

Civilization 180

Chapter 180: Alliance, Villages and Nobility Privileges - Part 2

Every year, from April to June and August to October, during the busy agricultural seasons, the villagers collectively worked with stone tools. The remaining time was the agrarian downtime, during which they produced stone tools, wove cotton fabric, ground cornmeal, collected wood, and repaired homes and warehouses. Additionally, they excavated river mud for the Lord, constructed water channels and buildings for the Alliance, and during wartime, they were responsible for food transportation and served as battlefield militia.

In sum, in this era, the life of a peasant was endlessly busy, devoid of any idyllic leisure. Their lives did not belong to them.

Before the group approached, the intense clamor along with the thud of war clubs striking shields could be heard from a distance. Bertade's expression changed. He quickly stepped forward, positioning Xiulote behind him. Gillim's expression also turned solemn.

The three passed through the thatched huts and saw at the village center a samurai wearing Family-Crested Leather Armor, loudly haranguing something. At his feet knelt an elderly Village Elder, with a white-robed Village Priest standing beside him, looking anxious and incessantly arguing.

Nearby, around a hundred samurai in Cotton Armor were pillaging the central warehouse and nearby houses, appearing to be collecting the tribute. Some held cornbreads, others carried cotton fabrics, dragged turkeys, rabbits, and dogs, and still others bore various pottery and stone tools. Occasionally, a samurai swung a war club and shield, intimidating villagers attempting to interfere. The others were busily delighted, beaming with joy.

On the outskirts, less than ten civilian samurai accompanied hundreds of village strongmen, holding simple weapons, gathered together in fear and anger.

Xiulote quickly counted, noting there were four groups of samurai in Cotton Armor, eighty men in total. This was a force a single village could not resist. Even with the wealth of the Lake Region, after paying tribute, a village of this thousand-person scale could only support less than ten full-time samurai, plus several hundred village strongmen, barely resisting an assault of forty samurai.

Thus, the tax collection teams of each City-State were typically between forty and sixty people. Teams of eighty were rare because the samurai often took additional profits for themselves, which damaged the village's wealth and, by extension, the Lord's interests.

Xiulote glanced at Bertade, and the Head Warrior nodded slightly. He quickly moved forward, approaching the lead tax-collecting samurai.

"...The noble Prince of Tlacopan demands this year's tribute! Everyone must obey the commands of the Alliance! As the Village Priest, you must also submit to the Lord of the Village, the great Prince of Tlacopan!"

The taxing samurai's expression was fierce. He used his war club to strike his shield, intimidating the still-persistent Village Priest. This Priest from the village was always troublesome and held a special status, making direct action difficult. As for the kneeling village Elder pleading below him, he barely gave him a glance.

"Honorable sir, every year our tribute is paid according to the standards of the Alliance. Why is there so much more this year! The village truly cannot afford it. Please, sir, consider a reduction!"

The white-robed Priest bowed deeply, earnestly grasped the arm of the taxing samurai, and whispered his plea.

The taxing samurai furrowed his brow. He pushed the white-robed Priest impatiently and shouted casually.

"That's because the merciful Prince has always been lenient; you've already accrued much debt. This is the last tax collection, and it must be paid in full now! The laws of the Alliance have always been thus, the Nobility of Tlacopan all follow this standard! Hmm? If you don't believe it, you can go to Tlacopan now and inquire!"

Without written laws and decrees, it was up to the Nobility to decide how much to collect. How could the white-robed Priest leave now? He could only plead repeatedly, hoping for a compassion that the taxing samurai did not possess.

Bertade approached with long strides. His face was calm, his eyes suppressed with anger, and he asked sternly.

"The New Year hasn't even started. The date for the Alliance to collect tribute hasn't arrived, so why are you collecting taxes now?!"

The taxing samurai sized up Bertade's plain attire, initially disregarding him. Then, noticing his poised way of walking, his pupils contracted. Finally, his gaze lingered on the longbow behind him and he finally showed disdain.

"Hmm? Where did this Rogue Warrior come from, using such a despicable weapon as a bow and arrow! When to collect taxes is surely decided by the Prince of Tlacopan. Is the Prince's command something you can question? Get lost!"

Saying this, he swung his war club, and several samurai quickly gathered around, half-encircling Bertade.

Bertade remained composed. He continued to question solemnly.

"This land and village will soon be under the jurisdiction of the Royal Family. If you are collecting excessive taxes now, are you handing them over to the Alliance? When the New Year begins and the Royal Family officially collects taxes, what will these villagers pay with?"

Hearing this, the kneeling Village Elder suddenly looked up, disbelievably staring at the taxing samurai. The white-robed Priest also stepped back in astonishment, then quickly relayed the message to the village's warriors and strongmen.

The village warriors, who had been enduring, could no longer restrain themselves. They shouted loudly, and the armed strongmen also boiled over with rage. Everyone brandished their weapons, bolstering each other's courage as they approached the equally armed samurai in Cotton Armor, on the verge of erupting into violence.

The taxing samurai's eyes flashed with malice. He gestured to his left and right, then moved towards Bertade filled with killing intent.

Xiulote had been calmly observing; now he nodded at his followers, then proudly stepped forward. A follower took out a rare horn bestowed by the elders and blew it loudly. The deep and resonant sound echoed across the land, and everyone momentarily paused, turning their gaze together.