

Civilization 151

Chapter 151 - Questions and Fate Part 3

The elder pondered for a moment, then changed his question.

"Child, are you willing to dedicate your life to the cause of the Mexica people?"

This time, Xiulote nodded without hesitation. The cause of the Mexica people was now his own, his family's, his clan's, and even his tribe's cause.

The elder looked at Xiulote's resolute expression, his earnest face, and the nodding of his head. He paused for a moment, withdrawing the fierce killing intent, before asking again.

"Child, tell me, what is a Priest?"

"Priests are those who honor the divine spirits, preside over sacrificial rites, and soothe the souls of believers. Whether they believe in divine spirits or not, they serve those who do believe, guiding the hearts of the faithful. In our Alliance, they are the bond that connects the various City-States through a common culture and faith," Xiulote reflected for a moment, then candidly replied according to his understanding.

The elder contemplated the young man's answer. Feeling a curiosity he hadn't felt in a long time, he asked seriously and unrelentingly.

"Child, do you believe in the existence of divine spirits?"

Xiulote shook his head. He opened his mouth to speak, but remembering his own experiences, he altered his words.

"Perhaps there are, but they have no bearing on the mortal world. We govern the nation in the name of the divine, but the rise and fall of the nation are matters of the human world."

The elder examined the young man carefully for a moment. He made no comment, but continued with the examination.

"Child, tell me, what is a King?"

"The King is the ruler of the nation. They control the nation's wealth and manpower, and with these resources, they accomplish meaningful deeds for the nation, developing its strength and maintaining its stability. Such endeavors may include cultivating fields, building canals, unifying tribes, and establishing institutions. In our Alliance, kings must lead the Mexica people forward to conquer future adversities and challenges."

As Xiulote pondered the future, his tone was filled with both hope and gravity.

The elder looked down once again. He mused for a long while before continuing to inquire.

"Child, tell me, what does the future of the Alliance look like?"

This time, Xiulote thought for a long time, from the burgeoning civilizations of the Stone Age to the prolonged development of the Iron Age, to the boundless expansion of the Age of Sail, and then to the reshaping of everything in the age of steam and electricity.

At last, he shook his head slightly; those futures beyond the economic foundation and technical limitations of this era held no meaning now.

"The future of the Alliance is a united and strong nation. We must vanquish the Tarasco to the west and the Tlaxcalans to the east. We need to establish a centralized authority, reclaim the powers of the various City-States. Build a top-down governance system, but also provide bottom-up channels for advancement.

The Alliance should extensively use metal agricultural tools and implements, construct vast waterways, develop commerce and mining, increase the production of food and other sources of wealth, and cultivate a class of low-ranking Samurai who own land. Maintain the balance of power between the Royal Family, the Priesthood, the Great Nobility, the lesser Nobility, the Samurai, and the commoners to keep the nation stable.

What's more important, we must standardize the script of the Alliance and disseminate, in the form of books, the mythological histories, astronomical geography, herbal medicine, and sacrificial rites controlled by the Priesthood, as well as philosophical concepts. Most importantly, establish the foundation for national governance, thorough legislative systems, and clear codifications of rights and responsibilities!"

After this response, the elder pondered for a very long time. He scrutinized the young man once again and then asked calmly.

"Child, you possess great wisdom. Some say you are the reincarnation of my elder brother, Montezuma I, destined to rule the nation in the future. Do you think they're right?"

Xiulote had just snapped back to his senses from his daydreaming and planning when this mundane query sent a chill from his feet to his head. It took him quite a while to answer with difficulty.

"I am not the reincarnation of Montezuma I, but I yearn to govern this nation. Because only I can fulfill dreams that others cannot realize," he said.

For the first time, the elder nodded slightly. He returned to the previous topic, his words now tinged with warmth.

"My child, you said you want to compile a Code of Law using the written word, principles that shall govern our nation. So, what will the content of this Code be?" he asked.

Upon hearing this, Xiulote tried hard to recall. He first attempted to remember the laws of the Celestial Empire's Ming Dynasty of this era, but could only recall the punishments of flogging, caning, penal servitude, exile, and death—the five canonical penalties. He tried to remember something earlier, the criminal law of the Great Song—no killing Scholar-officials? That didn't seem right. The three chapters of laws by Liu Bang? That felt too brief.

He switched his approach and thought of the Roman Code from the West, the Law of the Twelve Tables, which seemed closer, the Law of Nations, distinguishing citizens from non-citizens, the Justinian Code? What exactly was that?

Regretting that he had not studied more diligently, Xiulote struggled to organize his fragmented knowledge and slowly recounted based on his understanding.

"The Code should strictly define the rights and duties of each stratum, regulate the distribution and inheritance of property. The King possesses supreme authority, limiting the power of Priest and Nobility while ensuring the private property of citizens. We need Civil Law for the Mexica people, Law of Nations for the other tribes, and Religious Law that balances differing faiths. The maintenance of state affairs should be based on a social contract that adheres to the law..." he explained.

The elder slightly frowned, but soon returned to an expressionless face. He patiently listened to all of Xiulote's recollections, then fell into silence.

Xiulote looked at the elder, who was staring at the stone wall opposite them. Under the dim candlelight, there was a huge serpent body of the Feathered Serpent Divine carved on it, with three-colored Long Feathers on its body, and people crawling below it.

After watching for a while, the elder slowly began to speak.

"My child, this is the old Snake House of the Feathered Serpent Divine, a test of a Priest's resolve, mindset, wisdom, and divine grace. The Priests would meditate here for seven days, accompanied by the snake, seeking the gods' revelations between life and death," he explained.

"Give him a Potion, a candle," the elder commanded the Head Warrior behind him. The Head Warrior took a vial of pale yellow Potion from a clay jar in his bosom and placed it at Xiulote's feet. He also lit a slender fish oil candle and fixed it to the wall.

"My child, here's a candle for you, to study the mural thoroughly. Here's a potion, which you will need at a crucial moment," he said.

"Starting tomorrow, I shall come to ask you about the written word. You have seven days to ponder carefully. After seven days, I shall ask you again about the Code," he stated.

"Remember, you have already lost one opportunity. For the sake of the gift you brought, this is your last chance," he cautioned.

Having finished, the elder turned and left without pause, not bothering to explain the use of the Potion.

If Xiulote fed the Potion to the water-bellied snake, the snake would die. If he was careless enough to be bitten by the snake, the Potion applied to the wound could temporarily save his life. If he was foolish enough to drink the Potion directly, then there would be no need to consider who should be chosen anymore.

Fate lies in the choices of mortals.

Xiulote watched the elder leave. He suddenly felt all strength leave his body, collapsing onto the straw-covered ground, ignoring the dimly glowing Potion beside him, just lying there staring at the ceiling.

In the faint candlelight above, there was the figure of the Feathered Serpent Divine with a man's body. He wore a smile, with pale skin and a large beard, standing on the Snake Boat, sailing toward the Great Lake in the East. Behind him were crowds of crying and despairing people, and the even taller War God.

"What a strange mural," Xiulote sighed, "what a strange fate."

As the smell of the dreadful Herbs drifted away, the little green snake emerged from nowhere once again. It coiled itself atop the young man's chest, forming a ":" shape. Then, shaking its head and tails, it hissed softly at the ceiling's great snake as if proclaiming something, as if to drive the Feathered Serpent Divine off its territory.

"What a strange little snake," the young man thought, before he sank into a deep sleep, into the realm of the unknown.