

## Civilization 204

### Chapter 204: The Salt Mine and Salt Workers\_2

Xiulote nodded slightly. Then, his gaze shifted, observing the salt workers gathered in several clusters around him, noisy and chaotic, occasionally glancing this way.

Similar to the gold miners, the salt workers were lean and had distinct facial features. They also came from nearby villages and settlements, banding together, supporting their respective salt worker leaders. However, unlike the simple demeanor the gold miners maintained due to strict constraints, the temperament of the salt workers was far more fierce and combative.

Even with the presence of a significant figure at the salt fields, the salt workers continued to jostle and softly curse at each other. Xiulote faintly heard phrases like "south, salt road, fortune". He frowned slightly, the previous dissatisfaction accumulating in his heart. The young man looked sternly toward Bertade.

The Head Warrior bowed his head in salute, then solemnly waved forward. The accompanying elite Samurai immediately drew their war clubs and advanced in orderly trots, harshly shouting at the salt workers, "Kneel, be quiet!". Fearful, the salt workers stepped back, and most hastily fell to the ground. A minority of salt workers, resentfully cursing, retaliated but were promptly subdued by the Samurai as they skillfully swung their clubs, using the wooden blunt end to knock them down mercilessly.

Xiulote observed for a moment, the resistance of the salt workers was not worth mentioning in martial arts; they had no power to retaliate against the charging Samurai. However, they instinctively covered for each other, forming supportive squads, only to be knocked down together. This innate understanding was one of the most critical qualities in team combat and key to the coordination of the spear formation.

The young man nodded to himself. He looked at the last fallen group of salt workers and pointed at a salt worker leader at the center. Immediately, two Leather Armor Samurai approached and dragged the leader forward. About a dozen salt workers behind him tried to struggle to save their leader but were struck again, rolling on the ground in agony.

The salt worker leader was just over thirty years old, with a fierce face and an unruly arrogance that couldn't be concealed. He was pulled before Xiulote, raising his head boldly to scrutinize the young man's attire and even pausing for a moment on the young man's face.

Seeing this, Bertade's gaze turned cold. The Head Warrior stepped forward, pinched the back of the leader's neck, and then swiftly struck the man's armpit and abdomen several times. The leader's eyes first widened violently, then his pupils constricted dramatically as he let out a low moan. Subsequently, he slumped forward, falling face-first into the salty soil, saliva uncontrollably leaking from the corner of his mouth.

After a while, he regained consciousness, kneeling fearfully, not daring to raise his head again. The fierceness had vanished from his face. Sweat seeped out, forming beads that fell onto the salty soil, splashing with a faint but distinct sound.

Xiulote watched all this calmly. A deadly silence and quiet fell over the salt fields. The supervising Samurai also knelt down in salute. Merely fifty to sixty armored elite Samurai had subdued over a thousand salt workers. Untrained salt workers, however fierce, were merely unarmed civilians.

A death-like silence lasted for two quarters of an hour, the salt workers remained petrified, silent and still. Only then did the young man slightly smile. As long as the oppression was sufficient, the salt workers' discipline was actually quite feasible.

"Are you the leader of the salt workers' rebellion? What's your name?"

"Ah! Respected High Priest, I am not the leader of the salt workers, nor dare we rebel against you! I'm just... I'm just the team leader elected by our village, there are many like me. Just now, my brothers were impulsive, please..."

"What's your name?" a cold voice came from above.

"I am Moreno." Moreno dared not lift his head, his abdomen still in severe pain.

"How many salt workers are there among the nearby villages?"

"This... many villages quietly make salt, men, women, old and young alike. As many as several hundred, as few as dozens; adding up to about a thousand people here at the great salt mines, there are overall more than three thousand workers. I couldn't tell you the exact number."

Moreno's forehead was sweaty, unsure of what the Great Nobility in front of him intended.

"Moreno, if I gave you warriors and wealth, how many salt workers could you bring me?"

"This... Sir, are you dealing with the salt workers? Please spare our lives, Sir! We all do small business, even if we secretly sell a bit of salt, most revenue goes to the nobles in the capital. That little wealth, to someone like you, a Great Noble, is but an ant's leg!"

