

Civilization 78

Chapter 78: The Eagle and The Rabbit

The encampment nestled high in the mountains had an unobstructed view of its surroundings. An army of more than ten thousand troops would have great difficulty concealing itself in the forest, not to mention launching a surprise attack from a long distance.

Just past noon, the day was bright. From afar, the sight of the approaching army, with Mexica banners and even the King's regalia, prompted the encampment to swiftly dispatch an envoy.

The envoy from the encampment was just a thin, ordinary Samurai. He approached the massive army with confusion, saluted the King's regalia from a distance, and then respectfully asked an outermost Jaguar Warrior, "Esteemed military noble, we just welcomed a group of the King's Samurai this morning who said the main army would arrive in two days. How has the King arrived here just after noon?"

However, the army did not halt; the Guards seized the envoy. Aweit, leading three thousand Samurai, Xiulote, commanding the Longbow Guards, and the King's regalia at the forefront—they all hastened towards the encampment.

In just a moment, three thousand Samurai swiftly reached the gates of the encampment. The stationed Militia barely had time to react before the gates swung open. Immediately, a thousand-strong Jaguar Warrior Brigade poured in, swiftly taking control of the camp. Two thousand clan Samurai followed the majestic King straight to the commander's tent.

Xiulote nodded his head; the Intelligence Officer had done well. Before setting out, Aweit, under the name of the main encampment of Xilotepec, had sent a group of Samurai into the camp, gaining control over some Militia. Inside the camp, there were merely a few hundred lower-ranked Samurai and eight thousand village Militia. Now, with coordination from inside and outside, there was no resistance whatsoever, and the encampment had changed hands without a struggle.

The Jaguar Warriors flung open the commander's tent, and dozens of trusted aides rushed in. After a tumultuous interrogation and the clashing of weapons, silence fell quickly.

Soon after, one trusted aide exited the tent and reported with a bowed head. Only then did Aweit, dressed in Royal Garb, step firmly into the tent with Xiulote.

Upon entering the tent, Xiulote saw dishes overturned, corn cakes scattered about, and dozens of neatly-dressed but now captive lean Samurai being firmly held down by the trusted aides. Clearly, moments before, the Samurai in the tent had been in the midst of a meal. No wonder smoke was seen at noon; the Militia did not share that privilege.

Hearing the noise at the entrance of the tent, the apprehended Samurai all looked up.

Xiulote observed their somewhat gaunt faces, marks of hunger, and then his gaze settled on the leading Samurai. His face was grimy but strangely familiar.

"Aweit?!" the disheveled leading Samurai exclaimed in astonishment, "How is it you?! What about the Tarascans? The Otomi? Have they let you go?"

"Balda," Aweit said with a slight smile. His Royal Garb made his smile shine even more brightly, "Since you are here, Tizoc must be nearby, right? How many men does he have now?"

It was then that Xiulote recalled that this was one of the three Commanders he had encountered in his first battle against the Otomi, a noble of the Eagle Warrior Battalion. He led the first wave of the assault force and was also the deputy to Commander Casal.

Upon hearing this, Balda finally noticed Aweit's Royal Garb and the Divine Staff in his hand. His mouth opened wide, shock spreading over his face.

"You...you...how can you be wearing the King's attire? How can you possibly be here in Royal Garb!"

"Because I am now the new Tratuoani. Look, this is the regalia from the Capital's coronation ceremony," Aweit said with a smile, "Tizoc's war for coronation has failed; the Elder Priests have stripped him of his kingship! The Chief Priesthood and the High Priesthood now pledge their loyalty to me. And look at these," he gestured.

At his signal, a trusted aide came forward with Totec's command banner, while Acap presented the High Priesthood's Feather Banner.

"This is impossible!!" Balda's voice was hoarse with shock, his expression frozen. He looked back and forth between the two banners, mumbling in disbelief, "How could Totec betray the King?! The King promised him the honor of nobility. And how could the High Priest support you? Xiuxoke was loyally guarding the King all the way. Even when other City-States turned their backs, he did not leave!"

"You can't do this! Although the King has been defeated, the Samurai have lost only a few thousand. As long as the King returns to the Capital, convinces the Priests and Elders, we can still reorganize and fight again! Yes, back to the Capital!" The barrage of shocking news left Balda dazed; he had temporarily lost the ability to discern.

Aweit waved his hand, and the trusted aides escorted Balda and the others away. Xiulote instructed his followers to send them corn cakes and black bean rice. By the look on their faces, they seemed to have had a tough time with hunger on the road. The thought made the young man worry for his father and Teacher Olosh.

"Xiulote," Aweit turned to the young man, his eyes shining, "Your strategy was quite good. Since Balda believed what was said, then most likely, the majority of Tizoc's Samurai will too. Utilizing the information asymmetry you mentioned, and fabricating narratives can indeed significantly sway the hearts of the people. We will give Tizoc a surprise!"

