Governor 481

Chapter 481, Only a Madman Would Pay You Taxes! Battleship Cruiser!

Though not truly a battleship, its significance might not be less than that of a battleship itself.

Essentially, it's a high-speed battleship. Compared to battleships, the battleship cruiser has slightly thinner armor and slightly weaker firepower, but the speed gained from sacrificing some armor endows it with extremely high tactical value.

It possesses firepower akin to that of a battleship, yet has the speed of a cruiser.

In the Empire, the mainstream idea is still centered on fleet engagements, with thick armor, sturdy shields, and fierce firepower making the battleship the undisputed core; however, within the Imperial Navy doctrine, there are theorists and Navy Generals who, in wartime, favor the battleship cruiser.

Its pursuit is to outpace any ship that can outrun mine and outgun any ship that can outgun mine.

The former refers to cruisers—battleship cruisers can easily defeat cruisers through superior speed and firepower;

The latter refers to battleships, those much slower than cruisers for battleship cruisers, that truly can't catch up. It might even circle around to the other side of a star or planet before the battleship can close in.

This grants the battleship cruiser a very flexible role in warfare.

It's more suited for solitary operations than a battleship, less likely to fail in striking the enemy or getting easily surrounded;

It can serve as the vanguard during fleet operations, pushing the enemy's vanguard into difficult positions. If the enemy's vanguard fleet engages alone, it's obviously disadvantageous for them.

If the enemy vanguard retreats to join the main force, the battleship cruiser can use its high speed to chase from behind, inflicting significant damage before engagement; it can also flank the enemy fleet, creating a side-attack advantage; or, if impossible, it can return to the main fleet during major engagements, acting as a standard battleship.

It can also act as a rearguard, quickly joining the frontline battle after the onset; and during retreats, it can hold off enemies, making itself an unavoidable target, yet capable of swiftly disengaging from combat due to its speed advantage.

Among the Imperial Navy, those who support the battleship cruiser believe that under the current cosmic conditions, where forces are balanced, relying on battleships to resolve fleet battles is a rare occurrence.

In wars, there's always one side with an advantage and the other at a disadvantage.

As the superior side, battleship cruisers can better chase, disrupt, and annihilate enemies; as the inferior side, they are more flexible and capable of outmaneuvering the cumbersome battleships.

They believe that building more battleship cruisers, rather than traditional battleships, represents a more advanced approach.

Gu Hang, not caring about which theory is right or wrong, if forced to choose, he chooses to have it all!

And now, before drawing a battleship, getting a battle cruiser is also a good choice.

The battleship cruiser drawn this time is named 'Holy Grail Class,' similar in length to the Retribution-class battleship but much slenderer; it uses a similar power specification, even slightly stronger.

Its firepower is also formidable, unable to surpass a true battleship, but when compared with a cruiser, it's simply overpowering. With 12 L-sized cannons, six times that of the Lunar Class, and one X-sized cannon, it's truly a death sentence for cruisers.

But the cost is that its armor and Void Shield ability level, compared to a Lunar-Class cruiser, can be considered in the same category, only slightly stronger, not much difference, and certainly no match for a battleship.

But how does that matter?

Gu Hang still doesn't know how long it will take to construct a battleship after drawing battleship technology, but it seems, it will take quite a long time; however, building a 'Holy Grail' only requires 6 years, time-wise just two years more than a Lunar-Class cruiser!

But the cost is much higher, one 'Holy Grail' costs 450 billion Tax Currency, five times that of the Lunar Class.

And currently, the Alliance doesn't have any dock capable of building the Holy Grail. The docks for building cruisers are too small, without even a margin for remodeling. The Alliance will need to construct bigger docks to accommodate the assembly and production of the Holy Grail Class.

But fortunately, Gu Hang had planned for this.

He never doubted that he would draw larger ship technologies; it was just a matter of sooner or later.

In fact, the dock where 'Firebath Nova' was positioned during the washing process, originally for the gigantic belly-class transport ship, had been undergoing modifications for the past two and half years, to make it more suitable for a battleship military dock.

On one hand, it facilitates the need for the Firebath Nova to return for major repairs when necessary, on the other hand, it prepares for the current situation.

They can start construction now.

Finished Black Boxes can pull out some high-difficulty components, and as one gets produced, they are sent skyward; production lines are methodically set up, starting from simple ones; and finally, assembly work is completed within the battleship dock.

With the help of Finished Black Boxes, the construction time for the Alliance's first battleship could be cut by more than half.

Of course, if two ships were constructed simultaneously, the help from the Finished Black Box wouldn't be as significant.

But currently, the Alliance only has the capability to start one vessel, unless a new large dock is built and a complete production line capable of handling all parts of a battleship cruiser is established.

Chapter 481, Only a Madman Would Pay You Taxes!_2 But for now, it was enough.

The Alliance urgently needed the "Holy Grail"! If a Battleship Cruiser could be built in three years, that would be quite an achievement. A Battleship Cruiser could barely serve as the flagship of a Star Domain Level Fleet, holding its own in a show of force.

…

After completing the technology lottery, the Black Box with Gu Hang's name naturally ended up in the Black Box Factory within the Storm God Kingdom, operated by the Heroic Spirits; the related products would then pass through the Alliance's research institutes before being delivered to the specific industrial sectors that manufactured these products.

At the same time, the Alliance Government would receive instructions from Gu Hang to start planning according to the new technological capabilities and ensure these technological products were effectively implemented, providing significant assistance to the development of the Alliance.

Gu Hang himself was far from idle.

He took his entire staff team and headed to Rage Owl Star.

Bringing the team ensured the smooth operation of all tasks related to the function of the "Alliance Governor" after leaving Flying Wing Star. Additionally, the trip to Rage Owl Star aimed to utilize the Planetary Climate Transformation Technology.

Rage Owl Star was the first location where Gu Hang planned to use his potent psychic powers and the close relationship between the Storm God Kingdom and Rage Owl Star to not only alter the planet's climate but also to alleviate the permeation of subspace energy.

The particularity of Rage Owl Star lay in the thinness of its reality veil. During the flourishing era centuries ago, this was a blessing, bringing forth advanced energy sources like Spiritualized Gas Fields. Over a hundred years ago, however, it turned into disaster. Excessive exploitation of the Spiritualized Gas Fields led to uncontrollable subspace energy seepage, and an accident caused a Subspace Rift and a demonic invasion. The Imperial Army did suppress the demons, destroyed the Subspace Rift, and saved Rage Owl Star from total annihilation.

But now, it became an advantage again.

With the climate transformation technology and Gu Hang's control over the Storm God Kingdom, combined with the native Subspace region of Rage Owl Star, it was possible to quell the energy storms and have the Spiritualized Gas Fields emerge anew.

Moreover, there was less concern for a repeat of the disaster going forward.

In its heyday, Rage Owl Star mined the Spiritualized Gas Fields for hundreds or thousands of years with only one major incident occurring, meaning the probability was initially low. Not to mention that the Subspace region closest to Rage Owl Star now was Gu Hang's own Storm God Kingdom.

Demons wishing to invade Rage Owl Star? They would have to contend with the Storm God Kingdom first.

Gu Hang intended to stay on Rage Owl Star peacefully for three months, working in tandem with climate transformation devices taken from finished Black Boxes, to begin the preliminary work on transforming the planet.

Once the most challenging part was done, the fine-tuning and maintenance could proceed without him necessarily being on-site.

However, during the second month of Gu Hang's work on Rage Owl Star, trouble found him, courtesy of the Fury Flame Battle Group.

An old acquaintance arrived, none other than Ms. Nell Raouise, previously the Chief Administrator of Dragonhawk Star Domain, now back to her old role, leading a Tax Fleet towards the controlled regions of the Alliance, currently held up outside Capital Star by the Alliance's "border defense."

The Tax Fleet led by Raouise didn't try to force its way through but made its purpose clear: collecting Imperial Taxes.

The war was largely over, and the Eastern and Western parts of the Star Domain were nominally reunited.

With the Imperial Taxes stalled for several years, it was time to resume payments.

The news of the Star Domain Government's Tax Fleet's arrival was promptly relayed back.

Without orders, the border defense dared not let them pass.

The Alliance War Committee and the Alliance Government, upon seeing the message from the border defense, were also hesitant to make a unilateral decision. Osenia made a Star Speech call to Gu Hang to report the situation, waiting for Mr. Gu's directives.

"Blast her away," Gu Hang gave a very clear response.

"But the Imperial Tax… Didn't you instruct our Finance Department to specifically reserve a budget for paying the Imperial Tax?"

"Yes, that's right, we of course need to pay the Imperial Tax. Is our loyalty to the Empire in question? Of course, we will pay the Imperial Tax."

At this point, Gu Hang paused, then continued, “But who said we have to pay the Imperial Tax to the Star Domain Government?”

Osenia inquired, “You mean to directly contact a higher tier of government to make this tax payment?”

“Yes, that’s exactly what I mean,” said Gu Hang, “We pay the Imperial Tax to the Dragonhawk Star Domain Government, but can we trust Raouise to fill her Tax Fleet with tax currency and deliver it to Yunluo Star to be transferred to the Empire’s hands? Clearly not. How much of the Imperial Tax collected by the western part of the Star Domain actually gets passed on? Didn’t the Fury Flame Battle Group cleverly create numerous pretexts to spend it on themselves?”

“No matter how many valid reasons there are, the majority of the Imperial Taxes currently collected by the Dragonhawk Star Domain Government is under the control of the Fury Flame Battle Group. They have too many justifications for spending these taxes—subduing rebellions, defense, clearing out Green Skins… just like what they did with ‘Iron Fury Stone’ in the Princess Star Domain.”

“If we dutifully pay our taxes to the Star Domain Government, we would have to hand over one-tenth of the Alliance’s outputs—the past two years’ Imperial Taxes total up to 76 billion tax currency in materials! Are we insane? To give 76 billion to the Fury Flame and then let them use our own money to fight us?”

Chapter 481, Only a Madman Would Pay You Taxes!_3 “I understand what you’re saying, I’ll arrange the corresponding transport fleet and escort work right away. The route we now have to choose, leading to the Wuji Star at the Cosmic Domain Capital, might be a bit roundabout. We’ll have to go from the East Adjoining Starfield on the eastern side to the Wuji Starfield. The journey in-between is quite convoluted, and it’s not necessarily safe. We will need to dedicate a significant portion of our forces to ensure the safety of the Tax Fleet’s arrival at the target. A round trip will take at least six months to complete this tax payment.”

“What I want to say is, paying the Imperial Tax imposes a significant pressure on us. This task, it not only occupies a part of our naval vessels but, more importantly, it also takes up one-third of our interstellar transport capacity. A large number of transport ships will be engaged to handle the transportation of the huge amount of materials represented by the Imperial Tax. These are all costs of levying and transporting taxes, which used to be borne by the Star Domain Government. Now, we have to bear them ourselves…”

Osenia’s voice sounded somewhat discontented.

