

Civilization 67

Chapter 67 Seizing Command

The army made a simple camp in a rain-sheltered hollow of the mountain and rested for the night. Dawn was just breaking when Xiulote woke in his leaky tent. He felt his single-layer garment, already soaked through by the fine rain and dew. Fortunately, the Mexican Plateau during the rainy season was quite warm, with temperatures comfortably above twenty degrees, so there was no need to worry about the cold.

Marching and fighting were always arduous. Without a robust physique, it was impossible to withstand the harsh natural environment and endure the relentless pain and slaughter required to become a fearsome Samurai, let alone rise to the rank of a Commander bearing the flag of a commander.

The young Samurai roughly wiped over his distinctly sculpted body, changed into sturdy leather armor, and then donned a gray-black ceremonial war robe. The feather crown was too cumbersome, so he wore the sharp leather cap commonly seen among warriors. Finally, he strapped his war club and shield on his back and tucked the long dagger at his waist, ready to maintain a combat stance at any time.

Next, the young Samurai went to gather his followers and the Longbow Guards, with Head Warrior Bertade guarding by his side.

Today, Aweit was dressed splendidly. He wore a mighty beast helmet, a necklace adorned with gemstones, and a set of striking red exquisite leather armor, with a gold sun embedded on the chest.

In his left hand was a long shield also depicting the sun, vibrant feathers hanging down from the bottom of the shield. In his right hand was a Divine Staff about two meters long, its top made of a pure gold oval base, about the size of a palm. Set in the middle of the gold base was a chicken-egg-sized Starlight Ruby, sharply cut with six star lines, rendering a perfect "*" star shape.

Xiulote held his breath for a moment. He asked Aweit for the Divine Staff and gently touched the smooth surface of the cut Starlight Ruby. This ruby must have exceeded one hundred carats, its perfect cuts and star marks almost on par with the famous future-era Starlight Ruby from Roslifields. This was a gemstone that would captivate the whole world.

"This is..." the young man looked at his mentor in astonishment.

"Montezuma I's Divine Staff, embedded with the largest ruby under the heavens. This staff was passed on to his daughter, my mother Atotoztli II. Before she left for the Divine Kingdom, she left it to her youngest son, me."

Aweit looked at the staff nostalgically, his voice laden with reminiscence, "It represents royal authority!"

Xiulote quickly snapped out of his awe of the divine object. He looked up and continued to survey Aweit's commander's flag.

This new flag stood four meters tall, with an exceptionally large yellow dome-shaped canopy. The canopy was covered with intricate red patterns and exquisite feathers, topped with a massive jaguar skull, and in front was a dazzling sun crafted from black obsidian and yellow gemstone. Behind the commander's flag, a line of trusted aides held aloft grand banners.

"This is the banner of the Supreme Commander, exclusively for the King!" the young man exclaimed, recognizing the design and size of the banner. He looked into his teacher's eyes, harboring some speculations.

"Correct," Aweit smiled lightly, "It's the royal banner from the capital, it arrived last night. It's the second most distinguished Blood Sun among the commander's regalia, only second to the Evil Spirit Commander carried away by the king."

"Now, let us take it on the road."

The army then set off, swiftly marching northeast under the guidance of scouts. Xiulote asked Aweit for Montezuma I's Divine Staff, offering to carry it for him so the teacher wouldn't be "overburdened". Aweit didn't mind at all, although the staff was indeed dazzling, he had appreciated it countless times. Now he just watched with a smile as Xiulote's face was illuminated by the ruby's glow.

The young man curiously twirled the translucent gemstone repeatedly. This was a museum-piece quality gemstone, only viewable in future-era national museums, separated by thick bulletproof glass.

Under various lights, the ruby reflected different "starlights". The surrounding warriors all exhibited adoring looks towards the divine object, considering this starlight as the Divine's radiance, blessed and awe-inspiring with the protection of Heavenly Divine.

After noon, the drizzle gradually ceased and the clouds thinned, letting through slivers of sunlight. The Commander reestablished contact with the family Samurai within the reinforcements. The troops were only three to four hours away from the reinforcements.

