

Aztec Civilization: Destiny to Conquer America!

Chapter 6: Chapter 6 Going Home

The azure sky shed warm sunshine, and the wind on the Mexican Plateau was still cool, the moist air carrying the freshness of Lake Haltocan. Lake Haltocan to the south was connected to Lake Texcoco, and just a dozen kilometers down the east shore was the ancient holy city of Teotihuacan, where Xiulote was born.

Seeing Lake Haltocan, the team suddenly came alive, as if infused with some kind of vitality.

The samurai hastened to the lakeside, scooped up water from the shore, and drank greedily of the taste of home. Small boats plied the waters, and villagers going back and forth warmly greeted the samurai, inquiring about the bounty of their capture. Young girls, rowing closer in their boats and clad only in waistcloths, boldly displayed their youthful figures and sang love songs admiring the warriors.

Xiulote's face flushed, and he turned to look at the nearby village. Simple canals diverted lake water, feeding into the sprawling cornfields outside the village, where black beans and pumpkins were intercropped. The agriculture here was clearly far more developed, and the population seemed much denser.

Between the village and the lake were numerous small ponds with floating gardens of various sizes, the chinampas. The chinampas could be harvested 6-7 times a year, making full use of river silt nutrients in the water-rich, pest-light environment, yielding nearly ten times that of regular tilled farms. These chinampas were controlled by the nobility of the city-states, sustaining their affluent lifestyles. The Great Nobility often had chinampa gardens filled with flowers, herbs, and even cacao.

Xiulote's gaze lingered long over a pond near a village until Ters roused him, and the group set off once more. Soon, the grand and ancient city came into Xiulote's view.

Teotihuacan had no city walls; its walls were buried in the dust of history, along with most of the city. In distant antiquity, it was "City of the Gods," and also where the gods departed.

Xiulote entered from the west, crossing the subtle boundary of the city, presented with a grand spectacle that spanned millennia under the sun. A stone-paved avenue stretched north to south, about forty to fifty meters wide, seemingly leading to the edge of an era—the famed Avenue of the Dead.

At the end to the north was a stone plaza, two hundred meters square, with a four-sided sacrificial altar at its center. This was Moon Plaza, the sacred land of sacrificial rites, a

place to please the gods. Xiulote had first witnessed the bright red converging into lakes here, a shocking memory so unforgettable it made him realize that he had left behind a bloodless modern civilization and arrived in this savage, brutal era of the jungle.

The samurai, with their terrified captives, marched along the Avenue of the Dead. North of the sacrificial altar was a majestic pyramid, thrice the width of the avenue and about forty to fifty meters high. As he looked up, the massive boulders formed into a five-tiered pyramid body, atop which stood an exquisite temple adorned with red and blue dyes highlighting ancient patterns etched with many moons, stars, jaguars, and snakes.

At the entrance of the temple stood four guards wearing wolf headdresses, clad in black leather with blue and yellow stripes, statue-still. The statuesque guards held half-meter square leather-covered wooden shields in their left hands and gripped obsidian-tipped staffs over a meter long in their right, the obsidian blades gleaming coldly.

Xiulote often thought of climbing to the top of the pyramid to find a way back, but was always stopped by the sculpture-like guards. This was the Moon Pyramid, a bridge connecting heaven and earth.

Directly facing the procession, to the east of the avenue was another colossal pyramid, facing the sun with a two to three hundred meter square base and similarly five-tiered, yet taller and more imposing. The top was open, with a sacrificial stone about half a person's height in the middle, and to the east was the semi-open Temple of the Sun.

In the temple stood a tall Sun God statue facing the East. Its crown was made of gold, its eyes of gemstones, and silver ornaments hung from its arms and waist, with a pure gold sun several meters in diameter at its back.

Sunlight now bathed the top of the Sun Pyramid, the dazzling golden rays temporarily blinding Xiulote's eyes. This was the most revered Sun Pyramid, where only the most sacred sacrificial ceremonies could take place, strictly off-limits at other times.

Olosh led the warriors to halt and knelt toward the Temple of the Sun to the east.

He prayed aloud with a solemnity Xiulote had never witnessed before, "Great Guardian God Huitzilopochtli, under your sunshine that illuminates all, we have completed this capture! As your eternally loyal warriors, we will offer you the hearts and blood of our enemies until we return to the earth and offer ourselves. May you bless our bodies and weapons, that we may win the next sacred battle!"

Xiulote also performed the prayer with proper semblance, and as he stood up, he saw Olosh ordering the captives to kneel before the Sun God, offering their faith. The captives, believing death was imminent, trembled with terror, crying out in disorder. Fear drained their strength, leaving them prostrate on the ground, a huddled mass.

Not far to the west of the procession was a magnificent complex of palaces and temples adorned with colorful paintings on the walls and fluttering on the pure white cotton curtains. Gods of heavens and earth, sacrificial rites for the fields, rainforest and lakes, tigers, leopards, snakes, and deer—all were vividly alive in the palaces. The paintings depicted the past and present of the Aztec people, their faith and way of life.

