

Civilization 63

Chapter 63 Covenant

Clad in a simple straw raincoat and wearing a broad hat woven from reeds, Xiulote led the Messenger Acap through the camp. The large raindrops struck the wide brim of the hat, their pitter-patter drowning out all other sounds between heaven and earth.

"How did Grandfather come to know Aweit?" the youth asked curiously. In his previous memories, he had not heard any information on this matter.

"The High Priest and the Royal Family of Tenochtitlan definitely knew each other. He is also a royal elder who has come from the time of Montezuma I. Becoming the High Priest of Teotihuacan was inseparable from the strong support of Montezuma I," Acap explained gently.

"However, the High Priest had always kept a neutral distance from the legitimate lineage of the Capital's Royal Family," Acap sighed softly, his eyes filled with tenderness as he looked at the youth. "When you were taken away by the King, the High Priest had two restless days of sleep. After that, he made up his mind to secretly contact the King's brother and ask for his help in looking after you."

Xiulote nodded with some enlightenment. In the world of adults, every act of kindness has its original source. Under Tizoc's suspicion, his situation had once become very dangerous. If it weren't for Aweit's secret help, he might have already faced a grim fate.

The two quickly arrived at the grand tent. Seeing the youth and the Messenger, the Commander laughed heartily and strode forward. He warmly grasped both of their arms, pulling them into the tent with an air of familiarity that transcended formality.

Acap smiled helplessly, apparently also having met Aweit several times. He removed his straw raincoat and hat, solemnly paid his respects to the King's brother, and only then did the three of them sit cross-legged inside the grand tent.

The thick cotton cloth isolated the wind and rain outside, providing a sense of intimate warmth and safety. The campfire flickered in the brazier, drying the rain on their bodies and casting a flickering light on their faces. The tent was momentarily silent.

After a long while, seemingly having completely dried off, Acap spoke calmly, "Your Highness Aweit, before I set out, I received an urgent message. The people of Tlaxcala have amassed on a large scale at the northeast border of the Alliance. Nearly eighty thousand of the Four States' Allied Forces are estimated, with about forty thousand Samurai."

"The City-States in the eastern part of Mexica have been mobilizing, calling up Militia and Samurai. Atotoztli, the most bordering State, has urgently requested help from the Alliance. When I was coming here, four of the six legions beneath Xilotepec City had already crossed the Tampen River, moving towards Atotoztli."

Aweit nodded calmly, obviously already aware of this news: "Atotoztli has been a long-standing battleground, replete with fortresses and sturdy City-States, not so easily to fall. The Tlaxcala people may not be able to sustain the heavy casualties of a siege attack."

"It's just that the legion commanders of the eastern City-States have long wanted to withdraw, stirring up a fuss in the camp with this news. Hence, Tizoc decided to dispatch four legions there, to silence everyone's mouths."

Although not in Otapan's besieging camp, the Chief Intelligence Officer knew everything that happened in the camp as if he had seen it with his own eyes.

"After over a year of campaigning, the Samurai are eager to return home," Xiulote nodded in agreement. He often talked with ordinary Samurai and the lowest-ranking Militia, knowing that everyone had lost their passion for war. In this difficult rainy season, homesickness pervaded the army. Only thanks to the Commander's prestige and recent victories did the troops maintain their morale.

"Based on the mobilization of the Tarasco and Tlaxcala people," Acap spoke seriously, "the High Priest concluded that our enemies have united together, preparing to rescue the ancestral lands of the Otomi people, to prevent them from being utterly conquered by the Alliance."

Xiulote's expression became grave. During this year's spring plowing, he had experienced an attack. This assault had already revealed signs of a coalition between the Otomi, Tarasco, and Tlaxcala people.

"Therefore, the High Priest believes that the next key point is Xilotepec City. He has already sent Scouts to keep an eye on this Otomi City at all times. Because our enemies would not forget how crucial this position is, especially since it still harbors eight thousand Samurai."

Aweit praised softly with a clap of his hand, "The eagle's gaze is always the same distance away, while the ground mouse only fixates on the food before it. Xilotepec City is just pretending to submit. They are like a venomous snake pressed under a stone, and the moment the stone is lifted, they will certainly bite."

"Does that mean Xilotepec City could rebel at any moment?" Xiulote asked curiously, "With an unstable rear, the King should withdraw the troops as soon as possible, shouldn't he?"

"The ground mouse lured by the food in front will not be driven away, except for the instant the fox pounces," Aweit said with a smile, no longer disguising his disdain for the King.

