Governor 451

Chapter 451, Seizing the Ship Heroic Spirit If Gu Hang merely wanted to secure a victory in this war, he could have achieved that already.

The Wraith Spire was indeed powerful, after all, as a main battleship. But in Gu Hang's hands, it was still possible to tear apart the battleship's Void Shield and temporarily disable it.

Then, with the full fleet firing in unison, the battleship lacking the protection of the Void Shield would quickly explode into space debris.

Although the armor of the battleship was also very thick, it couldn't possibly withstand the volley of an entire fleet without protection.

If it could withstand the first round, it wouldn't withstand the second.

If Gu Hang had chosen to do so, the battle would have finished earlier.

But didn't he covet their vessel?

That was a main battleship!

Alone and unprotected!

Just the purchase alone would cost fifty billion! Not to mention bloodsucking, based on the financial situation of the Alliance, it would take five years of savings!

And that would still be under the condition that the Alliance Government wouldn't eat, drink, or spend money.

Moreover, something like a battleship, even if you have the money, isn't easy to buy.

The production of battleships in the Empire is limited, and they are claimed before completion or sometimes even before construction begins.

Even if Gu Hang later acquired battleship technology and wanted to start production, that wouldn't be an easy task. Constructing shipyards is a strenuous endeavor; the sheer size makes the capital investment particularly huge.

And to draw such a blueprint was a bit difficult; Gu Hang hadn't even managed to secure cruiser technology yet.

Getting this battleship that came to his doorstep would save him years of effort.

Since he was aiming to seize the ship, the most convenient method of victory naturally couldn't be used.

To say nothing of blowing up the ship, even inflicting serious damage was unacceptable, for if the ship couldn't be towed back or was irreparable after being towed back, it would all be in vain.

And since seizing the ship was the goal, it naturally meant boarding it. It was necessary to kill all the Mutinous Star Warriors and Chaos Cultists corrupted by chaos onboard the battleship.

As for the damage that would occur during the process of seizing the ship, whether it was the loss to the fleet or casualties in the boarding combat, it was both inevitable and a necessary sacrifice.

However, Gu Hang still didn't choose to commence boarding combat at the very start of the battle.

The technology for teleportation was not great in the Alliance; if teleportation was a must, then they could only rely on Gu Hang leading his Storm Mage Corps into a teleportation combat.

But that was very difficult.

The situation was somewhat like the battle at Korolya.

On that Chaos-corrupted battleship, the power of the Evil God was prevalent. Its affiliation, different from that of the plague outbreak in Korolya, didn't belong to the 'Benevolent Father,' but rather appeared to be that of a 'Tyrant' seated on a brass throne.

But undoubtedly, both were equally grand presences.

Though of course, a battleship's scale didn't equate to that of a world or a Nest Capital, it didn't mean Gu Hang could easily use teleportation to send in too many troops.

After all, although the scale of a battleship was smaller, this time Gu Hang didn't have a blade like the Great Unclean One's to act as an anchor point to deceive his opponent.

He could only send in a force of around two thousand men into the battleship.

That was already three times more than the number they smuggled into Korolya, but facing hundreds of thousands of Chaos Evildoers, two or three hundred Mutinous Star Warriors, and battling within the domain of the Blood God, Gu Hang still felt the risk was too great.

Even if he participated in person and could guarantee victory, the cost was still a concern that had to be considered.

A price that must be paid for greater gains was one he was not stingy in risking; but when it came to additional investments with equal returns, he didn't want to spend an extra dime.

Coincidentally, those followers of the Blood God clearly intended to engage in teleportation combat.

Then bring it on.

First kill those who teleport over. That way, when they board the battleship for an offensive, the resistance would obviously become much smaller.

Those two hundred Mutinous Star Warriors, it would definitely be much easier to eliminate them on their own warships than on the opponent's.

And as long as those two hundred Mutinous Star Warriors were killed, the remaining forces of the ash dead might not even be a hundred, making the entire combat much easier.

However, Gu Hang couldn't really wait to clear out all the teleporting heretics before dealing with the Wraith Spire.

If he did that, it would be too slow.

Since they couldn't dare to fire excessively at that battleship for fear of destroying it, and eliminating the traitors on the ship would take time.

In such a case, it was tantamount to completely allowing the Wraith Spire to use the formidable heavy artillery of a battleship to attack their ships at close range, resulting in substantial losses.

If it took just a bit longer, it was not impossible for the battleship to destroy half the fleet.

That would have been a loss too great to justify.

Gu Hang definitely would not let such a result happen.

Therefore, as soon as those two hundred Interstellar Warriors started their teleportation, Gu Hang simultaneously made a counter move: tearing open the rift of the Divine Realm and using Spiritual Energy to forcefully penetrate the veil between the Storm God Kingdom and that battleship.

This was not so easy; what Gu Hang had to tear apart was not only the veil between the Storm God Kingdom and the real world, he also had to break through the domain of the Blood God surrounding that corrupted ship.

In the process of doing so, Gu Hang's nostrils were filled with the stench of blood, and he was quite anxious, fearing that he might provoke a Great Demon.

Chapter 451, Seizing the Ship Heroic Spirit_2 Gu Hang had once killed a Great Demon, but it was only because the Great Unclean One, Ge Wajia, had fallen ill and walked into the Storm God Kingdom himself, giving Gu Hang a home-field advantage that allowed him to kill the demon.

Although Gu Hang had become stronger than before, if it were to happen again, and the enemy didn't just give himself up, it was still hard to say what the outcome would be.

Besides, even if he won, wouldn't it still be a tough fight?

It's better not to meet such a challenge if possible.

Fortunately, Gu Hang had never come across such signs.

A good thing.

Once the direct tunnel to the battleship in the Storm God Kingdom was completed, Gu Hang deployed his loyal Valor Spirit Legion into it.

Theoretically, Gu Hang could absorb the souls of every fallen Alliance Warrior on the battlefield into the Storm God Kingdom and convert them into Heroic Spirits.

Before, the number of casualties among Alliance Warriors was relatively low. But after the Green Skins War started, this number skyrocketed.

In almost a year of war, not counting the Pact Army, just the Land Forces alone had suffered over sixty million casualties. Among them, twenty percent were seriously wounded but survived with pensions and retired from active duty; ten percent were healed and could return to their old units; but the remaining seventy percent—that is, over forty million Alliance Warriors—either perished on the spot or succumbed to their injuries in field hospitals in the rear.

Logically speaking, the souls of these forty million dead Alliance Warriors should all be in Gu Hang's Divine Realm.

But realistically, that was not the case.

Gu Hang could absorb that many, but he could not sustain the existence of that many Heroic Spirits.

Why bother then?

If he couldn't handle it, he might as well let them return to the Golden Throne.

It's all the same.

Currently, there were about five million Heroic Spirit Warriors in Gu Hang's Storm God Kingdom.

If anyone dared to enter his divine kingdom and battle him, these five million Heroic Spirits would become their worst nightmare.

However, Gu Hang was not yet able to bring all five million into the real world.

If he had the ability, he wouldn't need to fuss so much; he would just capture the ship and be done with it.

Right now, the maximum number he could sustain in the real world was at most five hundred thousand—a mere tenth.

But that was enough.

Gu Hang had already deployed seventy to eighty thousand on the 'Wraith Spire.'

It wasn't that he couldn't deploy more, there just wasn't enough space.

The Heroic Spirits fought with the most fearless disposition, possessing combat consciousness and skills just like when they were alive; their firearms, similar to the Alliance's standard G Series Weapons, no longer fired physical bullets but launched bolts of lightning.

After being attacked, 'Wraith Spire' fell into disarray for a moment.

In the past, it was always them boarding others' ships, when had they ever been boarded?

During this initial chaos, multiple firepower systems on Wraith Spire were overtaken by the Heroic Spirits.

They didn't destroy these firepower points but defended them on the spot, engaging in determined battles with the retaliating Chaotic Evildoers.

Meanwhile, more Heroic Spirits were attacking other areas.

The defending army on Wraith Spire soon realized that they simply couldn't kill all these invaders.

These beings, glowing with blue light, could certainly be killed. However, the Chaotic Evildoers also always seemed to find that, just when they'd watched a recently constructed barricade manned by only seven Heroic Spirits and had killed three of them—supposedly leaving four—when their squad charged and reached them, they were shocked to find there were still seven Heroic Spirits defending!

Heroic Spirits couldn't be killed—not in the real world at least. They would reassemble shortly after dying in the Storm God Kingdom.

Every time one died, Gu Hang would casually replace it. Unless the Chaotic Evildoers on Wraith Spire could kill five million instances of Heroic Spirits in a short time, Gu Hang's Heroic Spirits were infinite.

How were the Chaotic Evildoers on Wraith Spire supposed to fight?

There was simply no way to fight!

Compared to the unlimited Heroic Spirits, their numbers were finite.

This situation had eased only after the Ashen Dead joined the fight.

The leader of the Battle Group, Zhong Jihua, had finally understood what was going on.

He had heard that Gu Hang, the leader of the Alliance, was a powerful Psychic.

An A-level Psychic was indeed formidable from all angles.

But initially, he hadn't taken it very seriously.

There were also mages within the Battle Group and even those who were A-level in strength; their abilities were even higher due to also being Interstellar Warriors.

But what was the deal with these suddenly-appearing Heroic Spirits?

This was something that had never been mentioned in the intelligence reports!

—Gu Hang was very cautious about using the Valor Spirit Legion; for now, apart from the Mechanic Servants working in the Black Line Factory and a very few researchers with a very high level of confidentiality, only a portion of the Phoenix Battle Group knew of the existence of the Valor Spirit Legion.

This had also been explicitly ordered to be kept a secret by Gu Hang.

Gu Hang still trusted the confidentiality capabilities of the Interstellar Warriors.

Zhong Jihua already felt that he had fallen into a conspiracy, a trap specifically aimed at him and his ships.

Fighting like a trapped beast, he led the less than one hundred Ashen Dead on the battleship and personally joined the frontline combat.

With him and nearly a hundred Ashen Dead, the Heroic Spirits suffered heavy losses.

To be frank, the actual combat power demonstrated by the Heroic Spirits was only slightly stronger than the average T5 level soldiers, after all, they couldn't shake off their strength levels from their lifetimes. Their greatest characteristics were their indestructibility and their unpredictable way of deploying.

However, Gu Hang had obviously considered this as well.

On the Opera Cruiser, dealing with the defected Ashen Dead was Rizzo, the High Priest.

And where was the Battle Group Leader of the Phoenix?

Right here, of course!

Matins and his Phoenix First Company, who had not participated in the battle on the Opera Cruiser, were, at a crucial moment, transported to the Wraith Spire by Gu Hang and the members of the Storm Mage Corps through Psionic Teleportation.

The long-suppressed rage could finally be unleashed. Matins, along with his battle brothers, under the coordination of a large number of Heroic Spirit troops, eliminated one squad after another and searched the entire ship for Zhong Jihua.

And at this time, Zhong Jihua finally showed his cunning side.

He attempted to contact Anconi, but the communication device only emitted an endless buzzing sound with no response. He knew that the defected troops no longer had any chance of surviving, and the situation on the ‘Wraith Spire’ was rapidly deteriorating.

What to do if he cannot win?

Of course, he had to run.

If they didn’t flee, they would soon be cornered and tangled by these undying Heroic Spirits, and then his former battle brother would find him with towering fury.

At another time, he wouldn’t mind fighting Matins to the death, but not today.

If they fought today, he would certainly be on the losing side.

This battle was unnecessary.

Zhong Jihua, with a few loyal subordinates, moved to the boarding chamber. They exchanged fire with the Heroic Spirits in the corridors, and each step was incredibly difficult.

Eventually, they burst into the boarding chamber.

Here, there were several small, quick spirit ships, equipped with some anti-detection stealth features.

He planned to escape by ship.

The risks were indeed great; escaping in this chaotic battlefield could easily result in being destroyed.

But the Wraith Spire was definitely not getting away; his only choice if he wanted to survive.

Zhong Jihua skillfully operated the boarding system, preparing to launch a spare small escape ship.

However, just as they were about to detach from the warship, a figure suddenly appeared at the hatch. It was Matins—the Battle Group Leader of the Phoenix, his eyes cold, his armor still stained with blood.

Chapter 452, So You've Joined Them Too When Zhong Jihua saw Matins and the group of Phoenix warriors burst in, his heart sank to rock bottom.

But he still tried to appear fearless, "Matins, my brother…"

"Shut up, you traitor!"

Matins, full of rage, entered the room. Accompanying him were dozens of Phoenix warriors who had already engaged the Ashen Dead.