This splendid complex of buildings was the dwelling of priests and nobility, as well as the workplace of the servants of the gods.

Upon seeing the returning company, a young assistant priest hurried out from the palaces. The youth appeared to be around twenty, his features gentle and refined, like jade. He wore no feather crown; his upper body was draped in a white shawl, and he wore a short white skirt below, his chest bare. Around his neck was a common obsidian necklace, signifying his role as an assistant priest.

"Respected Olosh Samurai, oh, and little Xiulote," the assistant priest said with a smile, winking at Xiulote, "did the capture go smoothly?"

"Not bad, Acap. This time we ventured into Vastec territory and found a tribe of savages. The opponents were weak; none of our warriors were injured," Olosh nodded, his stern expression as if he had not yet recovered from the prayer, then pointed towards the crowd of kneeling people, "the captives are all here."

"Good." The assistant priest quickly counted the captives and glanced a few times at the damaged leather armors of the warriors standing at the rear. Acap smiled again, "The spoils of the returning warriors are quite impressive. Hand over the male captives to me, and you all can deal with the female captives. With twenty-five sacrifices, it seems every new recruit will be able to get a promotion."

Olosh also smiled, then turned to the samurai and roared, "You turkeys, I have good news for you. After this capture, each of you will be promoted to first level warriors, 'Captors'."

"Ters, Marley," Olosh continued to roar, "you two will be promoted to second level warriors, 'Vastec Hunters'."

Xiulote saw two faces both eager for battle, one cruel, the other pure.

"After I report to the elders, you can go to collect your new war clothes and cloaks tomorrow," the warriors let out a cheer of excitement. "But remember, your opponents this time were weak, you're still a bunch of turkeys! Only when you've captured a Tlaxcala or Tarasco warrior on your own, can you truly be called brave."

"Ters, Marley. Take the four-palm-sized women to South City, sell them to commoners without wives. The cacao beans you get in exchange should be shared among the brothers, and get your weapons and leather armors repaired!"

At this, the warriors cheered again.

"And remember, if it's one of our own, make it cheaper."

As Olosh spoke, he also patted Xiulote on the shoulder and laughed, "Xiulote, it's a pity you don't have a share in this! Of course, you're not lacking in that bit."

But Xiulote seemed unenthusiastic. The youth hung his head low, watching as the captives were led away like merchandise.

It was then that Acap took up the conversation, smiling, "Well, Olosh. Now that everything is arranged, you and Xiulote come with me. Captain Xiuxoke had given orders long ago; as soon as you returned, you were to see him immediately." With that, he led the two towards the magnificent palaces.

Chapter 7: Chapter 7 Father

The priestly order's palace complex was divided into two levels. The guards on the lower level wore beast helmets and yellow robes, adorned with the attire of jaguars and eagles. Assistant priests wore solid-colored capes or shawls, carrying wooden boards painted with images as they moved about.

The three of them ascended the granite staircase to the second level of the palace complex, passing by an exceptionally tall palace. Xiulote faintly heard intense arguing coming from inside the palace; the words "war" and "Otomi people" could be discerned.

At the palace entrance fluttered a large, multicolored curtain. At the center of the curtain sat the imposing Sun God, War God, and Mexica Guardian God Huitzilopochtli, the Chief Divine of the Mexica Alliance. Dark green long feathers covered the lower half of the Chief Divine's body, radiating outwards like the sun.

Next to the curtain of the palace entrance stood two guards wearing wolf heads and black robes.

One of them gave Acap a questioning look; in response, Acap pointed to Olosh and Xiulote, then gestured to the right. The guard nodded and gave Xiulote a "ferocious" smile through the gap in the wolf's mouth. Xiulote rolled his eyes, while the preoccupied Olosh seemed lost in thought.

Acap then led them off to the right. Xiulote asked in a low voice, "What are the High Priests discussing in the Chief Divine's Temple?"

"You'll know in a moment," Acap replied with a smile, not answering the question directly but appearing to suddenly become thoughtful himself.

After a while, they arrived at a side hall. There was also a huge curtain at the entrance of the side hall, depicting a deity with its arms raised high and a head resembling that of both man and dog, gazing into the sky. With a bright red tongue, deep black feathers, and headdress, it seemed ready to leap off the vibrant red Throne of the Gods at any moment.

This was the god of thunder and death, the Night Star that escorts the sun—Xiulotel, also the twin brother of the Feathered Serpent Divine.

The guards of the side hall were much more enthusiastic, "Little Xiulote, back already? How was the hunt? Did you get bloody? Did you capture any prisoners?"

Xiulote nodded and shook his head, following Acap silently.

Entering the side hall, they were met with a low stone table holding a wooden board. A burly man in his thirties sat cross-legged on the floor, draped in a painted red robe, with a dark green feather crown on his head and silver arm bands. Holding a wooden pen with bristles made of resilient hair, he dipped it in black paint and began etching two patterns on the board — one of writing and one of painting.

