

## Civilization 801

Chapter 801: Alliance Secrets, Books and Cash Documents Complete\_2

"Hmm? The Red Crow Chieftain, Amoxtli..."

Xiulote was somewhat surprised. The Chieftain of the Red Crow Tribe had such insight... He asked in a deep voice.

"How did the Alliance respond?"

"They are just scattered Canine Descendants Tribes. What qualifications do they have to become subjects of the Alliance?"

The High Priest spoke calmly, with the confidence of the Mexica dominion over the lands.

"General Osellor from the North suggested dispatching the Mexica legion to quell the newly arrived Canine Descendants. After central deliberation with the Royal Family and the High Priesthood, it was decided to halt for now and not to engage... The eastern expedition is about to begin, leaving this Canine Tribe to exert pressure on the Vastec people poses no harm to the Alliance."

"Hmm, indeed. Then let them be for now!"

Xiulote agreed, feeling a sense of appreciation in his heart.

"To have migrated all the way from the northern wilderness and finally established themselves in the northeastern plains and jungle... The Red Crow Tribe is indeed fortunate!"

The two spoke no more, and Xiulote continued to review the Alliance's confidential matters.

To the east of the Lake Capital City, there were no enfeoffed city-states, only towering and inaccessible mountains that completely separated the Mexican Valley from the Tlaxcala Valley. If the Tlaxcala Valley could be conquered, it would count as the Alliance's eastern city-state.

Apart from the western, southern, and northern city-states, the Alliance also had several more distant territories.

"The Land of Jontal, with a total population of 200,000, and approximately 1-2 million acres of milpa."

"Further south from the southern city-states, along the Tarsas River, lies the Land of Jontal, with a population of 200,000. This area is vast and sparsely populated, with many mudflats and marshes along the river. The Land of Jontal falls under the jurisdiction of the Alliance, with some emerging small Mexica city-states, currently in a state of autonomy by great nobility and tribal leaders... The High Priesthood has sent many priests to facilitate the conversion of the Jontal tribespeople in this area."

The High Priest explained calmly.

"Xiulote, my child. The lower reaches of the Tarsas River are your southern fief, the middle reaches are the Land of Jontal, and further upstream, a hundred to two hundred miles past the Mistec Alliance, you'll reach the source, the fertile and prosperous core valley of Tlaxcala..."

Xiulote solemnly nodded. He had long contemplated that the Tarsas River was the key to the southern campaign.

"As long as the southern army can gain the upper hand in naval battles, advancing upstream along the Tarsas River, attacking along the way, we can penetrate deep into the heart of the Tlaxcalans!"

The High Priest slightly raised his eyebrows and gently shook his head.

"My child, do not take risks! The upper reaches of the Tarsas River are very narrow, with many river fortresses obstructing the way, and you must pass through Mistec territory... The southern army should advance steadily, both by land and water."

Xiulote's eyes flickered, pondering in silence. Having led many campaigns, he had a sophisticated understanding of warfare. Conquering strong fortresses on land was evidently a prolonged and arduous task, with uncertain delays and immense consumption of food supplies. But advancing by water, striking

directly at the enemy's core, and ending the war in one decisive battle was an irresistible temptation for any commander.

"My child. In this campaign, there is no need to rush. It's best to advance gradually. The core of Tlaxcala also has many fortresses. If the army recklessly advances along the water route and is stalled under a fortress, it will be very dangerous."

The High Priest's expression remained unchanged, his voice turning somber.

"Even if we conquer the Four States of Tlaxcala and utterly annihilate the Tlaxcalans, this prosperous Eastern Valley will be incorporated directly into the Royal domain or enfeoffed to other princes... The Kingdom of the Lake lacks population; during your eastern expedition, you may seize and transport many people back to your fief. The priests in the Land of Jontal will cooperate as much as possible."

As he spoke to this point, a faint sense of nostalgia appeared in the High Priest's eyes. He extended his hand and gently caressed Xiulote's face, his voice fading to a whisper.

"My child, when you march into the Tlaxcala Valley, and with King Aweit, eliminate the Alliance's fifty-year-old nemesis... I will... pray for you..."

"Hmm? Grandfather, what did you say?"

"...I said, remember, always be wary of the Mistec people, no matter how submissive they appear!"

A vague unease flashed through Xiulote's mind. He looked at his grandfather's calm face and respectfully nodded.

"Yes, I will abide by your counsel. I will not act rashly in these eastern campaigns!"

The High Priest smiled kindly, withdrew his withered hand, and said no more. Xiulote turned to the last page of the documents and read softly.

"The mountainous Vite State, directly under the Alliance, with a population of 150,000, and 500,000-1,000,000 acres of milpa. The Xitaqualo State, enfeoffed to Prince Iskali, with a population of 70,000, and approximately 500,000 acres of milpa. The Akanbaro State, enfeoffed to Prince Tepopolo, with a population of 100,000, milpa not specified. The Three States of the Kingdom of the Lake, enfeoffed to His Highness Xiulote, with a population of 700,000-800,000, milpa not specified..."

These figures needed no explanation from the High Priest, as Xiulote was well-acquainted with them.

The mountainous Vite State is located south of the Tarsas River, southeast of Zicao County, and is the copper mining area directly under the Alliance. To exploit the copper mines, the Alliance has relocated 20,000-30,000 miners and their families here, and the area has developed rapidly in recent years.

The Xitaqualo State is nominally the fief of Prince Iskali, located southeast of the Kingdom of the Lake, with fortified clusters arduously attacked by the Southern Army. Prince Iskali is a royal noble, loyal, and closely connected to the royal central authority. The Royal Family and the High Priesthood directly dispatched royal advisors and preaching priests to manage the fief for Prince Iskali, with data on the fief meticulously detailed, almost akin to direct control.

The Akanbaro State is the fief of Prince Tepopolo, located northeast of the Kingdom of the Lake, south of the Lerma River. It is also a small military city-state. Tepopolo

"The mountainous Vite State, directly under the Alliance, with a population of 150,000, and 500,000-1,000,000 acres of milpa. The Xitaqualo State, enfeoffed to Prince Iskali, with a population of 70,000, and approximately 500,000 acres of milpa. The Akanbaro State, enfeoffed to Prince Tepopolo, with a population of 100,000, milpa not specified. The Three States of the Kingdom of the Lake, enfeoffed to His Highness Xiulote, with a population of 700,000-800,000, milpa not specified..."

These figures needed no explanation from the High Priest, as Xiulote was well-acquainted with them.

The mountainous Vite State is located south of the Tarsas River, southeast of Zicao County, and is the copper mining area directly under the Alliance. To exploit the copper mines, the Alliance has relocated 20,000-30,000 miners and their families here, and the area has developed rapidly in recent years.

The Xitaqualo State is nominally the fief of Prince Iskali, located southeast of the Kingdom of the Lake, with fortified clusters arduously attacked by the Southern Army. Prince Iskali is a royal noble, loyal, and

closely connected to the royal central authority. The Royal Family and the High Priesthood directly dispatched royal advisors and preaching priests to manage the fief for Prince Iskali, with data on the fief meticulously detailed, almost akin to direct control.

The Akanbaro State is the fief of Prince Tepopolo, located northeast of the Kingdom of the Lake, south of the Lerma River. It is also a small military city-state. Tepopolo

"The mountainous Vite State, directly under the Alliance, with a population of 150,000, and 500,000-1,000,000 acres of milpa. The Xitaqualo State, enfeoffed to Prince Iskali, with a population of 70,000, and approximately 500,000 acres of milpa. The Akanbaro State, enfeoffed to Prince Tepopolo, with a population of 100,000, milpa not specified. The Three States of the Kingdom of the Lake, enfeoffed to His Highness Xiulote, with a population of 700,000-800,000, milpa not specified..."

These figures needed no explanation from the High Priest, as Xiulote was well-acquainted with them.

The mountainous Vite State is located south of the Tarsas River, southeast of Zicao County, and is the copper mining area directly under the Alliance. To exploit the copper mines, the Alliance has relocated 20,000-30,000 miners and their families here, and the area has developed rapidly in recent years.

The Xitaqualo State is nominally the fief of Prince Iskali, located southeast of the Kingdom of the Lake, with fortified clusters arduously attacked by the Southern Army. Prince Iskali is a royal noble, loyal, and closely connected to the royal central authority. The Royal Family and the High Priesthood directly dispatched royal advisors and preaching priests to manage the fief for Prince Iskali, with data on the fief meticulously detailed, almost akin to direct control.

The Akanbaro State is the fief of Prince Tepopolo, located northeast of the Kingdom of the Lake, south of the Lerma River. It is also a small military city-state. Tepopolo

"The mountainous Vite State, directly under the Alliance, with a population of 150,000, and 500,000-1,000,000 acres of milpa. The Xitaqualo State, enfeoffed to Prince Iskali, with a population of 70,000, and approximately 500,000 acres of milpa. The Akanbaro State, enfeoffed to Prince Tepopolo, with a population of 100,000, milpa not specified. The Three States of the Kingdom of the Lake, enfeoffed to His Highness Xiulote, with a population of 700,000-800,000, milpa not specified..."

Chapter 802: Time is Running Out

The red sun set between the mountains, casting ripples of light on Lake Texcoco. The twilight turned into glowing colors, shining in the horizon's end. As dusk fell, smoke once again rose from all parts of the capital city, accompanied by endless evening prayers of praise, like the Divine Kingdom on earth.

The grand palace stood majestically, with the High Priest seated on the throne of the gods, calm and composed, handling the daily ecclesiastical affairs.

In the midst, the envoy of King Aweit had come once. The envoy met with the Prince of Tlacopan, confirmed the capture mission in Tlacopan, and swiftly departed again. Now, the Royal Warriors of the capital had long been deployed to the City-State of Tlacopan to assist in suppressing the rebellion.

Xiulote sat cross-legged, perusing the documents at hand, pondering the direction of further reforms.