Yet, no one bothered Zhong Jihua.

Before entering, the Battle Group Leader had made it clear that this was his opponent.

He wanted to personally slaughter this traitor.

"Don't be so serious…"

Zhong Jihua spread his hands, trying to say something more, but in the next moment took the opportunity, while speaking, to swiftly pull out his Bombardment Gun and shoot at Matins.

His series of actions was incredibly quick, as if honed through relentless practice.

But Matins was obviously on guard.

“Ugly tricks!” he sarcastically uttered as he blocked the bomb with his hardest shoulder armor. However, at the same time, Zhong Jihua’s demonic sword had already chopped towards him.

The demonic sword in his hands was the Fine Work Dynamo Sword he had worn in the Battle Group in the past, now even more sinister with the infusion of the Evil God’s Power, carrying a foreboding blood hue. With a fierce strike of the demonic sword, he tried to dominate Matins with his wild onslaught right at the start of the fight.

The two giants clad in Terminator Power Armor engaged in a fight to the death!

Matins struggled to block, but in the melee of swordsmanship, he clearly fell into a disadvantage.

“You were never my match before, and this time is no exception!” Zhong Jihua sneered.

What he said was the truth.

Zhong Jihua and he were from the same batch that entered the Phoenix.

During their rookie period, both had shown exceptional potential and were once simultaneously hailed as the next hope of the Battle Group.

And they both lived up to expectations.

However, there was still a noticeable difference in their abilities. Matins had more leadership and command talent, while Zhong Jihua excelled in swordsmanship, shooting, and physical gifts.

This naturally led to different developmental paths, and logically, Matins became a Company Commander at a relatively young age for an Interstellar Warrior. At the same time, Zhong Jihua, although titled the Champion Swordsman of the Battle Group, had a different role than a Company Commander.

But this did not affect the deep brotherhood between them—at least that’s what Matins thought.

During the Crusade of Atonement, when he heard that an entire company led by Zhong Jihua had gone missing and was destroyed, he was heartbroken.

And at that time he was so heartbroken, but when he found out that Zhong Jihua had become a traitor, he was filled with sadness and anger!

Had it only been like Blaywins, abandoning their posts, it would have been forgivable, but they were in batches! Organized! Rebels!

If those two hundred or so Phoenix Veterans had not defected, could the final battle of the Phoenix have been different? Could doubling the number of veteran Phoenix have brought more survivors back, making it less arduous to rebuild?

He truly hated Zhong Jihua!

Yet, hate as he might, one thing remained unchanged—after all these years, he still couldn't defeat Zhong Jihua.

Over the years, his skill level had indeed improved, even becoming more adept at using the Terminator Power Armor.

However, Zhong Jihua's level was still above his.

The progress Matins made over these years couldn't compare to the Blood God's Evil power that Zhong Jihua had received. This malevolent power further enhanced his blood and flesh power, significantly strengthening his physique, making his slashes even more formidable and forceful.

Linking several swords, each time Matins' body swayed more than Zhong Jihua's, each time it was a very reactive defense, accumulating, the disadvantage was quickly turning into a rout.

On the contrary, Zhong Jihua cut more and more excitedly.

Defeat was imminent, and Matins sighed in his heart.

With one more strike, the end from Zhong Jihua was coming, Matins struggled into an upward sword block, but it was clearly not enough.

Yet, at that moment, a burst of lightning erupted from his body.

The explosive barbaric force repelled Zhong Jihua's demon sword directly.

The leader of the Ashen dead cautiously stepped back several paces, looking at Matins with surprise and doubt.

Was this his power?

No, it wasn't.

Matins had been able to release this special energy long ago; if he had done so earlier, he wouldn't have suffered so horrendously.

Nevertheless, he waited until this moment to use this power.

Zhong Jihua discerned for a moment, then mockingly said, "You still call me a traitor? Just look at yourself now!"

"I wondered where those indestructible little blue men came from, so you've sided with them too…"

"Shut up, meet your death!"

Matins, with a bolt of lightning in his sword, forced Zhong Jihua's words back.

Although Zhong Jihua didn't finish speaking and had to fully focus on the greatly empowered heavy sword after the lightning surge, the mockery in his eyes only grew richer.

Taking advantage of a pause, he was about to add, "How does it feel to side with a Subspace Powerhouse? Isn't it much cooler than believing in that fake Emperor full of lies?"

"Shameless rebel, don't compare me with you!"

"Ha ha ha! Be honest for once, Matins!"

Although laughing, the heart of today's Zhong Jihua was entirely cold.

Feeling the numbness in his arms, sensing that the Blood God's Power was dissipating with every clash, he knew the tide had turned against him.

Now, he was resorting to verbal advantage, as there was nothing else left to leverage. If he couldn't gain an advantage verbally, what else could he do?

He didn't dare hope that Matins would spare his life.

That was impossible.

Eventually, in a fierce counterattack, Matins's Powered Sword, still crackling with lightning, pierced through Zhong Jihua's armor and into his heart.

Zhong Jihua struggled in extreme pain, but in an instant, the lightning destroyed his heart, leaving his body weak.

Matins quickly withdrew the sword, then stabbed again, piercing the second heart.

Blood spilled from Zhong Jihua's mouth, he murmured weakly:

"Don't trust the entities of Subspace too much; none of them bear good intentions…"

"I told you, don't compare me with you."

"Is that so? Then, I'll wait for you in hell…"

Before he could finish, Matins pulled out the Powered Sword and with one sweeping strike, decapitated Zhong Jihua.

The headless body fell onto the cold metal floor.

Matins stood beside the body of Zhong Jihua and took a deep breath.

His gaze then shifted to the others still engaged in the battle.

Lifting his Powered Sword, still ablaze with lingering lightning, Matins charged at the remaining Ashen dead.

Chapter 453: Drag the Battleship Back Home Zhong Jihua's death marked the end of the battle.

After his death, the fighting aboard the ship had not yet concluded. Not to mention the heretics deeply corrupted by chaos, even the mutinous interstellar warriors of the Ashen Dead still had many survivors, stubbornly resisting throughout the starship.

But since it was merely stubborn resistance, it meant it did not affect the overall situation.

The Heroic Spirit Legion ravaging the starship had turned everything upside down.

Once these Heroic Spirits had taken over a large number of the weapon systems' launch platforms, the battleship quickly ceased fire reducing the threat to the human military forces outside the starship significantly.

Meanwhile, the human fleet also stopped continuing their attacks on the Wraith Spire.

They simply besieged it quietly.

Next, Gu Hang, along with Rizzo and the Phoenix, who had wiped out two hundred Ashen Dead on the Opera Cruiser, also teleported onto the battleship.

With this, more than four hundred interstellar warriors, along with the Heroic Spirit Legion, slaughtered on the Wraith Spire, significantly increasing their efficiency.

Three hours after Zhong Jihua's death, there were no longer any chaotic evildoers alive on the Wraith Spire.

The losses of the Heroic Spirit Legion were negligible; they would regrow from the Storm God Kingdom. The current deaths only added some spiritual stress to Gu Hang, which he could recover from with some rest.

The Phoenix lost about sixty warriors.

The main losses occurred on the Opera Cruiser. Four hundred of the Phoenix's new recruits who fought the two hundred veteran Ashen Dead suffered considerable casualties.

However, after this battle, the battle group's pharmacists had collected more than three hundred gene seeds.

The gene seeds left by the dead Phoenix would obviously be useful later.

Those two hundred plus, nearly three hundred gene seeds of the Ashen Dead, were slightly awkward.

The Ashen Dead were not merely deserters or traitors; they genuinely fell into chaos. They had accepted the power infusions of a Chaos God and truly became slaves of chaos.

And after their deaths, the gene seeds they left behind might also likely be problematic due to their prior corruption.

Using such gene seeds to cultivate new Phoenix recruits?

Gu Hang wouldn't dare.

Who knows what kind of monster might emerge?

Even if there seemed to be no issue for the time being, it could still be a ticking time bomb in the future.

It simply wasn't worth it.

Nor was it feasible to use them to pay the gene seed tax.

Gu Hang did indeed hear that some Starfighter Battle Groups would hand over others' seeds as their tax. This usually came from some battle groups needing to expand their numbers or requiring rapid recovery. Generally, most battle groups would care greatly about the purity of their own battle group's gene seeds, but since they must pay taxes to the Empire, they exchanged other seeds instead.

But these battle groups generally used 'allies', or at worst, traitor's seeds. Using Chaos Starfield Warriors' seeds was absurd.

The Empire's collection of gene seed taxes partly intended to inspect the purity of each battle group's gene seeds from the genetic level, ensuring that there were no issues with any battle group.

Handing over seeds tainted with chaos would definitely provoke the Empire.

Generally, captured chaotic gene seeds were certainly meant to be destroyed.

But to destroy them all would still feel like a waste to Gu Hang.

Three hundred gene seeds, that would be thirty thousand grace points if exchanged.

Wasting is not a good habit.

Nevertheless, Gu Hang had come up with an idea to deal with these gene seeds. Although it was still immature and required many more trials, if successful, it might turn waste into treasure.

He collected all the seeds and divided them into two parts. The Phoenix's took theirs; Gu Hang gathered the Chaotic seeds and tossed them into the Storm God Kingdom, planning to deal with them later when he had some spare time.

Subsequently, some members of the Navy boarded the ship.

When they arrived, the battle had already completely ended, and the Valor Spirit Legion had returned. Those left on the ship were only the four hundred-plus Red Armor giants, including Gu Hang.

As these naval sailors and officers moved about the ship, passing by the Red Armor giants, they couldn't help but cast admiring and awestruck glances at them.

From their perspective, they had no idea about the Valor Spirit Legion. They naturally assumed that the cleanup of an entire Battleship of ten to hundreds of thousands of mutineers was all the work of these Phoenixes.

A few hours, a few hundred people, to kill nearly two hundred thousand… indeed, it was beyond the imagination of these mortal officers.

However, no one was there to explain anything to them.

The commander who boarded the Battleship, also selected by Gu Hang as the captain of this Retribution-class Battleship, was an Alliance Navy brigadier named Song Jianyun.

He arrived at the bridge, saw Gu Hang, and solemnly saluted the Alliance Leader:

“Alliance Navy Brigadier, Song Jianyun, reporting to you!”

It was the Alliance Navy, not the Imperial Navy, and the ranks were different.

In the past, the best destination for outstanding graduates from the Naval Academy on Flying Wing Star was the Tianma Fleet, to become a distinguished Imperial Navy officer; the next best option was to go to the ships of the Empire Commerce Guild led by the Gu Commercial Firm.

Now, there was another option—the Alliance Navy.

This option, for now, wasn’t as attractive as the Tianma Fleet. However, given that the Tianma Fleet had been consistently losing ships without replenishment,

The two major shipyards of the Alliance had recently added new ships to the United Fleet under the command of either Yelisia or Zhao Shiliang, and now it appeared there was no difference between the Alliance Navy and the Tianma Fleet, but Gu Hang would definitely need to consider matters after the war.

Certainly, new ships would all be funneled into the Alliance Navy.

Including the just-acquired Battleship.

Yelisia, the Supreme Commander of the United Fleet and acting supreme commander of the Tianma Fleet, had no objection to this either.

It was precisely because of this that the crew, including the officers who boarded this wave, all came from the Alliance Navy's ranks, which was quite normal.

Gu Hang returned the salute to Song Jianyun and then said, "Quickly assess the condition of the ship. I hope it can still be operated. We need to tow it back to the Flying Wing Star Shipyard. After repairs and modifications, this Retribution-class Battleship will become the flagship of our Alliance Navy."

"Yes! Our technicians, under the lead of Chief Advisor Wang Zhaoran, have already been working on this. According to the Chief Advisor's estimation, we need one day's time to complete the preliminary assessment and temporary repairs."

"Alright, make it quick."

This length of time actually dissatisfied Gu Hang. But it was a bit unavoidable, as Gu Hang had consulted with the relevant technicians to assess the situation before departure. At that time, Wang Zhaoran had already informed Gu Hang about this timeframe.

Now, it was just following the expected schedule.

Chapter 454, Machine Spirit Cleansing To repair and assess the condition of the freshly captured Retribution-class Battleship, the entire United Fleet was to stay an entire day within the Iron Dong II Star System.

Despite Gu Hang's dissatisfaction with the need for such a long stop, Wang Zhaoran, the Dominant Bishop of the Mingyang Sect and the technical advisor to Flying Wing Star, didn't mind.

He had explained the reasons to Gu Hang.