Which was understandable.

As the Prime Minister of the Alliance Government, they hadn't paid Imperial Taxes in recent years—no, that's not right, the Imperial Taxes had been used locally, the accounts were still clear—now that they suddenly had to pay taxes formally, it really hurt.

The area occupied by the Alliance wasn't small. In the recent two years, in the struggle with the Fury Flame Battle Group, the Alliance had basically stabilized outside Seven Horse Territory and controlled an additional 12 Star Sectors. Excluding the four Star Sectors without any output, which were strongholds of the Green Skins with no other population but new immigrants, naturally, there wouldn't be a matter of Imperial Taxes. But for the remaining eight Star Sectors now in the hands of the Alliance, the Alliance naturally had the responsibility to pay taxes.

It wasn't the Alliance paying directly, but these planets were. However, since these planets were either under the common defense framework or under the Economic Community Act, in Osenia's eyes, their money was as good as the Alliance's money!

When they were paying taxes, it was as if the Alliance was paying taxes!

These newly acquired territories, with a total population of over 150 billion, naturally meant the Imperial Taxes reached over 15 billion Tax Currency. But these planets had only just come into the hands of the Alliance, hadn't had time to develop, and, furthermore, substantial initial investments were needed for later development.

The money levied from these planets, after being used to pay Imperial Taxes, left the Alliance with a remaining fiscal balance of just over five billion. And this was based on the residents of these planets having very low living standards, with an average annual consumption per capita of only about 0.6-0.7.

Life was so miserable and heavily exploited that they could only squeeze out this little bit.

Should the Alliance then go on to pour money into developing these places, that fiscal surplus of fifty-odd billion was definitely not going to be enough, and the Alliance would still need to put more money in!

To toil so hard, only to work for the Imperial Tax? And to lose money?

Osenia certainly wasn't satisfied.

Moreover, it wasn't just about the Imperial Tax; that was inevitable, a sum that couldn't be avoided no matter what.

But what made Osenia even more frustrated was that it seemed the cost of paying the tax would still be borne by the Alliance in the future. One-third of the Alliance's transport ships being occupied for more than half a year, what a tremendous capital loss? This would impact the development of the Alliance.

Osenia's thoughts were roughly understood by Gu Hang. He could only offer consolation, "I know it's not easy, but we must do it. In the future, we will have to reach this point one day, better to take this step now using the Fury Flame Battle Group, a circumstance everyone can understand, as an opportunity. Tell the United Fleet to allocate four cruisers to form a battle group for this escort fleet."

With that, Gu Hang added, "Moreover, we don't actually need to transport all the materials to Wuji Star."

"Hisss!"

Osenia sucked in a breath of cold air; just now, the Governor was criticizing Furyflame for intercepting the Imperial Tax, and now you're suggesting…?

Chapter 482, you made the right choice Through the virtual image of the Star Speech phone, Gu Hang saw the astonishment on Osenia's face and said discontentedly, "What kind of expression is that?"

"Uh… Nothing, I'm just waiting to hear the next brilliant remarks from you, Governor."

The corner of Gu Hang's mouth twitched, and he decided not to stoop to Osenia's level, explaining patiently, "Doing something similar to the Fury Flame Battle Group is not something we can afford to do. They have many reasons for intercepting Imperial Tax, but the main part still lies in claiming that the Green Skins on various planets in their control zone have not been completely eliminated, necessitating significant investments, and thus they demand unilateral tax reductions or substitutions in lieu of tax."

“Of course, that’s illegal because theoretically, the Green Skin threat on each planet is the responsibility of the local government of those planets to resolve. Even if combat is conducted in the name of the Star Domain Government, the only portion they can legitimately retain is what the original Star Domain Government was able to keep. But the amount intercepted by the Fury Flame Battle Group far exceeds what a normal Star Domain Government would be allowed to retain. This greatly offends the higher-level government while also damaging their reputation.”

“We have to differentiate ourselves from the Fury Flame Battle Group; we cannot be the same as them in this regard, or else we become tarred with the same brush.”

Osenia nodded, indicating her understanding, but she also said, “I understand what you’re saying, but… the cost of bearing the 76 billion Tax Currency plus collection and transportation ourselves is still too steep. If we go by that figure, it could impact our current four-year plan.”

Gu Hang agreed with Osenia’s point.

Imperial Tax is for the Empire, but parting with so much cash is always done reluctantly, especially when the numbers are so vast.

76 billion… that’s almost enough to build one and a half Holy Grail Class Battleship Cruisers!

“So, we need to think of some other methods,” Gu Hang said. “I’ve discussed this with the Space Domain Government; they are of course happy for us to do this since a large amount of wealth would flow directly to them, skipping the Star Domain Government altogether. Chairman Zuo is also aware that if the Dragonhawk Star Domain gets the taxes, most of it will end up in Furyflame’s hands, and there won’t be much left to deliver.”

“Next, I will talk to the Space Domain Government again. Since they are reaping such large benefits, it’s only fair that they share some of the costs. I’m fairly confident they should agree.”

After pondering for a while, Osenia asked, “Is there a chance to get a direct tax reduction? To deduct the costs right at our step.”

“It should be possible.”

“That would indeed relieve quite a bit of pressure.”

“Moreover, we don’t really need to transport so many resources all the way to Wuji Star ourselves. I’ve spoken with the Space Domain Government and the government of the neighboring East Adjoining Starfield. We can deliver the materials directly to Abundant Spirit Star, and they can transfer them.”

“That would save a considerable amount of time and costs!”

It was all legal and legitimate to do so.

When collecting Imperial Tax, large amounts of physical materials would never actually be transported all the way to Holy Terra and handed over to the Central Empire, then distributed according to need to various Cosmos Domains, Star Domains, and Star Sectors. The wear and tear on the road would be immense.

Transportation costs would indeed decrease significantly with scale; however, even then, such a large base figure requires a substantial number of ships, which wouldn’t be used for anything else, and the fuel costs for the trip were extremely high.

Such a degree of waste is something even the Empire can’t bear.

It was for this reason that the Empire’s method of handling Imperial Tax allowed the Star Domain and Space Domain Governments to retain a portion; the remainder that goes to the central authorities would not actually all be transported to Holy Terra. Some would be distributed in accordance with the Empire’s current strategic objectives to the areas in need, while the rest would establish storage worlds within various Cosmos Domains for resource storage.

The costs generated in these processes are usually borne by the Imperial System. The Alliance now handling the transfer of tax duties effectively replaced part of the Star Domain Government’s functions, so they could naturally require that these costs not be borne by themselves.

However, this situation was somewhat unreasonable.

The Star Domain Government is theoretically still in existence; is it your turn, Alliance, to pay taxes directly to the top?

If the Space Domain Government stood by the Star Domain Government and rejected your taxes submitted out of turn, then it would be all over.

That is, in fact, the most likely scenario to occur. The Star Domain Government is an official subordinate of the Space Domain Government with a direct affiliation under normal circumstances. The Space Domain Government would not normally accept taxes paid directly by a local power within a Star Domain.

It was only due to the exceptional circumstances of the Dragonhawk Star Domain and the implications from Zuo Zhaofeng, the Cosmic Domain Chair, facilitated by Galaraldo, that this could be arranged.

And it wasn't just arranged.

"I will also talk to Chairman Zuo later. After all, we are currently in a state of war, and we indeed have assumed half of the Star Domain Government's responsibilities. Accordingly, we should also be able to receive a part of the appropriations for the Star Domain Government. Getting the standard 30% might be difficult, but 20% should be fair."

"However, the method of retention can't be for me to keep it directly. We still have to give it up, and then the Space Domain Government will provide the funding. Osenia, you need to be prepared to receive it accordingly."

Chapter 482, you made the right choice_2 "I understand," Osenia nodded.

She didn't ask why they had to go to these lengths.

She knew the reason; it was a matter of legitimacy.

No matter what, the Alliance still wasn't a Star Domain Government. It was already against the rules to pay taxes directly to a higher authority bypassing the Star Domain Government, and keeping the Imperial Tax for themselves would be even more out of line. However, after the taxes were paid, having the Space Domain Government redistribute them as special funding was a relatively better approach.

Before ending the communication, Osenia said to Gu Hang, "Governor, this cannot be a long-term solution. Furyflame has caused us too much trouble with things like this. I look forward to the day you become the true master of Dragonhawk."

"Very soon."

…

As Osenia said, the Imperial Tax was not the first problem Furyflame sought to create.

Over the past two years, they had used similar tactics to cause numerous troubles for the Alliance.

The simplest was sending Star Zone Leaders and Planetary Governors to occupied territories in the name of the Star Domain Government.

Every time someone was sent, Gu Hang detained them.

As supreme commander, they would issue orders to the Alliance Army.

Every order was ignored.

Other measures, like cutting off trade, were routine.

Furyflame Battle Group clearly knew these acts would have no results.

But each time the Alliance detained or expelled an official from the Star Domain Government, or ignored an order from the Star Domain Government, they provided Furyflame with an argument, an excuse.

They made use of these to vigorously denounce Gu Hang's overbearing behavior, to attack the Alliance as separatists, labeling them as traitors.

This wasn't said for Gu Hang's benefit, but aimed at the surrounding star domains, the Space Domain Government, and up to the Central Empire.

How could the Alliance handle this?

Such accusations couldn't stand unchallenged, leaving them only to refute.

Of course, mere refutation wouldn't suffice. Any explanation was still a defensive move.

The Alliance also relentlessly criticized the Fury Flame Battle Group for hijacking the Star Domain Government, harbouring malicious intentions, and being traitors to the Empire.

Insulting others is easy enough, isn't it?

Then there was another infuriating affair: claiming battle honors from the Iron Teeth War.

Theoretically, since the Iron Teeth War took place in the Dragonhawk Star Domain, the victory report detailing the conduct and outcome of the war should be submitted by the Star Domain Government. This process decided who, which military forces, had played a larger role in the war, and specifically what their contributions were.

This determined not just issues of honor but how the Empire's rewards would be allocated.

Funding for planetary reconstruction and replenishing military losses were matters of practical benefit.

For Gu Hang, an even more crucial matter was asserting his indisputable merit in the war, aiming to obtain the legitimate standing of the Dragonhawk Star Domain Government.

The various troubles Furyflame caused were essentially leveraging the naturally legal title of the Star Domain Government. The key to resolving these issues was to become the spokesperson for legitimacy.

But since Gu Hang already clashed with Furyflame, how could he expect them to speak well of him?

Submitting victory reports through the Star Domain Government to the higher authorities would likely render the Alliance invisible.

Gu Hang profoundly understood that victory and the fruits of victory were two different things. It was possible to win a war and end up with nothing.

He had to fight for that right to speak.

