

Civilization 143

Chapter 143 Admonitions and Holy Water

The wind and moon were but temporary havens, for the life of a Samurai was always one of clashing iron and combat, and as a ruler, one must also encompass strategies and reforms.

Xiulote quietly accompanied Alisa for two hours, relishing the inner peace and joy. Then, an Envoy hurried in, requesting his presence at an important meeting. He waved goodbye to the princess and made his way to the solemn great hall. This time, with a resolute face and steady steps, he was able to observe the characteristics of Montezuma Palace.

Montezuma Palace was not vast in size, and its furnishings were quite rustic and grand. Along the way, the palace buildings were decorated with black stripes, red roofs, and heavy stoneware, reminiscent of the Qin and Han dynasties. From this, one could also discern the personal characteristics of Montezuma I.

Upon reaching the great hall, the generals were seated around a blazing fire pit, with open air vents around. Due to the lack of fats, candles could not be widely used. The bonfire thus cast numerous shadows, solidifying the solemn expressions of the Samurais.

Seeing Xiulote arriving, the generals smiled knowingly. King Aweit, who presided over the meeting, beckoned Xiulote to sit on his right. Xiulote performed a solemn ritual and formally took his seat as the secondary chair. This gathering of young men and women inadvertently confirmed Xiulote's identity, and from then on, he was officially the heir to Aweit's military and political conglomerate.

Xiulote saw Acap again. He had set out from Teotihuacan, actually arriving two days early, waiting in the capital. Acap first smiled at Xiulote, then solemnly saluted King Aweit and reported back.

"The High Priest has already dispatched an Envoy to the Elder. Should the situation change, he himself will leave the capital at any time to come here. The legions of Teotihuacan will do the same. The High Priest assesses that this coronation will not encounter major problems. The Chief Priest will also actively seek reconciliation with the king," Acap said.

King Aweit nodded, and today's performance by Quetzal proved this point.

Gillim then performed a ritual before speaking, "Since the Elder has intervened in politics again, it is now inappropriate to act against Quetzal. Given the current health of the Elder, this political interference will not last long and there is still much time ahead. Our first priority should be to dispatch Envoys, requiring city-states and forces to send representatives to offer tributes and participate in the coronation."

Next, Gillim discussed the specific list of city-states and tributes with King Aweit. Acap tugged at Xiulote, who then leaned in to hear his grandfather's private message.

"Xiulote, the High Priest isn't worried about King Aweit, but he's very concerned about you," Acap expressed with a grave look.

Xiulote listened intently.

"The following words, the High Priest told me to tell only you. He said the Elder's thoughts are always unpredictable, but his will rarely changes and his emotions are nearly nonexistent. The only certainty is that his decisions will be made with the best interests of the Alliance in mind, favoring the lineage of Tenochtitlan. What could influence him is also only the overall situation of the Alliance, his lifetime's work!"

As Acap said this, he looked around, evidently uneasy about what he was about to say next.

"In the eyes of the Elder, the gods are the supreme instruments!"

After uttering this blasphemous statement, Acap silently prayed for the gods' forgiveness, surprised to find that Xiulote's expression remained unchanged.

"The person you need to guard against most in the capital is Chief Priest Quetzal. The High Priest knows Quetzal very well, he's a master of Alchemy and was a distinguished Samurai in his youth. He once assassinated an elder of a rival city-state with a dagger coated with snake poison. His often-carried Divine Staff can actually be disassembled, encased in copper blocks for striking, and inside it is a hollow weapon used by southern jungle tribes, capable of blowing Wooden Spikes coated with lethal Frog Poison. Therefore, whenever you are near Quetzal, you must wear Leather Armor."

The Divine Staff of the Chief Priest was actually a blowgun? Xiulote had not realized this.

"However, except for once when he was young, Chief Priest Quetzal rarely takes action himself afterward. The High Priest said, absolutely do not drink cocoa in the capital, and definitely do not eat anything touched by the Chief Priest. Although he does not know the principle, many enemies of the Great Temple have died suddenly after drinking cocoa, even though others dining with them showed no signs of poisoning," Acap revealed.

Xiulote was startled by the realization that the capital was not as calm and beautiful as it appeared on the surface.

"Finally, the High Priest has already sent another Envoy to the Elder and delivered a personal message. Considering the past relationship, the Elder should agree to meet with you alone," Acap finished.

At this point, Acap solemnly sat up straight, mimicking the tone of the High Priest.

"Xiulote, I know you have many extraordinary ideas and insights. When facing the Elder, you need not hesitate to speak your mind. Especially your proposals for the Alliance, if the Elder approves and adopts them, he will immediately begin planning and executing them! This is an opportunity!"

Xiulote nodded and bowed in thanks to Acap before falling into thought.

The meeting that followed was quite uneventful. Aweit assigned different tasks to the generals, organizing them to defend various sectors and preparing them to take over the four major armories of the capital city. He also met with the military representatives from the four areas of the capital. He planned to gradually take over the management rights of each community, controlling the grassroots tax collection and military mobilization. As for the fiefs and private armies of the Great Nobility, he could only temporarily focus on winning them over, recognizing their autonomy.

