Governor 341

Chapter 341, The Parting Flute and Xiao

Gu Hang's previous statement, though a sign of great respect for Yelisia by leaving the choice to her, felt somewhat perfunctory due to their differing statuses.

But the following one truly struck a chord with what Yelisia yearned for in her heart.

Was she someone contented with the status quo? Was she someone satisfied with just being a representative of her family, becoming Gu Hang's wife, a symbol of the union between two families?

No, she wasn't.

Although Fufana hadn't explicitly stated it, his previous comment about 'placing oneself amidst the starry ocean to establish Fufana's prestige' had clearly laid out the old man's perspective.

And then, Gu Hang precisely articulated her thoughts—it was indeed her heart's desire.

The man she trusted most in her past life, and theoretically, the man she should trust the most in her future, had both said the same.

What more was there to hesitate about?

Yelisia smiled at Gu Hang and asked, "So, I'm to leave right after our engagement, without knowing how long it'll be until the war ends. Will you wait for me all this time?"

"Of course, my lady, I will await the news of your victorious return."

"After the war is over, we will get married."

Gu Hang felt there was something odd about this statement, but he didn't dwell on whether it was auspicious or not.

He tentatively stretched out his hand and embraced Yelisia.

The female general's body stiffened, unaccustomed and almost instinctively wanting to pull away.

But she didn't.

Following that, neither of them spoke.

Feeling each other's body warmth, they both relaxed significantly.

In fact, they both understood a truth: they had little emotional foundation to speak of, and precisely for that reason, they should make the most of the little time they had to foster such emotions.

It was a thought born of rationality.

But soon enough, all that rationality turned into sentiment.

…

The engagement ceremony uniting the Gu Clan and Fufana, even on the flourishing planet of Flying Wing Star, was a rare grand occasion.

The grand, luxurious setup was secondary; more important were the attendees and the political implications of the event.

There were two groups of people to mention.

The foremost group included many of a neutral stance. In addition to representatives from the Empire Commerce Guild and the Imperial Navy, there were also members of the national religion, the Psychic Cultivator's Association, and various other major merchants and capitalists… These people attended this engagement ceremony.

They all shared two characteristics:

First, each had their own political or tangible strength but was not too powerful within the Star Sector.

Second, they all wished to avoid getting involved in the ongoing struggle between the Fatches Family and the Star Sector Government dominating the Tianma Star Sector.

Now, the union between the Gu Clan and Fufana suddenly stood as a banner, rallying these neutral forces together.

Thus, the neutral parties, originally not weak but quite scattered, formed an alliance that was not very tight-knit but at least shared a common goal, uniting around the Gu Clan and Fufana.

This, in turn, brought about the second wave of attendees.

The Fatches Family sent representatives, and especially Korolya Governor Ivan Fatches, a rising star of the Fatches Family, flew in personally from Korolya.

Meanwhile, Star Sector head Ivan Martinelli, as well as Flying Wing Star Governor Pei Desi, were also in attendance.

These core figures from both opposing sides were all present.

For outsiders, this demonstrated great respect to both families and to the engaged couple, Gu Hang and Yelisia. Even those with dire conflicts could temporarily set aside their differences and share a room for the engagement ceremony.

In reality, however, they felt somewhat compelled.

The previously overlooked neutral forces, now gathered together by the engagement ceremony, could no longer be ignored. They could not afford such a significant group leaning toward the other side, which would directly upset the balance of opposition.

The neutral groups had a clear demand: You may continue your power struggle, as we cannot interfere anyway. But even so, there must be rules, fight within the limits, and do not go overboard. The chaotic and limit-free political strife that Tianma Star Sector had experienced over the past two years must end. The situation in Korolya, not showing any improvement and progressively worsening, had to be reversed.

Without a doubt, Ms. Nell Raouise, the Chief Tax Officer attending Gu Hang and Yelisia's engagement ceremony as the representative of the Star Domain Government, also stood with the neutral parties, posing the same demands to both sides of the political conflict.

This forced both reluctant parties to sit at the same table and seriously discuss the matter.

This was essentially an arrangement made by Wang Qi and Fufana, who deeply cared for the larger picture of the Star Sector, leveraging the engagement of two young people.

And as the main characters of the engagement ceremony, the two of them had little interest in participating in the underlying matters.

Not that they lacked the capacity to influence. Both had significant standing within their respective groups. It could even be said that the next generation of Fufana was to be managed by Yelisia, and the same went for the Gu Commercial Firm. They didn't need to wait for later; their words already carried immense weight now, especially for Gu Hang.

Chapter 341, The Farewell Flute and Xiao_2

But since there was an old hand at home, they didn't bother to get involved in areas that called for the old hand's experience and wisdom.

Instead of engaging in deceit and intrigue, they preferred to cherish the final moments, to cultivate their relationship.

Then, while those “elders” were still negotiating and compromising without reaching a result, the two had to say goodbye.

Six days after the engagement ceremony, Yelisia received her formal reassignment orders from the Imperial Navy.

The mission consisted of five cruisers, including Quintet, Opera Cruiser, Cello, Final Mark, and Interlude Cruiser, accompanied by fourteen destroyers and thirty escort ships, excluding the smaller vessels not worth mentioning.

The dispatched forces of Tianma Fleet made up more than half of its capacity; most of the ships had set sail, leaving only two cruisers behind.

The expedition fleet was commanded by Tilermungs, the Vice Admiral of Tianma Fleet; his flagship was the “Opera Cruiser.”

Yelisia held the rank of Rear Admiral and served as the captain of “Quintet” and also as the fleet’s Deputy Commander, assisting Tilermungs.

On Flying Wing Star, a grand deployment ceremony was held for the navy.

The sailors of the many starships of Tianma Fleet mainly came from the Imperial Tax—in plainer terms, from Korolya.

However, most of the naval officers were locals from Flying Wing Star, graduates of the Flying Wing Naval Academy.

Before departure, these local officers said their farewells to their wives, children, and parents amidst flying streamers and stirring music played on repeat, walking toward the starry sea under a bright sun, with their families’ hopes and concerns in their hearts.

After saying goodbye to her parents and family, Yelisia then stood before Gu Hang. Just like other young officers parting with their partners, they embraced and whispered sweet nothings to each other.

A moment later, the urging “beep beep beep” of the space elevator sounded, prompting them to part ways.

Yelisia stepped back with her hands behind her, sunlight outlining her figure as she faced Gu Hang, smiling.

“I’m off.”

“Return victorious.”

“Alright.”

The female general donned her military cap, waved with a smile, turned, and left, heading towards the battlefield that awaited her.

…

With Yelisia’s departure, Gu Hang found he indeed missed her a little.

He didn’t suppress this emotion; he let it grow.

This wasn’t a bad thing.

As for Yelisia’s safety, no one could guarantee it. Separated by several star sectors, Gu Hang was powerless. All he could do was to dispatch a team into Quintet to ensure Yelisia’s safety.

This team consisted of five Phoenix members and one hundred of the Tenth Special Warfare Elites in exoskeletons.

But in reality, their ability to make a difference was not that significant.

In the warfare of the Star Sea, the losing side rarely had a way out, and Interstellar Warriors were not gods; no matter how strong, they couldn't save anyone when a starship exploded.

The only situation where they could really make a difference was during boarding combat.

As it happened, the Green Skin Orcs were one of the factions in the entire Star Sea that loved to engage in hit-and-run battles the most.

With these hundred or so elites, at least in the event of hit-and-run battles, paired with the defense forces on board the Quintet, they should be able to play a significant role.

…

After Yelisia had left, Gu Hang himself didn't stay on the Flying Wing type for long; the next day he bid farewell to his mother and returned to Rage Owl Star.

On the way, he made a brief stop at Korolya, where he, in his capacity as legion commander, visited his soldiers, particularly those who had just left the new recruit camps on Korolya and joined the Rage Bear Legion.

In an army consisting of 320,000 people, although the numbers were complete and headquarters were assigned, it had not yet been fully established.

The paperwork was already in place, and the tax currency totaling over 14 million had been provided to the league by the Military Affairs Department, transformed into orders for all the military supplies needed to arm these 320,000 people.

But at present, these supplies were still in the order phase; after all, weapons and equipment couldn't just materialize out of thin air, they needed to be produced.

The league was already working at full capacity on Rage Owl Star and on Heijian Star.

According to negotiations between the league and representatives from the Military Affairs Department, within the next year, the league was to equip these 320,000 people completely. An official from the Military Affairs Department would stay here, and a representative from the Dragonhawk Third Legion, as allies, would also attend to supervise the matter.

This meant that over the next year, beyond the league's own requirements, they had to produce an additional 600 or more tanks, over 3000 armored vehicles and self-propelled artillery, and tens of thousands of other military vehicles. As for other individual equipment, let's not even count company-level equipment.

There was indeed pressure on production capacity.

Reliance on Rage Owl Star alone to meet such a large production demand was somewhat challenging. After all, the wars on Heijian Star over the past two years had also resulted in a significant loss of weapons and equipment, and those tanks and armored vehicles had still not been replenished to date. Unless completely ceasing supply to other league forces and not expanding its own forces, it would be difficult to satisfy the demand of the Rage Bear Legion's new troops within a year.

However, if Heijian Star could be included, then things would look better.

On Heijian Star, centered around what used to be the capital of the Kingdom of Stefano, the Stefano Industrial Center had already launched a production line for Lion Tanks.

With the increase in industrial population there and more production lines being laid out, as productivity gradually increased, it should also be able to take on some of the production burden from Rage Owl Star.

After inspecting the military forces, Gu Hang also met with Colonel Li Kexi, a commander who had been striving on Heijian Star for a long time, and discussed the recent situation, as well as Li Kexi's views on the future.

The situation, actually, wasn't much to talk about. The intensity of the battle in Korolya had never been too high, even though that Governor Fatches kept urging them to attack with all their might to resolve the issue as soon as possible, General Hansen, the chief commander here, did not heed those calls.

In his words, Li Kexi still had quite an approval of General Hansen. They had discussed this issue before, with General Hansen assuring his subordinates that he would absolutely not engage in a 'political war'. Whether or not to fight, and how to fight, would all be purely from a military standpoint.

After all, he was the chief commander of the Star Realm Army; the Planetary Governor had no jurisdiction over him.

This brings us to mention the views of Li Kexi and many Imperial officers on the front lines regarding the future.

They were rather pessimistic.

Fino City was like a giant black hole, continuously 'sucking' everything in its vicinity; the population kept taking losses, but due to some political reasons, the relocation of the established refugee camps wasn't quick enough.

As for the demand from politicians to push the military into Fino City and fully take back the entire Nest Capital, that was out of the question.

"With our current strength, we might have to send all of the more than twenty million troops from the entire Dragonhawk Legion in there to possibly accomplish this task."

"But if that were to happen, what about the other cities?"

“Governor… Legion Commander, please understand one thing: the problem with Korolya is far greater than imagined. The current military strength can only just barely prevent the situation from worsening. To resolve it, unless another thirty million from the Star Realm Army arrives, and decision-makers are willing to sacrifice twenty million from the Star Realm Army, it could truly be resolved. Otherwise, if what Ivan Fatches that blowhard said were to come true, adding a billion native troops, that too would solve the problem.”

“And it must be done quickly. Fifty million from the Star Realm Army, be prepared to lose twenty million, or a billion native Defense Forces—that’s the current price for solving the problem. If we delay any further and the situation deteriorates, then what the price will be, nobody knows.”

Chapter 342, 4 years

Four years had flown by, and this marked the fifth year that Lucy Lee Ko Xi fought in Korolya.

Gazing at the ruined Fino City in the distance, he couldn’t help but remember the meeting they had with Mr. Gu during his passage through Korolya, after the engagement ceremony on his way back to Rage Owl Star four years ago, as well as the conversation they had.

At that time, he had been fighting on Korolya for less than a year. He remembered expressing his views on the war to Mr. Gu.

He was a soldier, and before that, he couldn’t even be considered one. Initially just a small merchant active in Rubbish Town, dealing in some daily necessities and ores, it wasn’t until his wife and child died at the hands of the Green Skin aliens that he took up arms, swearing to kill all the Green Skins.

Forming the Beast Slaughter Group was something that came later; back then, he was simply driven by hatred and determination.

At that stage, he never imagined that by joining the alliance and improving his skills to better slay Green Skins, he would truly eradicate them all in a short time. The heavens-sent fire that seemed capable of destroying everything was something he still vividly remembered to this day.

It was from then on that he turned his heart to steel, adopting the mindset of a soldier and serving the alliance.

He had gone through the entire campaign for the unification of Rage Owl Star and was immediately sent to Korolya to combat the demonic threats. From initially being an acting commander, he now almost commanded the entire Rage Bear Legion's army of a million, and he had been formally promoted to the rank of Imperial Brigadier General a few years prior.

But no matter how his identity had changed over the years, he always saw himself as a soldier and could only view things from a military perspective.

The so-called military needs to resolve Korolya's problems that he proposed to Mr. Gu had come from this perspective.

He also remembered that after hearing his suggestions, Mr. Gu let out a wry smile, sighed, and then said to him,

"It seems you will be staying in Korolya for many years."

A prophetic statement.

Thinking like a soldier, Li Kexi found many things incomprehensible. For instance, he couldn't grasp why Mr. Gu knew at once that the solution he proposed was impossible to implement?

Wasn't it a very simple task?

Fifty million Star Realm Armed Forces, or a billion native troops – these numbers might seem astronomical at first glance, but when put in the context of the Human Empire spanning across the galaxy, and Korolya with its population of forty billion, they appeared rather trivial.

Within the Dragonhawk Star Domain alone, there are nine Army Groups named after the Star Domain itself, just like the Dragonhawk Legion. In addition, there are numerous other Star Realm Armed Forces units, similar to the Rage Bear Legion, with only the 3rd Army Group currently stationed in the Tianma Star Sector.

In Li Kexi's view, it was always possible to squeeze out another Army Group from somewhere else.

As for that one billion troops, it sounded alarmingly high but for Korolya's population of forty billion, it simply meant achieving a mobilization rate of 2.5%.

He didn't ask Mr. Gu this question at the time, but over the years, he gradually figured out some reasons himself. For example, although the Empire had many troops, it had even more enemies, leaving no troops available to spare; mobilizing millions, or tens of millions of people at a high rate was relatively easy, but it was much harder with a population of forty billion. It wasn't just a difference in scale; it also reflected a demand on the governmental mobilization ability, not to mention that Korolya's finances couldn't support an army of ten billion at war.

However, after understanding all these reasons, Li Kexi had more questions rather than fewer.

The real difficulties certainly existed objectively, but… it was a matter of life and death! Was it the time to talk about this difficulty or that difficulty when death was on the doorstep?

