Governor 431

Chapter 431, I made the call too early.

Gu Hang received the news from Wu Jiarong on Shangyuan Star in the Mist Horse Star District.

After the Steel Wing Star battle had ended, the threat of the Green Skins' main force invading Eagle Horse had been basically eliminated; what remained was to pacify the remnants of the Green Skins on various planets.

The Alliance Army had already dispersed to various locations, and the situation was looking very good.

The Mist Horse Star District had also suffered an invasion by the Green Skins, coming from the direction of Copper Barrier Star District, but this was clearly not the main force of the Green Skins: the ships were few, and their numbers were low.

Even though the local Defense Army was beaten to the point of crying for their parents, once the Seven Horse Treaty was signed, the main forces of the Alliance arrived soon after, and the situation was completely controlled.

Under these circumstances, what else could the leader of Mist Horse do?

He hadn't signed yet, but all his governors had.

This made him, as the leader, nothing more than a figurehead; all the governors could now directly interact with the Alliance in military, political, and economic matters through the framework of the Seven Horse Treaty.

Even the core power to determine the development level and population of the star sectors, and to establish the tax amount, was lost.

The Imperial Tax was now collected by the Alliance under the Seven Horse Treaty, and there was nothing left to determine.

Now his situation was such that the Alliance would attend to him if they wished, and if they didn't, his position as the leader of the star sector was utterly useless.

This leader of Mist Horse, named Martesis Becker, had reached a point where he couldn't put on airs any longer; he held his nose and signed as well.

Not signing, he worried about his own life.

There was no need for the Alliance to act; the looks in the eyes of the governors who had signed were already somewhat wrong.

And so Gu Hang had come to the Mist Horse Star District.

After a brief respite from combat, he had indeed planned to return to the Tianma Star Sector.

The quickest path was certainly to go back the same way through Eagle Horse, but since Mist Horse had just bowed down, it was also fine to pass through this sector.

It was a bit of a detour, but with a solid count of 13 worlds and 16.6 billion people, that was no falsehood.

Compared to the Tianma Star Sector, this population was pitifully small.

In the Seven Horse Territory, Tianma Star Sector had the fewest planets, but it had money (Flying Wing Star) and people (Korolya).

The surrounding star sectors seemed large, with Mist Horse boasting a population of 16.6 billion; Eagle Horse wasn't much better at 15 billion, both just a quarter of Tianma's.

The most populous was the Purple Horse Sector, with 17 worlds and just 38 billion people.

But with a scale in the billions, it was still worth Gu Hang making the trip.

In this journey, he traveled from Steel Wing Star to Emerald Spring II, Emerald Spring I, then all the way south into the heartland of Mist Horse, and finally turned east to reach Shangyuan Star.

Two more jumps, and he would be at Flying Wing Star.

The entire journey was almost at an end.

And then, at this moment, Wu Jiarong sent him this catastrophic news.

Upper Plateau Star was finished; the United Fleet of Dragonhawk and Mingyang Sect was also finished.

It was unknown how many ships managed to break through, but the slow-moving Mechanical Arks were definitely doomed.

And without the Fleet's protection, the Orbital Defense system was sure to be dismantled, meaning real trouble for the fifteen billion elite human troops deployed across the planet.

They would face off against the Green Skin Orcs under orbital bombardment, with interstellar supplies cut off.

Upper Plateau Star itself wasn't exactly a developed world, at best producing some ammunition to resupply the troops, while its industrial facilities also faced bombing by the Green Skins.

As for things like tanks and Titans, once one was destroyed, that was one less available.

They couldn't even produce energy crystals locally, so some high-performance equipment would face an energy shortage…

Even food supplies would be problematic; Upper Plateau Star probably couldn't meet the additional food consumption of fifteen billion troops that was an astronomical figure.

Famine, energy shortages, bombing, war…

Fifteen billion human soldiers were likely doomed.

Just thinking about that scene made Gu Hang feel sad.

That feeling didn't come simply from fear and terror, but was a sense of heaviness, of heartache.

Fifteen billion people, young and strong, the elite.

Many human planets had that many inhabitants in an entire world.

And they, in the not-too-distant future, would die tragically amidst bombings that covered the planet, amid bitter cold and hunger, in the grip of desperation.

It was such a waste.

And with the loss of these fifteen billion people, the loss of the Mechanical Arks, and the loss of at least half the Fleet, the Dragonhawk Star Domain no longer had anything that could block the Iron Tooth Orcs with their battle moons.

Though their battle moons were only for show, what did that matter?

The Dragonhawk Star Domain now can't even come up with a single battleship-class object and has no capital to fight back!

Even the ground forces, after losing a billion of the called-up Defense Army, the many human worlds behind them are now empty, almost as if defenseless; after losing three hundred million from the Star

Realm Army, the defenses of Yunluo Star have also been depleted; the Protection Army lost two hundred million, including a portion from the Mingyang Sect's Titan Legion forces, and the ground defenses of Jindi Star will face a huge challenge…

This was not only a feeling of nostalgia, Gu Hang genuinely felt the threat.

After the fall of Yunluo and Jindi, who would be the next unfortunate one?

Wouldn't that be the Alliance?

Don't look at the battle of Steel Wing Star as if it were serious, but Gu Hang wasn't facing the main force of the Iron Tooth; the scale of the battle was an entire magnitude smaller than the current battle occurring at Upper Plateau Star.

If the Green Skin main forces turned eastward, the current Alliance would be unable to stop them.

But at the main battlefield of Yunluo and Jindi, not to mention being out of reach, even if they could get there, the Alliance with its slight build, also couldn't change the course of the war.

Could Gu Hang possibly think of a way to kill that battle moon?

He wasn't sure of it.

How can I save you, my Star Domain?

Gu Hang decided to go ask the person who needed to be saved.

By making use of the Star Language Tower on the starship, and after some time, Gu Hang dialed the Star Domain Government's number.

The holographic figure that appeared before Gu Hang was Tan Jiuyi, the head of the Star Domain.

Tan Jiuyi's face was stern, and the first thing he said upon connection was quite rude, "Gu Hang, you're behaving quite inappropriately this moment.

You clearly have the capacity to contact the Star Domain Government yet seldom do so actively.

What?

Do the directives from the Star Domain Government have no guiding significance to you now?"

Gu Hang was taken aback upon hearing this.

Is Tan Jiuyi hinting at something to me?

Gu Hang immediately came to his senses.

Tan Jiuyi, who was in Yunluo, might not even know what had happened on Upper Plateau Star!

From Tan Jiuyi's perspective, he negotiated diligently, convincing the Mingyang Sect to join forces with him to strike out, and the Green Skins were detained at Frost Origin IV for a long time without movement, providing precious time for humans to turn Upper Plateau Star into a solid fortress.

Furthermore, with the 'Furyflame' Battle Group about to arrive, there was already a great hope of defeating the Green Skin Orcs, without needing anything further from the Alliance.

This head of government might even be considering post-war matters already, such as how to limit the increasingly expanding Alliance and how to consolidate power.

The current admonishment was just planting a seed for the future.

Realizing all this, Gu Hang found it laughable.

He spoke softly, “It seems I called too early.”

Chapter 432 “`

“What do you mean?”

“Upper Plateau Star is gone, the Mechanical Ark of the Mingyang Sect is beyond saving, Founding General Chen Haixu led a small number of people to break through and flee to Jindi Star, fifteen billion human troops have fallen…”

“Don’t spout nonsense here!” Tan Jiuyi simply didn’t believe it.

But Gu Hang had no more patience to entangle with him over the truth of the matter.

“Listen, Head Tan, I’m not joking about this kind of thing, nor do I have any reason to deceive you, and I don’t need to gain anything from you anymore.

I just want to know, under these circumstances, what can I do to help the situation in the Star Domain?”

“Just wait a second…”

Tan Jiuyi was completely confused.

He would rather believe that Gu Hang had a scheme than accept the truth.

How could he believe it?

If the news was true, it meant that the sky had fallen.

“Stop having illusions, the sky has fallen.” Gu Hang said, “I know, without verification, you won’t fully believe, but I informed you of this news in advance so that you can get prepared as soon as possible.

You can try to verify the events in every way possible, but please first treat it as if it were true and plan for the worst.”

Tan Jiuyi tried to maintain his dignity as the Star Domain Head, but in reality, he was completely distraught.

“Alright, I got it, that’s all.”

He actively disconnected the communication, without giving any further instructions.

The virtual image disappeared, and Gu Hang sighed.

He had little hope for the Star Domain Government but thought that they were at least teammates, so he contacted them to ask for their plan.

However, he didn’t expect that the mettle of this teammate would be even worse than he had anticipated.

He had to rely on himself.

In fact, he could only rely on himself.

Do what man can, leave the rest to fate.

Gu Hang quickly figured out what he had to do next.

It boiled down to three aspects.

Internally, he made a call to Osenia and gave clear instructions.

Going forward, the production power of the alliance would be significantly tilted towards ship manufacturing.

Squeeze out every bit of production capacity possible; for the subsequent construction of the ships, reduce any process that takes a long time wherever possible.

This would impact the lifespan and performance of the ships, but even if they turned out to be a bunch of single-use products, it would be worth it.

The point is, ramp up the numbers for me first.

For this, the technical director of the Flying Wing Star Shipyard, Supreme Bishop Wang Zhaoran, had to work overtime.

Ordinarily, getting a Supreme Bishop to work overtime wasn't realistic, and one couldn't force it; with his special status and significant political power behind him, the Governors of Flying Wing Star not only couldn't command him but also had to flatter and cajole him.

But in special times, one couldn't care about that.

Actually, there was no need to force it.

Just informing Wang Zhaoran of the frontline news would make him smart enough to know what to do.

The assumption here is that this guy doesn't get the idea to run away.

The alliance just unearthed a batch of special agents who need to keep a close eye on this matter.

Externally, there are two aspects as well.

First, regarding the Green Skins.

The alliance had to take more initiative.

If before Gu Hang was slightly worriedwhat if he fought too fiercely here and attracted the main force of the Green Skins, what then?

But now there was no need to worry about that.

Though not very willing, Gu Hang realized that he needed to draw, to the extent possible, some of the Green Skins' forces, ideally making their faction dispatch some fleets, troops, to return and defend their base.

Gu Hang couldn't be sure that this would work, but he had to do something; otherwise, he would be leaving his fate to whether that Chieftain Titus, after exterminating the Star Domain Government and the Mingyang Sect, would spare himand obviously, he would not.

Gu Hang planned to let the United Fleet take the initiative to strike, entering the Golden Pass Star Sector, looking for the previously scattered main force of the Green Skins, trying to annihilate them.

The alliance's Land Forces would also enter into many worlds in the Golden Pass Star Sector for ground combat, aiming to take back the Golden Pass Star Sector.

This would slow down the Green Skins' plundering of resources and prevent their strength from further swelling.

At the same time, it might attract some of the Green Skins' forces from the main battlefield to come to their aid.

Would Titus' main force return?

Gu Hang judged that it would not.

Right now, Jindi Star and Yunluo Star, these two beautiful prizes, were blatantly displayed before the toothy Chieftain, and without taking down these two places, Titus would probably not return.

If he did take them, then no matter what Gu Hang did, Titus would still come back.

No difference.

Conversely, if he could take on more pressure for the frontline battle, maybe the main battlefield could hold out a bit longer, which would delay Titus' return even more.

This would not only buy more time for the alliance's development, but the ultimate goal was to make it so that Titus could not return: if the Fury Flame Battle Group arrived, even if Furyflame couldn't beat Titus, at least it was a strong army that could hold out for a longer time.

Perhaps when the Empire realized that the problems in the Dragonhawk Star Domain had grown, and even the Sect of Mechanics and the Battle Group could not handle it, they might send even more powerful reinforcements.

Gu Hang needed this kind of balance.

The second external matter was that the expansion of the Seven Horse Treaty could no longer wait; Gu Hang must integrate as many human and material resources from the Seven Horse Territory as possible.

Among the remaining six of the Seven Horse Territories, there truly weren't any particularly exceptional worlds, but that didn't mean their output was unimportant.

Within those six territories, there are seventy-eight human worlds, with a total population that can reach one hundred billion.

Even if their productivity was poor and they couldn't be relied upon to manufacture starships, Titans, or high-grade equipment for the alliance, they could still manage to lay out some ammunition and handle production tasks for logistics and supplies; that vast population is also a good place to draw troops from.

Chapter 432: War Means Burning Money_2 Especially the former, is the most important.

The amount of supplies consumed in warfare is simply astronomical.

Consider the battle at Steel Wing Star, for instance.

The consumption of various types of ammunition was outrageous.

Taking Yelisia's cruiser Quintet as an example, a single full-force volley would fire hundreds of Scalpel Missiles, twenty Heat Hammer Macro Cannons, and two Loyal Rage Macro Cannons, totaling up to a cost of 210,000 Tax Currency just for the ammunition.

The other cruisers cost about the same.

After the battle at Steel Wing Star, just the ammunition, light spears, and missiles used by the seven cruisers came to over twenty million Tax Currency; the rest of the ships would probably add up to another thirty to forty million.

And that doesn't even include the ground forces.

When an Army Group stages an artillery barrage, firing at top speed for just two minutes can deplete ten thousand rounds after ten volleys, which would also cost several tens of thousands of Tax Currency.

There were fifty Army Groups involved in the ground campaign at Steel Wing Star!

In actuality, even the ongoing operations in the Mist Horse and Eagle Horse Sectors, with a moderate intensity sustained by the Alliance, require the logistical support of two hundred million troops, including food, medicine, equipment wear and tear, and ammunition replenishment…

Every month, this alone absorbs sixty to seventy million worth of supplies.

And if you include the costs of arming the Planetary Defense Forces in those places, that number would only grow.

And keep in mind, this is at a low intensity and only covers logistical support, not factoring in the costs of replenishing units of tanks, artillery, armored vehicles, infantry, and other war units that have been destroyed.

Once the intensity of the war significantly increases, the cost of war consumption will skyrocket without a ceiling.

Just looking at the battle at Steel Wing Star, including logistical expenses and losses of both ships and ground units, the Alliance spent a staggering fifty billion Tax Currency for that one battle!

War is simply burning money, burning it in a way that makes people's hearts panic.

Fortunately, communications with the Star Domain Government have been severed now, so we don't have to bear the burden of Imperial Tax.

Otherwise, the Alliance wouldn't be able to sustain this burn rate.

How are we supposed to fight this war if we don't integrate the entirety of Seven Horse Territory and seize their Imperial Tax for ourselves?

Never mind that Gu Hang still wants to go on the offensive, to alleviate the pressure on the main battlefield, without additional revenue, the Alliance can at best maintain the current war intensity.

A few more battles like the one at Steel Wing Star, and the Alliance's own economy would collapse, at least mobilization at the third level certainly wouldn't hold up, it would need to be raised to the second or even the first level.

What about the other planets that just sit back and cheer us on?

That won't do.

They all need to get on the battlefield!

Even if it's truly a backward world as poor as Extinct Soil Star, providing agricultural products, engaging in preliminary food processing, textiles, or supplying some minerals and transporting them to the core worlds of the Tianma Star Sector allowing the Alliance to reduce the pressure on necessities and raw materials, to redirect more workers and productive forces into expanding shipyards and producing more military equipmentwould also be a form of help.

Moreover, integration must be swift.

Previously, Gu Hang thought that after winning the battle at Steel Wing Star, he still had time.

He could use gentler methods, plotting slowly.

But now the overall situation of the war has changed drastically, and Gu Hang no longer has the luxury of time.

For the sake of speed, certain special measures, which would normally be used cautiously, now must be employed immediately.

After some thought, Gu Hang issued a directive to Osenia, Lambert, and Tadeusz respectively.

…

At Flying Wing Star, in the official residence of Chief Justice Lambert.

This place is not only Lambert Hodgson's residence; it is also the office location of the Alliance Legal Affairs Center, located on Flying Wing Star.

At this moment, Lambert Chief Justice, who had just received Mr.

Gu's instructions, was feeling a headache.

Sitting in front of him, a man with a stern face, is the current head of the Alliance Legal Affairs Center – Central Investigation Bureau, named Gustav Isaacson.

"Arno Chinko, you should know who he is, right?

His security clearance is high, though still visible."

"Yes.

