasco ratfish surrender! But Your Highness, if those timid ratfish surrender, where will our Samurai go to gain their glorious achievements and substantial wealth?"

Xiulote chuckled, patted Black Wolf on the shoulder, and continued to speak,

"When the first phase is complete and the Tarasco kingdom's political power is wiped out, we will enter the second phase. In this stage, we must seize both political and religious authority and control even more land and manpower. The legions must pacify the lesser nobility within the controlled region, transform all Tarasco Priests, directly control the local populace, and also suppress the Great Nobility in the adjacent regions! The new rule must penetrate into the villages, whether in the name of the Alliance or in the name of the Divine!"

"In this phase, the heathen Priests within the controlled region and the Tarasco Nobility in the adjacent areas are enemies that must be eradicated! Samurai and Militia who are willing to pledge allegiance to the Alliance, merchants and civilians who obey the ruling from various places, are our friends and we

must, as much as possible, turn them into our own. We have to establish a brand new order, an enlightened path to promotion, a centralized and powerful Kingdom!"

Hearing this, Kuluka, who was born into the lower working class, his eyes flickered. He looked at His Highness, who loomed majestic, and asked cautiously and carefully,

"Your Highness, what then is the third phase?"

Xiulote paused for a moment, pondered for a while, and slowly said,

"The third phase is about extending control deep into the villages, increasing the area under effective rule, conquering the Chapala Lake Region, the mountainous Weytamo State, gaining control over the Tekos people of Colima State in the south, influencing the Tekos Tribes in the north, assimilating and pacifying the Guamal Canine Descendants, gradually incorporating the northern Otomi people!"

"So Your Highness, what is the fourth phase?"

Hearing the monkey's question, Xiulote's gaze deepened, and he thought of many things: the Alliance, the Nobility, the civilians, the slaves... The not so distant new worlds of north and south, the distant nations of the old world, and even the infinite future! After a long pause, he calmly shook his head.

"Monkey, you will see the fourth phase, for that is our era!"

The tent fell silent once again, the generals internalized His Highness's innovative teachings, and felt the contained ambition surge in their hearts. After a moment, the confident and fearless Toltec asked loudly,

"Your Highness, is there a third saying?"

Xiulote thought for a moment and then said meaningfully,

"Yes! The third saying is, contradictions continue to transform, the struggle never stops, the enemy is always there!"

Hearing this, Olosh and Etalik exchanged a knowing glance; the two nodded subtly in agreement, and then their gazes diverged.

The tent lapsed into silence once more, the tranquil burning of sandalwood permeated the air. The distant scent pervaded hearts and minds, following soaring thoughts across time and space, all the way to the changing future.

Soon, the tent flap was lifted again, and the Royal Family's Vice Legion Commander, Balda, along with the Divine Blessing Legion Commander, Natali, arrived side by side. They each took a knee in succession, bowing respectfully to Xiulote.

"Respected Your Highness, praise the King! The grand Alliance upholds us, and under the command of the exalted Royal Family, the legions of the Alliance have achieved a brilliant victory!"

Adorned in the magnificent attire of an Eagle Warrior, Balda wore a sincere joy, his fist placed over his chest, performing an ancient Nobility gesture.

"Respected High Priest, praise the Chief Divine! The most high Chief Divine blesses us, and under the guidance of the sacred Priests, the army of the Chief Divine has won a glorious victory!"

Natali, dressed in the simple robe of the Divine Blessing Legion, looked solemn and calm. Clutching the Sun Amulet on his neck, he faced the young Priest and praised and prayed with devotion.

Xiulote watched the two Legion Commanders who had arrived last, listening to their different yet similar words, and laughed heartily. He opened his arms wide, as if to lift the two men, and replied likewise.

"Balda, I dedicate the splendid victory to our esteemed Royal Family and the honor of battle to our immortal ancestors! The land and civilians of Tarasco are destined to become an inseparable part of the Alliance!"

"Natali, I dedicate the glorious victory to the supreme Sun God and the noble Sacrifices to the great War God! The foreign gods of Tarasco will be expelled, and this place will become a bright and sacred Divine Kingdom!"

The three laughed together, their laughter filled with the heroic spirit of conquest. Following this, Balda and Natali took a step to either side, standing firm beside the gathering of commanders.

A breeze blew into the tent from outside, and Xiulote slightly lowered his gaze. He savored the fading scent, which conveyed a different flavor, as well as a different attitude of allegiance.

Afterward, the Young Commander opened his eyes and looked calmly at Toltec.

"Black Wolf, how are the longbow Militia faring?"

"Your Highness, aside from the hundred or so who are healing, there remain fifteen hundred in the longbow Militia. They have donned the cotton Armor we captured, they're rested and ready, and they can march at any time! Also, the abandoned longbows have been properly collected; we just need to replenish the troops, and they can be reformed into an army!"

Xiulote nodded slightly. Having gone through naval battles on the lake and siege shootouts, the longbow Militia had suffered heavy losses. Their equipment had been upgraded to reduce casualties in shootouts. These Militia are precise at mid-close range archery, adept at squad movements, and perfectly suited as snipers or for hit-and-run guerrilla tactics.

"The longbow Militia will continue to garrison at Huayamo Fortress, waiting for further orders! Toltec, you will select from the three thousand surrendering members of the Tekos Tribe. As before, pick out five hundred skilled in archery and add them to the longbow Militia, then begin intensive training.

As for the remaining two thousand five hundred, including all of the tribal Chieftains, hand them over to the Naval Corps Commander Annatri by Cuitzeo Lake. She will lead half the fleet back to transport grain; take these unstable captives to her, to be handed over to the northern General Osellor, as a way to thank him for providing Canine Descendant support.

In the distant northern stronghold, these Tekos far from their homeland will be easier to convert. The northern General's forces will need fresh blood that can be easily controlled, and so does my Legion! Tell Annatri to relay the message: If General Osellor agrees, the exchange between the Chichimeca Canine Descendants and the Tecos Tribe can continue, and I will also provide sponsorship for weapons!"

Toltec responded loudly. He silently repeated the plans in his mind, carefully contemplating His Highness's arrangements.

Then, Xiulote turned to Balda and smiled warmly.

"Balda, how many are left of the three thousand Royal Legion?"

Balda looked somewhat somber as he spoke loudly.

"Your Highness, the siege of Huayamo Fortress has cost us several hundred Samurai. Of the three thousand troops I led, fewer than two thousand remain! The Royal Legion is the true elite; please ensure they receive adequate consolation and rewards!"

Xiulote nodded slowly.

"Very well. I shall personally preside over the funeral of those who died in battle and generously reward the injured Warriors! Balda, your Legion will also stay stationed in Huayamo. Secure the fortress with fortified spirits!"

The mighty Eagle Warrior bowed his head to take the order. Finally, Xiulote looked toward Natali of the Divine Blessing Legion.

"Natali, how is the Divine Blessing Legion now?"

Natali bowed respectfully, never letting go of his Amulet.