Would they only stop talking about difficulties once the population of forty billion fell, and a lament composed of countless bodies, lives, and souls echoed in subspace, turning the entire Korolya into a super den of evil, radiating outwards to swallow the entire Star Sector and even the neighboring Star Sectors, evolving into a threat on the scale of the Iron-teeth Greenskins?

He admitted he was full of grievances.

He wasn't a Korolya person, but after fighting here for so long and witnessing countless Korolyans suffer, anyone would be moved. Even if only from a soldier's standpoint, he needed to know what the soldiers under his command and he himself were fighting for.

But no matter how great his grievances, they couldn't change the situation.

The forces he had hoped would come to resolve the problem had not arrived in the past four years.

And he could only watch his troops send countless bullets and shells to face those monsters; watch his brave soldiers fight and fall, only to be replaced by another batch…

Although the Rage Bear Legion had expanded, most of its forces now actually came from Korolya itself. Every two years, the Military Affairs Department would allocate a portion of the Imperial Tax received from Korolya, including a population part, to the Rage Bear Legion. One reason was to replenish the losses incurred by the Rage Bear Legion in previous battles, and the other was to further expand their forces.

The Rage Bear Legion, which had expanded to five hundred thousand troops four years ago, now boasted a million-strong force, seemingly growing ever larger as they fought.

Chapter 342, Four Years_2

Under this number, only 20% of the troops in the Rage Bear Legion were from the Alliance, maintaining roughly the same total number as before the military expansion, while the rest of the newly increased forces were primarily from Korolya itself.

At the same time, as per Gu Hang's request, the newly formed units in the Rage Bear Legion had at least 10% of their personnel from the Alliance.

As for weapons, equipment, and logistical supplies, the Alliance accepted orders directly from the Imperial Military Department for direct provision.

Even after several rounds of expansion, the personnel composition of the Rage Bear Legion was predominantly Korolya people, but they still proved to be the best-performing division-level force on Korolya. Under the command of General Hans, the Rage Bear Legion always undertook very important tasks.

Li Kexi asked himself honestly if they had fought hard enough. At the same time, he had considerable respect for the warriors of the Dragonhawk Legion – 3rd Army Group, who fought alongside them; the Star Realm Army and some Planetary Defense Forces were indeed not the same concept.

But still, they kept retreating.

Four years ago, they could still maintain control over the top layer of Nest Capital in Fino City and occasionally launch military operations on the ground to snatch some resources, evacuate some civilians who were not infected, or strike at enemy clusters that were reported in the intelligence.

Two years ago, they had almost completely withdrawn from the ground sections of Nest Capital, and even the top layers began to experience severe erosion.

A year ago, the Star Realm Army already felt overwhelmed. Fino City had now become a dead zone, with virtually no military forces or living people serving the military anymore. Normal civilians, if not already evacuated in the past few years, were the ones who couldn't be saved anyway.

Moreover, a year ago, there were more and more reports of plague infections and Plague Cult incidents in other nesting areas. Even in the planetary capital, Mingyan City, the Bottom Nest District was showing signs of getting out of control.

The severely undermanned Korolya Defense Forces, which had barely expanded to two hundred million, simply could not manage so many super-large-scale Nest Capitals. In some severe areas, the Star Realm Army had to divide their forces to deal with them.

This severely weakened the control of the Star Realm Army over the situation in Fino City.

Therefore, a year ago, General Hans made a decision to completely withdraw all forces from Fino City and no longer waste resources there.

All troops left the Nest Capital within a month, taking with them all the healthy people they could.

Following that, a cruiser of the Imperial Navy, along with several destroyers, began to coordinate strikes against Fino City.

This strike was carried out in a manner of extermination. There could no longer be any more hesitations; they planned to completely destroy the entire Fino City, to eradicate this biggest den of evil and source of infection.

This way, whether it be the Star Realm Army freed up or the local Defense Forces, they could deploy the freed up forces into other Nest Capitals to resolve problems that were still resolvable.

Anyway, Fino City was beyond saving.

However, what happened later proved that this decision was made too late.

Heavenly fire descended, and that orbital strike was even grander than what Li Kexi had seen on Rage Owl Star when bombarding the Green Skin Orcs. After all, in addition to a cruiser, several destroyers also participated in the bombardment. They weren't just conducting a single round of strikes but planned to carry out multiple, super-saturated orbital bombings.

If destruction was the goal, then it had to be ensured that it was carried out completely and thoroughly.

However, after the bombardment began, the first few rounds were quite effective; the upper district of Fino City was basically destroyed. Then, above the half-ruined Fino City, a layer of purple-green luminescent membrane emerged, blocking the strikes from orbit.

Although it wasn't quite the same as conventional shields, in the end, they confirmed that what appeared over the skies of Fino City was a Void Shield.

A special kind of Void Shield powered by Subspace Dark Magic.

This was far too astonishing; even at this point, people realized that during these few uncontrolled years, beneath the festering wounds that even the Star Realm Army couldn't deal with, those Plague Cultists had already developed to such an extent!

While General Hans urgently called a meeting, preparing to discuss how to deal with the Void Shield enshrouding Fino City, allowing the orbital strike to continue, the situation took a further turn.

From the holes in the destroyed upper district of Fino City, dozens of dark green missiles streaked through Korolya's dusky atmosphere and shot straight into the sky.

Immediately sensing something ominous, General Hans urgently contacted the Imperial Navy in orbit.

Indeed, they had been struck.

The Plague Cult in Fino City now not only possessed Void Shields, protecting their already owned city from orbital bombardment, but even further developed countermeasures. This type of anti-orbital firepower was, without a doubt, a direct threat to the Imperial Navy's fleet.

The Imperial Navy had not anticipated this at the beginning; the "Concerto" cruiser didn't even activate its Void Shield and took a solid hit.

It was understandable that they didn't raise their shields. They weren't engaging in a naval battle against another fleet, and in their original expectations, they never thought they would be hit. Whether it was a Void Shield or an energy shield, activating them requires a significant amount of energy, and that's expensive.

But it was this oversight that caused considerable losses.

The cruiser was strong enough to sustain a hit, suffering only damage, which wasn't a big problem—it could just go back for repairs. However, a destroyer that also hadn't activated its energy shield was very unlucky and took six hits, one of which penetrated the power cabin, causing an internal explosion.

Therefore, the Korolya people, in the right location, could look up at the sky and see a huge firework explode above.

The loss of a destroyer was by no means a small matter. Any one of Tianma Fleet's combat destroyers cost no less than 1.3 billion.

Using the exchange rate of ten Tax Currency for one soldier, this was the life of 130 million soldiers.

Moreover, on that fully staffed destroyer, there were more than 40,000 naval soldiers.

All of them were gone in the explosion.

The chaotic Navy fleet immediately activated their Void Shields and energy shields, and then bombarded the planet's surface even more fiercely.

This exchange of fire between the orbit and the surface lasted for three days.

Li Kexi and his comrades surrounding Fino City watched a very splendid 'fireworks show' for three days.

And this ground-orbit bombardment war eventually ended with the Imperial Navy giving up.

In the last communication deciding the matter, the commander of the Imperial Navy, with a quite embarrassing attitude, made it clear to Hans that they would not continue the fight.

On one hand, they were running out of ammunition.

On the other hand, and more importantly, they saw no hope of victory.

Although throughout these three days, the Imperial Navy always held the initiative—they could bombard whenever they wanted and if not, just fly to the other side of the planet's orbit to avoid the enemy's fire, waiting for their energy shields to recover before coming back. Precisely because of this initiative, the Imperial Navy didn't suffer any further losses.

But obviously, they had no real way of dealing with Fino City.

With their ships continuously driven away from orbit by the Plague Cult's anti-orbital fire, the orbital firepower never reached its initial saturation level over the three days and thus could not completely break Fino City's Void Shield.

General Hans was quite dissatisfied, questioning the Navy why they didn't dare to persist despite the casualties, to completely destroy the Void Shield?

The Navy seniors refused to be outdone, arguing that losing one ship was already a major loss, and they certainly did not want to risk losing another.

In their words, it was: “The value of any single ship is worth more than all the lives on the ground combined. Rather than have us risk our necks, you should launch a ground assault. As long as you destroy their anti-orbital firepower, I will continue the bombardment of the planet’s surface.”

This statement infuriated General Hans, but what the other side said, although it might not be the truth, was probably not far off.

Neither side could convince the other to bear the sacrifice, so a fierce war of words ensued, with both sides hurling verbal assault at each other, but the obvious result was that neither would be persuaded to endure the sacrifice.

This matter was thus dragged on, right up to now, for a whole year.

Chapter 343, Creeping City

The commander of the Tianma Fleet providing orbital support in Korolya made a judgment that wasn’t really problematic.

The Navy couldn’t possibly exchange fire with the surface’s anti-orbital firepower under these circumstances.

It was unrealistic.

With an entire planet’s surface that “never falls” as defense, without resolving the anti-orbital firepower and the Void Shield, this battle couldn’t be fought.

The Void Shield was actually a secondary concern; even if it were broken, they could simply hide the anti-orbit cannons in the Bottom Nest District, distributing them so they could still exchange fire.

Is the Starship tough, or is the planet’s surface tough?

This was obvious.

They demanded the Land Forces deal with the anti-orbital firepower or else they refused to continue fighting, which wasn't an unreasonable demand.

But…

Having fought in Fino City for so long, the brothers in the Land Forces clearly understood just how terrifying things inside the city were.

Although they weren't trying to independently seize Fino City, but merely to enter the Nest Capital to find and destroy the anti-orbit points and preferably shut down the Void Shield, General Hans simply couldn't estimate how many people under his command would have to die to achieve this goal.

It was said that the Star Realm Army wasn't afraid of sacrifice, but the key issue was if they all died, what about the matters that followed?

Moreover, who could truly not fear death?

They hadn't been able to enter the Bottom Nest District of Fino City for two years. If they forced their way, the Bottom Nest District would swallow up everyone daring to enter.

And even as elite as the Star Realm Army was, it couldn't withstand a war with casualty rates so high they were fundamentally incalculable.

At first, these Star Realm Army units gathered around Fino City, extremely anxious, afraid that a Plague Army of tens of millions might rush out, and then things would become uncontrollable.

But that scenario never happened.

It had been a year since they retreated from the Nest Capital and the orbital strike failed, and since the Navy had refused to continue fighting, and the situation around Fino City was surprisingly calm.

Although this calm was quite nerve-wracking, those Plague cultists had proven their fierceness. Not dealing with the Bottom Nest District's issues over the past few years allowed the enemy to develop the Void Shield and anti-orbit cannons. Now, with the entire city in their hands and silently working for a year, who knew what other major activities they could have prepared?

But despite being anxious, what could be done?

The Star Realm Army couldn't just station so many people indefinitely in this place where no war was happening.

As the issues with the other Nest Capitals worsened, and since there had been no movement in Fino City for a long time, gradually, units were redeployed elsewhere to suppress the Cult and the Rebel Army.

But even with disturbances elsewhere, they didn't dare to relax too much in Fino City. Even now, at the times of least activity, there were at least five million from the Star Realm Army and ten million from the Planetary Defense Force "basking in the sun" and keeping watch.

Many people, like Lucy Lee Ko Xi, could indeed see that Fino City was a huge ticking time bomb.

Nobody knew when it would explode, but without a doubt, there would be a time when it did.

However, when the day of the explosion finally arrived, everything still felt so sudden and overwhelming.

And that moment was right now.

Li Kexi was still gazing distantly at the massive Nest Capital, lost in thought about the past, when he suddenly felt the entire city seem to move slightly.

He snapped out of his reverie instantly.

At first, he suspected that he might be seeing things.

That would've been quite normal. The air in Korolya was filled with yellow dust. Non-toxic, or to say its toxicity was negligible, but no one wanted to inhale a noseful, a lungful of dust. The troops were issued corresponding breathing masks to filter out these harmful particles, while some of the local Defense Forces without such equipment had no choice but to wrap scarves around their faces several times to make do.

And this dust, lingering in the air, made the sunlight projected from the sky dim and obscured all day long, making it difficult to see clearly.

Seeing illusions after staring at something for too long in such abnormal atmospheric refraction was quite a normal occurrence, wasn't it?

But what happened next mercilessly shattered Li Kexi's last bit of wishful thinking.

He saw the entire Nest Capital come to life!

Those steel structures that were motionless in his sight began to warp and writhe right before his eyes.

Considering that he could see such twisting from so far away, one could imagine how terrifying the distortion would be up close.

A great unease rose in his heart.

What was going to happen next?

He didn't know, he didn't know at all.

He rushed back to headquarters, urging his subordinates to quickly bring back intelligence.

Even though they had completely withdrawn from the city, they hadn't completely relaxed their surveillance over Fino City. The main base was set up dozens of kilometers away from the city, but at closer range there were outposts; inside the city, there were even a few surveillance points. When pressured, they would temporarily withdraw; when the pressure eased, they would go back and establish a few more observation points. In any case, they couldn't be completely ignorant about this den of evil.

The situation was very grim.

All the surveillance points were out of contact.

And the troops from the advance encampments were experiencing air raids by the enemy emerging from the Nest Capital. A massive swarm of Plague Flies enveloped the advance encampments. The military's air defense firepower was already doing its utmost to cover the brothers in the advance encampments, with some artillery units even loading airburst shells to strike around one kilometer ahead of the advance camp's position. As the Plague Fly Swarm generally didn't fly very high, airburst shells detonating at heights of around ten or twenty meters could inflict substantial damage on these flying creatures, the size of a human's torso—especially since they liked to move in dense formations.

Chapter 343, Creeping City_2

Under the cover of various types of firepower, the soldiers in the advancing camp finally retreated.

Though they suffered significant losses, they still managed to bring back valuable intelligence.

Just as Li Kexi had seen from a distance, the entire city had come to life.

The architectural skin, once made of steel and concrete, began to writhe like a living organism and started to be enveloped by a layer resembling flesh and organic tissue.

This was very bad news, but for the moment, no one knew what these changes would lead to.

Li Kexi was called by General Hans to attend a military meeting while, at the same time, the Star Realm Army continued to dispatch reconnaissance units to closely observe the transformation of the Nest Capital.

In the following days, various pieces of intelligence kept coming in.

Buildings turned into irregular, pus-filled flesh; a multitude of twisted limbs, Plague Demons, undead, and Plague Fly Swarms wriggled and fluttered about in the cavities.

The entire Nest Capital had ‘come alive’!

They didn’t lack the will to change the situation, but even when there had been no change, they could hardly penetrate Fino City, let alone now. The plague creatures were furiously violent, becoming more aggressive and even more powerful.

Moving the artillery into range to fire at the awakening Nest Capital proved ineffective. The enemy barely bothered to activate their Void Shield at first—after all, what does the bombardment from heavy howitzer shells amount to against an entire Nest Capital?

