Governor 301

Chapter 301, Can't You Afford to Play?!

“We aim for a quick victory,” but the battles on the Alliance’s Western Front still dragged on for half a year.

By the time nearly a month had elapsed, the following seven hundred thousand Star Realm Army troops had already arrived at the frontline.

In total, the Alliance Army’s one million three hundred thousand troops could be described as advancing irresistibly in the five months that followed, yet they were briefly suppressed by the Mechanical Legion of Blackbird Heavy Industries in some engagements.

This side fact highlighted how absurd Cai Minjin’s original plan of achieving results in three weeks, wrapping up the fight in six weeks, and heading back to the Fatches Star System for the New Year was.

If you asked Yan Fangxu about the root cause, he believed it was the combat effectiveness of the Dragonhawk Third Legion’s Star Realm Army not meeting expectations.

In the strictest sense, according to the most standard requirements of the empire, the combat effectiveness of the Star Realm Army should be strong. In terms of soldier quality, it should be the best of the best.

The armies of the Alliance, under the miraculous training of the governor’s boot camps, barely met the minimum requirements for the Star Realm Army’s new recruits.

However, reality begged to differ.

From what Yan Fangxu saw, the Dragonhawk Third Legion was indeed a formal Star Realm Army formation, and while it wasn’t a well-known legion, logic dictated that it should at least not be worse than the Alliance’s forces, right?

But in reality, it was a notch lower.

Take for example a so-called large regimental formation; normally, it would consist of nine enhanced regiments, of which only about two would reach the level of Alliance soldiers, and the rest… it's not to say they were just making up numbers, but they were certainly stronger than average soldiers. For instance, the Soldiers of the Luman Kingdom they encountered on Heijian Star were far inferior to them.

Yet, compared to the level of Alliance soldiers, it still fell short.

That was just the issue with the quality of soldiers—Yan Fangxu was still unimpressed by their equipment.

This Star Realm Army lacked even enough troop transport vehicles.

If it weren't for the Alliance's ample logistical support, which mobilized a large number of civilian vehicles and newly constructed trains to help with transportation, this Star Realm Army would have had to rely on marching thousands of kilometers on foot to reach the Western Front battlefield.

By the time they got there, the war might well be over.

The Alliance's forces, even the third-tier garrison divisions, combined infantry with heavy artillery, albeit in smaller numbers. But these large regimental formations of the Star Realm Army didn't have such integrated units; infantry regiments were just infantry, artillery regiments were just artillery, and armored regiments were just armor.

Yan Fangxu didn't comment much on this, perhaps it was just a difference in military philosophy. Maybe the troops of the Dragonhawk Third Legion believed in concentrating firepower and armor, which wasn't necessarily wrong.

Such military formations might be able to exert greater strength in major decisive battle scenarios?

But no matter whether it's concentrating firepower and armor, or the Alliance Army's multi-branch composite units that gather firepower and armor when necessary, the overall number of various fire support and technical equipment must be sufficient, right?

Under one of their large regimental formations with over forty thousand troops, they were already comparable to four brigades of the Alliance. Yet within it, there was only one armored regiment with just over a hundred armored vehicles and forty tanks.

Compared to the Wind-Extinguishing Brigade with its mere nine thousand troops, they boasted eighty tanks and over two hundred armored vehicles.

The vehicles and tanks of a single Wind-Extinguishing Brigade matched that of two large regiments of the Dragonhawk Legion.

If that's not a disparity, what is?

Even among pure infantry, whether it's the infantry companies in composite brigades or the troops under the infantry divisions, all had completed motorization and had dedicated military vehicles down to the squad level; each squad had two to three rocket launchers, each platoon had one to two mortars; each company had a heavy grenade launcher as a fire support point.

The Star Realm Army's infantry regiments also had these things, but they were all concentrated at the regiment level and were also fewer in number.

The differences in troop quality and weaponry led to differences in combat performance during the six months of battle.

Oftentimes, within the same timeframe, the progress made by a large forty-thousand-strong Star Realm Army regiment was comparable to that made by two twenty-thousand-strong Alliance brigade regiments.

The Alliance was able to achieve the same results with half the number of troops as those of the Dragonhawk Legion's soldiers.

In the half-year battle at Rage Owl Star, Cai Minjin didn't make any further trouble. He dutifully played his role as the second-in-command of the Alliance Army and took care of his own responsibilities.

On one hand, Commander Matins had overshadowed him in terms of legitimacy and status. On the other hand, the combat effectiveness demonstrated by the Alliance forces in actual combat left him with nothing to say.

However, in the final stage of the war, a conflict still arose between the two sides.

It was when the enemy had almost been entirely wiped out, leaving only one final strategic target—Blackbird City.

Matins devised an attack plan, with the Alliance Army spearheading the assault.

But here, Cai Minjin unusually raised an objection.

Such an incident hadn't occurred in the past half year.

And both Matins and Yan Fangxu understood the thoughts of General Cai.

He might have been here on a mission.

Though the Fatches Family were not the masters of Dragonhawk 3rd Corps, they still had significant influence over this troop that was mainly sourced in manpower and supplies from three worlds within the Fatches Star System. It was indeed normal for Cai Minjin to have received some special instruction upon leaving.

And this instruction was surely related to Blackbird Heavy Industries.

The supposed administrator of Blackbird Heavy Industries, Irong Fatches, was still untraceable.

In the previous battles, they had repeatedly encountered spider-type mechanical monsters bearing the face of Irong Fatches. Their combat ability was secondary; what was most crucial was that she always seemed to play a key role in the information and command nodes of the Mechanical Legion. Eliminating her would greatly disrupt the strategic coordination capabilities of the Mechanical Legion.

But clearly, these were not really Irong Fatches herself.

Her actual body was surely still in the center of Blackbird City.

Cai Minjin's mission, presumably, was to destroy all evidence that connected Blackbird with the Fatches Family.

Even though the existence of Irong Fatches and the Fatches Family's investment in Blackbird Heavy Industries made their relationship indelible, they were already striving to sever ties, and with the added aggressive attitude, destroying the evidence would make things much more comfortable.

In such a situation, Cai Minjin indeed did not wish for the Alliance to lead this assault.

Even if his own corps suffered considerable casualties in the final attack, he was determined to take on this mission.

Matins thought for a moment and decided not to confront this rare show of backbone from the imperial major general.

Half a year's peaceful wartime cooperation owed much to this general. Thus, it was appropriate to give him some face in this last battle.

He made a decision to let the two forces, one from the south and one from the north, launch a pincer attack on Blackbird City.

A fair competition, whoever entered the city first would be king, would that not suffice?

Cai Minjin knew this was the best outcome he could possibly have secured.

He went back to start preparing his troops, secretly summoning several officers to discuss the battle plans.

Although the Alliance Army, bearing the name of the Planetary Defense Force, had left a big impression on him, making him dare not underestimate this force that was even stronger than the actual Star Realm Army, he was still determined to win this all-important strategic battle.

Then, he heard a piece of news:

After the military conference, Commander Matins, personally escorted by thirty fully-armed Phoenix soldiers, went north.

It was clear he intended to personally join the battle, entering the combat sequences on the side of the Alliance.

Inside the command center of the Dragonhawk 3rd Corps, the once lively strategic discussion abruptly ceased.

In a silent room, Cai Minjin furiously threw the document in his hand and burst out cursing:

“Can’t you play fair?!”

Chapter 302, The Mechanical Throne

Cai Minjin was so angry he was steaming, yet he still had to deploy his troops for an all-out attack.

Although upon hearing that the attacking Alliance Army from the north had been assisted by the Phoenix Battle Group, he feared the chances of winning this ‘race’ were slim. However, that didn’t mean the Star Realm Army would surrender without a fight.

But some things cannot be swayed by human will.

The forces he had been able to muster to attack Blackbird City amounted to two full divisions. Over seventy thousand warriors, under fierce artillery cover, engaged in a fight to the death with the enemy in front of them.

However, the results were not very good.

The troops suffered heavy losses under an irrationally hasty assault.

Just as he was considering whether to continue ordering his troops to attack at all costs, he heard news from the Northern Front.

The Alliance Army had, led by the Interstellar Warrior Squad, broken into the inner district of Blackbird City.

He let out a long sigh, feeling somewhat despondent.

Even though it was an anticipated outcome, it still hurt.

Nevertheless, he soon calmed down.

He had done his best, after all. How could he compete with the likes of the mighty Gundams?

Nobody could blame him now.

At the same time, he rescinded the order for the troops to attack at all costs, deciding instead to be patient and fight normally.

After failing to be the first to enter Blackbird City, to continue sacrificing many lives for it would have been a loss too great.

…

Inside Blackbird City, in the core city area.

Matins flung the mechanical torso that was clinging onto his powered sword.

It was the upper half of a machine with the face of Irong Fetches.

In front of him stood a massive machine.

This was Blackbird City's Energy Shield Generator.

At the moment, the surrounding battle was nearly over, with few remaining enemies who would soon be wiped out by the remaining members of the Interstellar Warrior Squad and the elites of the Tenth Brigade.

Where they currently stood was the bottom layer of the core city zone.

They had not gone straight to the upper floors to find the real body of Irong Fetches. That task was left to several infantry platoons. Of course, this wasn't to suggest that these infantry platoons would handle it on their own, as there could be unknown risks involved. Their job was just to clear the path, identify the target's location, and either surround it or cut off its escape routes.

Afterward, Matins would lead a team to deal with it personally.

But before that, he needed to deal with the Shield Generator.

It wasn't that the existence of this machine was causing any hindrance to the Alliance's advance, that wasn't the case. The Energy Shield couldn't prevent the approach of slow-moving targets, so the army didn't encounter any problems entering the inner city area; it was just that the artillery couldn't fire directly into it. But with the Interstellar Warrior Squad leading the vanguard, the artillery had entered within the shield's range, so there was no longer any concern about artillery fire being blocked.

Matins was thinking about how to dismantle this thing and move it back.

Although it wasn't the biggest, most expensive type that could envelop an entire planet, being able to cover a city was still quite remarkable.

The value of this item was at least four million Tax Currency upwards, so to blow it up on the spot would be a terrible waste.

Weixing City of the Alliance was the industrial heart of the entire planet, and with further development to come, such a device was needed for protection.

Indeed, if possible, they would love to have every key city equipped with its own city-level energy shield.

It's just that the price is a bit too much to bear.

Now, to be able to pick up a set and take it back would definitely be good.

For this reason, one of the Alliance's chief technical officers, Engine Prophet Hu Ke, even came over on a Wind Falcon. Under the escort of a group of elite soldiers, he began his research.

The main task was to safely dismantle this city-level shield generator. The device itself is very large, covering an area of two hundred square meters, with a height of six meters, heavy and bulky. Transporting the whole thing back would be too strenuous and there was the risk of knocking it about. If possible, the best way was to dismantle it and ship back the parts for reassembly.

Matins exchanged a few words with Hu Ke, then watched this member of the Sect of Mechanics work, and scanning the surroundings, realized the battle had calmed and knew there was no need for him to stay longer.

However, to ensure the safety and continuation of the work here, Matins still left a squad of Phoenix warriors, led by Anat, in place.

He himself, however, led the main force toward the upper district.

In this area, several recon units tasked with scouting above had reached a point where it was quite difficult to advance further.

Outside the door where Irong Fatches's real body was located, the defense was heavily guarded.

The Alliance soldiers had been ordered only to clear the way and scout; they were not required to conquer the target. Upon discovering that the enemy's defense forces were quite strong, the commanders of these units did not require their troops to recklessly engage in combat.

They set up heavy firepower, blocking the entrances and exits to prevent anyone from escaping, and occasionally managed to send artillery shells inside.

The most critical issues were left to the Interstellar Warrior Squad to resolve.