His war report, like the Imperial Tax, bypassed the Star Domain Government and was sent directly to higher authority.

However, the efficiency of the Empire was dreadfully slow.

A year ago, Gu Hang had contacted Galaraldo to ask about the conclusion of the Dragonhawk Star Domain war. At that time, Galaraldo told him that the relevant information had not yet reached the Imperial Military Department!

Gu Hang had no choice but to inquire with the Space Domain Government, and Chairman Zuo said he had already sent it.

What a mess.

Now, no one knew where this victory report was stuck.

But reportedly, this was normal.

For Holy Terra, the Eastern Cosmos Domain… is a rather remote place. Here, a star-field-level war had unfolded, its scale was only so-so. In the entire universe, within the Imperial Territory, wars of a similar scale were exaggerated if one said they happened every day—they were happening several times a day!

Wait patiently.

But all things considered, with the attention of big shots like Zuo Zhaofeng and Galaraldo, efficiency would inevitably be a bit faster than usual.

And so, the wait continued until now.

Gu Hang couldn't very well keep pushing.

He just had to keep waiting.

And if the final result he waited for turned out to be unsatisfactory, he also had some backup plans in readiness.

Hopefully, they would not be needed.

…

Gu Hang had not yet received a response to the war report when an old acquaintance arrived first.

It was Lois.

The Alliance border troops at Capital Star, after receiving instructions from Governor Gu, naturally had to drive away the Tax Fleet led by Lois.

They denied the Tax Fleet's docking request, the Navy was closing in, and they warned this Dragonhawk Tax Fleet that if they forced their way through the Capital Star System's jump point, it would be considered an act of war.

But the Tax Fleet didn't leave.

Lois made a request for a personal communication with Gu Hang.

Gu Hang thought this high official from the Star Domain Government was going to try to persuade him of something.

After all, Gu Hang could guess why the Fury Flame Battle Group had made Lois the tax official—it was because of the so-called "grace of knowing" that Lois had toward him.

Of course, they knew it was impossible to collect money from Gu Hang, and it was also about irritating Gu Hang.

Moreover, the nature of the Imperial Tax was worse than anything else. They were just waiting to use the issue Gu Hang brushed off to keep nitpicking.

In theory, after being expelled by the Alliance, Lois should have already obtained what she needed and should have left.

What is there to talk about?

However, once they really connected, Gu Hang realized that he was wrong.

"Gu Hang, please save the Star Domain Government," Lois said as her first sentence.

"Save the Star Domain Government?" Gu Hang replied, "How? Can the Star Domain Government admit that you've been coerced by the Fury Flame Battle Group?"

“Of course! That’s the truth!”

Gu Hang gave no direct response but continued to ask, “So, does the Star Domain Government want to give me a secret order to expel the Fury Flame Battle Group with troops?”

“If you need it, of course!”

“Very well, please issue the secret order,” Gu Hang said with a smile.

But his heart was ice-cold.

Even with the so-called secret order, he couldn’t possibly send troops westward to fight a civil war.

This move was just like every other time the Fury Flame Battle Group annoyed him; with this secret order, Gu Hang could openly declare, “Look at what the Fury Flame Battle Group has put the Star Domain Government through.”

But Lois didn’t give him that secret order.

She said, “I don’t want to go back to Yunluo Star.”

“Oh?” It was at this point that Gu Hang truly became interested.

“If I go back, it would be meaningless. I would just continue to be a puppet for the Fury Flame Battle Group; they’ve never thought about leaving the Star Domain Government, Tan Jiuyi’s wishful thinking is just a dream!”

“I want to restructure the Star Domain Government in the Eastern Star Domain, or at least restructure the structure of the Star Domain Administration Department. Gu Hang… will you support me?”

Gu Hang's tone warmed up: "Of course! We're old friends, I will certainly support you fully! The actions of the Fury Flame Battle Group are just too excessive; the Star Domain Government needs people like you, Director Lois, to stand up, expose them, and independently take on the responsibilities that the Star Domain Government should bear! If you wish, then stay. The Alliance will provide you with all the help you need."

"Believe me, Director Lois, you have made the most correct choice!"

Chapter 483, Silver Tribunal Lois's choice was indeed a pleasant surprise for Gu Hang.

Wasn't legality the concern?

With Lois's help, Gu Hang could indeed clear several hurdles.

As the Chief Director of the Dragonhawk Star Domain Government Affairs Department, she could be considered the second in command throughout the Star Domain Government.

Once she arrived, Gu Hang could establish a smaller Star Domain Government within his controlled area.

The justification was clear: the Chief Administrator was here to conduct the operations of the Star Domain Administration Department, which was quite reasonable.

Afterwards, Gu Hang could also act in the name of the Star Domain Government.

Even more, he could turn back and cause some trouble for the Fury Flame Battle Group.

This was the conflict between "name" and "reality."

In fact, having suffered quite a few setbacks in the name of the Star Domain Government, Gu Hang also made some efforts in this regard.

Although filled with difficulties, the Alliance's intelligence departments had each exhibited their prowess, thinking of methods to insert agents into the various worlds of the Western Dragonhawk Star Domain, including Yunluo Star.

These agents weren't realistic in staging rebellions, as the Alliance's influence and capacity to incite were not sufficient; but they were capable of gathering some intelligence and making covert contacts with certain key figures.

With this intelligence, even though it wasn't all classified, Gu Hang could see that the Star Domain Government wasn't willingly serving the Fury Flame Battle Group like a loyal dog.

Some high officials in the Star Domain Government had reached a certain understanding with the Alliance.

They couldn't directly oppose the Fury Flame Battle Group, but they could pass information to the Alliance; they didn't dare to overtly assist the Alliance, yet they were able to resist and delay certain cooperations needed by the Fury Flame Battle Group, thus increasing their operational costs.

After all, the Fury Flame Battle Group consisted of alien forces; half a Star Domain, with billions of people and a hundred or two worlds, couldn't possibly be managed by less than a thousand Interstellar Warriors. Although they brought a considerable number of Auxiliary Army troops, they still needed to rely heavily on local forces to maintain their rule.

Truthfully, this was very unstable and entirely different from Erso's original plans.

Initially, Erso envisioned the Fury Flame Battle Group becoming heroes of the Dragonhawk Star Domain, then everything would become very manageable. They intended to return power to the local forces and form strong alliances through influence and security guarantees. Then, by bringing in forces from the Menghe Star Domain and the Princess Star Domain, they planned to infiltrate through continual trade and political cooperation. In a few years, the Dragonhawk Star Domain would become a de facto ally to the "Iron Fury Stone"; and even further down the line, they would have to heavily rely on the "Iron Fury Stone."

This strategy had been tested in multiple star domains. Though it took time, it had always been successful.

However, in Dragonhawk Star Domain, everything was different. The step of becoming heroes, saviors, was greatly underachieved. Now, regarded as enemies by half the star domain, where could they be considered heroes? And precisely because of their adversarial relationship with the Alliance, they were unable to fully build their “glorious image,” forced to exploit the energies of the controlled half of the star domain to sustain this Cold War.

But this would significantly erode the prestige they had painstakingly established through the Iron Teeth War, already compromised by the presence of the Alliance.

It must be emphasized again, they were alien forces, not the native rulers of the Dragonhawk Star Domain. They managed to control half the star domain based on their wartime victories, the prestige of saving their world, and their formidable power. Both elements were indispensable.

As the former was being continuously eroded, it would be impossible to permanently control half the star domain once the local forces truly began to disengage, regardless of how strong they were.

As for Gu Hang, he was much more patient in this regard.

By dragging things out, the Eastern part of the Dragonhawk Star Domain under his control would only develop better, society would stabilize, and he could turn those two hundred worlds into his stronghold.

On the other hand, as long as Gu Hang maintained a Cold War stance with the Fury Flame Battle Group, the intrinsic contradictions of the Western part of the star domain would become increasingly uncontainable, and the entire society more turbulent. Persistent rebellions might be unlikely, but the governance costs of the Fury Flame Battle Group would undoubtedly keep climbing, to the point where they not only couldn’t benefit from it but had to continuously pour in resources to maintain it.

Patience, don’t rush, avoid mistakes, consolidate gains, accumulate strength.

This was Gu Hang’s overall strategy for leading the Alliance against the Fury Flame Battle Group.

Just two years had passed, and a Lois had already defected;

What about after two more years? Four years?

Keep up if you can for six years, eight years. By then, who knows how much the Alliance's naval fleets would have grown!

…

But clearly, Erso didn't want to keep dragging things out with Gu Hang.

From far in the Eastern Star Domain, Gu Hang could see things clearly, but being in the thick of it, Erso felt it even more acutely.

He was increasingly feeling uneasy.

Up to now, he had to admit that the Alliance, standing opposite him, was a tremendously potent enemy. His own intelligence gathering inside the Alliance wasn't great, but the snippets he did catch were enough to let him know that this enemy would only grow stronger.

And yet he couldn't take advantage of this time to launch a direct attack, instead forced to stew here in this Cold War.

Chapter 483, Silver Tribunal_2 He felt extremely frustrated, but what was even more suffocating was that he sensed the local forces in the western Dragonhawk Star Domain reacting due to the extraction of resources from the Cold War and the oppressive and dominant rule that the Fury Flame Battle Group had been forced to adopt.

Resource allocation and personnel replenishment were becoming increasingly unsmooth, and the conveyance and execution of orders were also growing more obscure.

He felt as though he was sinking into a quagmire. He could clearly sense that if things continued this way, he and his Battle Group would drown in the Dragonhawk Star Domain.

He had to break the game.

But the method to break the game couldn't be war, at least not an unjustified war.

Blatantly accusing the Alliance of treason wasn't enough; while his words were fierce, Erso knew better than anyone what the image of 'Iron Fury Stone' was in the Empire's political arena. If you yourself can't wash off the mud you're stuck in, pointing fingers at others and calling them traitors won't be believed by anyone.

Once he initiated a war without sufficient 'claims', it might provoke a very severe reaction. In the worst case, it could even lead the Empire to declare the Fury Flame Battle Group as traitors and mobilize forces to suppress him.

At that point, it would be another 'Cercis Flower Rebellion'. That was the most critical opportunity for 'Iron Fury Stone' to grow and strengthen, but also their greatest crisis. Back then, if they hadn't won, the fate of the three Battle Groups: Cercis Flower, Starbreaker Blade, and Phoenix, would be the fate of Iron Armor, Fury Flame, and Bedrock Shield.

But on the other hand, what if the 'claims' were sufficient?

Over the past two years, Erso had been finding various troubles for the Alliance, all to accumulate 'claims'.

Defying orders, ignoring assignments, not accepting officials from the Star Domain Government… And this time, the issue with the Imperial Tax was a finishing blow.

