

## Civilization 205

### Chapter 205: An Unexpected Discovery

A group of people walked out of the large salt mine. Xiulote let out a long breath, which turned into a faint white mist in the cold, slightly damp breeze.

He looked around, the salt mine was built in a valley dense with salt springs. In the low-lying areas were extensive white saline soil, interspersed with many small brown mounds. The vast expanse looked like a world after the snow, with the slightly arched brown mounds resembling eyes gazing up at the sky.

Xiulote shook his head, bringing his thoughts back to the salt mine industry. The demand for salt was an important factor in the formation of the Central American Tribal Alliance. Only a stronger organizational connection like the Tribal Alliance could allow the vast numbers of Central American ancestors to more easily obtain essential living materials, through war or peace.

These essential living materials also included cotton to ward off the cold, obsidian for weapons and tools, and jade to satisfy religious needs. Salt, cotton, obsidian, and jade were also the strategic materials that the Mexica Alliance actively sought to control. In contrast, flashy ornaments such as gold, silver, and feathers seemed less important.

The young boy walked on in contemplation. Unintentionally, he stepped on one of the arched brown mounds, immediately lost his balance and stumbled. The mound looked dense but was actually quite loose. As soon as he stepped on it, it collapsed beneath his foot. The loose saline soil engulfed his ankles, and grains of soil seeped through the edges of his deerskin boots, falling into the plain laces of his simple socks.

Xiulote struggled to pull his foot free and as he walked on, the grainy saline soil grated painfully against the sole, with a faint sensation of skin irritation. The young man bent down to remove his footwear, but

it was as if he'd been cursed by a soil sprite. His eyes widened in shock as he stared fixedly at the brown soil, lost in thought and motionless.

"White saline ground, brown loose soil, grains like ant eggs... This is..."

Xiulote froze like a statue, with countless fragments of reality and fantasy flickering past like fleeting shadows, ultimately settling on a certain apocalyptic survival scenario. He opened his mouth in amazement and murmured softly.

Seeing the suddenly motionless young man, the surrounding Samurai looked at each other, puzzled.

Under Bertade's command, they cautiously drew their weapons, spread out to guard the area, wary of any potential enemy. The Head Warrior observed for a moment but did not disturb the young man's "Divine Revelation." He just somberly took out his longbow, angled it diagonally, and pointed an arrow towards the ground, ready for the soil sprites that could bewitch hearts according to Mexica myths. The surroundings instantly became deathly still, with silence reigning between heaven and earth.

After a moment, Xiulote gestured to the guard. His expression was unusually serious.

"Get the overseer of the salt pans here."

The guard bowed and hurried away in silence. The young man continued to look at the ground, his eyes shining with a brilliant light, deep in thought and speechless.

After a while, the round-faced overseer came from the large salt mine. Seeing the tense scene before him, sweat appeared on his forehead, and he cautiously slowed his pace. Then, urged fiercely by the guard, he reluctantly walked to the center of the Samurai's circle.

"Respected Priest, may I know your orders?"

The round-faced overseer bowed deeply, following the young man's gaze, but he saw nothing.

"What is this brown loose soil?"

Xiulote asked solemnly, pointing towards the ground.

The round-faced overseer gave another look and noticed the young man's foot trapped by the loose soil. He knelt in trepidation.

"Respected Priest, this brown loose soil has nothing to do with the large salt mine! For most of the year, it doesn't appear, and the saline land is quite convenient to traverse. Only when the cold days descend, like now in January, does this brown loose soil suddenly emerge from the land.

Legend has it that this is because the soil sprites awaken from their sleep during the cold days. They move underground, pushing the soil up, but they don't harm people. As long as spring comes, especially when the rain falls, they will sleep again."

Xiulote pondered for a moment, his eyes sparkling with insight. He asked urgently, his voice filled with eagerness.

"Is it saline soil?"

The round-faced overseer looked at the young man's face, unable to grasp what His Highness was focusing on. He carefully reported the truth.

"This brown loose soil is indeed salty saline soil. But ordinarily, the salt miners don't use it to make salt because salt made from it tastes slightly bitter and even a bit spicy. Sometimes, hunters from the mountains come to dig up some of the soil to treat hides. Since it's not used in the mine, we haven't paid it much attention."

Hearing this, Xiulote hesitated for a moment but still extended his finger, touched a bit of the brown loose saline soil, and tasted it. He noted the normal saltiness first, followed by a tinge of bitterness and a faint spiciness. A bright light shone in the young man's eyes.

"What color is the salt made from these soils?" Xiulote's tone was infused with joy.

"The color of the salt? Salt... it's all white."

The round-faced overseer kept his head down, inwardly wondering if His Highness had been bewitched by the soil sprite.

"Can the salt be burned?" the young man continued to inquire.

"Salt, burn? This... Your Highness, we have never tried it."

The round-faced overseer was utterly confused, and his certainty about his earlier assumption grew stronger.

Xiulote's expression became serious as he thought about the soil, a thrilling hypothesis gradually coming to mind.

"Saline ground, brown loose saline soil, ant-egg-sized grains. Appearing in winter, salty yet bitter and slightly spicy, this must be... this has to be saltpeter! The most important ingredient for making gunpowder!"