After Matins arrived with the Phoenix warriors, they took over the conflict here. All the infantrymen then became supporting roles, following quickly as the Interstellar Warriors cleared the paths, seizing control of the corridors and checking for any remaining enemies…Oh, generally, there were none, as the Interstellar Warriors were not so careless in their work.

Making their way through, whether it was the well-armed mechanical guards or the sneakily positioned automated cannon guards, all met the same fate of being dismantled into pieces.

Matins led the team to the front of a massive steel door.

He tried using some force, and somewhat to his surprise, the door wasn't locked. Although it was a bit of a struggle, he managed to push the door open.

When the door swung open, he saw what lay behind it:

In this vast space, there was a throne made of steel. Countless mechanical structures were exposed; numerous pipes, cables, and chains intertwined within, and blue electrical light flickered ceaselessly.

Sitting atop the throne was a ‘Queen.’

Upon a closer look, it wasn’t so much sitting as her lower body was fused with the machinery of the throne below. Her seemingly human upper body was also just a likeness; her eyes flashed with blue electrical light, and numerous cables extended from the back of her head to the far end of the ceiling.

She seemed to be engaged in many complex calculations, with the electric lights resembling countless messages being continuously sent out.

This scene shocked the Phoenix squad members who had entered.

Many among them, referred to as ‘interstellar’ warriors, were actually born and raised on Rage Owl Star, never having left it. Their bodies and wills may have reached the level of interstellar warriors, but their experiences had yet to catch up.

Matins was an exception.

He had seen far too many weird and wonderful things.

A quick check confirmed that the human female upper body before him was indeed the likeness of Irong Fatches.

“Bang.”

A gunshot rang out, and the explosive round in Matins’s hand hit the base of the throne, setting off a blast.

Unlike the energy shield generator below, such a heretical creation had no value for use; the best course of action was to destroy it immediately.

Chapter 303, Blackbird Battle Settlement, Ironman Puzzle

Matins’s gunshot startled his subordinates awake.

Without further words, his actions had already expressed his discontent.

The newcomers of Phoenix still felt a bit ashamed, they should not have been daunted just by witnessing something unexpected.

Now, the only way to redeem themselves in the eyes of their displeased commander was through practical action.

They spread out silently and swiftly, keeping a watchful eye for any potential enemies while dispersing throughout the area.

They began placing bombs in various locations to ensure that everything within the building would be destroyed.

Meanwhile, Matins casually walked forward to Irong Fetches, whose eyes were still flickering with electricity.

He drew out his power sword.

And at that moment, the woman with only half a body left, her eyes' electric glimmer subsided, revealing the human-like pupils underneath.

"Human, please hear me…"

Matins, without uttering a second word, raised his power sword high and cut her in half at the waist.

With a crackle of electricity, Irong Fetches's body was pulled by the tubing at the back of her head, drooping without falling.

But the words she had not finished saying were still coming out.

“…say, no matter how you view the God of Many Changes, the will under the Throne of the Mechanical God has never changed…”

Matins, silent, raised his sword again and severed the many tubes connected to the back of Irong Fetches’s head as well.

This really caused her speech to become intermittent, filled with shrieks of static.

Betwixt the squeals and whirrs, she managed to leave one last sentence:

“…ever tolerant of humans… always gracious… there’s always a place for you… flesh is frail, mech…”

Behind Matins, a few elite soldiers approached carrying a black coffin; they incorporated the half-mechanical, half-human carcass of Irong Fetches into it.

Then, more of Ms. Wu Jiarong’s direct disciples, wearing sealed iron masks, started checking every part of the machine silently and solemnly, collecting data, searching for anything of value.

Matins hesitated.

He had intended to stop these people’s actions.

As he had thought earlier, such sacrilege should not exist in this world at all. Listening to those few blasphemous words spoken by Irong Fetches had only confirmed this belief.

However, in the end, Matins did not voice his objections.

These people must have come on the orders of Ms. Wu Jiarong, and Wu Jiarong was a technical officer greatly trusted by the Governor, who mostly refrained from meddling in external affairs.

Her sudden dispatch of a team for this task suggested great importance, and it was very possible that the Governor was aware of it.

After considering the matter, Matins decided not to escalate the issue.

Thinking of the Governor's capabilities, perhaps there wouldn't be any issues, right?

…

The Governor that Matins was pondering was currently on Korolya III.

Gu Hang was aware of the events transpiring in Blackbird City.

Matins was right: Wu Jiarong, who normally avoided external affairs, had acted upon Gu Hang's instructions.

The reason stemmed from the moment the allied forces came near Blackbird City; while on Korolya III, Gu Hang noticed the [Event] option flashing incessantly on the system interface.

Upon clicking it, he discovered an unknown event that could be unlocked for two hundred points of Grace.

This was similar to the initial activation of the [Phoenix Will Die] event—a mystery that became clear only after unlocking it.

Considering the returns from that time and also factoring in the abundance of Grace points at his disposal—over thirty thousand accumulated over six months, on top of what was previously saved—the two hundred points' expenditure seemed trivial.

Even if it turned out to be a worthless event, Gu Hang could opt to ignore it and not proceed.

Once the event was unlocked, it was named [Iron Mystery].

[Event Activated: Iron Mystery]

[Your planet is experiencing an Iron Rebellion, but have you ever been curious about how, during humanity's conquest of the universe, all intelligent devices, which were once the greatest aids to humans, eventually became anathemas feared throughout human society?]

[Search for clues related to the Irons, conduct research, and perhaps you will gradually discover some answers.]

[Reward unknown.]

Gu Hang admitted that there were certain risks involved with this. For such blasphemous entities, the most reasonable course of action, in accordance with Empire regulations, was to annihilate them immediately upon discovery, eradicating all traces of their existence without mercy.

The reason for such stringent and absolute rules regarding these blasphemous entities was, of course, due to the painful experiences the Human Empire had suffered during past encounters with such entities, and the lessons learned therefrom.

This approach was undoubtedly the safest.

However… On one hand, Gu Hang was genuinely curious about the questions raised by the event; on the other hand, the 'unknown' reward tantalized him.

Of course, if this had been a gift from some other entity, wrapped up in the most attractive packaging, he would not have accepted it so readily.

But this came from his system.

It’s not that he absolutely trusted his system one hundred percent. Maybe it was a plot conceived by a Subspace Evil God, with some grand, shocking conspiracy at play?

Chapter 303, Blackbird Battle Settlement, Iron Man Puzzle_2

But Gu Hang considered himself to have one advantage, that is, he doesn’t overthink meaningless things.

First of all, since he had obtained the system up until now, over two and a half years, he had used it frequently, and this thing had never betrayed him.

Second, and most importantly, he had already been using the system for two and a half years, and he expected to continue using it frequently in the future. So under these circumstances, what’s the point in worrying about whether the system has any malicious intent? If it really were some Subspace Evil God’s conspiracy, Gu Hang would have already been deeply ensnared.

In such a situation, without much consideration, Gu Hang had Wu Jiarong dispatch people to investigate the scene and to bring back Irong Fetches’ body for research.

To tell the truth, he didn’t know whether this was the way to solve this so-called ‘Ironman Puzzle’, but anyway, he might as well do it.

Of course, while he trusted the system, he still needed to be careful in handling specific matters.

When Wu Jiarong was researching this thing, a new research institute would be established, completely isolated from those Black Boxes; throughout the research process, all researchers would be sequestered and must adhere to a series of research rules, undergo regular health checks, and try to avoid the problem of corruption as much as possible.

…

Regarding the [Ironman Puzzle], Gu Hang soon put it aside without giving it much more thought.

After all, it could only be considered a leisurely move; whether there were any benefits or what the rewards were, he would address those questions later.

Gu Hang was more concerned about the battle itself.

[Blackbird Battle Assessment: Resounding Victory, 22990 points of Grace Awarded]

[Total Losses 119384, Eliminated 764023]

[Star Realm Army – Dragonhawk Third Legion (Allies): Losses 74847, Eliminated 416167]

[Star Realm Army – Rage Bear Legion: Losses 12697, Eliminated 97016]

[Allied Counties – Central Group Army: Losses 31840, Eliminated 250840]

…

A total of seventy-six thousand enemies were eliminated, while the allied forces had a total loss of one hundred and eleven thousand.

These losses included not only those killed in action but also non-combat injuries and other reductions in manpower. Those who could return to the military and restore their combat effectiveness after not too long a treatment period were not included in these statistics.

The actual number of fatalities was approximately sixty to seventy thousand.

Overall, the casualty ratio was 1:7, which is quite a good number.

However, the actual combat power of both sides was not as disparate as the data suggests. The allied troops, fully equipped and with ample logistical support, if you eliminate ambushes, surprise attacks, and the like, could achieve a confrontation ratio of approximately 1:4 in a straightforward battle; the Star Realm Army was worse, only achieving 1:2.5.

However, sometimes the victorious side in a war, at certain critical junctures, can break through, encircle the enemy, and execute annihilation campaigns, after which the victory often becomes significantly greater.

The reverse is also true; regardless of what the exchange rate on the front lines might be, if you lose and let the enemy score a decisive annihilation victory, such as cutting off logistics or encircling you, preventing ammunition and supplies from reaching you, then whether allied soldiers or Star Realm warriors, all would be easily wiped out in large numbers.

It's just a pity that all these things only happened to those mechanical monsters; humanity was the victorious side.

And this brought Gu Hang a bounty of over twenty thousand points of Grace.

Up to now, counting the monthly accumulations of Grace points from the past six months, his current total had already exceeded fifty thousand points.

It felt like he could do quite a lot with that.

But no rush.

Right now, Gu Hang wasn't even on Rage Owl Star; he couldn't go about making moves even if he wanted to.

He had already been here for half a year, returning to Rage Owl Star a few times in between, while spending the rest of his time on Korolya III, cooperating with investigations.

The death of Apostle of War Bojoya Galaraldo brought about an impact and aftermath that was even more severe than imagined.

First, the Tianma Star Sector mobilized elites from all sides as much as possible to form an investigation team. A Mother Superior and the State Archbishop of the Korolya diocese were considered major figures. It's just that within the Tianma Star Sector, the influence of the Sect of Mechanics was very

weak, with the highest-ranking individual being merely a Mechanical Priest; the Psychic Cultivator's Association didn't fare much better, their president being only a C-class spiritual energy wielder. Overall, however, they assembled the most outstanding individuals from all sides they possibly could.

Among them was Gu Hang, the person involved and also an A-class spiritual energy wielder.

The investigation by the Tianma Star Sector itself lasted about half a month, and their ultimate conclusion was that it had been a demon attack, where the Apostle of War had tragically fallen into an abyssal rift.

However, the explanation given by this investigative team from the Tianma Star Sector was clearly not convincing.

It wasn't a matter of whether the evidence was sufficient, or whether the investigation methods could withstand scrutiny, what mattered most was that the identity and status of the deceased were too important, and the investigative team's own status was too low.

Half a month later, an investigative group from the Dragonhawk Star Domain's capital, Yunluo Star, arrived.

This team was considerably larger, headed by a Judge from the Tribunal, including a whole squad of the Tribunal's elite; the State Church, Sect of Mechanics, and Psychic Cultivator's Association all gathered, sending representatives from both the administrative and military affairs departments.

This entire colossal investigative team also brought along a fleet and land forces.

At their request, everyone who had participated in the banquet that day was not allowed to leave Korolya III and had to undergo the investigation again.

Their investigation hadn't yielded any results yet when an investigative team from the Eastern Cosmos Domain arrived. Its structure was similar to the Star Domain's investigative team, but the tier was higher.

Then came the recent news that an investigation group representing the Sun Lord and coming from the Solar Expedition Army was en route. However, given their great distance, it was estimated that the investigative group wouldn't arrive until a year later.

The situation was getting more and more blown out of proportion.