Erso had already considered that Gu Hang wouldn't pay him the tax. Otherwise, with over seventy billion in his hands, many issues could be resolved smoothly without having to exploit the locals so harshly, and he could even share some benefits…

But not paying the tax was also fine, even if Gu Hang would pay it to the higher-level government, just like the previous incident of reporting achievements, it was within his expectations.

He even considered whether he should plunder the transport fleets dispatched by Gu Hang, since they weren't officially the Imperial Tax Fleet, and plundering them wasn't the same as robbing the Imperial Tax.

But after consideration, the risk was still too high; it was too offensive to the Space Domain Government. After all, that money was meant for the Space Domain Government. If they claimed that this was their official tax fleet, he would be in big trouble.

Under the current circumstances, it was enough.

Skipping the Star Domain Government and paying taxes directly to the higher-level government?

Even if he got approval from the senior government, there were too many angles to exploit in this issue.

In this universe, things that are truly black and white are few, most affairs exist in shades of gray, merely varying in depth. The same issue, under different judgments or different stances, could entirely change in nature.

The accumulated material from the past, along with the current issue of Imperial Tax, were all ammunition for Erso's next move.

But this ammunition couldn't be fired by the Fury Flame Battle Group, for the same reason he couldn't start a war on his own.

However, 'Iron Fury Stone' had been messing around in the Empire's political scene for so many years, doing many rule-breaking and illicit things, and could still be so brazen now, there was naturally a reason for that. Apart from their inherently strong capabilities, they had developed some collaborators and shared-interest groups, which also formed a certain level of 'protection'.

Without connections, he would have capsized long ago!

And now, it's time to utilize those "connections."

Imperial Inquisition.

Over the years, ‘Iron Fury Stone’ had maintained fairly good relations with numerous Imperial Inquisition institutions and Orders.

Speaking of the Imperial Inquisition, this is an organization within the Empire quite exceptional in nature.

They are a super-spy organization that combines the functions of secret police, espionage, intelligence, domestic surveillance, dealing with heretics, eliminating demons and aliens from outside, and more.

Their power is immense, almost towering above any other political entity in the Empire, constantly monitoring every living being within the Empire.

In theory, a Judge possesses almost boundless power. As long as there is a justifiable reason, they could virtually do as they please—signing an Extinction Order, killing billions or even hundreds of billions of people on a planet; executing an Empire Marshal; overseeing lords of the Supreme Council; declaring a Starfighter Battle Group traitorous…

At the same time, the Imperial Inquisition is a vast, loose, and complex organization. Every Judge has their own idea of how to defend the empire more effectively. Depending on their philosophy of handling situations and methodology, the Inquisition internally actually divides into countless factions.

There are specialized tribunals like the Demon Tribunal for dealing with Abyss Demons, the Extraplanar Tribunal focused on various kinds of aliens, and the Heretic Tribunal for rooting out traitors within the Empire… These three are among the largest, yet there are many smaller, radically different other factions.

The Imperial Inquisition does not have a formal structural framework; some Judges, when facing significant problems they cannot solve alone, form cooperative groups. Often, such cooperative groups are the precursors and embryonic forms of a tribunal faction.

While Judges' powers are boundless in theory, in specific affairs, the situation is much more complicated. The nominally excessive power of the Inquisition often evolves into having no power at all. Or rather, what a specific Judge wishes to do depends on his "strength."

This strength depends on how much power a Judge can mobilize within the Inquisition itself, how willing his own faction is to support him, how much power he can mobilize from other factions, how much support he can fish from outside organizations, and whether he can mobilize help from the State Religion, Sect of Mechanics, or even the Star Realm Army or Imperial Navy. All these constitute parts of a Judge's strength.

On the other hand, it depends on how much recognition a Judge's words and judgments can gain within the Empire.

Thus, although Judges possess almost boundless secular power in theory, if they abuse their authority in reality, they will soon face a variety of worldly repercussions—even the Inquisition itself has a specialized institution responsible for overseeing Judges who abuse their power. Therefore, although theoretically feasible, Judges cannot really do as they please.

And yet, the connections of 'Iron Fury Stone' within the Inquisition are surprisingly good.

Especially a major faction that is often active in the Eastern parts of the Empire—the Silver Tribunal.

This tribunal had a glorious history, commanding tens of thousands of formal Judges and maintaining good cooperation with several powerful Star Realm Army Corps and Admirals. The biggest case involved them successfully inciting a trial against the Cosmic Domain Chair of the McClay Domain—a figure absolutely among the top officials of the Empire, which ended with the judgment by the Silver Tribunal.

Whether he was actually as the Silver Tribunal claimed, a "traitor," "incompetent and corrupt," causing "immense losses to the Empire," in the end, that Domain Chair tried to incite a rebellion for self-protection but was still dismantled and executed by the Silver Tribunal.

And their second major act was during the massive Cercis Flower rebellion over a century ago, they proved the loyalty of the Iron Armor Battle Group, sentenced the Cercis Flower Battle Group to extinction, and ordered the Starbreaker Blade and Phoenix on a redemption expedition.

With these two major incidents happening one after the other, the Silver Tribunal became famously influential in multiple Star Domains within the eastern part of the Empire. ‘Iron Fury Stone’ also often coordinated with some of their actions, causing quite a stir.

Moreover, the decisions made by the Silver Tribunal, backed by their original strong force and support from ‘Iron Fury Stone,’ always materialized. They also managed to get the headquarters of the Imperial Inquisition to sign off and approve their judgments.

Chapter 484: Confronting the Trial The Silver Judges hadn’t yet entered the Dragonhawk Star Domain, and Gu Hang already knew about it.

They were coming with an overwhelming and undisguised presence, broadcasting their intentions far and wide, and even a message requesting the Alliance’s cooperation with the investigation had been delivered into Gu Hang’s hands.

After receiving this message, Gu Hang sighed.

What was meant to come, would always come.

Of course, he did not want the Tribunal to enter his territory, especially not a Tribunal with hostile intent.

Gu Hang carefully pondered the possibility of refusing the Silver Tribunal entry into Alliance territory.

It seemed unlikely.

By doing so, he would appear guilty whether he was or not.

The Fury Flame Battle Group would immediately have the most reasonable excuse for war, and the Silver Tribunal would join in.

If it was just that, it might have been fine since they were already enemies, bound to fight sooner or later. But the key point is, after providing a perfect rationale for war, all imperial forces that could have

assisted Gu Hang would no longer be able to help him, and would involuntarily become his enemies instead.

By then, he wouldn't just be fighting the Fury Flame Battle Group and the Silver Tribunal, but rather an unrestrained Fury Flame Battle Group that could fully mobilize all its resources, while he would be battling alone.

That would definitely not do.

Gu Hang abandoned this idea.

He could only allow the Silver Tribunal to enter.

And since he couldn't stop them, Gu Hang had some ways to deal with it.

Mainly in two aspects, and he could use both simultaneously.

One was about the inspection itself.

The other was beyond the inspection.

Firstly, regarding the inspection itself, based on various reports and statements, Gu Hang believed there might still be room for negotiation.

The Silver Tribunal was not subordinate to Iron Fury Stone; they could at best be considered to be in a good relationship, sharing common interests, akin to allies.

They were still the 'Tribunal' and must adhere to its rules. Quite a number of Judges were indeed idealists.

This meant that they would accept Iron Fury Stone's invitation to help, serve as Iron Fury Stone's umbrella, but not subordinates, not nodding along with whatever Iron Fury Stone said.

And if one believed that the Silver Tribunal would judge to a certain extent fairly, then there really was a point in trying.

However, what Gu Hang was most troubled about was exactly this.

If the Alliance truly had no issues and could withstand scrutiny, he would not have worried about others coming with malice.

True gold fears no fire!

The key was, there were too many matters within the Alliance that couldn't withstand detailed investigation.

Furthermore, not just the nonsensical accusations from Erso that Gu Hang was worried about. It was the multitude of problems within the Alliance itself.

Where did the various industries and technologies that rapidly developed within the Alliance in such a short time frame come from?

Why is the training of the Alliance's soldiers so efficient?

How did the number of Phoenixes inflate to hundreds or thousands in just a few short years?

How did the political entity known as the 'Alliance' gain legitimacy? Does Galaraldo have the authority to make the decision for such a multi-planet political union? Are all the planets that have joined the Alliance to date in accordance with imperial statutes? Are the 'Seven Horse Framework' and the 'Economic Community Act' legal?

Even if these are all legal, the Alliance is replicating its political system on every affiliate planet, sidelining every Planetary Governor, an approach completely inconsistent with the basic political structure of the Empire. Does the Alliance have this right?

If a whole squad of professional Tribunal officials, even those truly impartial without the influence of the Fury Flame Battle Group, were to investigate thoroughly, it would cause Gu Hang to sweat profusely.

For these 'issues,' Gu Hang had actually made many preparations, with various explanations. Some could withstand scrutiny; others not quite so much. A detailed investigation would always be risky.

He had to face it with a tough face.

Specific countermeasures were already arranged by Gu Hang. This would be a high-priority task for the Alliance moving forward, with all preparations underway. Once the Silver Tribunal's Fleet arrived, they would begin execution.

As for the work beyond the inspection, no one else could help, and Gu Hang had to take care of it himself.

He started to frequently communicate with two parties: Zuo Zhaofeng and Bochoya Galaraldo.

Who doesn't have a patron after all?

Maybe someone's patron is even bigger!

And Gu Hang's efforts started to bear some fruits.

From Zuo Zhaofeng's side, the Cosmic Domain Chair provided Gu Hang with no small amount of help.

Initially, he honestly had no particular feeling towards Gu Hang. Upon taking office, he was a senior official of the Empire, and compared to Gu Hang, who was then only mingling at the Star Region Level, was Gu Hang of any significance to him? The difference in grade and class was too great.

But the reason he helped Gu Hang was purely because of Galaraldo, his most important political ally, who mentioned Gu Hang several times, asking him to take good care of the young man.

Under such circumstances, Zuo Zhaofeng naturally came to see Gu Hang as one of his own in the same political faction, and it became natural to provide assistance.

Later, the Iron Teeth War in the Dragonhawk Star Domain also greatly attracted the attention of the Space Domain Government.

The Space Domain Government certainly paid close attention to the war in the Dragonhawk Star Domain. The Green Skin crisis that suddenly erupted here was indeed frightening. The Eastern Cosmos Domain was also fearful of the Iron-Tooth Clan, which had swept across the entire Dragonhawk Star Domain in just a few months, fearing it would turn into a more vast and uncontrollable Green Tide, and spill out beyond the Star Domain's bounds, affecting other Star Domains, and even the entire Cosmos Domain.

Chapter 484, Confronting the Trial_2 Even towards the end, when the form of battle became deadlocked, the Space Domain Government still maintained a high level of attention here. They also did not wish for the entire Dragonhawk Star Domain to be destroyed in this war. The position of the Dragonhawk Star Domain within the Eastern Cosmos Domain is quite significant—destroying an entire star domain would be a loss too great to bear.

