

Civilization 202

Chapter 202: Gold Mines and Miners

Starlight illuminated the distance, and the night was tranquil and silent, except for the soft cry of an eagle and the hiss of a snake.

In the wooden box on the bedroom's stone platform, little Aviloztli spread its grayish short wings, held its white-furred little head high, and its small black eyes shone brightly. Two meters above the stone platform, it peeked out, eyeing the little green snake on the ground and letting out a proud "yoo-hoo" chirp.

The little green snake raised its head, its vertical pupil staring silently at the bird above for a while. Then, it slithered up the rough edge of the stone platform with a hissing sound, reaching the wooden box in a moment. It then opened its green mouth wide, menacing the nearby little golden eagle with a high-pitched threatening "shush."

Little Aviloztli froze instantly, calling out a frightened "cheep cheep" for help. It flapped its short wings vigorously, trying to struggle free but only lifted slightly off the ground before falling back into the box. After struggling for a moment, it could only cower fearfully in the corner of the box, covering its eyes with its wings and shrinking into a fluffy ball, shivering.

Xiulote was woken by the urgent cries of the eagle. The young man rose briskly, half-naked, revealing the firm contours of his growing figure. He scanned his surroundings quickly, his right hand clutching the long dagger he never parted with. Then, he carefully moved the corner brazier to finally see the confrontation between the eagle and the snake and couldn't help but let out a mute chuckle.

The young man reached out and touched the little golden eagle's soft little head, soothing the terrified Aviloztli and whispered with a smile,

"You, you should be good and quiet. Your task now is to accumulate your feathers and wait for the day they are fully grown!"

Then, he wrapped his hand around the wriggling little green snake from the side, feeling the snake's smooth and delicate body and let out a light chuckle.

"And as for you, you should contain your voice and posture, lurk silently, and wait low-key. A fatal strike is but a moment, what's the point in confrontation and intimidation?"

At this point, Xiulote seemed to have a moment of distraction, as if something had come to mind. He looked toward the first light of dawn rising in the east, his gaze profound and distant.

Having gotten up, Xiulote then proceeded to complete his daily morning training. After waiting for a moment, the head craftsman Kuode finally hurried over. The two had a brief discussion and decided on the day's schedule, to inspect the mining industry around the capital city. He had spent half a day with the old carpenter yesterday, and it would probably take a full day today.

Xiulote instructed the guards to wait for the craftsmen holding the jade talisman and to ensure they were properly settled. Then, he took the Head Warrior and the old carpenter and hurried to the port southwest of the capital city.

As the boat floated towards the sunrise, they traveled not far southwest from Lake Texcoco to where the Lerma River converged, marking the meeting point of many small rivers. The small boat entered a tributary, and they saw dozens of armed City-State Warriors and hundreds of busy miners bent over beside the riverbed.

Continuing forward for several hundred meters, the clear river suddenly glistened. Layers of gold light rose from the half-person-deep riverbed, like stars scattered across the night sky. This was the nearest gold panning site to the capital city.

Due to active volcanic activity, Central America is one of the world's richest regions in gold and silver production. The vast Mexican Plateau possesses the world's largest reserves of silver mines, along with hundreds of gold mine ranges to the south, north, and west, with continuous belts of gold and silver mines underground.

The gold and silver reserves here are calculated in tens of thousands of tons, distributed at different depths of the strata, even surpassing Japan, which also frequently experiences volcanic activity. Historically, the Caribbean treasure fleet set sail from Veracruz on Mexico's eastern coast, loaded with Mexican gold and silver that drove pirates and various national navies mad. They would assemble in Havana, Cuba, before navigating towards Seville in the south of Spain, becoming the initial source of financial capital expansion in Western Europe and an inexhaustible driving force for socioeconomic development.

Gold mining in Central America has been ongoing for thousands of years, and the accumulated gold is beyond count. The capital city, Tenochtitlan, is the center of wealth in Central America. According to what Xiulote witnessed in daily life, the gold in the capital amounted to hundreds or even thousands of tons, many of which were buried deep in tombs and temples.

Typically, the extraction of precious metals is divided into rock mining and panning in rivers and streams. Due to the lack of metal mining tools, rock gold mining was very inefficient and costly. The Mexica and other groups primarily relied on panning for alluvial gold in the rivers. In the rivers to the west and north of the Mexica Alliance, there were a vast number of Gold Sand Rivers, where thousands of miners worked to provide a continuous stream of wealth to various city-states.

Xiulote stopped the patrolling Samurai's salutation and gestured for the miners to continue collecting the gold dust. Then he strode forward, observing the miners' labor by the riverbank.

The main work area for the miners was a diverted river. The water had been drained to reveal a shining gold-streaked riverbed. They used crude stone shovels to dig up the river mud, piling it up by the riverbank in glittering mounds. Then, the miners took out simple panning dishes, placed the dug-up gold mud into them, and washed it continuously with river water.

The panning dishes were about the size of a washbasin, made of wood or pottery, with a series of special grooves on top. As the lightweight mud and sand dispersed and useless stones were picked out, what remained were the heavy and glistening gold particles of various sizes. The gold dust, like fine dust, and the nuggets, like grains of rice, shone and flowed in the sunlight, turning with the crisp sound of rustling, enticing the hearts of those who beheld them.