Xiulote stepped forward and saw that the square pattern in the front depicted a shield and a club, while the pattern behind was a white cloth wrapping a corpse. He had learned of these glyphs before and knew they meant "war" and "death."

The man looked up, showing a distinct and resolute face. He had deep-set eyebrows, a prominent nose, and an air of self-assurance. His eyes were bright and keen, first landing on Xiulote, stretching into a smile, then acknowledging Acap with a nod. Lastly, he looked at Olosh and let out a laugh.

"Welcome back, my warrior! And welcome, my son! You've returned just in time," the man stood up, revealing his large, muscular build, then spread his arms in a welcoming gesture. "The war is about to begin!"

"Good news, Head Warrior Xiuxoke! When? And against whom?" asked an excited and surprised Olosh, returning the gesture.

"A few days ago, a messenger came from Tenochtitlan bringing orders from the newly appointed Tratuoani: The King commands us to start mobilizing, for the coronation war will begin next month, aiming to subjugate the Otomi people to the northwest for refusing to pay tribute to the Alliance."

Xiuxoke and Olosh clashed forearms and then he inquired, "How did the capturing go this time?"

"I took Xiulote and the new recruits for a spin around the people of the Vastec to the north, grabbing several dozen Canine Descendants. The Vastec were quite compliant,

and their food supplies were ample. It seems the northeast won't pose any significant problems for now."

Olosh pondered for a moment before adding, "Xiulote's strength and martial arts are commendable; he took down a would-be warrior this time. Just too many questions, he wants to know everything."

"Speaking of which, Olosh frowned in distress, 'Some of the numbers and principles, how can a warrior like me answer these?'"

"Haha, it seems this youngster has made quite some progress if he can stump my top Head Warrior," Xiuxoke laughed as he patted Xiulote's head, hmm, that hurt a bit.

"Is the City-State preparing to send out troops? How many?"

"Of course, as the King's kin, the City-State will definitely dispatch troops in support. The specific number of troops has been discussed by the Elder Priests all morning. The High Priest should have the information when he returns later. However, the King has already announced that Tenochtitlan will mobilize three elite Xiquipilli units, which is a force of eight thousand men. Texcoco and Tlacopan will each mobilize one elite unit, and the villages subordinate to the three cities will mobilize five commoner units."

"So all together, the capital and the other two cities will mobilize ten eight-thousand-man units, which is eighty thousand men?" Xiulote took a sharp breath, eighty thousand warriors?

"Heh, Xiulote is quite good at math," Olosh was also somewhat surprised, "Mobilizing an army of a hundred thousand men to gnaw at the Otomi's mountain city in the north as the rainy season approaches? That wouldn't be a wise choice."

"Indeed," Xiuxoke stopped smiling and slowly nodded, "The City-States to the south like Tzalko should be able to mobilize at least two units, Xochipeople and Cuauhnacvac one each, the two nearby units from Weyophethlan to the north will be conscripted, and to the west, Tepanecapan, Tollocan, and Tzalko will muster at least four units. To the east, to guard against the Tlaxcala people, no troops can move. All in all, it should be twenty eight-thousand-man units."

"The frontal battlefield is definitely not something to worry about. Even if all the City-States of the Otomi send reinforcements, they'll barely make up ten units, and their combat power can't compare to our elite warrior units," Olosh confidently patted his chest.

"But twenty units would require at least a hundred thousand laborers. And during the wet rainy season, the daily consumption of food is incalculable. The northern Otomi villages have always been poor, so there's not much food to seize. Once the Otomi people hide in their City-States and hold out, if the war drags on, we'll be in trouble."

"Those are my worries too," Xiuxoke unconsciously pinched Xiulote's cheek, hmm, still painful.

"However, the northeast Vastec provides a large tribute every year, so there's no reason or benefit to attack them. The tripartite alliance of City-States to the south has been deferential over the years, and they're interconnected—if you throw a stone, it's sure to cause ripples in the pond.

"The Tarasco to the west are very strong in battle; we even suffered a defeat at their hands two years ago. The Tlaxcala to the east goes without saying; to fight them, we would need to mobilize completely, and not everyone is prepared for that. The King, after calculating, probably has no other choice but to pick the northern Otomi."

"In the end, it's still about bullying the weak and fearing the strong," Olosh muttered dissatisfiedly, "How can the King lack the heart of a warrior?"

Olosh paused, then lowered his voice, "The new King's authority has not yet been established. Fighting our enemies the Tlaxcala or the formidable Tarasco, even if we are defeated, no one would complain. But fighting the weak and cunning Otomi, if we gain no advantage at all, it won't matter if we're victorious—if the victory is too slight, it will cause dissatisfaction among the people."

Xiuxoke nodded in agreement, smiling, "Olosh, your talent is more than enough to lead an elite warrior unit as its commander."

"Too bad our City-State doesn't have eight thousand warriors for me to lead," Olosh laughed heartily.

