

Civilization 218

Chapter 218 Accidental Encounter_2

The Head Warrior finally breathed a sigh of relief. He nodded at the youth, signaling confirmation.

Xiulote pondered silently. The Alliance had recently enacted trade laws, imposing heavy taxes on luxury goods. Clearly, this was an illicit trade of luxury goods taking place in secret, not intending to pay taxes according to the law. On one side was a merchant with connections, while the other possessed large quantities of gold dust and salt, likely a member of the Capital City's Great Nobility with a fief.

Xiulote stepped forward a few paces, closely observing the faces of the individuals. Two of them, upon seeing the youth's High Priest attire, changed their expressions. They instinctively bowed their heads, only to be forced to look up as the samurai gripped their chins. After scrutinizing the two individuals for a long while, the youth had no recollection of them in his mind and turned towards another.

After looking for a moment, Xiulote let out a soft "Eh," for among them was actually an acquaintance he had seen before.

"I remember you, you're a merchant from the Capital City market, the owner of a luxury goods store. What's your name?"

What the youth didn't mention was that he had personally witnessed this merchant buying honey at a low price and reselling it at a markup. In just a quarter of an hour, the profits made were three to four times the initial cost, which made a deep impression on him.

"Ah, no, I'm not... Respectable sir, you must be mistaken..."

The merchant had not finished his words when he saw the young Priest's brow furrow slightly. Then, his hair was gripped tightly as the middle-aged samurai behind him placed a war club against his neck. A chill ran down the merchant's neck followed by a slight pricking sensation. The sharp edge had already cut through the skin, and a slow seep of crimson marked the breach.

"Yes, I am! I am Ocatel from the Capital City market!...Sir, you remember me. I must have served you before, please spare my life!"

Ocatel was terrified out of his wits. The sight before the frightened merchant: the High Priest in black robes, the fifty to sixty elite samurai in Leather Armor, and the several dozen powerful Longbows. He was too heartbroken to cry as the threat of the distant weapons prevented even his prepared escape plan.

All he did was sell a few jars of Herbs to his regular customers and make a small profit discreetly. Even if it violated the recently enacted trade laws, was it necessary to mobilize so many senior Temple Guards? Judging by their equipment and numbers, this force was sufficient to attack an ordinary Noble's manor!

With this thought, the merchant finally let the tears of grievance flow.

Xiulote looked at the merchant with an expressionless face. He first raised his hand, and the middle-aged samurai threatening the merchant stopped his actions. Next, he pointed towards the two who had been bowing their heads earlier, and the warriors escorted them aside. Then, the youth approached Ocatel. With a quick shove to the knees by the middle-aged samurai, the merchant knelt in pain, eliminating the need for His Highness to look up.

Afterward, Xiulote began to interrogate Ocatel with authority. The merchant started out talking nonsense, prompting the youth to frown again. The middle-aged warrior understood and applied pressure several times, gauging it just right. Soon, amidst the great terror of life and death uncertainty, Ocatel's psychological defenses finally collapsed. He confessed the truth while sobbing.

The trade laws had only been enacted for a few days, yet the formal trading of luxury goods in the Capital City market had significantly decreased. The local merchants were unwilling to bear the high taxes and began to conduct secret trades. Having been rooted locally for many years and maintaining long-standing cooperation with the Capital City Nobility, they were familiar with the local conditions and sentiments, so they moved the trading venues.

With the Temple Guards now patrolling the Capital City and Priests' influence in each community being strong, the local merchants and Nobility eventually shifted their covert trading spots to hidden islands in the lakes. This island, covered with reeds as tall as a man and not far from the Capital City, was chosen by Ocatel as his exclusive spot for illicit trade.

With the New Year Sacrificial Rites about to begin, the Nobility all had considerable demand for luxury goods. Nearly every day, Ocatel would come here to trade with different Nobles, sometimes with a member of the Great Nobility, other times with several lesser Nobles. Occasionally, he would encounter competitors; they would tacitly avoid each other while carefully guarding against possible reports.

Today, Ocatel had brought two Escorts to trade with the servants of a member of the Capital City's Great Nobility. In the most secluded part of the reeds, they exchanged Herbs and spices for gold dust and salt produced from the fief. He also had connections to sell this salt.

"It's said that now there are even members of the Great Nobility who specialize in mediating trades. They provide guarantees for low-taxed transactions on their own fiefs for foreign merchants who come from afar and are unknown."

In the end, Ocatel, crying profusely, revealed a vague yet significant piece of information.

Hearing all this, Xiulote frowned deeply, as the enforcement of trade laws was evidently not going smoothly.

The autonomy of the Great Nobility was simply too vast. They had enough power, as well as enough greed, to defy the Alliance's trade laws. Should inspections become too stringent, luxury goods trade would largely shift into the fiefs of the Great Nobility. It would be difficult for the Alliance to intervene directly without resorting to military force.

The force of the law of the Alliance always closely correlated with the Government's control. This was the same with various kinds of taxes; regions would withhold Tribute to different extents based on their level of autonomy, coupled with bureaucratic corruption.

In the end, the actual revenue of the Government would balance out between local control, autonomy, and the degree of corruption. Xiulote termed this as taxation efficiency.

In this era, most taxes in a feudal state would flow into the pockets of Nobility, Officials, and the elite, especially towards the end of a dynasty. For example, more than a hundred years later in the Ming Dynasty...

Xiulote shook his head, drawing his wandering thoughts back to the present. He looked at Ocatel weeping on the ground, lost in thought.