Actually, I don't even need to look at the files; his surname itself is sensitive."

"Since you know who he is, why did you send him to Baishuo Star?"

"Per your request.

"What?"

"You asked me to dispatch my best agents to Purple Horse Sector to conduct special operations, so I sent Arno there."

"You…

huh, do you really have no one else?"

“I do, but none as outstanding as him.”

“You’re unbelievable.” Lambert said somewhat speechlessly, “Okay, now Mr.

Gu wants us to initiate special operations ahead of schedule, and the first place to act is Baishuo Star at the Purple Horse Capital.

There’s going to be a regime change.”

“Arno will fulfill his mission, I believe in him.”

“Haven’t you thought about what if he fails, what if something happens to him?”

“That would be our responsibility, for not fulfilling the mission entrusted to us by Mr.

Gu and the people.

I am willing to bear all consequences.

As for Arno, if something really happens, then we would have lost a reliable and loyal comrade, which would deeply sadden me, but such is our duty.”

“Prime Minister Osenia will flay you!”

“No, she won’t, I believe in Prime Minister Osenia’s consciousness.”

“Are you implying something about me?

Doubting my consciousness?”

“I never said that.”

“You, you…” Lambert was genuinely at a loss for what to do with Isaacson.

This guy was stubborn and intractable, but indeed he was a rare talent under Lambert’s command, loyal and competent, or else he wouldn’t have been promoted to head the Central Investigation Bureau.

However, such excessive uprightness and indifference were truly troublesome qualities.

Chapter 432, Fighting a War is Like Burning Money_3

Arno Chinko, this is Osenia’s younger brother.

Back then, on Rage Owl Star, Osenia came to Mr. Gu’s camp as a refugee, not alone, but with her brother.

Escaping from the pus-filled monsters and famine at home, Osenia suffered untold hardships along the way, barely managing to save Arno Chinko’s life.

Fourteen years have passed since then.

The little boy, who was only eleven at the time, is now a fine young man.

After Osenia rose to a high position, the young man’s living conditions improved significantly, and he also received the best education the Alliance had to offer.

He lived up to expectations, his grades always impressive.

He graduated two years ago.

With his achievements, he could have had a bright future; having the identity of Osenia's brother made it easy to land a high position.

However, on one hand, Osenia herself was somewhat worried, being a Prime Minister was like walking on thin ice, with enormous pressure every day. Bringing her brother into this might invite controversy; on the other hand, Arno himself had no interest in politics or becoming a civil servant.

He once thought about joining the military, but eventually, Osenia persuaded him to go to Lambert's place.

Although some connections were still used, Lambert's law center is an institution parallel to the Alliance Government.

Then, the young man forcefully made his way into the most unsafe among many institutions under Lambert: the Alliance Central Investigation Bureau.

This is one of the top three external intelligence agencies of the Alliance.

During his two-year training, he performed exceptionally well; especially recently, with a performance that seemed to suddenly blossom, he quickly became one of the best newcomers in the Central Investigation Bureau.

Of course, it was only after Isaacson, the director, reported this to Lambert that he became aware of it.

Lambert himself was too busy to personally check the training performance of a young agent.

If he were to be honest, he was a bit skeptical at the beginning.

Perhaps Arno did perform well, but to be called 'the best' could very likely be an exaggeration due to his identity.

But he still shared the news with Osenia, to give the sister a bit of joy.

Back then, he thought Isaacson had ‘improved’, knowing to say things that please the ear, and knowing to exaggerate a bit the achievements of someone with a special identity like Arno.

He wasn’t sure whether to be happy or worried.

But now, it seems that the truth is not as such.

Isaacson is still the same Isaacson; Arno is probably indeed the best agent, hence being assigned such an important mission.

And indeed, Isaacson didn’t consider the identity issue at all, strictly adhering to sending the most suitable person to the most suitable place.

Lambert knew this was right, that’s how it should be.

But still…

Had he become a little forgetful of his original aspirations?

Was it as Isaacson said, that his own judgment was beginning to falter?

He couldn’t help but begin to reflect on himself.

During this process, Isaacson sat upright and proper in front of him.

“Alright, you can go back now. Pay close attention to this mission, it has nothing to do with the young man’s identity, it’s an important mission for the Alliance, and we cannot afford mistakes!”

“Yes!” Isaacson stood up; after a moment’s hesitation, he still asked, “What about Prime Minister Osenia?”

“I will speak to her.”

“Yes!”

After watching Isaacson leave, Lambert made a call to Osenia, explaining the situation.

Osenia was silent for a long time.

Just as Lambert started to feel unsettled, worried that the Alliance Premier was very angry and about to explode, Osenia’s voice finally came through:

“I understand.”

…

Purple Horse Sector, Baishuo Star.

This is the capital planet of the Purple Horse Sector, classified as a civilized world, with a population of nine billion, and an economic development level of 2.

Although lacking any outstanding specialty products, as a civilized world, the overall productivity cannot be too shoddy; people here live a fairly good life, and the little shipyards at the starport can even build some civilian ships.

The entire Purple Horse Sector has a population of thirty-eight billion across seventeen worlds. Apart from Capital Hundred Shuo Star, the many other worlds are also quite decent, without any particular lagging behind, and there are even several with a development level of 2.

Besides the Tianma Star Sector, Seven Horse Territory's Purple Horse is the best developed.

Leader of Purple Horse—Ms. Isquier Zelos, has a decent grip on the entire sector, backed by the support of the sector's governors.

With high support and substantial strength, among the neighboring star sectors, she is the most resolute against the Seven Horse Pact.

From her perspective, supporting the Alliance in the Green Skins war is natural, but signing the Seven Horse Pact is unnecessary.

The former is the duty of an imperial star sector head, while the latter means a change of nature.

Wouldn't that mean incorporating Purple Horse Sector into the control of the Alliance?

Not officially joining the Alliance, but nearly the same as changing all officials and governmental bodies of all planets to the model of the Alliance.

What independence would there be in administration, military, or economics when all resources must be at the disposal of others, doing whatever they command?

This stance also garnered support from many governors within the Purple Horse Sector.

They heard that the planetary governors of Tianma Star Sector are all honorary positions, either directly managed by the famous Mr. Gu or remotely held by Alliance high officials, without any real power.

Chapter 432, War is Burning Money_4

And they were the true governors, the de facto emperors of their own planets.

Although they had not joined the Alliance, merely entered the framework of the Seven Horses Treaty, many of the conditions within that framework still imposed considerable restrictions on them.

Besides, who knew what the future would hold?

Boundaries were always pushed, little by little.

However, when the Iron Tooth Orcs brought war to Beiyuan Star, and the governors of Mist Horse desperately sent out calls for help and signed the Seven Horses Treaty, waiting for the Alliance's Tianma soldiers to come and save the world, the governors of Purple Horse underwent some subtle changes in their mentality.

On one hand, they rejected the pleas for aid from the governors of Mist Horse, claiming themselves to be poor, with nothing to spare; even if they had the intention to help, they lacked the capacity to deploy troops and were genuinely helpless.

On the other hand, they felt a shared sense of urgency as they watched the people of Mist Horse deeply engulfed in the flames of war.

Beiyuan Star, that was the world closest to Purple Horse Sector within the Mist Horse Star District. The war fires burning there made the temperature palpable, especially for the governors of East Garden I, II, and III.

They couldn't help but worry.

If the Green Skins really came knocking, what then?

Just as they neither went to nor could save Beiyuan Star, it was likely that the other worlds in the Purple Horse Sector would adopt the same attitude towards them.

This was a matter of life and death.

Under such pressure, the Seven Horses Treaty suddenly seemed quite appealing.

This mentality reached its pinnacle after the Alliance won the battle at Steel Wing Star and swiftly pulled the Mist Horse Star District out of the flames of war.

And the reason it was at its peak was because very soon, they were about to undergo yet another change of heart.

The Alliance was so powerful, surely there wouldn't be anything left for them to do, right?

Bordering Purple Horse was Tianma, the Alliance's main base, and Mist Horse had joined the treaty and came under the Alliance's protection. Wouldn't that mean the Alliance would surely stand at the forefront, blocking the Green Skins?

Whether I sign with the Alliance or not, won't they still have to stand in front of me?

As for the Alliance's thinly veiled implication of "if the Green Skins can't hit you, I can," they understood but pretended not to.

The deterrent effect was somewhat present, but overall, they were skeptical.

We're all part of the Empire, would you dare to openly strike me?

It was exactly with this mindset that they once again started to play coy, banding together around the lead of Zelos once more.

They also didn't dare to offend the diplomats from the Alliance too much.

The Alliance had already demonstrated their terrifying strength.

But besides burning bridges, there were many other options available to them.

For instance, they could shift the blame onto Zelos.

“It’s not that we don’t want to sign, we truly cannot. Our Purple Horse Sector has always been under Zelos’s head; her influence is immense, we can’t possibly bypass her and sign the treaty on our own, that would be impossible to explain to the Star Sector Government.”

That had become the unified excuse of the governors of Purple Horse.

The officials from the Alliance Foreign Affairs Department certainly knew these were just excuses, but with the other side stubbornly sticking to their story, it was difficult to take action.

However, if their excuse was the sector head, then they would just have to talk to that head.

Hardliner?

Good.

Upon the capital planet of Purple Horse Sector, Baishuo Star, a storm was brewing.

Arno Chinko, dressed in the traditional attire of Baishuo Star, entered a tavern located in the lower district of Shuoguo City, the planetary capital.

He saw the tavern’s sign, as well as the assurance that the safety mark was still intact, confirming that the place was secure.

He dipped his hat lower and made his way to the lowest level of the tavern.

Chapter 433, Subversion Operation

Pushing open the door to the innermost room on the ground floor of the tavern, under the dim light, Arno Chinko saw a small table with a man and a woman standing beside it.

Upon hearing the door open, both individuals looked over, their hands stealthily reaching for their weapons.

Arno made three complex hand signals in front of his abdomen with his left hand.

The pair's tension eased somewhat, and they made different hand gestures in response.

The three of them spent half a minute exchanging signals before completing the complex but necessary ritual of verifying each other's identity.

"Comrade, hello, I'm Martin from Military Intelligence."

"I'm Amanda from Foreign Intelligence."

After both people revealed their affiliations, Arno also said, "I'm Bentek from the Investigative Bureau."

He gave a fake name, as he believed the other two did as well.

The names would definitely not be real; even after confirming each other's identity, there was no need to reveal true names. A pseudonym would suffice as a code name.

As long as the background information was correct, that was all that mattered.

This 'meeting' was an encounter between three major intelligence agencies of the Alliance.

It was an operation highly valued by the Alliance, one that no single agency could complete alone. The three organizations, which seldom interacted except at the higher levels for intelligence sharing, were now collaborating directly on the ground level, an uncommon occurrence.

Dispensing with pleasantries, they quickly got down to business.

Amanda began, “In two days, at noon, Zelos will arrive at the ‘restaurant’. He’s been invited by several wealthy merchants and politicians from local planets and has accepted.”

Arno cautiously inquired, “The merchants and politicians, are they reliable? Could they leak our operation?”

“No, they don’t know what we are planning to do.”

Arno nodded slightly, then shared his side: “The arrangements for strikes and riots are ready. We estimate that at least thirty thousand people will take to the streets to protest in two days. Weapons and equipment have been distributed, and at that time, the Planetary Government and Star Sector Government’s palaces will face challenges. The protest march will pass by the ‘restaurant’.”

Then, he turned his gaze to Martin and Amanda.

Amanda said, “The local police might intervene, which could be challenging.”

Martin stated, “Several of our comrades will be embedded within the marching crowd to help neutralize the threat from the local police force; if necessary, the special forces warriors infiltrated in the crowd will also take action. However, that would make a big commotion, not a move we want to make unless absolutely necessary.”

Arno asked, “What about the military?”

With confidence, Martin asserted, “I can ensure that the military will be very slow to act on any orders to suppress the uprising, extremely slow.”

Arno didn’t know how Martin would fulfill his promise. It might be that he had swayed the commander of the troops guarding the capital city, or perhaps Military Intelligence had infiltrated a significant number of its operatives to halt military action.

But regardless of the specific methods, Arno didn’t care, nor did he ask further.

As long as the objectives were achieved, that was all that mattered.

The three huddled together, once again confirming the details and process of the operation, before concluding their secret meeting.

Leaving the tavern with different identities and guises, they departed one after another.

Yet as they left, they never realized that on the balcony of a small building opposite the tavern, a woman had been watching them all along.

She was Milia Derong, an Alliance Demon Hunter.

The Alliance had eight official intelligence organizations on record, but in reality, there were nine.

There was also the Demon Hunter Organization.

The Demon Hunters were originally established under the Alliance Legal Affairs Center, led by Lambert, and even spearheaded the Alliance's first anti-corruption wave.

Later, the Demon Hunters were separated from the Legal Affairs Center, no longer under the leadership of the Chief Justice, but became a direct subsidiary of the Governor's Office.

They operated both internally and externally, responsible for intelligence and direct action, and even had the authority to handle tasks without trial.

Sanctioned by the governor, act first, report later!

This was the essence of the Demon Hunters!

Given the importance of this operation, the Demon Hunters were also involved.

Milia Derong was among the oldest members of the Demon Hunters, being the instigator of that initial anti-corruption wave; she also participated in the Korolya Plague War. Although she didn't handle frontline combat, she and her Demon Hunter Squad played a crucial role in controlling the politics of Mingyan City.

With deep experience and significant contributions, she was now a leader of one of the several independent teams within the Demon Hunter Organization.

This time, the operation on Baishuo Star was directly mandated by the Alliance leaders, of utmost importance. With the full commitment of the three major intelligence agencies, naturally, the presence of the Demon Hunters was required.

However, the Demon Hunters still operated independently. The Demon Hunters had some knowledge of what the three agencies were up to but were not privy to the full details unless they chose to share their intelligence proactively.

With more intelligence support and greater authority to mobilize resources, and considering that all their agents were at least trained by the Demon Hunters, skilled in various espionage techniques and bolstered by Spiritual Energy…

They had infiltrated Baishuo Star even deeper than the three agencies and had their own set of operation plans.

However, after learning about Arno Chinko's plan to unite the power of the three agencies for the action in two days, Milia took a keen interest.

Chapter 433, Subversive Action_2

The overall plan seems plausible, and the chances of success appear to be quite high, indeed capable of achieving the goals the alliance desires.

In that case, it might as well lend a hand.

If it succeeds, it would save the trouble of exerting more effort later on.

If it fails, the Demon Hunters also have their backup scheme.

…

Two days later.

Arno Chinko, dressed as a waiter, was doing his job in a luxurious hotel.

Clearing tables, serving dishes, carrying plates, pushing trolleys… nothing more than that.

He had been doing this work for two months.

If nothing unexpected happened, this should be his last day.

The luxurious hotel where he worked was also the mission location codenamed ‘hotel.’

At this moment, the hotel was somewhat empty. Today, they only arranged for one group of guests.

Many political dignitaries and representatives of wealthy businessmen were here to host a banquet for Ms. Zelos, the head of the Star Sector.

Such distinguished guests, of course, required separate treatment.

In fact, two days before, ‘hotel’ had already ceased operations to the public, fully preparing for today’s banquet. At the same time, the security detail of the Star Sector head had also been stationed in the ‘hotel’ since then, conducting safety inspections on the hotel and remaining onsite to avoid any potential hazards.

As the head of the Star Sector, Zelos's security measures were very strong.

And all these were things that Arno and others had anticipated long ago.

He diligently did his job, just as his 'supervisor' had repeatedly instructed over the past two days, saying that the guests' identities were significant, and no mistakes were allowed.

He couldn't see or hear what was happening outside, but he guessed that the first step of the plan must have already begun.

…

Inside the 'hotel,' the banquet had already started. Ms. Zelos, who arrived on time as a VIP, had just mingled with others, engaging in a round of non-critical conversation, when a security personnel came to her side.

"Head of the Sector…"

Hearing the soft call, Zelos, with her perfect smile, gestured to the person she had been talking to and then moved aside, her expression becoming serious as she listened to the report.

The content was brief: Demonstrations had erupted in Shuoguo City.

The protest was mainly demanding the government to release journalists, commentators, and scholars arrested over the past month.

The charges against those people were the preposterous 'espionage.'

The accusation was laughable!

