

Civilization 188

Chapter 188: The Merchant and Feathers_2

At last, the young man lowered his voice so that only the two of them could hear.

Bertade's lips slightly curled up. He nodded solemnly, half drew the longbow, and aimed carefully. After reflecting on his past experiences, he adjusted his aim slightly upward.

Tikalo's body shook like a sieve, and his legs went weak. Sweat beads rolled down his forehead, over his cheeks and neck, carrying the intense aroma of pineapple, as if it were soul-stirring.

Time seemed to stretch on like a century. Then, with a "buzz" of the bow trembling and a "whoosh" of an arrow shooting forth, followed by a "bang," the pineapple exploded, splashing juice in all directions.

The Mayan merchant trembled in fright. The force of the arrow knocked him backward, and his weak legs could no longer stand steady. He fell heavily backwards, hands still not daring to let go, as the juice of the pineapple flowed down his slender forehead, slid past his breath-held nose, and entered his parched mouth.

Tikalo instinctively tasted it. The pineapple juice was sour and sweet, the flavor of fate, and also the beauty of a narrow escape from disaster. He looked up at Xiulote again, fear undisguisable on his face.

Xiulote carefully observed the merchant's expression. He nodded to himself, his defenses finally breached, casting himself into the shadow of the king.

So, the young man smiled and stepped forward. He pulled up his old acquaintance, offering warm reassurances.

"Tikalo, the divine has made its choice. Your sin of deceit has been forgiven, and now you are my guest!"

The Mayan merchant was drenched in cold sweat. His emotions had not yet settled, and he was speechless.

Afterward, Xiulote had new clothes brought for the merchant to change into. Then he pulled him into the grand hall to sit face to face.

The samurai then sheathed their weapons, guarding inside and outside the grand hall. Retainers served cocoa drinks, light tequila, sweet honey water, and delicious snacks.

"Come, Tikalo. Drink this cup fully, thankful for the Chief Divine's protection! Fate has brought us together!" Xiulote drank down the cocoa in one gulp. It was his favorite taste: hot cocoa with honey.

As a merchant, Tikalo could only drink the tequila. He looked at the smiling young man, his feelings complex and changing. The once naive young priest had now grown into a formidable figure capable of life and death decisions.

He silently reminisced for a moment, inwardly reproaching himself. Influenced by past memories and underestimating the young man, he had lost the caution necessary when facing a venerable figure. But the one sitting opposite him was no longer a child, but the heir to a powerful empire.

As Tikalo realized this, his past memories blurred completely, dissipating in his mind. Only the piercing arrow remained, like the invincible force of a king.

The Mayan merchant moved his lips but ended up only bowing deeply.

"Thank you, Your Highness. Thank you for the Chief Divine's protection!"

Xiulote nodded slightly, smiling faintly. His gaze sternly fixed on the merchant.

"Tikalo, what brings you here this time? Feel free to speak."

The merchant opened his mouth, paused for a moment, then sighed.

"Respected Your Highness. I originally came to propose a business law, but now I dare not speak further."

"Very well. Then let's discuss something else."

Hearing the merchant's candor, Xiulote was quite satisfied. Immediately, his expression turned serious, and he asked in a deep voice.

"Where does your bronze battle axe come from? Can you get more?"

Tikalo's face froze, his instinct was to fob it off. He lifted his head and saw the young man's expression, and his recent experience resurfaced, making his body tremble slightly. The merchant hesitated for a moment, but eventually, he revealed his secret.

"The bronze battle axes come from the scattered southern city-states of the Tarasco people. The Patzcuaro Lake region is the center of Tarasco rule, where copper mines are strictly controlled. Yet, departing from the Capital City on the lake, heading west along the Balsas River, through the territories of the Jontal people, deep into the southern mountains of the Tarasco in Weytamo, there are still abundant open-pit mottled copper mines."

The Weytamo Realm was located south of the Balsas River. Impoverished tribes in the mountainous area had been secretly mining these copper ores. They would craft bronze vessels and sell them through foreign merchants to exchange for various expensive luxury goods. The sixty bronze battle axes I brought originated from the southernmost tribes. That place, being the furthest from the capital Qinchongcan of the Tarasco people, had the boldest tribes, even daring to manufacture and sell bronze weapons.