"The Alliance's capital region directly incorporates households, with taxes and tribute collected at about 40% annually, quite heavy. However, in the western, southern, and northern City-States, the local great nobility can collect 25-30% annually as tribute, while the Royal Family and Priesthood receive the remaining 10-15%. As for the more remote enfeoffed City-States, the central and local tribute ratio will further tilt towards the local great nobility."

Reading this, Xiulote fell into silent contemplation. The Kingdom of the Lake, located in the far west, enjoys the Alliance's special favor. To maintain stability, the kingdom's tribute collection is slightly over 30% annually, while the tribute submitted to the Alliance yearly is less than 5%.

Of course, whether in the Alliance or the kingdom, farmers in the villages and towns must follow the command of the village chiefs and priests, fulfilling various labor services. For instance, building canals, making stone tools, felling trees, quarrying stones, transporting food... As the lowest level of national governance, it is impossible for farmers to enjoy a peaceful and idle life.

"The Lake Capital City is affluent and prosperous, located at the center of the world. The main city is filled with nobles in Chinese Clothes, possessing the most wealth in the world. The North City has a huge trade market, dealing with the world's most goods... gemstones, jade, obsidian, gold and silver ornaments, copper and pottery, feather clothes, spices and herbs, cotton and cocoa, timber and stones, salt and food, and various slaves are traded in this giant city."

Xiulote recalled the bustling scene of the Tlatelolco Grand Market, a slight smile appearing on his face. Then, he became serious, looking at the commercial tax records received by the Priesthood.

"Ecclesiastic reforms, strict inspections on merchant smuggling; centralization and system reforms, cutting off the private trade of nobility... Now, the daily commercial tax amount in the capital city is staggering. Even without considering the part lost to the tax collectors' embezzlement, it is enough to support two armies of eight thousand men each!"

Xiulote marveled to himself. Without the extremely profitable gemstone trade and the lucrative copper trade, the commercial tax of the entire Kingdom of the Lake would likely not compare to that of the Alliance's capital city alone. Then, he raised his eyebrows, noting a line of small annotations after the simple tax records.

"This is questionable... This is normal..."

"This is the evaluation by the High Priest specialized in numbers after auditing the Priesthood's accounts."

The High Priest smiled faintly.

"For the commercial tax on various traded goods, it is counted every three to four months. The elders of the High Priesthood have a rough estimate of how much the tax collectors in the capital's markets have embezzled."

Xiulote nodded. He looked at the roster of tax collectors on record, soon drawn by some annotations. Under the gemstone trade, there was a tax collector named Mes, every evaluation was questionable, but never further dealt with. Under the copper trade, another tax collector Ramakui had only one questionable mark, followed by a sacrificial skull mark.

"This is..."

"Hmm? Oh..."

The High Priest glanced at it and calmly explained.

"Mes is in charge of the gemstone trade and takes bribes from merchants every time. However, the amount should not be large and never caused a problem. Ramakui, on the other hand, privately sold a batch of military supplies to the Mistek people in the copper trade and was sacrificed after being discovered. As long as it does not hinder major affairs, the High Priesthood does not mind the occasional corruption of the Preaching Priests. But if they violate the Alliance's bottom line, there is only the fate of being sacrificed!"

"Hmm."

Xiulote lowered his eyes calmly, nodding in agreement.

When the water is too clear, there are no fish. For feudal bureaucrats, one cannot demand too much. In the kingdom's tax collection, a 10-20% loss is common, usually divided among various levels of the system. Losses of 30-40% would be scolded and not allowed to occur too often. Losses over 50% or delaying military or state affairs would be pursued for accountability and directly sacrificed to the Chief Divine!

After reading the Alliance documents, Xiulote sighed imperceptibly. He stood up, looking into the already dark night sky. A line of torches appeared from the western part of the capital, swaying closer towards the Temple District.

"A group from the west, heading straight for the Priest Grand Hall."

Xiulote observed for a moment, seeing several figures at the front with glimmering copper-studded cloth, and confidently judged.

"High Priest, the capture mission has yielded results!"

The High Priest nodded slightly. He called a few priests to move the books and documents from the grand hall to the secret side hall. Then, the High Priest wore the Feather Crown, held the Divine Staff, and sat at the top seat. Xiulote stood by quietly, waiting.



"May the Chief Divine protect us!"

Elder Azar, covered in blood and wearing Bronze Armor, strode to the grand hall entrance, bowing his head in salute. His War Club hung low, dripping bright red, leaving a long mark on the stone steps outside the hall.

"Respected High Priest, the capture mission in Tlacopan was entirely successful!"

Upon hearing this, Xiulote turned to look. Elder Azar of the War God, over forty years old, wearing thirty pounds of armor and holding a War Club weighing several pounds, yet still agile and steady. The War Priests of the Chief Divine always undergo professional training, ready for war at all times. They are fully capable and armored warriors, nothing like frail clergy.

Chapter 803: Time Is Running Out\_2

"Chief Divine protection! Very good, Elder Azar, you have worked hard!"

The High Priest nodded satisfactorily and waved the Divine Staff. Several Temple Warriors stepped forward to help the War God Elder remove the bronze medium armor and the Obsidian Club. In the Chief Divine's Priest Grand Hall, only sacrificial Obsidian Daggers were usually allowed.

Elder Azar did not mind, donned the priest's robe, and walked into the grand hall, laughing heartily.

"Haha, the High Priest's decision was truly decisive! Over a dozen of Tlacopan's Great Nobility, and several subordinate priests were all captured in one sweep! The Temple Guards arrived suddenly, swiftly apprehended them, and encountered almost no significant resistance. The Great Nobility were unprepared, unable to mobilize their family warriors in time, and were directly taken down!"

Then, Elder Azar's expression turned solemn as he nodded slightly to Xiulote.

"Chief Divine witness! The Prince of Tlacopan's intelligence was very accurate; these Great Nobility and priests were indeed plotting assassination, planned during Xiulote Supreme High Priest's wedding celebration. Judging by the situation, they hadn't been conspiring for long, and many preparations were incomplete... As for the specific details of the plot, whether other nobility are involved, further interrogation is needed!"

"The Supreme Chief Divine, protecting the sacred Alliance! All blasphemy is revealed under the Divine's gaze, nowhere to hide!"

The High Priest spoke solemnly, calmly instructing.

"Azar, hand the captured noble leaders over to the High Priesthood judges. Under the priest's potion, no secret can remain hidden. Also, dispatch a High Priest to the Royal Palace, report the latest situation to King Aweit. King Aweit is likely to send an advisor to jointly participate in the trial of the nobility."

"Following your command, High Priest!"

Elder Azar respectfully nodded. Then, he hesitated slightly.

"The Elder..."

"Hmm... The Elder is communicating with the Divine, do not disturb him lightly."

The High Priest pondered briefly and then instructed solemnly.

"Wait until everything is thoroughly investigated, I will personally report to the Elder."

"Following your will!"

Thinking about the Elder's health condition, Elder Azar showed agreement. Then, he inquired solemnly, without concealing his killing intent.

"High Priest, let me handle the subordinate priests who dared to rebel!"

"You may."

The High Priest glanced at Elder Azar and nodded calmly.

"When sacrificing priests, do not let outsiders participate to avoid affecting the dignified reputation of the Priesthood."

"Rest assured!"

Elder Azar nodded knowingly.

"The Chief Divine's majesty must never be compromised!"

"Very good! The Chief Divine's glory will shine upon the earth!"

"Praise the Chief Divine!"

In the twilight dusk, many High Priests prayed aloud together, offering their most sacred praises to the Fire-illuminated statue of the Chief Divine.

After the evening prayer, the High Priests dispersed. Accompanied by dozens of Temple Guards, Xiulote and the High Priest descended from the towering Pyramid Temple and headed towards the nearby High Priest's Mansion.

The night was deep, the firelight dispelling the shadows, everyone headed homeward. The High Priest's expression was calm, his steps steady, though busy all day, he showed no signs of fatigue. Supreme power was the best vitality potion, revered by all, controlling everything, standing above millions, naturally invigorating and uplifted.

Xiulote followed his grandfather's footsteps, silently observing the capital city under the night. The lanterns in the distant civilian district were dim, while the nearby noble district was brightly lit. The songs of evening banquets echoed from the manors on both sides of the main road, accompanied by bamboo flute, celebrating the prosperity and glory of the Alliance. The nobility of this era, Mexico, were filled with simple vigor and confident upliftment.

The two walked in silence all the way to the High Priest's Mansion. The High Priest removed the heavy feathered stone crown, took off the elaborate ceremonial dress, and sat relaxed, cross-legged in the side hall, exhaling deeply. At this moment, he finally shed the divinity he carried all day, becoming a kindly grandfather again, a gaunt and weathered old man.

After several years, Xiulote looking at his grandfather's white hair, withered body, feeling a pang of sorrow. He softly called.

"Grandfather..."

"Xiulote, cough... cough cough!"

High Priest Xutel smiled gently, coughed lightly. He had endured throughout the day, now unable to bear it any longer, and coughed violently. After a while, he took the honey water hurriedly handed over by his grandson, drank a couple of sips, feeling somewhat better.

"Cough... My child, everything I do is for you... I know you have many questions. Now, with no one around, it's a good time to talk."

Xiulote reached out both hands, firmly grasped his grandfather's thin hands, feeling the rough and slightly cool touch. He earnestly looked into his grandfather's eyes.

"Grandfather, on the way east, I heard many complaints from City-State Nobles, calling you 'bloody sunset, the Divine Sacrificer', and heard your decrees, exterminating and exiling many nobles and priests... At that time, I hardly believed it."

Speaking of this, worry appeared in Xiulote's eyes. He clenched his teeth and sincerely asked.

"Grandfather! Since arriving in the capital, I witnessed your authority on the Throne of the Gods, leading tens of thousands of followers, your majesty even surpassing King Aweit!... You pressured the Council of Elders, issuing decrees, granting me the right to interpret the scriptures; you mercilessly suppressed many Tlacopan nobles, even held the Priest Families of western city-states accountable; you obtained secret scrolls, allowing me to peruse the High Priesthood's religious books and the Alliance's census

tribute... You advised me not to rush, to gradually build strength. But now, why are you so sharp, so desperate? Why, why are you so anxious?!"

