

Civilization 66

Chapter 66: Marching

Dark clouds cloaked the sky and earth, casting a vague gloom over the fields. The fleet, mighty and vast, moved eastward, rowing against the current.

Xiulote sat cross-legged at the bow, clutching a long Obsidian dagger in his arms, which relaxed him. He watched the mighty river, observed the undulating mountains, gazed at the lush forests, and beheld birds flying low. Raindrops fell, pitter-pattering, dampening his long hair. The mist blurred his vision, making the world seem distant.

He had once been a passerby across millennia, silently wandering alone in the primitive past. Like a lost goose, circling in a strange sky, merely watching the years pass by, overlooking the majestic landscapes, feeling a distant detachment in his heart. Such was the loneliness of a transmigrator.

Sometime, perhaps when the goose grew tired, it finally alighted gently at the bow. The young man was no longer free and unattached; his heart now harbored emotions, concerns. He gained ancestors, teachers, friends, followers, and even a future wife. Only with a real home did he find his true existence.

The homeland was gone; where the goose landed, there was his home. The young man had people to love, a world to protect. With a world to protect came enemies to vanquish, whether they were brave samurais, distinguished kings, or fair-skinned colonizers.

A year of life and death transformations, a year of battles and strife. The once gentle and kind young traveler had morphed into a resolute and determined young samurai. The samurai's strength stemmed from his disdain for death and his love for life, for the people he cared about.

On this drifting journey at the bow, Xiulote clung tightly to the long dagger in his arms. He was utterly certain, "I have assimilated into this world."

He continued to survey the vast fleet surrounding him, thousands of boats racing toward the end of the highlands, like a hunting pack of wolves. The samurais silently harbored killing intent; archers cleaned their life-taking weapons. Aweit and Acap spoke in low voices, waiting for the hunt to begin!

The hunt targeted a king who could threaten everyone's lives, and who could also protect his own power. How should power be used? Xiulote already had a clear answer.

Six days had passed since the fleet sailed east. These six days involved marching daily from dawn till dusk, with militia and samurais taking turns rowing. The army finally entered the western border of the Mexica Alliance, Tepanecapan.

Here, the highlands stretched upwards, and just ahead were continuous mountain ranges. This was the most challenging part of rowing upstream; beyond the river's high point lay the fertile, thriving Mexican Valley.

The army disembarked here, turning northeast towards the Xilotepec encampment. The fleet then headed back west to pick up ten thousand militia left in Otomi territory.

Aweit dispatched swift scouts who dashed towards distant villages, searching for messengers already waiting with intelligence. Fourteen thousand samurais formed into marching columns, traveling light with just five days' supply of food, swiftly marching northeast. Three thousand militia, bearing more provisions, followed behind.

Xiulote also marched briskly. Thanks to prolonged training and ample nutrition, his endurance was comparable to that of an ordinary adult samurai. During the march, he still had the energy to look at the surrounding farmlands. On the boat trip, the north was Otomi's barren wilderness, while the south held sparse Tarasco fields. But upon entering the territory of the Mexica City-States, the view was filled with extensive connected fields of maize.

By the end of August, the maize had already grown tall, over a man's height. They absorbed ample rainfall, and their broad leaves bore slender ears of corn — it was the harvest season. Xiulote paused to examine the fields; the soil fertility was limited, the density of maize plants was not high. The corn was smaller than in later times, and the kernels less plump, yet the harvest was still abundant, yielding more than the commonly cultivated wheat in Eurasia.

Beans had also grown well, with pods peering out from the yellowing leaves, curiously eyeing the bountiful fields, also ripe for the picking. Below them, remnants of pumpkin leaves lingered. The pumpkins had been harvested not long before, and they were much smaller than those in later times. Yet these small pumpkins sustained the farmers through the toughest season before the harvest.

Seeing the pausing young man, Aweit caught up from behind. He wiped the rain from his face, shook the mud from his sandals, and asked with a smile, "Xiulote, what are you looking at?"