Xiulote's gaze was drawn to the gold dust, the color of which seemed to have a natural charm. Fortunately, he was accustomed to seeing gold, silver, and gemstones on regular days. After a few moments, the young man regained his composure.

He calculated the gold dust the miners laboriously washed out each time, merely a scant tenth of an ounce or so. Then he looked at the piles of gold-rich mud by the river, where a miner could collect at most a few ounces a day. Finally, he glanced at the long, gold-dapple riverbed and the distant river gleaming with gold, with tons of gold buried beneath.

The young man fell silent for a long while, then shook his head. The human effort expended on this collection was simply too costly, and in the gold and silver-rich city-states of Central America, the value of gold was nowhere near that of Eurasia, not buying much. The booming gold mining industry had essentially become a luxury industry, not bringing significant positive meaning to Mexica society.

Next, Xiulote shifted his attention to the miners' physical condition and their expressions.

The main sources of miners were commoners and slaves. Their work was strictly supervised by the city-state warriors, laboring for over ten hours each day to meet the minimum collection requirements.

The young man disregarded the ragged, numb-faced slaves who were skinny as sticks, human consumables with no military value. He focused his attention solely on the commoner miners in coarse brown clothes.

Most of these commoner miners came from nearby villages, summoned by the local nobility. They had resolute expressions and lean bodies, their upper torsos bowed slightly. Low body fat and high-intensity labor outlined their distinct facial contours, while their eyes reflected simplicity and honesty.

The miners endured long and tedious gathering every day, their obedience and discipline far surpassed that of ordinary peasants and citizens, and were even stronger than some young Samurais. The set gathering quotas also gave them a rough understanding of some simple numbers. In their labor, they needed to cooperate with each other, often banding together by village, sometimes conflicting with one another, possessing sufficient teamwork abilities.

Xiulote glanced around for a moment before calling over a simple and honest young miner, asking briefly.

The young miner, in his early twenties, already had a weather-beaten face. His knuckles were thick, and his hands and feet bore thick calluses. He answered the Priest's questions nervously, speaking simply yet with clear logic.

Xiulote nodded slightly. He gave his instructions calmly.

"Stand here, keep your back straight, and look forward. Do not move."

Upon hearing this, the young miner stood still like a stake, anxious and motionless. Sweat slid down his cheeks, cutting through the grime on his face and dropping to the ground, kicking up a cloud of dust. His pupils were slightly dilated, staring blankly at the unknown distance of the river.

Xiulote didn't speak. He sat down relaxedly in front of the miner. He then took a sip of the mescal that Bertade handed him, tilting his head back as he drank slowly, the alcohol's fragrance wafting along the riverbank. His gaze stayed fixed on the young miner's expressions.

The young miner's throat moved slightly, as if swallowing the scent of the alcohol in the air, still not daring to move. The young man slowly ate a corn tortilla filled with chili sauce. The miner's gaze was occasionally drawn to it, before he shifted it away out of fear.

After a while, Xiulote nodded in satisfaction.

"What's your name?"

"Great Priest, my name is Guzman, from the village of Coyohuacan."

The young miner replied tensely, looking downward, still not daring to move his body. Coyohuacan was a small city-state near the edge of Lake Texcoco, connected to the capital by the southern bridge of the Seven Bridges.

"How long have you been a miner? Do you know all the miners here?"

"Great Priest, I've been a miner for three years. I was trained for a few years in the community military school, but I couldn't pass the Samurai selection. The Lord ordered our village to send people for mining, so I came here. The miners here are all from the surrounding villages, everyone knows each other more or less, probably about one or two hundred people."

The young miner blinked, indicating he knew. He seemed to have a rough understanding of the concept of numbers as well.

Xiulote pondered for a moment. The villages all belonged to the fiefs of nobles in different places, and the villagers were under the jurisdiction of these nobles. However, with his current status, asking for some miners should not be refused by the nobles.

The young man then nodded slightly and waved his hand to indicate.

"Guzman, you may go."

Only then did miner Guzman dare to lower his head. He knelt to the ground to pay respect, let out a long sigh of relief in his heart, then turned and hurried away without a word. He still hadn't finished his gold-gathering task for the day.

Xiulote's gaze was profound. He watched the hundreds of miners on the riverbank and asked sternly.

"Kuode, how many miners are there in the Texcoco Lake District?"

Craftsman supervisor Kuode pondered for a moment before answering cautiously.

"Your Highness, there are nearly ten gold and silver mining spots around the lake district, with over two thousand civilian miners, and the slaves are incalculable. Further out, there are several large mining sites, with civilian miners also around two to three thousand."

Xiulote frowned slightly, the number was much less than he had expected. After thinking for a moment, he then looked at the old woodworker and spoke slowly.

"Let's take a look at the salt mines and stone mines. I need more miners!"

Kuode felt the implication in the young man's gaze. He thought for a moment, then bowed respectfully.

At the young man's command, everyone left without any hesitation, heading directly to the south. Behind them, gold dust shone brightly; the Gold River gleamed as always.