

## Civilization 181

### Chapter 181: Alliance, Villages and Nobility Privileges\_3

Xiulote's expression was dignified, with an air of superiority unique to those of high status. He calmly walked to the center of the crowd, stared into the eyes of the taxing Samurai, and loudly rebuked:

"Samurai of Tlacopan, the taxes you collect exceed the regulations of the Alliance. The Prince of Tlacopan is a man who knows his place, never opposing the Alliance. His intention was merely to collect taxes one last time, yet you took this opportunity to ruthlessly exploit and drive the village to desperation. Utterly foolish!"

The taxing Samurai was taken aback. He was overwhelmed by Xiulote's presence, hesitantly took half a step back, and gestured for the Samurai ready to take action to stop. Then, he scrutinized the young man before him. Although clad in the robes of a low-ranking Priest, the youth possessed a dignified and elegant visage, along with an indescribable quality.

Feeling a slight fear in his heart, he hesitated and asked, "May I ask who your Excellency is?"

Xiulote, however, paid him no heed and continued his rebuke: "Who do you think you can deceive with such actions? Have you ever considered the consequences if the Alliance and the Prince were to become adversaries? Are you prepared to calm the Royal Family's wrath with your own head?"

Hearing this, the taxing Samurai's face alternated between shades of red and white. The tone and insight indicated that he was indeed facing an important figure. Immediately, he reevaluated the youth's age, recalling the Venerables of similar youth. Moments later, he was struck by a shocking realization.

He quickly glanced again at the young man and the Longbow behind Bertade, no longer hesitant, he hastily commanded the other Samurai to sheathe their weapons. Following that, he kneeled before Xiulote and prostrated himself reverently.

"To think that it is the great and wise 'Divine Revelator' himself here! I was truly blind earlier, failing to recognize your true visage. To be blessed with your teachings is as fortunate as meeting a deity!"

Xiulote was slightly taken aback. "Divine Revelator"? Where did that title come from? He had no time to ponder, simply gazing coldly at the taxing Samurai before him.

"You recognize me?"

"Reporting to your Highness, not long ago on the Long Bridge, when you and the Elder Priest were seeing off the Prince, I was fortunate to be in attendance behind you. To catch a distant glimpse of your beautiful visage was an immense honor!"

This time, the taxing Samurai's admiration was truly heartfelt.

Xiulote's face darkened. However, in this era, people indeed liked to use flowers as compliments for Samurai. Flowers represented beauty for both men and women in the hearts of the people, leaning more towards the robust male.

Xiulote refrained from speaking further. He imitated the emotionless gaze of an Elder.

"Since you have served the Prince, you must be aware of the stakes. You may leave now!"

The intimidation of that gaze made the taxing Samurai take another step back. Yet after a brief hesitation, he still spoke up.

"Respected Highness, you can take everything else, but the corn cakes and cotton cloths are by the Prince's orders, and I must bring them back to be accountable."

Xiulote's imperious gaze bore down on the taxing Samurai. With a pressuring look for a moment, he was about to speak again.

It was then Gillim stepped forward. He had been quietly observing everything with a smile from the back. That was until he saw some young Cotton Armor-clad Samurai, displeased upon hearing the conversation, reaching for their War Clubs again.

"Fine. You may go now." Gillim smiled faintly, simply giving the taxing Samurai a deep look, memorizing his face.

Then, the Chief Intelligence Officer turned to Xiulote and whispered lowly.

"The Prince of Tlacopan has recently pledged allegiance to the Royal Family; there's no need to stir up disputes over these trifles. I will waive this year's Tribute from the village."

Xiulote nodded slightly, then gestured magnanimously for the taxing Samurai to depart.

The taxing Samurai once again made a deep bow, then hastily led the still indignant taxing party away without looking back. They took away the same number of corn cakes and cotton cloths as in previous years. But this time twice as many people came, and most of the Cotton Armor Samurai did not achieve their expected gains.

Only then did the village Priest draw the village Elder forward, respectfully greeting with a bow.

Xiulote offered a few words of reassurance to the village Elder before seriously questioning the village Priest.

"Behind you stands the Priesthood of the Alliance, the supreme divine authority. Why then are you so powerless against these taxing parties?"