"There will be in the future, I promise!" The two looked at each other and laughed heartily at the same time.

Xiulote was listening so intently that he hadn't noticed when Acap had left the hall, but now he saw him walking in from outside.

Acap entered with a smile and spoke softly, "Commander, the High Priest has finished the meeting and is on his way here."

Chapter 8: Chapter 8 Grandfather

Everyone stopped their conversations and came out to meet the visitor.

Standing at the entrance, Xiulote saw a man, about fifty-something years old, approaching him.

The elder had eagle-like eyes, and his piercing gaze chilled the hearts of those it fell upon. Time had etched deep lines on his face, blending with the bright red tattoos,

casting a stern and indifferent visage that bore a supernatural presence rather than mere old age.

The elder sported a formal obsidian long crown which seemed quite heavy. The broad-fronted crown had a "Divine Face" made out of gemstones. "Eyes" crafted from two large rubies surveyed the earthly realm as the elder walked. The top of the crown was adorned with numerous half-meter long green feathers, and the back was densely packed with short blue feathers, spreading out magnificently like the sun.

Xiulote looked at the hefty High Priest's crown, feeling a headache coming on. Acap and Olosh, on the other hand, seemed pricked by something and bowed their heads, not daring to look directly.

Under the sunlight, as the elder slowly approached, the radiance was nearly blinding to Xiulote.

He was draped in a red cloak, bordered with a circle of red feathers, upon which golden suns were embroidered, and beneath it worn a lavish robe, adorned on the front and back with grains of gold and silver depicting the radiance of the sun and moon.

A dazzling necklace of top-tier obsidian hung from his neck, filled with countless gold-dust-like translucent spots. His wrists and ankles were adorned with pure gold bands that glittered as he moved.

The Mexica people didn't regard gold as valuable currency, but simply revered its solar color.

The elder's walk was slow and steady, as if he bore some sort of "Divinity." Acap bowed his head and stepped forward to offer assistance, but upon catching a slight tilt of the elder's head and his emotionless gaze, he immediately stood back with folded hands, waiting by the side.

Everyone then quietly bowed their heads and waited by the sides until the elder slowly stepped into the side hall, following which they filed in, crowding behind him.

The air fell silent until the elder stopped, turned around, and his sharp gaze fell on Xiuxoke, who quickly bowed deeply, keeping his head lower than the elder's eyes.

"Xiuxoke, the assembly of Priests has decided," the elder intoned, "to mobilize a mixed group for the coronation war. You will be the leader of eight thousand men, leading them in battle for the King and the City-State."

Olosh looked up, emitting an uncontrollable cheer, which was swiftly suppressed as the elder's gaze fell on him again, prompting him to lower his head.

"Yes, High Priest. I will fight for the City-State and the King!"

At this reply, a faint, barely perceptible smile traced the stone-like face of the High Priest. Then his gaze swept over Acap and Olosh again. "Xiuxoke, I need to speak with you alone."

Acap and Olosh performed a gesture of piety, consciously exited, and then closed the door behind them.

Only then did High Priest Xutel remove the obsidian crown from his head and carefully place it on the stone table, revealing his white-haired head. It seemed as if he had shed some heavy divinity, allowing him to breathe a sigh of relief, his face showing more expression.

Xiulote approached and touched the stone crown, finding it truly hard, then tried embracing it—it was indeed heavy. It must be made of real stone. It appeared that being a High Priest was physically demanding; his grandfather was truly strong.

Xiuxoke hastened forward to assist, helping the elder unload the heavy cloak, the substantial necklace, and the pure gold bands. Only then could Xiulote see that beneath the dazzling and lofty priestly attire was a thin, weathered old man.

Xutel sat down on the ground, his thin frame finally showing a stoop. He patted beside him, motioning Xiulote to sit next to him, his left hand naturally stroking his grandson's head. His right hand pulled Xiuxoke to sit opposite; the three of them created an interesting contrast.

With no outsiders around, they could finally speak some private words.

"The City-State decided to mobilize a group of eight thousand, comprising ten camps, half of which are elite City-State camps and the other half are village civilian camps. That is, four thousand Samurai and four thousand Militia,"

"This time I overruled all the Elders and chose you to be the commander of the expedition," the old man's eyes were still exceptionally sharp. "You must seize this opportunity and achieve enough military merits."

"When you return, I will have reason to promote you from a Second Level Nobility to a Third Level Honorary Nobility, and in a few more years, you will rightfully become the ruler of the City-State," said the High Priest with an authoritative voice about the destined fate.

Xiuxoke nodded but unusually showed a hint of hesitation, "This battle will not be easy. The Otomi people are unlikely to fight us head-on, and the King's decision seems somewhat hasty."

Xutel nodded, "Every decision the King makes is naturally his responsibility. However, I will send a Messenger to him to have you avoid meaningless siege warfare."