The leaders Pei Desi and Governor Akuna both felt numbed already.

They had previously been considering how to lighten their responsibilities, but now they were resigned to the fact that there was nothing to hope for. They had a certain degree of influence over the Dragonhawk Star Domain's investigative team, but by the time the matter reached the Space Domain Government, their influence was almost negligible, not to mention the team that would arrive a year later, carrying the wrath of the Sun Lord.

With such a grand scale of operation, even Gu Hang began to feel a bit nervous.

The universe was too vast, and the empire too large, teeming with capable and extraordinary people. Who could say for sure whether there wouldn't be a few formidable individuals capable of uncovering something?

However, after much consideration, he was still relatively reassured.

Even if the arrivals were formidable to the point where they could pull Galaraldo back from the 'Fatherly' domain and interrogate him personally about what happened, Galaraldo could only say he was unlucky to have been attacked by demons. He hadn't seen Gu Hang take action; the entire incident was caused by a Plague Demon, so the blame couldn't be pinned on Gu Hang.

Nevertheless, being confined to Korolya III and unable to leave was quite troublesome.

In the half-year there, besides being investigated and investigating others, Gu Hang often made calls 'home', constantly maintaining communication with Osenia, Lambert, Tadeusz, Yan Fangxu, and others.

Currently, the situation on Rage Owl Star was good. In the six months of his absence, not only had there been no chaos, but they also relied on the Star Realm Army to completely exterminate Blackbird Heavy Industries and win the unification war.

This proved that the alliance system established by Gu Hang was reliable, able to operate even without him.

Yet, he still had a sense of crisis.

For a ruler, being away from the center of power for a long period was never a good thing.

He was planning a return trip to Rage Owl Star.

If it had been before, it would have been difficult for Gu Hang to go back.

But now, there were ways.

Gu Hang sought out an acquaintance: Zhang Guang'en.

An A-class spiritual energy wielder, Chief Mage of the Dragonhawk Star Domain's Star Law Hall, as well as a senior member of the Eastern Cosmos Domain's Psychic Cultivator's Association Mage Council, he represented both the Space Domain Government and the Star Domain Government, holding not an insignificant right to speak within the current investigative team.

Gu Hang had gotten along very well with him over the past few months.

Chapter 304, The Way to Return to Rage Owl Star

"Ha! Our genius has arrived!"

The speaker was Zhang Guang'en.

He was a portly man currently in the midst of a banquet.

Most of the attendees at the banquet were from the Psychic Cultivator's Association—local psychics from the Tianma Star Sector.

Upon hearing that an A-grade psychic, namely Gu Hang, had appeared in their Star Sector, many psychics from various planets rushed over; when they heard that the widely known Zhang Guang'en from the entire Cosmos Domain had arrived as well, the number of visitors increased substantially.

Zhang Guang'en was adept at social interaction, far more a politician than a scholarly figure or a reclusive and mentally sensitive psychic.

Gu Hang, a true politician, sometimes didn't have the patience to receive the numerous visitors individually, but Zhang Guang'en was willing to do so.

This might have been the difference between someone like Gu Hang, who held authority in his own right, and an official like Zhang Guang'en who worked under a larger system.

At Zhang Guang'en's enthusiastic invitation, Gu Hang joined the banquet.

Amid the clinking of cups and toasts, Gu Hang chatted with the attendees, exchanging what could only be described as trivial pleasantries.

He didn't like such occasions, but that didn't mean he wasn't good at them.

And how could the perceptive Zhang Guang'en not know that Gu Hang's visit was to seek him out for a matter?

He enjoyed the feeling of being flattered, but after arriving in the Tianma Star Sector, what mattered to him most was Gu Hang.

An A-grade psychic was a rare find. In the Dragonhawk Star Domain, there was only one, and in the entire Eastern Cosmos Domain, which totaled over two thousand planets, there weren't more than a hundred A-grade psychics.

Every A-grade psychic was a valuable treasure. Adding one meant that the entire Star Domain had a higher say in the upper echelons of the Psychic Cultivator's Association.

There were significant interests involved.

The value of one Gu Hang was many times greater than the Psychic Cultivators' Association of the entire Tianma Star Sector combined.

Soon, Zhang Guang'en had the others continue the banquet and interaction while he, personally, took Gu Hang to a private room with a terrace.

"What's up, young Gu? Is there something you want to discuss with me?" he asked with a smile, with no visible movement of his hands, yet tea cups, a teapot, and plates slowly flew over, pouring tea and setting themselves up on the small table on the terrace. In a matter of moments, a set of tea and snacks for conversation was arranged.

Gu Hang, without being polite, took a sip and expressed his admiration, then got down to business, "I'm thinking of leaving Korolya III for a while to return to Rage Owl Star."

Zhang Guang'en frowned.

He took a sip of his tea, then said, "This is… a bit difficult to manage. According to the investigation team's requirements, no one is allowed to leave the planet. You are a member of the investigation team, so you should know the rules."

"Hmm, so doesn't that bring me to you?" Gu Hang was of course good at speaking nicely, "Your face carries much more weight than mine. Rules are dead; there must be some flexibility, I ask the Grand Mage for guidance."

"Hahaha!" Gu Hang's somewhat flattering words made Zhang Guang'en laugh heartily.

The delighted Grand Mage said, “If it were someone else, then undoubtedly there would be no bending the rules, strict impartiality. But for you… well, there could indeed be some ways to think about it.”

“Please, Grand Mage, think if you can help.”

In fact, this was just a pretext.

Gu Hang himself was a member of the investigation team; he was well aware of the workings of the investigation teams from the Star Sector to the Star Domain to the Cosmos Domain.

In truth, by this time, the investigation work was not only lightweight but could practically be said to be idle.

Half a year had passed since the incident occurred, what evidence could there be left to find?

It was merely a matter of checking each person who was present at the time and the entire environment of Korolya III.

As for the elimination of suspects, it was pretty much conclusive. There were plenty with the motive, since the War Apostle had offended many; however, none had the capability to commit the crime.

If one insists the incident was man-made, then the perpetrator must have been a very powerful entity, possessing some unknown method, and had the ability to carry it out. And the doer must not have been present at the scene, perhaps no longer even in the Tianma Star Sector.

The probability of this was very low.

The consensus among the three investigation teams was that the incident was, with high probability, an accident.

This conclusion was supported by the fact that in the half-year since the incident, the Abyss’s invasions on Korolya III had become increasingly severe.

Theoretically, at this stage, the case could be closed.

With the final conclusion coming directly from the investigation team dispatched by the Eastern Cosmic Realm Government, the persuasiveness should already be high. Next, the investigation team would wrap up, the matter would largely be concluded, and the outcome reported to the Central Empire, where the Supreme Council of Holy Terra would sign off, and the whole case would be officially settled.

However, Galaraldo's unique status lay in the fact that his death would directly shock the Sun Lord himself.

This was the individual who directly oversaw the Terra Council and could be considered the de facto supreme ruler of the Empire, not so easily convinced by local government conclusions. He didn't even allow the Central Government to send an investigation team, but formed one directly from his own Expeditionary Force.

Chapter 304, The Way to Return to Rage Owl Star_2

There's nothing we can do then, everyone has to wait here.

There's nothing to do, and we can't leave.

We still have to wait almost a year.

There are quite a few people with grievances, not just one or two. This includes the investigation teams of the three levels themselves, who are also resentful. To travel all the way to your Tianma Star Sector and then have to wastefully linger here for another year, who would be happy with that?

In such circumstances, it's hardly surprising that some incidents have occurred.

Everyone here is someone with a reputation to uphold, showing off their own magic tricks. Leaving for a while isn't unthinkable.

One riskier method involves pretending to stay here while actually having left, as long as one returns before the delegation of the Sun Lord arrives.

Of course, the risk lies in being reported, which is quite troublesome; and you need someone to take this risk for you. Locals from Tianma Star Sector basically shouldn't expect this kind of treatment, especially Pei Desi and Akuna, who are key figures with leadership responsibilities. There's fear they may flee.

Besides the risk, there's another nauseating point: after leaving in this manner, you can't be too high-profile while carrying out your affairs outside, otherwise the facade of staying in Korolya would fall apart.

But Gu Hang clearly isn't too willing to adopt this method.

Here, Zhang Guang'en offered Gu Hang a second option:

"Aren't you the Governor of Rage Owl Star?"

"Yes."

"A year and a half ago, there were signs of a demon invasion on Rage Owl Star, and even the emergence of a very powerful demon incarnation, but it was suppressed by you all, right?"

"Yes."

"There have also been cult activities on your planet, and even the Ironmen Rebellion, which has just been quelled, right?"

"Yes."

"Sheesh… Gu, if you take my advice, don't bother with that planet and come to Yunluo with me. We could work together to expand and strengthen the Psychic Cultivator's Association. Wouldn't that be nice?"

“Archmage, you jest.” Gu Hang was somewhat helpless.

Such talk, while it was still okay back on Rage Owl Star, would invariably provoke such a remark anywhere else once they heard what Rage Owl Star had been through.

“Alright, I won’t persuade you further,” Zhang Guang’en said, “However, since these events have happened on Rage Owl Star, it would make sense for the investigation team to go there and perhaps find some clues, don’t you think?”

Gu Hang feigned a look of sudden realization.

He certainly had thought of this idea long ago, but it was best that Zhang Guang’en suggested it. It would seem a bit off if he made the suggestion himself.

Zhang Guang’en chuckled: “As a member of the investigating team, you can certainly go. However, the identity of the Star Sector investigation team is not enough; you need to join the Star Domain investigation team at least. What about that matter I mentioned to you before? Have you considered it?”

Gu Hang spoke earnestly: “I have made up my mind. I am willing to join the Psychic Cultivator’s Association’s Star Law Hall in the Dragonhawk Star Domain and serve as your deputy, contributing to the development of the Association. However, I should establish a branch of the Association on Rage Owl Star and develop the Association’s power in the Tianma Star Sector. In the affairs of the Association, I will support every decision you make.”

Zhang Guang’en felt slightly disappointed that he couldn’t lure Gu Hang over to the Stellar Capital, but he quickly let it go, thinking it might even be a blessing. After all, there was only one A-rank Spiritual Energy user in the Stellar Capital Yunluo Star. Having another one might cause trouble. Gu Hang, as he now seemed, was polite and not ambitious, but who knows what could happen once he made the move?

Having him outside yet contributing the influence of an A-rank Spiritual Energy user, being able to uphold the Association’s presence and even stepping in when necessary, achieved his goal.

“Alright, that settles it! I’ll issue the appointment decree from the Star Law Hall right now and recommend you to join the Star Domain investigation team. Once the information is filed, you will lead a team to Rage Owl Star to investigate the source of the Abyssal erosion, to see if it’s related to the disappearance of the apostle Galaraldo. The investigation period… let’s say three months, and you can extend it if it’s not enough. However, during this time, you must frequently return to report the situation. You can’t really stay on Rage Owl Star for the whole three months, understood?”

“I understand.”

Gu Hang was actually still a bit annoyed.

Even though traveling from the Korolya Star System to the Rage Owl Star System only required a single Stellar jump, the one-way journey still took a minimum of six days, and a round trip would waste twelve days on the road. After several such round trips, he feared that half of his three-month investigation period would be wasted in transit.

But there was nothing he could do about it.

Ultimately, it was a situation of his own making, so he had to bear with it.

As for a subdivision of the investigation team accompanying him to Rage Owl Star… so be it. The leader of the team was Gu Hang himself. Could he possibly find fault with himself?

Even if there was someone stubborn enough to investigate their leader, Gu Hang was not afraid. With three levels of investigation teams unable to find anything on Korolya III, could they possibly discover anything on Rage Owl Star?

There was only one thing that he truly feared being investigated—the Black Box.