"Praise be to the Chief Divine, He protects us! Your Highness, during the siege, the Legion merely sealed off the perimeter. The Samurai are in high spirits and unscathed. The Chief Divine is supreme, and Divine battle is grandest! The two thousand Samurai of the Divine Blessing Legion are always ready to sacrifice for the Chief Divine!"

Chapter 383 - Discussing Battle and Organizing the Army Part Two

Hummingbird-like red sandalwood slowly burned, its eyes sparkling with red sparks. The sun-like white jade incense burner gradually warmed, dispersing wafts of profound fragrance. Within the commander-in-chief's tent, every general pondered solemnly, their expressions grave as if enveloped by divine power.

Upon hearing Natali declare his stance, Xiulote nodded in satisfaction. The devoutly spiritual Divine Blessing Legion was like an exceptionally sharp obsidian dagger. Supported by their faith, they could launch fearless and powerful attacks but were also prone to breaking. These blessed warriors had already lost a thousand men, yet the remaining warriors still had stable morale and could participate in fierce field battles and sieges.

As the military council reached this point, all generals, having reported on their troops, stood by waiting with hands tied at their sides. Only Bertade, who was wounded and recovering, left the longbowmen temporarily without a leader. Xiulote personally commanded five hundred Jaguar warriors, one thousand longbow trusted aides, and one thousand five hundred royal longbow warriors, totaling three

thousand elite troops. These elites, always following the Black Wolf's banner, were used cautiously and could be considered the marshal's personal army.

The young commander looked around, the current status of every unit of the Mexica Northern Army was now clear. Afterwards, he focused his thoughts, mentally calculating the overall troop strength and grain supplies.

The Northern Wooden Fort along with the Otapan Legion was struck off. Rivermouth Fortress had five thousand five hundred warriors defending the city, nearly five thousand naval forces. Huayamo Fortress gathered the main force of the Northern Army, consisting of twelve thousand battle-ready warriors, eight thousand spear legions, and also longbow hunters, Otomi militia, various Canine Descendants, and Tarasco prisoners, totaling over twelve thousand militia.

In this calculation, there were over thirty thousand troops on Huayamo's front line, of which twenty thousand were trustworthy elites!

The army's logistics originated from the northern Rivermouth, with food first transported by water to the southernmost shore of Cuitzeo Lake, then transferred overland. The entire grain route needed about four days, not considered long. The legions had successively captured two key fortresses, seizing a large amount of grain from the Tarasco people. Now, the front line's stored food could sustain thirty thousand people for two months. With the dry season still lasting three months, the fortress's food consumption was minimal, and the quantity of stored food was equally within a safe range!

Thinking this far, Xiulote threw open the tent's curtain. In the fresh breeze, he looked again toward the south, his eyes filled with a burning desire, his chest filled with vigorous spirit.

"Tarasco's capital, the flourishing Qinchongcan City, lies just a hundred miles to the south! I want to lead the army southward, besiege the enemy's capital city, and cut off the Tarasco Royal Army's grain route! With one battle, we shall decide the fate of the land, is there any objection from the generals?"

Upon these words, Toltec was the first to step out, loudly exclaiming.

"Your Highness, I, Black Wolf Toltec, wish to be the vanguard for the great army!"

Natali followed a beat later, also solemnly responding.

"Praise the Chief Divine, to die for the divine! The Divine Blessing Legion wishes to be the vanguard!"

Balda opened his mouth, but remembered that His Highness had arranged for him to defend the fortress. He paused for a moment before speaking softly.

"Your Highness, the royal warriors are most elite; Balda wishes to be the vanguard!"

Xiulote laughed out loud. He waited a moment, but the calls for battle ceased there, and his three most trusted generals remained silent. The young commander turned to look at them, Master Olosh wore a worried expression, old General Etalik stroked his chin, and Monkey Kuluka had a flickering gaze. All three were simultaneously pondering something.

After a moment, it was Olosh, who had the closest relationship and most special position, who first spoke.

"Your Highness, when the great army moves south, how many people should be left to guard Huayamo Fortress?"

Xiulote already had a plan, and he said with a smile.

"Two to three thousand warriors, three to four thousand militia, enough to defend!"

"Chapala Legion is currently in Saka, just a week's distance from here. They have a force of thirty thousand, I estimate a third of them are battle-ready warriors. If they organize and attack, surround the fortress, cutting off our army's grain route, what then?" Olosh asked worryingly.

"That's exactly what I want them to do! Thirty thousand Chapala Legion, if they hide in Saka and defend, our army for the moment really has no way against them... I will leave the new style wooden cannons at Huayamo Fortress to assist in defense. As long as they come here, bogging down at the fortress, I will lead the great army back and completely crush them in one fell swoop!"

"If they remain cautious and only send troops to harass, repeatedly attacking our grain route, what then?"

"The fortress's grain route is only a few days long, we can strive to maintain it. The Tarasco royal legion to the south has even more troops, less stored grain! They are fighting with the Alliance's main forces in the south, the battleground is already scorched earth, logistics completely dependent on the Lake Region. Just cut off the grain route at Patzcuari for one to two months, and the southern Tarasco Royal

Army will inevitably crumble without a fight! By then, the southern Alliance's main forces can break through the solid fortress group in one stroke, and the Tarasco people will have no danger left to defend, and the world will hence be settled!"

Xiulote was confident. He had long pondered this, and this was the fastest plan! Qinchongcan City was difficult to conquer, but its defending army was also unable to battle. Just by encircling without attacking, then cutting off the grain transport a few dozen miles to the southeast at Patzcuari...by the fourth month, both western expeditionary forces could meet in Tarasco's capital, conducting the final siege!

Hearing this, Olosh was momentarily speechless. After a long silence, Etalik slowly opened his mouth, asking in a deep voice.

"Your Highness, if Tarasco's King Su'angua abandons the southern fortresses and directly leads his legions back, what then should our army do?"

Xiulote laughed heartily. With a smile full of mirth, he said.

Chapter 384 - Discussing Battle and Organizing the Army - Part 2

...

"Then let us wait on the road of his return, cutting off his way back! In doing so, the Tarasco Royal Army in hurried retreat, with the Mexica Southern Army in pursuit from behind and the Mexica Northern Army blocking their path ahead, one battle will lead to their entire force being annihilated!"

After that, the Young Commander expressed some yearning contemplation.

"If we could capture the King of Tarasco, perhaps we could persuade Qinchongcan City to surrender, and the world could be pacified without a battle! The once-thriving Patzcuaro Lake Region is now in decline—if all goes well, we might still be able to make up for this year's spring plowing!"

Hearing His Highness's reflections, the monkey Kuluka raised his head, gazing at His Highness's sincere face, his eyes sparkled with bright light. The old General Etalik paused for a moment. He looked around at the surrounding generals, his gaze becoming deep and distant. Then, he spoke softly.

"His Highness is merciful! But what if the Southern Army does not arrive in time? What if it is just us alone facing the returning Tarasco Royal Army? And if at that moment, the Chapala Legion from the northwest also happens to arrive?... By then, the Northern Army would be deep in enemy territory, with reinforcements hundreds of miles away. With the Tarasco Royal Army in front and the Chapala reinforcements behind, it will be us facing destruction after one battle!"