Was it because the Planetary Government and Star Sector Government didn't want to join the Seven Horse Covenant, and those media people did some analysis on why the government was reluctant to join?

Was arresting people the answer to contents that displeased the government?

That was far too absurd!

This was a narrative that emerged a few months ago across Baishuo Star, mentioned in newspapers, broadcasts, television shows, magazines… various media outlets. Some experts jumped out, claiming that joining the Seven Horse Covenant was a good idea, as it would bring protection from the alliance and completely resolve security issues. Mutual assistance was also the responsibility of human worlds.

Moreover, despite the broken contact with the Star Domain and being unable to remit the Imperial Tax, the Planetary Government continued to collect it; not only that, but they also imposed an additional war tax on top of the Imperial Tax, without halting ordinary taxation.

The exorbitant taxes were unbearable, and after being incited by various opinions, the call to join the Seven Horse Covenant grew, with the belief that it would be safer and life would be easier.

Additionally, some conspiracy theories suggested that the refusal to join the Seven Horse Covenant was not about freedom, independence, or Baishuo Star people deciding their own fate, but rather about the higher officials' unwillingness to relinquish power, an entirely selfish act without regard for the big picture.

This theory wasn't without reason, as quite a number of citizens found it persuasive.

Judging by this alone, it was rash to label the outspoken media people as spies.

Dictatorship! Tyranny!

Moreover, the charge of espionage was ridiculous!

Even if they had taken money from the alliance, how did that make them spies? Wasn't the alliance separate from the imperial forces? It was said that the Star Domain Government even authorized them to establish the Seven Horse Covenant, so how could they be spies?

Was Baishuo Star not part of the Empire World? Did the government consider itself separate from the imperial forces, thereby deeming the alliance's representatives as spies?

It made no sense!

Therefore, such a protest occurred.

Knowing about the protest, Zelos of course wasn't in the best of spirits.

She had at least three concerns.

First was the annoyance from the troublemakers.

Second, the dissatisfaction with the Governor of Baishuo.

Such a protest involving tens of thousands of people could only be described as widespread public outrage. The heavy-handed and unwise way the Governor of Baishuo dealt with the media people was the direct cause.

And the fundamental reason behind it all lay in the corruption of the Planetary Government.

For many years, Baishuo Star had faced several problems: excessive taxation, failure to solve the high unemployment rate, and the long-term stagnation of the people's standard of living.

These accumulating issues, recently compounded by the Green Skins problem resulting in increased taxes and journalists being arrested, showed signs of erupting.

It was because the Governor of Baishuo had done such a terrible job that all these problems had arisen!

The third concern was her vigilance.

Despite the boiling public discontent and the presence of a spark that could ignite further unrest, the situation had escalated so suddenly and fiercely that she couldn't help but suspect the involvement of some hostile forces stirring trouble.

Could public dissent really have reached such depths?

It seemed unlikely.

However, even if it had, Zelos still believed it was no big deal.

It was just a demonstration, after all.

The police had already been dispatched, and the Planetary Defense Forces had received orders and begun to take up defensive positions. Should any signs of the situation worsening or spiraling out of control appear, the Defense Forces would be deployed.

In fact, it was highly unlikely that things would escalate to that point, as the Capital Police Department should be able to resolve the issue.

But the news that followed made her feel more and more uneasy.

Firstly, there was a shootout in the streets between the mob and the police, and surprisingly, the mob had quite a few weapons!

This almost confirmed to Zelos that there had to be someone pulling the strings behind the scenes!

What was their purpose?

Who could it be, and what was their goal? To overthrow the current government?

She had lost all interest in the current banquet, found a room, asked not to be disturbed, and then placed a call to the Governor of Baishuo, ordering him to mobilize the Defense Army immediately to suppress the situation.

The Governor of Baishuo, sweating profusely and stuttering, said it probably wouldn't come to that, that police reinforcements had already been called in.

Zelos flew into a rage and scolded, "Things are never that simple! Deploy the Defense Army immediately! Whatever those shadowy figures behind the scenes have planned must be quashed quickly. We can't allow any more time for the situation to ferment, do you understand?!"

"Yes… I understand!"

After hanging up the phone, Zelos felt a bit more at ease.

But shortly after, she heard some noisy commotion.

"What's going on?"

Her personal security guard spoke into the intercom for a moment and then replied, "Some civilians affected by the riot are seeking refuge, trying to enter the hotel for safety. The hotel security and our men have stopped them."

Upon hearing this, Zelos was about to speak when she heard the sounds of explosions and gunfire, and they were close!

"Someone from among the civilians is charging the hotel!"

"They are strong!"

“Ah!!!”

Screams were heard through the communication.

Now, Zelos truly became anxious!

Were they coming for me?

She suddenly looked towards her personal bodyguard.

He quickly said, “Leader, please follow me, we need to leave this place. Rest assured, in our security team we have Spiritual Energy masters and elite squads, we will ensure your safety!”

“Alright.”

Zelos knew this was not the time to panic.

And the situation hadn’t reached a point of no return.

Attempting to assassinate her in this way was simply naïve.

Her security team included three accomplished Spiritual Energy users, and among the bodyguards, there were thirty elites clad in Feedback-Type Power Armor.

Breaking through their protection to threaten her would not be easy.

Furthermore, if they could just stall for a bit, the army would arrive. She could also actively seek to meet with the military, accompanied by her security team.

The matter of her safety was assured, for the time being.

At this moment, Zelos was filled with rage!

She vowed to make the puppet masters behind all this pay a heavy price!

No matter who the mastermind was!

In fact, she already had some suspicions about who it might be…

Chapter 434, Assassination

The operatives hidden among the civilians weren't having much success storming the hotel.

Despite the continuous explosions and gunfire, Arno knew that the operatives positioned by the Alliance were unlikely to breach the 'hotel' and complete their mission.

The intelligence gathered earlier had indicated that the security level around Zelos was very high. The elite guard was equipped with Feedback-Type Power Armor, and there were both Spiritual Energy users and Anti-Psychic Devices to contend with, making the assassination exceedingly difficult.

The Alliance warriors hidden outside were indeed elite. They were either agents from military intelligence or special forces élite from the military regiments. But because they had infiltrated surreptitiously for a surprise attack, they couldn't bring heavy equipment, relying only on light weaponry and hand grenades, with at most a few rocket launchers or grenade launchers-like gadgets, it was normal that they couldn't break through.

But the target was never there in the first place.

After the hotel was struck, what would Zelos's reaction be?

She shouldn't be panicking, but it would be only natural for her to try to leave the 'hotel'.

She could only bring a limited number of her security team with her, and even though the ‘hotel’ had been swept for security, it definitely wasn’t as safe as her own official residence. There, she would have more numerous and elite guards for protection, multiple escape routes, and the ability to directly communicate with various forces, making it a safer place and more suitable for coordinating efforts after a significant incident.

So, run.

Arno, who’d been ‘hurriedly’ pushing a dining cart along the corridor, was rudely shoved aside by a bodyguard and sent crashing into a private room.

Through the door of the private room, which had been left slightly ajar, Arno saw a stream of security personnel passing by.

He couldn’t see who was in the middle of the crowd, but he could guess.

Having worked at the ‘hotel’ for this period, he had become very familiar with the layout.

After taking stock, Arno knew they were on one of the two routes he had prepared in advance.

Then there was no problem.

Estimating their pace, Arno silently counted the seconds, his hand reaching into his pocket where there was a remote control.

When the time came, he gently pressed it.

Instantly, the roaring sound of an explosion resounded, followed by searing heat waves that he could feel even here.

Those were high-performance thermite bombs!

Installing them had been no small feat.

Zelos's guard had been extremely cautious and vigilant, conducting checks constantly over the past two days.

Confident in his skills though he was, Arno had not set up the bombs in advance. He didn't want to gamble on this chance; if they were detected, today's banquet would have to be canceled due to security risks, ruining their many plans.

Instead, he chose this very day, after witnessing the security sweep, to install the bombs.

Key areas like the banquet hall and lounges were out of the question, as they were constantly guarded.

But after all, it wasn't feasible for guards to cover every location in the hotel. That was unrealistic.

From the banquet hall and lounges to the garage, there were several porticos, corridors, and galleries to pass through and one needed to use either an elevator or three staircases… In any case, it was impossible for guards to be present at all times; a patrol every fifteen minutes was already quite stringent.

And today, Arno had relied on those intervals of less than fifteen minutes, after the final security check, to complete the preparations for setting the bombs.

When armed conflict broke out, naturally, the patrol team wouldn't have time to continue their rounds. They would either gather near Zelos's location to perform security duties or engage the armed attackers at the hotel's entrance.

This was Arno's last, and best, opportunity.

He seized the time before the patrol was diverted and Zelos evacuated, to finish placing the bombs and then, to detonate them on the spot.

Though he couldn’t bring in large bombs due to infiltration restrictions and could only bring ones the size of hand grenades, and also because he couldn’t be sure through which exit the target would evacuate, leading him to place bombs at all necessary locations, only two of them would actually be effective.

But those were thermite bombs.

Even an Interstellar Warrior’s ultimate Powered Armor wouldn’t withstand a thermite bomb.

If it’s big enough, such a bomb could even destroy a Starship—some Boarding Tactics involve an Elite Assault Team getting to the core of a Starship and detonating a massive thermite bomb.

The device used now was small, but the target wasn’t a Starship.

The explosion had probably occurred in a passageway. The splattered high-temperature liquid from two thermite explosions would be enough to engulf the entire area, and no creature inside could survive.

Of course, that was theoretical.

As an agent, Arno had to verify with his own eyes whether he had truly completed the mission.

Drawing his pistol, he stepped out of the room.

This was a laser pistol, which was naturally quiet, and with a specially made silencer, it was practically soundless.

Approaching the explosion site cautiously, Arno saw a few injured bodyguards, helping each other out.

When they saw Arno, they also paused, with one trying to speak up, but they were restrained by their companion.

Chapter 434: Assassination_2

They saw the gun in Arno's hand.

Arno fired three times in quick succession, three pale purple beams piercing through the bodies of three men, killing them.

Then, he quickened his pace, moving closer to the center of the explosion.

Along the way, he saw many remnants.

They appeared to be a certain model of Feedback-Type Power Armor, slightly different from the Servant Gods used by the Alliance, likely purchased by Zelos through trade from other places.

Even the elites in Feedback-Type Power Armor couldn't withstand the thermal bombs. Multiple parts of the armors had suffered severe melting.

Continuing forward, closer to the center of the explosion, Arno's gaze suddenly tightened.

He noticed an oddly intact area of the ground ahead.

Several thoughts flashed quickly through his mind, and he almost confirmed the most likely one: a miniaturized personal energy shield!

Such a device was rare and expensive, but for someone like Zelos, having one wouldn't be surprising.

And if there was such a device, the likelihood of survival under a thermal bomb would be greatly increased.

Arno's gaze was steady as he quickened his steps.

Having come this far, he couldn't let Zelos survive.

He had to personally handle this unexpected complication.

He deduced that there should be no guards left around Zelos.

The relatively intact area was just about large enough for one person to stand. This matched the performance of the personal energy shields mentioned in the knowledge Arno had learned, which were only large enough to cloak a single person and couldn't protect a second.

The rest of the guards must have already perished under the thermal bombs.

Of course, it was not impossible for a lucky individual to have been outside the blast radius at the moment of the explosion.

Anything was possible, but Arno still needed to follow up and see for himself.

Even if there were other survivors, he'd have to find a way to deal with them.

He would have to improvise then.

The traces left by the survivor from the explosion were quite evident to him.

Tracking them all the way, Arno's mood grew heavier.

He was almost at the underground parking garage.

There, he hadn't had the chance to set up bombs.

And for sure, there would still be guards on duty there. Having heard the explosion, they would probably come to respond.

That would complicate things.

Although they had a contingency plan for if they couldn't kill Zelos in the 'hotel' and had measures in place for what to do next, things were certainly better the simpler they were.

He couldn't help but quicken his pace, even forsaking the need for secrecy in his actions.

As he passed a narrow path, he squinted and slowed his steps— he observed some changes in the survivor's trail.

His gaze shifted to a small storage closet nearby, filled with cleaning supplies, with its door slightly ajar.

Arno made a judgement, muted his footsteps, and approached silently.

Suddenly, he saw a metallic reflection!

Instinctively dodging to the side, a beam grazed past him.

Without lingering on the close call, Arno retaliated with a swing of his hand.

Firing continuously, he sent pale purple beams into the compartment and, pushing off the ground with his feet, lunged forward!

There was no longer any movement inside the compartment.

Arno, pressing against the wall next to the compartment, cautiously reached out and fully opened the door, then aimed his gun inside.

He saw Ms. Zelos collapsed inside.

The Star Sector head was not yet dead, but a hole the size of a wrist had been melted through her abdomen by a laser. The residual heat from the laser shot was still causing continuous internal damage to her flesh and organs.

She was indeed not dead, but that was about to change.

Yet, Zelos thought she still had a chance of being saved.

If she could receive medical attention now, given the powerful medical technology and the relentless investment in medical resources, even replacing parts of her body with mechanical structures… she had a fair chance of survival.

That was if medical help arrived in time.

Her eyes, filled with the desire to live, turned towards Arno Chinko. She tried to speak, struggling:

“I know you are from the Alliance… save me… I will sign…”

Before she could finish, Arno fired.

Two shots hit her chest and neck; then, lowering the power, he added a shot to her forehead.

He had reduced the power to avoid making the hole too large and destroying the facial features.

Straight after, Arno pulled out a miniature camera, took several shots from different angles, and then left without a trace of mercy.

A live witness, definitely not needed.

For this operation, a dead Zelos was more useful than a live one.

The Alliance did not believe she would completely change sides. After the assassination, only hatred would remain.

Actually, taking the head or the entire body would have been ideal.

But at the moment, he didn't have the conditions to do so and couldn't take Zelos's body with him.

The photos would have to suffice.

Back in the employee dormitory, he was taking refuge with other hotel staff, and he found the opportunity to send a message each to Amanda and Martin.

The first phase of the operation was complete, and the following steps could proceed.

…

An assassination is not enough to overturn a government.

However, Zelos's death still caused huge ripples.

Zelos was very special in her position. As the head of the Star Sector, different from the governors of the various planets who could rise from below, this role was expressly appointed by the Empire to act on behalf of the imperial will, to integrate the Imperial forces within the Star Sector.

The Planetary Governor was, of course, appointed by the Empire to exercise imperial power on the planet. However, the more important role of the Planetary Governor was to represent the rights and interests of the planet's local populace; without resolving these, the mere title of 'Governor' was insufficient.

But for the head of the Star Sector, the title alone was enough.

In normal circumstances, if the head of the Star Sector died, the Star Domain Government would just appoint someone new to fill the position. Although individuals differ in capability and the networks they've built, in the end, the function they performed was consistent.

But now, with communications cut off, a new head of the Star Sector couldn't be replaced.

And with the existence of the head of the Star Sector, which had unified the Purple Horse Sector, things started to fall apart without him.

They found it very difficult to produce a new leader from within their midst in a short time period.

And even more events unfolded within Baishuo Star.

The government of Baishuo Star was, of course, controlled by the Governor of Baishuo. Although he listened to Zelos quite a bit, he wasn't dead, and the governmental structure of Baishuo Star hadn't collapsed; it wouldn't just crumble because of Zelos's death.

However, assassinating Zelos was evidently just the beginning.

Soon, someone from within the rioting populace stepped forward to take responsibility for Zelos's death.

It was an organization that called itself 'The Party of Salvation.' They took the slogans from the previous protests as their manifesto, clearly defined their organizational structure, and claimed credit for the assassination of Zelos.

They went a step further and demanded that the current government step down; they would take its place.

The capital's riots were never fully suppressed, and even came close to the government offices at one point.

The police were beaten down and disheveled by the mobs.

But all this began to gradually improve after the initial military intervention.

In this matter, Arno had questioned Martin.

But he could not be contacted anymore.

The fact that the Defense Army, previously suppressed and inert, was now starting to mobilize, led both Arno and Amanda to conjecture that something had likely happened to 'Martin,' signaling a probable failure of the Bureau of Military Affairs' operation.

The police and a few guards remained steadfast in defending the city, preventing the rioters from breaking in for the time being; the Defense Army was about to enter the city from outside.