The leader of these reinforcements was Ctokoc, a hereditary noble loyal to the King and the nephew of the Supreme Priest Quetzal in the Capital. He held a considerable reputation in the army. Tizoc loved theology and was always close to the Priesthood. Soon after ascending the throne, the King had promised more privileges to the Chief Priest, who, in return, had sent many noble youths to the army.

Acap suggested a brief preparation, "We could rest for a while and wait for nightfall. Then, coordinating from within and without, we could raid the command tent of the reinforcements by night, capture Ctokoc, and finally subdue the remaining forces."

Xiulote thought for a while and said that the plan was impractical, "The elite Samurai capable of night raiding are always few; we might not capture Ctokoc promptly. Moreover, a night raid could easily lead to chaos and fratricide within the army. Both sides are loyal Mexica warriors of the Alliance, and such valuable military strength should not be wasted here."

Aweit pondered for a moment, then nodded. He patted Xiulote on the shoulder and then, smiling at Acap, said, "Fighting by day is more apt. Let's rest for an hour to restore the warriors' strength. Then, we'll directly attack the marching reinforcement column. I will inform the family Samurai to prepare. This battle will be about momentum, with not much fighting involved."

After he finished speaking, he immediately dispatched an Envoy to the northeast.

The Mexica warriors sat down on the spot, simply consuming some food and water, silently conserving their strength. The Commander had already communicated the upcoming battle objectives. Though accustomed to countless life-and-death circumstances and indifferent to life itself, the warriors' morale was somewhat low. They were reluctant to strike against their own comrades in the same camp but maintained obedience under the Commander's authority.

The rain had stopped, and sunlight drenched the land. Xiulote asked the Longbow Warriors to prepare their armor-piercing copper arrows in case the Longbow Guards needed to deliver a fatal strike.

The fourteen thousand warriors soon embarked, like a surging beast herd, swiftly attacking their first opponent. As the sun dipped lightly towards the west, a vast army appeared before Xiulote's eyes. In

the rear were disorganized Militia carrying baggage and provisions. Ahead of them were eight thousand warriors roughly divided into three groups: two thousand in the Vanguard scouted ahead, four thousand in the center protecting the Commander's Royal Banner, and two thousand in the rear overseeing the Militia.

The reconnaissance Scouts of the reinforcements had already spotted the Mexica forces approaching from behind. At this time, the forward reinforcements had halted their advance. They slightly adjusted their formation but, did not adopt a combat stance. As both armies drew nearer, the "King's" Royal Banner became distinctly visible to every Mexica warrior.

The opposing warriors were somewhat noisy. They had urgently gathered from the Capital and then headed north to support Xilotepec City, aiming to establish the supply lines and reconnect with the unknown situation of the large Royal Army, and now the King had appeared here?

A new wave of Messengers came from under the command flag of the opposing center, respectfully bowing before the King's banner while bringing the inquiry of their Commander, "May I ask His Majesty the King, how fares the battle at Otapan, and how has Your Majesty come to be here?"

Aweit, his face covered by the Beast Helmet, maintained a godlike posture in silence, uttering no word.

Xiulote, dressed in a refined gray-black Tengu Ritual Attire, replied solemnly, "The Divinely blessed King, leading his trusted Samurai, headed south to the banks of the Lerma River. We boarded the Alliance's fleet and sailed upstream, returning to the Xilotepec camp ahead of others. We are now about to reorganize the large army and rescue the City-State forces stranded in the mountains. Let Commander Ctokoc come forth to meet the King."

The Messenger lifted his head, his expression slightly startled. The King abandoning the City-State forces to retreat first was major news that could destabilize the Alliance. After another glance at the imposing

Royal procession, the fierce Jaguar Warrior Brigade, and Xiulote in his Tengu Ritual Attire, he respectfully retreated.

Soon, slight disturbances and noisy murmurs arose among the opposing warriors. Then, hundreds of Commander's guards split the crowd, escorting a command banner slowly toward the King's procession.

Xiulote fixed his gaze, discerning a middle-aged Commander beneath that banner. He walked slowly, always keeping his eyes on the Royal Banner, accompanied also by five hundred elite guards, clearly harboring doubts.