

Civilization 252

Chapter 252: Trial Production of Gunpowder

The wind of February swept across Lake Texcoco, bringing with it a hint of chill. The winter sunlight was bright and dry, yet it warmed one a bit.

Early in the morning, Xiulote set out with over a hundred escorts on a large boat of the Naval Forces to inspect the production of saltpeter and gunpowder. Dozens of boats sliced through the lake's morning sun, and in less than a quarter hour, they arrived at an island of heavenly fire within the Eastern salt lake.

Small boats had already gone ahead to report; the saltpeter manager Esko had already led the people to wait at the makeshift port. As the fleet moored at the shore, the Head Warrior Bertade waved his hand and gave an order. More than a hundred Samurai immediately landed on the port, swiftly inspected the surroundings, then spread out vigilantly and stood guard with strict attention.

Xiulote shook his head. More than two weeks earlier, the Noble Law had just been promulgated, instantly sparking heated discussions. Soon, the Royal Family and the Priesthood mobilized over a thousand Samurai to arrest more than a dozen hereditary nobles from Tlacopan, directly sentencing them to be sacrificed. Faced with such thunderous pressure, the nobles around the lake region were once again deterred, forced to fall silent.

Afterwards, in the fiefs of the nobles, village Priests began to intervene in management according to the new Noble Law, participating in the collection of tribute for the new year. These tributes, which were doubled from previous years, flowed continuously from around the lake region, replenishing the increasingly tense treasury of the Alliance. Beneath the calm surface of the Capital City, undercurrents surged everywhere.

The number of Xiulote's escort Samurai had doubled and the boat had changed from a swift skiff to a stable large boat. The Head Warrior became even more vigilant and careful, guarding the prince's side day and night. Only after all the Samurai had completed their inspection did Xiulote finally go ashore.

Over half of February had passed, almost a month since his last visit.

Xiulote looked around; on the outside of the island were the patrolling Naval Forces, and by the lake was a simple port. Streams of smoke rose from the outer side of the island—those were the bonfires for boiling saltpeter. Short-shirted salt workers busied themselves laboriously by the saltpeter pools and firesides, while a bit further were the resting thatched cottages. At the center of the island, there were already a dozen large wooden houses and several dozen small thatched huts. At the large wooden houses, one could faintly see long-shirted female workers bustling about, carrying various pottery jars in haste.

Between the outer side and the center of the island was a simple circle of fences, dozens of upright wooden frames, and several flapping banners of the gods. Mexica Samurai patrolled inside and outside the fences, monitoring and urging loudly.

Xiulote nodded in greeting, lifting up Esko who had kneeled to pay respects. He smiled slightly in approval and asked,

"It's been some days since I last saw it, but this place is in good order and quite thriving. How much saltpeter is in storage now? And what is the daily production in pounds?"

Based on the memories of his past life, the young man roughly revised the system of weights and measures. Now, at the Divine Revelation Place and elsewhere, weight was measured in pounds, length in meters, and time in quarters and hours. Of course, these basic units could not be measured accurately, but they were sufficient for the time being.

Upon hearing the prince's inquiry, Esko's face showed panic. He bowed deeply, once again kneeling to the ground.

"Your Highness, the number of salt workers has now increased to over a hundred. There have been improvements in the extraction of saltpeter, and the current output is just over a hundred pounds a day, consuming slightly less than two thousand pounds of saltpeter soil... As for the stockpile, there is roughly less than a thousand pounds of saltpeter currently stored..."

At these words, Xiulote frowned slightly, his tone stern.

"Esko, production has been going on for twenty or thirty days; why is there only a thousand pounds of saltpeter in stock?"

The saltpeter manager bowed his head to the ground, replying in a low voice.

"Your Highness, this is my fault. About ten days ago, a salt worker entered the warehouse, and somehow, the stacked saltpeter suddenly ignited furiously. Flames rose and expanded, blowing the entire wooden house apart, with large chunks of wood flying dozens of meters. That salt worker died on the spot, his body scattered everywhere. Several other salt workers around him were also killed or injured..."

Your Highness, I have already beheaded that group of salt workers, and their heads are hung on the wooden frames, urging the other workers to intensify production by day and night. Now the island is divided into two layers, inner and outer. The outer layer is for the filtration of saltpeter soil, with over a hundred salt workers sleeping right beside the saltpeter pools. One half of the inner layer is for saltpeter

storage, the other half for gunpowder testing. The warehouse is managed by dedicated personnel, and idle people are not allowed inside..."

Xiulote's expression was serious. He watched the Holy City Samurai kneeling on the ground for a while, then lifted his head, observing the inside and outside of the island. The salt workers and female workers were orderly, and dozens of heads hung on the wooden frames in-between. The Samurai were conducting their rounds without a hint of slack.

After a long silence, Xiulote spoke calmly.

"Take twenty lashes, bear your guilt and seek merit. Speed up production, and do not err again!"

Upon hearing this, Esko finally breathed a sigh of relief. He bowed vigorously before standing up, stripped off his upper garment, took a water-soaked whip, and without hesitation whipped it across his chest and back, producing a heavy, forceful slapping sound. Shortly, fresh blood began to seep from the Samurai's front and back, dripping onto the ground and staining his feet red.

After twenty lashes were done, Xiulote gave a slight gesture. The Head Warrior immediately stepped forward, applying the prepared medicine to Esko's wounds and then wrapping them in steamed cotton cloth.

Esko's face twitched, and he bore the pain to express his thanks. After only a brief pause, he then led the prince to inspect the center of the island. Soon, they reached the largest saltpeter processing site.

The chief salt worker Moreno knelt reverently before the bonfire. Above the fire was a pot for boiling saltpeter, waves of pungent odor wafted through the air. At that moment, his head slightly bowed, his

face had thinned considerably, the fierceness in his expression deeply concealed, much like a submissive house dog.

Below that bowed head, the chief salt worker occasionally stole glances at the bloodied Esko, feeling a pang of thrilling retribution mixed with a subconscious fear and dread.