First, the shipbuilding technology of the Tianma Star Sector was already unmatched across the Dragonhawk Star Domain, but there was still no experience in manufacturing, maintaining, or repairing Retribution-class Battleships. Having never worked on a ship this big, taking a whole day to do this was already quite efficient.

Second, the level of Chaos corruption this ship had suffered was quite severe—a much bigger issue than the former.

In fact, when Wang Zhaoran initially told Gu Hang that he could get the ship back in working order, although he seemed very confident, he didn't actually have that much certainty.

But…

"Teacher, aren't we deceiving the Governor by doing this?" his apprentice inquired quietly to Wang Zhaoran while they worked.

One of Wang Zhaoran's mechanical arms pushed the apprentice's head back down, "Focus on your work and cut the chatter."

Another apprentice then spoke up with a smile, "If Teacher hadn't said it like that, what if Mr. Gu had given up on the plan to seize the ship? How else would we have such an opportunity to get our hands on such a big ship?"

Wang Zhaoran nodded slightly.

That was indeed what he meant.

Moreover, it was not just any Retribution-class ship; it was deeply corrupted by Chaos.

Chaos corruption was certainly not a good thing, but wasn't it also a rare occurrence?

A rare Battleship plus a rare state of corruption, how could the Oil Heads not be tempted?

He was sure to come!

However, the current situation was slightly beyond his expectations.

If it were only a matter of mechanical issues, it would actually be easier to handle. Although Wang Zhaoran also lacked experience with Retribution-class Battleships, many of the technical aspects of naval vessels were universal. Most importantly, the damage to this particular Retribution-class wasn't that severe to begin with—figuring out how to operate the ship would suffice.

But the corruption was different.

The Mechanical Cult Guild believed that every mechanical creation in the world, from super Starships as large as cities to the most ordinary gun, had a soul.

This was what they called the "Machine Spirit."

Whether replacing a battery in a laser gun, lubricating the tracks of a Lion Tank, or blessing the Interstellar Warriors with incense and scriptures before departure, all were methods to soothe the Machine Spirits. Delighted Machine Spirits could make machines more stable and even perform extraordinarily; discontented Machine Spirits, however, could cause malfunctions.

Of course, although this notion was quite popular, it was mainly the Sect of Mechanics and its followers who took it seriously.

The concept of Machine Spirits was rather mystical, and a good portion of people did not believe in it, or rather, did not understand it.

In the present circumstances, Wang Zhaoran had confirmed that rescuing this Battleship would be exceptionally challenging.

Primarily because of the mutiny of the Machine Spirits due to Chaos corruption.

The corrupted Machine Spirits were violent and bloodthirsty, filled with a madness-inducing power.

To pilot this ship, if it was only for a short time, it might still be manageable; but if it was any longer than that, all the crew members would be at risk of infection and then falling into madness.

Crazed crew members, at the least, would begin indiscriminate attacks during battles with their starships, and at worst, might conduct evil rituals within the ship to call upon abyssal demons.

This problem couldn't be solved just by repairing a few devices and components on the starships; it required a lengthy and complex technical solution to eradicate the corruption from the machine spirits.

Even Wang Zhaoran wasn't sure if there truly was a method to soothe and purify the machine spirits.

At least he couldn't.

After handing over the basic maintenance and repair tasks to the students, he spent the following day trying various approaches to see if any method of appeasing the machine spirits was effective.

He conducted fifteen attempts, each one failing.

There wasn't the slightest sign of life, and during the process of communicating with the machine spirit, he couldn't feel the slightest feedback from the Retribution-class Battleship's spirit; all he ever heard was its violent roars.

Eventually, he even feared to continue trying. With each attempt to communicate with the machine spirit, he felt a tremendous psychological pressure. After all fifteen methods failed, although he had a few more tricks up his sleeve, the chances of success were incredibly low, and there was even a risk of falling into the abyss himself…

It just wasn't worth it.

The following day, when he faced Gu Hang, he didn't dare to keep anything hidden or make up lies; he simply explained the situation as he knew it.

At that moment, he was somewhat uneasy.

Before his arrival, he had claimed he could pilot the ship back.

Now… he hadn't exactly broken his promise; he could definitely pilot it back. But what was the point of returning if the ship's corruption issue wasn't resolved? It couldn't be of any use in actual combat.

Even merely parking it in a starport posed the risk of spreading the corruption.

But Gu Hang didn't seem to care too much about that.

Smiling, he said, "As long as you can pilot it back, that's good enough. There's no time to delay, let's return now!"

…

Unlike what Wang Zhaoran worried about, Gu Hang didn't fear any chaotic corruption; what he feared most were significant, insurmountable problems with the ship's mechanical systems.

Should such a problem arise, he would be at a loss, only able to admit a major setback in this operation.

Fortunately, with his careful precautions, such problems didn't occur.

As for the issue of corruption, he had his ways to deal with it.

He didn't quite understand the 'machine spirit' as defined by the Sect of Mechanics. To him, the concept had more religious overtones than practical significance.

In this universe, which was neither materialistic nor scientific, Gu Hang wouldn't easily deny these mysterious notions. Their existence, widely acknowledged by many, could eventually turn fiction into reality.

However, for the current matter, Gu Hang had his own pragmatic solution.

He might not understand what a corrupted machine spirit meant, but he could tackle the problem in a very grounded manner: using thunder and Storm Divine Power to cleanse the ship, from top to bottom, inside and out, washing every part, even every screw.

With the divine power of storms and thunder, wash away the bloodline and divine presence that tainted the warship.

If washing it once wasn't enough, then do it ten times, a hundred times.

When the warship was in the Real Universe, out of the reach of the 'tyrant,' and subjected over and over again to the cleansing ritual of the thunder divine power, there would surely come a time when it was completely purified.

At that point, the corrupted machine spirit should also be cleansed of its corruption, right?

Chapter 455, Firebath Nova Wraith Spire had started to move in space, under the collective supervision of the human United Fleet.

The crew and officers of the Alliance Navy who boarded the warship were actually quite unfamiliar with piloting this type of vessel. At the same time, while navigating the ship, they felt an immense pressure, an inexplicable heat throughout their bodies, and occasionally they could see some crazy hallucinations and hear some unsettling whispers…

These were all rather bad signs.

On this battleship, Gu Hang had ordered many State Church Priests to be summoned from other ships. All crew members on the battleship must pray every three hours under the guidance of a priest.

Several temporary shipboard chapels had been established on the ship. Gu Hang personally cleansed these chapels with the power of thunder. Then, the State Church Priests would use these chapels as the central area to preach and help the crew resist the intrusion of chaos.

To be honest, these measures were all temporary.

If this went on for too long during the prolonged interstellar voyage, the pervasive corruption of chaos would inevitably drive the crew into madness. Even the accompanying priests could eventually succumb to corruption over time.

Fortunately, it wouldn't take too long to return from Tie Dong II.

These temporary measures, along with Gu Hang's personal care, were just barely enough to hold on.

The Flying Wing Star Starport, which was informed of the news, had already prepared a docking position.

The Starport of Flying Wing Star had never hosted a warship of the Retribution-class grade. The docking position now temporarily allocated was originally meant for Jufu-class transport ships.

In terms of size, it was just about adequate, as the Jufu-class transport vessels were quite large as well;

But the technical specifications and safety aspects… among other factors, the civilian and military berths were too different.

Despite this, as soon as the operation began, the port started refurbishments under the orders of Gu Hang. However, this too required quite some time.

But a temporary docking was acceptable.

From Korolya, a team of Battle Nuns, accompanied by a large group of chanting nuns, together with State Church Priests called from various places, would take turns staying on this warship in the coming time.

They would recite scriptures while sprinkling holy water, repeatedly cleansing every inch of the ship; they would transform and build chapels on the ship one after another, erecting statues of the Divine Emperor everywhere; they would arrange scripture ribbons and red clay seals in every possible place…

These were considered standard measures.

As for Gu Hang himself, as long as he was on Flying Wing Star, he must visit every two months to spend two days invoking the Storm God Kingdom—or immerse the warship in the Storm God Kingdom, if that would suffice.

Then, he would use the power of thunder to thoroughly cleanse the entire ship, inside and out.

After that, he would repeat the process with the techniques of the State Church Priests and nuns, as well as the Sect of Mechanics, and continue to do so.

In this way, after many cycles, this Retribution-class battleship would eventually be cleansed one day.

In fact, Gu Hang already had an estimated timeline:

At most, three years.

This was considering that Gu Hang might have to leave Flying Wing Star to handle other matters and could not always be watching over this warship to perform the cleansing ritual.

Otherwise, if pushed to the limit, it could possibly be done in just a year and a half.

As for this warship, its past name was definitely to be discarded. As for the new name, Gu Hang had already decided:

“Firebath Nova.”

…

This trip to the south of the Seven Horse Territory, solving the Ashen Dead issue, was naturally the biggest gain from the battleship.

At the same time, stabilizing the rear and solving the historical issues with Phoenix was also an important matter.

Otherwise, Gu Hang would always worry about such a hidden concern, not knowing when or where it might erupt.

When an uncertain danger became an actual problem and was resolved, of course, it was a reason to be happy.

This also meant that the Alliance could finally focus most of its efforts back onto the frontal battlefield against the Iron-Tooth Clan.

Yelisia, leading half of the United Fleet, set off northward after a brief post-war rest.

Having wasted a lot of time encircling the Ashen Dead Squad in the Iron Horse Sector, it was now probably too late to arrive at the Temir Star System ahead of the enemy's reinforcements and eliminate the Green Skin Fleet already there.

But still, Yelisia had to go.

Otherwise, once the Green Skins reinforced, especially with their naval power becoming stronger, Du Shiliang would not be able to hold on. The warfare in the Temir Star System could not do without the protection of the naval forces, or else the numerous land forces on the ground would suffer greatly.

Temir had already become a focal point of the war.

With navies in the vast galaxy standing off against each other, the occasional loss of a small ship was a loss of tens of thousands, even millions of Tax Currency; and on the ground, billions of human warriors and Green Skins used every method possible, treating every inch of two planets as a battlefield, and fought desperately against each other.

Here, it was not only the focus of the war between the Alliance and the Green Skins but also one of the focal points of the entire war effort.

As the Alliance continued to bleed in Temir, they were also heavily bleeding the Iron-Tooth Clan.

Even on the western front of the Star Domain, which the Beastmen were attacking, their offensive had weakened.

At least, up to this point, Jindi Star was still in the hands of the Sect of Mechanics.

According to the information Wu Jiarong sent back to Gu Hang, although the situation on Jindi Star was worsening day by day and would definitely be lost if it continued, the long-awaited reinforcements from the Mingyang Sect and the Star Domain Government—the Fury Flame Battle Group—were finally about to arrive.

Chapter 456, The War Situation Changes Drastically The arrival of the Furyflame Legion was the salvation desperately sought by the Star Domain Government.

In their understanding, as long as a legitimate Interstellar Warrior Battle Group like the Furyflame Legion arrived, all problems should have been solved.

But in reality, that was not the case.

The Furyflame Battle Group was a standard Interstellar Warrior Battle Group—at least they appeared very standard. A thousand true Furyflame warriors arrived, possessing a complete set of Interstellar Warrior fleets, where the fleets' Mortal servants and Mortal Auxiliary Army were also very conventional.

Could such a battle group really turn the tide of battle as expected upon their arrival?

Indeed they could.

At least, once they arrived and engaged in the battle, the situation on Jindi Star had not deteriorated further.

The Interstellar Warriors executed their most proficient tactic, and a very effective one against the Green Skin Orcs—beheading.

On the ground battlefield, the beheadings of several Beastman Overlords who were leading the battles were all successful.

The strikes against those Overlords directly caused severe chaos in the Green Skins' ground offensive.

The human army, under the command of the Battle Group Leader of the Furyflame Battle Group, known as 'Firewalker' Becker Matthesys, who took over all command of the battle zone, led the human troops in several beautiful battles, annihilating a large number of elite orc forces, and even momentarily repelling the Green Skins' offensive.

Meanwhile, in space, the Combat Shuttle named 'Spiritfire' from the Furyflame Battle Group brought significant pressure to the Green Skins.

The Interstellar Warrior's Combat Shuttle, a mothership whose scale and power even surpassed the standard Empire Battleship.

Its first strike caused damage to the Iron-Tooth Clan's battle moon and even destroyed three Green Skin cruisers.

However, the battle moon remained formidable. Along with the original Iron-Tooth flagship—a warship comparable at least to a Battleship Cruiser—ultimately drove 'Spiritfire' away.

But even so, while the Interstellar Warriors of the Furyflame Battle Group were 'forced' to retreat, they made a retaliatory strike.

They launched a jump-aided surprise attack on the Green Skin flagship.

