

Civilization 68

Chapter 68 Seizing the Army

Sunlight dappled the vast expanse of the highland plains. Beneath the sky, two massive legions drew near to each other. The samurai bore the same flags, wore the same armor, spoke the same language, and had familiar faces among them. One side was noisily and excitedly welcoming their allies; the other waited in silence for their opponents.

The King's ceremonial flag waved, signaling the opposing side to speed up. However, the middle-aged commander, Keteke, was in no hurry and even began to decelerate, his suspicion growing. Xiulote, somewhat puzzled, cast his gaze to the central army at the rear and noticed that two thousand samurai were already slowly shifting position, clearly indicating the true intended recipients of the flag signals.

Just two or three hundred meters from the ceremonial flag, the middle-aged commander looked another moment at the flag beneath the King and seemed to finally realize something was amiss. He abruptly stopped, shouted a few urgent commands to his side, and then the flag-bearer beside him quickly waved the flag of request for assistance. The musicians blew a sharp, warning blast on the conch shells, and the guard gathered around the commander and began to retreat.

Aweit did not wait any longer; he immediately gestured with his hand. Flags waved, war drums sounded, and a thousand Jaguars, along with three thousand samurai, fiercely pounced towards the nearby Keteke. The remaining ten thousand samurai split into two groups, dividing the opposing vanguard and rearguard from each other. And the two thousand Avite family samurai of the central army quickly split to either side; half strictly separating the remainder of the central army, and the other half flanking the middle-aged commander from behind.

The buildup was like a placid lake, the onslaught, like startling thunder. In mere moments, Keteke was completely surrounded by five thousand warriors. Xiulote and Acap commanded the accompanying priests and warriors to shout loudly, "King Tizoc has been attacked and killed by the Otomi people! The noble prince has already succeeded the throne and become the new Tratuani!"

"The King is dead, the prince takes his place!" The frightening shouts echoed across the plains, as Aweit, holding high the Divine Staff symbolizing the royal authority and carrying the huge banner of the Supreme Commander, shone radiantly in the golden evening light. The dazzling brilliance attracted the eyes of the warriors, and the opposing tripartite samurai hesitated. They looked around at the expressions of their comrades-in-arms, quietly lowered the weapons in their hands, and halted their charging steps, unsure of what to do.

Only the surrounded Keteke still shouted loudly, commanding hundreds of his guards to fight off the enemy while ordering the nearby central army to come to his aid. After a moment of hesitation, the warriors of the central army prepared for battle following the middle-aged commander's orders.

Head Warrior Bertade exchanged a glance with Xiulote, requesting permission to fire. A hundred and fifty of the Longbow Guards had already moved to a position more than two hundred meters from Keteke. They had arrows nocked and were aiming at Keteke and his guard from afar.

The young samurai hesitated slightly, knowing that once the longbows were fired, the opposing commander and a large number of guards would surely suffer heavy casualties. After just a few seconds, he made up his mind.

The young samurai's brows furrowed, a murderous intent in his eyes, as he was about to signal the order.

At that moment, a tall and powerfully built young Jaguar warrior suddenly emitted a fierce tiger-like roar, rushing forth from the ranks of the family warriors at the rear. He snatched a heavy shield from a comrade, lifted a pair of shields, and charged ferociously into the thin line of guards, leaping up in an agile pounce like a ravenous beast descending upon Keteke.

The middle-aged commander was clearly no longer as nimble as he once was. He turned to flee, but his steps could not keep up with the turning motion, and he was brought down by the young Jaguar's pounce. The young warrior followed up with a Shield Strike, knocking Keteke unconscious. He then grabbed him by the neck, intimidating the surrounding guard who had come to assist. With their command structure lost, the guards were indecisive, allowing the warriors to expertly swing their war clubs, knocking them out with the wooden sides.

Afterward, the young Jaguar warrior suddenly exerted force with his hands and broke Keteke's command flag, followed by a proud, tiger-like roar of triumph.

Six thousand reinforcing warriors stood stunned as they watched the large flag slowly fall, witnessing the sudden "betrayal" of their two thousand comrades and the capture of Keteke and his guard beneath the flag. In their ears was the shout, "The King is dead, the prince takes his place!" In their sight, Aweit's ceremonial regalia and the gemstone-studded Divine Staff shone resplendently in the sunset. Finally, they took another look around at the warriors enveloping them, outnumbering them by more than double.

At last, the reinforcing warriors laid down their weapons. They knelt to the ground, surrendering to their compatriots who held the upper hand, to the authority of the Divine Descendant's royal family. The crisis erupted suddenly, and without clear orders, the Militia at the rear were at a loss. They watched the royal family's strife in disarray until the victor had already emerged, and it was only then that the Militia leaders came forward one by one, offering their supplies and loyalty.