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But he decided that this time when he returned, he would collect all the Black Boxes into the Storm God Kingdom.

Without Gu Hang's permission, no one could enter the Storm God Kingdom.

Unless they forcibly broke in.

In the entire Empire, Gu Hang didn't think that there were many who could manage that, especially not here.

As for Gu Hang himself joining the Psychic Cultivator's Association, it was a matter of little consequence.

What would he need to give up?

Nothing but the title and influence of an A-grade Spiritual Energy user.

On the contrary, he could gain something from it.

It wasn't as if he was required to do anything specific.

If they really wanted him to fight, he could simply refuse.

The Psychic Cultivator's Association didn't possess that much binding power, especially not over someone like him.

…

Waiting for the investigation team to approve the procedures took some time.

And Gu Hang, having some spare time while he waited, made a trip to Nest Capital-Fino City.

It was an occupied area.

Fino City, with a population of ten billion, had become a massive den of Demons, a veritable Abyssal hell.

An Imperial Army of at least ten million people struggled within it.

Among them, seven million were from the Planetary Defense Force of Korolya III.

This army's level of strength and equipment… perfectly matched people's stereotype of a Planetary Defense Force.

Weak, poor equipment, problematic discipline and morale.

Despite a population of 40 billion on Korolya III, the planet's productivity couldn't keep up with the number of people. A significant portion of the population, fundamentally, was no different from pigs raised for slaughter—merely a source of taxes.

To say Korolya was wealthy was indeed true; it paid four billion in Imperial Taxes a year. To call it dirt-poor was also accurate; not only were the people poor, but to support such a vast population—compounded by severe corruption and administrative inefficiency—meant that aside from the populace, there were hardly any valuable outputs.

Under such circumstances, they simply could not afford a large, elite army.

The military forces on Korolya III numbered around 200 million, making up about 0.5% of the entire populace. Most of them could not be mobilized and were tasked with suppressing any revolts across various Nest Capitals to avoid uprisings.

Every moment, in each of the Nest Capitals, the lowest class, who lived worse than dogs and pigs, were on the verge of rebellion. With life being untenable either way, any incitement could escalate into a riot. They'd fight with an iron rod if they had to.

Those troops were responsible for crushing such rebellions and could not be moved lightly.

Being able to deploy seven million was no small feat.

They were primarily tasked with establishing a perimeter blockade around the entire Nest Capital. Additionally, some were used as ‘cannon fodder’ and mobilized by the Star Realm Army.

This Star Realm Army referred to the 3 million soldiers of the Dragonhawk 3rd Corps.

The first batch consisted of only one million men, but over the half-year, reinforcements arrived four times, bringing the total to three million.

The one in charge was a Major General named Jeden Hanson from the Empire.

He was the Deputy Corps Commander of the Dragonhawk 3rd Corps.

Aside from the Dragonhawk 3rd Corps, there was another less conspicuous force present.

It was a contingent of 77,000 from the Rage Bear Legion, originating from Rage Owl Star.

The commander of this force was the Colonel of the 3rd Beast-slaying Brigade, Lucy Lee Ko Xi.

Chapter 305, Let's see the situation

Lucy Lee Ko Xi was one of the few whose military rank did not diminish during the transition from the Alliance Army to the Star Realm Army sequence, eventually becoming part of the Rage Bear Legion.

For instance, Yan Fangxu was initially promised the position of legion commander, at least holding the rank of brigadier general, but in the end, Galaraldo’s interference left him as second-in-command with only the rank of colonel. Compared to his formal rank of major general within the Alliance structure, he had fallen two levels.

Li Kexi, however, fared much better. Originally a colonel in the Alliance, her rank should have dropped to lieutenant colonel during the Star Realm Army grading, just like other division and brigade commanders. However, Gu Hang, as legion commander, quickly pulled her back up to the rank of colonel within the scope of his authority—as legion commander and brigadier general, he had the power to do so.

It was merely a matter of nomination, submission, and waiting for approval.

Gu Hang was at Korolya III, with representatives from various investigation groups and the Military Affairs Department present, so the process went quite smoothly.

The reason Li Kexi's rank was pulled up a notch was to officially empower her to consolidate command of the half-strength Rage Bear Legion that had come to Korolya III.

As per Galaraldo's request, the Military Affairs Department had issued orders for the Rage Bear Legion to participate in the war at Korolya III.

77,000 Rage Bear warriors, away from home for half a year, were fighting in this foreign land.

She commanded seven division and brigade units, equating to two large regiments in terms of Star Realm Army numbers.

The Supreme Commander of the Korolya battle zone, Major General Jeden Hanson, did not take them seriously at first.

Over seventy thousand people mattered little in the grand scheme of battles like the fallen Nest Capital Fino City, where millions were involved. He regarded it as a superfluous move, an act of people manipulation by Galaraldo, the Apostle of War.

Of course, he was not on good terms with Galaraldo, had no entanglements of interest, and now that the Apostle's life or death was unknown, he had no need to please a dead man—just conduct business officially and fairly.

The Rage Bear Legion wasn't his direct unit, so he wouldn't grant them special treatment. While Gu Hang was their legion commander and had just displayed A-level Spiritual Energy capabilities, making him quite popular in the current special situation on Korolya III, Hanson wouldn't purposefully sacrifice the Rage Bear Legion.

The 77,000 members of the Rage Bear Legion received the standard treatment of the Star Realm Army, taking on some routine military tasks.

However, Major General Hanson quickly realized something was amiss.

Wasn't the Rage Bear Legion supposed to have been just a Planetary Defense Force half a year ago? They had only recently transformed into the Star Realm Army.

But why were they so fierce?

He allocated tasks based on the amount of work a normal two-regiment large unit should assume. Yet, this group managed to complete tasks relatively easily, and under Colonel Li Kexi's command, they often provided additional aid to nearby friendly forces.

Two months prior, during a large-scale Plague Demon uprising, tens of thousands of native soldiers, forming a Defense Forces, were defeated at an under-city exit. Tens of thousands of plague corpses, along with a large number of higher-grade Plague Demons, broke through to the quarantine zone.

At least three hundred thousand uninfected individuals were still in that quarantine zone, undergoing identification and evacuation.

Hanson did not wish to abandon them, so he assembled two regiment-sized units and contested the area again.

However, the number of enemies was unexpectedly immense, seemingly endless.

His troops soon found themselves in a tough fight, and the tens of thousands of native troops who later came to support dissolved like water in the desert, quickly evaporating without much effect.

The area turned into a quagmire and a meat grinder within a week, with over four hundred thousand human soldiers ensnared, surpassing the number of civilians awaiting rescue in that region.

Worse still, when Hanson considered abandoning the area, pulling out the troops, and destroying the entrance to prevent further losses, he was distraught to find that retreat would be incredibly difficult.

His numerous troops, locked in a chaotic battle with the Plague Demons, were strung throughout the complex architecture of the entire district. It wasn't a situation from which one could easily retreat.

A mismanaged retreat could turn into a rout, with the safety of four hundred thousand soldiers at stake, including two regiments of Star Realm forces—a considerable force. In the worst-case scenario, the chaos could allow the Demons to strike the next district and trigger a domino collapse across the entire Fino City blockade line.

This wasn't mere speculation, as a large regiment of the Dragonhawk Legion was already suffering.

At that moment, an unexpected force emerged from the skies.

It was a Composite Camp from the 35th Brigade of the Rage Bear Legion.

The combined assault of tanks and armored vehicles was resolute, and the timing and position they chose were particularly tricky. It was a critical moment when the enemy was about to encircle over thirty thousand Dragonhawk warriors and block the retreat path.

If one mentioned tanks and armored vehicles, the Dragonhawk Legion certainly had them. Everyone used the Lion and the Wanderer models; nobody was inherently better than the others.

But the difference lay in the fact that their Composite Camp had far tighter infantry-tank coordination than the Dragonhawk Legion. The armored infantry units deploying from the armored vehicles and the motorized infantry units could keep pace with the advancing armor units, securing the breach firmly. This not only prevented the enemy formation from 'healing' their 'wound' but also protected the armored units from being surrounded by overwhelming enemy forces during their assault.

Chapter 305 Assessing the Situation_2

And then, the artillery support platoon would swiftly move into position.

In the urban environment of Nest Capital, the power of artillery was greatly diminished.

The entirety of Nest Capital, rather than being a vast complex of buildings, could more accurately be described as if the whole city itself were a massive structure. Although there were some open spaces, the presence of various obstacles generally made it impossible for artillery to provide accurate fire support over a distance of twenty kilometers.

However, this did not mean that the artillery was useless.

Difficult to fire from a distance, but not at close range?

Facing the threat of the enemy, with the help of their armored and infantry brethren at the front, they could forcefully construct fire support points to lob fire in an almost direct-fire manner to places within their reach. Their fire coverage, from the usual twenty kilometers in open-field conditions, was reduced to just two kilometers, and even then, they were often blocked from having clear lines of sight.

But heavy artillery was still heavy artillery, and it could still devastate any target within its reach!

The highly skilled and smooth coordination of the Composite Camp left many officers of the Star Realm Army who witnessed this spectacle dumbfounded.

The fluidity of their offensive, like mercury pouring down, not only shattered many of their preconceived notions but also truly preserved the lifeline of the entire division.

They did not let their brothers in the Rage Bear Legion fight alone. Soon enough, multiple platoons came to their aid, helping the warriors of the Rage Bear Legion secure this retreat route. Then, the entire division began to retreat in an orderly fashion, as ordered, withdrawing from this hopelessly lost district.

Without a doubt, this Composite Camp of the Rage Bear Legion had performed an extraordinary feat.

Their arrival not only saved an entire division but also prevented the area from falling into utter ruin.

Although it was not a complete reversal of the situation, turning defeat into victory, it could still be considered as saving a building from near collapse.

The key point was that this was a combat group of less than a thousand soldiers.

The incident caught the attention of Major General Hanson.

On one hand, it resolved a major crisis, allowing him to finally get a good night's sleep.

On the other hand, he was astonished at how the Rage Bear Legion's troops could suddenly appear there and exhibit such formidable fighting strength.

The answer to this didn't require his personal investigation.

The multitude of staff under his command provided him with the answers.

The large staff team quickly delivered the report to the Major General's desk.

The appearance of a Rage Bear Legion unit on the battlefield wasn't particularly surprising.

They had been sent to a nearby area earlier for a routine clearance mission. They completed their mission successfully, and even finished several days ahead of schedule.

While the troops were stationed locally, awaiting the takeover by the Planetary Defense Forces, Colonel Li Kexi noticed the changing situation nearby and sent a camp over to "check things out."

And with that inspection, they "resolved" the situation.

Another matter that deserved Major General Hanson's careful consideration was this:

Why were the Rage Bear Legion troops so formidable with the same equipment and not a large number of soldiers?

According to reports from the staff, the first reason was that every soldier in the Rage Bear Legion met the standard requirements of the Star Realm Army.

Interestingly enough, although there were certainly many among the Dragonhawk 3rd Corps's twenty-plus million troops who reached this level, the overall proportion was only about half; and among that half, another half had reached this level only after arriving at the Star Realm Army.

This shouldn't have been the case, but it was the reality stemming from an unavoidable situation.

The soldiers of the Star Realm Army mainly come from the troops offered by various planets along with their payment of Imperial Tax, and it was also possible for the Star Realm Army to simply transfer troops from the Planetary Defense Forces into their ranks.

But the standard level of the Star Realm Army generally required at least five years of military training under experienced instructors before soldiers could meet the criteria. On many planets, the total service time for conscripts and volunteers wasn't even that long.

Of course, theoretically, none of this should have been a concern for the Star Realm Army. The Military Affairs Department, the Star Realm Army Command, weren't supposed to handle these issues. If a planet didn't provide qualified soldiers, it shouldn't count towards their tax obligations. But political and economic considerations, coupled with corruption factors…

There was no remedy.

