

Civilization 236

Chapter 236 Faction Force

Xiulote strode out from the papermaking area, leaving behind an imposing figure that, though not large, inspired fear and admiration in the eyes of the craftsmen. It wasn't until he had turned a corner and walked a bit further that he stopped, his heart stirring with emotion.

He stamped his foot briefly, then calmly lifted his head to look at the sky. The sun blazed fiercely, its light bright and clear, and beneath the dome of the Eastern sky, several columns of blue smoke rose clearly. Once the samurai arrived, he headed straight there.

Charcoal burning and brick firing required a lot of raw materials and took up a large area, so they were set up on the periphery to the east of the Divine Revelation Place, near convenient waterways. This area belonged to the outskirts of the city, known for its beautiful scenery, and was previously populated with many estates of the Texcoco nobility, adorned with gardens, green willows, and flowing waters amidst the pine trees.

However, after the blood sacrifices, the Great Nobility of Texcoco went to the Divine Kingdom, and the lesser nobility was detained for re-education—thus, these miles of land were requisitioned by the Divine Revelation Place. Now, parts of the nobility estates were converted into research centers, and the rest served as quarters for samurai and artisan communities. As for the local thousands of civilians, only a few could move away, the majority were subsumed into the jurisdiction of the Divine Revelation Place and henceforth enrolled into the military service, used as labor for *corvée*.

In a classical military society, everything is subordinated to military concerns, and administration is often crude, forceful, and direct in its effectiveness.

According to Xiulote's plan, all craftsmen involved in important projects would be moved here to form a new isolated community, relying on divided water channels. Within this community, households would

be registered, samurai would be stationed to accomplish personal control over the craftsmen, and at the same time, sectors would be established, priests dispatched to strengthen ideological guidance over the craftsmen. Outside the community, watch posts would be set up, tightly sealed, prohibiting the approach of unrelated individuals.

His line of thought came from the Venetians on Murano Island: isolating advanced production craftsmen, controlling the formulas for glass and mirrors, promoting research incentives, and minimizing the leakage of technology. Of course, it would be a full twenty-four years before the birth of the first Venetian mirror. And the secret of wealth from the Venetian mirrors would endure for one hundred and fifty years.

The group hastened on, grand and spirited, winding through houses and waterways, and soon reached the lakeshore.

Xiulote lifted his gaze and surveyed the surroundings, not far off was the shimmering water of Lake Texcoco. Continuous boat fleets worked day and night, the rowers sweating profusely, accompanied by samurai in armor, sharp and ready. They transported food and supplies to the northern camps, and then returned to the capital city carrying tributes from various states, making the round trip within a month, alternating back and forth, extending the Empire's roots to the distant places reached by rivers.

The young man paused for a moment and looked to the north with a distant gaze, his thoughts flying far away.

"A siege in October, and now the month is nearing its end. The Elder has postponed the New Year's sacrificial rites time and again—is he perhaps awaiting news from the north? Reform ultimately requires the sacrifice of life, both ours and our enemy's.

And the new year's tributes have already begun. Will the vassals to the north and south dare to refuse their tribute? The Mexica people's wars have never ceased, the Mexica people's wars are about to begin... What the Divine Revelation Place will bring is an unprecedented war to end all wars!..."

Xiulote quietly watched the scene before him. Not far off, the commoners paddled small boats, dragging floating rafts of wood in the water, laden with fine-grained clay, turning from the lake edge into the waterways. Then, under the oversight of the samurai, they unloaded the timber and clay into this newly established military artisan area.

Next, the timber would be dried and split into firewood to be used as raw material for charcoal burning; the clay would be piled up for tempering and shaped into brick moulds. The drying of wood and the accumulation of clay both took a considerable amount of time, often months, and the raw materials being used at this time all came from the stock. Splitting firewood, tempering clay, and making moulds were all highly labor-intensive processes.

In the young man's view, hundreds of commoners kept their heads down and worked busily along the open banks, using rudimentary stone tools. Far away came the cracking sounds of wood splitting and the scraping sounds of mould making.

Several tens of stationed samurai were scattered throughout the center and perimeter. They grouped in pairs, using blunt wooden sticks to spar with each other for amusement. On the ground between the sparring partners were scattered possessions, and the surrounding samurai watched intently, likely gambling on the outcomes. A little further away, a few middle-aged samurai leaned against the shadows of large trees, squinting as they rested.

