

Civilization 217

Chapter 217 Accidental Encounter

In the following days, Xiulote was still in a hurry. He darted around the outskirts of the Lake Capital City like a breeze skimming the surface of Lake Texcoco, pursuing the light that tore through time and space.

To the southeast of the dike outside the Lake Capital City, there were two fairly large islands: one named Zakatramanko, the other Yitakata. The names of the islands roughly related to "Saltwater," "Saline Land," "Reed Thickets," which also reflected the desolate appearance of the area.

These islands, situated in the Saltwater Lake, bore no potential for transformation into Chinampa and thus remained uninhabited. Only waterbirds made their nests there, and occasionally merchants would anchor. Now, Aweit had granted both small islands to Xiulote for use as experimental fields for gunpowder research.

The young man arrived in the morning with dozens of Guard Warriors by boat. He set foot on the northern island and looked around. The island was about an hour or two away from the Capital City, secluded and deserted. Looking north, the Great Temple in the center of the Capital City stood tall and majestic, Chinampas miles away were lush and verdant, and on the lake, the constant flow of merchant fleets painted a picture of flourishing civilization. Southward, another island of his own was not far off.

Xiulote quietly observed for a while before continuing to assess the two islands. Each of the islands spanned several hundred hectares. The northern one, smaller and nearer, he named Tianhuo One, dedicated to storing saltpeter, extracting saltpeter from the soil, and attempting gunpowder formulas. The southern island, broader and more distant, was named Tianhuo Two for testing future firearms and was left idle for the time being.

The young man then explored the terrain of the islands with the Guard Warriors. Parts of the lower edges might be submerged during the flood season, necessitating the construction of mounds at the

center to elevate the ground and high platforms, which would host the research facilities. Dry warehouses were also to be built to store the extracted saltpeter and mixed gunpowder.

While inspecting, Bertade's expression suddenly changed, and he stepped forward to protect Xiulote. The Head Warrior pointed to something with his thumb, then silently drew his Longbow, fitting it with Armor-Piercing Copper Arrows.

Xiulote looked carefully into the distance, a stern expression on his face—across two or three hundred meters, a small portion of a boat peeked out from the reeds. He too took out his shield and War Club, ready for battle. Behind him, the well-trained Guard Warriors—half with bows aimed, half with clubs and shields—gradually fanned out into a circular formation, protecting their lord in their midst.

The Guard Warriors cautiously advanced to about a hundred paces, the optimal shooting distance. Bertade then signaled for his men to stop. He switched to a whistle arrow, aimed slightly, and with swift release, the sharp whistling sound came immediately. The tip of the whistle arrow was fitted with a bone whistle, and it had a blunt head to avoid causing accidental injuries.

Rustling sounds came from the reed thickets. The Guard Warriors readied their Copper Arrows, prepared to engage at a moment's notice if the figures turned out to be unidentified warriors. Bertade drew his bow and waited; after a while, the noise in the reeds faded. With a slight frown, he shouted towards the reeds.

"Who's in the reeds? Come out! If you don't show yourself, we will shoot!"

The reeds rustled again, but the people inside still did not emerge.

Without waiting further, Bertade assumed a solemn expression and waved his left hand forward. Over twenty Armor-Piercing Copper Arrows flew out, piercing the air, to nail themselves around the wooden boat in the reeds. Several cries of surprise sounded, followed by frantic and frightened replies.

"Stop, stop! We are not enemies, we are the diligent and loyal citizens of the Capital City!"

The Head Warrior frowned again, looking at Xiulote who, after a moment's thought, nodded slightly. It indeed seemed they were not enemies.

"Come out from the reeds, all of you!" Bertade ordered once again, raising his voice.

After a moment, five or six trembling figures emerged from the reeds. The Guard Warriors immediately aimed their Longbows at their vital points.

Xiulote first looked at their hands; they were empty, save for Short Daggers at their waists. Then, the young man took in their attire. None wore armor, only long robes and cloaks that concealed their figures; both garments were of unobtrusive colors and simple patterns. At a glance, they resembled the common citizen's attire, but upon closer inspection, they were made of fine fabric. Some had Conical Hats with wide brims partially covering their faces.

The youngster was somewhat puzzled; this appearance... It always gave him a mysteriously familiar feeling.

After observing for a while, Bertade determined this was only a group of suspicious civilians. He scanned the reed thickets once more, now silent. Then, the Head Warrior gestured, and a surge of Leather Armor-clad warriors tackled the suspects. They removed the Conical Hats, stripped away the capacious

cloaks and long robes, confiscated the Daggers from their waists, and after a thorough search, nodded to the Head Warrior.

Bertade nodded slightly, shifting the Longbow's direction. He then pointed to the dense reeds, and ten warriors entered cautiously. After a brief search, they returned, carrying several small clay pots and two dark cloth bags.

"Your Highness, there are two small boats inside; one has over a dozen luxurious pots of Herbs and spices, and the other carries a bag of Gold Dust and several bags of salt," reported a Guard Warrior to Xiulote.

Xiulote turned to look at the Head Warrior.

Bertade took a marked pot, opened it, and felt around inside. A rich fragrance wafted out—only Luwei fruit. Then he opened two cloth bags: one held heavy, gleaming Gold Dust, the other grayish-white table salt.