At these words, Xiulote was taken aback. He looked toward the old General Etalik, as the loyal warriors of the Holy City bowed their heads in salute, prostrating themselves on the ground, silent and solemn.

The Young Commander stood quietly, sensing the unspoken meanings in the old General's speech. At that moment, the passion in his chest did not extinguish, yet he felt a chill. Like a cold bath in winter, suddenly poured over him, instantly alternating between cold and heat, leaving his heart in a melancholy state.

Balda thought for a while, then suddenly reacted. His eyes widened, and he spoke loudly in disbelief.

"Your Highness is of the Royal Family's branch, the King's nephew, also the King's son-in-law, and furthermore, the heir of the Alliance! Your Highness is known for your prestigious and virtuous reputation, victorious all along the western campaign, and your fame is indeed remarkable. The battle-hardened King himself presides over the Southern Army and will surely chase down the enemy, hastening through day and night to our aid—how could he allow the Northern Army to be encircled?!"

Xiulote remained expressionless, silent. After a while, he looked towards Natali of the Divine Blessing Legion, focusing on the right hand placed around his neck.

Witnessing this scene, the young Otomi Legion Commander's gaze flickered with contemplation. Under the trust of His Highness, he had even moved ahead of the Poet Balamo, entering the highest decision-making circle of the Mexica Alliance. Then his eyes met with the indifferent gaze of His Highness, and he suddenly felt cold.

At that instant, Natali was blessed with an epiphany. He finally loosened his grip on the Sun Amulet, placed both hands on the ground, and his forehead touched the ground, showing his loyalty to the respected His Highness in the traditional Otomi manner.

"Your Highness, Natali of Xilotepec pledges loyalty to you! To fight for the gods, to die for you!"

Natali spoke earnestly. His young face, a mixture of devotion and sincerity, resembled intertwining vines in search of the Divine Wood to rely on entirely.

Xiulote watched his face, standing silently for a moment, then slowly nodded.

"Natali, in the presence of the Chief Divine, I accept your loyalty and promise you a bright future!"

Then, Xiulote stepped forward, calmly drawing the Obsidian Dagger from his waist, slashing off half of the prostrate Natali's hair, and throwing it into the corner of the bonfire. The scent of burnt hair dispersed into the air, mixing with the faint fragrance of sandalwood, creating an indescribable solemnity.

The tent fell silent for a time as the generals watched without a word. They kept their eyes on the two in the center until the sudden loyalty ceremony was fully concluded, and Natali was formally accepted.

Balda's expression was complex, holding his tongue. Only then did the monkey Kuluka speak, diverting away from the heavy topic.

"In the midst of marching and fighting, many things are uncertain. Military situations often shift unpredictably, and the coordination of the march is difficult to accomplish on time. If the Tarasco Royal Army leaves behind a group of Samurai willing to fight to the death, they indeed could rely on the last stronghold, hindering the advance of the Southern Legion. And after seizing the fortress, the Southern Legion might need to regroup, or perhaps face insufficient supplies and struggle to advance...Your Highness, our army's march south to besiege the city, aiming for a quick victory, is still somewhat risky!"

"Spring plowing begins in May; we could first organize civilians and the Militia, distribute food and seeds, and restore cultivation in the controlled areas. These actions to resume farming, regardless of their effectiveness, will surely unite the hearts of the Tarasco civilians. Just as Your Highness mentioned, we'll bring them to our side, turning them into our friends!"

...

Hearing this, Xiulote's expression softened and he nodded. He smiled slightly and looked at the monkey Kuluka, admiringly he said in a deep voice.

"Monkey, you are indeed intelligent!"

After that, the Young Commander fell into deep thought. He reconsidered the counsel of his generals, reevaluating the development of the situation and the responses of all parties. After a while, he made his decision and spoke loudly.

"What the generals said makes sense! Since a swift victory is hard to come by, our army must be cautious. We need to stockpile food at the frontline, concentrate the power of the Samurai, and reduce the number of Militia! Reassign the remaining four thousand Otomi Militia to be stationed at the Rivermouth Fortress, under the command of the Deputy Marshal!"

If a swift victory could not be achieved, Rivermouth Fortress needed to be cautiously defended. The fortress currently only had the Royal Warriors of Tepopolo and the private soldiers of the western City-States' Nobility. Xiulote transferred the Otomi Militia to his father, as a direct Force under his command to strengthen the defense of the fortress. This way, on one hand, the consumption of food on the frontline would be reduced, and on the other hand, the balance of powers within the Rivermouth Fortress would be maintained.

"Reassign the five thousand Tarasco subordinate soldiers from Ezpan to be stationed between the Rivermouth Fortress and Huayamo, and have them stationed on the spot. Order them to clear out the local nobility's Manors, gather food and supplies, and maintain control and order in the region! Allow him to promote auxiliary Sheriffs from the local civilians, the list needs to be reviewed by the Deputy Marshal of the Rivermouth Fortress!"

After pondering for a moment, Xiulote issued another order. The Tarasco subordinate soldiers at the frontline always posed certain risks. Since there was no urgency to move southward for the time being, he redeployed those soldiers to the rear to further cleanse the area, which would also improve their loyalty. And with the departure of nearly ten thousand Militia, the pressure on the frontline's food supply would be greatly reduced, and the elite Samurai Legions would be more flexible, capable of rapid mobilization and striking distances of a hundred miles.

"Send over a hundred Jaguar warriors to constantly spy on the movements of the northwest Chapala Legion! Determine their specific Samurai ratio, possible marching routes, and look for suitable ambush locations! Have Annatri leave half the Naval Forces to ensure that, around the Cuitzeo Lake region, the Samurai Legion can be quickly assembled!"

Once calm, Xiulote's primary target shifted from the Capital City in the south, and the Royal Army further south, to the reinforcements of Chapala in the northwest. This legion was thirty thousand strong, the last field army of Tarasco in the north, and the biggest threat to the rear of the Northern Army. He pondered for a moment, then continued giving orders.

"Contact the northern merchant caravans, continue to incite the Guamal Canine Descendants to move south, and raid the Chapala Lake Region! I will provide them with a new batch of supplies, and next, they need to unleash all their Force, the larger the scale of the Canine Descendants' raids, the better! Send another Envoy, have them take a detour from the northern Canine Descendants, and contact the Tekos Northern Tribes, letting them know: the main Legion from the Lake Region has already left, and the local Tarascans are at their weakest! The Mexica Alliance is willing to form an Alliance with them to divide the Chapala Lake Region!"

Afterward, Xiulote stood with his hands behind his back, staring at the vast south. There lay the plains of the Lake Region, extending as far as the eye could see, convenient for marching. It was not until the Xitaqualo in the southeast that one could find undulating hills and mountains.

The young man pondered for a moment and then made another decision.

"Even if we cannot send a large army down south to completely cut off the food supply of the Tarasco Royal Army, we cannot allow their grain route to be smooth! Toltec, replenish your troops as soon as possible, then lead the Longbow Militia south to raid the food transportation outside Patzcuari!"