The situation was becoming quite dire.

At this point, both Arno and Amanda were almost ready to decide to abandon the mission.

In fact, with the assassination of Zelos completed, they had already fulfilled the foundational part of the mission assigned by headquarters.

The further challenge of overthrowing the current government and establishing a local administration friendly to the Alliance could wait if it couldn't be accomplished immediately.

After all, with the Purple Horse Sector scattered and disorganized following the death of Zelos, it would be easy to manipulate later on; there were plenty of tactics still available.

Yet Arno was still somewhat unwilling to let go.

He hoped that his first significant mission could be completed as perfectly as possible.

But he was also very rational.

Seeking perfection in everything could end up causing undesirable outcomes.

Now, the most sensible course of action was to move the hard-earned forces developed on the home planet underground, halt the riots, continue to accumulate strength, and await further instructions.

However, just as he and Amanda had decided to do this, there was a major turn in the situation:

On the third night of the riots, they saw brilliant flashes of light in the sky.

It was in the direction of the Baishuo Starport.

The starport of Baishuo Star was situated in orbit right above the capital, Shuoguo City.

In the early hours of the morning, they received a message: Continue to lead the riots, and support will come.

Chapter 435, Act According to the Script

“Is this the External Intelligence Agency?”

“Is this the Investigative Bureau?”

When Arno and Amanda met again, they asked each other simultaneously.

But apparently, it was neither.

What they referred to was, of course, the incident that occurred on Baishuo Starport, where flashes of light had burst forth in the night sky.

There was no specific intelligence yet, but it was clear that something major had happened at the Starport, and it was the work of the Alliance.

Otherwise, they wouldn't have received orders from their superiors to continue their mission.

"It wasn't us. Could it be the Military Intelligence Bureau? But Martin has already lost contact…" Amanda was doubtful.

"Either he's actually fine and has just moved locations, or there are other agents from the Military Intelligence Bureau in action, or it's some other department of the Alliance," Arno offered several conjectures, "but all of this is irrelevant now. What we need to do is to carry out the orders from our superiors. Since we've ensured that there will be reinforcements, our operation must continue."

"I understand," Amanda nodded slightly but soon felt troubled, "It's easy to say, but so hard to do. The politicians and business owners I've been in contact with are all wavering. I've lost contact with many, and some have even started to doubt my identity. My previous cover identities are probably all blown."

Hearing this, Arno also felt it was a tricky situation.

Although the rebellion was significant and they took advantage of the chaos to assassinate Zelos, the Star Sector leader, in reality, they didn't have many core operatives.

The scale of the rebellion might have been around fifty thousand people; among them, only one-tenth dared to take up arms and fight. When the rebellion turned into an armed conflict with the local planetary police force, most of the rebels had already scattered in fear.

And this one-tenth, just a few thousand, were merely at the level of armed workers with little military training to speak of.

If it weren't for the backbone made up of agents from the Investigative Bureau and the Military Intelligence Bureau, along with some elite special forces brought in by the Military Intelligence Bureau, the military wouldn't have needed to step in, the police alone would have been able to suppress it.

Even so, that the rebellion lasted vigorously until this third day was largely due to the efforts of the Alliance Foreign Affairs Department.

An Alliance diplomat was here constantly running around; the External Intelligence Agency, under the Foreign Affairs Department, which Amanda and her colleagues belonged to, had shaken some of the local politicians and wealthy merchants. The covert help they provided also played a pivotal role.

Some police forces were tied down; some private militias went unused; even some of the supplies came from them.

But now that they were wavering, much of the help had vanished.

Moreover, after daybreak, the military was likely to move in.

What to do?

Arno didn't know either.

They had taken the Shuoguo City Government, but the Governor of Baishuo wasn't there, and most of the government officials had already slipped away.

"For now, we can only hold the government building," he said.

Arno couldn't think of a better plan.

“Let’s hope the support from our superiors is strong enough and arrives in time.”

…

The wee hours of the morning, the sky was still dim. The light drizzle from the night had turned into a torrential downpour at the break of dawn. The sky was covered with dark clouds, rain was pouring, and thunder boomed.

Arno Chinko, who personally led the team defending the Shuoguo City Government building, was now engulfed in fierce combat.

Not only had the police intensified their offensive, but a vanguard from the Planetary Defense Force had also arrived.

Despite being only roughly the size of an infantry battalion, their presence brought a crushing change.

The Planetary Defense Force was typically battered by the Green Skins, but in truth, they were not weak; they were, after all, a regular army within the planet.

Their side, mainly consisting of armed rioters, truly couldn’t withstand the onslaught.

Furthermore, the enemy had brought out artillery.

The 105mm caliber artillery fire coming through the rain wasn’t particularly fierce, but it was clearly something the unarmed rioters with no means of response couldn’t cope with.

Under the heavy bombardment, the government building’s defenses began to falter that morning. The inadequately trained armed personnel started to suffer mass casualties and morale was on the verge of collapsing.

Although the infantry battalion's first tentative ground assault was somewhat impaired by the heavy rain and was repelled by the elites of the Alliance, the next wave, with more intensive artillery barrages followed by an infantry charge, would undoubtedly be unstoppable.

Was this really the end?

Just had an artillery shell exploded in the next room, leaving Arno's ears ringing and deafened, he was now completely out of ideas.

Leaning against the wall, rainwater trickled down from the damaged wall.

He had only one thought: where were the reinforcements?

As he pondered, a bolt of lightning streaked across the sky.

Beneath the suddenly illuminated clouds, he saw many black dots.

What was that?

A light sparked in his eyes!

It was the relief force!

Grabbing the nearby radio, he shouted excitedly, "Comrades! Hold on! Our reinforcements have arrived!"

There were voices of doubt in the communication channel, with some thinking Arno was lying to boost morale.

Arno didn't bother explaining further, he simply said, "Look up at the sky."

Then, many cheers came through the communication channel!

Clearly, they too had seen it.

Not only the ones inside the government building but also the Planetary Defense Forces outside had taken notice.

They became visibly desperate, launching a violent assault on the government building.

Chapter 435, Acting According to the Script_2

The artillery began to unleash its ferocity, as infantry braved the rain and charged toward the government building under the cover of the artillery.

Seeing hope, the morale of the defending army inside the building surged anew.

They too fired back furiously from the windows and gaps blasted open in the building, at the attacking enemy forces.

But it wasn't enough to stop the enemies' entry.

The cover of artillery fire still pinned down the defenders within the building.

However, the next moment, a howling sound overshadowed the noise of the rain.

Then, a violent explosion occurred about ten kilometers away.

Arno crawled to the window and looked in the direction from where the sound came.

That was the artillery position of the Planetary Defense Force, which now, having been subjected to continuous missile strikes and machine gun bombardment, had turned into a sea of fire.

What flashed through the rain curtain were eight ‘Qilin’ fighters leading a formation of many Windfalcon Fighters from the Alliance Fighter Formation.

After completing the destruction of the artillery position, these combat aircraft began sweeping through the Planetary Defense Force that was still attacking the government building.

Large-caliber machine guns raked the ground, the Windfalcons were still fine, a 40mm caliber hit to a person would simply obliterate them, hitting the cement ground and leaving a washbowl-sized shallow crater;

But the weaponry mounted on the ‘Qilin’ was much more exaggerated in performance.

Not only did it have larger 55mm caliber machine guns, it carried twice as many missiles as the Windfalcon, and could also be equipped with multiple rocket launcher pods to enhance firepower. What was most terrifying was that they could be equipped simultaneously, without having to choose fitments like the Windfalcon.

Moreover, mounted on it was a genuine reflector—a Spec S grade of artillery firepower, not a castrated version of an anti-air gun or vehicle auxiliary cannon.

When this ‘reflector,’ firing at a rate of once every two or three seconds, continuously bombarded the ground, the area in front of the government building became a Photon Hell!

The immense heat brought by the high-energy laser not only destroyed the core of the direct hit, causing perforation, but also the dispersion of thermal energy inflicted fatal damage to the surrounding swathes of life forms.

The air strikes from just the ‘Qilin’ and ‘Windfalcon’ alone had already decimated this infantry battalion.

Of course, they were not wiped out, but when the front-line battalions were devastated under the air raid, and the rear's main artillery positions supporting the barrage had been eliminated, so too collapsed the battalion.

They no longer possessed any offensive capabilities.

At the same time, many black spots began to fall from the sky.

They were transport planes, one after another, and as they landed, masses of airborne troops streamed out from them.

Arno's face now bore a brilliant smile.

He recognized the insignia of this unit.

It was the Alliance's 31st Special Airborne Division, one of the card forces of the Alliance.

After landing, the airborne troops began to sweep the enemy forces that were scattered within the combat zone. At the same time, they also drove out airborne vehicles and artillery from the transport planes.

It was hard to imagine that airborne troops could bring so much equipment…

Although there were still some doubts in her mind, such as why the air defenses of Baishuo Star did not fire during the attack by the airborne troops and the Alliance fighters,

At least for now, she was safe.

Her mission had also come to completion.

…

Milia Derong sat in the Shuoguo City air defense command center, and beside her, some masked personnel were cleaning up the scene.

Whether corpses or surrendering soldiers, they all had to be tidied up.

“The government building hasn’t fallen, has it?”

“Report, captain, no, the 31st Division arrived just in time.”

“Good.” Thinking for a moment, Milia casually asked, “That investigator you were told to keep an eye on, the one called Arno, he’s fine too, right?”

“He’s fine.”

“Hmm.” With that response, Milia was no longer concerned.

As long as he wasn’t dead.

In fact, the operations of the third bureau were a great help.

Assassinating Zelos left the Star Sector leaderless, saving us some trouble; the subsequent three-day uprising, along with the influence of the assassination, diverted the attention of all political forces on the planet to that location.

This provided excellent cover for the Demon Hunter’s operations.

They had been well-prepared to act, and they took the opportunity to launch their offensive.

The primary target was the Starport.

Embedded within the Starport were two Phoenix Tactical Squads, who, through the resources of the Demon Hunters, had been reassigned there. They led about fifty other Demon Hunters in the initial attack. An Imperial Merchant Fleet ship, which had shifted allegiance to the Alliance and was contacted through interstellar trade, then helped the Alliance deliver two divisions to the inside of the Starport.

With the inside help and outside forces working together, the control of Baishuo's Starport was quickly secured.

The explosions and blazes in the sky that Arno had seen the night before were part of this operation.

In fact, that was a minor accident. According to the best estimates, not even that kind of explosion should have happened; the situation should have been resolved quickly and silently.

Then, one of the two Skeleton Divisions that had been deployed to Baishuo quickly reached the ground through the space elevator linking the Starport to the surface, and they took control of the terrestrial part of the Starport.

That location was also the outskirts of Shuoguo City.

There, they would establish a defensive line and, once it was fortified, move into the city.

Ahead of them were the two Phoenix Squads.

Once they landed, they immediately rushed to Shuoguo City's air defense command center.

Meanwhile, the Demon Hunters had also made preparations at the air defense command center.

After swiftly securing control of the command center, another merchant ship that had collaborated with the Alliance in their offensive, launched several transport shuttles along with 'Qilin' and Windfalcon Fighters into planetary orbit.

These transport shuttles rapidly deployed the elite troops of the 31st Airborne Division directly into the battlefield.

The ‘Qilin’ and Windfalcon Fighters arrived first to clear the ground, and the paratroopers then descended, promptly taking control of the city’s center.

Following that, the remaining forces of the Airborne Division, numbering over 30,000, would move at the fastest speed to pinpoint the location of the Governor of Baishuo using intelligence compiled by the Demon Hunters and the Alliance’s three major external intelligence agencies, and quickly launch an assault.

By this time, the Governor of Baishuo had probably just received the news that the Starport was lost and that the vanguard of the Defense Army had been crushed.

Whatever his reaction, it was already too late.

He didn’t even have a chance to link up with the advancing Planetary Defense Force; Milia was confident of that.

The air defense command center in Shuoguo City had now ironically become the Alliance’s ground operations command center.

Milia presided over it, calmly issuing one instruction after another.

Her authority would only last for these two to three days.

Afterwards, when the overall situation was secured, the military and political officials of the Alliance, already en route, would descend upon this world.

An Alliance political officer would be there to declare, with regret, the death of the Purple Horse leader during a civilian uprising; the cause of all this chaos would be attributed to Baishuo Star’s poor political governance and its betrayal of Imperial laws, with the Governor of Baishuo bearing full responsibility.

The Alliance, with the authority granted by the Star Domain Government, would remove the current Governor of Baishuo from office and judge his crimes.

The new Governor of Baishuo would sign the Seven Horse Accord and call upon all the planets in the Purple Horse Sector to sign it…

These events, still yet to happen, had already been scripted.

Under the will of Governor Gu Hang, this script would inevitably be played out.

…

Once the entirety of Baishuo Star was firmly in control according to plan, half the main force of the United Fleet led by Yelisia had also entered this Star Sector.

Initially, the various planets of the Purple Horse Sector would have had a fierce reaction to this.

This was a serious provocation.

But now, they were as quiet as quails.

The events on Baishuo Star had intimidated them.

It was the most populous, most developed, and militarily strongest planet in the entire sector.

Yet, how could it be that from a simple civilian uprising, the Star Sector leader was dead; just a minor effort by the Alliance, and the Governor of Baishuo was arrested on his own planet and then sentenced to death by firing squad?

Chapter 436: Seven Horses Come to Join

Had it been just that, it might have ended there.

Though a leader had almost instantly died, along with a governor, everyone knew the Alliance was powerful, even commanding the Starfighter Battle Group.

But just because you could kill a former ruler didn't mean you could rule this place smoothly!

That was the dark thought festering in the minds of many governors of Purple Horse.

They had expected, with the Alliance employing such unscrupulous methods to overthrow the Baishuo Government, the entire planet would be in turmoil, engulfed in the flames of war. The local Defense Armies would rise in revolt, if not to avenge the deceased governor and leader, at least they wouldn't easily accept a sudden change of master, right?

And the people everywhere would question the Alliance's legitimacy, especially given such a despicable method of subversion and coup. They would inevitably stir up unrest, armed resistance, strikes, riots…

However, the actual news they had received was disappointing.

It wasn't to say that such things were completely nonexistent, after all, there was such a large planet with nine billion people living on it.

But those sparse uprisings were not enough to affect the overall situation.

It's quite normal to have sporadic turmoil during a substantial change of power.

It's said that a single spark can start a prairie fire, but not every spark is mentioned.

Most flames in this world are extinguished as soon as they ignite.

Unless, there is an oil depot behind those flames.

The Alliance had such a depot for the coup's spark they ignited; however, the governors of Purple Horse who wanted to be the oil depot for the current unrest on Baishuo Star neither had the capacity nor the daring to do so.

Zelos and the Governor of Baishuo had just been cremated—who would dare?

They could only watch as the Alliance propped up a new acting governor on Baishuo Star and claimed they had the right to do so, with the relevant procedures being expedited and already recorded in the Alliance. As soon as communication was restored with Yunluo Star, Wuji Star, and Holy Terra, the formal appointment would come through.

This left them with nothing to say.

What could they say? With the previous governor gone, someone had to step up. The Alliance might not have the right to directly appoint a governor, but they could appoint an 'acting governor,' with the promise of later formalities.

So now the question arose: which governor in the Purple Horse Sector also wanted an 'acting governor'?

The Alliance's diplomats didn't say it outright. However, they would understand the implied message.

Continuous communication with the diplomats and the incessant flow of news from Baishuo Star, coupled with the approaching United Fleet…

All these factors were incessantly battering the psychological defenses of the Purple Horse governors.

When the United Fleet finally arrived in orbit around their planets with the text of the Qima Treaty in tow, most of the Planetary Governors made the correct decision and signed their names on it.

A minority of governors, however, had already approached the Alliance's diplomats and proactively signed their names before the arrival of the United Fleet.

Those who didn’t sign were none.

…

Half a month after the death of Zelos, the Purple Horse Sector had fully joined the Qima Treaty.

Gu Hang was quite satisfied with this outcome.

He certainly had the resolve to conquer these seventeen worlds of the sector with a population of thirty-eight billion, even if it meant waging war should things turn unfavorable.

But determination is one thing, and the best solution is another.

If it’s possible to avoid war, best avoid it.

