

Civilization 88

Chapter 88: Sunset and Sunrise

The sun set obliquely to the west, leaving behind the last of its afterglow and warmth. The golden rays of sunlight fell and refracted across the shimmering hills, painting a magnificent wilderness.

This was the boundary between the Otomi woodlands and the edge of the Mexican Valley. Southward from here, the trees gradually thinned, and the mountains flattened progressively.

Hundreds of warriors with longbows and copper spears marched south with steady, unquestioning strides.

A young commander wearing a helmet to cover his face was walking at the center of the troop. He was of a smaller stature, holding a shield, carrying a war club on his back, and draped in a commander's Sun Stone cloak with a greatbow painted on the back. An exquisite obsidian necklace wrapped around his neck, symbolizing the status of a high priest.

As the solemn warriors advanced, flocks of birds sporadically took flight, and the swirling cries of eagles echoed by their ears.

The young commander watched the eagle soaring through the brilliant red glow, bidding farewell to the golden sun and the warmth of this world.

At his side, an especially robust Jaguar warrior listened intently. After the similar cries of the eagle repeated several times, he nodded in understanding.

"Xiulote, the prey has moved eastward, half a day's journey from us, now drinking water," Olosh confidently stated.

Xiulote nodded slightly. He wore the face-covering helmet to maintain the majesty of his command and to prevent the warriors from seeing the youthful face of the commander.

"Teacher, is that all?" the young man maintained his demeanor, and after a long while, he turned to Olosh, his face filled with surprise.

"Of course! The Jaguar warriors' imitation of the eagle signals can only convey simple messages: east, west, south, north, half a day, one day, two days, drinking, eating, sleeping. It's not human language; what more do you want?"

Olosh looked at the young man, gave a helpless smile, and shook his head lightly.

"Also, within the army, the hierarchy is clear. You need to maintain your prestige, just call me by my name!"

"Yes, Teacher."

Xiulote nodded and then loudly commanded, "Turn east!"

The warriors obeyed the order and pursued eastward.

The hunt had been ongoing for two days. During these days, the Jaguar warriors from the Holy City of Teotihuacan finally had the chance to excel and demonstrate their traditional skill: hunting.

Unlike their prosperous counterparts in the capital, the war nobility of Teotihuacan did not have enough land and villages to sustain themselves. The High Priesthood also held a dominant position in the distribution of City-State wealth.

The war nobility of the Holy City had to fend for themselves to supplement their household.

They often ventured into the northern woodlands to hunt tigers, leopards, deer, wolves, and crocodiles, thereby obtaining hides and meat. The hides were used to create or repair leather armor, and the meat was used to supplement the young warriors in training in their families.

Every so often, when large sacrificial rites necessitated preparations for sacrifices, the warriors would assemble into small teams and delve deep into the lands of the Otomi, Vastec, Tarasco, and even Tlaxcala people to capture the local Canine Descendants, raid enemy villages, and even capture opposing warriors. This was the capture of prisoners.

Capturing prisoners could bring promotion and honor to the participating warriors but also hid the cruel reality of death. Male sacrifices could bring rewards from the temple, while female captives could be exchanged for riches in the market or simply kept at home to weave.

The youth of Teotihuacan always experienced their first battle through capturing prisoners, just as Xiulote himself had. Once the veteran warriors were promoted to war nobility, most of them joined the adept Jaguar Warrior Brigade to further enhance their hunting abilities.

In hunting, the most crucial skill was tracking, and the most valuable quality was patience.

To capture a peerless warrior like Totec, Xiulote had ample patience.

The young commander scattered the Jaguar warriors of the Holy City into the woodlands. They kept a close watch on Totec's movements, transmitting signals through the high, swirling cries of eagles.

The movements of Tizoc were consistently tracked; despite several attempts by Totec to break away and scatter, he failed each time.

In the two days of pursuit, the hunters continuously inflicted wounds on their prey, draining its stamina, waiting for an opportunity to deliver a fatal blow!

Whenever the Imperial Guards drank water, ate, or rested, the Longbow Warriors from the squad would quietly appear. The rapid-fire longbows delivered deadly feathered arrows, snatching away tired lives one after another and preventing the guards from regrouping.