Hanson was only a Major General, after all; he couldn't change these things. What he could do was ensure that, once soldiers came to his force, at least they could be trained into competent warriors through his efforts.

But even that was difficult to achieve.

During peacetime, when there were no wars, the budget of the Star Realm Army was insufficient, offering no opportunity to fully let the soldiers practice their military skills. Without enough bullets, there could be no sharpshooters.

The situation for artillerymen, tank crews, and the like was the same.

But if it were just a difference in the quality of soldiers, it wouldn't result in such significant concrete outcomes; after all, Dragonhawk's warriors are not weak.

This brings us to the third factor mentioned by the staff officers: tactical concept.

The Composite Forces model adopted by the Rage Bear Legion is not exactly a novel idea. The Star Realm Army is full of talented individuals; wouldn't they have thought of it?

Of course, they have.

To put it plainly, the advantage of Composite Forces lies in the flexibility of modular, small unit sizes, more officers under the same troop strength, a high concentration of technical equipment, and various troop types coordinating under a single command system.

It all sounds good, but each of these advantages comes at a cost.

Smaller unit sizes and flattened command structures mean more officers are needed, which costs money. Whether it's training officers or providing them with higher compensation after they're trained, the expenses are considerable.

A high concentration of technical equipment translates directly to money.

Various troop types coordinating requires a significant amount of training, which again means money.

The Military Affairs Department and the Star Realm Army, of course, have a lot of money; but they have even more places to spend it on.

All these advantages do not outweigh the benefits of maintaining more soldiers with less money under the current large-unit division system. And in a major frontal battle, large formations have their benefits.

Composite Forces can only be a small-scale approach to creating elite troops within the entire system of the Star Realm Army.

To be honest, Major General Hanson couldn't understand why Governor Gu Hang would be willing to use such an army to pay the Imperial Tax.

It's just not worth it, too honest… Isn't the standard practice to randomly pick tens of thousands of warriors trained for a year or two, equip them with suitable light gear, try to establish good relationships, and then just settle it?

That way, for a million Tax Currency paid, the actual cost would be only seven hundred thousand.

The way you're doing it now amounts to a cost of one million three hundred thousand to offset a tax of one million.

A complete loss.

Regardless, this was good news for Hanson.

He suddenly discovered that he had seventy thousand elite troops at his disposal.

Although there was only one brigade of true armored Composite Camps, the several infantry divisions from Rage Bear were all motorized, and the firepower of weapons like heavy-pounder guns was distributed down to the company level, with squad weaponry also packing more punch than the same number of Star Realm Army forces.

In any case, they were stronger than his own forces.

In a mix of emotions, he didn't hesitate to start assigning this army from Rage Owl Star to more important tasks more frequently.

This was different from using them as cannon fodder.

Supplies and logistics were given the highest priority; when acting as the tip of the spear, they also needed a hilt, so support and coordinating units behind them were also plentiful in numbers. In fact, during joint attacks, he would generously hand over command to Colonel Li Kexi instead of senior officers from the Dragonhawk Legion.

In addition, when it came to winning battles, he was anything but stingy with rewards. From combat allowances for warriors and officers to reporting achievements of entire units to the Military Affairs Department, he was meticulous.

When Gu Hang came to Fino City and met Li Kexi, Major General Hanson, who had also heard the news, hurried over for a meeting.

He sincerely thanked Gu Hang and also expressed some apologies.

After all, no matter how well he ensured the logistics or reported their accomplishments, the increased casualties from taking on more significant military duties were unavoidable.

Gu Hang expressed his understanding in return.

Although he was distressed by the casualties among his own soldiers, the combat actions of the Rage Bear warriors in this theater were indeed bringing real benefits and advantages.

After all, when the Star Realm Army fights, they're not just going through the motions.

Otherwise, he wouldn't have hinted to Li Kexi that it was okay to perform normally in battle. Otherwise, even if they were just going through the motions, the command level of the Dragonhawk Legion wouldn't notice.

Chapter 306 The Benefits of Fighting for the Empire

What are the benefits of fighting for the Empire as part of the Star Realm Army?

For the Rage Owl Star Alliance Government, there are no direct benefits.

But for Gu Hang, that may not be the case.

He originally did not wish to personally take on the role of legion commander of the Rage Bear Legion, preferring to have Yan Fangxu do it while he stayed behind the scenes, which was a better option.

However, now that he had assumed this position, he resolved to accept it and sought to make the most of the situation by looking for any potential value and opportunities that he could exploit.

And there were indeed such opportunities.

First was prestige, an indirect commodity, but a valuable one. He wasn't a lone wolf. As a politician and leader of a faction, silently accumulating wealth and slowly developing was not the only strategy.

Certainly, aspects like technological advancement and the development of the planet's industrial capacity did not need to be publicized; they were akin to inner cultivation.

But now, as Rage Owl Star gradually moved towards the Star Sea and engaged in interstellar exchanges, the importance of 'prestige,' an intangible asset, should not be underestimated.

For instance, Gu Hang's demonstration of A-level Spiritual Energy user capabilities was an enhancement of his personal prestige.

And this kind of thing, prestige, could be monetized, albeit with certain methods and abilities.

He was already capitalizing on it.

The forthcoming establishment of the Psychic Cultivator's Association branch on Rage Owl Star was one such way to cash in.

This branch would receive funding from the headquarters of the Tianma Cultivators Association; it could access precious materials for training Spiritual Energy users; Gu Hang would have an official excuse to train Spiritual Energy users and could issue legal licenses to them.

All these were crucial.

The funding amount didn't matter—any money is good money—and the most important thing was the issuing of legal licenses. Without a license, Spiritual Energy users trained on Rage Owl Star would be fine operating on their home planet. But as Rage Owl Star stabilized and society became relatively stable, it was bound to take to the interstellar stage.

Then, given the Empire's controlling policy towards Spiritual Energy users, lacking legal identity could easily lead to issues outside of their home star.

From now on, this would no longer be a concern.

Moreover, apart from matters related to Spiritual Energy, Gu Hang's recent surge in fame brought another significant benefit.

Through the Gu Commercial Firm, he found many investors and signed several investment contracts.

The planet's industrial capacity did not require foreign investment. The Alliance's economic system focused more on planned economics, with money and market functions playing a supporting role, so attracting a large influx of foreign investors for development wasn't necessary.

However, trade was indispensable. The Alliance had ample production capacity, and a significant portion of that capacity had no outlet for consumption. Even if all output went towards paying taxes, the excess

Tax Currency couldn't just sit idle; there had to be trade and order fulfillment to translate the extra capability into income.

And although the Alliance could be self-sustaining with its rich production capacity, it still required input from outside sources. As production expanded, the demand for raw materials would inevitably increase.

Mining, logging, farming… these activities would, of course, be developed on Rage Owl Star, but it was prudent to plan ahead. Establishing a trade route for resource input was also advantageous.

With the backing of the Gu Commercial Firm, Gu Hang wasn't worried about lacking channels for interstellar trade. But there was a huge problem: what about the Starport?

Rage Owl Star did have a starport, but it was too small. Accommodating several hundred thousand members of the mobile Star Realm Army required several days. In the context of large-scale interstellar trade, it was utterly insufficient for exchanges involving tens of millions, even billions of Tax Currency worth of goods— the starport simply didn't have the capacity.

And currently, the largest vessel that could dock at Rage Owl Star's starport was at the Escort Ship level. The 'Giant Belly' Transport Ship, a popular choice for interstellar trade, couldn't dock there at all.

Gu Hang had a complete set of blueprints for constructing a large starport and faced no technological bottlenecks. Below the starport in Skaaro City, which had a population of 500,000 residents, the area had transformed from a barren land into the largest city in Xiongya Province in less than a year. Almost all of these half a million people had come to construct the starport; even if they weren't directly involved in construction, they were at least transporting materials, supporting personnel and logistics, managing the ground operations, or working in medical care and law enforcement…

Of course, the core focus out of this plethora of associated jobs was still the construction of the starport.

However, despite the large workforce dedicated to the task, the construction progress of the starport was painfully slow.

When Gu Hang spoke about this with his mother, she stared at him with disbelief for quite a while.

“What do you think a starport is? You’ve only started building for less than a year! Those massive starports you’ve seen on other planets, didn’t all of them take decades, even a century of use and expansion, to slowly become what they are now? Don’t expect to get rich overnight!”

But Gu Hang did want to get rich overnight.

So what was the solution to accelerate construction?

Seeking external investment.

The current construction method of the Alliance involved firing orbital spacecraft in fits and starts, carrying only a small portion of parts produced on the ground, or one or two construction machines, into space at a time. Then workers, encumbered by space suits that greatly hindered their movements, had to perform space operations.

Chapter 306 The Benefits of Fighting for the Empire_2

Gu Hang now has a full set of blueprints and technology, but many of the construction methods simply weren’t feasible to realize.

However, with external investment, things would be much easier.

He could hire large engineering vessels to do the job, which would be far more reliable than engineering machines; he could directly purchase mass-produced, super-large components, transport them here, and have the engineering vessels equip them…

In short, if he had enough money, Gu Hang estimated that he could expand the Rage Owl Star Port to several hundred times its current size within one to two years.

Saving up such a large sum of money on his own, through deception and trickery, or even with the support of the Gu Commercial Firm, was no longer sufficient.

It was necessary to bring in strong investors.

After Miss Wang Qi learned about her son's ambition, she actively started pulling strings and found some initially interested parties.

In the past, this investment project would probably have attracted no interest. But now, Gu Hang had demonstrated a certain capability, the Rage Bear Legion had made a name for itself, and people began to slowly believe that investing in Rage Owl, a previously desolate planet, could be profitable.

Of course, these investors were still very cautious, willing to invest only tens of thousands, or at most hundreds of thousands, of Tax Currency.

This amount was hardly sufficient for Gu Hang's grand plans.

Still, he was not one to turn away any comers.

Setting an early example was essential. Even scammers know to give a taste of sweetness first, and Gu Hang intended to let those willing to invest in building the starport make money from it.

As for later… with the starport built in Rage Owl's orbit, and Gu Hang armed with guns and cannons, no need to say more.

However, at the moment, Gu Hang's main reputation was still focused on his identity as an A-level Spiritual Energy user and the young Family Head of the Gu family. This type of reputation didn't have as much pull in attracting investors.

If the Rage Bear Legion could put on a stellar performance on the battlefield of Korolya III, that would undoubtedly be a bonus.

Everyone knew that both the troops and equipment of the Rage Bear Legion came from Rage Owl itself. The combat effectiveness of an army could illustrate the comprehensive strength of a planet from all aspects, making it a massive billboard.

The value of reputation lay right there.

…

Beyond the value of reputation, if the Rage Bear Legion could achieve even better results here, they would reap other direct benefits.

Politically, it would help to strengthen relations with surrounding political powers. Helping the Empire World beat the Plague Demons was undoubtedly doing the right thing.

The achievements of the Rage Bear Legion would ultimately be attributed to Gu Hang. As the legion commander and a provisional general, if his merits were great enough later on, would the Star Domain Military Headquarters not consider promoting his military rank and improving his benefits?

Of course, this would be very important for those who are fully integrated into the Star Realm Army system, but for Gu Hang, the cost-effectiveness was not very high.

Even if his military rank were to soar and his duties increase, he could not abandon his base and merge into the Star Realm Army's circle.

But just as his entry into the Imperial Psychic Association, and becoming a senior figure within the Dragonhawk Star Domain Association, brought him a series of benefits in that system, so too would rising to a higher status in the Star Realm Army through the growth and strength of the Rage Bear Legion bring direct benefits.

For example, the Rage Bear Legion might be granted expansion — not from Rage Owl itself, but the Military Affairs Department directly enlarging the army, providing troops and equipment.

