

Civilization 50

Chapter 50: Divine Eagle and Cactus

"What a grand river!" Xiulote stood on the hill, looking at the Lerma River, and couldn't help but feel moved.

"Indeed, it really is a grand river!" Aweit also stood by, the command flag on his back raised high.

He looked toward the East where the river originated, then to the northeast where Xilotepec City was located, and finally to the north where the King's camp lay, sincerely admiring it all.

"Xiulote, do you know what's so great about this river?" Aweit asked with a smile.

"What's great about the river? It must be that marching along the river is fast, and transporting provisions is convenient," the clever youth understood immediately.

"Right. And this location is especially good," Aweit nodded in agreement. "Do you know, how long does it take from here to the Mexica's main camp outside Xilotepec City?"

"I'm not like you, having fought wars around here, how would I know the exact terrain?" the young man shook his head.

"From here to the main camp outside Xilotepec City, it's just eleven days. Seven days by water route heading east, then four days by land turning northeast. Tell me, how long did it take us from Xilotepec to Otapan?"

"Oh, that stretch through the forest, about sixteen days," the young man recalled the difficult trek through the woods.

"Exactly, sixteen days without enemy interference. From here, it's at least five days faster," Aweit became a bit excited, "Do you still remember, from Xilotepec to Otapan, how many mountain camps did the army set up along the way to transport provisions?"

"Four, roughly spaced three days apart each," he answered.

"That's it! From here to the closest mountain camp outside Xilotepec's main camp, it's just nine days. Six days by water, three days by land. That's also the essential route from Otapan's main camp to Xilotepec's main camp!"

Aweit laughed and patted the command flag behind him, causing the large umbrella above to sway, "From the siege camp to that place, it takes at least thirteen days."

"It's only four days faster, what are you so excited about, Aweit?" the young man looked incredulously at Aweit, then noticed the flag that was three meters tall and still swaying, feeling a pain in his back.

This thing was only slightly smaller than the four-meter-high King's commander's flag, but the commander's flag was always placed on the King's litter and didn't need to be carried by oneself.

"Four days faster! Well, it's useless for now, but it means we have the initiative. The eagle must catch the breeze to fly fast enough to snatch the racing hare," Aweit said.

"The premise is you've got to spot the hare first," Xiulote had already guessed something; he too had soaring ambitions, but everything had to follow the course of events.

"So, we stay put right here," Aweit laughed heartily. "Just like you said, guarding the stake, waiting for the rabbit to come crashing into it."

"A stake is easy to guard, but this river isn't so easy," the youth looked at the Tarasco patrol squad on the opposite bank of the river, their hands holding gleaming copper spears, staring across the river at the grand Mexica army. Further back, a few scouts were running swiftly to relay messages.

"But there's this command flag," Aweit said with a smile, patting the tall flag again. This action seemed to give him particular joy.

"Are you that happy to carry a flag? That umbrella flag looks heavy. Walking with it all the time, don't you feel tired?" Xiulote asked with some concern, "Take a rest, let someone else help you carry it!"

"This represents the highest command over thirty thousand men. A power bestowed by the Heavenly Divine, how can I pass it to someone else?" Aweit said with a smile, then changed his tone, "How about this, you help me carry it?"

The young man quickly waved his hands, refusing; the flag was heavy, and he was no fool: "You just said it represents power, how can you just hand it over to someone else?"

"Handing it over to someone else is of course out of the question. However, you, Xiulote..." his teacher laughed, "If I give it to you, I could accept that."

"Forget it, don't try to trick me into helping; it's too heavy," the wise young man had already seen through his teacher's ploy, "I'm still a child, go easy on me."

Aweit chuckled heartily. "You're still young, not realizing the benefits of this flag. When you grow up, you'll try every means to carry it. If it's light, you'll be dissatisfied and want to swap it for a heavier one—the heavier, the better. You wouldn't put it down even if it killed you."

Xiulote grimaced, "I want to be the master of power, not the slave of power!"

"Master? Slave?" Aweit pondered for a moment before saying, "That's a good analogy. So how do you plan to be the master?"

"To be the master...hmm," the young man thought for a moment, his eyes swirling, "Maybe it's about restraining one's desires?"

Aweit was tickled by the response. He patted Xiulote on the head, laughing, "You are the master, why should you restrain your desires? As a master, there's only one thing you need to learn: how to dominate your slaves, how to use your power!"

Aweit once again brainwashed the young man with ancient ruling-class ideology.

"In other words, you need to think about what to do with your power."

"And what about you? What do you want to do with your power?" the youth countered.

"I will use the power in my hands now," Aweit said, patting the Commander's flag again, "to catch the biggest, fastest rabbit. Thereby gaining more power!"

"And after that?"

"After that... the Divine Eagle will soar into the sky, and wherever Its gaze falls, that will be Its hunting ground, and it will ultimately become the realm of the gods," Aweit recited a sacrificial prayer softly. "I want to be the Divine Eagle, to conquer the whole world. What about you?"

"The Cactus will penetrate the earth, and wherever It can touch, it binds the roots as one, thereby making it the homeland of the people," Xiulote followed with the next line of the prayer. "Then I will be the Cactus, to cement an Empire."

"Then, the Divine Eagle alights on the Cactus. It makes a promise to the Mexica: the fields of corn and deer, the boundaries covered by heaven and earth, will all be your future!" The two of them continued to chant together, their voices growing louder and further, reaching up to the clouds and falling to the earth, like a vow offered to the divine.

Their intense emotions infused their voices and stirred in their hearts. They stood side by side, gazing into the distance.

After a long while, Aweit smiled lightly, "It seems a bit too far-fetched to discuss how to eat when the corn has just sprouted."

Xiulote nodded in agreement, "Then let's drive the stakes in firmly, in case the rabbit does come, right?"

The youth and the teacher looked at each other and burst into laughter.

Immediately after, Aweit exercised the Commander's power, turning the North Coast of the Lerma River into a massive construction site.

He first selected five highland hills by the river, each establishing a forward camp. The camps, relying on the terrain, were small but sturdy, spaced a few miles apart, thereby controlling an area suitable for crossing the river. The camps were like nails; even if the Tarascans crossed the river from afar, they would be threatened by these nails in their rear.

Into each camp, Aweit placed three thousand Militia, a thousand City-State Warriors as the base forces, a hundred personal warriors, and ten military Merit Nobility Jaguars as the command hierarchy. Their mission wasn't to attack but to hold their ground for at least five days. Relying on the sturdy camps, the morale of the troops was maintained. With the advantage of the terrain, a single Militia could achieve half the combat strength of a Warrior.

Next, Aweit built a large camp a day's distance from these small camps.

He stationed ten thousand of his true elite troops here. They prepared in secret, out of sight of the enemy, ready to strike at the halfway point. This was the main force for field battles, maintaining the initiative in choosing the appropriate battlefield. Xiulote's newly formed Longbow Guards were also in this camp.

Meanwhile, Aweit had long dispatched Envoys along the river to establish contact with the Capital's fleet. He was pushing for food supplies and reinforcements while demanding effective water intervention forces.

In the tense atmosphere of military preparations, two weeks quickly passed. The first fleet of Mexica boats, finally arriving with food supplies, appeared like a column of ants from the upstream Capital.

And the Tarascans had at last completed their assembly. An eighty-thousand-strong army approached majestically and set up a vast camp spanning several miles on the south bank of the Lerma River. Across from them, the Mexicas' camps, boats, and warriors formed a defensive line linked by mountain and river.