It wasn’t until later, after much bombardment, that they lazily turned on the shield as a token of respect, completely crushing any hopes harbored by the Star Realm forces.

Then something even more terrifying happened: the living Nest Capital started to move.

It largely maintained the appearance of a city or Nest Capital, with many buildings connected by original pipes, roads, foundations, and subterranean structures, forming a huge mass of flesh resembling a city-monster.

‘Living’ things are able to move—it seems like the natural order of things, right?

But when all of this truly unfolded before them, they still felt their scalps tingle.

When an enormous Nest Capital capable of housing a billion people began to advance toward the Star Realm forces with the momentum of a mountain bearing down on them, only the thought of ‘fear’ remained in their hearts.

The Nest Capital slithered forward on the ground, and the observed speed wasn’t fast—just a little over two kilometers an hour, even slower than a walking pace.

But what was terrifying was that it never stopped, day or night!

In just one day, ‘Fino City’ had inched forward almost thirty kilometers!

Even the elite Star Realm Army started to show signs of unrest, not to mention the ordinary Planetary Defense Force.

The main force was stationed dozens of kilometers away from the Nest Capital, which seemed quite far, but just one day later, it was almost within reach.

And in that moment, the leaders of the Star Realm Army had yet to come to any conclusion in their meeting.

Some insisted on holding the line, arguing there was no reason to retreat due to the difficulty of the battle. If they retreated, what else on this planet could possibly stand against such a crawling city?

But more people felt they couldn’t hold it off—what were they to use? The flesh and blood of millions of people? That wouldn’t be enough for the crawling Nest Capital to swallow in one bite!

And after the chaos of the first day passed without achieving a consensus, the commanders of the Star Realm Army didn’t have to continue their discussions.

The rank-and-file soldiers had already made the decision for them.

The first to collapse were the Planetary Defense Forces from Korolya itself. When the crawling city was less than twenty kilometers away, slowly but relentlessly pressing forward, they instinctively began to run backwards.

At first, before fleeing, they managed to gather their belongings, but before they could finish, an hour passed and the monstrous shadow had approached significantly closer. Who would dare continue packing? Time to run for it!

This was almost a mutiny, the kind not even the military police could control,

Furthermore, were the military police not afraid themselves?

They were just as scared.

After the collapse of the Planetary Defense Force, the Star Realm Army fell apart as well.

Involuntarily, out of sheer necessity.

The Star Realm Army could fight a desperate battle against a vicious enemy under a sky filled with artillery fire, and on a microscopic level, many soldiers harbored thoughts of fighting to the death, even if it meant undertaking a suicide mission, it was not out of the question.

But the current situation was too extraordinary.

One dares to die because there's hope, clinging to the sacrifice of one for the victory of the greater good.

But now?

Nobody knew how to achieve victory, let alone entertain the thought of taking the enemy down with them before dying.

Take who down?

This was simply not something human strength could contend with!

In such an overwhelming situation, what was the point in holding military meetings?

General Hans had thrown quite a temper tantrum, but in the end, he could only sigh and order a full retreat of the troops.

But… retreat, how easy could that be?

Humans could move faster than ‘Fino City’, but they couldn’t march continuously for 24 hours without sleep.

Humans needed to sleep, to rest, to eat.

At the level of an army, the troops needed to be organized, there had to be logistical support…

Chased by the creeping Nest Capital that moved thirty kilometers a day, leave alone the possibility of being caught up, just running like this would scatter the entire army’s structure.

Under such compelling circumstances, General Hans made two decisions.

The troops began to scatter and flee to both sides, avoiding the march route of ‘Fino City’. It couldn’t possibly chase after individuals, could it? Even if it did chase, it could only pursue in one direction.

Secondly, a few platoons were organized into daredevil teams, attempting to counterattack the city.

Those who dared to go against the current were undoubtedly brave.

Then, they saw two platoons, just as they were approaching, the ‘skin’ of the creeping Nest Capital cracked open, and dark green heavy artillery covered the sky above them.

The troops were vigilant and brave enough; facing the artillery fire, they accelerated their vehicles in a charge and tried to retaliate against those protruding gun muzzles with some vehicle-mounted weapons.

Subsequently, the not inconsiderable losses of the troops burst into the city at once.

The creeping Nest Capital maintained the general shape of the city, but every inch of ‘ground’ was like a meat carpet that dragged the Nest Capital along, gnawing out a huge scar that was several hundred meters deep on the Earth’s surface, continuously creeping forward.

They stepped onto what was once a road but was now just a writhing flesh carpet, and continued to charge into the ‘city’.

Then, a plethora of monsters surged out of the oozing flesh buildings of Neili, and soon they could no longer keep advancing, fighting a bitter battle with the hoards of Plague Demons in the midst of the Nest Capital.

“We’re about to… los, los, los… lose everything… we will activ… bombs… For the Empire!”

The communication signal, which should have been maintained with the command center at all times, became extremely unstable upon their entry into the Nest Capital. The statement above was the last message transmitted back from one platoon.

Then, the commanders, observing from a distance with military binoculars, saw a shallow area of the Nest Capital explode. Several flesh buildings burst open with massive gaps, and the flames violently surged for a moment.

Since they were already on a doomed mission, each platoon carried powerful bombs—thermite bombs, nuclear incendiary bombs, they used them all.

The destructive power was significant, but not enough to destroy a city.

Not to mention, this was no ordinary city.

The flames were quickly extinguished, the damaged parts resembled massive pus-filled sores, not repaired but also not affecting much.

And the creeping Nest Capital only slightly slowed its pace, pausing for about twenty minutes, before continuing its march once again.

Chapter 344: Plague Marks

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Standing in the command bridge, Gu Hang gazed at the Korolya III outside the window, speechless for a long time.

It was a withered yellow planet.

Less than one tenth of the planet’s surface was covered by water bodies, and from orbit, they looked a sickly yellow-green, far from anything salubrious—and indeed that was the case; the water on Korolya III was undrinkable, filled with industrial wastewater and poisonous substances that seeped out of the overly exploited crust.

Even after multiple filtrations and purifications, it was still not recommended for use, failing to meet safety standards.

What’s more, on this broken land of Korolya, the purification process could not be completely guaranteed.

But no one cared; nearly all the Korolya people used this water.

What else if not this water? Could the water needed for a population of forty billion be imported through interstellar trade?

Aside from the small proportion of water bodies, the rest of the planet was parched yellow.

There was no vegetation, just desert as far as the eye could see. The ground was yellow, the atmospheric clouds were yellow, even the air in some places was yellow.

Within this vast expanse of desolation, there were a few dozen large, grey-black ‘spots’, which when combined, covered a substantial area visible from orbit.

These spots were the regions of Nest Capital.

Each Nest Capital on Korolya was home to a population ranging from a few hundred million to several billion.

And now, one of these Nest Capitals was particularly conspicuous.

It was not particularly large, being quite average, but behind it trailed a long tail that stretched for over a thousand kilometers.

Gu Hang knew it was moving, although it was not immediately apparent; its forward speed of about two kilometers per hour was virtually imperceptible from orbit, and Gu Hang could not possibly stay here and stare at it for a long time.

But he knew it was moving.

This was Fino City, and over the past month of its creeping progression, it had created a trench several hundred meters deep and tens of kilometers wide, known as the ‘Trace of Plague’.

The Star Realm Army was powerless against it, and the Tianma Fleet, with its main force absent, was also unable to do anything.

Yet this crawling Nest Capital continued with an attitude that seemed slow but was in fact resolute, advancing towards its target.

A week earlier, it had reached its destination: another Nest Capital.

This Nest Capital was relatively small, but it still housed over three hundred million people.

After realizing that Fino City's target was this Nest Capital, people all over the planet had already been doing their utmost to come up with solutions.

On one hand, the Nest Capital was frantically evacuating its inhabitants, but the process was not going smoothly. Unrest had broken out in the Bottom Nest District of this Nest Capital, and the Plague Cult had a certain level of infiltration there. Brainwashed cult followers, chanting slogans about 'becoming one with the fatherly figure', did their best to destroy and obstruct evacuation efforts.

Apart from the interference from cult followers, evacuating three hundred million people was in itself, a massive and impossible task. The internal transportation of the Nest Capital was fairly developed, but 'intercity transportation', which was originally designed for the flow of materials, commercial trade, and a small number of high-ranking personnel, had never considered having to deal with the movement of several hundred million people all at once.

Traffic jams within the Nest Capital were almost unavoidable.

On the other hand, in addition to the efforts of the Nest Capital itself, the Star Realm Army and the Planetary Defense Force had finally assembled and launched an Army Group-grade operation against Fino City.

A million-strong force bravely stood in front of Fino City. Heavy artillery bombarded every living building, armoured vehicles, tanks, and courageous soldiers stepped onto the carpet of flesh and blood, using flamethrowers and bombs to inflict as much damage as possible on the city.

But their actions ultimately failed.

The number of Plague Demons inside Fino City was far greater than that of the brave human warriors. They were fiercely counterattacked by the Plague Demons and the grotesquely mutated cult followers. They couldn't even make it close to the core of the city, being blocked at the outer perimeter.

Moreover, this was no longer human territory; the fleshed environment harboured immense malice towards humans. Structures built for cover could be animated and turn back to swallow the soldiers hiding behind; a cleared area of flesh carpet, the trenches and foxholes dug out, where soldiers still fought valiantly, would after a short while begin oozing pus from underneath, corroding the soldiers' uniforms, armor, and then their skin; entering a building for combat, the structure itself might collapse the next moment…

In contrast, their enemies could utilize the entire animated city to swiftly and stealthily appear anywhere…

Fino City had become a hell of flesh and blood for humans. And battling those Plague Demons within this hell was simply an impossible task.

The million-strong force collapsed after suffering over two hundred thousand casualties.

Even if they hadn't collapsed, they genuinely lacked the capability to fight any longer.

There were significant additional losses during the retreat.

And after so high a cost, they had only managed to delay Fino City's advance by about five days before it set off once again.

When Fino City made contact with the other Nest Capital, at least a hundred million people had not managed to evacuate in time.

Then, those on the outside bore witness to a 'fusion of cities'.

Physical integration.

Fino City moved like a colossal beast of flesh, wrapping its tentacles, every part of itself, around every building and structure of Nest Capital.

Where it enveloped, biological signs of life began to synchronize.

Within just three days, Fino City had devoured the entire Nest Capital along with the hundred million people who had not managed to escape.

Then, it paused, stopping for what appeared to be a week.

It was ‘digesting’.

Today, Gu Hang learned from intelligence gathered on the planet’s surface that ‘Fino City’ had likely finished its digestion and officially resumed movement.

Its next target was Korolya’s largest Nest Capital, also the central city with a population of three billion: Mingyan City.

The two locations were 2,700 kilometers apart. According to the speed of Fino City, it would reach its destination in three months.

Even more terrifying was the thought that it might plan to visit each of the dozens of Nest Capitals on Korolya at a speed of two kilometers per hour, approximately thirty kilometers a day.

It would consume the entire planet.

As Gu Hang watched all this, he felt a profound sense of powerlessness.

He had arrived in Korolya’s orbit today, invited by Nell Lavis.

This Star Domain's Chief Tax Officer now had an emergency commission granted by the Star Domain Government to resolve the Korolya III issue.

Gu Hang had already learned about the situation on Korolya through star communication.

But reading the report was entirely different from standing on the bridge of a starship in planetary orbit and witnessing the massive sore on this huge planet with his own eyes.

"What's the solution?"

Gu Hang muttered to himself.

Even he was at a loss.

The Alliance had been growing remarkably fast over the past four years.

Heijian Star's three industrial hubs had absorbed a huge population, industrialization was rapid; agriculture had essentially been mechanized, further boosting output while significantly reducing the dependent population.

The population on Rage Owl Star grew to 110 million through immigration and pro-birth policies, and productivity kept on rising rapidly along with the increase in population.

The annual output of the two planets had exceeded six hundred million; while quality of life was continually improving, financial surpluses could still reach nearly 150 million a year with annual taxes at only 45 million.

Everything was on the right track. The Alliance no longer needed to pay a human tax; they could even reinvest the abundant output. The future seemed so bright. Given another four years, or perhaps a bit longer, Gu Hang could create two prosperous, powerful planets with his strong technology.

But before that, the neighboring Korolya presented him with a massive debacle.

Gu Hang had considered that if Korolya continued to deteriorate, it would eventually spiral out of control.

But this happened too quickly.

No matter how fast and well the Alliance developed, it was still too small to fill the massive hole left by Korolya.

Of course, this was not his responsibility in the first place.

This is the duty of the Empire.

Actually, it's not that the Empire really has no way to deal with such things.

Some land forces' equipment, such as the 'Grand General Cannon,' can pose a terrifying threat to Void Shields, overloading even city-level shields after a few shots, and then with one more shot, nearly destroy a city; there are also some powerful bombs that can be carried in to blow up the city.

Not to mention, there is an even more fearsome weapon nearby: starships.

If the Empire were to issue an Extinction Order on a planet, there are actually many ways to do so. The most straightforward is for starship cannons to meticulously, comprehensively, and devastatingly strike the planet's surface, blasting every inch of it clean, also known as 'glassing.'

Of course, there are other ways to carry out an Extinction Order. 'Glassing' with ship cannons is actually quite costly, as it uses a lot of ammunition, is expensive, and takes a considerable amount of time, so it's not common. But when an Extinction Order needs to be carried out and no other weapons are readily available, they'll have to make do with what they have.

However, ordering a fleet to bomb requires ensuring that there is no threat to orbit from the ground; otherwise, instead of executing an Extinction Order, it turns into a shoot-out with the planet's anti-orbital firepower.

Even with other Extinction Order weapons, like Neutron Purge, Skyburn Torpedoes, or Planet-burst Annihilator… these weapons don't require as high a level of orbital security, but it's still best to ensure a certain safety before launch.

Neutron Purge is used to exterminate all organic life forms on a planet's surface. Its advantage is that after the neutron storm subsides, the planet can be recolonized and used again, but the disadvantage is that it's expensive and some individuals may find deep hiding places to escape extinction.

Planet-burst Annihilator can directly penetrate the crust and detonate the core, shattering the planet. Of course, this doesn't mean blowing the planet to smithereens—the matter itself will still exist as gravity will maintain the state of a planet, but this is just astronomical in nature. In reality, the entire planet is shattered and recombined by gravity, turning it into a molten state, making it impossible for anything to survive. The effect of this weapon is the best, but it is also the most expensive and rarest.

Compared with the former two, Skyburn Torpedoes mainly ignite the atmosphere, burning all gases while scorched the planet's surface; the planet, when seen from a cosmic perspective, will look like a burning amber for several days. However, like the previous weapons, there is also the possibility of individuals deeply hidden escaping extinction; and after burning, the planet is also wasted, but the advantage is that it's much cheaper.