"Why am I so anxious?"

Having anticipated these questions, the High Priest looked pleasantly surprised, then showed a warm smile, lovingly gazing at his grown grandson, calmly speaking.

"Xiulote, my child. Because, my days are numbered~"

"Ah!!"

Hearing this, Xiulote was shocked, his face turning pale instantly. He tightly held his grandfather's hand, gazing at the kindly smile, fearfully and arduously saying.

"No!... Grandfather... you... you won't..."

"My child, everyone has that day."

The High Priest calmly withdrew his hand, gently touching Xiulote's cheek.

"The royal ancestors went to the Divine Kingdom, the great Montezuma went to the Divine Kingdom, the everlasting Elder is about to go to the Divine Kingdom... Hence, how could I, a mere mortal, not? I have long heard the Chief Divine's call, that day is not far away."

"Grandfather!"

Xiulote lowered his head, couldn't help but tear up gradually. He had lost his mother early, growing up with heavy memories. In this world, his grandfather who nurtured him, trained him, and cared for him was his closest relative, even more so than his father... At this moment, the young leader's heart was a mess, feeling an unprecedented fear, not knowing how to face it. He bit his teeth and called out softly.

"Grandfather, the great Montezuma lived to seventy-one, the immortal Elder lived to ninety, and you're only sixty-two... The Royal Family's heritage must have some methods for longevity... Tomorrow I'll ask King Aweit for them!"

"Haha!"

Hearing this, High Priest Xutel chuckled lightly, patted his grandson's shoulder, and shook his head. Xiulote lowered his head, couldn't help but tear up gradually. He had lost his mother early, growing up with heavy memories. In this world...

#### Chapter 804: Secret Conversation Between Grandparent and Grandchild

Night fell deeply, and darkness seeped in through the window, pressing down on the room so heavily that it was hard to breathe. The candlelight flickered, temporarily dispelling the night outside the side hall, bringing in a touch of light.

The grandfather and grandson sat close together, dressed in casual clothes. An old face bore a faint smile, while a young one showed deep sadness. After a long period of stillness, their expressions gradually restrained, the surging emotions hidden away.

"Xiulote, my child. To see you grow up with my own eyes, to see you brave and decisive... my heart is filled with pride and comfort."

The High Priest Xutel's expression was calm, with a smile at the corner of his mouth.

"Soon, I will be able to see you get married, to see you continue the family line... it is truly joyous, and I have no more regrets!"

Xiulote pressed his lips together, prostrated himself on the ground, and saluted his grandfather.

"Grandfather, the Elders are already seriously ill, you must not fall... the religious reform cannot do without you, and the great cause of the Alliance still needs you to maintain it!"

"Haha!"

The High Priest Xutel laughed heartily, even shedding a few tears from laughter. Then, he reached out his hand and gently patted his grandson's head.

"Xiulote, my child, the great cause of the Alliance will be in your hands..."

Subsequently, the High Priest's expression became stern as he straightened up. He spoke slowly, his words calm and profound, sending a chill down one's spine.

"The list of rebels in the hands of Prince Totoquihuatzin, the names of the nobility in Tlacopan to be dealt with, were all drafted by me personally."

"Ah! What?! Was it you behind all this?..."

Upon hearing this, Xiulote's body trembled, and he exclaimed in surprise. He could hardly believe it.

"But, but!... The targets of the assassination plot by the Tlacopan nobility were you and the King..."

"Xiulote, my child, the human heart cannot withstand tests, and it can be guided."

The High Priest nodded openly and smiled faintly.

"The High Priesthood and the Royal Family deprived the Tlacopan Great Nobility of their autonomy, reduced large amounts of their land and population, and also reclaimed the religious authority from the Subordinate God Priests. The local nobility and priests naturally harbored discontent; this was the hidden spark. Later, the Alliance reduced the garrison in Tlacopan, relaxed management of the City-State, and ignored the frequent gatherings of the nobility, causing the spark to gradually ignite. Coupled with the deliberate cooperation of Prince Totoquihuatzin, the secret inducement of the Alliance's Secret Guard, and some hints from Elder Uguel, the spark grew ever more intense, developing into an assassination plot..."

"Prince Totoquihuatzin, the Alliance's Secret Guard, Elder Uguel... all were involved, guiding this plot..."

Xiulote was stunned, a chill ran through his heart.

"So, from the beginning of the conspiracy to the preparation for the assassination, the so-called rebellion of the Tlacopan nobility had always been manipulated by the Alliance?"

"Exactly. This assassination was always under the control of the Alliance. In fact, among the list, there were only three families of Great Nobility who truly planned to send assassins to kill the Venerable in a desperate gamble."

The High Priest smiled indifferently, bowed his head slightly, and looked at his palm. Again, he saw the vivid red all over his hands.

"As for the other dozen or so families, they merely participated in banquets, heard about it, but didn't report it immediately. This is still a serious crime, and how to punish it depends on the needs of the Alliance."

"Fabricate charges, incite great purges..."

Xiulote slightly lowered his eyes. The centralization reform of the Mexica Alliance, like the inheritance of the Alliance's throne, was full of blood and fire. The Royal Family and the High Priesthood wielded the most powerful forces, mercilessly and decisively clearing all obstacles, one could even call it ruthless.

"The fate of mortals is always set early by the Chief Divine, and only those blessed by the Divine can see it ahead of time."

The High Priest's expression carried a sense of weariness and tranquility, as if he had seen through the fog of fate, making everything seem serene.

"My child, the Chief Divine shines upon the Texcoco Lake District, spreading the most sacred light! From the beginning of the religious reform, the fate of the Tlacopan nobility was sealed. They were destined to be like the nobility of Texcoco, just living for five more years..."



At this thought, the High Priest gently shook his head, his expression resolute and his will as firm as iron.

"In the Capital Region, there cannot be such a group of disloyal nobles occupying land and population, constantly threatening the Lake Capital City! The High Priesthood and the Royal Family do not want them to exist. So now, with the time ripe, the Royal Family and the High Priesthood strong enough, they should be erased."

"The so-called reform is paved with the bones of the old nobility, creating a new path. The only chance for the Tlacopan nobles to survive is to join the westward expansion and be enfeoffed outside, or to request re-enfeoffment voluntarily. Prince Totoquihuatzin is very wise, always cooperating with the Alliance, and the Alliance is happy to leave a role model... and when the sensible nobles leave, the remaining stubborn traditionalists will all be sacrificed to the Chief Divine~"

"...The fate of mortals was decided long ago."

Hearing these familiar words, Xiulote felt a resonance in his heart. Bowing his head slightly, he listened to his grandfather's words, savoring the outward cruelty of political struggles, unable to truly grasp the hidden weariness in his grandfather's words.

"Xiulote, my child. The plot by the Tlacopan nobility was secretly controlled by the Alliance all along and posed no real threat. The reason I let Prince Totoquihuatzin make the initial report at this time was simply to avoid drawing attention to your newly acquired interpretative authority over the scriptures."

The High Priest smiled gently and held his grandson's hand.

"I've already come to know the Divine Revelation Scripture you spoke of at Divine Power University. The Mystery of Deities encompasses all things and possesses the power of creation. This is a path I never envisioned, never seen before, and I don't know where it leads... but I trust that you understand it in your heart. The road is always made by people walking it; it is just a bit hasty to try it at this time..."

Saying this, the High Priest paused. Looking at his grandson's young, determined face, his eyes showed a tender light, confident in his smile.

"But, my child, it's good to speak out now. Since I hold the position of High Priest, wield great power, I will handle the aftermath in advance for you, reducing some future troubles... The foundation of the Kingdom of the Lake is not yet deep; tell me your needs, and I will settle them for you!"

Xiulote lowered his eyes, and warm emotions surged in his chest like a tide. He held his grandfather's hand and, after a long silence, spoke in a deep voice.

"Grandfather, the Kingdom of the Lake is expanding rapidly with its conquests, and it has gathered many tribespeople. I need more Mexica to fill the kingdom and balance the different ethnic groups..."

"In addition, the kingdom has newly settled 90,000 Tekos tribespeople, and after the autumn harvest we must rally our troops for a distant eastward expedition. I need the Alliance's food support to fill the kingdom's granaries and reduce the pressure of food supply...."

"The kingdom's copper production is increasing rapidly. The mined copper materials need to be mixed with tin materials, cast into bronze weapons, armor, farm tools, and utensils. The primary source of tin ore is in the southern City-States of the Alliance, and further south in the Land of Jontal. The southern City-States of the Alliance are hard to intervene in; I wish to obtain some tin ore from the riverside Land of Jontal..."

"The gemstone trade of the kingdom is an important source of wealth and it's best to further expand into the City-States, and open an independent trade route to the prosperous South. This trade route must follow the Tarsas River and pass through the Land of Jontal..."

"The kingdom is in its early stages, needing more talent to fill various posts. The most needed are literate individuals who understand basic mathematics and are devout believers of the Chief God Priest. Secondly are senior artisans, skilled in a craft and capable of leading apprentices. Lastly, experienced master craftsmen who can design canals and seasoned farmers specialized in constructing Chinampa are needed..."

"Population, food, tin ore, trade routes, talent..."

Xiulote spoke all at once. In this cruel world, he had long grown accustomed to facing all difficulties independently, but only his grandfather could make him feel a sense of reliance.

The High Priest Xutel nodded calmly, with a gentle smile on his face. He lowered his old face, thinking deeply and recalling the situation in various parts of the Alliance. After a while, he promised calmly and forcefully.

"Xiulote, my child. Everything you need, I will resolve for you!"

#### Chapter 805: Grandfather's Promise, Migration of Population

The night outside the hall was deep, and the candles inside the hall were bright. The pale yellow candles burned slowly, emitting a warm yellow light. The yellow light softly fell, casting two figures on the bluestone floor. The figures sat opposite each other, silent at this moment.

The High Priest Xutel slowly stood up. He walked to the corner of the side hall and calmly searched among a pile of maps and books by the bright candlelight. Xiulote wanted to help, but his grandfather waved his hand.