Cost and hassle are one aspect, but the governance after the war would also be problematic.

That’s why they resorted to the method of subversive coups.

Whether the Alliance could control the entire planet after overthrowing the local government on Baishuo Star was based on thorough preliminary investigations and previous successful experiences on the Fatchess Tri-Star, and this was why the decision was made.

Initially, Gu Hang also had his concerns: such tactics could indeed overthrow the Central Government of a planet, but that didn’t guarantee that the Alliance could immediately establish a reliable new government.

Or rather, the establishment wasn’t the issue, but whether the newly established government could effectively rule the planet was uncertain.

However, after the investigations, these concerns were largely dispelled.

The residents of Baishuo Star, regardless of their class, mostly identified themselves within the grand structure of the human race – the Human Empire. They did not consider the governor, the Planetary Government, or the Star Sector Government to be 'their own government' or 'their own monarch' but as ruling officials sent by the Empire.

In such a scenario, in the name of the Empire and on behalf of higher authorities, the removal of those two leaders and the establishment of a new government by the Alliance could naturally gain legitimacy, and the people of Baishuo Star would have no doubts about it.

Isn't it just a change of governor? Just as some places change a mayor or town head, the common people wouldn't necessarily revolt because of it.

This reassured Gu Hang.

This aspect was also different from other administrative regions of the Empire and the Alliance.

Was the perception of the people on Baishuo Star wrong?

Of course not!

That is the common perception of the vast majority of humans within the Empire.

It's not absolute, of course, as exceptions like the Foundry World of the Sect of Mechanics, the religious worlds of the state religion, some extremely backward feudal systems, slave systems, or even primitive worlds are not excluded…

But overall, from a macro perspective, this statement is not problematic.

The legitimacy of the Human Empire derives from the 'humankind' collective, assembled together by The Emperor who ascended to godhood.

Chapter 436, Seven Horses Submit_2

This is a reasonable perception within the Empire, with not a single flaw, and the same is true within the Alliance.

But what comes next varies between the Alliance and other Star Sectors.

For most residents in the world, I am a human being, an Imperial, the Governor is either an appointee or an enfeoffed ruler by the Imperial Faction, so he has the right to rule over me. And if the Empire replaces this Governor one day, then the new one also has the right to rule over me; if the Empire declares this Governor a traitor one day, I would even angrily take up arms to execute him myself.

The Alliance, however, is slightly different.

The legitimacy of the Alliance's rule principally emanates from direct appointments by the Empire, which is supremely important.

Nevertheless, beyond this, the Alliance is establishing its own political legitimacy through systemic reforms, centralization of power, improvements in living standards brought about by increased productivity, ideological propaganda, education… among various means.

I am an Imperial, but I am also a member of the Alliance. Governors cannot be replaced at will—rather, it's the government of the Alliance that is legitimate.

This matter is crucial! It determines the social order and whether the authority of rulers can be consciously recognized and obeyed by the populace, shaping the relationship between the political rule of the rulers and the political subservience of the governed.

Putting it more bluntly, whether the political legitimacy of the Alliance itself can be cultivated will decide if, one day, Gu Hang points to Holy Terra and says, "For the Emperor, for humanity, follow me and charge onto Terra," whether the people of the Alliance would storm the battlefield with him or tie him up and send him to Terra.

It’s just a metaphor! Gu Hang absolutely doesn’t entertain such thoughts!

Only when it has developed legitimacy emanating from the bottom up can the Alliance become even more impregnable, not vanishing simply because of a decree from the Star Domain Government. What happened in Baisuo would not occur in the core territories of the Alliance.

The means of directly gaining control of a planet through subversion or coup d’état can be used by Gu Hang against others, but not by others against the planets of the Alliance. Should anyone attempt such a scheme, the people within the core territories of the Alliance would rise up in swarms. The Alliance’s complete grassroots structure and local government framework could efficiently lead a rebellion and resist outsiders.

Of course, the only places where the Alliance has managed to achieve this so far are Rage Owl Star and Korolya. The former is Gu Hang’s stronghold, the latter a world he genuinely saved from apocalyptic peril, earning immense prestige.

As for the other planets, especially Flying Wing Star and the Fatchess Tri-Star, they are on the way, but admittedly not quite stable yet.

Overall, however, the nine worlds of the Tianma Star Sector are the core territories of the Alliance. The political systems there have completed their reforms, and the Alliance’s control has reached into the grassroots, making the establishment of so-called ruling legitimacy merely a matter of time.

Regarding the areas beyond the Tianma Star Sector…

Although the situations differ in each location, for instance, Eagle Horse is quite obedient, followed by Mist Horse, and Purple Horse has just been subjugated through forceful means, generally under the current grand situation, these places do not possess the conditions to be transformed into core territories of the Alliance.

The main reason is the impact of the war.

The Alliance is currently at war and doesn't have the luxury to undertake societal reforms like the past few years in the Tianma Star Sector, nor to root itself in the Purple Horse Sector for several years to turn it into a core territory of the Alliance.

Since it has been decided to control Purple Horse with a suzerainty strategy, it is also necessary not to transform or purge the local ruling strata.

Keep the people, and control those planets indirectly.

However, this is not absolute.

Will the Alliance really refrain from intervening in the internal politics of planets under the seven-horse framework?

Officially, that's correct. The treaty clearly stipulates that the political, economic, and military development within each member planet will not be interfered with by the Alliance in principle and will be the responsibility of each Planetary Government/Governor.

However, the treaty also states that the Alliance, as the leader of the seven-horse treaty, will supervise all worlds to ensure that key resources are available for the war effort against the orcs.

How will they supervise?

The Alliance will send three supervisory officials to each planet.

These supervisory officials will monitor if the work within the planets is functioning as prescribed by the seven-horse treaty and ensure that each planet fulfills their obligations.

If everything goes smoothly, the supervisory officials won't intervene in planetary affairs; if problems arise, they will provide supervisory advice to the Planetary Government, effectively meddling in specific matters until the problems are resolved.

If the supervisory advice doesn't resolve the issues, then the supervisory officials will report up to the Alliance.

The Alliance will then 'kindly' offer support to the planet.

Genuine support, needing resources, personnel—all will be in place.

However, getting the Alliance to 'spend a fortune' comes at a price.

By that point, the Alliance will directly send a far larger team of officials to manage these Alliance assets on the planet, ensuring they are applied correctly and can effectively change the dire conditions within the planet.

This is akin to directly interfering with the responsibilities of the Planetary Government, even taking over.

Of course, the Alliance itself does not currently wish to take this step.

Still, they've left themselves an opening.

In the future, if the Planetary Governor doesn't comply, this could be a method of inspection and intervention;

Further down the line, when the war situation stabilizes, the pressure lessens, or when victory is in sight, that might just become the opportunity for the Alliance to expand its core territories.

Chapter 436, Seven Horses Return to Allegiance_3

The number of inspector officers assigned to each planet is not necessarily the same.

Among them, a certain presence is the military inspector officers.

They are responsible for overseeing the planet's military construction work and the preparation of military supplies.

In plain terms, they are the ones overseeing the collection of money.

Next in line is the economic inspector officer, tasked with overseeing the planet's economic development and production capacity. This is to ensure that the economic development within the planet can be maintained as much as possible, so as not to delay the production of military supplies.

The establishment of economic inspector officers is rather limited, only present on planets where the governors are more reliable, closer to the alliance, and 'in need' of alliance assistance.

The least installed would be the political inspector officers.

When the alliance's intelligence department detects signs of anti-alliance or anti-Seven Horse Treaty activities on a planet, they will warn the governor and send a political inspector officer. A political inspector officer can directly oversee every government personnel appointment and organizational structure.

When a political inspector officer is dispatched, it represents that the alliance's army may arrive at any time.

As long as the political inspector officer declares that the planetary governor/government has acted disloyally, or if something happens to an inspector officer, then the alliance will directly assume that the planet has rebelled, and the alliance will come on behalf of the empire to suppress the rebellion.

Those three officers shouldn't be seen as just three individuals; each of them represents an entire staff built around them, a team of support and adjuncts, akin to three institutions.

The inspector officer system will be the means for the alliance to control each member planet of the Seven Horse Treaty.

At least until the Treaty finishes its historical mission, the inspector officers will be a long-term presence.

Baishuo Star is somewhat special, though.

The alliance plans to bring Baishuo Star's starport and its capital city, Shuoguo City, under direct control, with leadership directly appointed by the alliance.

The reason for this is because there's a shipyard on the starport of Shuoguo City. While it's not possible to make large ships, building some armed merchant ships, patrol vessels, and such is viable.

Although this will not be decisive, it is still a good supplement to the navy, which is currently in the greatest shortage for the alliance.

…

Yelisia's fleet, after passing through Purple Horse Sector with the Seven Horse Treaty and taking control of it, continued to move southward, targeting Border Horse Sector and then Iron Horse Sector.

With the example of Purple Horse Sector, the heads and governors of these two sectors became much more amenable.

They each signed the Seven Horse Treaty in turn.

Cultivating Horse Sector in particular did not even require the fleet's arrival to sign.

For Cultivating Horse Sector, they have a more direct concern: a portion of the Iron-teeth Greenskins' military edge has reached Heigu Ridge Star Sector on the western side of Cultivating Horse.

Although the invasion of Cultivating Horse hasn't begun, they are worried about potential problems.

Gu Hang is also alerted to this.

His main focus is still on the northwestern part of the star map.

The southwest side, Cultivating Horse, is not the main strategic direction of the alliance, but it can't be ignored either.

If a Green Skins army really penetrates straight from Cultivating Horse, it could reach Hongjian Star in the Tianma Star Sector.

Yelisia no longer needs to go to Cultivating Horse, but a small detachment must be split from her fleet to go there and keep an eye on the Green Skins military edge towards Heigu Ridge.

…

After arranging the defensive line of the alliance to the southwest, Gu Hang's gaze once again turned toward the main battlefield in the northwest.

Major General Du Shiliang had received his orders to cautiously lead the fleet away from Steel Wing Star to the Temir Star System.

That is the eastern gateway of the Golden Pass Star Sector.

Chapter 437, Humanity Must Win

The Temir Star System is located at the southeast corner of the Golden Pass Star Sector and is a necessary route connecting Golden Pass to Eagle Horse, and it is also the main traffic artery within the entire Golden Pass Star Sector. In this star system, there are five Star Realm Tunnels, three towards the inside connecting to three star systems of the Golden Pass Star Sector, and the other two, respectively, lead to the Copper Barrier Star District and the Eagle Horse Star Sector.

At the same time, the Temir Star System itself also holds significant value. Within this star system, there are three habitable planets orbiting the Temir star, namely the 2nd, 4th, and 5th planets.

Before the menace of the Iron Tooth Orcs emerged, the combined population of these three planets was twenty billion; Temir II was a vast agricultural world with four billion inhabitants, and the food produced there was more than enough not just for the entire star sector, but there was also a surplus.

The 4th planet was a mining and industrial world, focused primarily on heavy industry and the export of raw materials. It also had a population of around four billion people.

The 5th planet was a civilized world, with a population of twelve billion and cities scattered throughout.

Without boasting too much, the three worlds within the star system each had its advantages and could complement each other.

In addition, due to its status as a major traffic corridor, this place could be described as a land of pearls—only before the rise of the Iron-teeth Greenskins.

After the orcs arrived, there was no use in talking about it.

After the fall of the Fourth Sector, the Golden Pass Star Sector became a battlefield. Although initially, the Temir Star System was not in the main battle area, it lay in the hinterland of the Golden Pass Star Sector at that time. However, because it was close and somewhat rich in foundations, the Star Domain Government, when fighting against the Iron Tooth Orcs, drew many of its forces directly from the Temiral Tristar.

Thus they siphoned off its resources for several decades, and on top of that, there were quite a few occasions when the Green Skin Orcs made their incursions into Temir, leaving these originally prosperous planets severely withered.

It might already sound miserable, but the truth was that it hadn’t yet reached the worst point.

No matter how depleted, the productivity and population of the planets were still there, at worst it meant the potential for development was exhausted, the standard of living for the populace dropped significantly, famines emerged, and various comprehensive problems led to a decline in population…

That was about as bad as it got. The few times the Green Skin Orcs struck Temir Star System, the chaos only lasted for a short while, the numbers were not large, and the human military forces would quickly drive them out again. After all, the Temir Star System was one of the few major bases inside Golden Pass after it turned into a war zone; unless it was absolutely necessary, human military forces would certainly not give up on these three worlds.

However, the previous aggressive campaign, which had collapsed under Titus's counterattack, had brought disaster upon Temir.

The Northern Fleet was annihilated, and Yunluo had fled. After losing its space forces, a large number of human ground troop elites got stranded in the four star systems of the southern part of Silver Pass Sector, with no word from them. The previously settled Golden Pass Star Sector suddenly flung its gates wide open, and the orcs swarmed in.

Even though the main force of the Iron-Tooth Clan was split into two in Golden Pass, with a large army marching west under Titus's leadership, bringing war to the heart of the Star Domain, and a powerful detachment led by the one-tusked ghost headed east to Eagle Horse. Nonetheless, just the Green Skin Orcs left in the Golden Pass Star Sector were enough to collapse it.

When Du Shiliang arrived at the Temir Star System with his fleet, the first thing he did was to carefully gather all the intelligence about the entire star system.

The one-tusked ghost was eliminated, and the Green Skin fleet collapsed and escaped through the jump point at Steel Wing Star and into Temir.

Although many of the Green Skins' main battleships were destroyed, at least two hundred ships remained. Now, with nearly half of the United Fleet having been taken by Yelisia on patrol through Seven Horse Territory, the strength of his fleet was somewhat insufficient. If he was careless and bit by the Green Skins, it was still possible to be overturned.

He knew the alliance couldn't withstand the consequences of a naval catastrophe, and although he had to go on the offensive, being as cautious as possible was never excessive.

After scouting, Du Shiliang preliminarily confirmed that the main fleet of the Green Skin Orcs was not in the Temir Star System. The stargazers aboard the ships only discovered about a dozen Green Skin vessels here.

However, conditions on the surface were already terrible.

Temir II, favored by the Green Skins due to its environment, was almost undetectable for human activity on the planet's surface.

This left Du Shiliang's heart aching.

The former breadbasket of Golden Pass, with a population of four billion, a world of beautiful scenery and a pleasant environment, had now fallen into a place riddled with Green Skin spores and relentless skirmishes.

For the Green Skin Orcs, it was evident they considered Temir II an important breeding stronghold and had invested considerable effort here.

In the few months since the occupation, the Iron Tooth Orcs had deployed a significant amount of manpower to Temir II. Not only were the human inhabitants slaughtered almost to extinction in just a few months, but they also put in the effort to transform the local ecological environment, establishing large swathes of Green Skin biomes.

New batches of Green Skin life were thriving. Not only were there Skugg-Beasts running amok and flatulent imps sprouting everywhere amidst the lush green spore plants.

The former could serve as food and draft animals for the Green Skins, and even participate in combat as akin to military dogs, coordinating with the Green-Skin Army.

The latter were, of course, also Green Skins.

Flatulent imps typically occupied the lower echelons of Green Skin society, acting as assistants and servants to the orcs. They were intelligent, cunning, and vicious, but at the same time base and

cowardly. They didn't count as suitable soldiers; under normal circumstances, if an army were composed purely of flatulent imps, morale would be very concerning.

Chapter 437, Humanity Will Prevail_2

They're bearable when the wind is in their sails; they can even be crueler than their orc masters. But let a little adversity blow their way, and you'll see those piss-poor troops crumble in minutes.

It's this very nature that doomed them to a life at the bottom of Green Skin society. They're content with their lot, assuming all the responsibilities the orcs disdain—which essentially means everything but fighting.

Sometimes, when the orcs felt gloomy, they would snatch a few of those cowards to eat and lighten their mood.

These cowards weren't particularly good as industrial workers or farmers either. Their cunning would show up in their work, as they loved to cut corners and cheat. But this problem was somewhat easy to solve: the orcs would personally wield whips to supervise, or appoint a favored coward to do so. The latter could be even harsher on their own kind than the orc masters.

Through these means, Green Skin society maintained at least a minimal level of productivity.

As for the upper limit, that remains unfathomable.