Zuo Zhaofeng, only a few years into his tenure as Cosmic Domain Chair, had already faced the blight of a star domain under his administration, which was a significant blow to his political career.

For this reason, during the Iron Teeth War, the Space Domain Government had actually provided considerable assistance.

A massive amount of resources, along with parts of the Star Realm Army and a portion of the naval fleet provided by the Space Domain Government, were sent as reinforcements to the Yunluo Government.

Even the Eastern Fleet's ace, equipped with three battleships and seven battleship cruisers, had received orders to detach a part of their main forces to directly intervene in the Iron Teeth War when necessary.

Towards the late stages of the Iron Teeth War, the reason why the Fury Flame Battle Group could continuously hold their ground against the Green Skins at the frontline and even maintain an advantage in the war of attrition was largely due to the robust support from the Eastern Cosmos Domain.

In fact, part of the reason the Fury Flame Battle Group came to the Dragonhawk Star Domain to fight was at the invitation of the Eastern Cosmic Realm Government.

However, after the war ended, the relationships between the two parties, which briefly went through a 'honeymoon phase', soon ended and even became fraught with contradiction.

This was all thanks to Gu Hang, who, due to competition with the Alliance, had to squeeze every bit of strength to maintain a non-disadvantaged situation in the Cold War.

Under such circumstances, Erso naturally continued to retain much of the assistance provided by the Eastern Cosmos Domain for his own use.

As for those resources sent as aid, it's one thing—they were consumables. Since they were used up in the war, the Space Domain Government reluctantly accepted that.

However, retaining the dispatched Star Realm Army, naval fleet, and transport ships was another matter, causing considerable dissatisfaction.

There were no few quarrels regarding this matter.

And with the Fury Flame Battle Group behaving as if they were staying in the Dragonhawk Star Domain indefinitely, effectively hostage-taking the Star Domain Government, it further vexed the Space Domain Government.

As the Space Domain Government oversees the Star Domain Government, bypassing the Star Domain Government was akin to cutting flesh from the Space Domain Government.

After the relationship rapidly deteriorated, the Alliance represented by Gu Hang suddenly seemed clear and distinctive in comparison.

Set side by side, they were utterly different.

The Alliance also made significant contributions during the war, not only directly attacking the Green Skins' lair, forcing the main forces of the Green Skins to retreat in panic, but ultimately it was the Alliance Governor Gu Hang himself who personally vanquished the great chieftain. Throughout the process, the Alliance hardly received any extra assistance from the Space Domain Government, nor did they constantly complain; instead, they only reported good news.

Following the onset of the Cold War, the statements made by the Fury Flame Battle Group seemed rather nonsensical. In contrast, the Alliance's criticism of the Fury Flame Battle Group for undermining the Star Domain Government was entirely on point.

More crucially, although the Alliance effectively controlled half a star domain, they were not at all 'arrogant'. It's normal that they couldn't pay the Imperial Tax for the preceding years due to the war; the expenses were meticulously documented and respectfully submitted for the higher government's review. After the war, with the biennial Imperial Tax due, the Alliance dutifully paid. Not paying the Star Domain Government was completely understandable—after all, wouldn't it just be withheld by the Fury Flame? The Alliance made direct payments to a higher-level government, which was perfectly reasonable!

That 76 billion in Tax Currency from the Imperial Tax truly delighted Zuo Zhaofeng.

What is called one of our own? This is truly one of our own!

Now, the Alliance's stature could not be treated as a minor player any longer.

How could such a powerful, promising ally be allowed to be messed with?

Zuo Zhaofeng, on behalf of the Imperial Space Domain Government, issued a note to the Silver Tribunal. While there is no jurisdictional subordination, he could not command the Silver Tribunal, but as the Chair of a Cosmos Domain, his words still carried weight,

after all, the Eastern Cosmos Domain is a frequent hotspot for the Silver Tribunal, and the Eastern Cosmic Realm Government has been cooperative with the various actions of the Silver Tribunal in the Eastern Cosmos Domain, maintaining a good relationship, and the Silver Tribunal also relies heavily on Zuo Zhaofeng's support.

In such a situation, the dissatisfaction explicitly expressed by Zuo Zhaofeng was a considerable pressure on the Silver Tribunal. A judge from the Silver faction hurried to meet Zuo Zhaofeng to explain the situation.

However, this alone could not completely stop the actions of the Silver Tribunal; at most, it might make them more restrained and mild.

But Zuo Zhaofeng was not satisfied.

Furthermore, another faction of the tribunal was also mobilized.

Among the active factions within the Eastern Cosmos Domain, one known as the Flash Judgement Court is small in size and its strength cannot be compared with the large tribunals like the Silver Tribunal, which has been involved in many major incidents across multiple Cosmos Domains. However, it still has a substantial number of official judges. At Zuo Zhaofeng's request, the Flash Judgement Court mobilized half of its personnel and headed to the Dragonhawk Star Domain.

It's not that the Flash faction was going to stop the Silver faction; they didn't have the capacity to do so, given the vast difference in scale and strength.

Upon reaching the Dragonhawk Star Domain, they divided into two groups.

One went to investigate Fury Flame, as a tit-for-tat response. Although even if the Flash faction declared the Fury Flame Battle Group as traitors it wouldn't mean much, as a verdict that can't be enforced is something no tribunal faction would do; it ruins their reputation. But this was the Space Domain Government making a statement, and the Fury Flame Battle Group had to restrain their behavior accordingly.

The other group went to the controlled area of the Alliance. They weren't there to investigate the Alliance nor to issue a radically different investigative conclusion from the Silver faction, for that would be akin to turning hostile, which the Flash faction would also avoid.

But they would oversee the actions of the Silver faction judges to ensure that their factional peers did not act recklessly.

You want to investigate, fine, but do it legally and properly. Don't use petty tricks, or else, although I can't stop you, it won't stop me from reporting your actions truthfully to disgust you.

Under Zuo Zhaofeng's will, the cumbersome system of the Space Domain Government operated with rare efficiency.

And this support brought a series of surprises to Gu Hang.

His pressure was significantly reduced, both internally and externally.

Internally, many worlds that were newly acquired and not yet fully loyal stabilized considerably. Previously, they thought the Alliance might truly be traitors, what with even the Tribunal showing up. Now it seems, although the final verdict is not yet out, there's some peace of mind.

Externally, the official commercial fleet of the Alliance, Gu Commercial Firm, as well as the newly established Alliance Chamber of Commerce, stabilized a lot in their trade dealings with the Eagle Silk Starfield and the East Adjoining Starfield.

More importantly, going forward, Gu Hang doesn't need to worry that if the Silver Tribunal indeed delivers the worst judgment, he would not be completely isolated and besieged. His enemies still remain focused mainly on the Fury Flame Battle Group, possibly extending to 'Iron Fury Stone' and the Silver Tribunal.

Er… Even so, the pressure is still immense. But the good news is that Iron Armor, Bedrock Shield, and the Silver Tribunal all have their own issues to deal with and can't focus all their forces on him.

He just needs to deal with Fury Flame.

…

If Zuo Zhaofeng's support alleviated some of Gu Hang's worries for the future, then Galaraldo presented him with another choice.

"Come to Terra." In the Star Speech communication, Galaraldo invited Gu Hang.

Chapter 485, Marshal Gu Gazing at the planet before him, he couldn't recognize it as Earth, the mother planet of humanity.

The impression of that blue and beautiful planet was completely gone.

Oceans that should have once covered most of the planet's surface had dried up an unknown number of years ago, and naturally, the floating white clouds also vanished without a trace.

Instead, countless artificial structures, clearly visible even from space, covered every inch of the planet, including the dried-up seabeds.

They were the Nest Capitals.

That was Gu Hang's first thought, but he quickly dismissed it.

It was far too imprecise.

It was a patchwork of Nest Capitals.

Today's Holy Terra was the Empire's largest Nest Capital World. According to the Empire's data, a trillion people lived here, including over fifty billion officials of the Empire Government, responsible for governing the vast territories of the Empire.

What a terrifying number that was?

Korolya was already a standard Nest Capital World, with its huge population being its core resource. But even at its peak, it only had a population of 40 billion, merely 4% of Holy Terra.

Currently, the Alliance controlled half of the Star Domain, and if we included the worlds indirectly controlled through the Economic Community Act within the Seven Horse Framework, there would be a total of 182 planets, with a combined population of 3.4 trillion, a mere one-third of that of Holy Terra.

And Holy Terra possessed not just a vast population. Its productivity was equally developed.

The entire Solar System was indeed the core region of humanity.

Here, not only Holy Terra existed, but also the Moon Base, as well as another magnificent world—the headquarters of the Sect of Mechanics, the Martian Foundry World.

Holy Terra's Starport District was also staggeringly vast, resembling a sprawling space world made of steel, stretching unbroken and nearly blending into the Moon Star Port in the distance.

Countless vessels, big and small, tightly packed, were entering and leaving this grand Starport District. The daily volume of materials moving through the starport was beyond calculation. Gu Hang could even see several ships hauling massive ice comets into designated starports. These ice comets, perhaps, were the source of water for the unimaginable trillion inhabitants of the now parched Holy Terra.

Additionally, the Imperial Navy's core Solar Fleet patrolled this area; Gu Hang could see many powerful warships of diverse shapes, each comparable in size to or even surpassing a Retribution-class Battleship. The most numerous, of course, were the commonly seen Retribution-class Battleships; but there were also some Battleships of a different mold that looked fiercer than the conventional Retribution-class.

Above the orbit of Holy Terra, the most eye-catching was a circular object, somewhat resembling a Star Fortress but larger than any other Star Fortress Gu Hang had ever seen.

Named Mount Array, it was the Empire's largest mobile fortress to date. Its size was like a satellite or a large asteroid, with its foredeck alone able to accommodate 10 warships. It could even be considered a cosmic Nest Capital, capable of housing an inconceivable number of inhabitants and requiring an incalculable number of mortal crew members.

It was not only enormous, but also fast. From the few records of its departures from Holy Terra, it was always able to quickly reach the battlefield and annihilate the Empire's enemies with unmatched firepower.

Its history even predated that of the Human Empire; it belonged to a prehistoric creation that the current human technology could only maintain. If it sustained significant damage, it could only be repaired with substitute technology, resulting in permanent performance loss, not to mention the impossibility of building a new one.

Mount Array was retrieved by the Interstellar Warrior 7th Legion 10,000 years ago. After the division of the Battle Group, it became the home of the reorganized Golden Knight Legion.

Now, the Golden Knight Legion was the only Starfighter Battle Group permanently stationed on Holy Terra, and together with the Imperial Guard, both painted golden, they defended the mother planet of humanity and the heart of the Empire.

