

Civilization 211

Chapter 211 - One Hundred Nineteen: The King and the Cabinet Minister

In the dimly lit great hall, the torches on the walls burned slowly, making a faint crackling sound. The windows and doors were tightly closed, with only a slight breeze coming from the vents, stirring the red and yellow flames. The flames flickered silently, casting the faces of everyone there in a light that fluctuated suddenly between brightness and darkness, like the changing inner heart of the nobility.

Xiulote knelt in serene reverence, recalling the fleeting glimpse from just moments ago.

Having not seen him for a while, Aweit seemed to have changed a lot. His face was cold and firm like a stone carving, his gaze deep as if it were a dark pool, and his demeanor majestic and imposing. At this moment, the King was seated on his throne, his emotions distanced, carrying a breath of divinity, like an eagle soaring into the Nine Heavens, his true form difficult to perceive.

On the icy throne, Aweit watched the kneeling youth. His eyes shifted ever so slightly, then silently lowered to hide the fluctuations of his feelings. The King was lost in thought, remaining silent. Time passed in this way, and the mountain-like focus of everyone in the hall was concentrated on the youth, with only their faint breathing being heard in the vast hall.

After a long while, Aweit's thoughts finally descended from the Nine Heavens. He smiled faintly and calmly began to speak.

"Xiulote, my student, come and sit by my side," he said.

Only then did the youth raise his head, looking at the familiar yet strange smile of his friend. His heart was full of turmoil, and he stood transfixed for several seconds before he lowered his head and took his place quietly below the throne.

Observing Xiulote's behavior, Aweit's gaze softened somewhat. He reached out his hand habitually but paused mid-air. After a few breaths, he continued to place his palm on the youth's hair, feeling the soft texture beneath his palm as he mussed it up in line with his own heart's direction.

The youth sat quietly. The familiar and affectionate gesture from his friend stabilized his mood. He pondered over the words that would follow.

The seated nobles all had sharp gazes and transparent thoughts. Witnessing this scene, Gillim remained expressionless, while Stanley showed envy. The two equally robust middle-aged noblemen exchanged a glance before lowering their heads to sip the bitter-sweet cocoa in their hands.

"Xiulote, you should have met these two Cabinet Ministers: Iskali from the Royal Family and Tepopolo from Tlatelolco," Aweit said.

Aweit's smile vanished in an instant. He drew back his hand, his introduction carrying authority as he took hold of the cold Divine Staff again.

Upon hearing this, Xiulote turned toward the two robust noblemen, recalling in his mind the details his grandfather had already presented to him.

Iskali was in his forties. His gaze was indifferent, with high cheekbones and sunken temples, his face stern and strong. In Nava language, this noble name, which means the "Month of Ending," is only used

by members of the Royal Family. Hearing the King's introduction, Iskali simply nodded at Xiulote, who returned the gesture with a smile.

Iskali was a member of the Great Nobility from the Tenochtitlan Royal Family, holding jurisdiction over some Royal Warriors. He maintained neutrality during the internal wars between the brothers of the previous two kings. And when King Aweit ascended the throne, he served as an advisor in the guise of an elder of the Royal Family, becoming one of the members of the five-person Council of Politics. His backing was from many traditional nobles of the Royal Family, mostly from the Huitzilíhuítl lineage, who wielded power.

With his grandfather's detailed introductions, Xiulote managed to clear up the Royal Family's lineage. Of course, in the Mexica society that revered military power, the seniority within the Royal Family was actually not important. Even a brave warrior born out of wedlock could inherit a noble status.

The youth and Aweit shared a common ancestor from the Royal Family, Acamapichtli.

The descendants of Acamapichtli's royal lineage split into two branches, the firstborn Huitzilíhuítl and the second son Itzcoatl, both of whom successively became the rulers of Tenochtitlan. Montezuma I was a descendant of Huitzilíhuítl, from then on firmly grasping the dominant power of the Alliance.

Xiulote's grandfather, Xutel, was a descendant of Itzcoatl and younger in age. During Montezuma I's reign, he was granted a fief in the Holy City of Teotihuacan and embarked on the path of the Priesthood. According to the precepts, Xutel could not have legitimate offspring, hence the youth's father was illegitimate.

Aweit was the inheritor of the intermarried branches of the two Royal Families, representing the combination and balance of Royal power. His father was from the Itzcoatl lineage, Texosoxomoc, and his

mother was Montezuma I's eldest daughter, Atotoztli II. Although his parents were close in age, they were in the relation of uncle and niece.

Therefore, by paternal lineage, Aweit was the youth's close relative, an uncle; by maternal lineage, they were distant cousins of the same generation. In reality, within the large Royal Family, seniority didn't hold much meaning, and even blood relations could not withstand the test of power.

In Xiulote's heart, Aweit was both a teacher and a friend, and he would also become a close family member. There were multiple ties between them, as well as shared aspirations. The youth hoped to maintain pure emotions and tried to preserve sincerity, even in a future where they might soar high.

With a sigh in his heart, the youth then paid his respects to Tepopolo, who returned the gesture with a kind smile.

