

Civilization 65

Chapter 65 Eastward

The curtain of rain connecting the heavens and the earth enveloped the world, and August marked the fiercest time of the rainy season.

Another week of wind and rain passed in the blink of an eye. During this week, Aweit remained calm amidst the storm, sitting steady like a fisherman waiting for a catch. He was just quietly waiting for the two most important pieces of news from both the North and the East.

The Tarasco people from the southern shore organized several naval attacks, but they were all sound and fury, signifying nothing. They brought merely three to four thousand militiamen to harass us, scattered over several days' distance along the river, exerting psychological pressure on the Mexica.

Xiulote was somewhat worried, "Xilotepec City has already rebelled, if the Tarasco people cross the river in large numbers, where should we retreat to?"

Aweit smiled faintly, "Child, don't worry. Conducting a campaign is not just about comparing strengths, but also the combat will of both sides."

"The Otomi people are defending their homeland; they will surely not hesitate to make sacrifices, doing everything to block the Mexica's troops. On the other hand, the Tarasco and Tlaxcala people are merely coordinating strategically, drawing our forces away to relieve the siege of Otapan City and prevent the extinction of the Otomi."

"Under such circumstances, the Tarasco will not possess a high combat will. They will fight only when the wind is at their back, taking advantage when they can. They would not cross the river on a large scale to have a desperate struggle with us holding the high ground. That would be like pulling chestnuts out of the fire for the Otomi, and the casualties would be too heavy."

"But if the King retreats, our opportunity to encircle and annihilate the Otomi might entice them to let the King pass and instead strike at our rear from the south. At that moment, our geographical advantage would be diminished by being attacked from both sides. With the Otomi as the vanguard, the Tarasco would seize this opportunity to cross the river in force. They would coordinate with the Otomi from the north and the south, aiming to completely annihilate us."

"If I guess correctly, the King's Messenger should arrive soon." Aweit paused, his expression showing an unpredictable smile.

"Aweit, what you said makes so much sense!" The youth agreed heartily.

"Child, you're not allowed to call me by my name, call me Teacher!" Aweit's face turned stern as he reached out to pinch the youth's cheek.

The daily training proved fruitful as the youth agilely dodged with a leap. It seemed that his teacher and friend's mood had yet to stabilize, so it would be best to hide in the trusted aides' camp for another two days.

In less than two days, the King's Messenger arrived as expected.

"...Your previous success in blocking the enemy was commendable, but you must continue to hold your position. Tratuoani generously bestows upon you lands and wealth... Without the King's orders, you may not retreat a single step. You must hold the North Coast of the Lerma River at all costs until Otapan City falls... Once you return to the Capital, you will be the prime contributor to this campaign! Promoted to Vice-King, rewarded with Chinampa..."

The Messenger began with a majestic proclamation in the great tent. Afterwards, he smiled as he congratulated the King's brother, expressing hope that the future Vice-King would fulfill the King's heavy responsibilities and expectations, continue to hold firm, and win the prime contribution to the campaign.

Aweit bowed his head for the last time to the King's decree. His expression resolute, he respectfully took the Token and the wooden tablet. His face showed a determination to fight to the death and an eager anticipation for the future, which remained until the Messenger departed.

Then, he turned to Xiulote with a smile, "The King is preparing to evacuate."

The Commander immediately secured the King's decree, instructing the officers loyal to him to disseminate the new military orders. The Samurai immediately prepared supplies, readying for evacuation.

The following morning, another huge fleet arrived from the Capital. Aweit had leveraged the influence of his matrilineal family, summoning as many boats as possible from Lake Texcoco. This time, one hundred large boats and four hundred small boats were gathered, carrying only essential food and the minimum number of Paddlers.

He now had in his possession three hundred large boats and a thousand small boats, with a maximum carrying capacity of seventeen thousand people.

The Tarasco's fleet was intimidated by the absolute superiority of the Mexica's naval force. They all reined in their activities, hiding deep in Cuitzeo Lake connected to the Lerma River, seeking shelter next to the fortresses deep in Tarasco territory.

At this point, everything was in place, only the East Wind was missing, and the youth was eagerly looking toward the North.