As Gu Hang's ship skimmed past Mount Array, his gaze lingered on this massive, majestic, and beautiful creation, thinking:

"When will I ever have such a behemoth…"

Until Mount Array vanished from his view, he reluctantly pulled his gaze away.

Entering a Starport, he switched to a smaller ship and headed for the surface.

In the approach, Gu Hang caught a glimpse of the people living among those towering Nest Capitals.

Hmm… life didn't seem great.

This slightly shattered the halo of Holy Terra in Gu Hang's heart.

In orbit above the planet, he was almost awestruck by the Imperial Capital, the heart of humanity. However, the living standards of the people on Holy Terra were similar to the Nest Capital Worlds of his stereotypical impression.

But it was said that real estate prices on Holy Terra were exceedingly expensive, with the most dilapidated room perhaps worth as much as a palace on other planets.

On the surface of Holy Terra, if one were to talk about the most magnificent set of buildings, that would still be the Imperial Palace.

It was situated on the Himalayas, covering the entire Tibetan Plateau. Its spires pierced the sky, and the resplendent palace gleamed in the sunlight with numerous ships circling above, guarding the glory and dignity of the Empire. It was not only a symbol of imperial authority but also seemed like an eternal fortress, standing through the ages, witnessing the rise and fall, the changes and transitions of the Empire.

Chapter 485, Marshal Gu_2 The Emperor began his rise to power here, unifying the entire world; the Emperor created the Interstellar Warriors and the so-called 'perfect humans' of the Imperial Guard here, and sparked the grand expedition that established the current boundaries of the Empire. Moreover, it was here that the Emperor ascended to godhood, sheltering humanity for countless millennia.

And now, Gu Hang's destination was precisely here.

…

Gu Hang's journey to Holy Terra took a great deal of time.

The longest part of the journey was from the Alliance to Wuji Star. The southern route was too dangerous, so Gu Hang had to choose to go through the East Adjoining Starfield, then south to the Eagle Silk Starfield, and from there to the Wuji Starfield.

After arriving at Wuji Star, one more jump was needed to enter the Wenshou Universe, and then to the Sun Zhou Domain.

When the Empire divided its administrative regions, it was particularly meticulous: each capital planet of a Cosmic Domain, while serving as the core of an entire Cosmos Domain, also had to meet another requirement—that its connection with the Sun Zhou Domain should not exceed one jump between star domains.

Even to the point where, in consideration of the second criterion, sometimes the first would be sacrificed, resulting in some Cosmic Domain capitals being isolated on the fringes.

Clearly, this was done to ensure the Empire could maintain as much control as possible over its vast territories.

Eventually, as the Empire's territories became overly large, this rule was relaxed to two Star Domains.

But in any case, the journey from Wuji Star to the heart of the Empire, the Sun Zhou Domain, did not seem so remote when looking at the map of the Empire's Star Domains.

However, even so, it took Gu Hang a full seven months of travel time to reach the Sun Zhou Domain, and another three months to arrive on Holy Terra.

This was still because Gu Hang was on a high-speed ship, not carrying an entire Fleet, with no stops along the way, minimal deceleration, and with travel passes issued by the Central Empire to various locations, that he managed to complete this journey in ten months.

If it had been a larger Fleet or transport convoy, the same journey would generally take close to two years.

For Gu Hang, a man worth millions every minute, it was certainly not desirable to spend such a long time on the road.

Especially on the critical occasion of the impending Silver Tribunal.

Could it be that Gu Hang wasn't worried that after the Silver Tribunal's arrival, under immense pressure, they would declare the Alliance as traitors, and then the Fury Flame Battle Group would start a war, launching a comprehensive attack on the Alliance's controlled areas?

Of course, he was still worried.

But after much consideration, Gu Hang still decided to make this trip.

Galaraldo invited him, primarily to resolve the 'Iron Fury Stone' issue brought to the Alliance.

Officially, it was to invite Gu Hang to Holy Terra for a commendation ceremony specifically in his honor. The victory report of the Iron Teeth War had finally gone through the procedures of the Imperial Military Department. Despite some complications, it was now almost certain that Gu Hang and his Alliance were the greatest contributors to this war.

But if it was just for commendation and decoration, Gu Hang certainly would not spend nearly two years to make a round trip to Holy Terra.

Even if Galaraldo said there was a chance to obtain a Marshal's rank for him.

Marshal, that's an outrageously high military rank. And to be awarded in Holy Terra means it couldn't possibly be some useless rank like those of local world Defense Armies, but a genuine Marshal of the Imperial Star Realm Army.

Usually, this top rank could only be obtained by the highest military Commander of an entire Cosmos Domain's Star Realm Army or Imperial Navy Fleet, as well as the highest permanent rank of the Star Realm Army and Navy. Although, in reality, there are still two higher ranks above Marshal: Grand Marshal and Supreme Marshal, which are generally honorary. A Grand Marshal is usually appointed by the Central Government to command a war with multiple Empire Marshals, assuming the highest unified command role.

At the end of a typical war, this temporary title of Supreme Commander would be revoked, or if the individual's performance and contributions during the war are too significant to overlook, the rank of Grand Marshal might be retained as an honorary title.

The Supreme Commander is unique in the entire Empire, representing the Star Realm Army among the thirteen seats of the Imperial Council.

In this sense, the rank of Marshal truly stands at the pinnacle within the conventional military ranks of the Empire, and it possesses tremendous political significance. Even a bare title of Marshal carries substantial influence.

However, for Gu Hang, the rank of Marshal was not worth the nearly two years of travel time back and forth.

He was different from the other genuine Marshals of the Star Realm Army. After their promotion, they would be formally tasked with or granted control over more Star Realm Armed Forces, becoming higher-level commanders, and only then would they be awarded such a top-tier military rank.

But Gu Hang's rank of Marshal was earned as an independent power. His Rage Bear Legion, though formally registered as a corps of the Star Realm Army, had expanded several times to a total size of twenty million. Of course, this was not enough to support the title of Marshal.

For him, the rank was merely a token of honor and not highly valuable in itself.

Yet, the underlying implications carried greater weight.

He could not expect, after being conferred the rank of Marshal, that the Empire would assign a vast number of Star Realm Armed Forces to expand his power. However, Gu Hang's own Rage Bear Legion could further increase its expansion.

If it could be legally expanded to tens of billions in size, then based on the standards of the Star Realm Army, it would mean an annual allocation of hundreds of billions, or even trillions, for maintaining the forces; the yearly maintenance cost itself would amount to tens of billions.

Moreover, in the discussions between Gu Hang and Galaraldo, the Empire was likely to grant another rank of Imperial Navy Admiral to the Alliance.

A bona fide Imperial Navy Admiral.

Of course, Gu Hang would offer this opportunity to Yelisia.

Aside from the honor of the rank, it also meant that the Tianma Fleet, as part of the Imperial Navy Fleet, could be expanded to several times its current size. This too signified an annual allocation of hundreds of billions, as well as maintenance costs of tens of billions per year.

Of course, the Empire wouldn't actually give a penny for this 'allocation' of funds for military buildup; all of it would be provided by the Alliance.

But it could offset taxes.

And that was as good as hard cash.

After all, military construction took time. Each year, the Alliance would deduct a portion of the Imperial Tax it was supposed to pay, equivalent to how much was built.

Rather than handing over the money for nothing, it was better to count it towards the construction of the Star Realm Army and the Imperial Navy to offset taxes.

Obviously, they couldn't actually build as much as their annual tax obligation of 38 billion; otherwise, others who needed the money along the line would be offended. But offsetting taxes by about 20 billion a year—and as the Alliance grew and the tax obligations increased, this number could also rise—would suffice. Over the course of twenty or thirty years, these two forces could be established.

Although theoretically, if the Alliance's forces were converted into the Star Realm Army and Imperial Navy, the Empire could command them, but…

In the past, Gu Hang would have had no choice but to comply with any orders received.

However, if Gu Hang had control of a Star Realm Army plus an Imperial Navy Fleet valued in the trillions, then whoever wanted to issue such ‘orders’ would have to think thrice.

Of course, Gu Hang was an Imperial Loyalist; he would definitely follow the orders, otherwise, wouldn’t that make him a domineering warlord?

But before such orders were issued, Gu Hang’s opinion would have to be seriously considered. As an Empire Marshal, and by then a Marshal with actual authority, who could ignore his views?

The deep significance behind the ranks of ‘Marshal Rage Bear’ and ‘Tianma Admiral’ was the apparent reason why Gu Hang had to make a personal visit to Holy Terra.

This concerned matters equal to two to three hundred billion in value, equivalent to four to five years’ worth of the Alliance’s Imperial Tax, and it also represented significant political interests that could not be overlooked.

Chapter 486, Only You, My Friend Outside Terra Imperial Palace, Gu Hang encountered two renowned legions of the Imperial Army.

The Golden Knight Legion, and the Imperial Guard.

The former is one of the original interstellar soldier corps, the founding corps, to which countless Battle Groups split from the Seventh Legion look up as their mother corps.

The Golden Knight Legion is stationed on Holy Terra, the only Battle Group of Interstellar Warriors that can recruit directly from Terra.

Besides Terra, they also have a mother planet—Duang Star, from which they can recruit; Moreover, there is another granted recruitment world: Romond, a Nest Capital World with a population of two hundred billion.

Sometimes, Gu Hang would mock, does a single Battle Group really need so many recruitment worlds? The population of these three worlds combined outnumbers that of a whole Star Domain by a lot.

Could it be true, the rumor that the Golden Knights vehemently deny — that they enlist a vast number of new soldiers in 'excess of quota'?

There are also whispers that the Golden Knights would redistribute these 'unused' elite recruits to some of their sub-legions, such as the renowned Black Cross Legion. Gu Hang suspects this might be true as well.

Outside Terra Imperial Palace, Gu Hang could no longer take his original flying vehicle and had to switch to one designated for use within the Palace. This procedure was supervised by the Interstellar Warriors of the Golden Knight Legion as well as the Terra Defense Army.

After switching to the dedicated flying vehicle of Terra Imperial Palace, passing through one of the numerous grand gates located on a plateau surrounded by tall walls, Gu Hang entered the Imperial Palace and encountered the genuine Imperial Guard.

They donned golden armors, all noticeably taller than any Interstellar Warrior Gu Hang had encountered. The designs on their armors were intricately terrifying, adorned with jewels. Atop their elongated helmets fluttered proud tassels of red, matched with the bright red cape and armor trim, creating an imposing presence of gold and red.

Gu Hang believed that the adornments on these two Imperial Guards were not merely for show. He could feel a distressing power emanating from them that suppressed the ambient Spiritual Energy.

It wasn't enough to inhibit Gu Hang from using his Spiritual Energy, but it was certainly sufficient to pose a threat.

