

Civilization 186

Chapter 186: The King and the Merchant, The Youth and an Old Friend _2

As the sun set in the west, the meeting concluded. The Elders bid farewell and hurriedly departed, dispersing with important news.

The High Priest Xutel once again patted the young man's head. He looked contently at the resolute youth and said, "My child, you are too reckless. I should have been the one to speak last."

Xiulote shook his head, staring firmly at his grandfather.

"The eagle must soar in the sky, facing the wind and rain head-on! I cannot hide atop the Divine Tree, relying on you."

The High Priest smiled appreciatively. Then, he called for Bertade and doubled the youth's personal guard, henceforth forbidding him from going out alone.

Two more days passed. The trade laws were not yet fully determined, and not even the price reference charts were complete. That afternoon, a merchant arrived, presenting New Year's gifts and requesting an audience with the Venerable.

Today, without any specific task, Xiulote was practicing archery with Bertade. From dozens of meters away, his arrows never missed their mark, hitting the large human-shaped wooden target in a normally distributed pattern. Beside him, the Divine Archer Bertade maintained a benevolent smile, making no comment on his lord's archery skills.

After listening to the guard's report, the young man waved his hand. The purpose of a merchant's visit at this time was obvious, indeed news travels fast. He then instructed the guard to convey the message.

"The High Priest has not returned. Unless it is urgent, he will not receive guests."

After a while, the guard hurried back and respectfully reported.

"Respected Highness, the merchant outside claims to be an old acquaintance of yours. He has also presented many gifts; here is the list."

Speaking so, the guard handed over a wooden board filled with images. Papermaking was just being adopted and literacy was still being taught. Far from widespread, wooden boards with images remained the standard.

Xiulote took the wooden board, quickly and casually glanced over it. Outfits with feathers, brightly colored gold and silver, odd fruits and flowers, and long-haired slaves of indeterminate gender... His gaze lingered on the golden-yellow axe, a new bronze weapon?

Xiulote pondered briefly, his curiosity piqued slightly. He handed the wooden board and his longbow to the guard and walked with Bertade towards the front gate to see this so-called old friend.

Arriving in the front courtyard, from afar, a merchant with an unusual appearance caught his eye. Round chubby face, slender head, tall feather decorations, and dangling silver ornaments. Xiulote paused slightly, recognizing the Mayan merchant as someone somewhat familiar.

As Xiulote approached, the Mayan merchant scrutinized him carefully, comparing the memory of the youthful boy with the steadfast Samurai before him. Then, he greeted him with a genuinely warm smile.

"Respected Highness! Your most loyal old friend, the nobility of Tikalo from Tutulxiu greets you! We met once in the market of Metztitlan. At the time, you and Head Warrior Olosh were returning from a hunt, and I was about to invite you to taste the finest sacred tobacco."

Xiulote recalled for a moment and finally matched the current Tikalo with the swindler Olosh had spoken of, indeed an old acquaintance!

He smiled faintly and nodded at Tikalo. Then he queried with a smile,

"Tikalo, how did you end up in Tenochtitlan? And how did you know I reside here?"

Tikalo's smile was sincere and warm.

"Respected Highness, we Mayan merchants wander between city-states, braving the elements, delivering goods people need right to their hands for a modest reward. I've been in the capital for several months, and everywhere I go, I hear of 'Divine Revelator' Highness's illustrious fame.

Your Highness invented the Stone-Throwing Behemoth and the Greatbow, Wisdom Revelation. You slaughtered the rebellious former Chief Commander with prowess extraordinary. Recently, you even

invented writing and participated in compiling the Code of Law, destined to inherit the greatness of the Alliance, who would not know, who would not admire?

With the New Year approaching, our Mayan merchant consortium came together, specifically preparing a present for the great Highness. Everyone talked about Your Highness's life achievements, and only then did I realize the privilege of being considered an old acquaintance of Yours. The consortium sent me as a representative to audaciously visit and offer these presents to You! Please do not consider the gifts insignificant, but accept our admiration."

Xiulote looked at Tikalo's radiant smile, then back at the courtyard where piles of feathered outfits, boxes of gold and gemstones, hundreds of fragrant fruits and flowers, and dozens of graceful female slaves bowed their heads. He pondered.