Waagh is an absurdity; what started as a meaningless Green Skin battle cry also signifies an adjective in their language, describing anything positive for the Green Skins; it can even serve as a noun, representing a grand war; and then there's so-called waagh energy—a form of Spiritual Energy unique to the Green Skin race.

Put simply, if they believe something can succeed, then it will.

This is where Green Skin technology astounds, with piles of junk miraculously able to take to space and exchange fire with human behemoths—sheer lunacy.

These cowards possess that capability too, and while their tendency to slack off generally subtracts from productivity, the moment one of them manages to create something miraculous while shirking their duties, it's a sudden spike in productivity.

Factor in their vast numbers and bodies that mature in just a few months… Temir II has now become a vast Green Skin factory.

And this factory's primary output is the Green Skins themselves; it churns out some weapons and equipment on the side, with resources plundered from the other two Temir planets.

Compared to Temir II, where human activity is nearly undetectable, the situations on Temir IV and Temir No.5 are somewhat better.

Though they're not great either.

Among them, Temir IV fares relatively better. The mining world's numerous mines, caverns, and complex industrial facilities enable the humans there to hunker down. With limited Green Skin forces committed, they have to methodically siege each mine. After several months of occupation, they've yet to devour it all.

However, the issue with Temir IV is the planet's own insufficient supplies. It used to rely on Temir II for food. Now that interstellar transport is cut off, when they deplete their stored supplies and even the synthetic starch production lines fail, the many mining outposts reliant on the mining industry will face annihilation.

Salvation is needed.

The situation on Temir No.5 is worse, but not as utterly disastrous as on Temir II. After all, unlike Temir II, where most of the land is wide-open fertile plains—wonderful in peacetime for bountiful farming—it offers no defense during war and was quickly overwhelmed.

At least on Temir No.5, humans can still resist in some mountainous areas and inside mega-cities.

After carefully analyzing the situation on the three Temir planets, Du Shiliang developed a set of response plans.

…

On Temir II.

In this world where large-scale human activity is no longer detectable, not everyone has been killed.

That would be impossible.

Humans are a tenacious species and won't be wiped out so easily.

Even under these circumstances, if more than 90% of the planetary population—a terrifying number that speaks to the Green Skins' killing efficiency—was butchered, the remaining less than ten percent would still mean two to three hundred million people, possibly more, live in various corners of the planet.

Zhu Zhengbao is one of them, now seventy years old.

He's a distinguished veteran of the Native Defense Forces of Temir II, once conscripted by the Empire to lead millions of Defense Army soldiers to the front lines against the Green Skins.

Strategic, bold, and valiant, he led the Defense Army to impressive victories.

Later, with age, he returned home to a hero's welcome and was honored as 'Marshal.'

Disinterested in politics, he desired only a peaceful retirement. But when the Green Skins invaded en masse, he stood once more, rallying the Temirians to resist the invaders.

The disparity in strength between the two sides was too vast, and with the Green Skin ships dominating orbit at the onset of war, the human forces were easily defeated. The Temirians had been brutally slaughtered across the defenseless plains.

But despite this, the old Marshal never lost his steadfast will.

Giving the situation on Temir, a direct confrontation with the Green Skins was impossible. He decisively led his troops and protected the civilians, relocating elsewhere.

A planet this large can't be thoroughly searched by the orcs in a short time.

Through tremendous efforts, they found places the orcs hadn't yet trampled, and they survived through hardship. They established a base, cautiously striking out, eliminating any Green Skins that might discover them.

Chapter 437, Humanity Must Triumph_3

Among them were warriors, heroes, and even women and children. Zhu Zhengbao always told everyone to keep faith, "The Emperor will not abandon us. As long as we persevere, one day we will be redeemed, and the Empire's Army will surely come. In the end, victory will certainly be ours."

Long live Mankind!

This was not only propaganda—it was something he deeply believed in.

Without such belief, how could an old general, over seventy and riddled with injuries and sickness, have held out until now?

Under his guidance, over the past several months, the people had calmed.

In their situation of having nothing, they had established an encampment. Although it was small, and there were only a few hundred thousand of them, and even if a large swarm of Green Skins came, they would still have to run…

But at least, they had sown the seeds; over the past few months, the wheat sprouts had broken through the soil and were almost ready for harvest.

Witnessing these scenes, many could feel the hope and belief that Marshal Zhu had spoken of.

At the same time, they had made contact with several other encampments, each of various sizes. They had agreed to support each other, forming a strategic alliance—if they encountered Green Skins they could fight off, they would fight; and for those they could not, they would retreat to another encampment at least.

Just keep holding on, they thought. As long as they kept striving and enduring, they would surely see the day Marshal Zhu spoke of: The Empire's great forces will come, and mankind will prevail!

And that day came even sooner than they had imagined.

On this day, early in the morning, Zhu Zhengbao was roused by someone calling out to him.

The person arrived, brimming with excitement, "They're here! They are really here! The Fleet from the Empire has come!"

"What did you say?"

"Go and see for yourself!"

Zhu Zhengbao threw on his clothes and stepped outside the rudimentary building.

Looking up, he saw the weather was fine; the azure sky above him showed several shadows.

At this distance, the silhouettes didn't look big or clear, but considering the distance, they must be enormous.

The old Marshal's eyesight was no longer good. He asked someone to fetch him a telescope, and then he could see clearly: those were indeed ships belonging to mankind!

With the Marshal's experience, he could even distinguish that they were human cruisers, and it looked like there were three or four of them!

This was definitely the main force!

The army had come! They were saved!

"Spread the word! Our steadfastness now has hope!" Zhu Zhengbao declared.

"Alright!" The people around him were also bursting with joy, "Actually, there's no need to spread the news; everyone can see it for themselves!"

"Still, we must announce it. It's a good opportunity to ensure morale," Zhu Zhengbao said with a smile, his heart stirring with excitement, yet he remained calm, "Even though the army is nearing, and we have hope, danger still exists until the ground troops have landed and joined us. In this final moment of success, we absolutely can't fail before dawn, understand?"

"Understood! I'll go find someone to write this up, to boost morale! Marshal, rest assured, we will do all the work and hold the line as best as we can," replied one of the staff.

"Good, go on then," he said.

After sending his adjutant off, Zhu Zhengbao, still wearing a smile, continued to observe the sky through his telescope.

Our human ships are truly magnificent!

However, at that moment, he noticed a small black spot falling from one of the ships; it quickly caught fire upon contact with the atmosphere.

“Hmm? Is that a landing pod or a landing craft? It seems a bit too large, the size isn’t right… Are they rushing to land without conducting orbital bombardment first?”

The old Marshal was filled with questions.

Suddenly, he saw the small fireball explode within the atmosphere.

Had it been shot down by the Green Skins?

It didn’t seem so.

He observed the rolling flames, which did not diminish as one would expect from a destroyed spacecraft. Instead, they grew like igniting gasoline, expanding continuously.

In an extremely short time, the small fireball became a large one, and then spread into a sky full of fire clouds!

Even at this stage, the flames showed no sign of shrinking or extinguishing; instead, they hurriedly expanded until the entire sky within view turned from azure to a sea of fire!

The sea of fire continued to stretch, spreading downward and around.

All of this transpired in a mere few dozen seconds.

The entire encampment fell silent; the cheers that had just risen were now subdued.

Everyone stared blankly at the sky that had turned into a sea of fire.

Everything was happening quietly; Zhu Zhengbao could still hear the cries of insects and birds, the whisper of the wind.

But all his expressions had frozen.

If the current trend continued, in no more than a minute or two, the sea of fire would reach the encampment he was in; in less than an hour, the fires would sweep across the planet's atmosphere, burning every inch of Temir II.

By then, the whole planet would become a 'fireball,' violently burning in the universe. The fierce flames covering the surface would continue burning for days to a month, consuming the entire planet's atmosphere and oceans, killing every living thing on the planet.

Even if some lucky few managed to hide underground, in the mountains, in sturdy buildings, and escaped being burned to death, the complete annihilation of the ecosystem would make it impossible for survivors to continue living on a planet turned into dead land.

Temir II would go from being a rich and beautiful agricultural world to a Dead Silence World.

A Dead Silence World, a place categorically unsuitable for human habitation, whether an unaltered primitive planet or a devastated one—all were designated as Dead Silence Worlds.

In his seventy years of life, he had never once considered that what was only mentioned in rumors and records would one day descend upon his beautiful homeland.

Now, he understood what it was.

That was the Extinction Order from the Empire, that was the Skyburn Torpedo.

Chapter 438, I Am Not an Executioner

In the void, aboard the Interlude Cruiser, Du Shiliang stared at the fireball that grew increasingly distant in the cosmos.

His face was expressionless, resembling a ruthless general.

Yet his hands still trembled involuntarily.

At this moment, two days had passed since the Interlude Cruiser deployed the Skyburn Torpedo on the surface of Temir II. The flames that enveloped the globe had become more intense before their very eyes.

After completing the deployment task, the United Fleet observed the situation near Temir II for a day. Once they saw that the 'Skyburn Torpedo' had indeed ignited the entire planet, verifying the execution of the Extinction Order, they then departed.

He was the one who had deployed the Skyburn Torpedo.

Actually, he wasn't even sure if he had the authority to issue the Extinction Order.

Originally, he hadn't anticipated bearing such a responsibility.

Together with his war council, which included a part of the Alliance Army's staff team, they evaluated the situation on Temir II.

They reached a unanimous conclusion: launching a ground assault on Temir II, even with orbital support from the United Fleet, was not realistic.

This brings us to the war objectives for their proactive strike into the Golden Pass Star Sector, namely:

Under the premise of ensuring the safety of the Fleet, 1. Strike at the Iron Tooth Orcs' living forces. 2. Evacuate the imperial military and civilians from occupied territories. 3. Occupy planets to construct advanced defensive positions.

These three tasks had a hierarchy of importance.

Striking at living forces was most important, and evacuating imperial military and civilians was also important; which took precedence depended on the battlefield situation.

By comparison, occupying planets was the least important.

Mainly because controlling a planet didn't guarantee being able to defend it.

If there was an opportunity to occupy, then do so, deploying a not too sizable force like a nail pressed upon that location, waiting for the Green Skins to return. Even then, it would become an obstacle to the orcs' offense. For humanity's side, it would also be a defensible position, and at the very least, it would serve as an early warning outpost.

But, it would be a loss if excessive force was committed just to occupy planets.

Striking at living forces and evacuating imperial military and civilians, on the other hand, tangibly weakened the enemy and reinforced their own side.

Regarding Temir II, it was clear that the option to occupy the planet could almost be disregarded.

There were almost half a billion orcs on the surface, and not fewer than two billion other Green Skins—mainly Gretchin.

So many personnel and most weren't even native to the planet; they had been transported over time by Green Skin Ships.

After all, since the fall of Temir II, only a few months had passed, not enough for such numbers to have proliferated.

Transporting so many Green Skins likely aimed to spread more spores, hoping in the future many more Green Skins would emerge.

With such numbers, even if the United Fleet, carrying three Army Groups totaling sixty million human troops, were all thrown into battle and provided with orbital support, clearing enemy forces wouldn't be an easy task.

If they truly fought, the conflict could likely turn into a protracted war of attrition. Then, humanity might face an endless tide of orcs emerging from the Green Skin ecosystem, locked in mutually exhausting warfare.

Furthermore, orbital support wouldn't always be available. The Green Skin Fleet was still out there, and when the previously escaped two hundred junk vessels from Steel Wing Star regrouped and attacked, even if they couldn't overcome the more numerous main vessels of the United Fleet, they could distract them, preventing the Human Fleet from providing unbridled support to the surface. This was certainly feasible.

Under these circumstances, the hope for a swift victory in ground combat diminished even further.

Their mission was to seek opportunities to eliminate the enemy's living forces, not to deplete their own against the enemy.

The same logic applied to rescuing people.

Did Du Shiliang not know there were many survivors on the surface?

Of course, he knew.

Even if 95% of the people had been slaughtered, the remaining 5% still represented a population of more than two hundred million.

But the key issue was that these two hundred million people were scattered all over the world of Temir II!

If they were gathered in one place, that would be a different story—overwhelming orbital firepower providing cover, troops dropped to the surface to establish a defensive perimeter, defending for a couple of months, during which as many people as possible would be transported onto ships and evacuated. Once the majority were safe, the troops could be withdrawn, and then the Skyburn Torpedo could be deployed…

Had that been possible, it would have been cause for universal celebration.

Unfortunately, these two hundred million people were in groups of tens of thousands, or at most several hundred thousand, spread across the corners of the world, impossible to save.

Gathering them to evacuate would take an unknowable amount of time.

The Green Skin main Fleet could arrive at any time, and the Green Skins on the ground could entangle any Human landing forces at any moment.

The cost-effectiveness was too low.

In contrast, taking immediate advantage of Temir II's failing Orbital Defense system, which had not yet been upgraded by the Green Skins since their occupation and given the absence of the Green Skin main Fleet in the star system, creating the perfect conditions to deploy the Skyburn Torpedo—this was the optimal solution.

Otherwise, waiting could lead to complications, possibly losing even the chance to deploy the Skyburn Torpedo.

After all, should the Green Skin main Fleet arrive, they would not allow the Human Fleet to proceed as it wished.

The period between the deployment and detonation of an Extinction Order weapon was highly vulnerable, easily intercepted.

However, at this point, deploying the Skyburn Torpedo was still just a “plan”.

Although it seemed like the best solution, it appeared to be the most rational choice. However, Major General Du Shiliang had never thought about actually doing it.

Or rather, he had never imagined that he would be the one to make that decision.

He had never launched a Skyburn Torpedo, never executed an Extinction Order.

Even the Tianma Fleet itself didn’t have a stockpile of such weapons of extinction.

This sort of thing, even the Star Domain Government itself might not possess, at most, the Tribunal within the Star Domain might store one or two.

Now, the two Skyburn Torpedoes on his ship were transported over from Rage Owl Star by people sent by Governor Gu.

He no longer wished to think about why Mr. Gu had such a powerful weapon at his disposal.

But the decision to launch or not launch the Skyburn Torpedo shouldn’t be up to me to say, right?

The Empire lacked specific regulations on who and which units could issue Extinction Orders. From past records, it seemed that the Tribunals did it most frequently, followed by the leaders of the Interstellar War Regiments.

The first case made sense, as this was their job; the second case was also understandable, as Interstellar Warriors always fought on the most critical and harsh battlefields, encountering problems that only an Extinction Order could solve much more often than regular Empire troops. Plus, with such authority, naturally, they would issue it more often.

Beyond these two, the frequency of other personnel using Extinction Orders plummeted dramatically.

Of course, over ten thousand years, in such a vast universe, anything could happen. Marshals of the Star Realm Army, naval marshals, commanders of war zones, senior government officials, high-ranking clergy of the state religion and the Sect of Mechanics… Although rare, there were records of them issuing Extinction Orders.

But no matter who it was, it definitely wasn't himself.

I'm just an ordinary Navy Major General, I can't make such a big decision. Although he didn't understand who could sign off on it, it definitely wasn't him. Send the operational report back and then wait for orders, that's all I need to do.

Then, the order he received was that the person responsible for the forward campaign, Major General Du Shiliang himself, was to make this decision. Mr. Gu, in his capacities as the Alliance Governor, head of the Star Sector, and Leader of the Seven Horse Agreement, gave him full authorization and promised to take responsibility for any consequences of his decision, encouraging him to make a resolute choice.

This wasn't shirking responsibility, after all, Governor Gu said he would take all the blame.

This was a delegation of authority, allowing frontline commanders full autonomy to make decisions they believed to be correct, to avoid "I can't make the decision" situations that could lead to major problems at the front.

And then, Du Shiliang was stunned.

Me?

He was caught off guard.

After another round of discussion, they still believed that it was the best solution.

So, execute it.

But when Du Shiliang witnessed an entire world turn into a sea of flames because of his decision, when at least two hundred million people died because of what he decided, he felt his entire body shaking.

He had been shaking for two days now.

He couldn't sleep at all for these two days.

Every time he closed his eyes, he saw a burning world, and he could hear the constant wails of the Temirians, which he had never heard in person but which haunted him incessantly.

He always told himself, it's not my fault, I can't be blamed, it's the Green Skins' fault, it's the alien invasion that led to all this, I was just doing my duty, I was just trying to reduce casualties, to prevent more deaths…

But no matter how many reasons there were, no matter how correct, they couldn't erase the immense pressure of carrying the souls of two hundred million innocent dead.