"What you need to do is find the right moment to engage the Otomi in direct combat. Don't mind the casualties! I only need you to return, I only need substantial achievements. Samurai are like blooming flowers, always destined to wither somewhere. Civilians are even more like weeds in the fields, even if they die off, they will keep sprouting endlessly. Only you are the cocoa tree blessed by the Divinity, destined to bear the duty of leading the City-State!"

Xiuxoke remained silent without replying. Xutel then placed his right hand on his shoulder, looking at his son's resolute face and said softly, "I know, because of your background, you have developed some naive affection for the civilians and lower Samurai. Since I couldn't be by your side to teach you the way of the nobility from childhood, your mother filled you with too much of the civilians' frail emotions."

"But trees and weeds can never stand at the same height. As a Priest, the religious law forbids me from officially marrying. But as a descendant of the Sun God, I must cultivate a tree that shelters for the family. You were born with a future to shoulder. Go and fight! Victory must be nurtured with life."

The warriors of the City-State won't care if their leader is a bastard. What they care about is whether you are brave enough, and whether you have enough enemy blood on your hands!"

Finally, Xiuxoke nodded, gazing into his father's eyes and declared loudly, "I will, Father!"

Xiulote pretended to be a rag doll, overhearing this unsettling instruction, his attention focused on his grandfather's robe. How were those pieces of gold and silver embedded into the fabric, it felt like some precise weaving technique and natural glue were used. Perhaps it could be used to make Cloth Armor?

Therefore, Xutel's gaze finally shifted to his grandson standing beside him, "How do you plan to arrange for Xiulote?"

Xiuxoke looked at his son affectionately and said, "Xiulote just returned from hunting, and while I'm on the expedition, I plan to let him rest at home and maybe learn some Priestly knowledge from you."

Xutel thought for a moment and shook his head, "No. Let Xiulote go with you. The knowledge of a Priest can be made up later. After tallying up the results of this capture, I will promote Xiulote to an official Priest. Then, during this war, assign him a few prisoners so that when he comes back, I can promote him to a Second Level Priest 'Chitli.'"

"But Xiulote is only twelve years old. Such a young Second Level Priest..."

"Take him with you! Xiulote is good at mathematics, he can help you keep the rations accounted for accurately. With his mathematics and battlefield accomplishments, he will be enough to convince the others. Plus, I am here."

Speaking, Xutel lovingly lowered his head and gently pinched Xiulote's cheek. The gesture was gentle, not painful at all. "Xiulote, you've been intelligent since you were little, you are our hope, and the hope of our family. Listen well to your father. I know you understand everything."

"A Second Level Priest at twelve or thirteen years old, in two more years, I will make you the youngest Fifth Level 'Coyote Priest.' That way, when I am gone, you can take my place. Xiulote, you must remember this."

Xutel stared into the young boy's eyes, seemingly trying to convey something with his gaze.

"You are born extraordinary, with signs in the heavens! You are also a descendant of Acamapichtli, among generations of Mexica Kings, sharing the same bloodline! Your future holds limitless possibilities, and I will seize every opportunity for you!"

"And my future," the old man finally murmured to himself, "is only a few years away from the Divine Kingdom..."

Chapter 9: Chapter 9 Mobilization

The next day at noon, the sun was warm and dazzling. Xiulote, donned in a priest's robe, sat atop a miniature pyramid by the palace compound, gazing up at the majestic Pyramid of the Moon.

The decision of the Priesthood had spread throughout the city-state and nearby villages; the decision to deploy troops was unshakable! And today was the day for the mobilization speech, meant to inspire the morale of the warriors and the militia.

Xiulote looked up at the tall Pyramid of the Moon, where his grandfather Xutel, clothed in the heavy full attire of the High Priest, shimmered in gold, illuminating all directions.

To Xiulote, the Pyramid of the Moon held a special meaning; it was the place where everything changed.

Staring at the Pyramid of the Moon, the dazzling light seemed dreamlike, and he sank into some distant memories. Those were "past" memories, although they had begun to blur.

In that memory, he was a post-90s youth who loved history and geography, curious about the ancient civilizations of America, and had played as the Aztec countless times

in Civilization and Europe scenarios. At 25, he finally had the chance to travel to Teotihuacan in Mexico, where he secretly climbed the Pyramid of the Moon at night.

That evening, he sat on the ruins of the temple at the top of the pyramid; it was pitch dark, the black night engulfing him.

The Milky Way was boundlessly vast, and coincidentally, the once in a decade Leonid meteor shower rained down. On a whim, the youth loudly made a wish to the shooting stars, "I wish to return to the past, lead the destroyed Indian civilization to rise again, defeat the invading European colonizers, and make America belong to the Indians!"

Before he could finish his sentence, darkness fell before his eyes, he collapsed to the ground, his consciousness fuzzed as he felt himself turn into a beam of white light, followed by endless dizzying movement and rapid changes in color, until he woke up unable to see this world anymore. He could only vaguely sense his surroundings, still in the ancient city of Teotihuacan, but there was much more life around.

He wandered in a blurry world, without purpose or direction, simply drawn by feeling to a secluded hut that held a massive attraction.

