

Civilization 73

Chapter 73 Saving People

Time is always elusive, its pace shifting with the emotions of the heart. In the hushed grand tent, it seemed as if a moment had passed, yet also like a century.

Kuluka lay prostrate on the ground, like a weed swaying in the wind, trembling weakly. What could the weed on the ground say to the scorching sun above? It could only wither, losing moisture and vitality under the blazing heat.

For a moment, there was silence. Then, from the stone throne at the center of the grand tent, a soul-shattering sound rang out once more.

It was then that Kuluka struggled to speak, trying to maintain a calm response:

"Great Prince, I am an excellent Samurai and an outstanding Commander. I am familiar with the terrain, adept at judging situations, and capable of leading your legion into battle. I have keen observation skills, seizing opportune moments, and I can serve as your staff officer. My mathematics is also good, and I understand civil engineering, able to manage your Craftsmen.

I am a common Samurai, understand the thoughts of ordinary warriors, care for their lives, and get along well with the Militia. The warriors in the camp recognize and support me. That's how I became a temporary Commander..."

Xiulote listened with interest to Kuluka's self-promotion and quietly observed his teacher on the stone throne.

He saw Aweit's eyebrows furrow slightly, his eyes dangerously narrowed, his lips tightened. Knowing his teacher well, he immediately realized that because of something Kuluka had said, Aweit had become intent on killing him.

Kuluka did not dare to raise his head. Unaware, he continued the interview that would determine life or death:

"I was born into an ordinary Samurai family. My grandfather once followed the great Montezuma I and became a Nobility through his military exploits. My father followed Asayacatl and died of illness in the southern Rainforest campaigns. Military Nobility could not be inherited, and both my father and I were just common Samurais.

The life of a common Samurai is very hard. It wasn't until I was over thirty that I finally became Military Nobility. I don't want my descendants to repeat this difficult struggle. If you promise me the inheritance of Second-Level Nobility, I swear to Huitzilopochtli, the Sun God: I will remain loyal to you for life, never to betray!..."

Xiulote nodded slightly, Military Nobility being the dividing line between commoners and Nobles. For Kuluka, a commoner, to be promoted to Military Nobility in his early thirties was in itself proof of his excellent ability and flexible handling of affairs. First-Level Military Nobility was like a Knight, possessing some land and privileges.

And Second-Level hereditary Nobility lay between Viscount and Baron. The phrase "hereditary" means the privilege that passes on to descendants. Once one becomes a hereditary Noble, they enter the ranks of the Great Nobility, which share common cause with the nation. The difficulty of this threshold is thus not hard to imagine.

Hearing Kuluka's self-appraisal, Aweit said nothing.

The majestic King simply turned his face slightly away, no longer looking at Kuluka, then flicked the back of his hand outward lightly.

The trusted aides immediately understood. Two towering Jaguar warriors stepped forward again, one grabbing Kuluka's arm as if seizing a monkey before execution, and dragged him straight out of the grand tent.

Kuluka struggled violently, but was completely unable to break free from the grasp of the Jaguar warriors. The desire to live made him shout at his fastest speed, using all his strength, crying out his most genuine plea:

"Tizoc is but an aging Jaguar! With the siege failed, he's completely deserted! His weakness is laid bare for all to see, no longer able to intimidate fierce beasts or drive Coyotes like me. The camp is lost, all that awaits him is death!"

Aweit turned his face back, his gaze sharp as an eagle's. He scrutinized Kuluka's expression carefully. The trusted aides immediately stopped, leaving Kuluka on the threshold of life and death.

Kuluka gasped for breath, staking everything. He shouted once more towards the King on the stone throne:

"You are the young Jaguar, the new King of the Mexica Jungle, full of wisdom and strength! I am willing to be your war dog, to be driven by you, to chase field mice and hares, to kill running deer, until I die before you age!"

Aweit's gaze became more scrutinizing. With a familiar understanding, the young man felt his teacher's intent to kill wane.

"If you wish to become the Divine Eagle, flying into the vast sky, soaring over the jungles and mountains of Mexica, to preside over the tribes of Mexico! Then I will be your most loyal helper, your pack of wolves, killing Jaguars and bears for you, spreading the glory of the Guardian God across the entire Highland! As long as the Divine Eagle does not descend to the ground, the Coyote poses no threat!"

Kuluka's face flushed red. Between life and death, his heart thumped violently, fear etched deeply on his face, accompanied by an inexplicable exhilaration, his arms waving unconsciously in the process.

Xiulote noted the plain Samurai's movements and expressions. Hmm, too much adrenaline rushing, definitely a collapse of strength coming.

"How can there be absolute loyalty in this world? My loyalty depends only on you! Great Great Tlatoani, the future magnificent King!"