Yet, reality didn't give him any chance to escape or relieve his anguish.

He had to make the next decision right away.

The battles at Temir IV and V.

There, the conditions for deploying Skyburn Torpedoes were not met.

Skyburn Torpedoes are expensive, after all.

Although the Alliance didn't actually set up a production line for Skyburn Torpedoes, these two Skyburn Torpedoes were from stockpiles, produced by the Black Box, effectively costing nothing. However, the Black Box could only produce three Skyburn Torpedoes every two years, so the Alliance's stock wasn't large.

Moreover, Du Shiliang didn't know about this.

All he knew was that using one Skyburn Torpedo to exchange for the lives of 2.5 billion Green Skins was a good deal.

But there were not so many Green Skins for him to annihilate on Temir IV and V.

Additionally, the combined population still surviving on these two planets might exceed eight or nine billion.

Whoever bombed them would be a war criminal.

For these two planets, the plan discussed in previous military meetings prioritized preserving the population of the Empire.

The plans for the two planets could be discussed separately.

On Temir IV, there might be around a hundred million Green Skins, half of whom were clever tricksters. They were collecting raw material and waste in the occupied territories and had set up Green Skin factories locally to produce various types of crude 'junk.'

On the one hand, these were directly manufactured into weapons and equipment for the army.

On the other hand, they were stockpiled. It seemed that Green Skin Ships would regularly come to transport this 'junk' away.

This was consistent with Temir IV's positioning as a mining and industrial planet.

However, the natural environment of this planet was not particularly good. Except for the mining areas and the Nest Capital, it was almost unsuitable for organic life to survive.

Green Skins had a strong adaptability; their spores could take root and sprout anywhere. But the quality of the environment still affected the spores' growth speed and 'yield.' They had also preliminarily constructed an ecosystem, but it was neither large nor crucial.

In the past, the replenishment of Green Skins on Temir IV mainly relied on coming from the densely populated neighbouring Temir II.

Now, with Temir II scorched, Green Skins on IV would rely on when the main Green Skin Fleet would arrive, and whether they could transport more military forces from the heartland of their old lair.

Moreover, on Temir IV, humans still had an organized Defense Army, and the government had not yet collapsed. Although completely defenseless in orbit, their remaining ground-to-orbit forces were rather weak and dared not bombard the Green Skins' Fleet. Still, in a time of necessity, when willing to make sacrifices, they could provide cover for the Defense Army's assaults or retreats and play some role.

In a desperate struggle, Temir IV was maintaining a Defense Army of nearly half a billion people, continuously grappling and wearing down the Green Skins in mineshafts, trenches, and vast industrial zones.

They were no match for the Green Skins and lacked supplies, especially food. They often had to suffer ten times the casualties to defeat the enemy.

But they knew this was a battle for survival, a struggle with no retreat for their species where surrender and giving up were not options.

Clenching their teeth, they fought. Due to not having enough numbers, though the Green Skins had a blast fighting, their progress wasn't actually fast.

To rescue Temir IV would be fairly straightforward.

They planned to deploy four Army Groups as the main force; liaise with the local Defense Army, providing them with a large supply of logistics support, primarily food, with weapon and ammunition production lines as a secondary focus.

The former would solve the immediate urgent needs, while the latter could upgrade local weapon equipment.

Temir IV was not lacking in raw materials, but what was missing was a production line for quality weapons. Many in their Defense Army were still fighting with primitive guns and artillery.

The alliance would rain down G9 rifles and ammunition, plastic steel production lines, individual armor, artillery shells, cannons, and a suite of production capabilities. They didn't aim to create a production base but to increase production capacity, which would enhance the combat strength of the half-billion strong Planetary Defense Force by a significant margin.

Moreover, with the permanent presence of five ships from the United Fleet, along with the assistance of eight million elite Alliance troops, pushing back the Green Skins should not be a problem.

At the same time, civilians in the large settlements could be evacuated.

The current supply fleet and transport ships of the United Fleet had the capacity to move 3-5 hundred million people in one go.

They would first relocate them to Steel Wing Star, which should be safe. Then they would transport more. As for the dispatch to other locations from Steel Wing Star and how to arrange transportation that could really accept such a large population, that was not something for Du Shiliang, a frontline combat general, to consider. Officials from the Alliance would take over.

After a series of plans for Temir IV were drawn up and truly began to be implemented, Du Shiliang finally felt somewhat better.

Only then could he tell himself,

"I am not an executioner, I am a savior."

Chapter 439, Temir No.5 Meat Grinder

The war situation on Temir No.4 was progressing basically as planned by the war staff department.

Although there were some unexpected elements, such as after the land forces actually landed and met with the Planetary Defense Force, the Fleet also provided support from orbit, and after a more detailed reconnaissance of the enemy, they discovered an error in the initial estimate of the number of Green Skins.

There were not one hundred million Green Skins on Temir No.4, but close to three hundred million. Of these, there were seventy to eighty million actual Orcs, and not fifty million Pixies but over two hundred and thirty million.

The enemy situation had a fairly large deviation from the estimates, but it did not affect the implementation of the specific strategic plan.

The battle would be fought as it was meant to be fought.

For the few Green Skin gatherings and ecosystems that were detected, orbital bombardment was used for direct destruction. The number of ground troops deployed remained at eight million, only now their subsequent battles would be a bit tougher.

On Temir No.4, armored units had some difficulty in maneuvering. Just as the Orcs were hampered by various mining areas and pits in their attempts to wipe out the human troops on Temir No.4, after humans switched from defense to offense, they also struggled to chew through the Green Skin-held directions. The Aliens could also hide in those pits.

Those pits, unless they were of some particularly large size, were not accessible to normal defense outposts or tanks.

For this reason, the several armored divisions that went down, after some consideration, exchanged some equipment with other brother units, greatly reducing the number of Lion Tanks and Lion King Tanks deployed, and even the number of artillery was reduced.

What replaced the heavy tanks was a large number of Sentry Mechas.

These were definitely not as effective as heavy tanks on the front lines; their armor could not withstand even machine gun fire for long before breaking; and they could not, like tanks, directly equip a large-caliber tank cannon, at most carrying some machine guns, rocket nests, and the like.

However, they still counted as armored units and were flexible. They were roughly humanoid in shape, although much taller than normal human soldiers, but basically, if infantry could get into a place, so could they.

This kind of convenience was something that tanks could not replace. In an environment like Temir No.4, filled with pits and interior building combat, they could play a surprisingly large role.

Their natural enemies on the battlefield—artillery and heavy tanks—were either nowhere to be seen or could not perform effectively in tight and complex environments, making it the perfect stage for the Sentry Mechas to show their prowess, right?

Also, artillery was not easy to deploy in this kind of war environment. It was alright during defense, but during offense, the caverns were too winding and undestroyable by cannon fire to be of any use, not to mention that artillery couldn't get inside.

Replacing artillery was enhanced individual firepower. Equipped with more offensive grenades, bombs, rocket launchers.

As for grenades, no need to explain; bombs were used after entering the caves to locate key positions, then blowing up the caves and calling it a day. Once the key passages collapsed, regardless of whether the Green Skins inside were dead or alive, they would eventually perish. Green Skins indeed didn't need to eat and could "photosynthesize," but there was no sunlight in the underground caverns for that.

Rocket launchers were suitable for direct bombardment into the cave openings during the attack. No matter if there were people inside or not, first launching three to five rockets inside, then the infantry could advance.

In summary, if tanks were not usable, find another armored alternative; if artillery wasn't efficient, find another firepower replacement.

Thanks to the mobilization order sounded by the Alliance rear, the billions of skilled workers worked overtime to produce all kinds of war materials and equipment, so the Alliance Land Forces still had plenty, and a wide variety, of stuff to fight those Green Skins with.

Of course, eliminating all the Green Skins on Temir No.4 wasn't something that could be done quickly. The Alliance sent down eight million men, but in the end, it still relied on several hundred million troops from the home front to serve as the main force. Even though those Green Skins had lost their reinforcements and had to fear orbital attacks forcing them to shrink back, precisely because of this, by leveraging the terrain for pure defense, the human side looking to completely annihilate the opponent might need eight to ten years to accomplish it.

But it didn't matter.

As long as the overall situation was determined, that was enough.

Although Temir No.4 was still in a state of war, all production activities within the human-controlled areas could fully recover. They no longer had to fear like before that starting production would attract Orcs and lead to annihilation; now they craved for Orcs to come out, then with the reinforced Planetary Defense Force serving as the main force, and the Alliance Land Forces as the decider in a fatal blow, they could systematically eliminate the enemy's living forces.

If the Orcs didn't come out, then they'd continue mining; the minerals extracted would be processed into steel alloys on-site, turned into raw materials in chemical plants, and then sent to newly established munitions factories to be made into weapons or bombs, supplying the front-line troops, innovating equipment, and strengthening firepower.

The local Defense Army, with increasing war experience and upgraded equipment, would become stronger and stronger!

As long as the space above could prevent these Orcs from being resupplied, cleaning up the Orcs from the planet was just a matter of time.

Even more so, as the battlefront became increasingly stable, these Defense Armies who had come through the flames of war could be conscripted to other battlefields.

Actually, under the direction of Gu Hang, the Alliance Military and Political Department was already in the process of assembling troops under the Septem Pact framework. This would be the third force under Gu Hang's control, apart from the Alliance Land Forces and the Star Realm Army—the Pact Army.

Chapter 439, Temir No.5 Meat Grinder_2

The five hundred million people on Temir No.4 can all be integrated into the framework of the Pact Army.

At the same time, the mineral resources of Temir No.4, raw material processing, and the military industries under development can all contribute to the Alliance's endeavors.

Temir No.4 no longer has a governor; they abandoned their post in the face of disaster, only to be apprehended and executed by the angry military and populace of Temir No.4 before they could take flight.

Now, an officer from the Native Defense Forces is in charge of the planet.

After consulting with Supreme Commander Gu, the execution of the governor of Temir No.4 was deemed a 'purge of a traitor' and certainly not a rebellion.

The defense army officer was temporarily appointed by Gu Hang as the Acting Governor of Temir No.4 and brought the planet into the Seven Horse Pact.

Nobody stipulated that only a star sector bearing the word 'Horse' in its name could join the Seven Horse Pact, right?

…

Compared to the fourth, the situation on the fifth planet is somewhat more difficult.

It lacks the complex terrain that is conducive to defense found on the fourth planet; it's a fairly standard civilized world.

Yet the number of Green Skins here is close to that on Temir II.

There are four hundred million Green Skin Orcs and slightly fewer leprechauns, but still around one billion of them.

The defense organization on planet No.5 is not as reliable as No.4's. Not just because of terrain, but also governmental organization strengths vary.

The fourth planet lost about five hundred million people at the onset of the war, but still managed to mobilize a military force of five hundred million from a population of thirty-five billion — an mobilization rate of over 14%; virtually all other citizens were also working for the war effort.

However, starting with a population of twelve billion, planet No.5, despite already having lost over two billion, still had a substantial remainder of ten billion people. Yet the defense forces they managed to raise amounted only to the same as No.4's five hundred million, barely reaching a 5% mobilization rate.

Moreover, as a civilized world, Temir No.5's production capacity should be far more developed than No.4's. But this capacity was not effectively organized for wartime service.

With only five hundred million in their Defense Army, facing an equally numbered Green Skin force and a leprechaun force two to three times their size, they were certainly at a tremendous disadvantage.

One after another, cities were captured and burned, Green Skin enclaves were established.

Clearly, the Iron-Tooth Clan treated Temir No.5 as they did Temir II.

Even the conditions here were more favorable, especially considering the developed industrial base, which the Green Skins could convert into their scrap factories and junk cities.

The human Defense Army could only maintain a force of around five hundred million. The Planetary Government behind the lines had been 'desperately' recruiting, but by the time they assembled an army

corps of tens of millions to send to various frontlines, the battle lines had already retreated significantly, costing tens of millions of lives.

This is how human resources were frantically consumed.

Even then, they couldn't maintain control over the entire planetary frontline. Just as one barely managed to plug a hole, somewhere else, the Green Skins would suddenly make a vicious breakthrough. Often this would result in the fall of a highly populated city, followed by an even greater depletion of the already stretched human resources due to the deficient organizational abilities of the administration…

This world, in particular, is in dire need of substantial Alliance intervention.

The Extinction Order is not an option; the only recourse is Fleet support, orbital bombardment plus ground troops.

Fifty million troops from the Alliance Army were deployed to the surface.

The already brutal ground battles on Temir No.5 escalated in intensity to a new level.

The Alliance was extremely dissatisfied with the pre-existing battle command system on planet No.5. The commanding general of the deployed Alliance troops, Major General Perbov of the First Alliance Army Group, demanded full command over the Planetary Defense Forces.

Under the leadership of the Alliance Army, within a week, human forces waged three impressive campaigns in three different directions.

Such a short period was not even enough for starships to deploy troops and gather them for battle. A significant portion of the forces were directly dropped close to the frontline, then immediately engaged in combat.

It was precisely this sudden and direct engagement that shocked the Native Defense Forces, which considerably smoothed Perbov's take over of the command.

What followed was routine combat operations.

Using armored forces and artillery, they sought out the main body of Green Skin forces for decisive battles.

And these decisive battles were invariably won by the human side.

The high quality of the Alliance Army was one factor, but not the key one; although the Green Skins' tactical awareness was deficient, their individual quality was so high that sometimes tactics alone were not enough to handle them.

The key lay in the support from orbital firepower.

As soon as human forces located a main Green Skin force, whether it was a battle of tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, or even several hundred thousand, once the battle commenced, the Green Skin Orcs were virtually transparent under orbital surveillance. They would be bombarded while gathering, their logistics and munition depots would be obliterated, and their transport units ambushed and destroyed by infiltrating human infantry squads…

Even when both sides did manage to set up formations for a battle, often before infantry could even engage each other, the Green Skins had to contend not only with heavy artillery bombardment and air attacks from each division and brigade, but also suffer the devastating impact of orbital strikes.

Chapter 439, Temir No.5 Meat Grinder_3

This kind of large-scale decisive battle is something the Green Skin Orcs can't afford.

After suffering losses a few times, they had grown smarter.

Rarely do they assemble large forces. When they encounter a large number of human troops gathering for an advance, they scatter, even at the expense of losing hard-won ecological circles and key sites such as garbage city armories.

And the dispersed Green Skin Orcs, relying on not needing food supplies, in addition to some garbage-built armed trucks, with Skugg Beasts for transport, and carrying extra ammo supplies, formed numerous armies ranging from a few hundred to just over ten thousand in size, poking into the depths of the human army's frontline.

Often in the front, a considerable number of petty spirits formed fodder armies, drawing the attention of the human main forces, while the real Orc troops engaged in guerrilla warfare behind, fighting small-scale battles.

This halted the momentum of the human armies' offenses.

It was very uncomfortable.

This bunch of Green Skins can truly fight without logistics—at least they rely on it far less than humans do.

Human armies can hardly fight without logistics. People need food, guns need bullets, shells, vehicles need energy… Without any one of these, their combat effectiveness plummets.

It's different for the Green Skins, they don't need to eat, or they can eat the petty spirits and Skugg Beasts accompanying them; they also need ammunition and energy, but the former can be hand-made, and the latter can be looted.

Turn to suppress banditry?

Fight small-scale battles with Green Skins?

That's a real loss.

Actually, the land forces are still okay. Once they catch the Green Skins, one part holds them, and help comes from all sides. If the Green Skins also send reinforcements, that's even better, a decisive battle would be most welcome.

But that often would not happen. They don’t send reinforcements. Instead, they look for ways to break through, or if they can’t, they defend stubbornly and fight hard.

The Green Skin youngsters had battles to fight, howling excitedly.

Calling in ship artillery for such small troop units is a loss-making affair.

The lofty attitudes of the Alliance Navy had improved a lot; they wouldn’t say not to disturb them unless you had a hole that could be filled with twenty thousand lives, but calling a ship over to rain down intense fire for a day, the cost of the ammunition and the firepower effectiveness ratio would become absurdly high.

So the Alliance Army had to rely on their own artillery for support.

That would result in significant casualties.