But even the cheapest Skyburn Torpedoes almost cost as much as a cruiser. The price of Extinction Order weapons themselves is so high, and their breakthrough effectiveness isn't great—if the enemy has strong anti-orbital firepower, they are easily intercepted.

If intercepted once, an Extinction weapon is written off, and that's not sustainable.

In short, on an entire Imperial level, if an Extinction Order can be executed, let alone the destruction of a city—even if the Nest Capital is moving.

However, when it comes to the Tianma Star Sector, and especially to Korolya III, there is just no way.

Enacting an Extinction Order on Korolya is nonsense. So many people live on this planet, along with other industries valued at hundreds of billions, even trillions of Tax Currency. Without reaching a completely irretrievable state, such a decision would not be made.

And to obliterate 'Fino City,' weapons like the Colossal Cannon or the Light Spear Array on the starships would suffice.

But the problem lies in the inability to resolve the ground-based Void Shield and anti-orbital forces.

Using starships to bombard the ground is foolish; your fleet may be formidable, but the opponent is truly a planet. The firepower that starships can be equipped with is limited, as is the armor and the supportable energy shield. For stronger firepower, thicker armor, or more abundant energy, the starship must be larger, but a larger size means the cost skyrockets exponentially.

However, on the surface of a planet, these problems don't exist. Firepower? Fit as many cannons as you can; there's no lack of space; don't worry about armor, no ship's armor is thicker than the ground itself; energy shields or Void Shield generators don't have to consider size—on the surface or underground, there's ample space to accommodate…

This is akin to a stationary, yet unassailable, starship!

If the Land Forces can't take out the anti-orbital firepower, the Tianma Fleet can't wipe out Fino City.

But obviously, the current land forces on Korolya can't do it.

Unless the main forces of the Tianma Fleet were urgently recalled from the battlefield against the Green Skin Orcs.

Even if they abandon all concerns and immediately withdraw from the battlefield, but… will it be in time? To cross multiple star sectors and return to Korolya might also take three to four months.

By then, Mingyan City would be gone.

If the creeping Nest Capital is greatly strengthened again, the strength of the Void Shield and the Anti-Orbit Sinister Energy Cannon will likely be further increased. By the time the main forces of the Tianma Fleet arrive, the problem may still not be solvable.

If it reaches that point, considering an Extinction Order might be a bit too late.

Chapter 345, Turns Out My House Caught Fire

“Mr. Gu, the meeting is about to start,”

a servant reminded from behind.

Gu Hang nodded slightly, turned around, and left for the starship’s battle conference room.

As a special envoy of the Star Domain, Lois’s first task in resolving the Korolya issue was to gather the heads of all influential factions within the Star Sector.

Then watch them quarrel.

At present, the Tianma Star Sector had gradually formed a triangular political pattern, which was much more stable than the tumultuous two years following Pei Desi’s death. Although the two Ivans, the Parliamentary Faction and Fatches, never ceased their strife, the emergence of a third neutral faction led by Fufana and the Gu Clan played mediator.

…

Fighting was permissible, but should anyone go too far, the third party would intervene.

In such a scenario, although it didn’t stop the two sides from sabotaging each other, the situation had somewhat improved.

However, the problem with Korolya was a core conflict; the neutral faction could at best only maintain the status quo.

And now, a major incident had occurred.

Fatches and the Parliamentary Faction had resumed their fierce, non-solution-focused conflict.

At one moment, Fatches would demand an immediate movement towards declaring Korolya a Battle Zone, halt the payment of Imperial Tax, and call for increased commitment from the Star Realm Army inside the Star Domain, insisting at least another Army Group be transferred here. They also needed substantial military aid to arm Korolya's local Defense Forces. They claimed that if their needs had been met earlier by amassing fifty million Star Realm soldiers and one billion Planetary Defense Force troops, the issue would have been resolved long ago, without dragging on to this extent.

On the other side, the Star Sector's leadership would curse Ivan Fatches, calling him incompetent and foolish, claiming that Korolya's corruption and inefficiency were the real culprits behind the worsening situation. In recent years, through population exports and accepted aid, Korolya had already acquired plenty of resources. Coupled with its production capabilities and large populous base, it had every capacity to arm itself. However, the abysmal performance of the Korolya government turned everything to ashes, leading to the current deplorable state.

Fatches promptly retorted with similar scathing remarks, accusing the Star Sector Government of being utterly useless and only capable of hindrance, claiming that Flying Wing Star, as the capital planet, had provided less support than Fatches single-handedly. The Parliamentary Faction immediately retorted by insinuating that the Fatchess Tri-Star hadn't taken the crisis seriously at all, only focusing on their own power struggles while completely disregarding the lives of Korolya's people…

They blamed each other, attacked each other, but none could offer a solution.

Lois, sitting to the side with an ashen face, couldn't help but speak up.

Originally, she wanted to put an end to this meaningless squabble and refocus on resolving the real issues. But in the end, she, too, was dragged into the argument.

'Resolving the real issues,' sounds nice.

But how?

It was precisely because there was no solution that they could only resort to hurling accusations.

Gu Hang attended this meeting, watching and listening intently, but in reality, his mind had gone blank.

The meeting had gone on for a whole day yesterday without producing any results.

Serious discussions were indistinguishable from blame-shifting arguments in essence. Without viable solutions, no outcome would emerge.

And what Gu Hang was doing now was searching for a real solution.

His blank mind allowed his spirit to enter his Divine Realm.

He was observing the changes in the Subspace from an entirely different perspective.

The root of the problem stemmed from the so-called ‘Benevolent Father,’ the Evil God. To resolve the issue, one had to start with the Subspace.

Subspace did not correlate directly with the real world. In fact, in Subspace, notions like ‘position,’ ‘time,’ and ‘distance’ were extremely weak.

Yet within Korolya, cult followers’ chants and the countless souls tormented by the plague had mapped a portion of the Eternal Kingdom of the Benevolent Father onto Korolya itself.

In Gu Hang’s vision, he could see the yellow-green and rotting Subspace clinging tightly to the entire world of Korolya. Legions of demons raged in the Subspace, salivating at the brink of reality, only to be pushed back time and again. Swirling winds of yellow-green plague battered and corroded reality’s veil, trying to break through.

The veil of reality, though still present, was riddled with holes. The weakest point, the location of Fino City, was practically overlapped.

Gu Hang's gaze swept through this portion of Subspace. He was cautious, consolidating his storm vision extended from his Divine Realm. He could not be discovered, as that would mean exposing the Storm God Kingdom to these Plague Demons' sight—an extremely dangerous situation.

Even this brief observation allowed Gu Hang to catch a significant piece of information.

Or rather, he saw a familiar 'face.'

It was the Great Unclean One—Ge Wajia.

The name originally came from Rage Owl Star, where the leader of the 'Nature Salvation Society,' now deemed a Cult, resided. According to Hu Ke, who had traveled through the long years from the pre-war era of Rage Owl Star to the present via hibernation pods, Ge Wajia was a former student of his. Somehow, the man survived into the post-war period, established such an organization, and was corrupted by the Evil God at an unknown time, sparking unrest.

Worse yet, Ge Wajia himself had nearly caused significant trouble when a Great Unclean One used his body and soul to cast its avatar onto him.

And the creature that had beguiled and corrupted Ge Wajia, this unclean entity, was the very one that Gu Hang saw before him now.

Humans couldn't grasp the real names of such powerful demons, so the official records of the Alliance simply used the name of Ge Wajia to designate this abomination.

"You really are restless…" Gu Hang thought to himself, "Failing at Rage Owl Star, you immediately tried another trick here at Korolya."

As he said this, he also became aware of a problem.

Probably Korolya was the primary target for Ge Wajia all along. The Plague Cult had sprung up so fiercely that these heretics must have been developing covertly in the various Nest Capitals of Korolya for quite some time. The outbreak six years ago was simply a sudden detonation of past accumulations.

Ge Wajia's actions at Rage Owl Star were inconsequential at best.

…

This place here was its true delight.

Gu Hang could even discern in his spiritual vision, this colossus in subspace wearing a 'sincere' smile, which made Gu Hang feel nauseated, his hand itching to strike it down with a sword.

Huh?

Strike it with a sword?

An item that Gu Hang had almost forgotten suddenly came to his mind.

It was a sword.

On Rage Owl Star, after the human warriors expelled Ge Wajia's incarnation, the filthy entity left behind a giant, rusty demon sword.

Once brought back, the sword underwent systematic purification and became an award for the event that expelled the Great Demon, transforming into a lesser holy artifact that could be wielded. Its properties were quite impressive, but there was a chance of being influenced by whispers of the abyss. Being cautious, Gu Hang had not activated that weapon but had sealed it away.

But Gu Hang hadn't forgotten the explanation the system gave as a reward after the event was completed.

[Lesser Holy Artifact: Purifying God Plague Great Sword (False)]

[Contains a small fraction of the unclean entity's chaotic essence, which could be wielded by humans after purification.]

The chaotic essence of the unclean entity…

Could this thing perhaps be of some use at this moment?

An idea started to form, vague and indistinct, in Gu Hang's mind.

But a mere thought wasn't enough. Gu Hang inspected more closely, focusing on where the curtain between subspace and reality merged.

That was the moving Fino City.

He couldn't see Fino City in the real world, but he could see Fino City dragged into subspace.

Within subspace, Fino City was a playground for demons. Cultists completely corrupted by subspace were holding one terrifying orgy after another, offering one innocent soul after another as fuel to the Evil God in exchange for power.

This power, mixed with the essence of subspace, created many things that caused endless headaches for humankind today.

For example, the Plague Demonic Cannon, also known as Fino City's anti-orbital firepower. This thing was entirely a construct of subspace, made up of warped sinister energy resembling the concept of a cannon, with no relation to technological products; a powerful Demon Engine played the role of a Void Shield, which formed for the same reason.

These things, of course, were not the creations of the heretics or plague monsters of the Bottom Nest District; they more resembled the grace and power bestowed by the Evil God, a tangible thing, completely unrelated to technology, industry, or skill.

Only in places where the reality curtain was excessively torn—like Fino City—could these devices function. Once outside the boundaries of Fino City, they would be squeezed and expelled by the reality curtain, turning into nothingness.

If only the connection between Fino City and subspace could be temporarily blocked, the Void Shield and anti-orbital firepower would fail;

If these failed, the Tianma Fleet and Lois's Tax Fleet would then be able to unleash a barrage of fire, using the Colossal Cannon and light spear to destroy Fino City;

If Fino City were destroyed, all the tormented souls would be liberated, all demons and plague monsters serving as stable anchors for subspace would be annihilated, and then the reality curtain would seal the breach once again.

This would form a closed loop.

Combine this with his own Storm God Kingdom, and with the Purifying God Plague Great Sword…

Gu Hang's heart gradually conceived a plan.

This plan carried great risks, but after pondering over it again and again and considering the forces at his disposal, it appeared to have a fairly high chance of success.

Moreover, even if it failed, he should be able to make a full retreat.

That made it worth taking the risk.

But this gave rise to a new problem:

Why the rush to risk life and limb over Korolya's affairs?

Actually, there was a most crucial reason: Korolya couldn't truly be doomed.

Otherwise, a world with a population of forty billion being completely dragged into subspace would result in a huge tear in the fabric of real space. By then, the Father's power manifesting outside wouldn't be a matter of many Anti-Orbit Cannons, Wicked Void Shields, or even a single crawling Nest—it would be far simpler.

By then, starships constructed through dark magic chaos would appear in the physical universe. They would bring terrible divine plagues through the Star Realm Tunnels and begin attacking other planets.

Any planet attacked would instantly fall into an extremely horrific disaster. The Chaos Fleet itself would pose a terrifying orbital threat, and at the same time, they would be anchors to subspace, easily tearing open the reality fabric wherever they went.

Then, with the Chaos Fleet above, countless Abyss cracks would open on the ground. Mortals would be corrupted into chaos followers, and demons would directly descend upon the world.

And unfortunately, Rage Owl Star was the world closest to Korolya, just one Star Realm Tunnel jump away.

Gu Hang couldn't imagine what would happen if this scene unfolded on Rage Owl Star.

From the perspective of defending his own world, if Gu Hang had the means, it was certainly necessary to do everything possible to save Korolya.

But still…

If it were just about self-rescue, it wouldn't be enough.

On the other hand, since this was something that had to be done anyway, why not strive to gain enough additional benefits?

With this thought, Gu Hang opened his eyes.

The people in the room were just getting into an argument about the position of the Korolya Governor itself.

Ivan Fatches was saying if they thought he wasn't good enough, then they could replace him, letting another Ivan, the 'great', extraordinarily capable Star Sector Governor, take on the role of Korolya Governor and see if he could do any better.

A month ago, when Fino City hadn't come back to life yet, if Ivan Fatches had said this, the Parliamentary Faction would have immediately agreed—wasn't this what they had been dreaming of?

But now, the head of the Parliamentary Faction, Ivan Martinez, snapped back, saying that after turning Korolya into this mess and now wanting to throw in the towel was absolutely 'an act of disloyalty'. He demanded that the Fatches Family take responsibility for this and must devote even more efforts to solve Korolya's problems.

Lois, the special envoy of the Star Domain, was sitting on the side, rubbing her head in frustration, not saying a word. Four years ago, she wanted to replace Ivan Fatches, but now she had stopped bringing it up.

If he were replaced, who could solve the problem?

Now, everyone knew that Korolya was a mess, and both sides saw it as a hot potato that none had a solution for. The Fatches Family was even ready to give up and throw it away, but the Parliamentary Faction wouldn't let them.

And at that moment, Gu Hang raised his hand and said softly, "If that's the case, let me take the position of Planetary Governor of Korolya."

His voice was not loud, but it rang out like a loud bell in the room, silencing everyone's voices, and all eyes converged on him.

Wang Qi, sitting beside him, was shocked.

I was just sitting on the bench on the side, eating melon seeds and enjoying the drama, only to discover that it's actually my own house on fire?

She clutched the corner of Gu Hang's clothes tightly.

Though she didn't speak, her knitted brows and facial expressions clearly conveyed a message to Gu Hang:

"Just enjoy the show! Why are you getting involved?!"

Chapter 346, We Will Not Fail Our Mission!

Gu Hang gently patted his mother's hand, signaling her to be at ease, then turned his gaze toward the other attendees of the meeting.

No one spoke.

Those who had recovered from the initial shock of his declaration instinctively began to weigh the pros and cons of the situation.

What was the Gu Clan's youngest up to?

No one could fathom his thoughts.

Ivan Fatches pressed his lips tightly together.

…

He dared not speak.