What they most hoped for was to catch Chieftain Titus there and behead the great chieftain of the Beastman Empire. Eliminating him would plunge the entire Green-skinned Empire into prolonged chaos and collapse, leading to widespread civil war.

This was a consolidating experience from the Empire's history of warfare against the Green Skins across the universe, with almost no exceptions.

If they couldn't capture Chieftain Titus on the ship, their plan to combat-jump and internally destroy the enemy warship would still significantly aid future engagements by destroying a core Green Skin Battleship.

However, this plan of jump-aided combat did not succeed. Titus was indeed there, they found him, but in battle, his Black Beast Guard Squad displayed combat effectiveness not inferior to that of the Interstellar Warriors.

Even though the Furyflame warriors dragged the battle into their preferred close-quarters combat, would the elite among the Green Skin Orcs fear hand-to-hand combat?

Clearly, they would not.

In a brief and brutal confrontation, the Interstellar Warriors of the Furyflame Battle Group quickly realized that their boarding force was not capable of eliminating Titus.

At that moment, they decisively abandoned their original plan and began to retreat.

Some stayed behind, while others, carrying bombs that should have been planted inside the ship's core for detonation, just set them off randomly. Even though they could not destroy the ship, they at least inflicted substantial damage on the Green Skin flagship and created chaos onboard to facilitate their escape.

Indeed, they did carve a bloody path back, boarded the rescue ship, and left the warship.

Still, they paid a considerable cost in this whole process. A Champion of the battle group, a Company Commander, both perished in this battle. Of the elite squad engaged in the combat, only a third managed to get out.

Yet even so, after the Furyflame Battle Group engaged in this war, the Green Skins suffered an unexpected harsh blow.

Previously, they had never endured such severe beatings.

On both ground and space battlefields, the orcs, frustrated greatly, but as Titus had become the great chieftain, it meant he possessed not just bravery and tyranny, but also indispensable cunning and wisdom.

Under his command, the heavily loss-bearing Green Skin Orcs became more cautious.

On the surface, they scaled back their offensive, no longer as aggressively; in space, they no longer senselessly expanded the battle lines but tightly grouped their fleet around the slow, cumbersome battle moon as a core.

This made it impossible for the Furyflame Battle Group to find more opportunities.

Indeed, the Furyflame Battle Group's combat style itself, demonstrated through this series of actions, emphasized ferocity and aggression.

However, after one failure, they realized that this enemy was not like most they had encountered in Star Sea wars, who could be swiftly crushed.

Chapter 456, The War Situation Changes Drastically_2 Both sides had learned their lessons, and the entire battlefield situation had thus calmed down somewhat.

But this calm didn't last long soon after, both sides began to demonstrate their prowess, with the Jindi Star battlefield as the core and expanding to several surrounding star systems, engaging in continuous skirmishes.

The more Jindi Star was fought over, the less it seemed to fall; the Green Skins would definitely also try to find a way from other star systems, even attempting to invade the Yunluo Sector from Highland Star in the Snow Eagle Star Sector to the southwest, aiming to directly threaten the capital of the Dragonhawk Star Domain.

But wasn't this inconvenient?

Realizing that the Green Skins' main force was on Jindi Star, there weren't many options for space warfare using battle moons; direct fleet engagements would not necessarily be advantageous, even with the presence of the combat shuttle "Spiritfire." Therefore, Martesis was also thinking about whether it was possible to open a second front, starting from the Snow Eagle Star Sector. If both Highland Stars could be taken and then launched an attack from the Dragon Tamer Sector to seal off the north side of the Steel Fire Dragon Star Sector, that would effectively lock the Green Skins' main force inside Steel Fire Dragon.

Green Skins have a relatively weak dependency on logistics; that is just a relative term. Such a huge fleet, so many Green-Skin armies, convening around Jindi Star if they genuinely had no rear support, no new ships, personnel, supplies, and couldn't continuously plunder and transport from the rear, then the Beastman legions would also be significantly impacted, with a substantial decrease in combat capability.

Both sides had similar ideas, so naturally, the intensity of the war shifted from being focused around Jindi Star to becoming fierce in the surrounding four or five star systems.

Just looking at Jindi Star, perhaps the intensity of the war had decreased by one notch; however, in terms of the entire war's progression, it was clear that both sides were fighting even more fiercely.

…

When this series of intelligence reached Gu Hang's hands, he also felt much relieved.

At least, looking at the current state, the situation in the war had changed from initially being a complete rout with the Beastmen crushing everything in their path, to now being a back-and-forth engagement.

Gu Hang no longer had to worry about the Star Domain Government being quickly obliterated and then the Beastmen's main force turning their attention to trouble him.

However, Gu Hang soon had a new problem.

The situation happening on Jindi Star was beginning to occur in the Temir Star System as well.

When Yelisia led her fleet and arrived at the Temir Star System, she was still slightly faster than the Beastmen's reinforcements.

She took over command from Zhao Shiliang and amassed the Alliance Fleet, launching a fierce attack on the Green Skin Orcs.

But the Beastman Overlord, whom Gu Hang already knew was named Saru, clearly wasn't a mindless fool who only knew recklessness. He understood the importance of avoiding sharp edges and even engaging in tug-of-war on a broader battlefield scope.

He refused to engage in a decisive battle with the Human Fleet but instead expanded the scope of the battlefield.

After suffering certain losses, he evaded the pursuit of the Human Fleet. Yet he didn't completely withdraw from the entire star system; he still lurked menacingly, ready to launch an offensive as soon as the Human Fleet committed to large-scale orbital support on the surface of Temir No.5, threatening that the Human Fleet wouldn't be able to concentrate wholly on ground support.

Of course, such threats weren't enough; if the Human Fleet continued to fight regardless, splitting their forces into two groups, one to distract the Green Skins and the other to continue ground support, then what could Saru do?

To address this problem, a portion of Saru's fleet moved north into the Copper Barrier Star Sector and from Copper Barrier I to Emerald Spring in the Mist Horse Star District.

This clearly meant that if the Alliance truly committed all-out to attacking the Temir Star System, then they would be allowed to do so.

But firstly, do not expect to obtain it too easily; the cost won't be small. At the same time, if the Beastman Fleet was momentarily unattended, it would make a deep push into the Mist Horse Star District, causing chaos.

This was something Gu Hang couldn't accept.

The Mist Horse Star District had signed the Seven Horse Treaty quite early, only slightly later than the Eagle Horse Star Sector. If there were significant turmoil here, and the Alliance was unable to quickly stabilize the situation, the credibility of the Seven Horse Treaty would be greatly lowered. Even the rear Star Sectors like Purple Horse, Border Horse, and Iron Horse would waver, starting to doubt whether the Alliance genuinely had the capability to ensure their safety as promised.

After all, the premise for these star sectors and planets ceding authority, even willing to be milked, was the security assurances provided by the Alliance.

When the Beastmen really wanted to escalate the war, the Alliance had no choice but to follow suit.

Helping the Mist Horse Star District meant splitting up their forces.

After splitting up, the agile Green Skins were quickly driven out of Emerald Spring I, and the human Fleet continued to advance north through the Mist Horse Star District, pushing the battle further into the Copper Barrier Star District, even retaking Copper Barrier I and the Brass Star System.

Copper Barrier I had only one industrial world, but the Brass Star System consisted of three human worlds. These two star systems, four planets in total, had a combined human population of six billion. Due to years of war, there had been severe population and industrial losses, but at least two billion people remained.

The Alliance simply established observation groups on these four worlds, supported proxy governors, and had them all join the Seven Horse Pact.

The operational approach was similar to that on Temir No.4.

On the one hand, they tried to move as many survivors as possible out of the war zones and back to the Tianma Star Sector to replenish the core population of the Alliance;

On the other hand, they mobilized the local population as much as possible, delivered weapons and equipment, and armed them in hopes that they would deal with the remaining Green Skins on the planets themselves.

The Alliance would provide military assistance and support with orbital fire.

On top of these foundations, they also had to try to restore production as best as they could and work hard to fortify the entire planet, building more orbital cannon platforms.

But clearly, the Green Skins wouldn't give up so easily. Their ships, which had just fled hastily but hadn't been destroyed, continued to transport troops from elsewhere, seizing opportunities to deploy them on the planet's surface; they would launch surprise attacks on human transport ships; they even bombarded the planet's surface with artillery.

In this back-and-forth tug of war, the Green-Skin support Fleet also arrived.

Overall, in terms of naval strength, the Alliance Fleet still had the upper hand. However, the extent of the advantage was no longer overwhelming.

Additionally, both Fleets no longer limited the battlefield to a single star system, but instead expanded the conflict across both the Golden Pass and Copper Barrier Star Sectors.

The main land forces of both sides were still embroiled in meat-grinder-like battles on Temir No.5, but the Fleets were running rampant everywhere. The Beastmen would attack human supply lines, which of course had to be defended; the human Fleet would also strike back, reaching as far as Light Blessing Star in some cases.

Light Blessing Star was a vital thoroughfare for the Green-skinned Empire, connecting the Golden Pass Star Sector to the main Western Front battlefield. A great deal of resources from the core of the Green-Skin territory to the main battlefield passed through here.

A group consisting of one Spiritfire and two Silver Swords ambushed two waves of Green-Skin transport ships here, at least ensuring that more than two billion Green Skins, along with their transport ships and a substantial amount of war supplies, became space debris.

Such a significant loss resulted in Saru facing a severe reprimand. The main Beastman forces on the Western Front were already struggling, and now their supplies were hit; who else would he berate but Saru?

Saru was thus forced, like the human Fleet, to allocate troops to the rear transportation channels, chasing away the human raiding ships and securing the safety of the supplies being sent to the front line.

Overall, the battle scenario on the entire field had become larger and broader for both sides.

And it shifted more towards a competition of “internal strength”; isolated victories or defeats in one or two battles were no longer enough to change much. It all depended on the overall resilience of each side, who could endure more losses.

This also put even greater economic pressure on the Alliance.

Chapter 457, Are You Signing or Not? The situation in the war definitely improved, and for now, there were no signs of defeat. However, the expansion of the war’s scope also put greater economic pressure on the Alliance.

The Navy was fine, since maintaining the same size fleet was the plan all along, and construction of new ships had never stopped.

But the Army’s expenses were huge.

In the Temir Star System, ground warfare on two planets hadn’t ceased. Although the intensity had dropped, the overall scale remained, and there was no real way to spend much less money.

With ground battles also erupting in the Copper Barrier Star District, the Alliance Army began to increase troops across multiple planets of that district. After the Mist Horse Star District was attacked, fortifications were certainly necessary, ensuring safety.

All of these increased expenses.

Another rapidly increasing cost was military aid for the many planets in war, which consumed a lot of the Alliance's funds.

These military aids included direct support for weapons, equipment, and ammunition allowing the aided planets to directly establish armies with decent capabilities. These armies fought alongside the Alliance Army or under the management of dispatched Alliance officers.

Besides direct weapon support, the Alliance also provided substantial industrial production aid. Its core objective was to help these planets establish and revive their own industrial production capabilities, especially heavy industries and military industries.

The aim was to boost each planet's military potential, striving to make them self-sufficient in military arms.

Of course, reaching this level was difficult, but every little bit helped reduce reliance on external Alliance support as much as possible. This also eased the Alliance's transportation pressure.

In plain terms, this was the impact after increasing the war's scale and extending the frontline.

It was indeed a more cost-effective tactic. If the war relied solely on the primary forces of the Alliance, costs would be much higher, and deploying Alliance Army units to various planets would occupy valuable fleet resources.

If those planets could form sufficient local resistance forces with the help of the Alliance, that would be ideal.

But it still involved spending money.

Moreover, throughout this period, the population transferred from the Golden Pass Star District and Copper Barrier Star District totaled in the billions.

Human resources were also a valuable asset. Initially, however, the Alliance still needed to spend money to settle these people.

Providing housing, food, and handling interstellar population transportation… these necessities cost money.

Only after spending this money could subsequent plans be made to provide suitable jobs and integrate them into the Alliance's war factories, maximizing their potential value…

In summary, the Alliance's spending was soaring.

Till now, even though all the Imperial Tax owed by the Seven Horse Territory had been transferred to the Alliance, it was beginning to be a bit too much to handle.

At present, it was barely manageable. But moving forward, if the scope of war expanded further, or even if a large-scale counterattack was undertaken, the whole economy would be severely strained.

Moreover, Alliance Premier Osenia had even discussed with Gu Hang once about the government's plan to initiate a secondary mobilization order.

It wouldn't stretch to a secondary level for manpower mobilization, but the economic act might need to reach a secondary level—essentially a wartime economic model.