The village Priest replied with a wry smile.

"Venerable High Priest, although the divine power of the Priesthood is mighty, it isn't of much help here in the confines of the village. The local Nobility's taxation squads act without restraint, and the lords are like kings of the village."

"If things get too dire, I may have to sacrifice myself to the gods here. By that time, the villagers likely won't dare to report the truth. The Nobility could simply report an accidental drowning or a Coyote attack, and the matter would be considered closed."

Upon hearing this, Xiulote paused. He fell into deep thought. Clearly, his previous plans had been too naive. For a village Priest to compete with the local Nobility for control of the village, support from armed forces was absolutely essential.

Most village Priests are indeed selected from the villagers, and their stance is naturally opposed to that of the local Nobility. But for them to play an effective role, they must be equipped with some weapons and receive guidance, mobilization, training, and command of the Militia to support themselves with basic military force locally.

Then, it is crucial to station organized Temple Guards at key points who can provide timely support to the village Priests and deter surrounding Nobility. The initial operation is the hardest. Once the entire system is truly up and running, the power of the Priests will grow continuously, while the power of the Nobility will be gradually weakened, until a new balance is established.

Xiulote nodded slowly. He asked in a deep voice,

"That makes sense. Very clever. What's your name?"

The Priest in white grinned with joy, revealing the weathered face of a middle-aged man.

"Venerable High Priest, I am Bravo of Tlacopan, ready to serve you."

It was apparent that a village Priest of his age must indeed be a commoner.

Xiulote nodded slowly. He said no more, simply committing Bravo's name to memory. Then, amidst the slight disappointment in the other's eyes, he and Gillim returned the way they came. After returning, he would investigate this Priest further.

The sun had already begun to slant westward. Without lingering in the village, they boarded a small boat amid the profuse thanks of the village leader and set off for the Lake Capital City.

Navigating over Lake Texcoco, the sunlight was a bright golden yellow, the surface of the lake shimmered with dazzling light. Xiulote gazed far ahead at the Lake Capital City but realized the grandeur and vastness of the Capital City were merely faint ripples here, unable to cascade over the Valley like the sunlight.

Just as the power of the Royal Family stopped outside the Nobility's fiefs.

Xiulote carefully watched the distant Capital City amidst the reflections on the lake for a moment, before slowly turning to Gillim.

"Exactly what privileges do the Alliance's Nobility have?"

Gillim looked solemn. He pondered for a while before seriously answering.

"Hereditary Great Nobility are fully autonomous, their fiefs are hereditary. The population of the fief don't pay taxes or perform mandatory services. They provide Tribute once a year, which the King needs to reciprocate. They provide their own private armies during war, but the command typically goes to the

sons of the Great Nobility. They levy their own commercial taxes on their fiefs, are allowed private foreign trade. Apart from lacking power in foreign diplomacy, the Great Nobility are nearly kings in their own fiefs. The Royal Family's Nobility are equivalent to Hereditary Great Nobility, but the King as the head of the Royal Family, has natural authority."

"For the lesser Nobility who earned their station through military service, they have partial autonomy; their fiefs can only be partially inherited. The population of the fief partially takes on taxes and mandatory services, provide Tribute once a year, reciprocation depends on the King's favor. They perform military service during war, at least serving as junior officers. Their fiefs don't include cities, have no commercial taxes, but are similarly allowed foreign trade, with Royal trade caravans taking priority. The greatest control the Royal Family has over the lesser Nobility is the inheritance of the fiefs."

"The Royal Family must understand, lesser Nobility rise easily, but Great Nobility are hard to demote. The hereditary award of fiefs must be given utmost caution!"

Finally, with a solemn face, Gillim bowed and recited a Royal maxim.

Xiulote nodded slightly and responded with due respect. He said nothing further. Gillim, too, remained silent. They watched as the Lake Capital City approached. Under the setting sun, the white Stone City was so majestic and the twin peaks of the Great Temple stood so tall and imposing!

In the eyes of the youth, lights began to swirl, and his thoughts followed the rays, crossing through time and space.

Monarchical and divine powers stood quietly in the Capital of the Mexica, waiting and yearning for that destined future to illuminate the world!

"Even though the road ahead is long, with me,"