"At your command! Black Wolf Toltec will never disappoint the Wolf King!"

Given the opportunity to lead an army on his own, Toltec was radiant, excited, and seething with the intention to kill.

"Black Wolf, you should prioritize raids and avoid pitched battles. Be vigilant in your reconnaissance! I will assign you an additional hundred elite Jaguars, to maintain constant contact with Huayamo! If there are any signs of enemy movement from Qinchongcan, report back to me immediately. If you do indeed scout the Royal Army coming from the south, raid them once to roughly determine their troop strength, then swiftly retreat. Do not engage in prolonged combat!"

"Your Highness, I will follow your will!"

Toltec's expression turned serious, he bowed deeply, and solemnly promised.

Xiulote extended his hand, patting Black Wolf's shoulder. Then, he looked around solemnly at everyone and loudly gave the order.

"Rest of the army's warriors, be patient in resting, conserve your strength, and wait for the opportunity to strike!"

Hearing the Marshal's decision, all the generals bowed their heads in unison, thunderously responding!

Chapter 385 - The Battle of Takuro Plains Part 1

January marked the beginning of the New Year, a time for celebration and sacrificial rites. From the start of the month, grand ceremonies occurred successively throughout the regions of Mexico. In every peaceful village and town, Priests sang high, civilians danced joyfully, all celebrating together till the end of the month.

The Divine Descendants and nobility from the states had no interest in dancing or singing. They dispatched tribute Envoys and sent out discrete spies, questioning passing merchants, and closely monitored the warfare unfolding between the Lerma River and the Tarsus River. Among the world's mightiest forces, a massive and brutal war was underway between the two longest rivers.

In distant rumors, it was said that a hundred thousand Samurai were engaged in relentless battle, their clashing so thunderous that flocks of birds scattered in migration, and the converging blood turned the rivers an altered color. At the intense frontline, the nobility perished like wilting flowers, Samurai fell like drops of rain, buried meekly in the earth alongside ordinary civilians!

Hearing the news from afar, the nobility of the states showed astonishment and harbored anxiety. The more tangible effects were evident in the markets of the City-States.

Alliances and kingdoms aggressively intercepted merchant caravans and mandated the collection of resources. Fleeing soldiers and rampant outlaws plundered areas, causing merchants to steer clear of the battlegrounds. The war had lasted long, and items like copper ware from Tarasco, dried fish from the Mikenque Lake Region, and medicinal herbs from the western forests were no longer available for purchase. The Mexica Priests exertively controlled the markets of the Alliance states, causing significant

reductions in grain and salt from the Valley, not to mention war essentials like shields, cotton armor, and the fragile but lethal Obsidian Clubs.

Among all the news, the most unexpected was the loss of the northern defenses of the Tarascos Kingdom, with the Mexica Northern Army pressing close to the Capital City! The leaders of the City-States were shocked: "The Mexica have 'divinely gifted' weapons, conquering all in their path!" In just over half a year, the strong Bronze Ware Kingdom revealed clear signs of decline, unable to resist the Mexica invasion.

The leaders of the states discussed fervently. They were acutely aware that the outcome of this colossal war would determine the future of the entire world!

Thus, even more Envoys were dispatched to forge connections with different kingdoms. More spies received orders to gather intelligence on the new weapons of the Mexica. Amidst hurrying travelers, February arrived abruptly.

February was a fitting season for travel. The warm sunshine splendidly beamed down, the cloudless sky devoid of rain. The ground's soil turned dry, roadside shrubs shed their leaves, and insects were fewer than during the rainy season. Long marches became easier, especially in the flat Patzcuaro Lake Region.

Under the golden sunshine, "Feather" Penguari, adorned in gold and silver garments, donning a magnificent Feather Crown, holding a noble Divine Staff, glittered like a divine envoy. His appearance was striking, demeanor grand, his majesty undeniable, and his movements graceful and composed. Behind him, a grand flag reaching four meters high was held aloft by a Standard Bearer.

The brand-new flag fluttered in the air, carrying the standard of a Prince, decidedly more exquisite. On the front of the flag was a flying Cherchar bird, with long, beautifully blue-green tail feathers. The back featured an abstract image of three deities, with clear and bright crimson eyes.

Under the guard of his trusted aides, Penguari ascended a nearby hillock, spiritedly gazing around. In his view was an endless column of marching troops, a vast army from the Lake Region!

The Lake Region Samurai were spirited, dressed in patterned cotton armor, carrying Copper Spears, War Clubs, and shields, confidently heading towards the Capital City. The Militia gathered into loose groups, resembling swarms of ants. They traveled by village units, and under the control of Militia Captains, they carried the army's baggage, holding Long Spears tipped with copper, stone, or bone spearheads, noisily heading east. In the rear, thousands of porters carrying provisions followed, conscripted from nearby villages to maintain the army's logistics.

This was a powerful Lake Region army, comprising ten thousand Chapala Samurai and twenty thousand trained Militia! The brave people of Chapala could not be compared to the delicate Patzcuaro. They grew up fighting, resisting the Guamal Canine Descendants from the north and clashing with raiding squads while suppressing the Tecos Tribe to the west, occasionally raiding hostile settlements.

"This is an army to save the kingdom! And I am the leader of this army, today's 'Feather' Prince, tomorrow's 'Feather' King!"

Atop the hillock, Penguari was filled with passion, looking to the rear. The tributary from Lake Chapala towards the East ended here, marking the end of the convenient marching route. On the river, supply boats were visible in the distance, continuously delivering supplies from the rear. Along the tributary, he had left the Sakap state, also moving beyond the protection of mountains and fortresses, possibly facing the Mexica forces at any moment.

Thinking of this, Penguari's brows furrowed slightly— he vividly remembered a previous encounter on Lake Yuriria. However, land battles differed from those on the lake; Samurai could move and dodge freely. Nearby, vegetation was not lush, providing no fuel for the Mexica's Fire Arrows.

He looked forward, seeing a vast plain ahead, with fields that had been cultivated scattered with villages. Traces of past prosperity were faintly visible, now filled with desolation and decay, with no signs of human life or smoke from cooking fires. This area was the edge of the Patzcuaro Lake Region, with Capital City Qinchongcan just a five-day journey away.

Chapter 386 - The Battle of Takuro Plains Part 2

The rivermouth fortress had already fallen, so there was no need for him to move along the Lerma River to support it, risking an encounter with the Mexica naval forces. The area around Cuitzeo Lake was controlled by the enemy's fleet and was no longer safe. The latest envoy brought shocking news: the Mexicans had even captured the Huayamo Fortress, gaining complete control over the north of the Capital City.

Pengguari carefully considered and repeatedly questioned the scout before he found the safest route to march. The army first moved southward to the small river that connected to Chapala Lake, then proceeded eastward along the river, making their way through the heartland of the Kingdom directly towards the west of the Capital City. By moving in this manner, the army effectively abandoned the opportunity to harass the rear of the Mexicans' northern army, but it also avoided worrying about its own logistics.