"My child, think carefully again about what you still need."

Upon hearing these words, Xiulote stood still, slightly tilting his head. He looked at the flickering candles on the wall, his thoughts rising and falling like the candle flame.

These are unique tropical palm candles of America, painstakingly made by craftsmen from palm wax collected from the leaves of certain palm trees. They are very expensive and rare. Palm candles burn brightly without thick smoke and emit a fragrance similar to the Divine Smoke from the Celestial Empire's Ever-bright Lamp, made from whale wax.

Xiulote remained silent, gazing at the flame of the candles on the wall, then at his grandfather's completely white hair. Sadness gradually emerged in his eyes.

The candles before him, though bright, were already burning towards their end, with only the last bits of fire swaying gently in the evening breeze. One never knows when the candles will extinguish, turning into a wisp of blue smoke, dispersing into the vast night sky, never to be seen again...

"Hmm, the candles are almost out."

The High Priest Xutel, holding several volumes of maps, walked back slowly from the corner. He calmly took out a new candle, personally lighting it with the candle flame, and placed it on the wall sconce. Then, he gently inhaled, preparing to blow out the remaining candle.

"Grandfather!... Don't... blow it out..."

Xiulote spoke softly, his eyes fixed on his grandfather.

"Oh?"

The High Priest was slightly startled. He looked at the sadness hidden in Xiulote's eyes, glanced at the remaining candle, and suddenly understood his grandson's feelings. A smile slowly appeared on his deeply wrinkled face, like an aged and withered plum blossom.

"Alright, let it be then!"

The High Priest nodded, placing the remaining candle back next to the new one. The two candles stood side by side, one tall and one short, both shining brightly and emitting a sacred fragrance. They burned quietly, sharing an inextricable connection through their lineage. Eventually, one would burn out, while the other had just begun...

"Xiulote, my child."

The High Priest's eyes were filled with warmth. He calmly unfolded a map of the world, revealing the powerful Mexica Alliance.

"My child, last year I migrated ten thousand people to the Kingdom of the Lake. This year, I will give you..."

At this point, the High Priest paused for several moments, his eyes resolute.

"At least seventy thousand young Mexica!"

"Ah?! At least seventy thousand young men and women?"

Xiulote was very surprised. This number was almost the result of a Southern or Northern expedition! And even more valuable, these people were the main ethnic group forming the ruling base!

"Yes, at least seventy thousand! I will personally meet the elder to gain his support."

The High Priest's expression was calm.

"My child, under your leadership, the Kingdom of the Lake develops every single day, constantly bringing forth new changes... All this is seen by the High Priesthood, seen by the elder. Currently, the influence of the Prepetcha within the Kingdom of the Lake has grown somewhat excessively..."

"Among the kingdom's 800,000 citizens, the Mexica people from the Alliance number less than 80,000, accounting for only one-tenth. The remaining over seventy percent are Prepetcha... Prepetcha elites permeate various parts of the kingdom. They serve as advisors at all levels, guiding the kingdom's reforms. They serve as low-level priests in the villages and towns, believing in the faith of a single god. They serve as senior craftsmen in the Divine Revelation Place, mastering the most powerful new weapons. They also act as warriors and officers, even leading the kingdom's army..."

Hearing this, Xiulote raised his brow slightly and affirmed.

"Grandfather, I can assure you that the loyalty of the Prepetcha people to me is no less than that of the Mexica people, even exceeding it..."

"Haha, my child, this is precisely what the Alliance worries about! Sometimes, obedience and integration can be forms of conquest."

The High Priest chuckled lightly, shaking his head. His expression became severe.

"Xiulote, I know that many Prepetcha respectfully call you Your Majesty, viewing you as their only sun. While the Mexica Warriors call you Your Highness, following King Aweit... But you must always remember that you are the noblest prince of the Mexica people, the future king of the Mexica Alliance! Your sacred throne lies in the magnificent Capital City, at the top of the Great Temple, and certainly not in the Western Qinchongcan City, nor in the Akatla at the House of Wind!"

Xiulote was momentarily stunned. He recalled the words of his uncle Cacamatzin and nodded after some silence.

"Grandfather, I remember. I will leave, and I will ultimately return!"

"Good! My child, you are the hope of the Holy City line! You are destined to become the master of the four corners of the world, not just the lord of one place in the West..."

The High Priest nodded solemnly, speaking in a low voice. Then, he reached out his finger, touching the map at the western region of Lake Texcoco.

"The rebellion in Tlacopan will be severely suppressed. The dozen noble families will either be executed or exiled. The servants, relatives, and fief citizens on the noble estates will be handled by the High Priesthood... I will transplant twenty thousand people into the heart of the Kingdom of the Lake under the guise of exile!"

"Transplant so many fief citizens, the royal family and the High Priesthood..."

"No problem. These lands and fief citizens will be redistributed, jointly managed by the royal family and the High Priesthood. Under the name of exile, relocating twenty thousand people won't cause big trouble."

The High Priest's expression remained unchanged. Holding supreme divine authority, he was prepared for everything. Next, he moved his finger, pointing heavily at the location of the northeast Holy City.

"Teotihuacan in the northeast of Lake Texcoco is the dwelling place of all gods and has branches of the royal family. Our family's foundation is right here. And among the surrounding city-states, there are many affiliated tribes closely connected with us... My child, since you have firmly rooted yourself in the

Kingdom of the Lake, the main branches of our families can migrate to the kingdom as your most loyal supporters!... From the northeast of the lake region, twenty thousand people will migrate to the Patzcuaro Lake region!"

"Migrating family foundations to the kingdom..."

Upon hearing this, Xiulote's expression became serious. The political structure of the Alliance was transforming from a loose tribe alliance into a centralized fief kingdom. The royal family itself was the most powerful Mexica tribe.

Before King Aweit's ascension, he already had twenty to thirty thousand direct tribal members and over two thousand family warriors. After becoming king, he inherited all the affiliated tribes of Montezuma's lineage. Likewise, the Holy City lineage naturally held many population members firmly in their own hands.

"Grandfather, will the affiliated tribes be willing to move westwards?"

"The era of the kingship is about to begin..."

The High Priest smiled meaningfully, speaking in a low voice.

"As affiliates of the Holy City line, they will be willing to move west."

Hearing this, Xiulote felt a bit skeptical. He glanced at his grandfather's steady expression but still nodded.

"That's good. The Patzcuaro Lake region has many abandoned old fields as well as new cultivable lands that can be allocated to the migrating tribes."

"Yes."

The High Priest moved his finger, gradually shifting from the northeast of the lake region to the west, arriving at the Telokan State through which the Lerma River flows.

"The western Telokan State has a flourishing population. The Spring Rain Priestly Family has been passing down for a hundred years, controlling three to four thousand fief citizens. After exterminating them, and then cleansing two old noble families, we can gather a population of ten thousand, exiling them immediately to Rivermouth County in the kingdom."

Next, the aged finger moved again, landing ruthlessly on the southwest.

"The southwestern Raziko State also has an abundant population. Facing the centralization reform, several Great Nobility families have expressed objections. The High Priesthood and the royal central authority both intend to clean up... There too will contribute ten thousand people, moving them immediately to Zicao County in the southern part of the kingdom."

"Cleansing old nobles, migrating populations..."

Xiulote slightly lowered his eyes. Such severe methods, though effective and powerful, had significant side effects as well.

"Grandfather, in doing so, your reputation, your safety..."

"Haha! From the moment I took control of the Divine Authority and implemented religious reforms, it was destined for the evil name to follow behind me."

The High Priest cared little, chuckling lightly. He pinched his fingers, calculating.

"Hmm, in this way, it accounts for a population of sixty thousand. Another ten thousand will be conscripted from various villages in the capital region of the Alliance, serving as the standard for priests' promotions!... My child, you must properly settle these seventy thousand Mexica people, forming the foundation for the stability of your kingdom."

"Grandfather, I will!"



Xiulote's expression was spirited. Among these seventy thousand Mexica immigrants, fifty thousand would be settled in the central region of the kingdom, ten thousand would be moved to the northern Rivermouth County, and ten thousand to the southern Zicao County. They would engage in mass intermarriage with the Prepetcha people, eliminating the latent dangers within the kingdom. However...

"To a ruler, population is the most precious wealth..."

Xiulote silently pondered, feeling a bit uneasy, while looking at his grandfather's gentle smile.

"Grandfather, for these promises, what price will you pay?"

On the wall, the candlelight flickered peacefully, emanating a distant fragrance, bringing warmth nearby. In the warm night, the old candle flame gradually weakened, like distant stars in the sky. The new candle flame grew brighter and more brilliant, resembling the light of the sun!

Chapter 806: Grandfather's Promise, Food, Stronghold, and Talent

"Grain...the relocation and resettlement of the tribes all require grain. With the eastward expedition imminent, the grain from various villages in the Lake Region must be collected and prioritized for war preparations."

The High Priest Xutel gazed at the candlelight in the hall for a long while in contemplation. Then, he turned to Xiulote and promised calmly.

"Xiulote, my child, I will give you a year's supply of grain for 200,000 people! Thirty percent of this will come from the High Priesthood's reserves, thirty percent from the warehouses of the Holy City faction. The remaining forty percent will be collected from the local nobility of the Telokan State and Raziko State after dealing with the Great Nobility in these states, to support the migrating groups."

"Grain for 200,000 people for a year!..."

Hearing this number, Xiulote was quite elated. If there truly was this much grain, not only could the migrating tribes be resettled, but it would also fill the grain deficit of the kingdom and even ensure the supply for the Imperial Guard Legion's eastward expedition.

"Yes. Both the population and grain must be transported by water as much as possible. The first batch of grain will be transferred immediately, and the kingdom's Naval Forces must be prepared for transport."

The High Priest smiled faintly, reached out his hand, and touched the cheek of his grandson.

"The last batch of grain is estimated to be ready after the autumn harvest in October...Rest assured, my child. As long as I am here, nothing will go wrong."

"Grandfather..."

Xiulote bowed down sincerely, saluting his grandfather.

"Chief Divine bless! Ancestors protect! May you be in good health and bring glory to the Alliance!"