The following evening, the "East Wind" finally arrived from the North. Acap, travel-worn and noticeably thinner, no longer carried his usual airy grace. However, when Xiulote looked into his eyes, he saw a spirited and lustrous gleam that dazzled.

The three seated themselves cross-legged. The same tightly shut tent as before, the same flickering campfire, the same unending wind and rain, but an altogether different surge of excitement.

"We can't wait any longer, now is the moment!" exclaimed Acap, his voice quivering with excitement.

"News of the rebellion in Xilotepec City arrived, followed by the severance of the supply routes. The City-State legions were in uproar, thirty thousand Samurai completely demoralized. Within a week, the Legion Commanders gathered several times, advising a retreat. The last time, even the direct officers were persuaded.

With only three and a half weeks' worth of rations left in the camp, and at least two weeks needed to return to Xilotepec City. Furthermore, there was no telling when the supply lines at the rear would be restored, and Otomi guerrilla squads could be seen everywhere in the mountains and forests.

The King could no longer contain the situation and was forced to nod his agreement. After dispatching a wave of Messengers to your positions, insisting on holding out, he began to dismantle the camp, regrouping the scattered legions, in preparation to return to the main encampment at Xilotepec.

I had a final secret talk with Legion Commander Xiuxoke. The Commander has already rallied his four thousand Samurai and will always follow the King, closely behind Tizoc, waiting for our arrival!"

Aweit also nodded vigorously, trying to suppress his excitement: "The army has finished packing and can embark eastward at any time. My loyal two thousand family Samurai have joined the new relief forces assembled at the Capital, and are about to support the main encampment at Xilotepec City."

"We will sail east, subdue this relief force, and then take down the main encampment of Xilotepec City, blocking the King's return. If all goes well, we will capture the nearest mountain campsite, where I will bid farewell to my brother!"

Having said this, the two men hugged each other with steadfast determination, their eyes ablaze with fiery zeal.

The youth, caught in the middle, felt like the ham in a sandwich. He couldn't help but cry out for help loud, "Tizoc is nothing more than an aging field mouse; don't get too carried away. Young Divine Eagles, your gaze should be upon the entire world!"

After hearing these words, Aweit and Acap paused for a moment before bursting into hearty laughter, hugging the youth even more tightly.

With the world in their grasp, their hearts like fire. A sleepless night, their martial spirit vast and mighty!

The next morning, Aweit broke camp and boarded the ship.

After the battle at the river crossing, he commanded fourteen thousand Samurai and thirteen thousand Militia, while the maximum capacity of the fleet was seventeen thousand. The Commander left ten thousand Militia to defend the five encampments, instructing them to hold out for just two days, after which they could retreat on their own or surrender. He ordered a retreat along the river to the East if possible, so that when the fleet returned, they could be picked up with the utmost speed.

Next, fourteen thousand Samurai and three thousand Militia boarded the ships. The army, taking only two weeks' rations, rushed upriver to the East. Samurai and Militia took turns as Paddlers, keeping the boats moving without rest. With this pace, it was estimated that they would reach the vicinity of Xilotepec main encampment in just about ten days.

Standing on the large ship amidst wind and rain, Xiulote took a moment to look at the North Coast encampment.

Under Aweit's orders, the Militia planted numerous flags, and the Commander's grand standard stood solemnly at the highest point of the fort, temporarily deceiving the enemy on the South Coast. The encampment still had more than a month's supply of provisions.

The Militia stood silently atop the encampment, their morale low as they watched the fleet head east. Nearly a hundred loyal Samurai also remained to maintain the bare minimum of order. Their fate was to be sacrificed and wait.

As the great boat moved, the shores flowed past, the river roared. Xiulote's heart was filled with cold firmness—such was the cruel reality. He took one last look at the South Coast, where the flag of the Tarasco King still flew high, and the Priest's altars were faintly visible, with Samurai and Militia scattered around.

When shall we meet again? A hint of a warm smile crept onto the youth's face, a mix of anticipation and confidence for the future, as if the searing flames were driving away the cold.

"The next time we meet, it shall be total conquest!"