"Once I reach the Capital City and marry the former king's princess, I will possess the qualifications to inherit the kingdom!"

Thinking thus, "Feathers" Pengguari revealed a handsome smile, his eyes sparkling brightly, compelling admiration from those who saw him. The family samurai around him also looked up to the family head standing atop the small hill with respectful gazes.

However, not everyone admired the new prince. The higher the standing of the Great Nobility, the more they knew about the naval battles at Lake Yuriria, the less they admired him.

Under the escort of several dozen trusted aides, a Great Noble dressed in lavish clothes and a sky-blue cloak, holding a bronze spear, approached the hill with a fierce look. He glanced at the Prince's banner behind Pengguari, slightly curled his lips, and then spoke loudly.

"Respected 'Feathers', our front-line scouts in the East have spotted rising dust, which should be from the marches of the Mexica's grand army! We need to quickly get into formation, take the initiative to strike, and prepare to face the glory of war!"

Pengguari's expression stiffened. He lifted his head in surprise and looked toward the Great Noble.

"Respected 'Heavenly Divine' Ahonda, are you sure you saw the grand army of the Mexica? These days, there have always been Mexica scouts around here, sounding their whistles, but those are just enemy squads. This place is located at the furthest west of the Lake Region, at least one or two hundred miles from the main force of the Mexica stationed at Huayamo Fortress. Has the grand army of the Mexica really appeared in the east?"

In the Tarasco language, Ahonda means sky. Such a noble name, transmitted through his family, is in no way inferior to Feathers, even perhaps surpassing it!

Indeed, this was the case. The Heavenly Divine family held a distinguished position in the Chapala Lake Region. Even with the prince's endorsement, Pengguari was only nominally the Supreme Commander of the lake region's forces. He could firmly control only five thousand samurai and ten thousand militia. Meanwhile, the blue-clothed Noble Ahonda, standing before him, commanded as many as three thousand samurai and six thousand militia, ranking second in the region's forces.

A hint of a faint smile, seemingly carrying silent mockery, appeared on the corners of Ahonda's mouth. He then spoke in real mockery.

"Brave and skilled in combat, the 'Feathers' Prince who vows to never retreat, you are familiar with the real battlefield, surely you know: in this dry season, on such open plains, the traces of a large army's movement cannot be concealed. With our marching scale, the dust raised envelops the sky and could be easily spotted by enemies even ten miles away or farther! So I do not know why our Prince would detour from the south, taking these needless extra two days of travel."

"And if the Mexica people wish to attack us, they would also send out an army of more than ten thousand! Their movement could not be concealed either, and the dust in the East would soon be visible here."

Having said this, the battle-hardened Ahonda looked towards the east, calculated for a moment, and then continued.

"'Feathers' Pengguari, we probably have six or seven quarters to prepare and arrange our troops for battle. Then after another two quarters, the two armies will engage in battle. We should launch the initial charge, not giving the opponent the chance to deploy!"

Pengguari paused momentarily, then also tiptoed to look towards the East. In the distant east, he could indeed see faint dust approaching their direction. He remembered again the might of the Mexica grand army, his heartfelt lofty spirits suddenly waned, and his face showed hesitation.

"Ahonda, after half a day of marching, the army is always somewhat weary. Here, there are no advantageous hillocks to take nor fortified towns to rely on... If we retreat ten or so miles, it leads back to the river from where we came. Relying on the naval forces by the river, we could protect either our

left or right wing and promptly assist the commander. Moreover, on the western side of the river, I remember there's a hill about dozens of meters tall which could give us a strategical advantage...."

Ahonda listened with a stern face, his expression growing uglier as he listened. Finally, he could not suppress his anger and explosively interrupted the legion commander.

"Penguari! When two armies meet, it's advance with no retreat, merely putting life and death in the hands of Heavenly Divine and fighting head-on! The elite samurai are capable of moving swiftly, so how could these cumbersome militia maneuver in front of an enemy? If you command rashly, and our forces collide, it's a path to being routed without a fight. Since you have fortuitously become the commander, you must take up the commander's responsibilities and not issue ridiculous orders!..."

Cardinals and red hawks both have magnificent feathers. The former only chirp and boast, revealing fear when facing a true wild wolf; the latter, however, spread their wings to soar in the sky, bravely pouncing on the jungle's black panther! As a noble family from the Lake Region, you must live up to your name and not bring shame to the warriors of Chapala!

Penguari's face turned a mix of purple and red as he tightly gripped his prestigious Divine Staff, almost ready to swing it vigorously. The last Great Nobility who dared to yell at him like this had become a captive of the Mexica, their fate unknown! He frowned, staring at Ahonda in front of him, neither giving an order nor speaking a word.

Not far behind him, another Great Nobility clad in a silver-white robe, seeing the dispute, hurried over. He wore a smile as warm as a spring breeze and extended both hands to grab the commanders, persuasively speaking with a chuckle.

"The esteemed 'Feathers' Prince, the respected 'Sky' Commander-in-Chief, both of your points are valid! Retreating several miles to the rear is indeed safer, securing advantageous terrain and leading to an

invincible position. However, Mexica people are right before us, their numbers yet unknown; retreating without fighting might indeed dampen our spirits. The Lake Region's grand army is so illustrious; under the leadership of you two commanders, both warriors and militia carry a belief in victory, yearning for a glorious battle!

Seeing the Capital of Qinchongcan is only a few days away, once we defeat the coming enemy, nothing further will stand in our path. Then, everyone will be heroes who saved the Capital! The nobles of the Chapala Lake Region could finally hold their heads high in front of the Capital's nobility, perhaps even more!"

Hearing the words of the white-robed nobility, Pengguari's expression slightly softened. He glared fiercely at Ahonda, who knew his tone had been rather harsh in his urgency and slightly bowed his head, showing compliance and concession. Afterward, Pengguari put a bit of force into pulling his arm free, then offered a small smile to him.

"Respected 'Silver' Tekata, your words do make sense. Let me observe the enemy's military strength!"

Tekata means silver, symbolizing the divine radiance of the spirits. It is another noble family name. Tekata is the third person in command of the Lake Region's legion, commanding two thousand warriors and four thousand militia, and is known for being exceedingly warm and approachable. Everyone thus gives him face, maintaining a veneer of unity and harmony among the allied nobility.

Following that, "Feathers" commander pondered for a moment, then asked the aide beside him who was familiar with the terrain,

"Where are we now?"

"Respected Prince, we are between the Chapa region and Lake Patzcuaro, on the plains called Takuro."

"What does Takuro mean?"

"Takuro is a resting place, where flocks of birds descend from the sky. Initially, it was a meadow filled with lush aquatic plants. After our ancestors migrated here, driving away wild beasts and cultivating the land, they turned it into fertile fields," the aide quickly recalled, bowing his head and answering in a deep voice.

Hearing "flocks of birds descend from the sky," "Feathers" Pengguari furrowed his brow deeply; this seemed to be an ill omen, perhaps making this place unsuitable for battle.