The Alliance Army was precious and elite, and the main combat power still had to depend on them, so they could only rely on the Native Defense Forces to fill the gaps, with the Alliance’s heavy artillery for fire support and the armored units for assaults, with the infantry cleaning up at the end.

But even so, the Native Defense Forces didn’t have much of a complaint.

Even though it sounded unpleasant, it was like being cannon fodder, but the casualty ratio, compared to when they fought independently before, was much lower.

Perbov didn’t want to be led by the nose by a bunch of Green Skin Orcs. While providing necessary support to the Planetary Defense Force, he still gathered as much of the Alliance Army as possible and selected many strategic targets.

Freeing captured cities, rescuing populations, destroying garbage cities, destroying the ecological circles of the Green Skins… If you dare not fight a decisive battle with me, I will dig up your roots.

As for the numerous scattered fronts, stretching thousands of kilometers across the globe, the endless intricate battle lines, those battles that could be called meat grinders had to continue.

With the Alliance Army as the core backbone of the various battlefields and fire support from the Space Fleet, those numerous meat grinders weren't only grinding human flesh but also that of the Green Skins.

Before the Alliance arrived, the exchange ratio between humans and Green Skin Orcs was about 10:1; now it had been brought down to within 2:1—most of the human casualties were still from the Native Defense Forces.

If those petty spirits were included, the casualty ratio could be reversed to 1 human for 2 Green Skins.

The combat capability of the petty spirits was quite far behind that of the proper Orcs.

Cut off the Green Skins' external reinforcements, destroy their ecological circles as much as possible, and reduce local production… If it came to attrition, the existing one and a half billion Green Skin creatures still couldn't outlast humans.

But even so, the estimate for eradicating the Green Skins on Temir No.5 predicted that humans would likely suffer over five hundred million casualties.

This number, upon seeing the data provided by the staff department, made Perbov shudder.

Five hundred million… even on Temir II, where the native populace was burned by a Skyburn Torpedo, the number didn't reach half this figure. But to clear Temir II through ground offensives, the losses wouldn't be lower than this number, and might even be higher.

What was more frightening was that on Temir II, there weren't as many Planetary Defense Forces—now called Pact Army—as allies for the Alliance like here on No.5. By then, most of the losses might have to be borne by the Alliance Army.

Who could withstand that?

In interstellar battlefields, where both sides span across Star Sectors, combining the forces of all races, the scale is so exaggerated that it's unimaginable.

Thinking of this, Perbov no longer had any doubt about whether it was really right to deploy that World-ending Weapon.

All he had in his heart now was a profound hatred for the Alien Races.

Clenching his teeth, he ordered his troops to destroy another Orc garbage city and then received some terrible intelligence.

It came from above.

Commander Du Shiliang informed him that from this moment on, the firepower support that the Alliance Navy could provide would be greatly reduced.

Because the Green Skins' Fleet was coming.

Although it had not arrived and was still shuttling through the Star Realm Tunnel, the Navy had to save their cannon reserves; otherwise, if a naval battle broke out and the rear artillery supplies hadn't arrived, having no firepower for a naval battle would be ridiculous.

Chapter 439, Temir No.5 Meat Grinder_4

Soon, just a few days later, Du Shiliang's United Fleet had been forced to leave the orbit of the planet.

This planet had no orbital defense system to provide shelter to the Human Fleet, so guarding the orbit and fighting against the Green Skin Fleet, which could freely advance or retreat outside, was no longer a wise choice. They could be trapped and beaten in the planet's orbit.

They had to pull out into the vast star domain to confront and drag out the Beastman Fleet.

Overall, the strengths of both fleets were similar. After all, only half of the United Fleet was here; the remaining half was with Yelisia.

About a hundred warships, including four Main Cruisers.

On the other side, the Green Skins had two hundred vessels, with three cruisers at the main warship grade.

That number was one more than the main ship that had initially escaped from Steel Wing Star.

It seemed the Beastman still had some reserves.

Du Shiliang had to act cautiously, not daring to engage in a fleet-decisive battle when the strengths were so closely matched.

The implications of win or lose were far too significant.

With both sides wary of making a move, they started to play a game of cat and mouse across the entire star system, testing, ambushing, and exchanging fire from extreme distances before swiftly avoiding each other. They also took the opportunity to fire a few shots when passing near planets…

In this space situation, neither side had control of the dominion of space, but a ground battlefield was brewing the largest engagement since the war began.

Upon hearing that they had no orbital support, Perbov's first reaction was naturally one of tension.

This was certainly not good news.

He didn't even consider whether the naval battle would be won or lost. If they lost, he was prepared to suffer like the Green Skins who were bombed a while ago.

Just looking at the current situation, without ship cannon support, the Green Skin ground troops might not continue to fight guerilla warfare in such a constrained manner.

They were very likely to rise up and assemble their forces to battle humans in a large-scale engagement.

By that time, could the human army, lacking orbital firepower support, still ensure victory?

Could they maintain a high combat damage ratio?

These were concerning issues.

But… perhaps Perbov had a bit of a gambler's nature in him.

This could also be an opportunity.

Fighting numerous small-scale, vicious battles, the fleet's fire-support was inherently limited and served more as a deterrent to prevent the enemy from gathering.

And the actual combat was being fought with a relatively fixed attrition rate.

While this was 'steady,' it was splendid if a clear victory could be secured in one of the engagements, meaning countless Green Skins would lose their combat effectiveness. After the victory, human forces, with their artillery and armored groups gathered, could massacre the finally assembled Beastman army.

Of course, if they lost, the same situation might very well fall upon themselves.

But Perbov felt it was worth the gamble.

And soon, the opportunity arose.

When the fleet of Green Skins truly appeared within the Temir Star System, the leader of the Green Skin Orcs on Temir No.5 also received the news.

This cunning Beastman Overlord immediately perceived it as a good opportunity for a counterattack.

He had had enough of guerilla warfare; what Beastman wouldn't want to fight a tremendous earth-shattering battle if possible?

Under his deliberate command, several originally scattered Green Skin Beastman armies quickly gathered around him. In just a few days, they assembled a large force of over five hundred thousand troops.

At the same time, even more armies were converging on his location.

But he couldn't wait any longer.

He immediately launched an operation, deploying heavy forces to break through along a battlefront hundreds of kilometers wide.

Mighty armed trucks, Skugg War Behemoths, death tanks… all of the Green Skins' heavy equipment were deployed!

The human army, caught off guard, was completely overwhelmed!

Chapter 440, I don't want casualty numbers, I just want Gaomen Ridge

When the Beastman Overlord truly gathered the vast Green Skin army, when the firepower and armored strength of the Green Skins could be utilized without restraint, they also demonstrated the strong combat capability that allowed their race to dominate the Star Sea.

This hundred-kilometer battle line was subjected to a powerful breakthrough by the Green Skin forces. A vast number of human troops were caught off guard and were directly overwhelmed by the flood of Beastmen.

Of course, the human troops here were primarily from the Planetary Defense Force.

The massive assembly and attack by the enemy was precisely what Perbov wanted to see. It was to be expected that the Defense Army couldn't withstand it.

However, the Defense Army's failing still caught him off guard, or rather, the offensive power of the Beastmen exceeded his expectations.

How could a single assault create a breach in the defensive line that was one hundred fifty kilometers wide and nearly three hundred kilometers deep?

Perbov's main forces hadn't even had time to complete their deployment!

This gap was too large; even if he managed to deploy his troops completely and win the decisive battle, encircling the enemy would be difficult.

Without forming an encirclement, the defeated Green Skins, once reorganized, could still continue to fight. Only with an encirclement could a genuine annihilation battle be fought.

The Green Skins were still gathering step by step, and now was the time to net them.

Perbov now was no longer concerned about the magnitude of the battle results; what he considered was whether he could stomach what was to come.

At the same time, he couldn't let this operation result in overly adverse consequences.

A major home-planet city with a population in the tens of millions was right before the Beastmen's onslaught.

Tactically, Perbov couldn't allow the Green Skins to further widen the gap; strategically, he couldn't afford to lose a large city with tens of millions of inhabitants. Therefore, he issued orders to the three divisions stationed directly in front of the Green Skin forces to hold the city's outskirts at all costs.

He himself then began large-scale mobilization of the main forces of the Alliance Army, preparing to enter the battle.

Before that, the three infantry divisions of the Alliance Army had to build a defense line by utilizing mountains, rivers, and several bridges, and hold off the advancing Green Skins from tearing through the front lines until Perbov's main forces arrived.

…

"I don't want casualty numbers, I just want Gaomen Ridge!"

This was the last order that Zhang Zhikai heard over the phone from his division commander.

He was the Major Battalion Commander of the 326th Infantry Division – Battalion 7, part of the 7th Corps of the Alliance Land Forces. Four hours earlier, he and his troops had been ordered to support "Gaomen Ridge."

Currently, the main attack direction of the Green Skin Orcs was trying to cross the river; the human military, in response, defended along the river to prevent the enemy from crossing.

The initial core of the battle was at the bridge, but it was quickly destroyed, and both sides began to repeatedly contest, rebuild, and destroy the damaged bridge, resulting in countless human and Green Skin deaths.

Subsequently, the Green Skins tried to create new river crossing points, with their technically dominant leaders bringing a large number of lesser minions to build pontoon and makeshift bridges.

There were failures, of course, but also successes. However, even a successful crossing would face the stiffest counterattacks by the humans where the artillery group would intensely bombard, followed by resolute counterattacks by infantry companies.

Later on, the frustrated Green Skins even attempted to find a shorter section of the river to cross directly with armed Skugg Beasts.

Of course, it was suicidal. A large-scale fording, once discovered, was akin to delivering themselves to the slaughter. The Green Skin Orcs caught in the swift current couldn't even counterattack and could only passively take hits.

Even if small-scale fordings succeeded, they hardly mattered. A small number of troops in a conflict involving forces of hundreds of thousands on both sides could not make a significant impact.

Originally, Zhang Zhikai's Battalion 7 was tasked with guarding along the river. In their responsible area, there were no bridges or pontoons, just direct crossings by Green Skins that were harshly repelled by them.

However, the nature of beating a dog in the water couldn't last long.

His defense area was taken over by two infantry battalions from the Defense Army. These two battalions were previously disorganized by being routed at the frontline and had retreated to regroup. One couldn't expect much from their combat effectiveness, but there was no other option now.

Their defense lines were severely strained under the fierce attack of the Beastmen; any usable force had to be utilized.

Zhang Zhikai's Battalion 7, still maintaining relatively complete combat effectiveness as a standard infantry battalion, received a new task: reinforce Gaomen Ridge.

This was a river bend plateau, not particularly high in altitude but still strategically significant. Located on three sides by water, setting up an artillery battery and stationing troops here could surveil a wide stretch of the river. Commanding from high ground, the Green Skins had no chance of breaking through from this point.

Yet because of its importance, Green Skin rocket artillery and heavy artillery constantly targeted it; other Green Skins crossing the river from different locations circled to the northern side of the land at the plateau to fiercely attack.

Previously stationed here was another infantry battalion from the 326 Division. They had staunchly resisted here for two days, reportedly suffering heavy casualties and were about to give in.

Battalion 7 was the force ordered to support.

As soon as it engaged in combat, Battalion 7 achieved commendable battle results. At that moment, the Green Skins assaulting the high ground suddenly encountered an attack from behind, suffering terrible losses from the artillery fire. The engaged companies and platoons also annihilated a substantial number of Green Skins.

Especially the anti-armor company directly under the battalion, using portable armor-piercing rocket launchers and plasma guns, destroyed several killer cans and also killed two Skugg Beasts.

The heavy units sent across the river by the Green Skins weren't many!

Having been heavily damaged, the Green Skins were thus repulsed.

Then, Zhang Zhikai dispatched a liaison to communicate with Battalion 11 on the high ground.

Based on his strategy, defending the high ground was the priority, but they couldn't just passively hold it, foolishly waiting. The two battalions could completely complement each other — Battalion 11 could continue holding the high ground while he led Battalion 7 on the lower side of the high ground.

Once the Green Skins continued their assault on Gaomen Ridge, Battalion 7 could flank them just like in the recent battle; but if the Green Skins chose to deal with Battalion 7, then Battalion 11 could provide fire support from higher ground and even countercharge.

The number of Green Skins crossing the river was still limited—otherwise they wouldn't have been so desperate to seize Gaomen Ridge, which was to ensure that subsequent river-crossing operations could proceed more smoothly. Under these circumstances, the Green Skins should not have had sufficient forces to attack two battalions and two positions simultaneously.

However, when the messenger relayed the message from the high ground, Zhang Zhikai's heart sank:

Where was Battalion 11?

After defending Gaomen Ridge for a whole day, the fully staffed Battalion 11, which should have had three thousand men, now had only about three hundred.

That was not just the frontline forces being reduced to two hundred men; that was all that was left of the battalion.

The artillery position had been destroyed under the heavy fire from the Beastmen across the river, countless warriors died under the bombardment, and they still held their ground despite heavy casualties until logistical troops, guards moved up; artillerymen, without cannons to operate, also had to pick up rifles and enter the frontline trenches and bomb shelters.

The battalion commander had been killed, the commissar and deputy commander took over; when they all died, the company commanders and instructors moved up…

Now, in charge of Gaomen Ridge was a lieutenant, who was normally just an instructor for a company.

And he was now the highest-ranking officer remaining in Battalion 11.

Zhang Zhikai was silent.

He was shocked by the heavy sacrifice of his allies and, on the other hand, he felt a fearful awe for the entire mission.

Of course, he was afraid.

Was there any fundamental difference between Battalion 7 and Battalion 11?

Now that Battalion 11 was gone, with no one to support him, what was he supposed to do?

As per the division commander's orders, he had to take charge himself.

And then, watch his own battalion end up like Battalion 11?

He was truly afraid.

But with the mission at hand, he could only tell the messenger to find a way to contact the division headquarters, report the situation of Battalion 11, and express his concerns.

The casualties would be enormous.

Then, the division commander gave him that sentence, "Don't want casualty numbers, just want Gaomen Ridge."

What else could he do?

Afraid as he was, he could only push forward.

But lessons from the situation of Battalion 11 still had to be learned.

Defending to death would only lead to death. He decided to defend both at the foothills and the highland.

Artillery positions were placed at the foothills to ensure they could bombard the incoming Green Skin forces from the north, but also with cover from the high ground, so that artillery fire from the Green Skins on the southern bank of the Great River could hardly hit directly here.

Artillery must be preserved, or there was no way to fight.

Battalion 1, along with his own guards, were sent to the highland, relieving the brothers from Battalion 11. Battalions 2 and 3, along with battalion headquarters, were positioned at the foothills.

Both sides ensured they could communicate and support each other.

As he was finalizing the strategic deployment, the Green Skins attacked, heading directly towards his headquarters at the foothills.

In hastily established positions, his troops could only rely on bomb craters, fallen trees, small hills, and large boulders as cover to fight the oncoming Beastmen.

The casualties were substantial.

On average, it took ten to twenty hits with firearms to kill one Beastman; while their commonly equipped shotguns and large caliber rifles, if hit, would penetrate immediately, making the personal body armor seem as flimsy as paper.

Even though they had managed to establish the artillery formation, under the assault of over a thousand Green Skin Orcs, Battalion 7's position at the foothills was nearly broken through.

Zhang Zhikai even began to doubt whether his strategy of dividing his forces was correct.

Fortunately, at the last moment, it proved useful for the troops assigned to the mountain.

Mortar fire from Battalion 1 rained down from above, and multiple heavy bomb machine guns on the high ground, from a distance of fifteen hundred meters, crazily swept down.

In addition, the division commander didn't just expect him to use lives to fill; upon the call of the messenger, a division-affiliated aviation force scrambled three Wind Falcons, breaking through the Beastmen's air blockade, and dropping six missiles.

With all this help, Zhang Zhikai suffered over two hundred casualties but repelled the Green Skins' attack.

But there was no time to catch a breath; he had to immediately fortify the position, quickly digging foxholes, bomb shelters, and trenches as needed.

The Green Skins wouldn't give him much time; the Beastmen's next assault would arrive soon.

The scouts on the high ground, using binoculars, could already see several Skugg War Behemoths breaking through the river blockade and swimming across. Judging by their path, they were coming for Gaomen Ridge.