

## Civilization 208

### Chapter 208: Salt Fields, Obsidian, and Volcanoes

The night was deep, and after a day of exhaustion, Xiulote fell asleep beneath the starry heavens.

Dreams beneath the stars were always bright and resplendent. The Milky Way of the Middle Ages swirled with countless shining stars, much like the era's great figures emerging one by one in his dreams, carrying the distant combat and cries. That was until the immense Clark Sailing Ship came over from the horizon, and amid the booming cannons, the pale-skinned and yellow-skinned gunners exchanged fire at sea and shore, East and West. Then, the young man suddenly awoke.

He opened his eyes wide to the sky above. The morning star Qiming shone on the horizon, dawn light touched upon the East, and the God of Death had already escorted the sun, traversing the long darkness, once again rising in the sky, bringing light to this land!

Xiulote lay upon the soft dry grass, quietly watching the sunrise, inhaling the scent of withered grass mixed with salt.

Bertade's eyes were slightly closed as if in a light slumber. Sensing something, he opened his eyes and saw the daydreaming youth, cracking a slight smile. The Head Warrior had grown accustomed to the youth's "Divine Revelation" and showed only slight concern about the visions of the previous night. He believed that Xiulote was the Mexica people's dawn, the only hope for the common people, thus he gladly followed, protecting him till old age.

The old carpenter Kuode slept lightly. He had observed in silence the previous night, staring absently into the profound smoke. From the youth's agitated behavior, he sensed a hint of ominous foreboding, the smell of more life perishing.

Farther away, Moreno and his brothers slept together, restless through the night. The leader of the salt workers tossed and turned, occasionally glancing at his hands worriedly, then heaving deep sighs. He recalled the burning "salt," thought of the purple-blue smoke, and contemplated the flames under the moonlight, filled with anxiety.

"Have I been cursed by the High Priest, exchanging future lives for the sinister moon's boon?"

Moreno, the fierce, once again fell into a mire of unknown fears and confusion. Facing the dawn, he stealthily glanced at the High Priest, but saw him already up, practicing martial arts with the fearsome Head Warrior.

By the time the first rays of the sun emerged, Xiulote finally completed his daily training. Having had a simple breakfast in the Saline Soil field, the samurai were all ready to depart.

The young man first turned to Cavali, who stood waiting at the side. The supervisor's smile was filled with deep reverence.

"Cavali, you said yesterday that this brown fluffy Saline Soil only appears on cold days?"

Cavali fearfully glanced at the Saltpeter on the ground. By now, he was fully convinced of the legend of the earth spirits.

"Respected Highness, the earth spirits awaken only at the end of November to the end of February, during the coldest time of the dry season, leaving behind this soil tinged with Divinity. At other times,

it's hard to see such soil. And when the rainy season comes, the spirits slumber, and the divine soil completely disappears," said Cavali.

Xiulote pondered for a moment, considering the crucial point. Then, with a solemn expression, he made a decision and issued an order to the supervisor.

"Cavali, it is January now. From today until the end of February, I want you to direct the salt workers to collect as much of this fluffy Saline Soil as possible! The Priesthood needs this divine soil for an important ritual to summon Heavenly Divine. You are permitted to requisition the surrounding villagers to dig. The collected divine soil must be dried and stored separately from other salinities," he commanded.

Hearing of the sacrificial rite, Cavali's eyes conveyed deep reverence. But soon, awe for the myth was replaced by practical interests. He respectfully looked at the Highness, but his quietly voiced reply contained a note of refusal.

"This, Your Highness... the great salt mine has daily quotas for salt harvesting. And the salt workers have many tasks to complete..."

"Cavali, kneel down!" Xiulote's commanding presence brooked no denial.

The elite samurai immediately stepped forward, taking hold of Cavali's shoulders. They lifted their legs, striking precisely at Cavali's popliteal fossa, and the supervisor crashed painfully to his knees, his brow furrowing in agony.

"Cavali, do not think I am unaware of your dealings with the merchants! The priestly ceremony concerns the Heavenly Divine. Those who disrupt the ritual, regardless of their status, will be punished by death! Do you want to be sacrificed on the Great Temple's Sacrificial Stone?" said Xiulote.

Hearing this, Cavali bowed his head in fear, sweat streaming down his round face.

"I will seek decrees from the King and the High Priest. Starting today, most supervisors will be dismissed, leaving only four or five for handovers. I will send another sixty samurai to oversee the collection in the salt fields. Call upon the surrounding villagers! The Alliance will distribute a batch of cotton cloth as compensation. General Casal is already at leisure at home; you must understand your own value for survival!" Xiulote announced threateningly.

Hearing the real threat, Cavali finally could bear no more. He prostrated on the ground and accepted the orders.

Xiulote watched the supervisor for a while with an impassive face, ensuring his compliance. Then he turned to the silent Moreno.

"Moreno, take your loyal men, pack the Saltpeter collected yesterday, and accompany me to the Capital City. On the way, think about how we can distill more burning powder!" Xiulote ordered.

Moreno let out an internal cry of distress. The Highness, neglecting the southern trade routes rich with Gold River, instead went to refine the evil and peculiar Saline Soil. He had never heard of a ritual using such soil, fearing it might be a sacrifice to the original evil, Xipactli... With that thought, the chief of the salt workers shuddered. He only nodded respectfully, daring not to speak further.

Afterward, the salt workers again bustled about their tasks. Before long, over two hundred Temple Guards in dark War Clothes, wearing noble Beast Helmets, hurried to the entrance of the salt field.