Tekata, observing his reactions, immediately spoke with a beaming smile,

"Chapala's eagles descend from the sky, tearing apart the Mexica's jaguars, sacrificing them to the Mother Goddess of the Earth! Tarasco's ancestors flattened the lands in the lakes, driving away the invading Mexican beasts, cultivating fertile fields! 'Feathers' Prince, this is a good omen! We are destined to win this battle!"

Upon hearing this, "Feathers" Pengguari and "Sky" Ahonda looked at each other and burst into laughter shortly after. Both turned towards the East, where the rising dust was finally becoming visible.

At the horizon's end, the Mexica army gradually became evident, their long spears and war clubs glinting coldly. Soon, commands rang out from a hillock, the Tarasco legion began to halt in their tracks,

regrouping, their vibrant banners fluttering in the wind. Hence, a great battle was inevitable, and an epic saga began!

Chapter 387 - The Battle of Takuro Plains Part 2

The brilliant sunlight fell straight from the sky, illuminating the ant colonies on the earth not far apart, which were the small yet vast formations of two legions. A refreshing breeze swept through, dispersing the raised dust and bringing with it the roars and shouts of the legions.

The Mexica warriors, draped in vibrant Cotton Armor and Leather Armor, wielded glittering War Clubs and Copper Spears, and their left arms were further equipped with essential Wooden Shields and Rattan Shields. They formed tight ranks and let out loud roars, imitating the cries of eagles and tigers. From time to time, a Warrior Captain, carrying a small flag on his back, would lead the squad members to rhythmically beat the Wooden Shields and shout in unison, deterring the enemy in front of them.

And the captains of the Temple legion were even more conspicuous. These frenetic warriors with tattooed faces stood at the forefront of the formation, lifting bone-shaped musical instruments and blowing the terrifying Death Whistles. The deep whistle sounds passed, like a haunting ghostly wind, and immediately quieted the Chapala Militia ahead, significantly lowering their morale.

In the center surrounded by the warriors, there was a quickly constructed wooden high platform. At each corner of the platform stood a Personal Guard Warrior holding a Great Shield, firmly defending the central Commander-in-Chief. At the center, Xiulote in his commanding regal attire, wearing a heavy Feather Crown and carrying the four-meter-tall Black Wolf Banner, stood solemnly on the high platform holding a delicate Spear Flag. He positioned himself at the most conspicuous height, under the largest canopy, ensuring that all warriors could clearly see him—the heart of the army's spirit!

Next to him stood several Messenger Officers, ready at all times and holding various small flags. Behind him was a military band with drums and wooden gongs, holding horns and conches, and with Bone Whistles and copper whistles in their mouths. They were ready at all times to turn the military commands into sounds of various types and rhythms. Military commands need not be melodious; they only need to resound in all directions!

Xiulote stood solemnly at a considerable height, his expression firm and grave. He watched the Chapala Legion several miles away, quickly estimating the military situation, imprinting the circumstances in his mind.

The enemy army was fully deployed, with squads and circles stationed in place, arranged in a rough line formation. The Chapala Legion was about thirty thousand in size, with warriors around ten thousand. In their military formation, four warrior squares were most prominent. There was one square on each flank, with the left flank warriors dressed in sky-blue War Clothes, slightly more in number, and the right flank in silver-white War Clothes, slightly fewer.

Xiulote observed carefully. The left flank warriors had more Copper Spears, and their formation was more orderly as they were loudly shouting at that time.

"The left flank is more elite. It seems the enemy favors the left side!"

The Young Commander nodded slightly and noted this in his mind. He then looked towards the central warriors of the enemy.

The central warriors of Chapala were divided into front and rear formations, with almost equal numbers in both. They wore patterned War Clothes, gathering as tightly as feathers. From a distance, Xiulote observed that the front formation had more warriors while the rear guard was slightly fewer, resembling a large-headed bird, with the bird's head precisely where a large Commander's battle flag stood!

The battle flag was situated on a small hill, conspicuously placed, with the brilliant Long Feathers of a special bird embroidered on the fluttering flag. A trusted aide familiar with the Tarasco immediately approached, whispering a few words. The Young Commander then nodded steadily and smiled slightly.

"The Prince's Commander's great flag! Chapala's feathers, we meet again! Congratulations on your promotion, I've prepared a new gift for you!"

At that moment, Xiulote turned smilingly and looked back at the two pine cannons behind him. The cannon barrels had already been loaded, the muzzle sealed with cotton, and the match cord extended long. The surrounding gunmen, carrying fire sources, were also ready.

The Young Commander estimated in his mind. The enemy's warriors were around ten thousand, each of the four squares holding between two and three thousand, allowing for flexible command. Following that, his gaze shifted left and right, his pupils slightly constricted.

On the small hill surrounding the enemy Commander, there were two groups of high-ground-holding Archer Militia, each about two thousand strong. The Militia formed rough squares, anxiously checking the bows and arrows in their hands, evidently well-trained.

Xiulote carefully examined those tiny figures and the nearly man-high Wooden Bows, feeling somewhat relieved. Most of these Chapala Militia archers used Tlaxcala Wooden Bows, with a few crude Hunting Bows; their threat to warriors in Cotton Armor was usually only effective within thirty steps. Even though they had the high ground, their effective killing range extended only a little beyond forty steps, unless their archery skills were extraordinary.

The Chapala legion placed warrior squares at its core, surrounded by large groups of assembled Militia and scattered supervisory teams. Under the leadership of village leaders, Chapala's Militia gathered by village units. They wore clothes, held high Stone Spears and Stone Hammers, mixed with slings for

throwing stones, loosely formed into groups. At this moment, the Militia were engaging in chaotic loud shouting, countering the terrifying cries of the Death Whistle, seeming to maintain decent morale, yet their specific numbers were difficult to discern.

Xiulote swiftly estimated, adding the reports from the Scouts, and roughly had the numbers in his mind. Around four thousand close-combat Militia flanked each side of Chapala's warrior squares. In front of the warriors were four thousand stone-throwers and four thousand close-combat Militia. Accompanied by four thousand archers in the rear formation, the total was around twenty thousand. As for further behind the formations, those who kept far away and flickered dimly were probably unarmed logistics workers.

Having grasped the enemy's deployment, the Young Commander no longer hesitated. He swiftly waved the command flag, issuing orders. The Mexica legion also made slight adjustments and fully deployed.

Under the Black Wolf's banner, there was a three thousand-strong shooting legion composed of Longbow Personal Guards, Archer warriors, and Temple Crossbowmen, plus four hundred Jaguar Warriors guarding the left and right as the Personal Army of the Commander. The main body of Warrior Militia was then deployed in front, forming five parallel squares.

Chapter 388 - The Battle of Takuro Plains Part 2

The central army was composed of three thousand five hundred fervent Holy City warriors, organized tightly under the roaring leadership of Commander Olosh. On each flank were four thousand warriors armed with long spears. The spear warriors were silent, arrayed in tight and orderly phalanxes, their spears slanting forward. The left flank was under the command of "Monkey" Kuluka, and the right, temporarily pulled back, was under Ezpan. Further out, the outer perimeters of both wings were entrusted to the warrior legions of the western City-States, approximately two thousand on each side. They held shields and war clubs, shouting loudly, looking quite formidable.