Passing through walls, he felt two connected lives, one a weak miscellaneous light, the other colorless specks. Guided by feeling, he merged into the colorless specks, a flash of white light sparked, and his consciousness blurred.

The next time he awoke accompanied by piercing cries, seemingly his own? He opened his eyes to see a low roof and two faces, one happy, the other sad. Black hair, yellow skin, the bent forms casting giant shadows in the moonlight, covering his tiny body.

Sorrow soon overtook joy, and he stopped crying, but heard another suppressed cry, a bent figure suddenly stood up, carrying him out of the room.

The cries gradually receded, the baby's brain unable to support much thought, he felt himself being carried to the edge of a pond, then water slowly overtook him. Had he been abandoned just after traversing?

The frail body coughed violently, unable to breathe, and he seemed to hear a new cry nearby. His consciousness gradually faded, the newborn body no longer feeling.

This time, he didn't wander aimlessly. Recognizing the scale of the buildings, he slowly drifted towards the most bustling and massive center, resisting the occasional attractions around him. He wandered around the center of the ancient city, finally feeling a new pull at the bustling palace compound, and merged into the colorless specks once again.

Waking up once more was accompanied by his own cries, and an uncontrollable laughter. The infant opened his eyes, a young and robust man was holding him aloft.

His head adorned with a feather crown, his upright body dressed in a white cotton robe. A resolute face, also with black hair and yellow skin.

The high roof was painted with colorful characters and landscapes. A circle of people knelt around, grinning silently. On the bed lay a young woman, her laugh brimming with tears.

Soon, a richly dressed, stone-crowned middle-aged man hurried in, pushed away his little legs, then looked at his tiny speck with joy and laughed loudly, then spoke some incomprehensible words, a term repeated several times. Those surrounding also began to repeat this term, faintly distinct as, "Xiulote!"

Since then, he had a new name, Xiulote.

The middle-aged man from his memories now stood on the high platform, his face aged by time. Only the dazzling golden light illuminated the crowd below. Nobility, warriors, and commoners gathered from all directions at the base of the pyramid, listening to the High Priest relay the divine message.

"The Sun God, the War God, Huitzilopochtli's protected citizens. The bloodline of Huitzilopochtli, the new Tratoani brings the command of the gods, asking you to take up arms, join the king's sacred coronation war, and capture the divinely chosen sacrifices, the weak Otomi from the north."

The imposing voice was relayed tier upon tier down from the Moon Pyramid, growing grander, until it enveloped the entire square and jolted Xiulote from his memories.

"Since the last holy war and the great sacrifice, twelve rainy seasons have passed. The Fifth Era's Sun had an agreement with us. He requires thousands of hearts to maintain the sky's light, or else the Sun will extinguish, and all things will wither. The time for sacrifice has come again!

The ground beneath our feet, Xipactli, also had an agreement with us. It allows corn to grow, nurturing all things, and we repay with blood, or else the grain will fail. The earth craves blood!

The world is balanced, the War God sustains the operation of the world. You all know, the population of the city-states is increasing, abandoned infants are becoming more frequent, and the food in our hands is diminishing! The world has lost its balance, the War God needs lives to prevent the world's destruction.

We have only one choice, to capture the lives of our enemies, sacrifice them to our guardians, this is a war to save the world!"

Limited productivity, scarce food, restricted demographic limits, and ever-growing populations. This is the historical cyclical law of Central America. Xiulote thought, it seems there are inevitable reasons for the endless wars and sacrifices.

The commoners discussed in panic, troubled by the Priest's terrifying prophecy. Fear was then channeled, transformed into a resolve to take up arms. The nobility and the warriors were still silent.

"In the name of the Guardian God, I swear: in this holy war, all young warriors, if you capture a captive alive, you will be promoted to a First Level Captor; capture two more, you advance to a Second Level Vastec Hunter; capture three more, to a Third Level Elite Fire Warrior; and capture four more, you become a true Fourth Level Veteran Warrior, eligible to join the Eagle Warrior Group or the Jaguar Warrior Group, becoming a First Level Warrior of military merit! They will be forever granted a fertile land by the city-state, even a Chinampa in the lake! All priests participating in the war will be similarly recognized."

The warriors erupted, cheering unclearly, some even drew their staffs and created sounds by striking their shields. Some newly ascended warriors of military merit also became excited at the mention of Chinampa.

"Our enemies are the weak Otomi, whose ancestors we easily expelled from the divinely granted Mexican Valley, killing them is as simple as pulling weeds. Yet today, these jackal-like creatures still threaten our valley, salivating over our fields. Only by thoroughly sacrificing them to the deities can we protect our most precious land.

The city-state of the Otomi is prosperous, filled with countless corn cakes, black bean paste, cocoa fruits, cotton fabrics, and various beautiful flowers, feathers, herbs, silver ornaments, gold ornaments, obsidian, and gemstones. Their city-state has no warriors, only sacrifices, slaves, and your future wives!"