Should it come to a real fight, Gu Hang felt he could take them down, but it would be far more difficult than dealing with an Interstellar Warrior.

No wonder these were the top tier of the Empire's Super Soldiers, created painstakingly by The Emperor himself, templates of 'perfect humans.'

Gu Hang earnestly went through the inspection and handed over his personal documents.

His identity of course posed no issue, but as an A-rated Psychic, he was considered a subject of strict limitation and was thus ordered to wear a bracelet made from some black stone.

This artifact strongly suppressed Gu Hang's Spiritual Power.

He estimated that under normal conditions, he wouldn't even be able to remove the bracelet using his own power; his psychic strength would be suppressed to a very low level. Yet, if he exerted full effort, tearing through a Subspace Rift to summon the power of the Storm God Kingdom, it would be possible to destroy the bracelet. But to do such a thing within Terra Imperial Palace would be pure suicide. If a simple bracelet possessed such a potent psychic suppression effect, then within the Palace, there must be far more powerful means of energy dampening.

Feeling somewhat insecure, Gu Hang still obediently wore the bracelet and compliantly followed a Terra official deeper into the Imperial Palace.

He finally met Galaraldo.

The Terra Imperial Palace was the current core of the Central Government of the Empire, and as a high official of the Central Empire, Galaraldo's office and residence were both situated here. The latter came with his position.

Upon meeting, Galaraldo greeted Gu Hang with a big hug.

"It's been ages, and you haven't changed a bit!" Galaraldo's attitude was very warm.

Gu Hang felt that the Psyche Seed he had planted in this former Apostle of War, now the Executive Director of the Military Affairs Department, had vanished.

To be honest, this gave Gu Hang a bit of a shock.

But soon, he calmed down.

Galaraldo's demeanor didn't seem to be feigned, which didn't match the reaction if the psyche-manipulating seed had been discovered.

It's also possible that Galaraldo was playing a role, pretending to be close. But on one hand it didn't seem like it, on the other hand, there seemed no need.

Given Galaraldo's nature, if he knew that his sense of gratitude for Gu Hang saving his life, as well as the subsequent affectionate emotions, were all false—an illusion spawned by manipulations from Gu Hang, with his unforgiving temperament, it would be impossible for him to refrain from acting all this time. He would have started causing trouble for Gu Hang, seeking ways to kill him.

But none of these scenarios occurred.

Gu Hang was still quite confident in his own methods; not only were they covert and sophisticated, but mainly because the interference he initiated was minimalistic and difficult to detect.

Based on the current situation, Gu Hang deduced the truth: The psyche seed had been completely assimilated; Now Galaraldo's 'feelings' toward him were genuine, stemming from his heart, resistant to any scrutiny, for the psychic influence had vanished entirely.

This was a good thing; Gu Hang no longer had to worry about his manipulations of Galaraldo's mind being exposed.

However, there were drawbacks; since the locked-in level of fondness was no more, it meant that if Gu Hang were to utter something offensive or perform an upsetting action, the former Apostle of War's perception of him could sour, even turning into hostility.

Chapter 486, Only You, My Friend_2 Overall, Gu Hang believed that the advantages of this matter far outweighed the disadvantages.

A crisis with the potential risk of extinction no longer existed.

As for not locking in goodwill, that was also fine—at least there was no loss. Moreover, the ‘favorability’ from the start was almost maxed out, and Gu Hang himself was not a troublemaker, not prone to squandering the relationship between the two of them.

Furthermore, they currently had quite a consistent interest.

After the initial pleasantries, that evening’s dinner was a banquet arranged by Galaraldo.

In the Imperial Palace, a restaurant dedicated to serving high-ranking officials was chosen, where various officials accepted his invitation and came.

Galaraldo, bringing Gu Hang along, introduced him to many individuals one by one.

These people were from all departments of the Empire Government. Military Affairs Department, Department of Political Affairs, Legal Department, Department of Taxation… In addition to these government departments, there were also several high-ranking generals from the Star Realm Army, the Imperial Navy, and even senior clergy from the State Religion and Sect of Mechanics.

Those who were personally introduced by Galaraldo, of course, were no minor characters; at a minimum, they held the status of senior committee members of their respective departments, and among them, there were even a few deputy directors of the Central Government. The highest-ranking attendee was a Deputy Prime Minister from the Imperial Taxation Department.

Gu Hang had indeed come to admire Galaraldo a bit. Initially, he thought this guy was just a good hand who used the name of the Sun Lord to make money everywhere. But now, it seemed that the loss of the Sun Lord had, conversely, acted like lifting a seal for him, revealing his other side capable of mingling adeptly.

Making so many ‘friends’ was not easy.

Gu Hang’s network was suddenly expanded by a lot.

Of course, these people wouldn't easily become Gu Hang's friends just because of one introduction. But at least, they were now acquaintances, having exchanged contact information; when Gu Hang needed something, he at least knew who to approach, and visiting them wouldn't result in being ignored.

Asking for help might not be appropriate, but if there were some opportunities for an exchange of interests that could benefit both sides, there shouldn't be any major problem.

In short, becoming familiar faces was always beneficial.

The senior figures from the various departments and forces of the Empire, their attitude towards Gu Hang was also pretty good. Of course, Galaraldo's influence was a reason, and the main reason at that; but, many were also genuinely interested in Gu Hang himself, and had engaging conversations with him.

"These people, you really can mingle with them more, they are the ones who need support from local power brokers. If you have any ideas, you can communicate more with these people and exchange some things," Galaraldo whispered to Gu Hang at the end of the banquet, when the two of them were chatting on a terrace. The Executive Minister of the Military Affairs Department had begun to speak quietly to Gu Hang about the various people they had talked with earlier.

"And that Deputy Minister of the Taxation Department, he is our true friend."

Gu Hang laughed: "I thought everyone in the hall was your friend."

"Hahaha!" Galaraldo laughed loudly, his tone inadvertently carrying a hint of scorn: "How could that be? Among the people here, only you are worthy of the term 'friend'."

"In my heart, people are hierarchical."

"The majority in the meeting hall belong to the lowest tier. Most of them are mediocrities, neither possessing exceptional abilities nor firm will, their greatest value lies in their positions. These people are mere underlings, only useful for creating an imposing presence. Relying on them in crucial moments is not their fault, but ours."

“The few who are truly capable are also just for mutual use; they can be trusted when there are profits in sight, but one must always be vigilant. In the cruel battleground of fame and fortune that is Holy Terra, betrayal and bribery are ever-present.”

“The least in number are those who can be deemed ‘partners’; they are trustworthy and capable, with interests deeply intertwined and a certain foundation of sentiment. These people can be relied on. But they cannot be regarded as friends; they are not to be entrusted with one’s life.”

“Only you, my friend, I will always remember that you once saved my life and gave me the opportunity to quickly return to the center of power. I can rest assured handing my life over to you, without fear that you will betray me.”

Even Gu Hang was somewhat moved after hearing all this.

He seriously said to Galaraldo: “I feel the same.”

Galaraldo patted Gu Hang’s shoulder, smiled, and after toasting with him, he continued: “No need to be so serious, today isn’t a very serious occasion. However, later tonight, there’s another, smaller gathering. That will need to be more stringent, as we have some major issues to discuss, real major issues.”

“Okay,” Gu Hang emptied the cup of wine in one gulp.

…

A little later, Gu Hang sat in a small resting room of the banquet hall.

Galaraldo, who had previously left him to attend to something for a while, had returned.

“Let’s go.” He called out.

Gu Hang got up but saw Galaraldo walk up to a bookshelf wall in the resting room, tapped a spot twice, and a password lock popped up. After entering the password for a moment, the carpet in front of Gu Hang was automatically rolled back, and a secret passage appeared.

Galaraldo took the lead down the passage, with Gu Hang close behind.

At the end of the downward-turning staircase was actually a small underground railcar.

Chapter 486, Only You, My Friend_3 Riding inside, deep beneath the Imperial Palace, the track twisted and turned through many complex intersections before arriving at a certain location.

After leaving the railcar, Gu Hang was led into a dimly lit meeting hall.

Several people were already seated there.

Some of them had attended the banquet just before, some had not. Galaraldo enthusiastically pulled Gu Hang along to introduce him to everyone:

“This is our new member! Gu Hang from the Eastern Cosmos Domain, Dragonhawk Star Domain. The Alliance he controls is a true local faction.”

Everyone’s gazes turned towards Gu Hang, filled with scrutiny.

No one spoke, but Gu Hang could see some doubt in the eyes of a few individuals.

A local power faction? Just half a Star Sector.

Do you become a local power faction simply by owning a few Battleships?

Gu Hang didn’t say anything; he simply sat down with a smile.

Galaraldo, on the other hand, began to speak: “Ladies and gentlemen, please pay attention. Sitting before you is a man who, twenty years ago, entered an abandoned world with just a single follower and started from scratch. In twenty years, he now wields influence over 182 worlds.”

“He eradicated the Rebels on the planets, destroyed the Plague Demons about to obliterate a Nest Capital World, and won a war against the Beastmen with casualties in the hundreds of billions.”

“The Star Sector he controls now possesses a Fleet with a Battleship as its flagship, supported by more than a dozen Lunar-Class Cruisers; he has a Starfighter Battle Group that has regained its former glory fighting alongside him; his Land Forces are even stronger than the Star Realm Army.”

“Perhaps, you who often dwell in the Central Government may not be aware of the local situations. But I assure you, with the integrity I’ve maintained in my decades of travel throughout the Empire, that Gu Hang and his Alliance are absolutely reliable, true powerhouses. He already has a force that no one can ignore, and under his wise leadership, his power is bound to grow rapidly.”

“And we are the best helpers and investors for him. Gu Hang undoubtedly qualifies to be one of us, and our current investments will assuredly bring us a hefty return in the future.”

“Don’t you envy the ease with which the Prime Minister can mobilize the ‘Otaubis’ Regiment? Don’t you envy the close ties each family has with local powers? I know we all have our connections, but who would complain about having an extra ace up their sleeve?”

Galaraldo was an eloquent speaker.

After his speech, the crowd’s view of Gu Hang had changed significantly.

And just at that moment, two more individuals walked through another entrance of the meeting hall.

The one in the lead, clapping his hands with a smile, said: “Bochoya is right, we warmly welcome you, Mr. Gu, the Governor. With you joining us, our future will certainly become brighter!”

As he spoke, everyone in the room stood up.

Gu Hang stood up as well.

Among the two, one was familiar to him. The person following the leader was none other than the most prominent figure at the previous banquet, the Deputy Premier of the Department of Taxation, Tang Mili.

And the leader himself, although Gu Hang had never seen him in person, he was a figure often seen elsewhere.

He was one of the thirteen High Lords of the Imperial Council, the Minister of Justice of the Empire: Ou Juren.

———————

Thank you to the Alliance Hierarch [Hu Yifan] for the generous reward!!!