All Star Realm Army Corps operate in this manner.

At that time, Gu Hang would essentially gain an army for nothing. The expenses for maintaining the army could be claimed back from the Military Affairs Department.

And to speak of even more direct benefits, there were others.

Wars produce spoils.

The Rage Bear Legion strictly followed the Alliance Army's customs, disallowing looting and requiring unconditional surrender of all unclaimed spoils gathered after battle.

In the Alliance, these surrendered items would eventually enter the national treasury, soldiers would receive combat allowances, rank advancements due to valor, and the dead and injured would receive generous compensation…

But on the battlefield of Korolya, there was no such rule. The highest level for surrender was at the corps level.

The Demons killed by the troops in battle had value, and the corresponding logistics would deal with the biological materials from the bodies remaining after the Demons' spirits were expelled. The logistics took a portion of the fees, and the rest went to the corps.

Moreover, when certain areas were recovered, and many of the local population were dead, the property left behind by the residents also became the possession of the corps.

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Li Kexi was somewhat at a loss; he had never dealt with this sort of thing before!

He had previously thought it necessary to hand over the funds to the Military Affairs Department and even consulted with the Dragonhawk Legion about it, only to find out it wasn't necessary.

Later, following an inquiry to Gu Hang, the legion commander decided, the money would be taken as property of the legion and lent in full to the Alliance Government.

And the Alliance Government would establish a "Legion Foundation," dedicated to consolations, extra allowances for the Rage Bear Legion warriors, ammunition replenishment, logistics maintenance, and the like. Of course, it could also be used for other purposes, but the foundation had to pay interest, whatever the case.

It was essentially a case of money changing hands from the left pocket to the right.

However, extra allowances and additional consolations did greatly help with the morale of the Rage Bear Legion.

The Alliance Army never had to worry about morale. On the one hand, soldiers trained systematically possessed an inherently high level of organization. They were resolute, disciplined, and spirited. On the other hand, the Alliance Army was a force with a belief system; previously mainly engaged in combat on the planet of Rage Owl Star, political officers always emphasized to the soldiers that their fight was for the future of the entire planet, for the happiness of all humanity.

However, in extraterrestrial combat, this belief was somewhat challenged.

Despite that, the political officers could offer another set of ideologies:

First was the loyalty to Mr. Gu, which was unquestionable and recognized by all the warriors.

Second was transforming the “for our world” message into “for all of humanity.” However, this message wasn’t quite as effective.

The former had already been grand enough, and many had come to accept this belief after experiencing firsthand the massive changes to themselves, their families, friends, and the entire planet.

But the latter was even grander and more abstract.

What was more terrifying was the lack of visible change. They had fought for half a year, but to be honest, had the situation in Fino City improved at all?

It had not; in fact, it was getting worse.

The soldiers were willing to accept that they were fighting for humanity, but their acceptance was low, and the situation, without any outcomes or changes, inevitably caused some distress.

At such times, better allowances and improved conditions served as a material financial reward and played a role in compensation.

Gu Hang also clarified in his meeting with Li Kexi that they would fight for at most another half year; he would dispatch another half of the Rage Bear Legion from Rage Owl Star for rotation, letting the warriors who had fought for a long time have a chance to return home for rest, reunite with their families, and enjoy life a bit.

…

All the benefits and interests obtained by the Rage Bear Legion there, whether direct or indirect, whether in terms of prestige, politics, or economics, all depended on the efforts and command of Li Kexi and his soldiers in battle.

They were earned with the blood of the warriors.

After half a year of fighting, all seven divisions were under strength. A total of more than thirteen thousand warriors had been killed or injured, with over eight thousand dead, and more than five thousand severely injured and confirmed to be unable to return to the unit.

Gu Hang visited the battlefield hospital to console the injured.

He promised to bring back the casualties and the remains of the fallen to their hometowns. They would receive grand funerals and generous consolations.

Gu Hang did as he promised.

The remains of more than five thousand soldiers who had been withdrawn from the combat sequence, along with the bodies that could be recovered, were transported through the Star Realm Army's

logistical system to the Starport on Korolya and placed aboard the armed merchant ship of the Gu Commercial Firm, which was also carrying Gu Hang as he departed.

Besides, there were others joining them on their journey.

A survey team, composed of around twenty people, mainly from the Star Domain survey team, with three observers from the Space Domain Government's survey group.

There was also a team of investors. Many tycoons, involved in the Galaraldo disappearance case and unable to leave Korolya, managed to send some investment consultants and trusted subordinates to inspect the value of Mr. Gu's planet alongside him.

In addition, the largest group, consisting of 210,000 refugees set to be "evacuated" to Rage Owl Star, were loaded onto an accompanying transport ship.

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The 210,000 refugees crammed into the transport ships were Gu Hang's 'spoils of war' on the political battlefield, all destined to be relocated to live on Rage Owl Star.

This was a legitimate value.

Five Tax Currency per person was the pricing set by the Empire. Taken to Rage Owl Star, even if they did absolutely nothing but set up refugee camps to sustain these people, after two years, once the Imperial Tax was paid, it could offset a million in Tax Currency.

But how did these people come about?

Firstly, it was the Tianma Star Sector's various planets… 'looting' Korolya.

Before Galaraldo disappeared, Korolya's situation was already deteriorating. Many of the learned in the Star Sector could tell that,

under the call of the Star Sector Government, the governors of each planet, some other forces within the planets, and even the wealthy were all “generously digging into their pockets,” providing some manageable relief for Korolya III.

It was mainly in the form of various supplies.

Similarly, many forces that provided supplies also ‘generously’ expressed that they could accept refugees from Korolya III who had become homeless due to turmoil and had nowhere else to be placed.

That was surely extortion.

The majority of the forces ‘generously’ donated supplies to support Korolya III that were not even worth as much as the population they plundered from Korolya III.

But the Korolya III Planetary Government had no choice but to accept.

They desperately needed those supplies, or else military operations would lack provisions, and the civilians’ lives would be affected.

Moreover, those homeless refugees, who had emerged due to outbreaks of the Plague Demon, truly existed.

It was more manageable elsewhere, but Fino City, having fallen by more than half, was facing the gravest issue.

There were originally a billion people there, half of them in occupied zones. Their fate, only death, transformation into plague walkers, or infection, these were the three outcomes.

But in the non-occupied zones, there were still hundreds of millions of people. They should, of course, be evacuated from areas that could become battlegrounds at any time, but… That was hundreds of millions of people, and moving them to other Nest Capitals was extremely difficult.

All along, Korolya III had always been in a state of having too many people and not enough resources. Trying to evacuate so many people, finding places that could take this many people, that was very hard.

They could only establish refugee camps and quarantine zones in some of the slightly more upper-level areas of Fino City.

All zones were managed by classification, divided into high-risk, medium-risk, low-risk, and no-risk infection zones, with strict barriers between each zone. All areas were placed under military management, with civilians not allowed to leave their homes—not even if they faced starvation.

After reporting, those without typical infection symptoms within seven days could be moved to a lower-risk zone, all the way down to the no-risk zones.

But in reality, no-risk zones only meant a very low risk of infection; it was not necessarily safe. The problem of scarcity of supplies always plagued the quarantine zones in Fino City's refugee camps. Additionally, regardless of the risk level of the area, there was always the danger of the Plague Demon breaking through the military defenses and directly taking over, there was also the risk of a sudden large-scale outbreak of the epidemic.

Therefore, under such circumstances, the most beneficial course of action for the Korolya Planetary Government really was to sell people to other planets and powers.

Not selling them meant they would find it tough to provide for and could be doomed at any moment.

But they had to sell at a reasonable price, right?

When all was calculated, other forces generally exchanged supplies worth about 0.2 to 0.5 Tax Currency to take away a population worth 5 Tax Currency per person. Was this not robbery?

Of course, with Korolya as the Nest Capital planet that held four hundred billion inhabitants, amounting to 62.2% of the entire Tianma Star Sector's population, its government was one of the most powerful Planetary Governments. Moreover, Governor Akuna was a staunch supporter of the Tianma leader, Pei Desi, belonging to the same faction.

They certainly would not accept being robbed so easily.

But… who could blame Akuna and Pei Desi, two core figures whose own hands were not very clean? Now, with the disappearance of Galaraldo causing much trouble, their political influence, which was once great, would be lucky to retain even two or three tenths of its former strength.

There was quite a lot of political struggle and compromise involved.

And the outcome that was ultimately negotiated was that each power could obtain a certain quota of 'migration' population for free based on their support for Korolya III; exceeding this quota would require purchasing with Tax Currency. The purchase price was determined using a tiered mechanism, ranging from 1 to 4 Tax Currency per person.

There were discounts offered but at the same time, it restricted those powers from plundering Korolya III too excessively.

Gu Hang was involved in the negotiation process for this matter.

Therein, he naturally stood from his own perspective, on behalf of Rage Owl Star, trying to gain as much advantage as possible.

But outside of this matter, Gu Hang sometimes detached himself emotionally and reflected on the situation.

During Korolya III's major disasters, when countless citizens of the Empire were afflicted, the ideal of all parties working together to face a natural disaster existed only on the surface. Behind closed doors, this had turned into a feast of dividing interests and feasting on the division of Korolya III. Various bigshots engaged in backstabbing and verbal combat, greedily feeding off the ravages of a disaster.

Gu Hang could not stand on the moral high ground to criticize these events, as he was one of those partaking in the feast.

But was there anything 'good' from start to finish in this matter?

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The various forces that were dividing up the population benefits of Korolya III were certainly acting with the intention of looting amidst chaos,

The Planetary Government of Korolya III was no cleaner; the population had become their bargaining chip for obtaining benefits. They did not think about how to preserve more human lives but were instead willing to place refugees in camps with enormous risks, where they could face death at any moment, rather than allow them to live in better places.

Only those people who were facing risks, who were inadequately clothed and underfed, who had lost their homes, were truly struggling the most.

Gu Hang couldn't change the entire environment, but what he could do was to ensure that those who were 'relocated' to Rage Owl Star could start living a life befitting a 'human' again.

All the people on the ship came from risk-free areas and had gone through the quarantine process.

Gu Hang also did not want to bring aboard people with contagious diseases; otherwise, there was a good chance that everyone on the ship would die before even reaching Rage Owl Star, and they might even bring the plague there.

Of the two hundred and ten thousand people, half came from the 'free' population provided to Korolya III by Rage Owl Star – this was the free population quota that Gu Hang obtained after getting involved in political activities on the side while participating in the investigation team's work.

The other one hundred and ten thousand people came from the Rage Bear Legion. They were directly involved in front-line combat, with several refugee camps within their defense areas. Li Kexi and the commanders of the local Korolya forces, in collusion, sold off this batch of people.

After all, if the Korolya government could sell the people without sharing the money with the military, why couldn't the native military forces sell them on their own?

The price was very cheap; the Korolya government's lowest price was 1 Tax Currency per person, but these native military forces were willing to sell for 0.6 Tax Currency. Moreover, with the authority Li Kexi

had over them, and after applying both soft and hard tactics, the price was directly pushed down to 0.2 Tax Currency per person.

For these one hundred and ten thousand people, Gu Hang spent just over twenty thousand Tax Currency, what's the difference from getting them for free?

…

After drifting in the Star Sea for seven days, the group finally arrived at Rage Owl Star.

A war merchant ship belonging to the Gu Commercial Firm, a transport ship, docked at the small port on Rage Owl Star.

Two hundred and ten thousand people disembarked, heading to the ground; some materials were loaded onto the ships, ready to be transported to Korolya, making the entire port start bustling with activity.

But of course, Gu Hang didn't have to squeeze in there.

He left the starport ahead of everyone else, taking the investigative team and the representatives of the investors, heading to the ground.

