

Civilization 77

Chapter 77: When the king is unjust, he should be overthrown.

The next morning, as the rainy season drew to a close and the sun showered down from the sky, a rare clear day unfolded.

Thirty thousand Mexica samurai assembled outside the encampment, spreading over the desolate fields and intimidating the Otomi people within the city of Xilotepec. Samurai were the dominators of war, the force capable of conquering all. Now, nearly a third of the Empire's might was gathered here, obeying the King's command.

The sacrificial altar had already been raised high; thirty thousand warriors gathered, and the ceremony of departure for war began.

Xiulote sang ancient songs in praise of the sun, while Acap brandished an obsidian dagger used for sacrifices. This represented the holy sacrificial rite offered to the Sun God, in the name of the divine, declaring the affairs of the human world.

Behind them stood nearly a hundred priests of various ranks. Everyone was dressed in ancient garb, solemn in demeanor. With feather crowns raised high, they played the distant, desolate pottery flutes and danced mysterious, ancient sacrificial dances, creating the solemnity of a formal ceremony.

The priesthood had just recently arrived from the Holy City of Teotihuacan to support Acap, who was now their leader. This also represented the High Priest Xutel's support for the prince Aweit, anointing the prince's campaign with the lofty authority of the divine and rallying the heart of the warriors.

Under the gaze of thirty thousand samurai, the Great Nobility member Ctotoc trembled as he crawled on the ground, having been previously fed Obsidian Knife Water. Now with a vacant gaze and limp limbs, he was unable to speak. Beside him were several of Tizoc's trusted officers, also in a narcotized state.

Xiulote had learned the recipe for the Knife Water from his grandfather. This anesthetic was commonly used before sacrificial rites, with main ingredients being psychoactive and sedating herbs like datura, nightshade, mandragora, and psilocybin mushrooms, as well as fortified tequila. These plants were known as "the plants of the gods" and were also added to sacred smoke by the Maya and Tarasco people.

"The effects of the potion are quite good, suitable for an anesthetic during surgery," the young man mused solemnly as he sang, "though the name is too plain. It would be better called 'Sacrificial Water!'"

Urgent military matters dictated simplicity. Before long, the solemn ceremony moved into the exalted sacrificial phase, and all the warriors held their breath. Their gaze fixated upon the altar, filled with reverence. Everything was silent between heaven and earth, except for the sacrificial song.

Ctotoc, like a boar to be slaughtered, was effortlessly dragged a hundred meters by the giant Stanley and brought onto the sacrificial altar. Then, under the obsidian daggers of the priests and in the trance of the Divine Kingdom, the blood of the Divine Descendant flowed on the altar, transforming into a noble sacrifice offered to the Sun God Huitzilopochtli.

In the comforting sunshine, Acap raised the warm offering in his hands and cried out the name of "Huitzilopochtli" to invoke the God's descent. Thirty thousand warriors also knelt in unison, calling out before the altar in a thunderous chant that echoed through the heavens and earth like lightning tearing the world asunder! After three cries, they prostrated themselves completely.

In the nearby city of Xilotepec, the Otomi nobility shivered amidst the shouts, well familiar with the ritual—an inexhaustible source of the Aztec's prowess in battle and a nightmare for the Otomi.

Soon, dozens of tall poles rose in front of the altar, heads of sacrifices now impaled to intimidate the three armies.

"Tizoc's war against the Otomi failed, it's time now to finish this war!"

Xiulote stood majestically atop the altar, shouting to the multitude with solemnity. His mind was filled with his grandfather's motivational speech in the Holy City, his body clad in the black garb of a celestial dog priest.

It was his "gift" from Tizoc after his first trial of life and death. At that time Tizoc held a great army, and having just learned of the peculiar omens of his birth and his innate exceptional wisdom, the King's murderous intent had arisen. With suspicion in his heart, the boy's father and grandfather could only watch in humiliation as he was taken away, his life hanging by a thread in the hands of others. After that came the clandestine communication between his grandfather and Aweit.

This was the cause of all that had transpired, and it would bear witness to the outcome.

"But Tizoc does not intend to end this war! For the sake of his shattered reputation, he wants to lay siege again and again, squandering the lives of warriors in the dreadful rainy season and the endless forests. There, warriors don't even get a death in battle with honor. They die either from weakness due to sickness or at the hands of despicable Otomi militia, never reaching the domain of the War God!"