Earlier, when he talked about letting go of the Korolya Governorship, it was with seven parts sincerity and three parts vexation. He knew that either way the Parliamentary Faction wouldn't let him get away, and this huge mess was clearly meant for him to bear, so his words were somewhat empty.

He indeed wished to let go, not wanting to carry this dark burden. The Fatches Family, backed by three worlds, was also struggling to cope, and the pit that was Korolya seemed bottomless.

If Korolya fell while in his hands, the entire Fatches Family would be in deep trouble.

Previously, he regarded Korolya as a juicy piece of fat that had finally fallen into his lap; now, he realized he'd leapt into a giant manure pit, impossible to climb out of.

But when someone really stepped forward to take over, he began to hesitate.

His instincts led him to one thought: Did the Gu Clan's youngster have a solution for Korolya's problems?

At that moment, he suddenly heard Martin Nelli, the sector head, speak up, "Mr. Gu, do not delude yourself. The responsibilities of Fatches must be borne by Fatches himself! Do you understand what you're doing?"

This Star Sector head seemed to have some misunderstandings. He probably thought that Gu Hang had accepted some form of benefit from the Fatches Family, which is why he was taking the fall for them.

But Ivan Fatches himself knew that wasn't the case.

He was even more puzzled.

“Mr. Gu, do you have a solution?” he asked cautiously, “Would you elaborate, please?”

To this question, Gu Hang seemed to turn a deaf ear, only smiling and turning his gaze toward the person who truly had the authority to decide.

Envoy Lois appeared hesitant.

She met Gu Hang’s gaze, with a hint of inquiry in her eyes.

She, too, wanted to know if Gu Hang had any solutions.

But Gu Hang chose not to discuss the matter any further.

He regained control of the rhythm of the conversation:

“Since the disaster of Korolya became apparent, we have witnessed far too many unsightly performances. The incompetence of the former governor Akuna led to continuous chaos in Korolya, placing forty billion Imperial citizens in hardship and suffering. The incompetent Planetary Government has been unable to fulfill the development of the planet and the burden of Imperial Tax, and has also allowed the Plague Cult to fester and spread.”

“The ongoing strife between the current governor and the Star Sector Government has long disgusted countless individuals. You never thought to solve the real problems, instead, you used the disasters facing the Imperial citizens as tools to attack your opponents and pursue personal gains. The past four years, which were the golden opportunity to address these problems, were utterly wasted by your vile actions, exacerbating the situation to its current state.”

“You have failed the trust of the Empire, failed the trust of forty billion people, you all should apologize!”

With these words, Gu Hang launched an indiscriminate attack that included both Fatches and the Parliamentary Faction.

Both parties looked uncomfortable, as no one enjoys being scolded.

But many others revealed expressions of relief.

The die-hard supporters of the two factions were, after all, in the minority. The neutrals had long been fed up with it all, and even a significant number who had chosen sides out of entanglement of interests had similar attitudes.

Seeing the unfavorable momentum, someone from the struggling factions wanted to interrupt Gu Hang and retort,

but was stopped by Lois.

“Let Mr. Gu continue,” she said.

Gu Hang’s words hit home for Lois. To the Star Domain Government, the state of affairs in the Tianma Star Sector was exactly as Gu Hang described.

However, Lois hadn’t put it so bluntly in her previous arguments. After all, as she saw it, no matter how distasteful the two factions were, the problems in Korolya still needed to be solved by them.

Insulting and lashing out would not solve the issues. However irritated or disgusted she felt inside, she had to coddle both parties.

But that didn’t mean she couldn’t enjoy someone lambasting them here, blasting them all over.

At that moment, Lois’s look toward Gu Hang was filled with expectation.

Come on, give a few more scathing remarks!

At the very least, it would be a fierce reprimand of the two factions!

But Gu Hang abruptly changed course, unleashing even fiercer artillery fire:

“Therefore, I propose here, since Ivan Fatches is considering resignation, then please, Envoy Lois, approve it.”

The words, seemingly less harsh than his previous scolding, were, in fact, a real move to force Fatches to resign.

If it were before, Lois would not have agreed.

Without Fatches, there was no alternative.

But now the circumstances were slightly different.

Gu Hang had said earlier that he was willing to take on the governorship.

This alleviated Lois’s worries.

Anyway, insisting on Ivan Fatches continuing the task wasn’t solving anything; his removal wouldn’t matter anymore.

More crucially, Gu Hang had already heightened the atmosphere to this point.

Lois turned her gaze toward Ivan Fatches.

The latter still wanted to struggle, but in the end, he caved in.

Better to discard this hot potato sooner. This strategy was predetermined by the Fatches Family.

He agreed to resign, then said with a sour tone and under his breath, “I really want to see what great solutions Mr. Gu has in mind!”

Chapter 346, Will Not Fail the Mission!_2

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Gu Hang laughed, “What good method do I have? Of course, I have a method.”

“Korolya should be completely militarized. The Korolya Governor should unyieldingly become the commander of the battle zone, establishing a unified front and command centered on Korolya. The Imperial Navy and the Imperial Star Realm Army should temporarily fight together under unified command to eradicate the Cult disaster in Korolya.”

“In the next three months, I will gather my troops, arm Mingyan City to the fullest, ally with the Star Realm Army and the Imperial Navy, and summon the Phoenix Battle Group that signed a loyalty and cooperation agreement with the alliance, to fight a determined battle to defend Mingyan City.”

“I will surely achieve victory, The Emperor will bless me!”

“After victory, Korolya will maintain its militarized state for six years, which equates to three tax seasons. A part of the Tianma Fleet and the Third Group Army of the Dragonhawk Legion should continue to fight around Korolya, following the commands of the battle zone commander. The Star Sector Government and the Star Domain Government should provide the necessary material support.”

…

“And I, will establish a complete and efficient administrative system, to eradicate the inefficiency and corruption that the Korolya government has continued for countless years, better mobilize the entire planet’s potential, and completely solve the Plague Cult problem within six years. By then, the Star Sector Government and the Star Domain Government will see a whole, with ample potential for development, a brand-new Korolya.”

Gu Hang’s words were quite impassioned.

Moreover, they might not entirely be empty or false promises.

In Rage Owl Star, in Heijian Star, he had set an example. In fact, within the star sector, many people had already become quite interested in the newly formed ‘alliance’, starting to study what the alliance’s system was really about.

Of course, studying it didn’t necessarily mean it could be replicated.

The alliance’s highly centralized and strongly planned economy wasn’t anything novel. However, practically no other planets could replicate it.

The alliance was able to do this because they had almost entirely smashed the original systems on two planets and then rebuilt from the ruins and blank slate. Where else would such conditions exist?

Not to mention that the rulers on other planets were the greatest beneficiaries of the existing systems.

Overthrow their own regime?

Impossible.

However, handing Korolya over to the alliance in such a chaotic war environment and afterwards, with the need to recover from the destruction of war, might actually allow Gu Hang to really achieve something significant.

Though that would be difficult, of course.

But all of this is predicated on resolving the huge crisis ‘Fino City’ presents.

Without addressing that, with its daily progress of thirty kilometers, it would swallow Mingyan City in just over three months, and then it would be on to the next target… the entire planet couldn’t withstand such consumption.

And what solution did Gu Hang mention in his speech?

A decisive battle outside Mingyan City.

What was the method of victory?

The support of the Interstellar Warriors, the unification of the planet's forces, promises of direct troop deployment from the alliance…

The last two points, actually, weren't taken seriously by many. If people believed that the planet's own strength was enough to solve the crisis, they wouldn't all be so pessimistic and desperate. As for the alliance's troops, the Rage Bear Legion's performance did indeed prove that alliance forces were quite capable, but it was only at the level of the Star Realm Army—at best, slightly better. But the key point is that this so-called alliance, with a combined population of just five hundred million across two planets, how much could they really provide? It's a question of scale!

But what really caused some commotion was the first point Gu Hang mentioned—about the Interstellar Warriors.

The Phoenix landing on Rage Owl Star initially caught some people's attention.

But at that time, people's attention was mostly on the political impact brought by this Battle Group. Their identity was rather special; they were a Battle Group that was charged with guilt during the Cercis Flower Rebellion, sentenced as a traitorous legion, but in the end, the Battle Group did not resist, voluntarily disarmed, and surrendered. The Tribunal, after reviewing their past records, communications, and considering they were misled and coerced, gave them one last chance—redemption through an expedition.

And the Phoenix willingly accepted.

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That was an event from a century ago, no one expected the Phoenix to return.

But they really did return, and they came to the Tianma Star Sector.

This made the great rebellion, which in the eyes of the Tianma Star Sector a hundred years ago was merely an occasion to watch from a distance, become a reality.

In a hundred years, many things can change, but not for the interstellar warriors. In the Cercis Flower Rebellion, a massive civil war involving more than a dozen interstellar warrior battle groups, the Phoenix Battle Group was the only “traitor” that ultimately survived. Moreover, during the civil war, many of the six loyalist battle groups suffered heavy losses under the Phoenix’s assault, which probably left behind some resentment.

What’s worse, initially the Tribunal insisted on executing all the Phoenixes, as traitors should not be forgiven. However, the Phoenix’s parent group – the Phoenix Legion played a significant role, with many sub-groups from the Phoenix series pleading on their behalf, coupled with the fact that the Phoenix was indeed misled and had surrendered, eventually led to this outcome.

But the Tribunal still harbored hatred, as did the battle groups that had made enemies during the civil war.

The people of the Tianma Star Sector, with regards to the arrival of the Phoenix, mostly feared that this trouble-ridden battle group would bring their troubles to Tianma.

As for the combat strength of the Phoenix itself?

With only seven veterans alive, what does that amount to?

But no one anticipated that in just eight years, the Phoenix would already show signs of revival.

Although people did not know the extent to which the Phoenix had revived by now, their performance in the battle on Heijian Star had already formed into intelligence, landing on many people's desks, being repeatedly reviewed.

People didn't understand how Gu Hang, this youngster from the Gu Family, managed to command a group of interstellar warriors to obey him and fight to death on his behalf, nor did they know how the scale of Rage Owl Star and Heijian Star supported the revival of an interstellar warrior battle group. But for now, if the state of Phoenix's revival was good, then promoting Gu Hang to his position was indeed the most likely solution to the problem.

At this stage, apart from a minority of people engrossed in political intrigues, the rest had to accept the resolution of the Korolya issue as the top priority in face of reality.

"I support Mr. Gu as the acting Governor of Korolya."

"I support the transfer of Korolya to the alliance's jurisdiction."

"I move for reconsideration."

…

Listening to these voices, the leader Ivan Martinelli fell silent.

Envoy Lois stood up.

"I understand. As the special envoy from the Star Domain Government, fully responsible for the Korolya campaign in the Tianma Star Sector, I approve the resignation request of Governor Ivan Fatches of Korolya III and appoint Gu Hang as the acting Planetary Governor of Korolya III."

"I authorize the establishment of the Korolya Battle Zone, appointing Gu Hang as the commander of the battle zone, in charge of overall military affairs in the Korolya Star System. Tianma Fleet's remaining forces, the Third Group Army of the Dragonhawk Legion, should fully comply with the unified command of the battle zone commander."

“The Korolya Battle Zone will continue for six years, and the Star Domain Government will strive to provide material and troop support. The first batch of military aid will arrive in two months.”

As he said this, Nell Lois’s gaze deeply focused on Gu Hang:

“The first strategic goal of the Korolya Battle Zone is to ensure that Mingyan City must not fall; the second goal is to destroy the Plague Cult’s hub, Fino City; the third goal is, within six years, to solve the problem of the Plague Cult infestation on Korolya III, and to restore the payment of the Imperial Tax.”

“Governor Gu, I hope you will not disappoint me. The four billion people on Korolya, the Tianma Star Sector Government, the Dragonhawk Star Domain Government, everyone is watching your performance.”

Gu Hang solemnly performed the Sky Eagle salute: “I swear to the Emperor, I will not fail in my mission!”

Chapter 347, I am the Korolya Governor.

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“You’re too impulsive,”

After the meeting, Wang Qi was criticizing Gu Hang.

But Gu Hang was still smiling, “I’ve gotten what I’ve dreamed of, Korolya III. No matter how much this place is a cesspool, how terrible the situation is, having forty-billion people in hand is everything. While everyone else is thinking about how important the position of Korolya Governor is, to me, it’s these forty-billion people who are the real opportunity to rise to great heights, the harvest I wanted most.”

Wang Qi certainly knew the value of Korolya, but what of it?

She emphasized, “This is a trap! Even Fatches couldn’t fill it!”

…

“You’re right, there are significant problems here now, and if they’re not handled well, everything could collapse. But on the other hand, if it weren’t for this situation, where would our opportunity come from? Moreover…”

“Hmm?”

Facing her son’s puzzlement, Gu Hang continued, “Treating Korolya as a pit to be filled is of course impossible. But…”

“Maybe Korolya itself doesn’t need filling at all?”

“Korolya III is a world with tremendous potential, where I see the most precious resource: people. People are more important than anything. First have the people, then you have everything. With such tremendous potential and abundant resources, Korolya actually doesn’t need anyone’s help. No matter the difficulty, it can cope. The premise is that no one holds it back.”

“But precisely, for a long time, there have been many things holding back the progress of Korolya. The Imperial Tax taking Korolya’s remaining wealth—even the wealth isn’t enough to satisfy the Empire’s appetite, as it requires population tributes; Korolya’s own bloated, yet incompetent and corrupt bureaucratic system, which doesn’t capitalize on its potential but is a major reason for its misfortune.”

“Just change these, and Korolya on its own power is sufficient to change the situation.”

“And I’m here to change these.”

Wang Qi sighed, “I won’t even say whether you can do it or not, you can’t even get past the first hurdle.”

“That’s the biggest difficulty,” Gu Hang knew his mother was referring to the problem of Fino City, “but I already have an idea for a solution.”

“Your Salt City decisive battle plan?”

Gu Hang ‘hehe’ smiled, “Yes, and no. As things stand now, the odds of winning such a decisive battle are too slim. But I have some other thoughts; if successful, the subsequent so-called decisive battle is just a showcase match.”

“What do you plan to do?”

“Even you, I cannot tell.”

Wang Qi looked deeply at her son’s face, helplessly saying, “Well, what can I say at this point? Whatever help you need, just tell me, the Gu family… the Gu family can only give our full support to our Family Head.”

“Mhm, I indeed have many things that require the help of the Gu Commercial Firm’s fleet. From Heijian Star, Rage Owl Star, there are massive amounts of materials and personnel that need to be transported. However, don’t worry, it won’t be for nothing. Now, as Battle Zone Commander, commandeering Empire Commerce Guild fleets to carry out military actions, the Military Affairs Department will foot the bill.”

Wang Qi nodded slightly.

She wasn’t worried about this at all.

No matter how the battle turns out in the end, for now, the Gu Commercial Firm stands to make a killing from military orders.