"Totec has already advised Tizoc several times, but the King insists on not withdrawing, intent on laying siege for another three months to capture Otapan City. He has just repeatedly urged the Capital, sending a new batch of troops to fill the camp below Xilotepec City. The King's prestige has been almost spent, and taking Otapan City has become his psychological bottom line."

Aweit turned his head and looked at the youth seriously, "Xiulote, do you remember what I've told you? If you can't maintain your bottom lines, they become weaknesses, and a great ruler cannot have weaknesses!"

"Because weaknesses bring death!" the youth blurted out. Death? The death of Tizoc? His understanding was complete, yet he felt a shiver of dread.

Acap nodded, "Thank you, Your Highness, for your teachings to Xiulote. He has indeed grown a lot."

"Xiulote is an outstanding youth and a good successor." Aweit smiled, looking at the youth with a rare tenderness in his eyes, "He is my student and my friend. I see many traces of my own past in him and also the shadow of my grandfather Montezuma I. He has the potential to be an excellent ruler."

Acap smiled and then suddenly performed a deep bow towards Aweit, "Your Highness. The High Priest is willing to form an alliance with you and offers the loyalty of the Teotihuacan lineage to help you realize your grand vision. But we also hope that you can return a favor, one substantial enough to give us peace of mind."

"A favor?" Aweit pondered for a moment, "Xiuxoke, the Legion Commander, has enough merits to become a Third Level Noble and to take charge of Teotihuacan City. Xiulote can become the successor to Chief Priest Quetzal of the Great Temple in the Capital, so that when he grows up, he can hold the positions of both Chief Priest and High Priest, unifying the two major priesthoods of the Alliance."

"Moreover, I can earmark five hundred hectares from the twenty-five hundred hectares of chinampa directly owned by the Royal Family to the Teotihuacan lineage. That should be enough to support the nurturing of two new Noble families in the Capital!"

The youth was somewhat surprised. One hectare of chinampa could support twenty people, meaning five hundred hectares could provide for ten thousand people. Tenochtitlan had only nine thousand hectares of chinampa in total. In the vast Celestial Empire, this was the treatment of nobility, let alone in the Aztec Alliance with its current population of three million.

"Thank you for your generous offer, Your Highness, but the gift of five hundred hectares of chinampa is too lavish, we dare not accept it," Acap solemnly shook his head. Taking one-fifth of the Royal Family's land would make them a mark for everyone; it was a road leading to certain ruin in the future.

Then, with a sly smile, he added, "You've said that Xiulote is your student and your friend. Have you considered taking it a step further?"

"What do you mean? A Priest cannot..." Aweit's face showed surprise; as clever as he, he instantly understood the implication.

"If the plan of the High Priest and Your Highness comes to pass, then there won't be an issue of what can or cannot be done." Acap smiled gently, revealing a hint of sharpness.

"The High Priest has heard that the eldest daughter of your chief wife is eleven years old, gentle and wise, lovely and beautiful, the purest white lotus of the lake city. He has specifically sent me to inquire: Would the Hummingbird of Teotihuacan have the fortune to settle upon the lotus of Tenochtitlan, awaiting the blessed blossoming?" After finishing his solemn message, Acap performed another deep bow, awaiting the Commander's response.

"This..." Aweit, unusually flustered, paced back and forth in the tent, glancing at Xiulote with a complex expression several times, before letting out a soft sigh, reaching out to touch Xiulote's face.

The youth was somewhat baffled, not yet grasping what was happening.

"My dear Alisa is still young and has not been promised to anyone. And Xiulote is indeed a good child," sighed Aweit again. Unable to hold back any longer, he tightened his grasp and pinched the student's cheek hard.

Pain, pain, so much pain, the youth cried out softly.

"Once we return to the Capital, let's betroth Alisa to Xiulote!" the Commander retracted his hand, feeling somewhat relieved at heart, and then announced his decision with a serious expression.

"The Teotihuacan lineage will be your most loyal ally, unwavering in the face of the Sun God's witness! And your enemies will be our enemies, no matter who they are!" Acap lifted his head, placed his fist over his chest, and vowed with the same seriousness.

"Nani?!" Xiulote was utterly dumbfounded and speechless. He rubbed his reddened cheek; it hurt, this wasn't a dream. What had he just heard? Were they really betrothed now? The youth looked up at Acap, who smiled back reassuringly. Then he looked at Aweit, who gave him a fierce glare,

"I'm only thirteen years old!" In the end, the youth let out an incredulous shout in his heart.