For this battle, Xiulote had gathered a maximal force, conscripting warriors from everywhere possible. The four thousand troops from the western City-States had been pulled from the Rivermouth fortress, quickly transported by the naval army. He dared not entrust the task of confronting the enemy warriors

to these nobility militias; instead, he directed them against the militia of Chapala. When faced with weaker foes, these City-State warriors always thoroughly demonstrated their fighting prowess.

Just behind the frontline formations were three thousand warriors of the Religious Legion on standby. The Divine warriors and Temple Guards stood opposite each other, praying softly. Chants praising the Chief Divine echoed through the ranks, soothing the warriors' spirits and elevating their combat will. These three thousand fanatical religious warriors were like sharp daggers, once thrust fiercely forward into the enemy's body, they could not be withdrawn.

Xiulote personally instructed the two generals to reserve the three thousand religious warriors for a decisive charge at a critical moment. Next to the Religious Legion, there stood two "Divinely Gifted" weapons, mighty wooden cannons that produced thunderous booms. Clay tribulus did not consistently perform well and were unfit for the rapidly changing conditions of field warfare, so the young leader brought these two "big whips".

Although called wooden cannons, they resembled oversized shotguns. Within eighty steps, they wrecked havoc on soldiers in regular clothes, within forty, those in cotton armor, and only within twenty could they kill elite warriors armored in leather with wooden shields. They could fire only once or twice per quarter-hour. However, the shotgun's effective firing range was broad, covering several steps to either side. Moreover, for the enemy encountering them for the first time, the immense booming was an absolute morale destroyer, as if myth had come to life!

To prepare the warriors from various states, Xiulote had held a large sacrificial rite before the army's departure. The wooden cannons, as weapons bestowed by the Chief Divine, were engraved with abstract divine patterns and made a shining entrance under everyone's gaze. Subsequently, amid the thunderous roars, the warriors were awed, bowing before the God of Thunder's weaponry. Led by the Priests, they swiftly transformed their fear of the unknown into devout faith in the divine, accepting the presence of these new weapons.

At this moment, the Religious Legion guarded these two Divinely Gifted weapons as fervently as they protected their faith!

Xiulote surveyed his forces: over thirteen thousand warriors, eight thousand spear troops, plus a battery with two wooden cannons — this was the grand Mexica army in his command! Satisfied, he nodded, waved the splendid battle flag, and the earth-shaking war drums began to sound. The Mexica warriors lowered their war clubs, the spear troops hoisted their long spears, and together they stepped deliberately and orderly toward the enemy across from them.

On the opposite hill, the Prince's banner flew high. "Feathers" Pengguari stared intensely at the opposing Black Wolf banner, making a resolute vow. He was determined to wash away the disgrace of retreating without battle, to seize the enemy Marshal's flag, to prove to all the Chapala nobility:

"I 'Feathers' Pengguari, am a true warrior! A Commander-in-Chief capable of victory! And the undeniable King of the Tarasco people!"

Pengguari tightly gripped the Divine Staff in his hand, then swung it vigorously forward. His eyes shone with a chilling light. If the enemy's longbow held the range advantage, let the militia use up all the arrows!

With the battle flag forward and the attack drum sounding, four thousand Tarasco stone-throwing militia, arrayed in a loose formation, hastily advanced toward the Mexica's army. Then, standing fifty steps away, they swung their slings, erupting into chaotic shouts, hurling a sky-full of whistling stones into the dense formation.

Facing the incoming lightly armoured stone throwers, Xiulote furrowed his brow. He commanded the army to halt, suppressing the warriors' urge to charge, maintaining the orderly formation. He then loudly ordered "Raise shields to defend," and the Messenger Officer quickly lifted the flag, running and shouting the command.

In the hearts of the soldiers, the Marshal's authority was supreme, and his commands were indisputable. The warriors promptly raised their wooden shields, lowered their heads adorned with rattan helmets, and silently endured the barrage of stones. Occasionally, a stone would pierce through a gap, striking the warriors' cotton armor or even their exposed faces. After two rounds of stone throwing, dozens of warriors were slightly injured, several bled from mouths and noses, and a few were gravely wounded or killed.

Xiulote again waved the command flag. The three thousand personal army troops immediately set their bows, raised their crossbows, and from a hundred steps away launched arrows at the stone throwers. Within moments, thousands of arrows, carrying sharp cries, obstructed the sky briefly before raining down into the militia below.

Over two hundred Tarasco militia screamed simultaneously as they were pierced by the powerful long arrows, pinned in various strange poses on the ground. They wore only their thin shirts, utterly defenseless against the longbows and powerful crossbows. A hit meant severe injury, and at this time, severe injury meant death! Driven by fear, the stone-throwing militia became even more disorganized, showing signs of breaking ranks.

The Young Commander kept the command flag steady. The three thousand personal army troops continued firing, shooting three more volleys. The expensive arrows swept elegant and merciless arcs, "whistling" into the enemy's formation, piercing Chapala militia bodies, blooming over four hundred crimson flowers. The four thousand stone throwers quickly broke and turned, running towards the rear.

Chapter 389 - Battle of the Takuro Plains Part 3

Xiulote silently counted the enemies left in front of their formation, frowning once again. After the first volley, the formation of the militia was extremely loose, and four volleys of arrow rain killed just over six hundred people. And the three thousand crossbowmen had used up a staggering twelve thousand expensive arrows—twenty arrows for one militia, no matter how you look at it, it was a losing deal!

The young commander's face was as still as water. He commanded the advancing army, with the samurai moving slowly. However, the enemy's taskmasters showed no mercy, killing the leading stone-throwing militiamen who tried to flee and once again compelling the militia to move forward, driving them to continue harassing the Mexica battle lines.

Xiulote waved the command flag. Two thousand five hundred longbow warriors stepped directly out of the formation, and at a distance of forty to fifty steps, they fired precisely at the enemy. The flat trajectory of the longbows packed a huge punch, akin to deadly thunderbolts! But after four volleys, the foremost rank of the clad militiamen lay dead, over a thousand in number, along with several dozen taskmaster Chapala warriors, all tumbling into the dust. The vigorous life force flowed, soaking through the flapping clothes, filling the air with the stench of blood.

Then, the loud sound of gongs and drums rang out as four hundred elite Jaguar Warrior Brigade charged from the formation, pouncing on the demoralized stone-throwing militia. With sweeps of their war clubs, the militia twisted and fell to the ground, and the survivors, terrified, ran back. The Jaguar warriors skillfully wielded their clubs, driving the remaining two thousand routed troops towards the enemy's samurai formation, towards the central commander's flag. Just when they came within forty to fifty steps of the formation, the enemy archers on the small hill released their arrows simultaneously, and the routed troops instantly fell in droves, then scattered to the paths on either side, driven by the front-line samurai.