The young man smiled lightly, pointing to the harvested fields, "The autumn harvest is upon us; I am observing this year's yield. What a bountiful year! This is the foundation of the Mexica Alliance, the great endeavor that dominates the world."

In the classic Empire era, agriculture was everything, and this was especially true in Central America where no food could be imported.

Hearing this, Aweit also broke open a bean pod and tasted a black bean.

"Indeed, the black beans are plump, and the corn cobs full, it truly is a bountiful year. Despite over a year of warfare, the City-States have not excessively conscripted the militia, hindering the crucial spring plowing. Once this year's autumn harvest is complete and the warfare halts, the food consumed during the war will be replenished. After yet another annual harvest, we can once again deploy troops massively."

Xiulote nodded. This war had already depleted too much of the Mexica's food supply. Even with the bounty of the Texcoco Lake District and the pillaging from Xilotepec City, the City-State's reserves had been consumed by as much as five years. The food transport away from the river channels was like a bottomless pit of loss.

"Next time we march, we must choose a route supported by rivers. I have a perfect target in mind, its land has both north and south waterways." The young man looked earnestly at his friend.

Aweit nodded in agreement, "Just like I was thinking. They have no allies to call upon, making them the ideal adversary. It's also time for me to settle things with an old friend."

Having said that, both men exchanged smiles, rediscovering their initial unspoken understanding.

The eagles with spread wings pounced on the voles in the forest, while their gaze was already set on the future.

After hastily traveling for half a day, the scouts finally connected with the intelligence personnel. The latest news, eight thousand Samurai and sixteen thousand militia from the three capitals were sent to

aid the main camp at Xilotepec. They were now only a day's march from the main army and two days from Xilotepec City.

This was nearly the largest mobilization of the Four States. In the vast Capital Region, there now remained only two thousand Samurai guarding the Lake Capital City and another thousand distributed between Texcoco and Tlacopan.

With nightfall approaching, the army made camp to rest. The Samurai restored their strength, preparing for tomorrow's rush. Xiulote and Aweit huddled together, carefully calculating the nearby significant military forces.

The Royal Family's fifty thousand direct samurai were now scattered all over.

Twelve thousand were in the northeast at Atotoztli, guarding against the Tlaxcala people, unable to return anytime soon. There were also three City-State legions there, totaling twenty-four thousand, half of which were City-State Warriors. Although this force was considerable, its distant location meant it couldn't significantly impact the overall situation.

Four thousand directly loyal were below Xilotepec City. After the Otomi attack, their casualties were unknown. There was also a City-State legion stationed there. The riverside camp and food were crucial here.

Ten thousand were directly under Aweit's control, now completely dominated by him. Accompanying were four thousand City-State Warriors and three thousand militia, with the army having only five days' worth of food.

Another ten thousand were in Tizoc's hands, having evacuated from Otapan City. Accompanying were twenty thousand City-State Warriors and five thousand militia. They were currently suffering the tribulations of disrupted supply lines, rainy season marches through forests and highlands, and Otomi guerrilla attacks, struggling on the mountainous forest roads back, with their exact situation unknown.

Xiuxoke, leading four thousand Teotihuacan Warriors, would closely follow the King, with other City-State armies likely to retreat on their own.

Between Otapan and Xilotepec, in the forests spanning more than two weeks, there were four encampments harboring over thirty thousand militia transporting food. The camps there would possess some food, and the food-stricken King would surely lead his troops there for provisions.

Three thousand directly loyal Samurai had already perished in the campaign against the Otomi, and another three thousand were left in the three capital cities. Although the capitals could mobilize tens of thousands of militia at any time, the distance was too great to have a substantial impact on the greater strategy.

The final eight thousand loyal Samurai were en route to support the main camp at Xilotepec, accompanied by sixteen thousand militia. This included two thousand of Aweit's clan warriors. This troop was key to the changing situation, close at hand, ready for the taking.

After final discussions, everyone understood clearly. The commander slammed his fist onto the roughly drawn wooden map, pointing northeast.

"We set off first thing tomorrow morning, increasing our marching speed. We must capture this troop by dusk!"