"Moreno, I'll ask you one more time, how many salt workers can you gather for me?" an authoritative voice came, carrying slight fluctuations, seemingly unwavering.

Moreno trembled slightly. Unable to see the Great Noble's expression, he could only guess the mood and thoughts of the Great Noble. He hesitated before speaking.

"Our village... can provide up to three hundred people. The salt they produce will all be offered to you."

"Well, then you are of no use to me. Someone, take him out and sacrifice him to the gods!"

The samurai immediately approached and held onto the arms of the leader of the salt miners.

Cruel fate descended from the sky, and Moreno instantly felt a chill run through his body as he cried out with all his might.

"My lord, my lord! If it's wealth you desire, I have a connection here, a tremendously profitable trade that will surely satisfy you!"

Xiulote waved his hand for the samurai to stop and looked at Moreno with interest.

"Speak."

"Respected High Priest, a great merchant from Tarasco was recently executed in the capital, apparently for having offended some Great Nobility. With his death, a huge gap has suddenly appeared in the saturated southern salt route. My brothers and I are eager to seize this money-making opportunity. Tensions among the salt miners were high, and the earlier commotion was because of this, not intended to offend you."

"The southern salt route? Heading to Mistec and Tlaxcala?" Xiulote recalled something and asked gravely.

"My lord is truly wise! With just fifty, no, thirty elite warriors and a bit of your protection, I can get involved in the southern trade. I'll hand over seventy, no, eighty percent of the profits to you! That is truly a white Gold River!"

Moreno's voice carried a slight excitement; he couldn't help but raise his voice.

Xiulote frowned. The southern trade routes to Mistec and Tlaxcala were not under the control of the Alliance; local nobles and foreign trading groups all participated. The hostile people of Tlaxcala had always managed to obtain important strategic resources from the Mexica Alliance, including salt, cotton, and even copperware.

Xiulote once again scrutinized the kneeling leader of the salt miners. Daring to be involved in such trade routes, he clearly had deep roots in the local villages. The young man pondered for a moment and asked coldly again.

"Moreno, I ask you one last time, how many salt miners can you gather for me?"

"Ah, this, my lord...I... with just fifty samurai and enough cotton, I can take control of the salt miners from the villages for you! There will certainly be two thousand men! But you must hold your own against the nobles in the capital, they are a bunch of greedy hyenas!"

Hearing this, Xiulote finally nodded slightly in satisfaction. The young man extended his left hand.

"Lift your head."

For the first time, Moreno raised his head and saw the expressionless face of the young priest, then looked at his slender left hand. After hesitating for a moment, he scanned the armor of the surrounding warriors again, contemplating the family crest on it, but still lacking in knowledge, he could not recall it.

He then glanced at the supervisor warriors, also prostrate on the ground, before gritting his teeth and crawling forward a few steps. Then, respectfully bowing his head, he mimicked the samurai's loyalty, allowing the young man's left hand to rest in his hair.

"Respected High Priest, I am ready to die for you!"

Xiulote grabbed the hair of the leader of the salt miners. He pondered for a moment and still took out the long dagger he carried with him, cutting off a lock of Moreno's hair.

"Moreno, under the witness of the Chief Divine, the 'Divine Revelator' accepts your loyalty! I will cast your hair into the sacred fire at the Priestly Temple, and report your loyalty to the all-powerful Guardian God. Take this token, and report to the High Priest's Mansion tomorrow!"

Bertade took out a jade talisman engraved with Xiulote's name and handed it to the leader of the salt miners. Moreno trembled slightly. He couldn't believe what he saw in the young man before him, then truly respectfully prostrated on the ground.

Xiulote nodded silently. He made one last survey of the vast white saline field, gazing deeply at the supervisor of the warriors, and then left surrounded by his guard. Long after he had gone, the salt miners slowly rose from the ground, looking at each other speechlessly.

The saline field was still snowy white, the salt water silently permeating, accumulating in the salt ponds forming shapes with unclear significance. Moreno held his abdomen, bowed his head, and silently watched the reflection in the salt pool. After a while, he shook his head with a bitter smile. The other salt miners also gathered around him, looking blankly at the salt pond.

In the white salt pond, the clear salt water slowly flowed, reflecting the unsteady images of people, just as their unforeseeable futures.