In this rapid and merciless hail of arrows, a few Jaguar warriors also fell, shot through, their fate unknown. Seeing the enemy samurai coming to meet them, the elite Jaguar Warrior Brigade no longer tested the waters and turned around to retreat. The enemy samurai gave chase for only forty to fifty steps before returning to the security of their solid formation at the foot of the hill, as bows from archers protected them.

Xiulote nodded in approval. In the fierce battlefield, only the elite Jaguar warriors could remain calm and composed, mastering their retreat, something other warriors could not achieve.

He then saw the flags on the opposite side wave again; thousands of militiamen in loose formation approached the Mexica battle lines. He watched carefully, noticing that the few front ranks of militia were wielding stone-throwing spears, posing a significant threat to the samurai.

The young commander had no choice but to wave his hand again, and the longbow warriors continued to fire an incessant rain of arrows, slaughtering the enemy's militia into various shapes. Every so often, militiamen charged to the front line, hurling powerful javelins that forcefully knocked down the front-rank samurai. Blood red spread from both sides of the battle lines until the ground became a sea of red, and the screams before death echoed between heaven and earth, followed by silence.

On the opposite hill, the "Feathers" flag waved like long feathers, and the formation of samurai stood as solid as mountains. Among the Chapala Legion, dozens of priests kindled the blue Sacred Fire, igniting the twining divine smoke, and danced feverishly. They sustained the morale of the army, extolling the Moon Goddess Halatana, offering batch after batch of militia to Her Divine Kingdom in prayers for the victory bestowed by the Goddess!

Arrows from the archers brought forth copious blood, while hurled javelins pierced the bodies of the samurai. Amid the blinding red, the hearts of the commanders on both sides were as hard as stone. The long period of probing finally came to an end as the feathered arrows gradually thinned, and the true fierce battle commenced at this moment!

Chapter 390 - The Battle of Takuro Plains Part 2

The long wind howled, blowing over the battlefield strewn with agonized screams. The brilliant sunlight illuminated the vibrant, bloody conflict.

From the sky above, two vast legions let out earth-shaking cries, converging like swarms of ants into tight formations. The Chapala Legion occupied a small hill with a tactical advantage, with ten thousand samurai firmly stationed on and around the hill, four thousand militia archers prepared their bows from on high, and twelve thousand militia advanced to harass the enemy.

The harassing militia, two thousand strong in each wave, spread out in a loose formation. Under the hail of longbow arrows, they threw stones and Stone Spears, causing trivial casualties, only to be repeatedly pinned down before the formation, their blood dyeing the red mud. From time to time, militia wailed as they broke and retreated, only to be corralled by the samurai behind them, who then forcefully coerced them to charge forward once more!

Watching this tragic scene, Xiulote was expressionless. He observed the enemy army, witnessing the frenzied dance of the rival Priest atop the hill, listening to the fervent calls to the names of their heathen gods, and scrutinizing the enemy forces. With the boost from their religious ceremonies, the Chapala samurai on the hill appeared calm and collected, completely undisturbed by the death and injury of their militia, as if they were mere spectators of a grand sacrifice.

"I truly underestimated these Chapala Great Nobility! To deplete the Longbows' arrows, they use the lives of their militia as mere fodder!"

The Young Commander frowned, listening to the Archery Corps' report on their arrow reserves and nodded slightly. Soon, the dense barrage of arrows thinned out, and the Longbow Warriors retreated behind the lines to recover their strength and cease firing.

Next, Xiulote issued a command with the wave of a flag, and the intense beat of the war drums immediately followed, signaling the samurai's formation to slowly march forth.

Under the cover of shields, the Mexica legion steadily advanced, destroying every enemy that stood in their way! The Spear Formation erected porcupine-like Long Spears, while the Holy City Legion raised their tortoise-like club shields. Amid the militia's harassment and the onslaught of javelins and stones, they moved forward with solemn determination. It wasn't long before the frontline Chapala militia had thrown their last javelins, wielding Stone Hammers and Stone Spears, erupting in frenzied cries as they fiercely charged.

Guardsman Guzman, clad in Paper Armor and wearing a Rattan Helmet, stood close to the front at the center of the dense Spear Formation. His left hand held a shield, guarding the ally to his left, while his right hand, clasping a Spear, rested on the shoulder of the comrade before him. Everyone was pressed together, shoulder to shoulder, spear braced against spear, slowly inching forward. Overhead, arrows whooshed past, as well as incoming stones and javelins, striking the sturdy rattan helmets and hefty shields. The stones were harmless, but the javelins posed some danger. Occasionally, someone would cry out in agony and fall to the ground, their exact location and identity unknown.

Guzman sniffed the air, filled with a thick, almost tangible stench of blood mingled with the familiar scent of his comrades' sweat. The ground under his feet was sticky, and now and then, he stepped on something soft that might still twitch. But he could not stop, nor could he look around. He was limited to a narrow field of vision, his gaze fixed on the enemy directly ahead, commanding the Spear Formation to keep moving forward, forward, and further forward!

Once the Spear Formation set into motion, it did not stop. Nearly half a year of rigorous and complex training turned each man's actions into muscle reflex, fusing them into a single entity. Now, Guzman was the brain and eyes of the formation. He saw countless figures charging from the front, their flimsy cloth garb, the swinging stone Short Spears, and finally, the contorted, screaming faces, rapidly magnifying before his eyes!

In that moment, Guzman's mind went blank, and his ears heard nothing. Slightly bewildered, he continued to lead the Spear Formation forward until it suddenly halted with a thud, having struck something!

Shrill screams erupted beside him, snapping the dazed Guzman back to reality. Opening his eyes, he saw that the very front of the formation was impaled with rows upon rows of Long Spears, five layers thick, now with two layers of bodies! No, the skewered were not yet corpses, only future ones. They writhed and wailed, bleeding and crying, until pushed further in by those behind them, until they lay motionless.

Seeing this gruesome scene jolted Guzman. The formation halted, he was now pressing against the front row, pushing forward as those behind him also pushed. Then, driven by the inertia of long training, he

suddenly remembered his duty. Quickly, the young captain stuffed the Bone Whistle into his mouth and blew sharp, rapid blasts while bellowing through the whistle,

"Toot, toot, thrust! Toot, toot, retrieve!... Toot, toot, thrust! Toot, toot, retrieve!..."

The frontline Pike Warriors braced against the enemy's charge, while the second and third rows of Militia Pikes stabbed through the gaps, sinking into the soft bodies, then swiftly pulling back. The fourth and fifth rows held their Spears high, mechanically stabbing downward from above the shoulders of those in front. Some spears hit the enemy's heads, others pierced the thin necks, most missed. Behind the fifth row, the sixth and seventh rows held their shields aloft to guard against an arrow shower that had yet to come, with the rear Militia pressed close together, pushing forward in unison.

Guzman was behind the fifth row. As a squad leader, he continually watched the front, as wave after wave of militia surged forward, repelled by the Spear Formation before being killed by the Spears from different angles with varying cries of pain. Then, these gradually cooling bodies, still oozing warm blood, succumbed without resistance, causing no harm. They either remained hanging from the Spears or collapsed directly onto the ground, soon motionless, like turkeys strung up and prepped for a festival feast.