The hereditary nobility were finally moved, the Great Nobility whispering among themselves, discussing the lacking luxury goods. Desire finally ignited in everyone's eyes.

"Warriors, for the covenant of the gods, for the glory of warriors, for our land, and for your wealth, join the holy war. The priests will be with you, in the name of the gods, we must win this battle!"

At that moment, except for Xiulote, everyone below the stage finally fell into senseless shouting and howling, eventually guided into earth-shaking cries: "War, war!"

The neat cheers resounded through the heavens, representing a certain national will. This scene was deeply ingrained in the eyes of a young boy, unforgettable.

Chapter 10: Chapter 10: Legion

Two full weeks had passed since that unforgettable mobilization, and the legions of the Teotihuacan City-State were finally fully assembled. The dry season had ended, and the rainy season was not yet upon us, so the cool breeze had become moist and the warm sunshine remained as comfortable as ever.

The south of the city had been transformed into a massive military camp. During this period, Xiulote watched his father meet with hereditary noblemen involved in the war, exchange courtesies, make small talk, dine together, make promises, and then exchange gifts. He also saw him spar with the elite samurai, embrace them, boast, praise, and test their martial arts before finally drinking tequila to intoxication.

Xiuxoke occasionally received representatives of the civic militia, resolved disputes, and demonstrated his authority. Over time, a military leadership group centered around Xiuxoke finally took shape, and the newly established battalion of eight thousand men could be somewhat clumsily commanded.

The Aztec military organization was based on squads of twenty, with a squad leader at the core. Then, in increments of twenty, units of 200, 400, 800 men were formed, all the way up to the ultimate military unit of eight thousand men, the Xiquipilli, measuring the final martial power of all city-states.

Under the tireless suggestions of Xiulote, Xiuxoke eventually divided the legions into ten camps, each with around 800 men. As for the exact numbers, other than Xiulote, no one could count them accurately.

Out of the ten camps, five elite camps came from urban communities, mainly composed of formally trained samurai, including veterans of the Fourth Level war ranks, such as Eagle Warriors and Jaguar warriors, all gathered in one veteran soldiers' camp. They had sufficient ability to use javelins. This was the core of the legion's combat power. Naturally, the Camp Commander of the veterans' camp was the most trusted Head Warrior, Olosh.

The remaining five were civilian camps, composed of conscripted militia from subordinate villages, most of whom only had rudimentary training. A part of the warriors with experience in using slings for hunting were all gathered in one sling camp, while the other four were close combat camps.

On this day, the fully reorganized legions finally assembled in the training field of the military camp. The priests held aloft the banners of the gods, maintaining order at the scene together with nobles of all levels. The samurai gathered by camps, forming circular formations of uneven sizes.

Xiuxoke, wearing resplendent war attire, stood at the most conspicuous spot, surrounded by noble officers from each camp. Together, they looked proudly over their "great army," openly expressing their eagerness for battle.

Xiulote, accompanied by Acap, his new bodyguard and assistant sent by his grandfather, visited the camps under the guise of a priest.

The first camp was the veterans' camp. The seasoned samurai wore yellow or green leather armor, donned red and yellow capes, and wore beast-shaped helmets. In one hand they held shields, and in the other, they swung clubs, the obsidian blades on both sides of the war clubs gleaming sharply in the sunlight. Most of them carried a javelin on their back, with a javelin thrower tucked at their waist.

The veterans stood naturally, their formation automatically taking on an open combat formation. With relaxed expressions and the indifference of those who had faced life and death, they effortlessly swung their war clubs with practiced finesse. Xiulote circled twice, counting more than two hundred intimidating Eagle and Jaguar heads.

"So it turns out we only have two hundred Jaguar and Eagle warriors," Xiulote sighed in disappointment. "This is a bit far from the legion I had imagined. I thought we could have a whole legion of Jaguars and Eagles!"

"Eight thousand Jaguar warriors?!" Acap chuckled lightly, "All the city-states of the Mexica combined probably couldn't muster that many. The capital's three cities could perhaps pull together a little over two thousand Jaguars and Eagles, plus more than five hundred 'hair cutters,' and that's enough for any king to intimidate many city-states. Remember, both the Jaguar and Eagle battalions are elite military nobility of the Alliance!"

"Alright then. We'll have Eagles, and we'll have Jaguars," Xiulote began to take mental notes. "Veterans' camp, the trump card, sword/club and shield soldiers, one javelin, leather medium armor, high morale, average discipline, intimidating to regular troops. Excellent assault infantry." He used a familiar method of assessment, which helped him quickly understand the strength of the troops.

Next, the second to fifth camps were the elite camps. Depending on their wealth, various samurai wore leather armor or war clothes, some even donned capes. Most of the warriors wore pointed helmets, the same Obsidian clubs, and leather round shields. The faces of the newly promoted samurai showed assorted excitations and fantasies about battle.

Amidst the somewhat disorderly troops, Xiulote saw two familiar faces, one smiling warmly at him and the other offering a stiff smile.