Aweit quickly sent his confidants to take control of the surrendered support troops and detained all the battalion-level 'Chiliarchs' and legion-level 'Decarchs.' The captured Keteke and his guard were stripped of their armor and weapons and handed over to the most loyal family warriors for safekeeping.

This brief assault lasted less than a quarter of an hour. Both sides' warriors exercised restraint, with only a little over sixty guard commanders falling in battle, and a hundred or so warriors were lightly injured.

As the sun finally dipped below the horizon, Aweit at last found a moment of respite. He summoned his trusted followers to gather and partake in a simple victory meal after the march, each enjoying two cups of low-proof tequila. Then, he extended his hand to summon the young Jaguar warrior to approach. The Samurai removed his beast helmet and, respectfully kneeling, saluted Aweit.

Xiulote inspected the young warrior who had just distinguished himself in battle by slaying generals and seizing banners. He was but twenty-four or twenty-five years of age. With short hair and a broad forehead, he had thick brows and large eyes, and wore a Jaguar bone ring through his nose, a symbol of bravery. The bone ring rested on his full lips, carrying the untamed aura of the jungle. His tiger-like eyes flashed with a barely concealed fierce killing intent, like that of a roaming fearsome beast.

Aweit introduced him to Xiulote and Acap with a smile, "This is the youngest Jaguar warrior of my family, twenty-four-year-old Sterling. He once captured eight seasoned Tlaxcala warriors by himself, thereby ascending to the nobility as a Fifth Level military achiever, a warrior more ferocious than the Jaguar itself!"

"Sterling, you performed brilliantly in battle and played a pivotal role in capturing the banner! Once we complete the great task and return to the capital city, I will promote you to the Second Level hereditary nobility! Come, pay your respects and offer a toast to the distinguished people here."

Sterling raised his head, his young face brimming with buoyant confidence. He cast a proud glance at the officers, then nodded his head on Aweit's instruction, slightly bowed, and did his best to restrain his fierce fighting spirit.

He first respectfully toasted Xiulote, the Fifth Level Coyote Priest. Then he paused and directly bypassed Bertade, the Head Warrior dressed in simple clothing beside Xiulote. Again respectfully, he toasted Acap, who had ascended to Third Level Black and White Priest.

Just as the Fifth Level Coyote Priest represented the God of Death Xiulotel, the Third Level Black and White Priest also represented the day and night gods, Ometeotl, most revered by the Otomi people. In the various tribal myths, the status of the gods differed greatly. The highest-ranking Chaos Priest among the Otomi people could only serve as an ordinary Third Level Black and White Priest among the Mexica people.

Xiulote noticed a flash of anger in the eyes of the Head Warrior next to him, which was swiftly replaced by calmness. He sighed softly and patted Bertade on the shoulder. Upon their return, he was determined to promote the Head Warrior to the First Level military nobility.

Bertade, born into the common class, although extremely brave and a skilled commander, had spent his years stagnating in the military. After being promoted to Fourth Level seasoned warrior at the age of thirty, he found it difficult to advance further, stuck right at the threshold of the elite Battle Group nobility.

Similarly in his thirties and of noble birth, Olosh was a long-renowned Jaguar warrior, a First Level military noble, and the "Chiliarch" of Commander Xiuxoke's veteran barracks.

And before them was Sterling, born into a royal family, who at only twenty-four was already a seasoned First Level military noble and soon to become a Second Level hereditary noble!

In Xiulote's view, the martial prowess of the three was actually comparable, with Bertade being slightly superior in archery. In terms of command ability, the older and more experienced Bertade and Olosh had a clear advantage. But in this age, and even in the next, one's destiny was not completely in their own hands. Birth determined the speed of one's rise and the height of one's advancement.

"In addition to educational reforms, I must consider military reforms. There has to be a clear path for commoner warriors to ascend to the military nobility. Position of battalion commanders in the forces should be filled by experienced senior commoner warriors," decided Xiulote resolutely.

The group then raised their glasses in unison, reveling in the mild buzz from the low-proof tequila. This drink, found among the supplies of the reinforcement troops and with an alcohol content of merely four or five degrees, was like water to the robust warriors.

After finishing the two cups quickly and having a simple dinner, Aweit commanded the officers to return to their camps. The warriors needed to recover their battle readiness for the next fight.

At the campfire, only three remained. With the flickering firelight, the trio exchanged looks and then burst into hearty laughter. Today marked the first and most crucial step in their successful hunt.

Now, they had in their hands an army of twenty-two thousand warriors, nearly twenty thousand militia, and also the military orders to support the great camp at Xilotepec!