To use a phrase from the Warring States period in Japan, it was "guaranteed domain security."

As the night deepened and the prominent figures of the capital dispersed, the generals also took their leave one by one. Only Aweit, Xiulote, Gillim, and Acap remained in the great hall. Everyone chatted idly while waiting for the Chief Priest to arrive.

Another quarter of an hour passed before Chief Priest Quetzal finally arrived, taking his time.

This evening, Quetzal wore a simple priest's robe, still holding that slender Divine Staff, which Xiulote now knew was a versatile weapon. Following him was a young-looking woman in black, carrying a small clay pot in her arms. Another ascetic priest followed, slightly bent over with a rather large wooden basket on his back, which seemed quite heavy.

Priests were a special profession. They would cut their skin and cheeks, offering their own blood to the deities, and even perform a certain degree of self-mutilation. These priests had an extremely high tolerance for pain, lived simply, and were often skilled in martial arts. They regularly visited various villages and even cities to hold sacrificial rites, greatly revered by the rural and city-state citizens, constituting an important influence of the Great Temple on non-directly controlled territories.

Quetzal entered with a gentle, warm smile, performing the highest custom of prostration immediately after entering, apologizing for his lateness and asking the king for forgiveness. With no onlookers this time, his gesture was one of the utmost reverence. The woman and the priest behind him also prostrated themselves.

Aweit gestured slightly, and Gillim immediately approached, returning the greeting and then helping Quetzal up. One of them always smiling, the other uttering solemn throughout, but to Xiulote, it appeared strangely harmonious.

Quetzal, smiling, looked around at everyone, nodding and bowing without any sense of authority, which made him remarkably approachable. He then instructed the woman beside him, taking the clay pot she was holding. The woman then raised her head, revealing a face that was charming and pitiful.

Quetzal continuously observed Aweit's expressions, and seeing a flicker of change in his eyes, he smiled slightly to himself. Then, he stepped forward, took out an exquisite stone bottle from the clay pot, and presented it to Aweit.

"Respected Your Highness, this is Holy Water that Elder Uguel and I have brewed for you. It serves as a medium of communication between deities and humans, a joy bestowed by the gods. Just a small cup will liberate the mind from worries, as if soaring in the clouds! Please accept this token of appreciation. I invite everyone to taste!"

Quetzal's face was filled with a sincere smile. He took out a small clay cup, then poured himself a drink and gulped it down. Within seconds, his eyes sparkled, and his face beamed with joy. Then he took out four more cups, intending to personally pour for the others present.

Aweit glanced at Gillim, who promptly understood, took the Holy Water from Quetzal's hands, and repeatedly thanked him. Then, linking arms with Quetzal, he invited him to sit near Aweit; the two accompanying individuals followed behind. He then naturally ordered the guards to bring over drinks, food, and new clay cups. The atmosphere warmed up considerably for a moment.

Xiulote pondered slightly—Quetzal mentioned Uguel? He exchanged a glance with Acap, who also nodded in confirmation. They both understood: it seemed the plan to replace the Chief Priest with Uguel had already been seen through, making it difficult to proceed. Uguel himself might have been secured by the Chief Priest. Both sighed inwardly.

The new clay cup filled with Holy Water was quickly served. Gillim ceremonially bowed before drinking on behalf of Aweit. Within moments, the usually meticulous Intelligence Officer also wore a flying smile, overflowing with joy. He then stood still for a few seconds, using his strong self-control to regain his composure, before looking at the cup in his hand with trepidation.

Aweit naturally did not drink the Holy Water, merely smiling as he greeted the Chief Priest. Having just heard his grandfather's warnings, although curious, Xiulote did not dare to drink and used his age and health as an excuse, "not coveting the fleeting joy of the deities."

Quetzal sighed quietly in his heart. He was just about to test Xiulote's resistance to the Holy Water to decide the dosage of poison needed for future plans that aimed to leave a person near death rather than dead. However, there would be more opportunities later. With these thoughts coursing through his mind, his smile grew even more cordial.

It was then Acap's turn. He drank in one gulp and within a few breaths, could not suppress his joyous expression, his face flushed and nearly ecstatic. He transformed from a graceful gentleman into a carefree, wild young man, even softly singing a prayerful tune.

Xiulote became wary, placing the Holy Water on the list of substances to avoid. Such a reaction, apart from Acap's initial low resistance, surely indicated the presence of unknown central nervous system stimulants in the Holy Water. Accompanying the high excitement was definitely an addictive quality, either strong or weak.

The woman in black secretly watched Acap, her gaze lingering on his gentle features. Listening to the beautiful man's melodious singing, she momentarily forgot about the gathering in the great hall until a prepared remark, like a thunderclap, burst into her heart.

"...This is my legitimate granddaughter Kapana, who is eighteen years old this year, not yet betrothed, and is still studying at Calmecac. She has always admired Your Highness's majestic demeanor and broad knowledge...I brazenly inquire here, hoping Your Highness might take her under your wing and teach her,"

Quetzal, with a graceful smile, made such a statement sound not the least bit presumptuous or impertinent, but rather entirely appropriate and naturally conforming to etiquette.