Currently, the Alliance was still in a standard third-level mobilization state, meaning partial mobilization.

Gu Hang certainly didn't want to use such harsh measures that would significantly affect the development efficiency of the Alliance.

He was always considering other methods.

And indeed, there were alternatives.

Currently, out of the Alliance's total fiscal revenue of 380 billion, two-thirds came from the Tianma Star Sector. One hundred billion was the Imperial Tax that should have been paid, and 130 billion was proper fiscal revenue.

The Alliance was still experiencing rapid development, yet, Gu Hang was somewhat unsatisfied with this pace.

He wasn't unhappy with the government's work; he understood there were practical factors involved, and unrealistic development expectations could force lower government officials to exaggerate or fabricate data, which would be even worse.

He was dissatisfied with the direction of the effort.

Among the nine worlds of the Tianma Star Sector, with a population of over 600 billion, a considerable portion had already reached a relatively prosperous state. Not to mention Flying Wing Star, which was already a developed planet, Rage Owl Star, where Gu Hang initially made his fortune, now boasted a per-capita output of over 3. Even Korolya III, the poorest among them, had a per-capita output of more than 1.

This figure might just meet the Imperial standards, but it's important to consider what Korolya III was like before the Alliance took control—merely at 0.6!

Korolya had indeed been the engine for the Alliance's major economic development in recent years, with its large population and rapid economic growth.

The reason was simple: extreme poverty.

From a state of utter deprivation to a relatively normal level, especially with external support, the path was relatively easier.

Looking at Flying Wing Star, with its original per-capita output over 4, there had indeed been growth under the Alliance's control over the years, especially as the shipbuilding industry, under strong stimulation and technological partnership from the Alliance, had started to further expand and increase production after many years.

Chapter 457, Are You Signing or Not?_2 However, even Flying Wing Star, including the previously relatively developed Fatchess Tri-Star, definitely couldn't compare to places like Korolya in terms of economic growth rate.

These developed planets were, of course, the economic cornerstones of the Alliance; however, for further economic advancement and growth, to obtain a greater scale more rapidly, it was not really possible to rely on them.

A pearl may be a pearl, but there also need to be more bricks and stones to serve as the foundation.

Within the Tianma Star Sector, the Alliance had already been making every effort to tap its potential, but in these extraordinary times, there was no need to limit our vision solely to within the Tianma Star Sector.

Sign the "Seven Horse Economic Union Bill" without consideration?

The Alliance isn't just about sucking blood!

It certainly also provides nourishment!

But to nourish, they have to be obedient, too.

After personally communicating with Osenia, the Alliance had established a series of new policies specifically for those worlds of the peripheral Seven Horse Pact.

…

Eagle Horse III, a planet with a population of eight hundred million, was an agricultural and mining world.

This was a typical primary material production world, relatively poor, but still reasonably abundant in resources.

Poverty in the past was mainly due to underdeveloped production. Despite having vast areas of arable land and some mineral deposits, both agricultural and mining technologies were relatively backward.

Not to mention, they had endured an invasion by the Green Skin Orcs.

However, these past six months had been relatively prosperous for them.

The invasion of the Green Skins had been resolved. It wasn't to say that there were no longer any Green Skins on the planet, but at least in the main human activity areas, they were no longer visible. All the Green Skin Trash Cities on the planet had been cleaned up, and all the Green Skin ecosystems, which hadn't been established for very long anyway, had been destroyed decisively, with fire purging every inch of land that had been contaminated.

Perhaps, in the future on this planet, Green Skins might still occasionally be discovered in the wild. But as long as vigilance was maintained, defenses bolstered, regular disinfection conducted, and any land that had Green Skins was burned with fire, the problem would not become more severe.

The entire planet seemed to have returned to a normal life trajectory.

The Alliance had a permanent division stationed here for defense; apart from the framework of the Seven Horse Pact, the Alliance sent military and economic supervisors to control the developmental situation of the entire planet… And besides these, their days seemed truly to have returned to before the war.

Although they were still quite impoverished and had to pay the Imperial Tax as before, which was merely a change in the recipient of the payment, at least the threat of war seemed to have receded, and

they didn't live in dread of the day when the Green Skin armies might suddenly come, destroying their farms and slaughtering their inhabitants.

But Lalin Ulrich, the Planetary Governor of Eagle Horse III, had been feeling rather conflicted lately.

An Alliance diplomat had presented him with a 'suggestion.'

And he still hadn't decided whether to accept it or not.

But there wasn't much time left.

The Alliance diplomat had come up to him once again.

"Governor Ulrich, you need to give me an answer right now," said the Alliance diplomat Wu Yang, standing pertly in front of him.

This female diplomat from the Flying Wing Star Academy of Literature and Law looked exceptionally young. With her glasses, she had a refined appearance, exuding a charm of intellectual femininity that was rarely seen on Eagle Horse III.

Her smile was gentle and not too aggressive, but Ulrich was still particularly afraid to meet this girl.

He really did not know how to respond to Wu Yang's question.

But there was no escaping it now.

Seeing him silent, Wu Yang asked again, "Last time, you said you would give me an answer today. I have been waiting until now, having specially argued with my superiors for this time extension; otherwise, the final deadline should have been two days ago."

After a pause, Wu Yang continued, “Moreover, I don’t understand what you’re hesitating about. The Alliance wants to provide direct economic aid to Eagle Horse III, helping to establish more efficient agricultural and mining production, and on the basis of these two industries, to build a series of industrial capabilities… How could that possibly be bad?”

Ulrich heaved a long sigh and said, “If it were just as simple as that, it would indeed be a great thing. But… what’s the cost?”

Before Wu Yang could speak, Ulrich hastily added, “Of course, I don’t mean to accuse the Alliance… But let’s be frank, the Alliance has helped us, annihilating the invading Green Skin Orcs, for which we are extremely grateful. Furthermore, the people of Eagle Horse know that the war is far from over. Although there’s no more fighting on Eagle Horse III, countless warriors of the Alliance are still fighting the invasion of the beastmen beyond the star sector. Without the Alliance, the peace of Eagle Horse III could not last.”

“But we also have paid a price, we too have made our contributions to the war. We’ve been giving up over ten percent of our annual output, even more than the Imperial Tax; we’ve turned all our military forces, as per the regulations of the Seven Horse Pact, into the Pact Army, under the command of the Alliance.”

“We have no complaints about this; this is the price we pay for peace. The people of Eagle Horse understand, these are equivalent.”

“The Alliance wants to step up economic aid to Eagle Horse III, and we are more than happy. But I know, there is no such thing as a free lunch in this world. That’s why I’m asking, what’s the price? What is it? Higher taxes? Or other political rights? Let’s talk about a price, a clear and transparent price; it’s better for everyone.”

Wu Yang gave a light chuckle and said, “The price? The price is that the people of the entire planet will henceforth live better lives; the price is that the entire planet can produce more, to support the war at the frontlines. That’s all.”

Ulrich retorted unsparingly, “It can’t be that simple, right? You want to implement your rank system on Eagle Horse III, don’t you?”

“Yes, what’s wrong with that?” Wu Yang asked with her hands spread, “Alliance aid and investment will establish many modern farms and mines. Eagle Horse III will invest resources, land, and labor; the Alliance will provide technology, products, and equipment. Management methods, staff welfare, and remuneration will be distributed according to Alliance standards. Sounds reasonable, doesn’t it?”

Ulrich fell silent for a moment, then shook his head, “I’ve been very frank, but Ambassador Wu Yang, you are not being entirely upfront. Shall I put it more bluntly? Once there are farms, mines, factories, and even cities built on Eagle Horse III with the aid or joint investment of the Alliance, and most of the output comes from these cooperative ventures, where people acquire ranks and abide by the Alliance’s system… what’s left for the Planetary Government to do?”

Wu Yang smiled and replied, “Isn’t that good? You must know what an Alliance rank implies. People will have better life security; they’ll have more output, and the Planetary Government will save a lot of management pressure. It’s a win-win!”

Ulrich, who had nearly lost the will to argue further, directly asked, “What about me? What do I get?”

Wu Yang seemed to hear a joke, “You? You would be the one who benefits most! You are the Governor of Eagle Horse III, and that’s unchangeable. If the planet progresses well, then you get an entire, more developed world! Isn’t that enough?”

“That would no longer be my world!”

“It seems we need to clarify something: do you consider the entire world as your private property? This world belongs to the Empire, and you are merely its lifelong manager. From the Empire’s perspective, it will always be the Empire’s world; from your perspective, you will always be its manager. Has anything changed?”

Ulrich was suddenly at a loss for words.

Wu Yang’s smile faded, and she said earnestly, “I have also introduced to you the series of treatments and arrangements for Planetary Governors by the Alliance. If you have any uncertainties, I can explain them to you again. Personally, I think they are quite generous treatments. Your current standard of living isn’t close to what the Alliance offers. But we really don’t have much time left. Today, right today, you must give me an answer.”

“The ‘Seven Horse Economic Union Bill,’ will you sign it or not?”

Chapter 458, How Dare You? Lalin Ulrich’s expression was quite grim.

As a Planetary Governor, and especially as the governor of a small, poor planet like Eagle Horse III, he hardly mattered in the grand politics of the entire Empire and the Star Sea. Anyone could trample on him.

But after all, he was a Planetary Governor.

Ordinarily, he didn’t often deal with the political structure beyond his planet—except for the Imperial Tax collection every two years.

At other times, he was the ‘Emperor’ of his planet, the kind whose word was law.

He rarely encountered someone who would speak to him without courtesy, in a tone tinged with threats.

Thus, his displeased expression.

However, displeased as he might be, as angry as he felt, if he really had to firmly say “no”, he still didn’t dare.

The fate of the Star Zone Leader of the Purple Horse Sector, the Governor of Baishuo Star, was still vivid in his mind.

He still clearly remembered the might of the Alliance Army during the ongoing Beastman War.

How could he dare show displeasure?

But to accept these terms, he felt somewhat unwilling.

Unlike the Seven Horse Treaty, which retained some independence and was an alliance-type treaty, if he signed this current confederation bill, it wasn't joining the Alliance, but it was almost as good.

The economic lifeline would be completely controlled by the Alliance, and political power would also expand as the Alliance's economic influence over the planet expanded, and it wouldn't be long before the Alliance's system could entirely replace the duties of the original Planetary Government.

Objectively speaking, this wasn't bad for the people on the planet.

At least for the poor on Eagle Horse III, that was the case.

The 'Tax Currency' set by the Empire wasn't set arbitrarily. Normally, a per capita output of 1 tax currency also indicated reaching the Imperial standard level. On this basis, paying 0.1 in tax, the Planetary Government taking another 0.1, the remaining 0.8 was enough for a commoner to live a pretty good life.

That wasn't just about subsistence; it was even a bit better than being moderately well-off.

Yet, this was always just the ideal state.

The Empire Government did indeed only take 0.1, but didn't the cost of taxation collection count for something?

Would the Planetary Government honestly keep the tax rate at 10%?

Corruption in government or similar government-like institutions, or let's say normal administrative costs, poor collection efficiency, weren't all these additional expenditures?

A per capita output of 1 tax currency didn't mean every individual could have this income. The disparity between rich and poor existed in any society, of course; the wealthy definitely earned far more than this, while the poor likely far less.

Moreover, a per capita output of 1 tax currency, many planets couldn't reach it.

Eagle Horse III didn't reach it, even before the war, it was only about 0.9 at best.

On the planet, a normal worker, whether a farmer or a miner, could usually spend about 0.4 per year for themselves, which barely reached the subsistence level; if poorer, then they simply couldn't even get enough to eat, living day to day.

For these ordinary people on the planet, their lives would improve with the Alliance coming.

Ulrich knew exactly what the living standard of an Alliance commoner was like, the lowest level, as long as one had any job, whatever it might be, could reach a minimum of E5 level.

And the lifestyle of an E5 level person, their annual consumption could at least reach 0.4 tax currency.

This could reach the subsistence level, no worse than the formal workers on Eagle Horse III. Moreover, under the Alliance system, eliminating unemployment was a fairly simple and swift affair, which also meant, quite a number of the lower layers, those without formal employment, would benefit from this. They would become strong supporters of the Alliance.

And those with formal jobs, even if their job level did not increase, their standard of living would at least remain the same.

And it might even surpass it.

This also brought up what the Alliance's job levels really meant for an ordinary person.

After obtaining a rank within the Alliance, each person's annual income was composed of two parts: welfare and allowances.

Welfare was divided into basic social welfare and personal welfare. The former included basic medical and educational guarantees, which were foundational to the establishment of the Alliance.