…

After finishing the conversation with his mother, Gu Hang took a landing shuttle heading for the planet surface, towards Mingyan City.

He needed to show his determination in this manner.

One couldn't be like Ivan Fatches

A governor, upon hearing the news of the crawling Nest Capital, used the pretext of a meeting to swiftly board a starship, hiding in the planet's orbit, too scared to go down…

Aside from his family background, a man of no merit, Gu Hang truly looked down on this Ivan.

On the shuttle, Gu Hang gazed at the increasingly enlarging view of Korolya III in front of him, filling his entire field of view, his mind teeming with countless thoughts.

In the meeting, he was fervent and impassioned in front of everyone;

With his mother, he appeared confident and sure of victory.

But, in truth, he himself knew, it wasn't going to be that easy.

The final words of Lois giving him his orders actually implied a lot.

Firstly, they confirmed his position: Korolya Governor and Korolya Battle Zone Commander.

The latter was actually more significant—at least for the war at hand.

Military zone status meant, first and foremost, that Korolya wouldn't have to pay taxes.

And as the commander, Gu Hang also meant that after the battle zone status of Korolya, he could decisively deploy all the Empire's forces stationed in the Korolya Battle Zone. Military forces, as well as all manpower and resources, were at his discretion.

This power was quite substantial; with land, sea, and Planetary Defense Force, Gu Hang became the supreme commander of all three military branches, not to mention having control over administration and finance as well.

To cope with this disaster, the Star Domain Government and the Star Sector Government would continuously transport various types of materials according to the battle zone's requirements. Gu Hang could even request further reinforcement of Star Realm Army forces.

Of course, this last part was only within Gu Hang's right to ask, not necessarily to receive.

After all, the Empire itself was short on resources.

But at least for what was already present in the Korolya Battle Zone, Gu Hang could have complete control.

Of course, there was a caveat to all this.

Gu Hang and Lois were at best acquaintances, hardly even friends, let alone insiders. Four years ago, when she invited Gu Hang to replace Ivan Fatches, she had her own motives, and today was also the same. Her final support for Gu Hang was to solve problems, and the core goal was to quickly restore the Imperial Tax from Korolya.

Chapter 347, I Am the Korolya Governor_2

Meanwhile, whether Gu Hang was capable of achieving all this still left doubts in people's hearts.

Therefore, that phased goal had become inevitable.

Not losing Mingyan City was the bare minimum. Now, since no one else could solve the problem, they let Gu Hang try, throwing the mess at him to see if he could save it. If Mingyan City were to be swallowed up by the Nest Capital, that would mean failure, and Gu Hang would likely be dismissed immediately.

In fact, although Lois didn't explicitly state it, Gu Hang could guess that the relevant reports had probably already reached higher levels. The Star Domain Government and possibly even the higher level Space Domain Government were probably making preparations for both outcomes.

If Gu Hang failed to solve the issue, the Star Domain Government would abandon the wishful thinking that Korolya could be settled with the current forces at hand. Afterward, whether it meant giving up the frontline battle or seeking assistance from the Space Domain Government preparing for a Revelation-level battle, mobilizing hundreds of millions from the Star Realm Army, more fleets, and even forces like the Tribunal, State Church Fleet, and specialized forces such as the Interstellar Warrior Battle Group—they would resolve the Korolya issue.

But by that time, it would have nothing to do with Gu Hang.

…

The loser should step aside.

Expecting the empire to intervene and then to profit from the leftovers… Gu Hang felt he didn't have the political clout to manage that.

And if the situation became even worse, such as if the Space Domain and Star Domain governments assessed that they couldn't mobilize sufficient forces to quell the rebellion, then a small chance remained that they would directly issue the Extinction Order.

The destruction of Korolya was far preferable to it becoming a Great Demon's lair, continuously exporting its influence to the outside.

For Gu Hang, his window of opportunity was just a few months.

Gazing at the surface of Korolya III, his mind continuously recalled various data about the planet, while switching to Spiritual Vision to check the subspace conditions.

His brain was always in motion, constantly refining the plan he had come up with at the beginning.

Previously, he had contacted the Alliance Government on Rage Owl Star through the Star Language Tower on the starship. Subsequently, three key figures would bring their teams to Korolya at top speed.

These three individuals were Alliance Chief Justice Lambert Hodgson, who would bring a group of Demon Hunters and Anti-Corruption Bureau officials. With a population of three billion in Mingyan City and forty billion on Korolya, Gu Hang needed to utilize the potential of this world, which was impossible without dealing with the existing administrative system. He couldn't replace all Korolya people with officials from the Alliance. First, the Alliance didn't have that many officials to spare, and second, the administrative personnel dropped in from above were not familiar with Korolya and would struggle to be effective immediately.

However, Gu Hang was particularly distrustful of Korolya's existing administrative system, both their capabilities and attitudes.

That was where Lambert and his Anti-Corruption Department came in.

It was impossible to turn around Korolya's climate immediately and create a highly efficient and corruption-free administrative system, but at least to ensure these people would accurately execute Gu Hang's will.

Major General Tadeusz, the head of the Alliance Military and Political Department, would bring a large number of military commissioners. At that time, the Star Realm Army wouldn't need his supervision, but Korolya's enormous native Defense Forces required restructuring to truly improve their combat effectiveness.

Phoenix Battalion Leader Matins would bring the freshly numbered Phoenix Battalion, which now barely exceeded a hundred members. The size of these Interstellar Warriors was already equivalent to a typical Battle Group's company.

Many Battle Groups, unless facing a high-intensity battle, wouldn't gather all their forces in one place. Some would stay to guard their headquarters while the rest followed the empire's assignments or responded to support requests at their discretion, dispatching some of their troops according to the situation.

And this “some troops” generally meant a company-sized unit.

A hundred-member company was already a significant independent unit for Interstellar Warriors in action.

The Phoenix had revived to this extent, and it was actually enough.

It was only lacking in some “foundations,” such as the absence of Dreadnought Mechs, heavy-duty vehicles exclusive to Interstellar Warriors, and the like. But those could be supplemented by the Alliance’s Land Forces.

These were the “key individuals” that Gu Hang would need moving forward.

Of course, it wasn’t just them.

Following that, the Alliance would send a large number of administrative personnel, transport a tremendous amount of material, and even armed forces, to participate directly in the conflict. However, given the massive demand for transportation, they had to wait until the Alliance had prepared all these items and personnel and the Gu Commercial Firm’s fleet was also ready.

At the latest, within three months, everything that was supposed to arrive must be in place—that was the requirement Gu Hang had made to the Alliance Government.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Oseina, the Alliance Government had already begun to operate at full capacity.

…

After landing, Gu Hang moved into the Governor’s residence on Korolya, welcoming its third occupant in recent years.

In Rage Owl Star and Heijian Star, Gu Hang also had governor’s residences.

The Governor's residence on Rage Owl Star was nothing to speak of; it was two floors taken from the top of the Old Alliance Parliament building, with the government offices still below, small and dilapidated, only recently having had the chance to be renovated.

As for the governor's residence on Heijian Star, the Alliance Government had initially planned to repurpose a certain nation's palace for the esteemed governor, but Gu Hang had declined.

Those palaces should either remain as historical monuments or serve as government buildings. As for his residence, a simple, plain white house built in the suburban area of Pincer City sufficed. Adjacent to it was the Central Government of the Alliance on Heijian Star—spacious enough and conveniently located, which was all that mattered.

Leading by example, precisely because Gu Hang himself advocated frugality, practicality, and efficiency, the general atmosphere within the Alliance was similar—at least publicly, in official settings.

However, the situation on Korolya was starkly different.

The Governor's residence situated in the upper district of Mingyan City epitomized opulence.

It primarily featured gold as its main color, complemented by red and purple, lending an aura of grandeur and elegance. Countless exquisite, handcrafted reliefs filled the inside and outside of the building, remarkably intricate.

Fine lacquer-coated sculptures and ornaments along with skillful paintings as decorations, made the architecture exceptionally rich in detail.

Indoor fountains and pools were also ubiquitous.

Maintained at constant temperature and humidity, the environment, although not as stringent as some tech research labs, was kept at the optimal level for human habitation.

The governor's residence covered a vast area, even larger than the largest palace on Heijian Star, and this was only the governor's dwelling, not even the seat of the Korolya Planetary Government.

Within this residence, there were also tens of thousands of 'staff members.'

They were servants, attendants, and various kinds of 'cultural workers.'

Among them, there were many art troupes of all sizes.

Symphonic orchestras, opera troupes, song and dance ensembles, clown troupes, drama troupes… These artists almost exclusively served the governor. Accompanying these troupes, there were also numerous support staff and attendants.

Even in these most perilous times, these individuals still 'steadfastly' held their positions.

Gu Hang had never dealt with such extravagances, and for a while, he didn't even know how many resources were needed to maintain such a palace and its countless attendants?

Gu Hang never denied the value of art, but he rejected the value of the art he currently witnessed.

Gu Hang shook his head but didn't immediately take any action.

Disbanding these art troupes straight away wouldn't recover the resources already spent.

Since the money had already been spent and couldn't be refunded, they had to be utilized to their fullest extent.

At Gu Hang's request, these troupes began to stage various 'dramas.'

Robust military anthems, plays reflecting the people's resistance against cults, and dramas extolling the frontier warriors…

The demands had been made; the specifics were left to the artists. Meanwhile, how to fully promote these works and performances to all social strata within the scope of Mingyan City would be the task of the Alliance Propaganda Department officials soon to arrive on Korolya.

Subsequently, Gu Hang, stationed at the Governor's residence, extended invitations to the important figures from all sectors of Mingyan City.

Chapter 348, You Must Believe in Our Loyalty

This was not Izla Hood's first visit to the governor's palace, nor was it his first time witnessing a new master upon the governor's throne.

Yet, as he came to meet with the governor this time, he was still very nervous.

It was his last chance to save his political future.

Originally, he didn't even have this opportunity.

His background was rather humble, but by some stroke of luck, he was noticed by someone important. With genuine capability, he began by working for a notable figure in the Lower Nest District and delivered a commendable performance that brought him into the government system. Later, he had the opportunity to further his education at an upper-district academy in Mingyan City, and when he returned, he was a mid-level official.

In theory, that was about as high as someone of modest origin could hope to climb in life.

…

But fortunately, during his work, he happened to meet Governor Akuna on an occasion. His work report won the female governor's approval, and just after turning forty, he rapidly ascended the ranks. In merely a decade, before reaching sixty, he had taken up the post of Mayor of Mingyan City.

Within Korolya, that was quite a distinguished position. Mingyan City was the largest of Korolya's Nest Capitals and also its capital city. As the mayor of Mingyan City, one more step up would allow him to enter into the cabinet of the Planetary Government and even compete for the most important position of Grand Secretary by the governor's side.

Throughout his entire political career, he always remembered what his first benefactor and later Governor Akuna had told him.

Even though they had phrased it differently, the gist was the same: he came from humble beginnings, had no influential background as he climbed the ladder, and relied entirely on his superiors' favor. And what did the superiors value in him? It was that he had no complex network of relationships, his work abilities were extremely outstanding, and he was an upright man who never reached for things he shouldn't take.

He could hold on to his status, adhere to his responsibilities, yet not be rigid; he knew when to be firm, when to use tact, and when to close his eyes.

That was good.

On Korolya, there were too many people at the top entangled in various interest groups, and when they acted, made decisions, they often didn't think about 'right or wrong' but rather considered 'pros and cons' related to their interest groups. However, these 'pros and cons' often contradicted the interests of the planet and the city.

Under such circumstances, the role of Hood became evident. Everyone was grabbing, lying down, behaving like parasites—someone had to do the work.

And that was his value. If one day, he too began to grab and act like a parasite, then there would be one too many such people on Korolya, and they wouldn't miss him.

He heeded the teachings and conducted himself in this manner throughout his life.

This allowed him to establish considerable prestige in Mingyan City, especially among the lower and middle classes of the population.

But likewise, he had also offended quite a few people.

In the past, he wasn't afraid. Governor Akuna knew what kind of person he was, needed him, and trusted him.

However, in what was left of his life, he never imagined that Governor Akuna, the ruler of the entire planet, could actually die one day.

The changes that death brought were too great.

The newly appointed governor didn't know what he had done in the past.

Moreover, from the few interactions he had with Ivan Fatches, he could tell that the governor's concern wasn't so much with governing the entire planet; instead, his focus seemed to be outside the planet.

His political enemies, on the other hand, were stirring. Over the past few years, they never ceased their attacks on him.

Worse still, Governor Fatches appeared to trust these enemies more.

This was normal; he was a typical bureaucrat, his power stemmed from the system of the Korolya Planetary Government, and the support of those in power. Now, the support was gone, and his enemies—holding substantial actual resources—became the objects Governor Fatches needed to win over more.

Although he was never removed from office, many of his powers were gradually taken away by subordinate agencies. Compared to the real power he held as mayor, under the tacit approval of Governor Fatches, he had nearly become reduced to a rubber-stamping machine.

Being marginalized was already a reality.

And soon, dismissal would become a matter of course, and he smelled danger.

After that, he feared, would be the loss of his entire family's lives. Once he lost the protection of his position, his political enemies would not let him off.

And it was at this moment that the governor changed again.

He realized this was his last opportunity.

If he couldn't regain trust in front of Mr. Gu, the governor who had taken charge during the crisis, then everything would truly be over.

He had prepared thoroughly for this meeting.

Of course, he knew that the greatest crisis at the moment was the Cult insurgents, the Living Cities that were slowly encroaching. Mingyan City had to be fully mobilized, optimally allocating resources and rallying the workforce, all for the sake of survival.

And he, who had been the mayor of Mingyan City for a dozen years and had risen from the ranks, knew how to improve administrative efficiency, how to mobilize manpower, which forces could be persuaded to cooperate, how to persuade them, which individuals were parasites and dead weight intent on fleeing, and how to eliminate them…

Chapter 348, You Must Believe in Our Loyalty_2

A series of important strategies, he had organized them in his case, ready to report to the new governor.

He had already thrown caution to the wind, no matter whether he might offend others. In his life, his only method was to work seriously; flattering, making up lies, he didn't want to, but he simply couldn't do it as well as others. Rather than that, he preferred to stick to his own style, hoping that the new governor would value these things.

If not… it was all going to be over anyway.

However, what he had originally envisioned, was having a one-on-one meeting with the new governor. Yet, the reality was different. Mr. Gu had gathered everyone together, then let everyone take the stage one by one, to say who they were, what job they did, and what contributions they could make to Mr. Gu's demand of "winning the battle of Mingyan City."

Izra Hood could understand that Mr. Gu didn't have the time to delay, as "Fino City" was estimated to arrive at Mingyan City in four months; he couldn't possibly spend those four months playing political struggles with the local bureaucrats of Mingyan City. He was using this public method to demand these people make political pledges openly.