By now, over half of the 150 Imperial Guard Warriors had already fallen. The remaining loyal escorts were also injured and exhausted. They didn't even dare to kindle a fire at night and could only chew on cold rations, enduring the chilly wind.

Once the enraged Totec prepared to chase, other squads would appear in the surrounding mountains, waiting for an opportunity to shoot the king. Totec was like a fierce beast, bound hand and foot, and Tizoc was the rope that bound him.

Would the fierce beast submit to him if he cut that rope? The youth mused leisurely.

Just then, guided by a Jaguar Warrior, Stanley came from the forests to the east. He hurried along, his expression slightly weary but very exhilarated.

"I've made contact with the Samurai Brigade to the south, three thousand samurai have encircled from the south, and by tomorrow morning, we will have Tizoc completely trapped."

"Well done," the youth removed his masked helmet, revealing his handsome face. His demeanor was confidently buoyant.

"Tomorrow morning, let us launch the fatal strike!"

Nights without a campfire were always tough. Totec's eyes were slightly closed as he stayed alert, guarding by Tizoc's side.

Around the king, Imperial Guards with shields stood vigilant. These two days of marching and fighting, the attacks leaving no time for sleep, found the guards struggling amidst exhaustion. Occasionally, they would close their eyes and bow their heads, their helmets lightly tapping the top of their shields, then they'd startle awake for a moment before quickly falling back asleep.

Totec listened carefully, hearing neither the annoying cry of eagles nor the low hum of longbows. He slightly relaxed. Tonight, the rebels hadn't disturbed them. He glanced again at the exhausted, scarred guards and said nothing.

Everyone enjoyed the rare rest, and the king could finally sleep peacefully. In his sleep, he growled unclear dream talk softly. In these two days, the army had traveled south harshly, harassed by rebels day and night; even sleeping required keeping one eye open.

In adversity, the king found the resilience of a samurai within himself. He no longer complained or cursed. Instead, he periodically motivated the loyal Imperial Guards, promising them a future.

"This is truly the descendant of Montezuma," Totec thought quietly, "not enamored with theology, not slighting loyal samurai. Not swayed by the Chief Priest's words, leading to murderous thoughts toward his own brother."

"If only he had been this way sooner..." Totec shook his head slightly. Once things of this world pass, they can never be changed; since they cannot be changed, there's no need to dwell on them.

"If we can return to the capital this time, the king will surely change and become a monarch like Montezuma!"

Totec tried to recall the face of the Predecessor Monarch but could only remember a vague, towering figure. Perhaps, in the distant past, in his youth, he never dared to directly face the great and brilliant Montezuma. He merely obeyed Montezuma's orders, loyally serving the king, keeping his vow of protection.

As a Tonsured Guard, he protected the previous monarch; as a Supreme Commander, he protected Tizoc. He was grateful to the king for his promotions, but official positions and awards meant little to him.

He was entirely alone, without a wife or relatives, living a simple life, pure as a rock on the mountain top. Because a samurai's life is nothing but being true to their mission, fulfilling their promises until a peaceful death!

The moments of tranquility always passed quickly, and at the crack of dawn, a new red sun emerged. The sunrise, with endless dawn and hope, illuminated the vast world, reaching for the highest peak, just as a monarch among men.

The red sun rises, its path brightly lit.

Totec watched the brilliant dawn, as it dyed the clouds at the horizon. The clouds unfolded from the east like the gates to the Divine Kingdom. A profound smile of enlightenment rose in his heart: the old sun had passed, the new sun had just risen — what a beautiful day it was, fitting for a peaceful death.

That night, Xiulote had slept well. He woke to the dawn and lazily stretched against the rising sun. Then the youth donned his armor, guided by the cry of eagles, and led the warriors east.

Before noon, he received urgent intelligence. Totec, leading eighty Imperial Guards, was nearly breaking through a thousand-man camp to the east, and it was uncertain how long the two thousand-man camps behind could hold on.

The youth cursed internally: "These Royal Warriors are so ineffectual!"

He immediately ordered, eight hundred samurai surged like a torrent, rapidly heading east.