Lady Ossina, the Alliance Premier, Major General Tadeusz, the Chief Political Commissar of the Entire Army, and Lambert Hodgson, the Grand Justice, the three figures who could be considered the top leaders of the Alliance Government, all came out to personally welcome their governor's return.

After a brief reception banquet, the group boarded several Wind Falcons heading for Revival City.

Lady Ossina, who had already received the news, would dispatch a team from the Alliance Foreign Affairs Department and the Commercial Department to interface with the representatives of the investors.

They would be taken to see the industrial center of Weixing City on Rage Owl Star, then to visit the vast planting fields in the Southern Green Valley Region, and then return to Skaaro City to look at the construction situation of the starport.

Surely, after viewing all this, they would provide a reasonable report to their masters about whether Rage Owl Star was worth investing in.

As for the members of the investigative group, things were slightly more troublesome.

Gu Hang couldn't afford to neglect them too much, so he simply took people on a trip to the Green Valley Region first.

This was also quite reasonable.

They had come to investigate the status of the Plague Demon; with the investigation on Korolya III completely deadlocked, they were looking to see if they could find some other clues on Rage Owl Star. The Green Valley Region, after all, was the starting point of that magical disaster a year and a half ago, so an investigation there was entirely sensible.

However, after they went to the Green Valley Region, how they would investigate was their own business.

The Alliance Government supported their work wholeheartedly, arranging for country villas with plenty of pure natural food, chefs, and servants. They would be able to enjoy the pastoral sceneries not easily seen in the Nest Capital or those civilized planets.

There was no shortage of fine food and wine, and if they got bored, they could even go to the southern edge of the Beiqing Valley Region to hunt some Aberrant Beasts for sport… no, investigative activities.

Isn't this much more comfortable than squatting and waiting for the Sun Lord's investigation team to arrive in that treacherous place on Korolya No. 3?

After settling in this batch of investigators, Gu Hang hurried back to Revival City.

Faced with the arrival of those 210,000 refugees and the investors' team busying around, Osenia hastily put down her work to meet the governor and deliver a work report.

The development of Rage Owl Star was of paramount importance, but Gu Hang did not need to hear much. In the past, they had generally maintained a communication frequency of at least once, and sometimes three times, per week. Although he was not on Rage Owl Star, he was well-informed about the development of the Alliance.

Some particular key points could be discussed separately.

For example, Weixing City, as the industrial center, had seen its population grow to five million, having doubled versus just over a year ago. This was mainly due to people syphoned from other regions.

Weixing City's annual industrial output value had reached 11 million in tax currency, with per capita output exceeding 2, which was double the empire's standard for annual per capita output.

The concept of 1 tax currency was originally set by the Central Empire Government as the 'standard case of total annual output value of an empire citizen'.

Of course, this was just Weixing City surpassing a per capita output value of 2, while other areas were far from it. Revival City, with 1.2 million people, only surpassed 1; the Beiqing Valley Region, due to vast land resources and exceptionally high per capita planting area, was able to reach 1.9 in tax currency; elsewhere, all fell short of 1.

Another matter, and also a key point in Osenia's report, was the situation after the entire West Desert Region, along with the Western Desert, had been reclaimed.

After the elimination of Blackbird Heavy Industries, which occupied the western continent, the Alliance no longer had any enemies on Rage Owl Star.

Rage Owl Star, with oceans comprising the majority of its area, had a very good natural environment before the war, with high living standards for its inhabitants, and could be considered a combination of a Garden World and a high-grade resource planet.

The entire planet's land area was only about 36%. The main part of the Alliance was located on the main continent, which was approximately 22% of the total area of the planet. There were two other continents, with areas of 9% and 5% of the planet's total area, respectively.

However, while the main continent was battered, it still had lush regions like the Green Valley; other lands with poor natural environments could still support inhabitants as long as the Low Energy Storms were avoided. Even the most hostile West Desert, with its sprinkling of oases and underground water systems, could supply the necessary water for the underground planting factories, sustaining a large population and even having the capacity to export food.

On the other two continents, they were almost entirely unsuitable for human life. They were originally the primary sites for the extraction of Spiritualized Gas Fields on Rage Owl Star, and now those two continents, along with the surrounding seas, were enshrouded in unceasing Low Energy Storms.

According to past intelligence, there truly seemed to be no signs of life activity on those two continents.

From this perspective, the Alliance could be considered to have definitively unified the entire world.

Unified the whole world!

Became a ruler of a planet in every sense of the word!

Although this had been Gu Hang's goal since he arrived in this world two and a half years ago, and he never doubted he would achieve it, when everything became a reality, he could not help but feel somewhat emotional.

Before crossing over, as just an ordinary person, how could he have ever imagined that he would see such a day?

However, Gu Hang did not feel very excited.

Had it not been for the series of events triggered by Galaraldo, and the journey to Korolya, Gu Hang might have been more excited.

But now, as the vast Star Sea was no longer just a background in his memory but had genuinely become the stage he was about to step onto, he realized how minuscule both he and the power of a single planet were in this context.

There is no choice but to forge ahead.

Chapter 308, Administration

The recovered western part of the continent was divided into three provinces, namely Baojun Province, Gushu Province, and Peninsula Province.

The names were actually chosen quite arbitrarily. Baojun is the area where Blackbird City is located, named after the pre-war era city ruins that used to bear this name; ‘Gushu’ is the northeastern part of the mainland, which has a very large ancient tree that surprises people, so they simply called it that; Peninsula is the southwestern part, which features a protruding peninsula.

Altogether, the three provinces have a population of over thirteen million people.

In fact, according to past records, it should be close to twenty million. However, for one thing, the past statistics might have been problematic, and for another, under the rule of Blackbird Heavy Industries, a large number of people were transformed into semi-mechanical beings without consciousness, or they died during past surgeries, in labor, or in the wars against the Alliance.

As for now, only eleven million remain. The other two million were, during the war, conveniently relocated to the heartland of the Alliance by the returning supply convoys.

These displaced populations primarily supplemented two locations—Weixing City and Beiqing Valley Province.

These are also the two areas with the greatest demand for labor.

As an industrial center, Weixing City naturally needs no further explanation. The explosive development of its industries craves labor like a black hole.

Beiqing Valley is not much better off. The region has a very high per capita output, but this output comes from massive per capita cultivated areas and strenuous labor. Even though Beiqing Valley has almost achieved complete mechanization and industrialization of agricultural production, the average agricultural worker still has too many fields to tend to, leading to excessively long working hours.

Of course, agricultural workers in the Green Valley Region are fully motivated to do so. Their efforts, under the Alliance's system, are rewarded. Based on their total work hours and output over the past year, almost everyone who worked normally received a promotion in their personal job grade by the end of the year, with going from E5 to E6 being a common occurrence, and even 30% of the people going directly to E7.

Moving from E5 to E6 means a 50% increase in basic benefits and allowances; reaching E7 is equivalent to doubling them.

Originally, the benefits and allowances at the E5 level already far surpassed the living standards they had as 'serfs' on plantations, where they lived almost like people. With a further increase of half or even double, the improvement in their quality of life was significant.

This was the reward for their hard work, but Mr. Gu did not intend to let them maintain a working day of 14 hours, or even more, forever.

The one million people arriving from the western three provinces would be able to alleviate some of the pressure.

As for opening up more land, it still required a larger population.

Currently, under the rule of the unified Alliance, there are over forty-four million people, with an annual total output value reaching fifty-two million Tax Currency.

The per capita output has just exceeded one, but only just.

The main reason for this was the uneven development of production forces across Rage Owl Star.

Beiqing Valley and Weixing City are quite high, but other regions have not yet passed one.

According to the standards of the Imperial Tax, handing over a tenth as tax presents not only no pressure, but is also more than sufficient.

At present, the per capita consumption level under the Alliance's rule is roughly 0.6 Tax Currency/person/year, which objectively speaking, is not a particularly high standard of living, roughly adequate for subsistence, a little short of modest comfort.

But the citizens' satisfaction is very high.

Although not wealthy, it's much stronger than struggling at the brink of survival as before.

Happiness is relative.

The current scale of consumption across Rage Owl Star is about twenty-seven million Tax Currency, theoretically leaving a 'surplus value' of twenty-five million.

And the administrative efficiency of the Alliance is very high, able to collect fifteen million of this surplus value into the Alliance finances.

This is quite rare, and the contrast is telling.

Korolya III has a population of forty billion, with an annual output of at least twenty-eight billion, a per capita consumption of 0.3, leaving a surplus value of sixteen billion in Tax Currency. In theory, collecting four billion in Imperial Tax every year should be relatively easy.

But the Korolya government simply cannot do it. At most, they manage to collect just over twenty billion each year, and the rest has to come from handing over populations.

This is where the difference in administrative efficiency lies.

The Alliance excels in this regard, mainly thanks to two factors.

Firstly, it's a matter of the system. Under an economy that is mainly planned on an overarching scale, the rent-seeking class between the government and producers has been greatly eliminated. Factory owners, plantation owners, entrepreneurs… In essence, all of them are employees of the Alliance Government. The means of production do not belong to these managers but to the Alliance. Their work enthusiasm is supplemented by rank promotions and extra allowances.

There is no 'collection' phase here; all output belongs to the government and is subject to government allocation.

But if that was all there was to it, it wouldn't be enough.

The number of administrative personnel in the Alliance is not high, but their efficiency is, thanks to persistent anti-corruption, anti-dereliction efforts, and incentive policies for administrative personnel, the whole society is currently operating in a highly efficient and clear political environment.

Even so, a large amount of output has "disappeared." Ten million in Tax Currency has neither entered the standard consumer spending nor the Alliance's finances.

There are many reasons for this, with the service industry being the main one, as its output is not counted in the Alliance's statistics. Following that, there are administrative costs, waste, spontaneous investments…

But no matter what, the current situation of the Alliance is more than capable of dealing with the Imperial Tax.

As long as they reserve one-third of the fiscal budget each year and slow down investment growth, the entire Alliance can enter into a normal cycle within the Empire World.

But Gu Hang has no intention of doing so.

Under his direction, the Alliance's fiscal budget remains maxed out, even running at a deficit in many areas.

Mainly, it's about reinvesting into production.

Under the Alliance's system, although there is a certain level of private investment, which the government encourages, overall development still relies on large-scale, government-led investment.

If they really slowed down, the Imperial Tax would take a big chunk, and military expenses another, leaving not enough for investments, and Gu Hang is unwilling to slow the pace of development.

On the one hand, the industrial centers must continue to be built; on the other hand, the economic levels of other regions within the Alliance need to rise.

Of course, another important factor restraining the development of the entire planet is the population.

Such a vast planet, with just over forty million people, is still too few.

Reliance on natural population growth is too slow. Despite many policies encouraging childbirth for the future, as for the present, immigration remains the most important avenue.

The two largest channels of immigration are Heijian Star and Korolya III.

According to Gu Hang's plan, in the next two years, they aim to continuously bring in at least ten million people from the outside.

This is a huge challenge for the Alliance Government.

Never mind how Mr. Gu will achieve this by then, government officials must be prepared to undertake the task of accommodating so many people. How to arrange it economically, how to clarify identities politically, how to resolve cultural disputes…

The difficulties are numerous, and as the Alliance Premier, Osenia can only take a deep breath, then go ahead and make plans with determination.

Chapter 309, The Governor's Speech

“To all residents of Rage Owl Star:”

“I am your Governor, Gu Hang.”

“Two and a half years ago, when I came to this world, I promised the entire planet that I would save this world.”

“I promised that I would establish a unified government, that I would unite all the people of this planet and bring security to the entire world; I promised that I would rescue everyone from hunger and panic, that I would enable everyone to enjoy a normal life.”