The young man smiled faintly, feeling he should make himself a feather fan - it was the perfect time to wave it.

"Balda's heart seems inclined to believe us. It appears that the failed siege and the army's lack of provisions have completely eroded Tizoc's prestige. With morale shattered and the City-States turning away, this is the weakest he's ever been!"

Aweit nodded in approval, "Tizoc's main forces should be in the western mountains about two days' march away. I've already sent the Intelligence Officer to contact Xiuxoke; we'll have detailed intelligence by tonight!"

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After taking control of the camp, Aweit carefully counted the camp's grain supplies. The main camp at Xilotepec City had stockpiled enough food for one hundred thousand people for a month, and the first mountainside camp had enough for thirty thousand people for a month. Xiulote then took out the camp's record wooden tablet and carefully examined the slash marks on the corn cakes.

Aweit summoned the former commander of the camp, a tall and thin Samurai in his thirties or forties with a seasoned presence. The prince's face was stern as he earnestly inquired about the details of food transportation.

"The camps to the west still have enough supplies for thirty thousand people for ten days. These past two weeks, the Otomi have been crazily guerrilla attacking, targeting the mountain camps and the grain transport teams. There are simply too few warriors in the camp, and we've only managed to successfully transport supplies to the west once. It wasn't much, but it was just enough to keep the western camps going," the tall and thin Samurai said with a face full of shame, obviously still not fully grasping the situation.

"Military supply shortages incur death by alliance rules. Please execute me! I am willing to plunge into the Abyss, just please do not cut off my son's path as a Samurai," said the tall and thin Samurai, prostrating himself on the ground, willing to seek death.

"What's your name?" Seeing the posture of the tall and thin Samurai, along with his body clearly gaunt from hunger, Xiulote's heart was slightly touched. Indeed, an army quartermaster starved of food.

"Priest Sir, my name is Begire," hearing such a simple name and surname, the youth was certain that he, like his Head Warrior, was of commoner origin.

Aweit did not care about the Samurai's background. His face emotionless, he simply waved his hand lightly, ordering people to take Begire away and keep him under custody.

"This is good news! Even if we disregard the lives of the militia, Tizoc's forces now have at most a little over a week's food supply. The army must be in a near-starvation state," Aweit said with a slight smile.

"Yes, I've checked the transport records, and the food storage in the three western camps is very limited." Saying this, the youth felt a little afraid, "We were just two days shy! If Tizoc got the food from here, he could regroup his forces, restore morale and spirit, and then it would be much more difficult to deal with him."

Aweit laughed heartily, gently patting the youth's head: "Xiulote, do you remember what I said to you when I first arrived at the Lerma River?"

"You said this position was particularly good," the youth recalled for a moment; that was before the conversation between the Divine Eagle and the Cactus.

"Right, all the way along the water route, arriving here, we were just two days ahead of Tizoc, but we've seized the most important initiative in war," Aweit reminisced a little emotionally.

"The Eagle always needs the wind to fly fast enough to catch the racing hare!"

"Now, we have finally grabbed the hare by the ears."

Setting off from the Lerma River camp, landing after seven days, then taking the reinforcements in one day, occupying the main camp in two days, and reaching the mountainside camp in three days—thirteen days in total, non-stop marching, restless nights. And now, the two of them had finally seized this fleeting opportunity!

The journey was exhausting, but the hope was exhilarating. At this moment, a young King and a young Priest looked at each other's faces, which had both thinned. They had the same uplifted spirits and the determined eyes of an Eagle on their faces.

The two exchanged glances, then burst into hearty laughter once more!

By evening, a Scout finally came running from the west, bringing a verbal message from Commander Xiuxoke:

"Under the leadership of a Commander named Jiowar, the warriors from Otapan fought desperately to attack Tizoc's great army, relentlessly pursuing the King. The King has split three thousand of his immediate forces to serve as the rear guard under Casal. Seven thousand of the Royal Banner's immediate forces remain, alongside one thousand Eagle Warriors and five hundred Tonsured Warriors, currently located at the third mountain camp.

Tizoc, having suffered consecutive defeats, is out of control with rage, irritable, and has lost the hearts of people. Supreme Commander Totec remains loyally dedicated to maintaining the overall situation. This man is formidable, be very careful.

The mountain trek is arduous, with a lack of grain and salt. Enemy guerrillas continue to attack, and warriors wander lost. Teotihuacan still has over three thousand warriors, closely following the outer perimeter of the Royal Banner. This journey is not easy; I am prepared.

Tizoc clings tightly to the food supply, with ample provision for his immediate forces. Although morale is low, combat strength remains. The Eagle Warrior Battalion and the Tonsured Guard are especially fierce; they must be split up.

The military groups from various City-States are full of complaints, having prematurely divided the second camp's food supplies. They have now scattered, days away. Please dispatch Envoys quickly, promise food supplies, stabilize the City-State armies, and do not affect the decisive battle."

The key to this battle is not killing, but Tizoc himself!"

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