"Chief Divine bless! Ancestors protect! May the Holy City faction shine upon the world..."

The High Priest nodded and softly chanted. Under the bright candlelight, the two highest-ranking clergy sat opposite each other, praying together for the future.

A moment later, the High Priest stopped chanting. He looked at the alliance map, pondered for a while, and his eyes flashed with brilliance. "Xiulote, the kingdom's tin ore supply and the southern trade route both need to pass through the Tarsas River, through the Land of Jontal...In fact, these two issues can be solved together."

As he spoke, the High Priest placed his finger heavily in the middle of the Land of Jontal.

"Here is a settlement of the Jontal people, named Tal Village after the river. Tal Village is located in the middle of the Tarsas River trade route. East of the village is a newly developed medium-sized tin mine and a small gold mine that has just been sporadically developed."

"Tal Village..."

Xiulote focused his gaze, seeing Tal Village (now Nuevo Balsas) located southwest of the Lake Capital City, over 400 li away, and southeast of Kulamo City, over 600 li away. It connects to the Kingdom of the Lake via the Tar River waterway, reachable by boat in half a month.

"My child, this is the midstream of the Tar River, an extremely important node! Landing from here, heading southeast, within a hundred li lies the territory of the Mistec people. Following the Tar River waterway northeast for two to three hundred li lies the Tlaxcala people's Tepeyacac State."

The High Priest spoke calmly, well-prepared.

"Tal Village is surrounded by mountains and only accessible conveniently via water. Although it appears to be closer to the Lake Capital City, the actual interactions are more convenient with the kingdom. Xiulote, during your eastward expedition, you need to establish a waystation in the midstream of the Tar River, and I have selected this place for you."

"The High Priesthood will hand this place to the kingdom in the name of the eastward expedition. You just need to build a mountain fortress here, station a thousand Samurai, and with the new large ships of the kingdom, you can control the entire Tar River..."

"...Located in the midstream of the Tar River, it is strategically important, surrounded by mountains and rivers. It is a junction of different tribes and a crucial point for the southern trade route. It can retreat and defend at the danger, and advance to attack the upper stream, with nearby tin and gold mines..."

Xiulote murmured softly, his facial expression changing. This treacherous position, if controlled by others, would leave the southern part of the kingdom exposed. He pondered for a while, then bowed down again, saluting his grandfather.

"Grandfather, thank you!"

"My child, there is nothing to thank between us."

Hearing this, the High Priest shook his head gently, unable to hold back his laughter.

"Everything I do is for you, for the family...I will try to do more before the end of the eastward expedition..."

The High Priest's voice gradually diminished. Then, his expression turned serious as he made another solemn promise.

"As for the various talents needed by the kingdom...In recent years, the priesthood university in the capital has recruited many commoner children, training them to become young priests knowledgeable in writing and arithmetic...The number of those still unassigned is about four to five hundred. Their abilities are reliable, but they have not yet been assigned due to the situation in the Texcoco Lake District...There are too many nobility heirs waiting for positions of real power."

"Xiulote, my child, I will entrust all these young priests of commoner origin to you! Their families will also be relocated to the Kingdom of the Lake. With this batch of key personnel, you will no longer need to rely too much on the elites of Prepetcha..."

"Excellent, truly excellent!"

Hearing this, Xiulote was very pleased and nodded with a smile.

"Four to five hundred young priests knowledgeable in writing and arithmetic are a valuable asset for the Kingdom of the Lake!"

A faint smile appeared on the High Priest's lips. He pondered for a while before speaking slowly, under his grandson's expectant gaze.

"My child, in the Divine Revelation Place of the Lake Capital City, there are many senior artisans you have commanded before...Give me a list, and I will try to mobilize them for you...The water

management project of Lake Texcoco was personally planned by the elders. The senior artisans skilled in water management should be requested from the elders, leave that to me...As for the expert farmers familiar with building Chinampa, the Holy City faction has them, and I will entrust them to you as well..."

Listening to his grandfather's promises, Xiulote was moved. He pursed his lips and asked softly.

"Grandfather, should I go to the elders and..."

"The elder's illness is severe, and he is rarely conscious. Leave these things to me."

The High Priest's words were calm, but his expression was resolute. Then, he asked softly.

"My child, do you have any other needs?"

Hearing this, Xiulote pondered silently, contemplating repeatedly. After a while, he looked at his paper armor and said softly.

"Grandfather, I also need some...guards skilled in assassination and adept at scouting intelligence. And instructors who can train such guards."

Only guards skilled in assassination can effectively defend against assassinations. This work requires specialized training, which is never the forte of warriors engaged in direct combat.

"Guards skilled in assassination and scouting..."

The High Priest's expression changed. He lowered his eyes, contemplated deeply for a moment, then slowly nodded.

"Xiulote, my child, I heard of the assassination attempt you faced in the kingdom's southern region."

At this point, the High Priest's face remained calm, but his words grew somber.

"The Holy City faction indeed has such talents. There are specially trained Priestesses in the High Priesthood. Over the years, many attempts on my life have been thwarted by them..."

"In a few days, I will send her to see you!"

## Chapter 807: Nashu

The night wind blew, and the candlelight flickered in the wind, illuminating the murals of the divine. The side hall was deep and quiet, with darkness hovering outside the firelight, devouring the corners of the walls. The candle silently burned, its shadows swaying back and forth, making the deities on the mural seem almost alive.

Xiulote sat silently, quietly waiting, sensing something. He lifted his head and glanced at the mural in the side hall. The Chief Divine in the center still shone brightly under the homage of the candlelight. In a corner, however, the God of Death was already hidden in the darkness, extending a long red tongue.

"Huh? Did I fall asleep?"

High Priest Xutel suddenly opened his eyes. He shook his head, his gaze cloudy for a moment before clearing. He was old, his energy weakened, and having been busy the entire day, he could no longer hold on. Talking on and on, he suddenly fell asleep. Fortunately, the summer night was warm, and there was no worry of catching a cold.

"Grandfather, you should rest early... Please, take care of your health!"

Xiulote extended his hand, grasping his grandfather's slightly cool and aging hand, a look of concern in his eyes.

"It's no bother."

The High Priest smiled and returned the grasp, his eyes warm, speaking softly.

"Xiulote, my child, is there anything else you need?"

Xiulote was about to shake his head when he saw the map on the table. After a moment of contemplation, he opened his mouth to ask.

"Grandfather...the alliance's maps and information, if convenient..."

"Hmm. I will have someone compile a set of the alliance's information held by the High Priesthood."

The High Priest immediately understood. He nodded with a slight smile, agreeing.

"And under the pretext of an eastern expedition, they will be handed to you. Just in case..."

Xiulote nodded. Many records of the alliance were drawings on wooden boards and ritual plates, stored in various temples, making them hard to copy secretly. Using the pretext of an eastern expedition would make things much simpler.

"Anything else?"

"That's all for now. Grandfather, there's no need to rush..."

"Hmm."

The High Priest calmly nodded, a slight smile on his lips.

"Xiulote, I shall retire for now."

"Grandfather, let me help you to bed."

Xiulote stood up and assisted his grandfather. The two stood side by side, one tall and one short, facing the candlelight on the wall. The High Priest paused as he looked at the candlelight, then resumed his calm demeanor.

"Let's go."

"Alright!"

Xiulote supported his grandfather and walked out of the side hall. Before leaving, he suddenly turned back. At some unknown point, the low candle had completely burned out, turning into wisps of smoke in the wind, with only a few traces of ash.

"The candle... has gone out."

Xiulote lowered his eyes, suppressing the unease in his heart. He helped his grandfather rest and quietly withdrew from the room. The long night was silent, stirring distant thoughts that made sleep elusive. Alone, he looked up at the vast Milky Way, which was dazzlingly brilliant.

Long after, a low sigh softly echoed, carrying a somewhat indistinct meaning.

"Who in the world... can achieve eternal life?"

In the following two days, Xiulote regularly visited the Priest Grand Hall, assisting his grandfather in handling the alliance's religious affairs and frequently meeting with the elder priests. Following his grandfather's instructions, he maintained propriety in public and did not become too close with any elders.

The Temple Guards captured the Texcoco noble families involved in the rebellion over two days, with none escaping the net. Subsequently, a strict trial was held in the Temple of the God of Death.

The High Priesthood and the central royal authority agreed: the rebels must face divine punishment—strictly, severely, and widely. This was an opportunity to root out the divided noble factions of Tlacopan thoroughly.



In just three days, the alliance's trial concluded. The heads of three prominent noble families had all their male members sacrificed, cutting off noble lineages and being erased from temple records. The remaining dozen noble families had their adult males sacrificed, and their dependents were exiled to the western kingdoms.

The entire noble force on the western shore of Lake Texcoco would be thoroughly purged. The number set for exile by the High Priesthood was an astonishing twenty thousand!

The shocking news spread rapidly, attracting everyone's attention. Nobles across the states were anxious and fearful. Waves of centralization reform by the alliance were sweeping in, changing traditions that had lasted for hundreds or thousands of years. The Lake Capital City, like the eye of the storm, continued to brew new tempests!

July passed in the sweeping storm, and August arrived quietly amidst the wind and rain. On this day, Xiulote finally found leisure and visited the noble district to pay respects to the Deputy Head of the Jaguar Legion, his father, Xiuxoke.

"Xiulote, my son, you're here!"

Xiuxoke, dressed in loose robes, stood in the open doorway of the mansion. He beamed and opened his arms, giving his son a warm embrace.

"Haha, son, let me have a good look at you! Hmm, you've grown taller than me, and you look even more valiant, just like I did when I was young!"

"Honorable father, I greet you! May the Chief Divine bless you with good health!"

Xiulote bowed, returning the embrace of his long-unseen father. The last time they parted was at the Huayamo Fortress in northern Qinchongcan. Two and a half years had passed, and his father had become even thinner... Hmm? No, that's not right...

"Father... you..."

Xiulote widened his eyes and curiously touched his father. Below the loose robe was solid and heavy fat, entirely covering the previously chiseled muscles. He then looked closely at his father's face, which was round and slightly plump, clearly showing a double chin when he smiled.