“Thus, the New Alliance Government replaced the Old Alliance and established the Alliance Army. The Rage Owl Star People’s own army fought on all fronts, unifying the entire planet. All the people of Rage Owl Star were once again united without any barriers, fighting for a common goal, no longer divided by power, ethnicity, or tribal interests.”

“The vast majority of you have never heard that declaration. But that does not matter, for I, and the Alliance I have built, have over the past two and a half years, step by step, turned these ‘promises’ into reality, into something that is right before everyone’s eyes.”

…

Listenting to the words coming from the radio, a tavern in Silver Sand City, the capital of the Peninsula Provincial Capital, was filled with cheers and jubilation.

These people were all soldiers of the Alliance.

After the hostilities on the Western Front ended, the main force had withdrawn to the east, but not without leaving some behind in the west.

The fighting had just ceased, and local governance had been transferred to the newly established local governments, ending military control. Nevertheless, it still required the continued presence of the Army brothers to suppress the area.

However, the situation in the three western provinces was somewhat better compared to the eastern provinces at the time of their initial recovery. With Blackbird Heavy Industries finished, this place was a blank slate.

When the Alliance liberated vast tracts of land and cleared them of Blackbird Heavy Industries, rebuilding order was not a difficult task.

As a result, the Alliance soldiers stationed in the west were generally in a stable frame of mind. They hardly encountered any serious incidents, and the troops were even able to allow soldiers to leave their posts and go to the city for a break.

The city was also relatively welcoming to the arrival of the Alliance soldiers.

The discipline of the Alliance soldiers was very strict. When they came out to shop, drink, and dine, they paid what they owed. The stipends in the hands of the soldiers were worth solid Alliance currency and quite reliable. Although the residents of Silver Sand City, who had just become Union Citizens, also had their ranks set, most were only at the E5 level and did not receive much stipend; they were certainly happy to earn a bit more.

The military command had already notified that today there would be a speech by the Governor. Those on duty naturally listened to the radio at the military base. But for those who were on leave and having fun in the city, they had to find a place to listen.

No one wanted to miss it.

They found a tavern and, after calling friends together, more than half the tavern was filled with off-duty Alliance soldiers, a total of sixty or seventy at least. At their request, the tavern owner changed from playing music to the news channel.

To be honest, the proprietor was not too keen on it.

As the Governor began his speech, boasting about how ‘I have turned promises into reality,’ he just glanced at the soldiers cheering wildly. He didn’t dare to speak loudly but muttered under his breath:

“Those high and mighty lords spout nonsense, and you, a bunch of cannon fodder sold out, have been brainwashed into fools, cheering for what?”

Although he spoke very quietly, he was still overheard by a soldier standing nearby.

The man turned around, glaring fiercely at him: “Old man, what did you say?”

The tavern owner was startled, stammering but afraid to speak again.

Getting beaten up was one thing, but what he feared most was his place getting smashed by this troop of soldiers.

Seeing the owner refusing to speak, the soldier became even more irritated: “We followed the Governor’s leadership and rescued you from those steel beasts. And you, you talk like this behind our backs? Huh?”

He stood up bristling with the smell of alcohol, closing in on the owner.

Frightened, the owner drew back, feeling doomed, as he knew a beating was inevitable.

At that moment, another tall figure stepped in front of that soldier.

It was a bald strong man with several scars on his face, but his expression was unexpectedly calm.

He first advised his comrade, saying, “Don’t get angry, don’t get angry…”

“This guy’s mouth is asking for a beating! Dimitriou, your old unit was completely wiped out, and now you’re getting talked to like this. Don’t you want to teach them a lesson? If you won’t, I will! I’ll take responsibility for any disciplinary issues!”

“It’s not a disciplinary issue, it’s about not tarnishing the Governor’s reputation,” Dimitriou said.

“Hmph!” The man was clearly still angry, but after hearing these words, he miraculously held back his temper.

After calming the person down, Dimitriou turned around, faced the bar owner, and said earnestly, “Mr. Owner, I hope you apologize for your remarks just now.”

The owner was about to apologize immediately, showing a very quick submission.

But before he could speak, Dimitriou stopped him.

“No need now. I don’t want your apology to be out of fear, out of terror. First, listen. After listening to the Governor’s speech, then you decide whether or not to apologize. I won’t force you.”

The owner could only stand anxiously to the side, trying hard to take in the information from the broadcast.

He could no longer afford to regret his loose tongue; he had to listen carefully to see if he could find a way to apologize later without getting a beating.

The broadcast continued:

“… We have resisted the resurgence of the cult, we have nipped the disaster of the Green-Skinned aliens in the bud, and our soldiers have gone into space and thwarted an attack by a Green-Skinned Space Fleet.”

“In the Green Valley Region, we carved out a large safe area in the north, essentially eliminating the threat of Aberrant Beasts in the Beiqing Valley Zone; we eradicated the cult in the Green Valley Region, and the Alliance Army chased the demons back to their homeland.”

“In the eastern three provinces, we have swept away the stubborn remnants of the old power.”

“In the North Territory, we have completely exterminated the threat of the Primordial Rage Owl Sect to the world, allowing Polar Industrial Group to join the Alliance.”

“In the west, we have just completely wiped out Blackbird Heavy Industries. We have ended the fear that 13 million people on the western edge of the continent had to face at all times. They no longer have to worry that they, or their family members, or friends, could be singled out to be sent into Blackbird City, never to be heard from again.”

…

Just hearing this much, the heart of the owner of the bar in Silver Sand City was somewhat shaken.

In the past, Blackbird Heavy Industries had absolute control over this land, especially towards the end. They continually forced people to move to Blackbird City, purportedly to lead a better life.

At first, everyone believed it, but as time went on, although people outside did not know what was happening inside, they stopped receiving any news from friends and relatives who had gone in.

Gradually, people began to question this, but anyone who dared to publicly question it would often be taken away very quickly;

The bar owner’s son and daughter were taken away like that. He had always been someone who didn’t believe in conspiracy theories – maybe because he didn’t dare to, still holding onto a sliver of hope.

But the arrival of the Alliance completely shattered his illusions.

He didn't want his illusions to be shattered; he preferred to still believe that his son and daughter were alive; he preferred to believe it was just a war of the rulers biting each other.

Chapter 310, Apology

What was Blackbird Heavy Industries' slogan again?

Oh, right.

"Embrace the glorious evolution."

The bar owner would rather believe that his son and daughter, chosen by Blackbird, really had better development opportunities than to think, as the Alliance claimed, that they were taken to have their brains cut open and turned into robots devoid of self-awareness.

But he found it increasingly difficult to deceive himself.

If it were only the Alliance's statement, he could dismiss it as false propaganda from a political rival. However, with some survivors returning and the spread of civilian news, these pieces of information could verify what the Alliance had said.

At that moment, the words spoken by Mr. Gu were not what truly convinced him, but they were the last straw that broke the camel's back.

He struggled to open his mouth. This time, it wasn't because of the soldiers in front of him, coercing him with force into making an apology. Instead, he had come to a realization from the bottom of his heart.

Yet, in front of him, Dimitriou still didn't let him speak.

He made a "shush" gesture, signaling the bar owner to keep listening.

The man had no choice but to hold back.

…

Meanwhile, Gu Hang's voice continued in the broadcast.

After narrating the achievements of the Alliance Government since its establishment, the southern and northern campaigns, the unification of the globe, and the liberation of the entire world, he began to talk about the aftermath:

"…We established a job-ranking system that benefits the whole world, from basic subsistence guarantees to basic medical care; from educational assurance to employment security; from basic welfare to a salary system determined by job rank; from government-led infrastructure construction and large factory production to policies encouraging the public to start their own businesses…"

"The Alliance is committed to ensuring that every individual has a place within its system. Everyone can live with dignity and have the opportunity to achieve a better and higher standard of living and realize their self-worth through their own efforts. The channels for advancement are always open to everyone."

Hearing this, the bar owner was even more convinced.

If it was all just boasting, that would be one thing, but many of these things had even been verified in his own life.

Most people he knew, as long as they were physically able and capable of working, were at least ranked as E5. According to the E5 level's benefits and allowances, this was at least a secure and contented living. For those with jobs, ranking was based on their work; those without, the Alliance took responsibility for assigning and arranging work.

As for himself, since he owned a bar that was doing quite well, he was even ranked as E7.

Admittedly, he had lost the ownership of the bar, which had irritated him. But when it came down to it, the Alliance gave him more than he lost. His previously meager business income was just enough to break even and support his own livelihood. The Alliance's contribution had actually improved his life.

Of course, the bar's business could get better in the future. But even though he lost profits, his accelerated rank promotion from running the bar could make up for it. All things considered, he wasn't at a loss.

Were there any downsides?

There were.

For example, "forced" labor.

The Alliance indeed did not support idleness; even if temporarily out of work, you were expected to sweep the streets or dig foundations at construction sites if assigned. But even for the "black hat" bar owners like him, it was difficult to criticize the Alliance on this point.

If people want to live well, they should work. Where is there such a good thing as being ranked and then lying at home living off welfare? The Alliance, or rather the entire society of Rage Owl Star, was not yet wealthy to that extent.

You don't want this job? Okay, the Alliance has never restricted anyone from seeking any employment. Assigned to sweep the streets, you're free anytime to become a factory worker or a store clerk. If you're not satisfied and want a better future, going back to school is also an option. Adult education can be deferred in payment, and if you have good grades, the tuition can be waived…

From this perspective, every word spoken by the Governor is true, a reality witnessed by the residents under the rule of the Alliance.

But that's not enough.

At least, in the mouth of Governor Gu, it's not enough.

"…These are our achievements, but we will never pause for a moment on the journey towards the happiness and welfare of all the people of the Alliance. On behalf of the Alliance Government, I solemnly promise to every citizen of the Alliance:"

“We will persevere in prioritizing economic development and the welfare of the people as the government’s primary concern.”

“We will build more factories, producing more products and food.”

“We will build a stronger military to protect the fruits of our hard work;”

“We will deepen reforms of the Alliance’s systems, invigorating economic development;”

“We will continue to promote anti-corruption policies and advocate for an efficient government, leaving no hiding place for the parasites!”

“We will create more valuable jobs, to accommodate more high-ranking positions, allowing more willing and intelligent Union Citizens to climb the ranks faster, and to receive better treatment.”

“This is the solemn promise I, and the Alliance Government, make to all the residents of the Alliance!”

…

The broadcast speech of Governor Gu has come to an end.

As the words ‘solemn promise’ fell silent, the little tavern in Silver Sand City became noisy and boisterous.

The loyal soldiers of the Alliance, their cheering and joyful voices, hadn’t ceased from the start of the Governor’s speech, and now they had become even louder!

Now, the soldiers, whose passions had been ignited, laughed, boasted to each other, competed in drinking, and no longer paid attention to the small interlude that had just occurred.

Just like the Governor said, we have an infinitely vast cause to work on, who has time to fuss over such trivial matters?

And the tavern owner had become a bit dumbfounded.

He looked around nervously and saw Dimitriou.

He opened his mouth and said, “I… I want to apologize to you.”

Dimitriou smiled and waved his hand, “Judging by your look, I roughly understand your thoughts. You should indeed apologize, but not today. Everyone is in high spirits, no one wants to dwell or listen to you talk about the upsetting incident just now.”

He paused, and the sergeant continued, “Actually, you’ve never needed to apologize to us, your apology should be to Mr. Gu. But Mr. Gu is even more magnanimous than us. Work well, make sure the tavern has more tables, a wider variety of drinks, tastier food… Endeavor to make this tavern better and better, that’s the best apology you can offer.”

The tavern owner took a deep breath and said, “I understand.”

Then, he called out loudly to the noisy soldiers, “Drinks are on the house today! Don’t worry about the loss, I still have plenty of loss margins! Drink up everyone!”

The soldiers laughed and cheered, whistles blowing loudly, no longer dwelling on what had happened before.