The siege had failed. What was next for Tizoc? Xiulote didn't know. But the Samurai had to know that their former king had become their enemy, the target of their weapons.

Remembering the forever damp rainy seasons, the endlessly harsh forests, and the Otomi people who were like swarms of mosquitoes, many Samurai showed pained expressions on their faces. The religious beliefs instilled in them since childhood made them not so much fear death. But dying without a glorious death in battle... That's what the Samurai feared in the afterlife.

"Tizoc has failed. He could not lead the Samurai to victory. He didn't cherish the lives of the Samurai. He has been stripped of his kingship!"

In the Mexica Empire, failure to achieve victory was the greatest sin of a king.

"Under the supreme witness of the Sun God, the War God, the Guardian God Huitzilopochtli, brother Aweit has ascended as Great Tlatoani! The High Priesthood of the Holy City has sworn allegiance to the new king. He will end this war and send all Samurai home! Now, it is time for you to show your loyalty!"

With these oath-taking words, Aweit, clad in the king's regal attire, raised Montezuma's Divine Staff, climbing atop the highest divine altar.

The youth then took out an Obsidian Dagger, cut a lock of his own hair, and placed it on the sacred altar before Aweit. The youth blinked quietly, while Aweit, radiant, watched the boy, a faint curve forming on his lips.

Next was Acap, cutting his hair to swear allegiance, followed by the Priests of all ranks, loyal camp Commanders, then two thousand family Samurai, fourteen thousand of the Southern Army, and finally thirty thousand of the Mexica legion!

"This is also the order of loyalty," Xiulote maintained the solemnity of the Priesthood. Facing the Samurai below who were cutting their hair in allegiance, he silently weighed in his heart.

The Great Nobility with the lowest loyalty were detained within the camp. At this time, they stood unarmed on the ramparts, wearing armor-less regal attire, silently watching the sacrifice of Ktoco and the allegiance of thirty thousand Samurai.

These Great Nobles were former Commanders of the legions, once supporters of Tizoc, now being forced to remain neutral. Well-versed in the games of power and not devout towards religious theocracy, they disregarded the Priest's words. Now, stripped of their command over the army, replaced by Nobles loyal to the brother, they were even offered on the sacrificial altar. In this war, they were no more important than the common Samurai.

Beside them stood fully-armed Samurai of the Avite Family. The Samurai had been ordered that if rebellion broke out in the Xilotepec main camp, they were to immediately execute the Great Nobles to prevent an escalation.

"King Zhou was tyrannical, and King Wu fought against him!" Xiulote closely observed the expressions of the Samurai, feeling their fighting spirit, then nodded in satisfaction. Those who control the army must first control the heart, for occupying the moral high ground in people's hearts is often more important than the battle itself. The morale of the army determines its combat power and the course of the war!

Similarly, those who attack the army must also attack the heart. The youth's thoughts flickered: "Today's strategy can also be used in reverse another time."

No matter the era, solemn rituals always gather the scattered hearts of people, implanting the suggestion of obedience. With the allegiance of thirty thousand Samurai complete, the morale of the army distinctly improved. The Samurai, touching the weapons at their backs, no longer resisted the upcoming battle.

"Samurai! It is not honorable to kill your brethren on the other side, but capturing the Samurai opposite counts as military merit. This battle is only to depose the king, to end the war, and for everyone to return to their hometowns!" Under the dazzling sunlight, Aweit finally consolidated the will of the people, with the magnanimous stance of a king.

In this moment, the three armies were united, and ten thousand were subdued here! The majestic king waved the Divine Staff to the west, and thirty thousand Samurai immediately set off, carrying two weeks' worth of march provisions, like a surging, solemn torrent, heading to the nearest camp in the hills.

Only thirty thousand Militia were left to garrison in Xilotepec's main camp, along with a few hundred core Samurai. Relying on the strong fortifications, they were sufficient to fend off the Otomi people. Scouts and Intelligence Officers had already moved out ahead, sneaking into the distant forests, to communicate with allies agreed upon long before.

After marching for three days, they came to the boundary between the forests and the plains. Xiulote saw again the sturdy camp between the mountains. The camp was built on the top of a hill, with open terrain and sparse forests, easy to defend. From afar, a wisp of smoke rose to the sky, and next to it flew the king's flag, also fluttering.