Tepopolo was a distinguished noble from Tlatelolco. Tlatelolco was the North City in the Lake Capital City, and it was one of the two cities first established by the Mexica people. The Tlatelolco lineage had long intermarried with the Capital Royal Family, so he was exceptionally close to the Royal Family by blood, representing the powerful interests of the Capital's Great Nobility.

Tepopolo possessed vast fiefs and thousands of private noble militia and dependent Samurai, as well as alliances with many Great Nobles. In last year's Royal civil war, he cautiously maintained neutrality and pledged allegiance to the victorious King Aweit at the first opportunity, hence becoming one of the Alliance's Cabinet Ministers.

Tepopolo was also in his forties. His Nava name meant "Destroyer, Killer, and Butcher," yet contrary to that, his brow was high, his forehead sunken, his eyes sharp yet smiling, giving him an appearance of being shrewd and amiable.

After the mutual salutations, Tepopolo smiled warmly.

"'Divine Revelator' Your Highness, your illustrious reputation is known to all in the Alliance. Many among the Nobility, myself included, have long admired you! Seeing you today confirms it—your exceptional appearance and extraordinary demeanor truly signify that you are a gift from the Heavenly Divine to the people of Mexica!"

Upon hearing these two effusive compliments, Itzcoatl raised an eyebrow and looked over coldly once more. Gillim remained expressionless as he glanced towards Xiulote, Stanley wore a look of discontent, and the King's gaze fell once again.

Xiulote was slightly taken aback. While the other's face was filled with a sincere smile, his intuition told him these praises were inappropriate. The boy smiled and nodded, saying nothing. Then, he took two steps forward, gently picked up the simple clay pot from the ground, and, under everyone's watchful eyes, returned to his seat with the pot in hand.

King Aweit opened his eyes again, calmly looking towards the boy.

"Xiulote, how is the religious reform that the elder ordered progressing? Lately, the Priesthood's activities have intensified, and you've also been absent from the Council of Politics' meetings."

Beneath the King was the Council of Politics, which directed the Alliance's military and political affairs. The five members included Intelligence Officer Gillim, heir apparent Xiulote, Commander-in-Chief Stanley, Royal Nobility Itzcoatl, and the honored Noble Tepopolo. Among them, the most trusted position of the "Female Serpent" was currently held by Gillim, while the military command firmly rested in King Aweit's hands.

Xiulote respectfully saluted and replied.

"Respected King, the religious reform has already started on the right path. The framework of the fundamental scriptures is completed, and we are gradually refining the doctrines. The establishment of the new laws is also nearing completion; both the trade law and the commoners' law will soon be announced, and after a trial period, the Noble Law will continue to be negotiated. The Church has undergone a series of rank adjustments, and literacy education is also being progressively promoted."

Hearing that the Noble Law was soon to be trialed, Aweit nodded slightly. The bear-like Stanley appeared unconcerned, his focus solely on the boy. Itzcoatl and Tepopolo exchanged looks once more, their expressions unchanged. Gillim sat solemnly in the corner, taking in every person present.

"After the fundamental scriptures are released, send me a copy to review," King Aweit instructed seriously. Then, he turned his attention to the clay pot in Xiulote's hands.

"Xiulote, do you have anything to report today?"

Xiulote nodded gravely. He opened the clay pot in his hands, revealing the sparkling and translucent saltpeter inside.

"Is this... salt?" Stanley asked, curious.

The boy first nodded, then shook his head.

"This is a kind of salt that can burn, saltpeter. It's something I've extracted from the saline soil of salt fields."

"Burning salt?" Stanley's eyes widened, showing disbelief.

Xiulote nodded solemnly.

"Yes, this salt is very important. Please allow me to demonstrate for everyone."

King Aweit's gaze fixed on the boy's face. After a moment of contemplation, he slowly nodded.

Gillim then stood up and took the clay pot from the boy's hands. He poured out a handful of the sparkling saltpeter and, at the boy's anxious hand gestures, took back most of it. Following the boy's suggestion, Gillim donned leather armor and a helmet and then used a torch to ignite the saltpeter.

In an instant, it was like a meteor shining bright. In the dimly lit hall, the saltpeter burned violently, emitting a bright light and puffing out purplish-cyan smoke, which floated up like the sigh of the Land of Death, emanating a strange mystery.

On the throne, Aweit involuntarily leaned forward, observing with great interest and amazement.

Itzcoatl and Tepopolo leaned back their heads simultaneously, their faces showing discomfort and fear. It was the first time the priestly robes on Xiulote's body entered their view, causing their suspicions to shift, silencing them instantly.

Gillim held his breath and backed away two steps, then lightly sniffed the acrid smell in the wind. Stanley gaped, the purplish-cyan smoke quickly choking him, and he started coughing repeatedly.

Amid the bear's coughing, Xiulote went to the window, pulled back the divine drapes with a sweep, and opened the sealed wooden windows. In an instant, the bright sunlight illuminated the dim hall, and the deep darkness was swept away at once. The breeze from the garden brought in a pleasant fragrance and the bustling voices, taking away the hall's heaviness and oppression.

The boy faced the sunlight satisfactorily, taking a deep breath. He turned around, smiling confidently and sincerely at the people with varying expressions.