"Such generous gifts do not come without great requests, surely related to the trade laws. Yet, trade laws are state matters, and there is little room for discussion."

Xiulote turned his attention to the last wooden crate. Tikalo confidently lifted the covering cloth, revealing dozens of golden bronze battle axes. The youth stared for a long time, these were indeed the gifts that truly moved him.

"This is a cunning merchant who will be beneficial for my great cause. What would Aweit do if he were here?" Xiulote thought of Aweit, and then remembered "Monkey" Kuluka. His heart stirred, and he made a decision.

Xiulote then smiled slightly, gazing at the equally smiling Tikalo with the eyes of Great Nobility. The latter was sincere and respectful, with superficial humility and a merchant's cunning calculations.

"Respected Your Highness, these are Bronze Battle Axes made by the people of Tarasco two months ago. They are extremely sharp and extraordinarily sturdy, capable of easily cutting through Leather Armor!" Noticing the youth's interest, Tikalo started by introducing.

Xiulote remained impassive, slightly nodding.

"Respected Your Highness, these are female slaves offered to you by the merchant group—from the rhythmically dancing Vastec priestesses, to naturally hostile young ladies of Tlaxcala, the delicate and graceful young women of Mistec, and the untamed and fierce Chichimec females. All are exquisitely beautiful, carefully selected, each with distinctive exotic charm. If Your Highness wishes, you can also make special requests to the merchant group."

Tikalo's face was like a spring breeze. According to his experience, dealing with such young and proud nobility, gold and silver finery typically had little effect, while matters of joyous songs often proved to be very effective, tried and true.

Xiulote's breathing paused slightly. He felt the presence of beautiful women, a tinge of instinctual desire arising. Immediately thereafter, an image of a girl in white clothes emerged in his mind, her pure smile flowing like a clear spring through his mind, calming his thoughts as he felt slightly abashed. The youth clenched his teeth and gave Tikalo a look, no longer hesitating about his next plan.

Tikalo observed the young man's expression, watching his clear eyes and slightly flushed face. He was somewhat puzzled and continued to introduce.

"Respected Your Highness, these are cherished flowers and fruits from the southern rainforest. Here are the giant white King Lotus, the purple Belladonnas, the enticing Red Lip flowers, the highland Passion

flowers, and the Fire Torch Ginger Flower symbolizing the Fire God... all are precious rare plants, not inferior to the Royal Garden!"

Xiulote nodded, those flowers were indeed wonderfully exotic and beautiful, rare even in future generations and seldom seen.

"Respected Your Highness, these are fruits I personally harvested from the wilderness, just for you. Here is the fresh Cactus fruit, the yellow Qilin Fruit, the sweet-and-sour Pineapple, the plump Mammy fruit, and the sweet white Custard Apple... all are gifts from the gods, through my hands, presented to one loved by the deities!"

Xiulote smiled faintly, asking meaningfully.

"Tikalo, these are fruits beloved by the deities, harvested by you personally?"

The Mayan merchant nodded his elegant head, smiling confidently and affectionately in reply.

"Absolutely true! Personally harvested by me, to be presented to you."

"Good! Since they are loved by the deities..."

Xiulote calmly stepped back two paces, positioned himself beside the guard Samurais, then coldly and imperiously ordered.

"Arrest him! I will offer both these fruits and the one who harvested them in sacrifice to the deities!"

The Armored Warriors thunderously complied, stepping forward. They took out War Clubs, easily knocking down the merchant's escorts and subduing the submissive servants. Then, the robust warriors advanced on either side, seizing the fully terror-stricken, trembling Mayan merchant, and mercilessly dragged him toward the sacrificial altar.

Xiulote turned his back on the dragged away merchant. Hearing Tikalo's urgent cries and pleas for mercy, he could not help but lightly smile.

Why bother with the merchant's tricks to subdue experienced and cunning merchants. One should use the king's advantages, the rules of the warriors, straightforwardly and directly!

"Those who submit shall live, those who do not shall die, you surely will not make it difficult for me."

The youth withdrew his smile, then sighed deeply.

"Old friends remain the same, yet I have inevitably changed."