The former, although the Alliance wouldn't provide resources guaranteed to cure everything, at least basic guarantees were available; treating headaches and fevers, preventing conditions from worsening was beneficial. Even if one contracted an incurable disease, enough painkillers were provided to make one's final journey a bit more comfortable.

This was already quite impressive, as a significant portion of the poor, regardless of their illness, wouldn't expect to receive treatment. But under the Alliance, these basic medical guarantees were free for all.

And the latter, educational guarantees, were even more progressive. The Alliance particularly emphasized educational equality—although it couldn't truly reach an ideal state of fairness, after all, how could one expect people on Eagle Horse III to obtain the same educational resources as those on Flying Wing Star?

But at least, the system tried to guarantee fairness as much as possible. Six years of primary education were mandatory and free; all children had to participate and were assigned to schools nearby. Afterwards, came four years of secondary education, which weren't mandatory, and tuition fees were required. As long as one's primary educational exam scores reached a certain level, they could advance; top students had their fees waived; even more exceptional ones received scholarships.

Chapter 458, You Dare Too?_2 After secondary education, it was necessary to compete for higher education, although it was a bloody path to forge, it at least provided an upward channel for people of any class.

This was a fundamental social welfare accessible to Union Citizens of all grades.

Just these two opportunities, could the lower class on Eagle Horse III have ever dared to dream of them in the past?

Personal welfare, on the other hand, was linked to one's grade. This included food security, housing security, and personal medical security, meaning that once one reached that grade, these things were all provided. The Alliance would be responsible for distributing food, allocating housing, and providing higher-quality medical services based on one's grade.

With a higher grade, the food would no longer be synthetic starches or simple grains, but would include more refined processed foods, meat, and vegetables…

Housing would also evolve from cramped shared cubicles of a few square meters to private residences and even better accommodations.

Medical services would evolve from the most basic to some drugs available for free and some diseases treatable for free. Without a high grade, one would only be able to get these services by paying [far more].

Progressing further, one might even receive more vacation days and greater transportation subsidies.

These were just the benefits, not to mention allowances.

Allowances, akin to a salary, were paid directly in Alliance currency. This money could be used to trade and purchase all legal goods. It could be used to pay for education costs beyond secondary level, to handle the costs of disease treatments beyond both the basic and grade-linked medical benefits, to buy better-quality food to improve meals, and to purchase furniture, appliances, cars, clothes…

With all this accounted for, a grade E5 citizen, though counting his welfare and allowance, might have an annual expense of 0.4 Tax Currency for food and clothing which might be close to enough, but with the benefits of healthcare and housing, he was far more secure than the non-Union poor; not to mention the educational benefits which not only provided upward mobility for oneself but also for one's descendants, and one could also ascend in grade through years of work and contributions.

For the common populace of Eagle Horse III, once they experienced these Alliance policies, who would want to return to the old days?

The Planetary Government was truly doomed!

Ulrich was deeply worried.

Yet he still did not dare to refuse outright.

“Give me a little more time…”

“I said today is the final deadline.”

“I understand, but today isn’t over yet, is it? Two hours, just two hours, at least allow me one last consultation.”

“Fine, I’ll give you these two hours. I’m not going anywhere, I’ll be right here waiting for good news.”

…

After parting from Wu Yang, Ulrich wiped the sweat from his forehead and went to another conference room not too far away.

Several big shots of Eagle Horse III were waiting here.

He was the Planetary Governor indeed, but no ruler could govern alone. On Eagle Horse III, various interest groups certainly existed.

Mainly comprising union farm owners, big landlords, and mining group executives.

They supported the Planetary Government, and in fact, Ulrich was one of them. The agricultural and mining groups he controlled were the largest landowners on the planet and the fourth largest miner.

They were the true masters of this world.

The Alliance’s economic union aimed to take this world from them.

They feared the power of the Alliance, coveted the aid of the Alliance, and resented the exploitation by the Alliance.

Seeing Ulrich return, someone immediately asked, “How did the talks go?”

“No change, the Alliance hasn’t given us any room to negotiate, only the options to accept or reject.”

Hearing this, someone roared, “Then let’s quit! Everyone goes their separate ways! I refuse to believe that the Alliance would really dare to kill us all!”

Another person cynically retorted, “What’s there not to dare? And why do they need to kill? They’ll take the land, seize the mines, what can you do? And who can handle their generals? The Planetary Defense Force is already fully under their command, do you dare revolt?”

“Then what do we do? Just hand over the property accumulated over generations for nothing?”

“There are options of redemption, equity conversion, local recruitment of management, I’ve always thought this was somewhat reasonable…”

“Nonsense! They’re just robbing you of your property and throwing you a few scraps!”

The conference room erupted into noise, and Ulrich’s headache grew.

This wasn’t the first time.

Actually, when Wu Yang first proposed this economic alliance bill and he gathered the various ‘vassals’ to discuss it, the situation was roughly as it is now. Subsequently, he held several more discussions, and the results were all similar.

No unified agreement was reached.

There were actually not many who were firm; most of the noise was from those hoping to stir everyone into collective action to avoid individual blame. Despite their fierce talk, when it came to being the leaders, they all would retract their heads.

Those more cowardly didn't dare make trouble at all.

However, there was a fundamental mentality that everyone, including himself, shared: dissatisfaction.

No, there seemed to be one exception.

Ulrich's gaze shifted to a young man who had been silent the whole time, merely puffing on a cigarette with a mocking expression on his face.

Chapter 458, You Dare Too?_3 This man was the second largest landowner on Eagle Horse III, a position not low by any means.

Ulrich knocked on the table, "Everybody stop, just stop!"

Once the conference room quieted down, he turned his attention back to the young man and asked, "Adam Shannon, I've noticed you've been quiet, and you rarely share your opinions. Let's hear it, what do you think?"

The eyes of everyone present turned to focus on the young man, with many looking on with a hint of scorn.

Adam Shannon was not a self-made man who had built his fortune from nothing. Just by looking at his age, one could tell he wasn't very experienced. He was a successor, who had only recently taken over his father's assets.

Who knows what old Shannon was thinking, letting such an inexperienced youngster take charge.

Adam Shannon, for his part, seemed indifferent to these stares; he just smiled slightly and said, "What can a young man like me possibly have to say? It's best to listen to my seniors. However…"

He paused for a moment, then continued, “Whatever the decisions are of the esteemed seniors here, they no longer concern Shannon Corporation. We have made our decision: from now on, we will fully accept assistance from the Alliance, incorporating their management layer. All of our employees will be managed under the Alliance’s system.”

Although he spoke these words softly, they were like throwing a huge stone into a tranquil lake, instantly causing a massive uproar!

“Shannon Corporation dares to negotiate with the Alliance behind the back of our alliance?!”

“How dare you, such a youngster?”

“Is this your decision, or your father’s? Bring out old Shannon!”

“Traitor!”

…

A multitude of accusations fell upon Adam Shannon’s head after a brief silence.

Ulrich once again managed to control the scene, quieting everyone down.

But his face was equally grim.

He glared at Adam Shannon’s excessively young face and asked, “Can you tell me what exactly Shannon Corporation is thinking on this matter? Are you really content to give up land that four generations have accumulated?”

Adam Shannon spread his hands and said, “It’s not exactly giving it up, is it? The Alliance did say…”

“Enough!” Ulrich cut off Adam Shannon’s insincere words, “This might be the last time we hold such a meeting. No matter what conflicts we’ve had in the past, or dirty tricks, at least we shared a bond from the same planet. Just be honest about what you’re thinking, let’s be frank here. Otherwise, if it’s just your family selling out, the rest of us together can make sure you don’t sell at all, or at least make it uncomfortable for you!”

Adam Shannon laughed heartily, his words tinged with irony, “But that doesn’t matter. We’ve already made our decision. Whatever you choose to do in the future, it won’t involve us. You can make all the noise you want with the Alliance. But… do you dare?”

Ulrich was left speechless.

Dare?

If they dared, why would they be bluffing in fear here?

Adam Shannon’s smile faded, his expression turned serious, “But, you did say one thing that’s correct, out of respect for our shared origins in this world, for the friendship of our ancestors, I advise you all:”

“If you view this as plunder, then you will lose everything; the Shannon family is different, we see this as an opportunity.”

“Opportunity?”

“Could you explain a bit more?”

Adam Shannon waved his hand, refusing to elaborate, and walked away.

He left a roomful of people exchanging glances.

…

Shannon signed, and many others did too.

How many understood Shannon's so-called 'opportunity' is anyone's guess. Some signed out of pressure.

But Ulrich eventually figured it out.

Or perhaps, just before the very last moment, after a visit to old Shannon and a conversation, he was persuaded.

On behalf of the Planetary Government, he too signed in the end.

The reason wasn't complicated.

First off, this wasn't something that could truly be stopped. Even if the entire planet stood united and managed to fend off the Alliance, what then?

The Alliance was unlikely to take aggressive action. That would look too unsightly and disrupt the unity in Seven Horse Territory.

But the ways the Alliance could pressure them were plentiful.

The Imperial Tax was in the Alliance's hands. The right to set the Tax Currency rates by the Star Sector Government was in the Alliance's hands. Interstellar trade was in the Alliance's hands. If the Alliance wanted someone to go bankrupt, that entity would go bankrupt. Food could rot in the granaries or be bought at rock-bottom prices; minerals that couldn't reach the factories were just a pile of useless rocks.

And was joining the Alliance's system really that bad?

For these wealthy magnates, maybe not.

The Alliance had offered preferential conditions, like for Ulrich himself—if he signed, as the Planetary Governor with the identity of a major asset owner, he would immediately receive a B8 level treatment.

Benefits and subsidies, six hundred Tax Currency a year.

Ulrich could touch his chest and ask himself: As Governor, did I ever spend six hundred Tax Currency a year purely for my own personal consumption?

Definitely not. Just on food, lodging, and entertainment, it wouldn't amount to that much. He was quite virtuous, advocated frugality, and had aspirations in business.

Moreover, what high-end luxuries could Eagle Horse III possibly offer?

It paled in comparison.

With those six hundred Tax Currency a year purely for personal use, life could well be more comfortable than before—without having to work.

Chapter 458, you dare too?_4 Could living on 600 Tax Currency a year starve him to death?

At current Alliance market rates, that amount represented the purchasing power of 10,000 tons of primary grain!

With that, he could afford to buy a mansion in the core district of the capital city on Flying Wing Star, hire a bunch of servants, and enjoy lavish meals and pleasurable play every day!

Of course, he had personal pursuits and wasn't after hedonism. Otherwise, as a Planetary Governor and a great capitalist, couldn't he easily spend 600 Tax Currency a year on personal enjoyment?

Yet, did joining the Alliance mean one could no longer have personal pursuits?

Grade B8, within the Alliance, was quite high. He wasn't that old yet; he could continue to strive for management of the Planet, participate in the new Planetary Government, and fully cooperate with Alliance endeavours; even promotional opportunities awaited in the Central Government in the future.

Previously, as the Planetary Governor and big capitalist, he had already reached the ceiling on Eagle Horse III; where was there room to advance?

But now, a vast and open opportunity lay before him.

According to his conclusion after chatting with old Shannon, the Alliance was coming, an unstoppable tide.

Rather than be the fool who resists the tide, he might as well be the one who rides it, or at least plays with it.

Perhaps, a future high official in the Alliance may bear the surnames Ulrich or Shannon.

Although Ulrich still felt nervous and uncertain about the future, it also ignited an extra flame within him.

In the past, already a Planetary Governor, would he really have been content to stay as a backwater Planetary Governor his whole life? The opportunity to progress further may be a good thing.

…

"Governor, the first batch of worlds to sign the 'Seven Horse Economic Union Bill' totals nine. Following your directive, these worlds have been selected for their relative poverty yet potential for development. Our economic assistance, along with matching industry upgrade plans and our management personnel, will be in place promptly,"

Osenia reported progress to Gu Hang straightforwardly:

“The economic aspect is preliminary. In the following stages, we will also gradually establish institutions for managerial grade personnel through replacing the original salary systems of each world, ultimately replacing the original Planetary Governments. Thus, aside from the regular Imperial Tax, these planets’ production capacities should yield additional fiscal revenues similar to those of the Alliance localities, and the overall living standards of the population should also rise with economic development.”

“Our comrades from the Development Department have already provided specific forecasts. We expect to continue investing 2 billion Tax Currency over the next two years. In these nine worlds, totaling a population of a hundred billion, a high economic growth rate should be maintained for the next two years, and the Alliance can annually secure about 1 billion Tax Currency in extra fiscal revenues.”