"Elite camps, elite, sword/club and shield soldiers, half leather light armor, average morale, poor discipline. Close combat infantry that maintains battle lines, with a somewhat low rate of armor coverage. Okay, that's acceptable."

Then, the sixth to the ninth civilian camps. These villagers' militia were much more poorly equipped. Most were bare-chested, with only a small number wearing war

clothes. Stone spears, wooden spears, stone clubs, a wide variety of weapons, and the prevalence of shields were also a problem, with only a few leaders having standard clubs and shields.

The militia from the village excitedly talked to each other, creating a noisy environment in the camp. Perhaps they all shared the same passion for combat, but such untrained zeal would soon be ground down by enemy forces or harsh conditions.

"Commoners' camp, ordinary, short spear soldiers, dressed in plain clothes without armor, low morale, no discipline," Xiulote said, hand to his forehead. "What use are these armed men? Cannon fodder to fill the battle lines? Without banding together, they simply cannot hold. Perhaps after improving discipline, we could consider long spears and light infantry?"

The tenth Javelin Throwing Camp gave Xiulote some fresh insights.

These seasoned hunters held a long rope, pinching the ends between two fingers. Then they would vigorously twirl the rope, causing the rock at its center to accelerate and produce a whizzing sound. Relying on their feeling and experience, at the right angle, they would release a finger, unfurling the rope and 'whoosh,' launch the rounded stone out, kicking up clouds of dust on the training field.

The accuracy of the stone-throwers was moving, and their collective firepower was considerable, especially against opponents without armor or only in light armor. Sadly, although the equipment was simple, it would still take years to master.

"Stone-throwing camp, ordinary, stone-throwing soldiers, dressed in plain clothes without armor, low morale, no discipline. A range attack unit requiring terrain support, striking at enemy morale," Xiulote could only accept the presence of this sole ranged unit. As for the hunters' simple short bows, after Xiulote tried shooting a few wooden arrows, he felt hopeless about their range and power.

"Why are our archers so weak?" Xiulote asked, puzzled.

"Bows and arrows are inherently weak. Only members of weak tribes would use such powerless weapons," Acap stated as if it were obvious. "Hmm, that's not entirely true. The Tlaxcalans have a type of bow that almost reaches the height of a person, with copper arrowheads, capable of penetrating a layer of cotton armor within fifty steps. Our samurai have been ambushed many times by the despicable Tlaxcalans."

"Fifty steps to penetrate cotton armor sounds quite impressive. We could also form such an archer unit, effective ranged troops are very important in some terrains," he said.

"Ranged sneak attacks are not the way of the samurai, nor can they capture prisoners. Without prisoners, there is no promotion, so Mexica warriors prefer close combat and do not like using bows and arrows," Acap laughed.

"Of course, there's also the fact that common craftsmen lack the skill to make bows. The wood for bow-making needs to be prepared for a long time, and archery likewise requires lengthy practice. Some chiefs might have a decorative bow, but that's far from enough to form a unit. Besides, the Tlaxcalan bow has a very short range, and its power cannot surpass that of a javelin, and it's still limited in the damage it can do to samurai's leather or cotton armor."

"Where do the Tlaxcalans get their materials and techniques?" The youth was only interested in the technology. In his view, archers and cavalry were indispensable components of an army, irreplaceable for their tactical roles. Since there was no way to have cavalry for now, he still had to form an archer unit.

"Who knows what crafts they have? They worship the God of the Hunt, Mixcoatl, and have always had numerous bowyers. The leather, silk thread, bone glue, and wood they use are likely either self-produced or come from trade with coastal Nava people or Mayan merchants, those Mayan merchants have many sources for goods. But no matter, without bows and arrows, our warriors can still sweep the world."

"Sweep the world? Indeed, for now. But in the future, the world may sweep us," Xiulote thought with a wry smile.

Long spears, bows and arrows, leather armor, Xiulote seriously considered the legion's flaws and potential improvements. Overall, the political structure of the Mexica city-states resembled that of the early Greek city-states, or perhaps the fifty lords during the Western Zhou Dynasty. While the military equipment and organizational levels barely maintained those of the Spring and Autumn period of the Wu and Yue rivalry, only their military mobilization capabilities had reached the level of the Warring States period of the Qin Dynasty.

"No cavalry, no archers, no heavy infantry, we're still centuries away from the Roman legions or the grand formations of the Qin army. Europe has already entered the era of matchlock guns and plate armor," Xiulote looked up at the sky as Acap also looked for something novel in the sky.

"Metals, we only have copper mines. Copper spears, copper armor, heavy infantry, Macedonian phalanx," Xiulote's eyes lit up, then dimmed again, the only known copper mines being in Tarasco hands.

"A heavy burden and a long road," Xiulote murmured a phrase that no one else understood, "fortunately, I still have time."

Just then, a messenger hurriedly arrived from the southern gate, bringing a message, "The King's grand army has already set out from the capital!"