However… he was stuck.

…

He had no political pledges to make.

Unlike those who took the stage before him, claiming how much manpower or resources they could provide, or the contributions they could make. He was just a bureaucrat, and what's more, a marginalized one. All he could offer was himself, his passion, and his work ability.

What he had prepared was also along these lines. Not to mention, within the material he prepared, how to divide and co-opt, to suppress interest groups, some of which definitely couldn't be trusted and must be removed—how could he say these things in a public setting?

What to do?

He hadn't come up with any ideas, and it was already his turn.

His mind went blank as he stood on stage.

Looking down at his 'colleagues' and at Mr. Gu who was smiling, Hu De took a deep breath.

To hell with it!

It had come to this point, What was the use of worrying about this or that?

If they couldn't win the defense of Mingyan City, everyone would die!

If he couldn't win this one breath, he would be killed by these interest groups sooner or later!

They had long been irreconcilable enemies, with no way out. For the sake of Mingyan City, for his own sake, he had to do what needed to be done!

He began.

The content of his speech was no different from what he had prepared.

He could see clearly the expressions of those below.

Those dignitaries, the big shots, when they first heard him talking about mobilizing manpower and establishing wartime mechanisms, looked at him with disdain.

He seemed to hear a voice: "Without us, your plans are all castles in the air, none can be realized."

His heart was full of anger.

He reached the critical part of his speech.

How to ensure the wartime mechanism's plans could be executed?

Then, he started naming names.

Potential collaborators, those to coerce, those harboring ulterior motives, those who needed to be suppressed. Most seriously, some who were already preparing to flee… who these people were, and what they would do, he laid it all out clearly.

Even, he added some improvisation on the spot.

Just now, hadn't many people on stage passionately made a series of pledges to Mr. Gu?

Izra Hood mercilessly exposed many of them.

Some fellows had no intention of fulfilling their promises. Their caravans were ready, and they had their people inside the Imperial Guard of Mingyan City, or they had been bribed. They would soon be riding in vehicles, taking a portion of their wealth, departing Mingyan City for other Nest Capitals.

Although they couldn't take everything with them, even the departure of these individuals, the loss of this portion of influence, would mean many things couldn't be carried out.

Upon hearing this, the people below could no longer sit still.

What nonsense are you spouting?

"Slander! This is absolute slander!"

"He's spouting nonsense! He's trying to suppress his rivals!"

"Mr. Gu, please believe in our loyalty!"

The people below were clearly agitated, their roaring voices even momentarily too loud for Hu De's speech to continue.

Cold sweat appeared on Hu De's forehead, and facing those eyes that seemed ready to tear him apart—especially knowing those eyes belonged to such influential figures—he was naturally afraid.

But at the same time, he felt a surge of pleasure within him.

Years of being sidelined and constantly criticized, decades of being hamstrung by the need to rely on his superiors, and a lifetime witnessing all manner of ugliness… all found a significant release at that moment.

Even if he accomplished nothing in the end, seeing these nobles exposed in such an undignified state felt like revenge.

Then, in the next instant, all the noise abruptly ceased around him.

A mysterious power enveloped the whole venue; aside from breathing, no other sound was heard.

It was only the voice of the new, still young-looking Mr. Gu that resonated within the hall.

"Continue speaking."

Hu De looked at Mr. Gu and saw a hint of a smile, exactly as he had at their first meeting.

He steadied himself and continued his narrative.

After he finished, Gu Hang softly clapped his hands: "Mayor Izla Hu De, I think your plan is very good, the best I've heard today. After the banquet, please stay behind, we need to discuss this in more depth. To win this war defending Mingyan City and end the greatest disaster looming over Korolya for years, I need talents like you."

"And to everyone else, please don't panic. I trust in everyone's loyalty to the Empire, to the Mr. Gu. However, I still don't know you all that well. As long as you follow through with what you've said today,

you will have proven your loyalty to me. As for Mayor Hu De, I hope you can implement the strategy you spoke of today to perfect our preparations for the war and oversee if the attendees fulfill their promises."

Upon hearing this, Izla Hu De finally felt relieved!

…

The morning after the banquet, after having breakfast with the new Mr. Gu at the governor's mansion, Hu De, weary yet exhilarated, got into his car to head home.

In the car, he still pondered the topics discussed in depth with Mr. Gu after the banquet had ended.

Alone with Mr. Gu, his words were bolder and sharper. With Mr. Gu's encouragement, he voiced ideas he had previously feared to express or that had been futile to try to implement.

And these ideas were all supported by Mr. Gu.

With only limited contact, he was now almost certain that this young Mr. Gu had indeed come with the goal of saving Korolya.

He too was willing to lend his strength to this cause.

At that moment, he suddenly heard the sound of shattering glass. A searing wind flew passed his face, and he felt an intense burning on his nose.

"There's a sniper!" His bodyguard shouted as he pushed down Hu De's head.

Only then did the belatedly aware Hu De realize he was the target of an assassination. A laser had just pierced the car window, grazing the tip of his nose.

He was just an inch away from having his head burned off by the laser gun.

However, hiding in the car was not safe either.

His car was bulletproof, but it was still a penetrable target for the high-powered laser gun in the assassin's hands.

Several beams struck, and his bodyguard's chest was pierced with a large hole; his own left leg became numb after a burning sensation.

He came back to his senses.

Am I going to die?

How could they be so heartless?

But then he heard rapid gunfire.

No more lasers came towards his car.

Enduring the severe pain and fear, he lifted his head and glanced outside the car window.

He saw a squad of warriors clad in Exoskeleton Combat Suits moving outside his car window.

Chapter 349, Killed, Bring the Head Back

Upon hearing the potentially subversive speech delivered by Hu De at the banquet and after showing his own stance, having left Hu De to talk throughout the night about granting the mayor of Mingyan City more power to oversee the city's preparations for war, Gu Hang thought that it was very likely this Mr. Mayor would be in danger.

The privileged wouldn't let him off.

Therefore, as Hu De left, Gu Hang dispatched his own guard to follow him.

It was initially just a precautionary measure, but it indeed proved useful.

Clearly, if the guards from the Tenth Brigade had not arrived in time, the ambushers would have nearly succeeded.

They had deployed a sniper, lying in wait on Hu De 's route home, and there was a second measure in place. Should the sniper fail, a large gang of recruited thugs would burst forth to ensure Hu De's death.

…

But unfortunately for them, these tactics failed in the face of the Governor's guards.

Though there were only eight of the Governor's guards, they still managed to force the sniper to retreat through remote fire suppression. To avoid being lured away, they did not pursue but stayed put, massacring the local gang until they fled in disarray, crying for their mothers after dropping dozens of bodies within minutes.

The sniper was quite a master; from a great distance, he almost succeeded with a single shot at taking Hu De's life, which was indeed an unexpected event. However, according to the latest situation, Hu De only suffered a broken leg, and the injuries were overall non-fatal.

This greatly relieved Gu Hang.

But what followed was a towering rage.

I see, just to be cautious, and you dared to make a move, huh?

Soon, officials from the Legal Department and security in Mingyan City appeared at the Governor's residence.

Busy closely examining the subspace conditions, Gu Hang had no time to personally deal with them. Coming to Korolya, he wasn't alone. Besides the few hundred in his Governor's guard, he also had a team of secretaries, roughly one hundred strong.

These secretaries conveyed the Governor's fury. Among them, a Spiritual Energy user directly intervened in the investigation and found the gang leader that very day.

In between, there were issues like the bureau's personnel having protective umbrellas, the gang leader refusing to confess the masterminds behind him, and scapegoats being thrown out to appease the Governor's rage.

But in these matters, the Governor took a firm stance.

I don't have time to mess around with you, playing games of decryption, searching for evidence.

I only need a list.

Good timing, the first batch of people Gu Hang shook from the Alliance had arrived.

Gu Hang confidently left this matter to Lambert Hodgson to handle.

Gu Hang's instructions were straightforward: contact a few trustworthy local officials and add officials from the security department to produce this list.

If the officials from the Legal or Security Departments do not cooperate, then put them on the list as well.

Cut the Gordian knot.

What about the wronged?

Among the officials in Korolya, killing every one or every other one might result in some being wronged, but failing to do so would definitely let many slip through the net.

…

“Boss, someone has already broken into the house.”

“I know,” Manus nodded, still with some trepidation in his heart.

He was the Director of the Planetary Government’s Logistics Equipment Management Department.

The assassination attempt on Izla Hood was arranged and instigated by him.

He admitted that this act was a bit reckless, but he had already been infuriated when publicly named in front of countless people and the new Governor as prepared to flee Mingyan City during the meeting.

Being accused of something you haven’t done won’t make you very angry; but when you’ve really done it and someone publicly calls you out, that’s utterly infuriating.

There are many pests within the Korolya government, but it’s rare to find pests like him.

The lowly ones tend to laugh at even baser creatures more viciously.

In the face of impending doom, most people still hold one concept: they can’t flee and must fight with all their might.

Otherwise, with two Nest Capitals already destroyed, if Mingyan City goes down too, the cities animated by Plague Sorcery would no longer be able to resist. In the end, when the entire planet is destroyed, where else can one find refuge?

After all, at that stage, the few who are ultimately able to escape the planet will always be in the minority.

And now, a traitor has emerged among us!

Now, Manus found himself in this awkward position.

How could he not hate Hood who brought all this upon him?

So, he took action.

At the same time, he also considered that this would provoke the new Governor's wrath.

But this Governor had just descended into this world, currently facing a great crisis, and didn't seem to have a powerful backing like Fatches; it's said that the new Governor's two worlds combined had just over five hundred million people, roughly equivalent to the smallest Nest Capital in Korolya.

The new Governor had too many matters to attend to; how would he have the time to focus on Manus?

Investigating upwards from the gang, the first to be found would be the scapegoats he threw out.

By this point, it would be considered having given an explanation.

What he wanted was not entirely to get by.

He never believed that Mr. Gu could solve the problems, intending to secure more time and means to escape Korolya after planning his escape.

It was just about running away sooner.

It’s a pity that the large amount of weapons and equipment he intended to take with him, whether they were the new equipment produced by Mingyan City’s armory or the military aid sent by the Empire, were all under his management.

Chapter 349, Killed, Bring the Head Back_2

He had originally planned to haul away several train cars, but now the plan was disrupted, and he had no choice but to take less.

What a pity.

The goods that could be taken had already been arranged and would soon be dispatched with the train.

As for himself, accompanied by a convoy of bodyguards, he had already left the city through the checkpoint at the Nest Capital pass that had been previously notified.

However, just at that moment, a whistling sound came from behind.

He turned his head and saw several vehicles bearing the Planetary Justice Department insignia rapidly catching up.

…

He immediately felt a sense of dread.

“Speed up! Speed up!”

“Take out the vehicles behind us!”

Under his command, his bodyguards began to attack fiercely towards the rear.

As an official from the equipment management department, he certainly had the means to procure a group of loyal bodyguards from the military. Even the five vehicles he used for his escape had all been converted from military armor vehicles.

On the vehicles, there were even automatic gun turrets, which rose to the top of the vehicles, rotating to aim at the pursuers.

However, the turrets still failed to fire.

Suddenly, a violent explosion occurred at the left rear wheel of the vehicle, flipping the entire car over by the side of the road.

And at that moment, the doors of the vehicles with the Justice Department insignia flung open, and several people jumped out of the speeding cars.

Ordinary people would have been severely injured jumping out of a car like this, but not these individuals clad in exoskeletons. They merely paused for a moment and then, using the momentum, continued running forward, drawing various weapons and firing at the armored vehicles.

The leader among them was straightforwardly wearing a suit of powered armor.

She was relatively petite, like a lady, clearly not an Interstellar Warrior; the silver and black paint job also confirmed she was not one of the Sisters of the Holy Mercy Lily with their white and green garb.

A bomb gun holstered on the side of her thigh remained undrawn, while instead, she pulled out a combat sword, pointing it towards another armored vehicle in front of her. Her eyes flashed with a deep blue light, and in a moment, a strange power surged at the tip of her sword. The next instant, one of the wheels on that armored vehicle also suddenly exploded, flipping it over.

During this process, her sprint never slowed. In a short burst, she was even faster than the vehicles.

Methodically, she flipped over all of the targeted vehicles.

The exoskeleton warriors beside her took over the aftermath.

The vehicles had only flipped over, not exploded, so there were still many survivors inside. These individuals were all pulled out, and anyone who dared resist was promptly shot dead.

In reality, there weren't many who were that foolish.

The ordeal was over, so why bother.

And the most important target was brought before the lady in the silver and black powered armor.

She removed the helmet of the powered armor to reveal her beautiful face.

This was the Alliance Demon Hunter – Milia Derong.

The feedback-type powered armor produced by the Alliance had been distributed in not a few sets over the years. These powered armors had varied destinations: some went to military officers, others to the Alliance Police Department, Security Department, Integrity Commission, and some went to the Demon Hunters.

Derong put on a set herself.

Now a captain of the Demon Hunters, her first mission upon following Lambert Chief Justice to this planet was to pursue the traitor Manus.

Her most important weapon, apart from the powered armor she wore, was her awakened Spiritual Energy.

When she had just been trained as a Demon Hunter, she had mastered the basics of using Spiritual Energy; later, she had furthered her studies at the Storm Mage Academy for half a year, where she formally mastered Spiritual Energy.

The technique used to flip over those armored vehicles was her Spiritual Energy.

After carefully observing the man kneeling on the ground, she softly said, “It’s confirmed that this is the traitor Manus of the empire. Put him down, take his head, and bring it back. Lambert Chief Justice doesn’t have time for some public trial; he prefers to have enough heads laid out in his office before having a talk with the rest. It should be quite effective.”

Manus was already feeling very uneasy, and hearing this, he trembled even more.

He hastily began to speak, “Madam! Madam! Please listen to me! I’m still useful, I know a lot of things…”

“No need, your life is a bit more useful.”

“No no no! The defending army of Mingyan City is planning a rebellion! I’m on good terms with their commander, I can…”

“Tch, like we needed you to tell us? Someone’s already on their way.” At this point, Milia’s expression soured, appearing annoyed at not being able to partake in that major operation.

As they were talking, another Demon Hunter had walked behind Manus, with the gun barrel pressed against his back.

“Please don’t…”

“Bang!”

“Ugh…”

With the sound of a gunshot, Manus, with a bullet through his heart, fell forward to the ground, fresh blood pouring from his shattered chest, staining his face, which still wore an expression of shock and disbelief.

…

In Mingyan City, the middle district, the headquarters of the Nest Capital Defense Army.

General Tadeusz entered General Qiongson's office under the protection of a team of governor's bodyguards.

