

Civilization 292

Chapter 292 Longbow Militia

The sun set in the west, casting an endless array of splendid evening glows, releasing a golden radiance that lit up the skies of the Divine Kingdom as if igniting a sacred fire.

Beneath the skies, in the encampment amidst the forested mountains, the accompanying priests swiftly erected a simple altar. They kindled a towering Sacred Fire before the altar and then chanted ancient and profound hymns, enveloping the campsite in a mysterious atmosphere.

Xiulote donned a magnificent ceremonial dress and stood authoritatively upon the altar. Peering through the flames before him, he looked towards the awed, kneeling tribal hunters and intoned loudly,

"Praise our god Huitzilopochtli!... Offer sacrifices to Him!"

Upon hearing His Highness's command, Toltec carried out a freshly caught wild deer, respectfully approaching the altar. He knelt on one knee, lowered his head, and pressed the deer firmly onto the altar. Meanwhile, a priest held the deer's head and placed a wide clay basin below its slender neck.

Only then did Xiulote draw out the obsidian dagger for the sacrifice, praying loudly with a solemn expression. Suddenly, his voice halted, and his movements became swift and forceful. The sacrificial dagger sliced through the deer's neck, breaking through the soft resistance, allowing the warmth of life to flow out, steadily filling the clay basin. The deer struggled fiercely for a few moments, firmly restrained by the robust Toltec, and soon lay motionless.

Xiulote stood up and continued chanting, calling for the arrival of the Chief Divine. Samurai and priests carried out the subsequent procedures. Shortly after, the entire deer was cast into the blazing bonfire, and the scent of burning flesh and blood quickly permeated the air. Then, the smell of roasting meat shifted to the acrid odor of charring. The blood in the clay basin was prepared into blood wine, poured into a row of clay cups, and placed beside the Sacred Fire to be warmed by the flames.

Observing the faces below him, full of reverence and obedience, Xiulote nodded in satisfaction. This was a holocaust wherein every bit of flesh was sacrificed through the flames to the Chief Divine, with the burning "fragrance" praising the sacrifices, expressing inner piety. This type of sacrificial rite was widespread in the Zhou Dynasty offerings, initially with humans and later with cattle as sacrifices. In the doctrines of the Cross Sects, it was considered the best sacrifice, often employing sheep or birds as the sacrifices.

Xiulote was always pushing for religious reform. Whenever he was in charge, he would use animal sacrifices instead of the common practice of human ones.

The young priest no longer dwelled on thoughts. He loudly chanted the next part of the ritual.

"Praise our god Huitzilopochtli!... Offer Him your entire body, heart, and soul!"

This was the loyalty oath segment, where priests sprinkled sulfur powder into the bright yellow Sacred Fire, causing the flames to turn a ghostly blue instantly, the pungent smell assaulting the senses as if connecting to another world.

The chieftains of the tribes, unable to suppress their fear, were hastened by the samurais towards the altar. They faced the burning Sacred Fire, knelt forcefully before the priests, and bowed their heads deeply. Then, the priests mercilessly shaved off their hair, tossing years of grown locks into the fire. The

flames rose high, and the black smoke carried the converts' spirits into the Divine Kingdom, into the hands of the Chief Divine.

Xiulote proclaimed with solemnity,

"The Chief Divine is almighty... He watches over you at all times, granting you light, food, and offspring. He holds your souls, deciding your posthumous fate, whether it be the Divine Kingdom or the Abyss... From now on, you are the Chief Divine's faithful, as well as His warriors, fighting to spread the Chief Divine's glory!"

After promising rewards in this world and the next, Xiulote took out over twenty Sun Amulet necklaces, placing one around each chieftain's neck. This was a reward for their loyalty, as well as a symbol of their conversion. Then, the chieftains guzzled the deer blood wine and grasped the front of their silver necklace, the pure gold Sun Hummingbird. Feeling the Divine Symbol in their hands, they sang the Chief Divine's praises while kneeling, repeating His divine name under the priests' guidance.

In the midst of the noble ritual and the mystical atmosphere, hunters came up in groups, shaving off all their hair, drinking the pungent blood wine, and then praying to the Chief Divine while kneeling together. They altered their bodies, henceforth keeping their hair cut short to prove their devotion and slightly increase their agility. They had been imbued with faith, from that time on devoted to the Chief Divine, their loyalty to the Alliance maintained through religious ideals.

Xiulote, representing the divinities, stood majestically on the altar until the loyalty ceremony was over. He looked at the bald-headed hunters below, then at the new-style longbows resembling Japanese bows, and his lips curved into a slight smile.

"They should also be distributed a cotton robe and wrapped in a headscarf," the young man remembered the classic monk soldier attire, chuckling softly in his heart yet nodding with a solemn face.

As the lengthy ritual concluded, the sun had already dipped below the horizon, and the skies were filled with countless stars. In the parade ground, more bonfires were lit, and the aroma of food began to spread—the start of the evening banquet.

At the most central bonfire, Xiulote changed into a relaxed samurai attire and joyfully drank and feasted, surrounded by his followers. As the feast warmed up, newly converted tribal chieftains respectfully came together. They wanted to offer a dance to the revered and sacred "Great Chief."

Xiulote graciously accepted. He sat cross-legged in the center, receiving the tribute from all. Thousands of tribespeople began singing ancient mountain ballads, praising heroes and ancestors, their desolate voices drifting into the distance. Elderly hunters played the bamboo flute and bone ocarinas, the flutes' melodious sounds and the ocarinas' rustic tones intertwined as if they were the natural music of the heavens.