“We will observe over the next two years if things develop according to the plan. If all is well, next year we will initiate the second batch of worlds to join the Economic Union. The ultimate plan is to expand the Economic Union to cover the entire Seven Horse Territory within ten years.”

After hearing this, Gu Hang’s brow slightly relaxed.

Indeed, when that time comes, the Alliance’s core territory could expand from the Tianma Star Sector to encompass all 88 worlds across the seven Star Sectors of the Seven Horse Territory!

With 230 billion core populations, the Alliance would become even stronger!

Chapter 459, Cruiser Technology! In no time, merely half a year later, Gu Hang was able to see on the “Vassal” interface that the worlds which had signed the “Seven Horse Territory Economic Union Act” were rapidly increasing in vassal grade.

This vassal grade fundamentally had nothing to do with the economic level or development level of the planet, it purely reflected the relationship between this world and the “sovereign state,” the Alliance.

Under the framework of the Seven Horse Covenant, besides the Tianma Star Sector, seventy-nine worlds were basically at LV2 and LV3. These grades were essentially stable or unstable in vassal status. It meant they could be squeezed for a bit of blood by the Alliance, and the Imperial Tax belonged to a special condition in extraordinary times.

However, starting from LV4 upwards, things were different.

LV4 signified a significant increase in the dependency on the economy, politics, and military of the vassal, and the entire world almost had no will to resist. The sovereign state could then manage and dispose of that world directly.

And reaching LV5 meant direct annexation; there would be no turmoil within the world, and instead, the people of these worlds would have a strong sense of belonging to the sovereign state. They believed they were a part of the sovereign state, naturally generating a strong centripetal force.

Of course, it didn't mean that once the vassal grade reached LV5, the world could be annexed arbitrarily. This grade was only about the internal state of the vassal world; how others viewed it externally was another matter.

The rising vassal grade meant the Alliance Government did not deceive him with fabrications, and everything was developing smoothly, just as Osenia had reported.

Moreover, the elevation of these planets' vassal grades brought in more Grace Points income.

This income from Grace Points on one hand was a result of increased productivity following development, and on the other, it was due to the increased ratio of Grace Points rewards following the elevation of vassal grades.

Overall, the base wasn't large, which quickly raised the monthly points given by vassals from about four thousand to six thousand.

Don't underestimate this number.

Although it was only two thousand, which might not seem much, the entire Alliance had grown from 36,000 to 37,000 during this period, an increase of merely a thousand.

And this was amidst billions of people migrating and the rapid development of the Alliance's military and shipbuilding industries.

This shows how profitable it is to develop these poor areas, to bring them to relative prosperity, pull up the extremely barren productivity to something decent, and incidentally elevate the vassal grade to offset the deflation of Grace Points provided by the vassals.

By now, a year had passed since the end of the Steel Wing Star battle.

Gu Hang now had a total of over 1.2 million Grace Points at his disposal.

This was mainly composed of two parts: monthly Grace Points income and vassal income, totaling around 540,000 combined. The other part was the income from annihilating the Ashen Dead Squad, totaling 680,000.

Although the scale of the Ashen Dead was not large, their quality was genuinely high. Not to mention the tens of thousands of Evil God believers on their ships, which were just an addition; the main profit source was those 300 Chaos Starfield Warrior veterans and that Battleship.

Especially the Battleship.

The reward was really high.

For Gu Hang, however, he had another significant ‘treasure trove’ waiting to be unlocked: the Temir battle, and the ongoing Beastman wars that had since expanded into two Star Sectors.

This war had been raging for eight months now, with large scale and brutal intensity. Before, Gu Hang thought the rewards from the Temir battle would be roughly on par with the Steel Wing Star battle, about a million Grace Points. But now, seeing how much larger and longer-lasting the scale of the Temir battle was, it seemed it would continue well into the foreseeable future.

This war wouldn’t just yield a mere one million once finished.

Three million? Four million?

If the Temir battle wasn't won, the losses wouldn't just include a total collapse of the situation; the excessive Grace Points could also vanish into thin air.

But this 'treasure trove,' for now, seemed unattainable.

However, the current 1.2 million Grace Points at Gu Hang's disposal still needed to be spent.

Keeping them idle wouldn't yield more eggs.

Apart from some emergency reserves, Gu Hang planned to spend a million this time.

As usual, five hundred thousand would be on staffing. The 'Heroes' interface's enlightenment would engage government officials, diplomats, and military officers in a wave of enlightenment. Ten Grace Points per person, once points were allocated, these people would have a greater potential for progress and could upgrade on their own.

For instance, Osenia, who was only level one and had a standard 'N' card when Gu Hang first enlightened her, had now become a level six administrative officer, and her card had evolved into an SSR, advancing three stages.

Of course, it was Gu Hang who spent the Grace Points to upgrade her.

Human beings, indeed, have boundless potential. Their level can be elevated, so can their potential.

Ordinarily, Gu Hang needn't worry about the level elevation; they would accumulate enough experience in their competent areas, produce enough outcomes, and could upgrade on their own. But the rarity of the card represented potential. Heroes in this aspect could also improve on their own, but very slowly.

Chapter 459, Cruiser Technology!_2 Others may wait, but for Gu Hang, waiting for Osenia was not an option, as her position was critically significant being the top figure in the Alliance Government. He couldn't wait for her rarity to increase on its own and straightforwardly used Grace Points to upgrade her from SR to SSR.

This cost Gu Hang 100,000 Grace Points, but he felt it was worth it.

Others may wait.

Gu Hang also spent another 100,000 points on a diverse pool of individuals from various sectors: army officers from different fronts, navy officers, technical engineers from factories, management staff from state-owned enterprises, and researchers from research institutions… totaling ten thousand people from all walks of life.

Among them was a notable individual: Salas Martins.

Even without enlightenment, the Battle Group Leader of the Phoenix was quite outstanding on his own.

In terms of personal strength, although he was forcibly placed in the position of Battle Group Leader, he at least possessed the level of a company champion; in combat command, he was even more distinguished than his personal strength.

However, before this, Gu Hang had never noticed his appearance in the “Heroes” interface.

Not just him, Gu Hang had never seen any Interstellar Warrior in the “Heroes” interface.

He once thought the level improvement of Interstellar Warriors could only be achieved through the special training functionality for Interstellar Warriors, which was available after the Phoenix event chain concluded. But that functionality only raised them to the level of company champions, which was obviously insufficient.

But this time, Gu Hang saw his option appear.

Gu Hang guessed that for Interstellar Warriors to appear in the “Heroes” interface, the difficulty might be much greater than for ordinary mortals. Matins’ appearance there came after his victory over the leader of the Ashen Dead Squad, Zhong Jihua, which represented a personal ascension, thus listing his name in the “Heroes” interface.

Since it appeared, Gu Hang immediately enlightened him.

Gu Hang was very curious about what the first Interstellar Warrior Hero would be like.

[Activated Hero: Salas Martins (SSR)]

[Level: lv7]

[Physique 41, Spirituality 9, Command 32, Politics 14]

[Attributes:]

[Battle Group Leader: He is the leader of the Starfighter Battle Group. Command +5, Physique +2]

[Survivor of the Atonement Expedition: He endured a long and brutal Atonement Expedition, which has become his valuable treasure. Command +2, Physique +3]

[Rebuilder of the Phoenix: He bears great responsibility, constantly vigilant. Command +5, Physique +1]

[Champion Swordsman: He has been awarded the title of Company Champion Swordsman: Physique +5]

[Avenger: He has completed a deeply personal revenge: Physique +3]

[Talents:]

[Phoenix Gene: He inherits the Phoenix Legion-Phoenix Squadron’s Gene Seed, making him an Interstellar Warrior: Physique +15, Command +10, Spirituality +5, Politics +5]

…

Gu Hang was very tempted by these attributes!

He was particularly concerned about the Phoenix Gene talent.

This talent should be present in every Interstellar Warrior. With the catalytic effect of the Gene Seed in their bodies, triggering two hearts, three lungs, and a series of superhuman organs, their physique naturally experiences a significant enhancement.

Now, the system tells him the enhancement is 15 points.

Does every Interstellar Warrior have this much? Probably not. It would still depend on the individual's compatibility with the Gene Seed, and how much power from within the genes is unearthed through personal postnatal training.

But indeed, this number itself represents the immense difference between them and ordinary mortals.

Being strong is only natural.

Becoming enlightened makes them stronger.

Seeing Matins makes it evident.

His series of attributes, accumulated through his personal experiences, were significant even without enlightenment. However, the purpose of enlightenment is to further excavate these attributes, genuinely enhancing power, and visually presenting these data to Gu Hang.

This also means that Matins' true capability level definitely surpassed that of a regular Interstellar Warrior company commander and might have reached the level of a Battle Group Champion.

This is a quantum leap from his past level of just a company champion.

What exactly is the level of a Battle Group Champion?

It's a level that Gu Hang cannot simply crush—requiring full force and several attempts.

When compared to the strength of Psychics, a regular Alpha-level Psychic definitely couldn't beat a Battle Group Champion. The multitude of Psychic Spells thrown at them would be greatly neutralized by the huge resistance brought by their physical attributes. The remaining power would fall short against the Battle Group Champion's extensive 'health bar' and excellent skills.

To defeat a Battle Group Champion using Psychic power, an A+ level Psychic might have a chance, while Alpha-level Psychics could be more certain.

This is why Interstellar Warriors are considered the top battle strength of the Empire, not the Psychic Cultivator's Association.

How many Alpha-level Psychics are there? Besides, it's impossible for humans to control Alpha-level Psychic power effectively in the long run. Each normal Alpha-level Psychic is ultimately destined to either turn into a Great Demon, corrupted by their power, or to die explosively. What about going mad? They probably went mad long ago.

But Battle Group Champions? Almost every older Battle Group has them, sometimes even more than one.

Not to mention, above the level of Battle Group Champions, there are the so-called 'Emperor Champions' and 'Emperor's Chosen.' These legendary Interstellar Warriors whose reputations resonate throughout the universe can even single-handedly tear apart a Great Demon, moving in and out of demon armies with sword in hand.

As for Matins, under normal circumstances, reaching the level of a Battle Group Champion would take who knows how many years of hard training.

Chapter 459, Cruiser Technology!_3 Now, "Overnight Success."

Even higher echelons had already opened their doors to him.

He was only at level seven and could ascend two more levels; furthermore, Interstellar Warriors were inherently different from mortals, and it was very likely that level nine might not even be their limit.

…

Beyond heroes, Gu Hang had also spent one hundred thousand Grace Points to train ten thousand Commissars, who primarily served in the military. The expansion rate of the Alliance Land Forces was somewhat rapid, although other aspects were also important, ideological work was of the utmost importance.

An additional two hundred thousand Grace Points were used to train over ten million soldiers, including those at T5 and T4 levels. The need for military expansion was also pressing, and he could no longer afford to train every soldier using the Army Badge System, as the size of the Alliance Land Forces had already exceeded four hundred million. Training each one with the Soldier Token would cost four hundred million Grace Points, which he definitely could not afford.

He could only train a portion, while the rest were elevated through conventional means. For example, raising the recruitment standards to select promising recruits; lengthening training times, using abundant resources to intensify conventional training methods; and once officially entering the forces, they were led by veterans or troops which had reached elite levels through the Army Badge System.

This way, the proficiency of new recruits could be rapidly enhanced.

A significant number of individuals, especially those selected from various Planetary Defense Forces, were quickly able to reach T5 level on their own.

But overall, there was still a substantial portion who did not meet T5 standards when they actually joined the forces.

That was the inevitable cost of expanding the forces.

Those trained with Soldier Tokens and those who had reached the level on their own ensured that Gu Hang could maintain a ratio of over 50% of soldiers in the Alliance Land Forces at T5 level.

A considerable portion of the Star Realm Army, such as the Dragonhawk 3rd Corps, also had similar ratios.

The remainder would be honed on the battlefield.

The battlefield is the best teacher for a soldier; if they managed to survive training under the Green Skins, they would be good soldiers.

The situation of the Alliance Land Forces was still quite optimistic. There was no need to speak of their equipment level, which was crafted just like the Star Realm Army's, with all sorts of equipment the Alliance could produce provided unreservedly to the Land Forces. Many of the Star Realm Army's equipment levels were even inferior to those of the Alliance Land Forces.

And in terms of training standards, thanks to the baptism of war, the Alliance was essentially able to achieve a 70% T5 rate.

Quite remarkable.

…

Aside from spending five hundred thousand on talent, the remaining seven hundred thousand was all invested by Gu Hang into technology lotteries.