I had once visited that place and met with the tribal leaders. There was still a lot of patterned copper ore in the mountains, yet there were no more bronze weapons. After all, the southern mountain tribes had limited populations, and both mining and casting were extremely labor-intensive activities; they could never scale up. Perhaps for this reason, the capital Qinchongcan turned a blind eye to the border mountain area."

Xiulote pondered carefully. Weytamo mountain area, copper mines. Hmm, who had mentioned it to me? He looked toward his escort, Bertade.

Bertade nodded earnestly.

"I have been there. The mountains are full of shimmering gold-like ore. But the treacherous mountain terrain, abundant trees, and extremely agile and fierce mountain people are not suitable for a large-scale military campaign."

Xiulote reflected for a moment. Such matters were most conveniently handled by merchants. He looked toward Tikalo, solemn and majestic.

"Tikalo, I need more copper mines. Would you be willing to purchase copper ore for me in Weytamo Realm? The Alliance is not short of craftsmen; we want as much pure copper ore as possible. The price is right, bronze weapons and bronze vessels are all wanted. I will offer a 20% premium in exchange for the goods of the Alliance.

If you are willing to serve the Alliance, the Alliance will list you as a secret military merchant, providing various discounts and conveniences to ensure your safety in the Alliance. I will also provide you with elite Samurai and sturdy boats.

I promise in the name of the Guardian God, as long as you collect enough copper ore and intelligence, you can become a military noble of the Alliance! And once you establish great merit, you can become a hereditary noble of the Alliance, passing on your legacy in your fief from generation to generation!"

Upon hearing this, Tikalo suddenly looked up. His gaze flickered with strong desire, leaping in his heart. As a well-off merchant, his greatest wish was to obtain a fief and truly become a member of the ruling class, escaping the fate controlled by others!

He subconsciously touched his intelligent head, feeling the smooth touch, the sacred curve. His agitated emotions gradually calmed down. In the powerful Mexica Alliance, he was but an odd and rootless foreigner, seeing no other sacred kin. Even if he truly had a fief here, how could he integrate into the ruling class? At the slightest disturbance, it would collapse first.

As Tikalo's thoughts surged, his reason and emotions alternately struggled. After a while, he sighed softly.

"Respected Your Highness. The wise sea turtle, which should belong to the boundless saltwater outside the Yucatan jungle. How could it survive in the freshwater lakes of the Mexican Plateau, under the teeth of countless crocodiles?"

Upon hearing the merchant's refusal, Xiulote was slightly surprised. He cautiously examined Tikalo again, appreciating the latter's wisdom, yet a hint of murderous intent appeared in his eyes.

Tikalo shivered, his reason fully recovered. He respectfully bowed again.

"Your Highness, I am happy to serve you. After the New Year, I will set out to purchase copper mines at equitable prices in Weytamo Realm. As for military intelligence, my servant always cannot keep his mouth shut. He will speak to the Venerable upon returning to the Lake Capital City."

Xiulote's expression remained unchanged, he gently shook his head. This one-sided service relationship was not what he wanted. Without stable mutual interests, it was impossible to truly subdue the merchant before him, nor could the latter be expected to dedicate himself fully to the Alliance's mission.

He pondered again for a moment, then spoke slowly.

"Tikalo, you are a clever person. I aspire to rule the world. If you truly serve me, I will promise you a satisfactory future. Remember you come from Tutulxiu, the fertile land rich in cotton?"

Would you like to return to Yucatan, becoming a noble lord among the Mayan people? The Samurai of Mexica will eventually set foot on the shores of Yucatan. With the support of tens of thousands from the Mexica legion, you will become the noble Kaluoemte, like the legendary King Jaguar's Claw!"

Tikalo's gaze flickered again. Desire intensely surged in his chest, the past glory of his family recorded in inherited verses, recited over and over in his mind. He looked again at Xiulote's solemn face, feeling the earnestness of the young man, and the hidden murderous intent behind that earnestness.

After a long while, the Mayan merchant finally lowered his sacred head. He closed his eyes, sighing in his heart, bowed deeply to the young man.

"Willing to serve you, my King."

Tikalo removed the feather crown silver ornament from his head, revealing his complete, slender head, performing an ancient noble ritual.

"By the oath of the Feathered Serpent Divine Kukulcan, I, Tikalo of the sacred Kokom Family, shall become your Feathers, helping you soar through the skies!"

Watching the merchant prostrate before him, Xiulote smiled slightly. The smile, holding the youthful charm of a young man and the composure of a king.