Kuluka shouted his last sentence with all his might. Then he was completely drained of strength, like a dehydrated fish, hanging from the arms of the Jaguar warriors.

The youth silently chuckled. Not too bad, even in his agitation, Kuluka hadn't completely lost his reason—his will to live was strong.

Aweit pondered briefly before smiling gently, "The Divine Eagle, the Coyote? Quite the orator."

Then, he made a gesture as if to bring someone over. The trusted aides once again dragged Kuluka back to his original spot. No sooner had they released their grip than Kuluka's strength gave out, and he slumped to the ground. Like a broken stalk of withered grass, he collapsed at an angle, only half his face exposed to the piercing gazes.

Xiulote quickly deliberated. He could always feel Aweit's murderous intent towards Kuluka. Where did this persistent thirst to kill stem from? He recalled that the murderous intent peaked when Kuluka declared he had been elected Commander by the camp.

Suddenly, the youth had a realization: Aweit always favored a carrot-and-stick approach. This was a peaceful conquest of the camp, with generous promises made to the samurai. Favors had been given, yet an air of authority seemed lacking. To establish his authority quickly, Kuluka was the chosen one, a chicken killed to warn the monkeys.

Since Kuluka was supported by a faction of warriors and had also been a camp Commander, his presence in the camp was always a threat. With a decisive battle nearing, the teacher was not prepared to leave any potential instability unaddressed—even the slightest possibility warranted elimination.

"Kill one to awe the army, execute; reward one to delight the masses, bestow." An ancient Huaxia saying surfaced in the youth's mind.

Talent was precious. Waiting any longer, Kuluka would still die. Xiulote thought it over and decided to intervene and save him.

"Aweit," the youth said with a joyful smile, "although this Kuluka comes from common stock, talent is, after all, hard to come by. Since he understands mathematics and is adept at civil engineering, let him join my craftsman team. I will keep him by my side at all times, with Bertade strictly overseeing him."

"Now we have an army of thirty thousand samurai and nearly as many militia, the next strike will be the winning blow!" He concluded, the joy finally brimming from within, spreading across the youth's face.

Aweit on the stone throne looked towards the youth; his icy gaze finally softened. The King's cruelty was temporarily supplanted by the teacher's gentleness. He smiled faintly, nodding to Xiulote.

After a moment's contemplation, the cold and imposing voice sounded again, "Kuluka, do you still wish to become a Second Level hereditary noble?"

Kuluka, just recovering from his weakness on the ground, managed to kneel properly. Upon hearing the question, he instinctively nodded, then shook his head desperately.

A light chuckle rose from the stone throne, followed by an unquestionable command, "Kuluka, from this moment on, you are to offer your loyalty to Priest Xiulote. The Divine Eagle does not tolerate the betrayal of a Coyote, even the thought of it signifies death! Do your duty, and until your demise, I grant you the succession of a hereditary noble!"

Kuluka once again prostrated respectfully, "I obey your will, Great Tlatoani!" His head buried deeply in the ground, he let out a nearly inaudible sigh of relief—his life was spared.

Immediately afterward, Aweit waved a hand. The trusted aides stepped forward to take Kuluka away. As they passed by Xiulote, Kuluka managed to squeeze out a sincere smile, "My respects to you, benevolent Priest."

The youth nodded gently, with a mild smile.

Aweit surveyed his generals with an authoritative air and issued the command for battle, "Return to camp tonight for preparation, set out tomorrow. Thirty thousand samurai will march to the highland camps to the west, awaiting our final prey! Roar!"

The generals in the tent thunderously echoed, their war cries like the howls of a wolf pack. The confidence in their victory and the desire for future glory transformed into a ferocious fighting spirit, blazing in their eyes, roaring in the samurais' chests.

In that moment, infected by the fervent atmosphere, Xiulote couldn't help but let out a long, impassioned howl!

Then, the King's coldness descended once again.

"Ketoco defied my orders and did not open the camp gates; he must be punished. Tomorrow morning, as the armies gather, we'll use him for the ritual execution and display his head before all troops!"

Xiulote bowed his head slightly. With the decisive battle approaching and the need to balance benevolence and authority, someone's head had to be offered as the price. Having saved the simple samurai Kuluka, it was time to use the Great Noble Ketoco as compensation.

"Generals, heed my command: this battle shall result in victory, not defeat; this is the will of the gods, and it shall not be defied!"

Aweit stood up, the Divine Staff once again raised high, like the avatar of a deity.

The people inside the tent fell into sudden silence. The generals prostrated in unison, responding thunderously once more. They were welcoming the birth of a fierce sun, to replace the vestiges of the old day's twilight!