He drew seven hundred thousand worth prizes, aiming for a higher yield of Epic Technology among them.

And indeed, Gu Hang's choice proved to be correct.

He struck gold!

Seven draws at the hundred thousand level yielded three Epic Technologies, and also three Elite Level technologies. Only one skewed into the Advanced Level.

And of these three Epic Technologies, including two from the Elite level, all were things that Gu Hang urgently needed!

[Lunar-Class Cruiser Technology: Epic]

No need for words, when Gu Hang saw this, he almost laughed his head off!

With it, the Alliance could expand its shipyards!

The so-called Musician-class Cruisers originally on Flying Wing Star were essentially a variant of the Lunar-Class Cruiser, altered to be more simplified and cheaper.

Just this had already cost a fortune back in the day, paying others to design and manufacture the shipyard. Flying Wing Star itself did not possess the technical capability to further expand cruiser production.

But now, the Alliance did.

And moreover, not expanding the bloodless version of the Musician-class, but the genuine Lunar-Class Cruiser!

The Lunar-Class Cruiser, being the most commonly seen cruiser in the Empire, commonality did not equate to weakness but rather indicated excellent performance and a high cost-effectiveness ratio.

If it were rubbish, how could the Empire possibly equip them on a large scale within its Navy?

Of course, merely having the technological capacity for cruisers wasn’t enough. Weapons also had to keep up.

And here they were!

["Doom" Light Spear Array: Epic]

This was an L-sized heavy cannon, belonging to the category of energy weapons. Only ships larger than cruisers could be equipped with it. With Doom, the Alliance's newly built cruisers would not lack main guns. As for secondary guns, using M-sized weapons would suffice.

The Alliance had the technological capabilities for M-sized weapons, whether they were light spears, Colossal Cannons, or missiles.

Moreover, this type of large light spear array wasn't only applicable to starships. Positioned in a starport, or even on the ground, it's suitable for powerful anti-orbit cannons, essential for transforming a planet into a fortress.

And a planet's mass is much greater than that of a warship. Normally, it's impossible for ships to bombard a planet like how ancient naval fleets couldn't stand up to coastal defense artillery. The number of heavy cannons that could be mounted on a planet had no limits, dependent only on sufficient funds and production capacity.

Of course, something like the "Doom" L-sized light spear array was costly to produce, and the ammunition was also very expensive. Production capacity was also why most planets found it challenging to fortify themselves.

However, slightly regrettably, for the L-sized heavy cannons, Gu Hang only acquired the energy weapon, only "Doom." He missed out on the L-sized Colossal Cannon "Wrath of Loyalty" and the L-sized missile "Scorching East Wind."

Having only light spears for main cannons was somewhat lacking in diversity, posing problems when facing different enemies.

Light spears were expensive, had lower firepower density, were more effective against energy shields and Void Shields but somewhat ineffective against ship armor, and their effect in providing orbital support to ground forces was also relatively poorer.

Light spears, Colossal Cannons, and missiles, the three most common types of ship weapons, had their strengths and weaknesses, each adept at handling different situations. A fleet should ideally have all types of weapons to be at its best.

And the third Epic Technology was an Interstellar Warrior Technology.

[Iron Cavalry Terminator Powered Armor: Epic]

Chapter 460, Iron Cavalry Terminator Terminator Power Armor!

What a fantastic piece of equipment!

Previously, the Alliance didn't have the capacity to produce Terminators, and the one Matins had had been purchased by Gu Hang himself.

Moreover, it was an Unyielding Terminator which, in terms of performance, was a notch below the Iron Cavalry Terminator.

The Iron Cavalry Terminator originated from an even more ancient era. It was developed during the time The Emperor still reigned and the Empire was in a significant phase of interstellar expansion. Over the years, through incessant upheavals, especially the catastrophic civil war within the Empire, the technology for the Iron Cavalry Terminator was gradually lost.

Like many technologies from the zenith of the Empire, such as the Majestic Type Tactical Power Armor currently used by the Phoenix Battle Group—lost, but not completely gone. Some Foundry Worlds could still build them, albeit in limited numbers. Perhaps it was because the key components could still be manufactured, but the capacity to expand production wasn't there; or maybe because there was a larger manufacturing scale for replacements that the old technologies weren't really needed…

But, in any case, the Iron Cavalry Terminator that Gu Hang drew from the technology system didn't have those problems.

The Iron Cavalry type is better than the Unyielding type often seen in the major battle groups, as is the way with the technology of the Empire—the older it is, the more formidable; but as a consequence, its production costs are also higher.

And, like the Majestic Type Armor Gu Hang drew before, it has a problem: rarity and antiquity, meaning it's conspicuously noticeable.

The process of making the Iron Cavalry type isn't common even among the Foundry Worlds. And now you, the Alliance, are able to produce it, too?

However, Gu Hang was no longer concerned about that.

How many similar technologies in the Alliance could there be?

In the past, he was anxious, but now his mindset was much more stable.

When there are too many lice, they don't itch.

Moreover, as the Alliance continued to thrive and grow, similar threats started to worry him less.

With the Iron Cavalry Terminator Power Armor, the power of the Phoenix Battle Group would climb another rung. They would be able to form their own Terminator Squad and charge against the most terrifying enemies in this universe!

Of course, Terminators were not invincible. They were only a bit over three meters tall, less than half the size of Knight Mecha.

But in a confrontation between a veteran Terminator and a Knight Mecha, Gu Hang believed that the Terminator had a high chance of victory.

Both equipped with energy shields, the Terminator couldn't mount weapons as powerful as those of a Knight Mecha due to its size, but its defensive capabilities were not much less in comparison. Much

more agile, and with an Interstellar Warrior, essentially a superman, at the controls, a Terminator could guarantee to take down any Knight Mecha that came its way—provided the seasoned Terminator didn't do something foolish like trying to match the larger Knight Mecha in firepower or mechanical strength; rather, it should rely on experience, skill, and agile tactics to win.

The Terminator's lack of agility compared to conventional Tactical Power Armors, but against Knight Mecha, it was still significantly superior.

However, the cost of producing an Iron Cavalry Terminator was exorbitant, usually reaching 1.2 million Tax Currency per unit. That's a full 50% more expensive than the standard 800,000 price for an Unyielding type. This might be another reason why the Iron Cavalry type was scarce in circulation.

But, as always, with a Black Box ready to churn out finished products and set up production lines, the cost for the Alliance to make these devices wouldn't be as high as it is on the market.

Besides, spending a bit more for significantly better performance could be a worthwhile trade-off.

…

After acquiring a [Cruiser], a [Doomsday Light Spear Array], and an [Iron Cavalry Terminator Powered Armor], Gu Hang was more than satisfied with his technological lottery winnings this time around.

However, among the three Elite Level technologies he drew afterward, there were also a couple of really good ones.

[L-Type Transport Ship – Behemoth]

Now this is a gem!

Although it's only Elite Level, its value isn't much less than that of the Moon Class Cruiser.

Despite the Behemoth's significant downsides—markedly unmaneuverable, incredibly slow, structurally unsuitable for conversion into an armed vessel, and an easy target if caught alone in space, much like a pig ready for slaughter…

Its plethora of weaknesses is offset by one overwhelming advantage: its capacity.

It's truly massive, just slightly smaller than a Retribution-class Battleship. True to its name, it boasts a colossal hold; like a moving Nest Capital in space, it can cram in up to twenty million people at its transport limit.

Because it can carry so much, the scale economics bring its transportation costs down substantially.

It wasn't expensive to build, around one billion, which was significantly cheaper than the Crazy Shark-class Destroyer.

It served as humanity's core vessel in interstellar trade. As long as it could haul goods for a few years, the cost would be recouped, and everything beyond that was profit.

In the past, the largest transport ship the Alliance could build was the Whale-class. That thing could only carry about one-tenth of what the Colossal Belly could. When it came to large-scale transportation, it was still more expensive than the Colossal Belly.

With this thing, making an economic community across Star Sectors would be easier for the Alliance. Otherwise, relying solely on the Gu Commercial Firm's existing ships would definitely be unreliable.

The scale of the Gu Commercial Firm was already nearly at its limit, covering the transportation needs within the Tianma Star Sector and the frontlines of the ongoing war. It would be nearly impossible to also accommodate the massive transportation demands that would arise after the integration of the Seven Horse Sectors.

The Alliance's shipyards were already operating at full throttle, building not just warships but various civilian vessels as well. In reality, even if the small shipyard on Baishuo Star in the Purple Horse Sector were included, there was a lot of squabbling from all parties. The navy wanted the civilian docks to build

warships for them. Even if legitimate warships couldn't be built, they demanded armed merchant ships instead;

While the Alliance's governmental units and merchant fleets were trying to pull together, the Alliance still needed to function, and the military needed support from the rear. The transport of raw materials, goods… these civilian ships are the vascular system of industrial manufacturing. They were willing to give way to the war, allowing some production capacity to build armed merchant ships to assist the navy with transport and combat, but they pleaded not to devote all of it.

There was no shortage of verbal disputes reaching Gu Hang.

Now, with the new build of the Colossal Belly Transport Ship, the problem hadn't been solved per se, but it certainly had been greatly alleviated. The shipyard tasked with building the Colossal Belly could only be used to manufacture them; after all, they were too large; using it for building large warships was also out of the question because of lacking adequate technical standards. And, producing one Colossal Belly—which had the capacity of ten Whale-class vessels—meant one could cover for ten and would greatly relieve the Alliance's 'circulatory system.'

And the second piece of Elite Level Technology was the "Dominion-class Knight Mecha"

It was much larger than the Ranger Level, and it almost reached the size of the Warhound-class Titan; its combat power could also be roughly on par with the Warhound. Although it fell slightly short, it was more flexible than the Warhound-class Titan—after all, it only required one person to operate, instead of a team like the Warhound Titan.

However, its cost of construction was also very high, skyrocketing from seven hundred thousand for a Ranger-class Knight to three and a half million.

This was even more expensive than the Warhound Titan, which only cost two million three hundred thousand.

It was certainly a fine piece, and for many Knight Worlds, the Dominion-class Knight Mecha was a treasure. A single Knight could pilot such a large machine, possessing the strength to match the Warhound Titan.

But to the Alliance, it seemed somewhat superfluous.

Those Knight Families from Knight Worlds had a sentiment for this thing, which the Alliance did not share. The Warhound was cheaper, had slightly greater combat power, and the slight difference in flexibility wasn't as valuable on the frontlines as another piece of armor plating. After all, if the enemy decided to lay down a barrage, whether it was a Titan of over a dozen meters tall or a Knight Mecha, that slight increase in agility wouldn't count for much—they would still be bombarded regardless.

Gu Hang couldn't think of any reason to allocate production capacity to Dominion Knights over Warhounds.

Of course, the Warhound's rate of expansion was ultimately limited. When it really came down to it and production capacity couldn't meet the demand, setting up a few Dominion production lines wasn't out of the question. Additionally, since it held some symbolic significance, the Alliance could use it to win over some of the feudal worlds within its territory that had Knight cultures.

Heijian Star was of course the most typical example.

Beyond Heijian Star, in the Iron Horse Sector's Iron Wing Star, the Border Horse Sector's Gathering Snow 7, and the Purple Horse Sector's Purple Peak 3, these three worlds were also classic feudal worlds with Knight traditions. Once the Alliance had the capability to manufacture both Ranger Level and Dominion Level Knights, control over these worlds would greatly increase.

The lords of these Knight Worlds were quite different from planets with unified governments. If pushed too hard, those Knight lords could stubbornly resist to the bitter end. Executing a few people or staging a coup wouldn't do much good, as they didn't even have a Central Government—each was its own Knight Family. Trying to forcibly subdue them would likely require a battle like the one at Heijian Star.

That definitely wouldn't be worth it.

Political maneuvers, trade tactics, and economic control would be more reliable.

The corresponding strategies were already being employed by the Alliance's government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The manufacturing capability of the Dominion-class Knight Mecha would significantly enhance the Alliance's various strategies on these Knight planets.

From this perspective, the Dominion-class Knight Mecha had advantages that the Warhound Titan couldn't match.

…

As for the other two technologies, one was Elite Level and the other Advanced Level, both were civilian technologies.

The Advanced Level technology was a construction engineering vehicle, and the Elite Level was an improved agricultural planter, suitable for use in large-scale plantations.

Civilian technologies were also valuable; they were needed for economic development.

Gu Hang was quite satisfied with the haul from the lottery this time.

Even though it cost a full seven hundred thousand Grace Points, each one was a fine piece of technology.

These technologies would also become a powerful engine for the Alliance's development in the next two years.

And those two years would pass quickly.