"Haha, the city life... is leisurely. This kind of leisure has turned a Jaguar into a brown bear."

Xiuxoke self-depreciatingly smiled and shook his head. He then took his most outstanding eldest son by the hand and excitedly led him into the mansion.

"Come, come, Xiulote, today you came just in time..."

Xiulote followed his father, passing quickly through the front hall for meetings and heading straight to the back living quarters. Just as he was feeling puzzled, his father's next words made him stumble, nearly falling to the ground.

"My son, your youngest brother just turned one this month! Come, let him call you 'brother'..."

After seeing his newly one-year-old brother, Xiulote finally sat down formally to have a good chat with his father. He spoke of the kingdom's governance, the southern and northern campaigns, and once mentioned the dangers he had encountered and the current status of Legion Commander Olosh.

Xiuxoke listened carefully, watching his valiant eldest son, his face full of relief and pride.

"Xiulote, my son, seeing you so impressive, fills me with pride!"

Then, he sighed and patted his stomach.

"As for me... Once I entered the capital, it was all wealth and leisure. These past two years, not to mention fighting enemies, I haven't even killed a single turkey with my own hands... Even the bow on the wall is gathering dust..."

For over two years, despite holding the deputy head title of the Jaguar Legion, Xiuxoke had little to manage. He had no direct Guard Camp to command and apart from acting as the king's escort official during various ceremonies, there was nothing else to do.

No official duties, but plenty of leisure affairs. Every now and then, he would be invited by the capital's great nobles to either enjoy songs and dances or go for outings. When in high spirits, the group would drink and sing, reciting poetry.

The Mexica nobles favored poetry highly, with elder venerables often reciting poems after banquets. Even among the commoners, a poet's status was higher than musicians and dancers. With several poems from who knows where, Xiuxoke earned the title "Honorable Poet" among the great nobles.

King Aweit also treated him with great favor, occasionally bestowing gifts and often rewarding many beauties presented by various states. Helplessly, Xiuxoke barely managed to endure nightly, siring several more brothers and sisters for Xiulote...

"Father, there should be some restraint in feasting and reveling!"

After listening, Xiulote pursed his lips and softly advised.

"Even if the military is idle, one can practice martial arts daily to hone the body."

"Hmm, my son, don't worry."

Xiuxoke smiled and gently shook his head.

"This... all comes from your grandfather's advice... I'm reluctantly enjoying leisure!..."

Upon hearing this, Xiulote paused. He thought of his frail grandfather, then looked at his round father. After a while, he slowly nodded.

"... I see. Father, you've had a hard time..."

"Haha!"

Father and son laughed heartily. The joyous laughter echoed through the courtyard, then abruptly ceased, giving way to silent contemplation. After a long while, Xiuxoke patted his son's shoulder, speaking emotionally.

"My son, let's drink together today until we're drunk!"

"Alright! I dare not disobey!"

The bamboo flute played cheerfully, music and dance soaring, and the merry revel only ended deep into the night with Xiuxoke's drunken fall.

In the grand hall, the firelight was warm. Xiulote placed a thin blanket over his father, sighing softly as he looked at his smiling mouth.

"The caged eagle... Father, you've had a hard time..."

Afterward, Xiulote stood up and left, not staying long in the mansion. Under Bertade's escort, lightly and simply, he tread through the vast night, heading back to the High Priest's mansion.

During his time in the capital city, he stayed with his grandfather, discussing arrangements closely and spending more time with his aged grandfather.

The High Priest's mansion was heavily guarded, with multiple layers of patrolling warriors to prevent assassination attempts by certain nobles. Xiulote, familiar with the path, entered the mansion. It was late at night, and he did not disturb his grandfather but headed toward his small courtyard.

"Your Highness, there's someone ahead!"

Halfway there, Bertade suddenly spoke, his expression becoming somber. He stepped forward cautiously, shielding Xiulote behind him. The Head Warrior squinted his hawk-like sharp eyes, slowly drawing the bronze sword from his waist, pointing it forward.

"Hmm?"

Xiulote was slightly surprised. Following the direction of the bronze sword, he discerned a dark figure in the shadows behind the courtyard wall.

The figure stood still, the position cleverly taking advantage of the distracting torchlight ahead, completely blending into the shadow behind, with not a sound of breathing heard. Having experienced battles, Xiulote considered himself an excellent warrior, but if not for Bertade's reminder, he wouldn't have noticed...

"Who are you?"

Xiulote frowned, having a guess. To appear in such a heavily guarded High Priest's mansion in this manner...

Seeing their reactions, the still figure seemed to come alive in an instant. She silently walked a few steps forward, standing under the courtyard torchlight, revealing a woman in black. The woman wore a veil covering her face, dressed in black short clothes, and silent cloth shoes. For mobility, the black clothes were tightly fitted, outlining her graceful curves, like a cinched funnel.

"Greetings, Your Highness Xiulote."

Under the cautious gaze of the Head Warrior, the woman in black walked soundlessly, stopping a few steps away, bowing her head in respect to Xiulote. Her voice was smoky, low yet full of confidence. She then extended her hand, slowly lifting the veil, revealing a beautiful and elegant face.

Xiulote's eyes shifted. Looking at the woman before him, he seemed to see a moonlit night blooming flower in the dark, a dazzling stone lotus.

The woman in black calmly extended her hand, producing the jade talisman of the High Priest, tossing it to the still-alert Head Warrior. Then, her eyes sparkled, examining Xiulote's handsome face, suddenly giving a charming smile, and bowed.

"Your Highness, from today, I am your shadow slave... I will always be by your side, ensuring your safety, complying with your every wish, and fulfilling any of your needs... From now on, I will bear your name, and be called Nashu."

#### Chapter 808: Escort, Intelligence, and Attending Bed

August is the warm cloud and rain, gently caressing the lover's cheeks, making people's hearts flutter and entangle. The summer rain falls incessantly, the cool breeze passes unnoticed, and a few days pass in a blink.

The High Priest's Mansion remains heavily guarded, with the Temple Warriors holding torches, patrolling day and night. In the courtyard where Xiulote resides, the flickering firelight cast shadows, the night was heavy, and a faint fragrance floated in the air.

The moonlight, like water, cascades from the open roof, bathing the simple bedroom in a clear glow. A beautiful red-edged echeveria blossoms silently under the moonlight. Its succulent leaves are elegantly simple and spread out layer by layer, tinged with a delicate pink edge. At first glance, it is dignified and graceful; upon closer inspection, it exudes an unspoken allure.

"Bewitching spirit shadow... The goddess under the moonlit night..."

Xiulote, neatly dressed, sat upright in the bedroom. He gazed at the flower and whispered softly.

"Osphrolirion..."

Osphrolirion, also known as red-edged echeveria, is a succulent plant native to Mexico, of the genus Echeveria. Its leaves are slender with red edges and overall resemble a graceful red-edged lotus flower, highly popular in later eras. In the Mexica Alliance, it is also a favored flower among the nobility, able to be grown in well-lit rooms.

Nashu, dressed in a short outfit, stood by the Osphrolirion, quietly waiting for His Highness to rest. The August weather was hot, and she had short hair and bare feet. Her short attire barely covered what needed to be concealed, drawing irresistible glances.

Xiulote's gaze moved slightly, then shifted away. Her face was as clear and delicate as water; her arms were slender and toned, her waist flexible and agile, her legs long and powerful. All these features caught his eye. The short attire outlined her graceful curves, making them even more alluring, stirring imaginations. The young king paused, then nonchalantly averted his gaze to admire the flower again.

The summer flowers bloomed around him, exuding enchanting aromas and swaying with alluring postures, stirring hearts without a word.

Nashu blinked and smiled faintly. She stood gracefully, silently adjusting her posture to accentuate her allure in the flickering firelight. As a priestess trained from a young age, she knew dozens of ways to hide herself and lessen her presence. But at this moment, she deliberately attracted His Highness's attention.

Xiulote looked away with a calm expression. Nashu had only been here a few days, but she quietly changed his daily life. Like a drop of ink falling into a cup, silently blending in, tinting the clear life.

In these few days, the first thing Nashu did was to replace Bertade, the Head Warrior, taking charge of His Highness's personal protection. At first, the Head Warrior had some objections, mainly doubting Nashu's combat skills.

However, the young Nashu, full of confidence, smiled and declared,

"Dear Holy Eagle Head Warrior, the Divine blesses all things, each with its strengths. On the battlefield, I am not your equal but in close combat, you are not mine."

At these words, the calm Head Warrior raised an eyebrow. Then, under Xiulote's witness, the two engaged in close combat with short daggers in a narrow room, the first to strike a vital area winning.

The daggers flashed, moving as swiftly as hawks. The dangerous duel lasted only a dozen breaths but left Xiulote sweating. Within five steps, each fighter could defeat a hundred; both were far more skilled than him...

The final outcome was unexpected yet made sense. As Nashu claimed, relying on agility and dexterity, she had the upper hand in the narrow room. Bertade, with a sullen face, acknowledged his defeat and handed over the close-in personal guard but remained responsible for His Highness's travel safety.

Nashu then arranged several professional assassins trained at the High Priest's Mansion to blend in among the guarding warriors as undercover observers. A few professional potion doctors were on standby, following His Highness with antidotes for common poisons. His meals were strictly managed, prepared by dedicated servants.

In the wild and tropical Americas, there were too many exotic herbs and poisons, often without antidotes, requiring caution.

Next, besides close protection, Nashu's second duty was to absorb the spies within the High Priest's Mansion, perfecting Xiulote's intelligence team.

In the Mexica Alliance, the systematic intelligence organization could be roughly divided into three branches. The first was the King's foreign intelligence scouts, the traveling merchants known as Pochteca. After the Mayan merchants Tikalo were absorbed by the Alliance, they became honorable Pochteca, leveraging their merchant status to trade between states and gather intelligence.