This place, far from the strict Divine Revelation Place and merely tasked with overseeing some valueless wood and clay, clearly had a relaxed discipline among the samurai.

Xiulote's brows slightly furrowed, then relaxed again.

The place wasn't of immediate importance, and it wouldn't be right to be too harsh on loyal and dedicated samurai of the direct lineage. Even though gambling had been prohibited by the teachings, it hadn't yet become widespread. Gambling had always been difficult to eradicate within military ranks, and as long as it didn't grow too large or impact military strength, it was reluctantly acceptable.

And such a form of martial contest was indeed conducive to enhancing the samurai's combat power and venting their excess energy, making it worth promoting. As for the consolidation of military discipline, that would have to wait until before the battle.

In an instant, myriad thoughts raced through the youth's mind. Then, he slightly raised his head, gazing at the blue smoke close at hand and the mounds of earth beneath it where charcoal was being burned, calmly waiting.

A light and shrill eagle's cry echoed from beneath the trees, startling the stationed samurai like alarmed big cats, making them leap up at the sound. They looked around cautiously, and upon seeing the elite Guard Warriors, they quickly understood. The samurai, displaying remarkable talent in ball games, kicked the treasures on the ground with precision, sending them into the piles of earth and underbrush. Then they jogged to regroup, standing in strict formation. The middle-aged samurai under the trees also straightened their backs, standing guard in a staggered formation.

Witnessing the samurai's reaction, Xiulote nodded slightly. The youth's gaze shifted and he saw an older middle-aged samurai walking steadily from under the trees. His eyes were like copper bells, his cheekbones protruded high, his body was sturdy, and he looked rather fierce, yet his face was filled with a familiar smile.

Seeing the old samurai's kind smile, Xiulote also smiled faintly.

This place was quite important in his future plans, naturally it was entrusted to Etalik, a trustworthy elder from the Holy City, and a civilian samurai. The old samurai Etalik, guard Elvi his grandfather, and saltpeter overseer Esko were all from the same clan and had guarded the Butterfly Palace. They had followed the Holy City's Royal Family for generations.

With the expansion of the Holy City's lineage, these vassal-like private samurai were gradually promoted. They took up mid-level positions in various places, expanding the influence of the Holy City and also becoming a natural faction within the new military-political group of the Alliance. Xiulote's branch of the Royal Family, precisely by relying on these loyal direct-force samurai, was able to hold onto the real central power and establish a firm foothold in the Capital City.

The covert opposition between the young man and Aweit was not just about the supreme power but also about the different royal factions. Both royal branches had their own foundations, connected by blood, yet there was a contradiction in power.

Driven by the forces of different factions, they were unable to cooperate as intimately or trustfully inside and out like Montezuma I and the elders who were brothers. Only by merging the two royal branches into one in the distant future could they once again mesh together and reconstruct a balance of power!

For now, relying on his direct-line vassals, Xiulote could implement his own will, rather than execute the King's. These vassal samurai, inheriting through generations, were a solid and united force of people's hearts, something that the rough-and-tumble heroes often lacked.

Soon, Etalik approached the young man with a smile. He knelt on one knee and offered a blessing in a low, respectful voice.

"Your Highness, I pray for you. May the 'Heavenly Dog' protect the sun, and may it rise in the sky."

Hearing this, Bertade's eyes brightened, examining the old samurai carefully and smiling kindly at him, to which the other returned the gesture knowingly.

Xiulote pondered for a moment and shook his head lightly with resignation. He meant to offer a couple of reminders.

"Etalik, when stationed on the outside, it is still best to be cautious."

Etalik smiled understandingly and replied.

"Rest assured, Your Highness, the samurai may appear relaxed but are actually very alert. Someone is always keeping an eye on the key positions; nothing will go wrong with these craftsmen!"

Hearing this, Xiulote observed the middle-aged samurai under the trees once more, noting their open eyes, the javelins they carried, and the positions they controlled... The youth slowly nodded his head.

After a few more words, Etalik respectfully led the way ahead. He pinched his lower lip, and the eagle's cry rang out once more, prompting the samurai to spread out and keep watch. The old samurai then led His Highness towards the smoke-wreathed charcoal pit, where the craftsmen, faces smeared with soot, waited reverently.