The man was white-haired but still had a strong visage, sitting behind his desk with an air of unspoken authority.

He looked up and saw Tadeusz, who wore the rank of general but was dressed in a uniform utterly different from his own, and demanded, "You had better have an explanation for me; it's not time for my meeting with you yet."

Without a smile, Tadeusz presented a piece of parchment to Qiongson, bearing a few words, and most crucially, the governor's signature and a lacquer seal.

"General Qiongson, effective immediately, you are relieved of all command over the Mingyan City Defense Army. From now on, I will fully oversee the defense and military construction of Mingyan City."

"Nonsense!" Qiongson slammed the table and stood up, "I am a planetary general! Do you think you can dismiss me with just a document? Delusional!"

"This is an order from the governor. Your rank of general and your command position are appointments within the Planetary Defense Force system. The governor has full authority to terminate your duties and strip you of your rank."

"How many divisions does the governor have in Mingyan City?" Qiongson, with an implied threat, said, "I have been stationed here for twenty years. Every officer here has either been promoted by me or

fought alongside me. They respect me, they love me, and if I am not in this position, I'm afraid the army will not remain calm. Surely the governor doesn't want the Mingyan City Defense Army to fall into disorder in times of crisis?"

Tadeusz's expression did not change upon hearing this.

He laid the governor's dismissal document in front of General Qiongson and pulled out a small booklet.

"Mingyan City Defense Army 31st Division commander Mateus, 37th Division commander Laurent, 49th Division commander Andre, 71st Division commander Potoski…"

With each name he read, Qiongson's face lost a shade of color.

These were almost his most trusted, closest commanding generals in the army.

After rapidly naming nearly twenty names, Tadeusz stopped and delivered the final verdict: "They will also be dismissed."

"Impossible!" Qiongson glared at Tadeusz, "They are all surrounded by layers of protection within their own troops, how could it be!…"

Just then, a telephone in his office suddenly rang.

There were several phones on the desk, and the one that rang was the least used but also the most important. When it rang, it meant something extremely urgent had happened.

Tadeusz gestured for Qiongson to answer the phone.

Qiongson picked up the phone: "I'm Qiongson, speak quickly…"

His face grew more and more sullen as the call went on.

Eventually, the handset fell from his hand.

He looked at Tadeusz in disbelief: “How… how could it be? In a matter of hours? You’ve killed all nineteen division commanders after breaking into the military?

“Traitors to the empire deserve such a fate. Moreover, the military court has already passed judgment on your traitorous actions…”

“Wait! Since when does Korolya have a military court?”

“Korolya doesn’t, but the Alliance does, and Korolya is now a member of the Alliance.”

“But there was no trial process!”

“I am the Alliance’s Chief Political Commissar, and the trial process’s highest decision is in my hands.”

“What is the verdict of the trial?”

Tadeusz pulled out a handgun and pointed it at General Qiongson’s forehead.

“Wait! Wait! I have served the planet, I have shed blood for Mingyan City, you can’t treat me like this, I want to see the governor! I …”

“Bang!”

“…Death.” Tadeusz softly recited the sentence of his verdict.

General Qiongson, with a bullet hole in his forehead, fell backward.

Chapter 350, Tens of Millions of Troops

“Greetings, this is the first time we meet, so allow me to introduce myself. I am Lambert Hodgson, the Chief Justice of the Alliance. The Alliance’s legislative, law enforcement, and judicial operations are all my responsibility. Of course, all laws of the Alliance are established in accordance with the Planetary Governor’s will, and I am here merely to refine the laws. The enforcement and judicial duties naturally must also be conducted in accordance with the law.”

“You all have been preliminarily screened and found unrelated to the rebellion that has yet to erupt. This is good, and on behalf of His Excellency the Planetary Governor, I hope you can continue to maintain this status.”

“As for the promises you made at the Planetary Governor’s banquet, I have a list here, all recorded. I believe that you, loyal citizens of the Empire, will take your political promises seriously.”

“This is your responsibility, as well as mine.”

A meeting was convened within the Governor’s residence.

The speaker, Lambert, had an amiable attitude and tone, merely recounting his job responsibilities and emphasizing the importance of dedication to their work.

…

However, the sight of several rows of heads lined up behind him cast a chilling air over the scene.

The many Salt City elites seated in the conference room were all as silent as cicadas in winter, barely daring to nod in agreement.

In the past few days, there had been a bloody purge in Salt City.

On normal days, many people would die daily in Salt City. Gang fights, overwork in factories, malnutrition, diseases…

However, those who died were the lowly, the worthless in society. To those elite, it would at most be a set of numbers—they would not even bother to look at those figures.

But now was different.

The heads hanging on the wall behind Lambert were almost all familiar faces, all once influential figures in Salt City, now all beheaded and displayed here.

Nobody wanted to end up hanging there too, so of course, they did not dare make any sudden moves.

And as for the rebellion?

Forget about it.

The head of General Qiongson, the Capital Commander in charge of the five million defending army of Salt City, was hanging right here. The biggest power player, who had hoped to force the Planetary Governor to yield with his troops, was finished. What play could the rest put on?

It was said that Commissar General Tadeusz who had just arrived, along with his commissariat team, had gone deep into the military to announce the standards of the Alliance Army's treatment.

This was far superior to that of the Planetary Defense Force (PDF) stationed on Korolya, almost on par with the Star Realm Army.

More critically, the Salt City's official warehouses and some privy depots of the elite had been opened, with a substantial amount of supplies being distributed. The promises to the rank and file were not just pie in the sky, but were genuinely delivered without any markdowns.

Many people who had 'volunteered' a lot in this process were bleeding inside.

It was pure silver given to those poor soldiers, such a sin!

They were all cannon fodder destined to die; was this really necessary?

But no one dared to say this aloud anymore.

They could only grumble to themselves—can the treasury sustain such high treatment?

Even if they slaughtered everyone like fattened pigs for the New Year, what about the days after the celebration?

But there was no choice.

Going forward, they still had to contribute their strength.

They could only hope that once the calamity passed, everything would return to normal.

…

Beside Lambert's own Demon Hunter Squad, the Integrity Commission soldiers, and the Phoenix Battle Group also took part in disposing of and collecting those heads.

No need for the Phoenix warriors to move otherwise, but when it came to General Qiongson's staunch confidants within the military, who were not just battalion commanders but also regiment leaders, it was crucial to eliminate any chance of them causing trouble—thus ensuring a one-hit kill. Such tasks could only be entrusted to the Interstellar Warriors, who would guarantee a hundred percent success.

Their operations had especially effective results. Carrying the Planetary Governor's orders and the government's mandate, and with the most obvious presence of the Emperor's own Angels personally arriving, the military truly did not act rashly. And those officers, even if they saw the dire situation and were unwilling to be captured without a fight, could not escape the Interstellar Warrior's execution when it mattered most.

After all, some minor disturbances were inevitable, but they were quickly subdued.

After carrying out these measures, the Interstellar Warriors also swiftly withdrew, handing the military over to the military commissars of the Alliance.

They had other, more important tasks to attend to.

…

The lavishly decorated Governor's residence of Salt City now became a grand administrative office. Lambert's team set up their headquarters here. And like the Mayor Izla Hood with a broken leg, she too gritted her teeth and insisted on working through her injuries, moving the city government in, fully cooperating with Lambert.

Or rather, both of them were cooperating with Tadeusz.

Now was a time of war, and military construction was of utmost importance. It was Tadeusz who was shouldering the most arduous tasks.

Under regular conditions, Salt City would have a garrison of ten million native troops. Since the problems in Fino City, there had been a high demand for troops, not just in Salt City but in all the Nest Capitals across the globe, with continuous deployment of forces participating in the situation at Fino City.

The strength of the garrison in Salt City had dropped to a low of two to three million people at one point over the last few years.

This was a dangerously low number. Any less, and they would not have sufficient force to suppress any issues in the Lower Nest District or Bottom Nest District.

But as the situation in Fino City collapsed, and when it became clear that Salt City was the next target, a considerable number of troops started to be redeployed here from various locations. Currently, there were about five million troops in the city.

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Following the governor’s request, the number of defending forces in Fino City must be further expanded. The total force is to reach a scale of twenty million.

Among them, a force enjoying the so-called ‘Star Realm Army’ benefits is the most core unit, with a planned total of ten million people, which is half of the total force.

This force will be granted the ‘Salvation Army’ designation.

From this, one can see how arduous Tadeusz’s task is.

In the coming months, he must not only take control of and reform the existing five million native forces but also recruit another fifteen million.

…

The entire government of Mingyan City will go all out to provide Tadeusz with all the necessary support to ensure he can complete the governor’s mission.

The main cooperation is in terms of human resources, which plainly put, is recruitment.

Do not think that just because Mingyan City has a population of three billion, recruitment is an easy matter, as if one could simply grab a mere five thousandths of the population.

It’s not that simple.

The Mingyan City government’s control over the most populous Bottom Nest District and Lower Nest District is inadequate, and this area is already experiencing a plague, with cult activities, rebels,

disobedient gangs, and opposition organizations. The government's organizational power and control over the population are surprisingly weak. There is no such thing as a list going out and people obediently showing up.

Similarly, assembling such a vast military force also poses massive logistics issues that need to be resolved.

With all sorts of objective problems present, the entire government department, under the efforts of Mayor Hu De and the supervision of Lambert, is strenuously working towards this goal.

Lambert anticipated the low administrative efficiency on Korolya, but facing it head-on, he found it to be even more difficult than he had imagined.

Subjectively, it is the people of the Korolya Planetary Government who are too incompetent in their work. The administrative staff is hundreds or even thousands of times larger than that of the Alliance Government, yet their efficiency is shockingly low; objectively, the difficulty has risen exponentially with a several-fold increase in the population managed.

This has resulted in an already challenging objective difficulty paired with substandard subjective capabilities.

Lambert was quite angered but also had to recognize that this was the reality. No matter how dissatisfied he was, what he needed to ensure now was just that these people were diligently working. After clearing out the corrupt individuals and traitors, there was nothing to do about the remaining, less capable people until later.

However low the efficiency might be, no matter how much the rusted gears in the system screeched, no matter how much procedural and result-oriented chaos there was, once the Nest Capital, with its population of three billion, started operating, the power it unleashed was still incredibly terrifying.

Lambert originally thought that achieving the goal would be extremely difficult, yet now it seemed quite hopeful.

…

Mingyan City was internally striving to expand its military.

Meanwhile, on this planet, the true main force was deployed in Fino City—or rather, ‘running alongside’ Fino City.

The Dragonhawk Legion’s forces, currently at eighteen million strong, are led by General Hans, with nearly fifty million Planetary Defense Forces; The Rage Bear Legion led by Li Kexi is also among them.

The remaining nearly one hundred million Planetary Defense Forces are stationed in other Nest Capitals, defending against and suppressing the spread of the Plague Cult in their respective regions.

Currently, the main human forces are relying primarily on long-range artillery for combat efforts.

The human self-propelled artillery units fire day and night following ‘Fino City,’ launching no fewer than thirty thousand shells daily at the living city. Even if they can’t break the Void Shield, they keep up the bombardment—to whatever extent it might be in vain or not.

Every now and then, the malevolent heavy artillery inside ‘Fino City’ also fires back at the human artillery formations. Comparatively, the losses suffered are much more significant than those from the human bombardment of the living city.

Moreover, the Plague Demon’s forces also launch periodic raids, causing notable damage.

Such battles are utterly meaningless; Fino City has not reduced its speed at all.

There’s no need to continue this sacrifice; after all, ammunition is quite valuable.

Upon his request, General Hans is now consolidating and organizing the entire force, with tens of millions set to assemble west of Mingyan City.

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Altogether, that's nearly sixty million people, which of course couldn't possibly gather in one place. No single battlefield could accommodate such a vast number of troops.

The troops, organized by division, constructed dozens of dense defense lines to the west of Mingyan City, in the direction of 'Fino City', each at least a hundred kilometers wide.

When General Hans was about to explain, Gu Hang gave him a clear directive:

"When necessary, we must be prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice, not sparing nineteen million from the Star Realm Army, nor sixty million from the Planetary Defense Force. We must launch a full-scale attack on Fino City."

General Hans strongly objected.

It wasn't that he was afraid to die; he just thought it was senseless.

An army is not more effective simply because it's larger. The battlefield space in Fino City is only so big; on one front, deploying hundreds of thousands to attack is already the limit, as the width of the battlefield is finite. Piling up more people is pointless.

Of course, having sufficient troops means that you could throw in hundreds of thousands, and when they collapse, immediately send in another batch, maintaining a relentless offensive posture.

However, such warfare requires exceptionally strong soldier quality and organization.

General Hans explicitly stated that the only one capable of this was the Star Realm Army.

As for that enormous Planetary Defense Force, could they undertake the same desperate task as the million Star Realm Army soldiers who previously attempted an offensive and were nearly wiped out inside Fino City?

That would be impossible.

The army didn't have enough strength, morale, or organization for this task. If orders were forced upon them, even with execution squads blocking their retreat, it's likely the troops would still mutiny: fighting the executioners might, after all, offer some chance of survival.

The role that the Planetary Defense Force could play was only to assist when there were sturdier troops able to hold the line in front; relying on them to act valiantly and take the lead was unrealistic.

In response, Gu Hang expressed understanding. But he still insisted that General Hans must carry out the orders as given.

The orders came with the authority of the battle zone commander.

General Hans had no choice but to comply.

Although the majority of his troops came from the Fatches Tri-Star and even a considerable proportion of his officers had deep ties to the Fatches Family, many people were urging him to keep his distance from the new governor who had usurped the Fatches' power and to not cooperate with him.

Yet, he still carried out the orders of the battle zone commander.

He remembered his identity in the Star Realm Army, as the Third Group Army of the Dragon Hawk Legion was not a private army of the Fatches family.

Of course, discontent was still present — it was not necessarily his own, but that of the Fatches officers under him. These people would show up at his doorstep daily, weeping, forcing him to send up an impeachment letter to his superiors every other day. And at Envoy Lois' ship meetings, the Fatches family members would make a big fuss about these same issues every single day.

Envoy Lois was under great pressure too.

Gu Hang, the battle zone commander, had been appointed by her in her capacity as an envoy. If things went south, it wouldn't mean the end of her political career, but it would still be significantly affected.

However, Madam Lois, who had lived for over three hundred years, had sufficient resilience to endure the pressure.

She single-handedly repelled all the pressure on one hand, and on the other, she did not say anything to Gu Hang.

Even though she too had her doubts, she still chose to place her full trust in Gu Hang.

In employing someone, do not suspect them; at least until Mingyan City falls, her trust would be absolute.

If Mingyan City is lost, then immediately the trust level will drop to zero, and all the backup plans that should be initiated will be set into motion.

She desperately hoped it wouldn't come to that.