The second also belonged to the King, mainly for internal espionage, the Alliance Secret Guards. Before inheriting the throne, Aweit had served as the Alliance's intelligence chief. After taking the throne, to enforce centralized reforms and monitor the Great Nobility who suffered losses in interests, he organized the Alliance Secret Guards, enhancing internal intelligence oversight.

Regarding the Alliance Secret Guards, Xiulote knew little, only that they mostly existed as guards serving the Great Nobility in the open while secretly serving the central royal family. The recent rise of the Telokan State's Mountain Family was inseparable from the Secret Guards.

The common leader of the Alliance Pochteca and Secret Guards was the Chief Intelligence Officer, Gillim.



The third branch was the numerous priesthoods under the High Priesthood, scattered everywhere. The Preaching Priests had the function of confession, gaining secrets through confessions; the Ascetic Priests traveled everywhere, trusted and respected by the people, thereby also gathering much information.

Additionally, the Alliance upheld chastity, executing adulterers. The female priestesses in various temples were the only place Alliance Warriors could legitimately seek pleasure outside their families, naturally becoming important sources of intelligence.

In these wild and war-ridden times, combat and death were omnipresent. Roads were blocked, bandits rampant, barbarian tribes raided and plundered, life was like grass. Effective intelligence organizations consumed vast resources, requiring constant investment in manpower and finances to train professionals, beyond the capacity of ordinary states.

In other words, without money or people, one shouldn't think about intelligence, better to raise a few more warriors.

The Kingdom of the Lake, newly established, had an incomplete intelligence team. Xiulote had taken in some bronze merchants for external Pochteca, and installed a few personal guard warriors in the army to monitor the Kingdom Legions. As for a more rigorous internal intelligence organization, the kingdom had just started investing resources to establish it. The organization's name, coined by Xiulote, was "Secret Guard," counter to the Alliance Secret Guards.

Nashu, coming from the Holy City temple line, had undergone rigorous training from childhood, raised by priestesses. Now, under the High Priest's orders, she became Xiulote's shadow slave and the first head of the "Secret Guard."

Besides close protection and managing intelligence, Nashu had a third role...

Thinking of this, Xiulote felt a headache. These days, Nashu was always by his side, like a shadow day and night, never more than ten steps away. And once night fell, the elegant beauty would stand tall, like a ripe fruit, swaying before him, ready for the picking.

"Ahem."

Xiulote lightly coughed, looking at the Osphrolirion-like enchanting woman.

"Nashu, I need to rest now..."

"Your Highness, it's late."

Nashu's lips curled into a seductive smile, her voice as smoky as it was alluring. She stepped forward gently, stretching out a fair hand to untie Xiulote's robe, then touched his firm chest.

"Please allow your shadow slave to serve you in resting..."

#### Chapter 809: Desire and Teaching

The night breeze was warm, and the moonlight was cool. Nashu's eyes filled with a smile as she reached out with her delicate hand, untying the young man's robe, caressing him intimately and gently.

"..."

Xiulote stood rigidly, motionless. He felt a pair of cool hands softly stroking his chest, causing his whole body to heat up. An enticing fragrance lingered at his nose. It was hard to tell whether it was the flowers blooming in the distance or the beauty beside him. He opened his eyes wide and saw the beautiful woman with her head lowered, gentle as water. He closed his eyes, feeling the soft, delicate hands move downwards, across his chest, passing his waist and abdomen, until...

"Uh, Nashu!"

Xiulote grunted, suddenly opening his eyes. He pushed away the close beauty and quickly stepped back two steps, hitting the wall behind him.

"Your Highness?"

Nashu raised her head in confusion. She looked at her hands, recalling the touch from moments ago, certain that His Highness was already aroused. So, the reaction of His Highness was to... She gave him a

reproachful glance, looking at the prince who was gasping against the wall. Then, without hesitation, she swiftly untied her short clothes, revealing everything hidden. With a charming smile, swaying like a red lotus, she approached him.

"Your Highness..."

Xiulote's gaze was instantly drawn to the undulating curves. After several breaths, he bit his lip hard and, with the agility of a Samurai, swiftly stepped back two steps.

"Nashu, you... stop!"

"Ah?"

Nashu's smile froze, obediently stopping in her tracks. For a shadow slave, obeying her master's orders was the most important duty. She stretched her alluring waist, hugging her barely concealed chest, looking pitifully at His Highness. However, His Highness averted his gaze, his face red, not meeting her eyes.

"Your Highness?"

Seeing the strange demeanor of His Highness, Nashu was taken aback, somewhat puzzled. She looked at the obvious reaction of His Highness' body and then at his heroic yet slightly flushed face... The beauty blinked her eyes, suddenly thinking of an incredulous possibility. She smiled lightly, the corners of her mouth curving up.

"Your Highness... could this be your first time?"

"..."

Xiulote was rendered speechless. In the Mexica Alliance, most noble youths his age were battle-hardened and even had offspring. After a brief silence, Xiulote spoke faintly.

"Nashu, an outstanding Jaguar Warrior can often suppress his desires and hone his body until the age of 20..."

"Ah, praise the Chief Divine! So Your Highness has never experienced such joy..."

Nashu covered her mouth and laughed softly, her chest heaving, her eyes showing undeniable delight. Her eyes glimmered with moisture, and she parted her red lips slightly. She then stood on her tiptoes, lightly twirling her body to make her beauty more apparent.

"Your Highness, do not worry. A shadow slave learns many things from the Priestesses. Though this is also my first time, I can surely bring you joy. As your personal shadow slave, I exist only for you, and everything of mine is devoted to you... Before you marry the Princess, you should not be ignorant of such things... Let us together begin a wonderful first exploration, to teach you the mysteries of love!"

"..."

Like smoke, a soft murmur filled the room, almost like the chirping of birds, irresistibly charming. Xiulote tightened his lips, remaining silent. The remnants of morality from the later ages and the ancient traditions of the Alliance fiercely clashed within him... After a while, he finally subdued his desires, shaking his head.

"Nashu... I understand. My first song of love is for Alisa..."

"Yes, I see... Your Highness' first song of love should be shared with the Princess..."

Upon hearing this, Nashu's eyes dimmed, lowering her head in disappointment. She stepped back a few paces, picked up her short garment from the floor, and, curling up her exquisite body, dressed herself again. In a moment, the seductive beauty swaying like a campfire transformed back into an elegant guard as cold as the moon.

Seeing this, Xiulote felt a strange pang of reluctance in his heart. He lay on his back on the soft wooden bed, gazing at the moon on the ceiling, feeling a fire burning in his abdomen.

Nashu blew out the candlelight, spreading a thin blanket on the ground, and went to sleep next to Xiulote's bed, fully clothed. As a shadow slave, she had undergone long-term training to sleep whenever necessary to recover physical strength, yet she slept lightly, waking up at the slightest disturbance, like a vigilant cat.

Soon, soft breathing filled the room, carrying a faint and delicate fragrance, lingering in Xiulote's ears.

The moon was enchanting, spreading its cool light. The night sky, like an expansive plain, let his wild thoughts run free. Xiulote lay still, staring at the pure night sky, his thoughts scattered. After a long time, he finally sighed and turned onto his side, facing away from Nashu, making himself more comfortable in some areas.

"Your Highness..."

A gentle voice suddenly rang from behind Xiulote. Then, a pair of tender arms wrapped around his neck. A soft touch pressed against his cheek, moving to his neck, and then a gentle nibble on his ear, turning into an enticing caress.

Xiulote stiffened, responding lowly while turned away.

"Nashu... you mustn't..."

"Master, do not worry."

A tender whisper filled Xiulote's ear, with a breath like orchids, making him itch with desire.

"If it goes on like this, you will not be able to sleep... The shadow slave will use another way to ease your troubles..."

Following this, the soft sensation trailed downwards, moving continually, bringing Xiulote relaxation until...

"Nashu, you!"

Xiulote exclaimed, his whole body tensing. An indescribable softness enveloped him, deeply etching into his bones like electricity, giving him uncontrollable pleasure...

The moonlight, as tender as water, quietly showered down from the sky, enveloping everything soundlessly. Under the moon, beautiful red-edged lotus blossoms bloomed, becoming more alluring and teasing, attracting the moonlight's gaze, making it impossible not to taste.

After a long time, a beast-like low roar burst forth like a storm, then everything returned to peace. Under the moonlit night, only a triumphant giggle and a helpless sigh remained.

"Nashu~"

The next morning, Xiulote dressed in his robes with Nashu's assistance. His expression was complex as he glanced at Nashu, who licked her enticing red lips with a smile.

Xiulote's pupils contracted, immediately turning his gaze away. He walked out of the mansion in large strides to pay respects to his grandfather.

The morning sun bathed the High Priest's Mansion, illuminating the waiting Imperial Guard Warrior. Bertade held a bronze sword, standing watch outside the mansion. Spotting His Highness, he bowed his head in calm salute and gave a faint glance at Nashu dressed as a female warrior.

"Your Highness, greetings! Did you sleep well last night?"

"... It was alright."

Xiulote hesitated, nodding slightly. With Nashu taking over the personal guard duty, the Head Warrior didn't have to work so hard every day... he affectionately patted the Head Warrior's shoulder before moving forward, passing through two layers of guards and arriving at his grandfather's bedchamber.

"May the Chief Divine bless you! Grandfather, I greet you and wish you good health!"

"May the Chief Divine bless you! Xiulote, come in."

The spacious bedchamber was filled with incense, instantly refreshing and soothing the spirit. Grandfather and grandson sat facing each other, each with a cup of steaming hibiscus tea in front of them.

"Xiulote, my child, did you sleep well last night?"

The High Priest smiled lightly. Observing Xiulote's expression, he seemed to understand everything clearly.

"... It was alright. The moonlight was beautiful, and the flowers were enchanting."

Xiulote lowered his eyes slightly, answering truthfully. Then, after hesitating for a moment, he asked.

"Grandfather... Nashu's origins..."

"Oh?"

The High Priest gave his grandson a look and smiled faintly, responding with a question.

"She is your shadow slave and will always stay by your side. My child, are you satisfied?"

"Yes."

Xiulote replied softly, his head nodding almost imperceptibly, but feeling somewhat embarrassed.

"However..."

"It is fine. Xiulote, everything should be as usual. Whatever you intend to do, you shouldn't be affected by the presence of a shadow slave, nor mind her thoughts."

The High Priest said calmly, his expression unchanging.

"A shadow slave is a servant in your shadow. Human fate is always predetermined by the Chief Divine. Nashu, like you, was born in Teotihuacan. She exists only for you, and everything is dedicated to you."

Hearing this, Xiulote frowned slightly. Last night, Nashu said the same thing.

Seeing his grandson's demeanor, the High Priest pondered and elaborated further.

"My child, since your miraculous birth, I have felt that you are the hope of the Holy City faction! You are extraordinary by nature and have been the focus of the family since young. When you showed signs of divine wisdom at two years old, the Holy City faction made many preparations."

"Nashu was adopted by the Priesthood of the Holy City at that time. She has no parents, no relatives, no friends, raised with utmost care, receiving the strictest training, growing up as your shadow slave. In fact, there were over a dozen baby girls receiving similar training; Nashu was the best of them."

"From the moment she could speak, she was taught by the Priestesses, understanding the purpose of her existence, solely to serve the incarnation of the divine on earth. Over a decade of education, combined with potions' conditioning... You are her only one! You need never doubt her loyalty."

"No parents, relatives, friends... indoctrinated from a young age to live for others..."

Upon hearing this, Xiulote lowered his eyes, his emotions swirling. He wanted to speak, but as the beneficiary, he found no words.

"My child, your safety is paramount and cannot be entrusted to others lightly. Nashu is the most suitable choice to handle intelligence and protection!"



At this point, the High Priest's eyes gleamed with hope. He reached out and touched his grandson's cheek, solemnly urging.

"Xiulote, your previous assassination attempt reminded me clearly. Over these years, you've been battling outside continuously, maintaining strict self-discipline. Though this comforts me, it inevitably means you lack... experience and resistance in certain aspects."

The High Priest spoke calmly, without any change in his expression.

"Another function of a shadow slave is to provide you with joy, releasing inner desires. The joys of a man and a woman are divinely bestowed instincts; the more suppressed, the more alluring they become. The scions of the Great Nobility experience the service of numerous beauties upon coming of age, a necessary part of their learning... The purpose isn't indulgence, but to show you that such joys are trivial!"

"This pleasure is readily available; after repeated experience, it becomes unremarkable and won't cloud your judgment on crucial decisions. Do not worry; shadow slaves routinely consume Zicao extract, preventing pregnancy."

"Grandfather!"

Listening to his grandfather, Xiulote's eyes widened. He realized everything had been meticulously planned.

The High Priest's expression turned serious. He looked at his grandson and at the hopes of the Holy City faction, bearing a weight that was both unbearable yet necessary. After a long while, he spoke again, his voice ancient but firm.

"Xiulote, my child, always remember! The pleasures of the flesh are fleeting. What truly deserves your lifelong pursuit is supreme power, immortal achievements, and the future of the Alliance!"

Chapter 810: The Prison

The morning prayers resonated in the Lake Capital City, singing praises of the Chief Divine's brilliance. Faint smoke rose into the sky, transforming into mystical shapes that narrated the omens of the divine.

Xiulote conversed briefly, then left his grandfather's bedroom. He raised his head, standing in the vast High Priest's Mansion, gazing at the cloudy sky. The fate of mortals is like the drifting smoke, scattering into the grand era's firmament, henceforth unable to control their destiny...

After a few seconds, the young king smiled calmly. He glanced at Bertade and Nashu standing on either side and instructed in a deep voice.

"Let's go to the Priesthood's prison and judge the fate of the rebels!"

"As your will commands!"

Under the escort of dozens of Imperial Guard Warriors, Xiulote stepped forward briskly, leaving the High Priest's Mansion within two steps. The group headed towards the Great Temple, arriving at the Priesthood's prison after a quarter of an hour.

The Priesthood's prison is situated at the center of the Temple District, inside the temple of the God of Sin, close to the Great Temple where sacrifices are held. The prison houses individuals who are destined to be divine sacrifices in the Great Temple's ceremonies, precious offerings meant for the divine. Therefore, the prison is heavily guarded by over a hundred Temple Warriors inside and out.

Seeing the approaching banners, a middle-aged Priest wearing a Feather Crown hurriedly walked out of the temple. His high cheekbones, gloomy and severe expression, with terrifying facial tattoos, made people shiver involuntarily. Only when he saw Xiulote, did he manage to squeeze out a smile, bowing his head in salute.

"The Chief Divine protects! Greetings, Supreme High Priest!"

"The Chief Divine protects! Greetings, Priest Yao!"

Xiulote smiled back, his manner gentle and words quite courteous.

Although the middle-aged priest in front of him is only a Fourth Level Chief Priest, he comes from an ancient priestly family. The meaning of Yao is combat and hostility; they are an important branch of the War God Priest lineage. Generationally, they manage the prison, overseeing the captives meant for sacrifice, devout in serving the divine, their position relatively independent. With the expanding influence of the High Priesthood, the role of Priest Yao has grown increasingly important, akin to the ancient judicial officials of the Celestial Empire.

After exchanging a few words, they moved to the main topic. Priest Yao's expression turned solemn as he spoke in a deep voice.

"Respected Supreme High Priest Xiulote, the prison of the God of Sin has always held many war prisoners and rebels sentenced for sacrifices. Recently, the High Priesthood has been rigorously dealing with the rebel nobility from Tlacopan, and numerous divine sacrifices have been transferred here... I wonder, who might you wish to visit?"

"Respected Priest Yao, I have come this time to visit the rebel noble from the Western Kingdom, Clan Leader Guramo of the Zicao Clan."

Xiulote's expression remained unchanged, but his hand silently tightened.

"Oh, Guramo! The one transferred here not long ago by the kingdom's Secret Guards. That guy, that guy..."

Saying this, Priest Yao frowned, pausing as though he had more to say. After a few breaths, he shook his head slightly.

"Supreme High Priest, it's best if I personally take you to see him!"

"Hmm?"

Xiulote raised his eyebrows thoughtfully. He ordered the Imperial Guards to remain outside the temple, taking only Bertade and Nashu with him, following Priest Yao deeper into the prison.

As soon as they entered the prison, the thick scent of blood and sweat assaulted their noses, causing slight dizziness. The prison held many narrow and sturdy stone cells, all tightly packed with male nobles covered in dirt. Some had blank expressions, others showed despair, some whispered in fear, and some screamed in anger. A few remained calm and unfazed.

As Priest Yao entered, the nobles in the stone cells erupted. Many rushed to the front of their cells, pleading loudly, swearing by the Chief Divine, and promising various benefits.

"Supreme High Priest, these are all great nobles from Tlacopan."

Priest Yao slightly turned his head to explain. Then, his expression became cold and stern as he scanned the hopeless sacrifices, leading the way deeper into the prison.

Seeing the indifference of the prison's Chief Priest, the nobles became even more desperate, some going hysterical. Recognizing Xiulote, they shouted loudly. Soon, frenzied curses erupted from the cells, mixed with venomous insults aimed at the High Priest.

Xiulote listened for a moment, a murderous intent rising in his heart. His face turned pale, clutching the Obsidian Dagger at his waist, his gaze sweeping across the struggling noble sacrifices, before slowly suppressing his killing intent. The warriors guarding the prison shouted harshly, violently poking the nobles with blunt wooden sticks, quieting the nearly crazed nobles slightly.

Priest Yao, accustomed to such scenes, continued steadily. He opened the inner stone cells of the prison, walking down cautiously, finally stopping at a bloodstained stone cell, pointing at the curled-up, thin figure in the corner.

"Supreme High Priest, this is Clan Leader Guramo of the Zicao Clan."

"Thank you, Priest Yao."

Xiulote nodded in acknowledgment. Then, his gaze deepened, observing the figure in the corner through the dim torchlight of the cell. The person hugged his legs, head down, his face unseen.

"Please open the cell. I want to question him personally."

"As you wish."

Priest Yao waved his hand, and two guards approached, untying the sisal rope lock outside the cell. Then, they exerted force together to open the heavy small cell door. Subsequently, Priest Yao solemnly reminded while pointing at the prisoner.

"Supreme High Priest, please be cautious during the interrogation. When the Alliance Secret Guards handed over the prisoner, they informed the prison that the sacrifices possess extraordinary martial arts skills and have consumed excessive Holy Water, resulting in complete insanity... In other words, this is a human-shaped beast, whose soul was destroyed by divine power during the trials."

"Consumed excessive Holy Water? Human-shaped beast..."

Upon hearing this, Xiulote's heart sank. He expressed gratitude to Priest Yao.

"Respected Priest Yao, Guramo is the mastermind behind the assassination plot against me. I wish to interrogate him alone for a while."

"As you wish."

Priest Yao nodded knowingly. He retreated with the guards a dozen steps away. Xiulote then brought Bertade into the narrow cell, with Nashu standing guard by the door.

Hearing the sound, the figure within the cell suddenly raised its head. He stared fiercely at Xiulote, eyes wild like a maddened beast.

Xiulote tightly gripped the dagger in his hand, his gaze burning silently. He confronted the man on the ground without uttering a word. Despite his pale face, contorted expression, and emaciated figure, that handsome appearance, and the resemblance to Medina's features, unmistakably confirmed his identity.

"Gu...ra...mo..."

Xiulote enunciated each syllable slowly, releasing the words from his chest. Flames of anger ignited within him, filling his face with murderous intent. He remembered the wilted, captivating rose, and the near-death kiss and farewell...

After a long while, he looked into Guramo's eyes, speaking coldly with the pleasure of revenge.

"Guramo, do you regret now?"

"Hehe, hehe, hehehe..."

Upon hearing the voice, Guramo stared for a moment, then suddenly grinned, laughing out loud. His voice was hoarse and unpleasant, like a dying duck. Suddenly, he stretched out his hand, widening his eyes, yelling madly at the person in front.

"Holy Water, Holy Water, give me Holy Water! Hehe, hehe, hehehe..."