Extremely grateful!

But now… my backlog of additional updates has skyrocketed from 50k to 70k, the more I repay, the more I owe… T0T

The lord even mentioned that there will be a Silver Alliance when the book is finished; I haven't ever had a Silver Alliance in my life.

But… doesn't that mean an extra 200k???

I'm afraid I'll never be able to fully repay the lord's kindness even after I finish writing this book…

I will definitely add an update tomorrow! I'll try to reduce the current debt as much as possible!

Chapter 487, He Should Step Down Gu Hang was somewhat surprised by the arrival of Ou Juren.

From the previous banquet, Gu Hang could obviously tell that after arriving at the heart of the Empire, Galaraldo had stirred up quite a scene, forming or joining a powerful political faction; otherwise, his own rapid promotion would not have been possible.

However, now that he found out the leader of this faction was Ou Juren, it exceeded his initial estimates.

Being able to pull in a top official like Ou Juren was a real show of strength.

Through the Empire Government's propaganda and policy setting, Gu Hang had come to understand that Ou Juren was an upright, impartial, and incorruptible person. And the position of Minister of Justice implied very high authority.

Among the four major institutions with direct access to the Terra Supreme Council High Collar Chairman Position, the main work of the Legal Department was to ensure the stability of public order on each planet within the boundless territories of the Empire and the compliance of the inhabited worlds, similar to the supreme police department.

The Legal Department would also act as a representative of the Terra Supreme Council to adjudicate conflicts between regional administrative officers and ensure their loyalty.

As the Minister of Justice, a High Lord with direct access to the Imperial Council seats, he was responsible for staying in the large courtroom of the Legal Department on Holy Terra, planning the overall law enforcement policy.

In fact, not all of the Empire's law enforcers belong to the Legal Department. The relationship between the Legal Department and the local law enforcement agencies on each planet is more akin to a partnership, rather than a hierarchy. Only at the Star Domain and Cosmos Domain government levels would the Legal Department's institutions and corresponding law enforcement agencies be directly arranged, and at the Star Sector level government, a liaison officer and office of the Legal Department would be set up.

If a case only involves violation of the laws on the local Planet, it will be handled by the local police—that is, under the jurisdiction of the Planetary Government, Planetary Governor. Only cases involving

interstellar crimes or violations of Empire law would be reported to the Legal Department's liaison officer in the local Star Sector. The liaison officer's job is usually to oversee the local law enforcement department's work, and in the event of serious cross-interstellar crimes, the liaison officer would first assess the situation and mobilize Star Domain or even higher level Legal Department forces to handle it.

Usually, the regional law enforcement departments of the Empire are also not keen on the involvement of the Legal Department in investigations, because this often means either they have messed up, or they have encountered major trouble. If it's a mess-up, the Legal Department will also clean up the local police station in the process of dealing with the culprits; if it's major trouble, it's equally disastrous.

Even worse is that the Legal Department might take the case to the Tribunal, where the Judge often makes the enforcer take a step ahead of the criminal.

However, for places like Holy Terra and some other important planets of the Empire, the Legal Department would actually take full control of their law enforcement to ensure that the rulers of the planets within the jurisdiction abide by the Empire laws and supervise local enforcers to maintain order. If a Planet experiences riots, the Legal Department can declare martial law and deploy forces to control the situation until it subsides or the Imperial forces take over. The Legal Department has law enforcement power over most people of the Empire, except for the Interstellar Warrior, Judge, and Navigator families; they can pretty much arrest, interrogate, and execute anyone within their jurisdiction.

And at the core of all the Legal Department's authorities are: Tax evasion and Heresy.

Other matters such as smuggling, organized crime, subversion, and treason are for local governments to handle.

Only these two are what the Legal Department cannot tolerate.

But these two matters have quite a bit to be discussed.

Tax evasion is easier, this is the 'core business' of the Legal Department, whether it's executing Planet Governors who fail to meet tax standards, or taking violent actions to ensure tax results, it's all under the Legal Department. They have their own violent institutions, the Legal Department's elite policemen

with laser guns, Bombardment Guns, Storm Shields, power weapons, and also have Riot Control Armored Vehicles, police tanks, police aircraft, and specially-made Justice Cruisers in space.

To be honest, in terms of armament, apart from having fewer numbers due to the specificity of their work and tasks, lacking artillery support, the armed police officers of the Legal Department are better at fighting than the average Star Realm Army, especially in small-scale conflicts.

Not to mention the local defense forces.

Moreover, the Legal Department's work is generally not about fighting a war but is more inclined towards policing, suppression, and planet safety.

And if the police forces of the Legal Department can't handle the situation, they can of course call for reinforcements, usually from the Star Realm Army, the Imperial Navy.

However, dealing with Heresy is a bit more awkward.

A Heresy crime is a classic "catch-all crime"; it can be pinned onto anyone in nearly any way. While only Heresy and tax evasion may seem to be treated seriously on the surface, in reality, Heresy can be applied almost everywhere—whether to arrest or not totally depends on the Legal Department's mood.

It seems like such great power, but in reality, it's not quite so.

As one of the most important tasks of the Legal Department, investigating heretical conduct is much more difficult than imagined. Not to mention the small matters they are too lazy to deal with, in the major issues that are genuinely worth the Legal Department's intervention, a considerable proportion will have problems. The entire process of case investigation can easily shift from a suspenseful cop thriller to a horror film involving Chaos Cults, Green Skins, and various terrifying alien creatures.

Chapter 487, He Should Step Down_2 However, this function is to a considerable extent diverted by various other institutions within the Empire. The Tribunal is specialized in this area; when things escalate to war, the regular forces such as the Star Realm Army and the Navy will step in, and if needed, the Interstellar Warriors as well. The Sect of Mechanics and the State Religion will also send forces to interfere when similar situations arise…

Everyone seems to have a say in this prime function of the Legal Department, even outdoing it sometimes. Who can they turn to for reasoning in such scenarios?

Actually, this whole process doesn't conflict much. In reality, a large amount of Cult activities, whether chaotic or alien, won't disturb the Interstellar Warrior Battle Group or the Tribunal before they become significant threats. That's when the Legal Department steps in, and if they can't handle it, things have escalated. At this point, the Legal Department often becomes the last line of defense in the region, struggling to maintain the status quo while waiting for support from the Interstellar Warriors or the Tribunal.

Doing the most and the most trivial tasks, and when a major incident occurs, they turn into a backdrop, becoming a footnote to others' success… From this angle, the Legal Department is indeed somewhat pitiful.

And for an ambitious Minister of Justice who wants to accomplish something, it seems intolerable for such situations to persist for long.

At least, that's how Gu Hang felt during the meeting.

Led by the Minister of Justice, High Lord Ou Juren, this group is undoubtedly a strong and powerful political faction within the Imperial Central Government. Just Ou Juren alone, as one of those standing at the apex of Empire power, is very strong. Not to mention, there is also a Deputy Premier of the Department of Taxation and Galaraldo, an Executive Minister at the Military Affairs Department. The remaining dozen or so members are, at the least, high commissioners.

Together, they can exert influence on various agencies of the Central Government towards their common governance goals and interests.

As a political faction, led by Ou Juren, they have a core idea, which Gu Hang perceived: centralizing power, government centralization.

This centralization, moreover, is not just reflected between the Central and local governments, but it also becomes apparent in the relationship between the government and various other political organizations within the Empire.

Can’t the Legal Department do the jobs of the Judges? With sufficient resources, we can do them too!

Should the Department of Taxation divide up so much money to allocate to the Tribunal and the Interstellar Warrior Battle Group? And the somewhat independent and autonomous war decisions of the Star Realm Army and the Navy’s Fleet are similar.

Can the Military Affairs Department possibly consolidate various military forces of the Empire under the unified command of the Central Government?

Could the Department of Political Affairs make personnel appointments and formulate development strategies that could be implemented everywhere?

These are the major directions Gu Hang gathered from the conversation.

Of course, implementing this is impossible. Not to mention the different political factions and ideologies within the Imperial Central Government, even if all these dignitaries of the Imperial Central Government unite with a common goal, facing such centralized targets, including individual Foundry Worlds, Battle Groups, and even local influencers like Gu Hang, is extremely difficult.

They are also not naïve; the specific strategies they discussed are all detailed regulations, hoping to be pushed forward in the upcoming period.

For instance, providing more budget for the armed police force of the Legal Department.

And Gu Hang, while overall being a local influencer, is in reality someone they aim to win over.

By joining us, you become one of us, which means your ‘local influence’ becomes our power, equivalent to the Central power.

After discussing several budgets and key official position arrangements, their conversation shifted to Gu Hang.

“Gu Hang, your personal presence here has shown good faith. With our full support, there should be no problem regarding your conferral of the Marshal rank during the upcoming award ceremony, and the Naval Captain you recommended directly obtaining the Admiral rank. The corresponding military expansion plans and budget allocation, as well as tax deduction schemes, should also be smoothly approved under our strong push.”

Ou Juren opened with these words to Gu Hang, who expressed his gratitude.

“No need for so much courtesy; since you’ve joined us, we are friends. Friends should help each other. Of course, we will help you secure what you deserve due to your exemplary performance during the Iron Teeth War. Not only that, but we will also help your Alliance deal with the threats brought by the Silver Tribunal and ‘Iron Fury Stone’.”

As he said this, Gu Hang became serious.

Marshal Rage Bear and Admiral Tianma, along with the accompanying benefits, were his ‘guarantee’ for coming to Holy Terra; the issues now mentioned were what he truly cared about.

In the beginning, when Galaraldo told him they would solve these issues, he was somewhat skeptical.

But now, he has come to understand.

This was not just ‘you are one of us, so I help you’; it was a barefaced exchange of interests.

“‘Iron Fury Stone’ is an undeniable cancer within the Empire, and they are growing stronger under some people’s indulgence,” Ou Juren began, marking it for termination, “It is time for this to end.”

“Norberto, huh…”

Ou Juren uttered a name, then let out a cold laugh.

Gu Hang knew who this Norberto was.

He was the Minister of the Imperial Military Department, effectively Galaraldo's direct superior.

This man had numerous accomplishments, but his rise to power began a hundred years ago when, with mere rhetoric, he 'pacified' the Cercis Flower uprising. He persuaded the Iron Armor Battle Group to cease their expansion while also pulling in the Silver Tribunal to deal with the Cercis Flower, Starbreaker Blade, and Phoenix Battle Groups.

"Norberto made a grave mistake a hundred years ago, and even greater error was that, over these hundred years, not only did he go unpunished, but he rose smoothly through the ranks until he became the Minister of Military Affairs. Once he reached a high position, he had no means to resolve the issues he left behind, allowing the situation to deteriorate further."

"All parties within the Empire deeply fear the 'Iron Fury Stone'. Now, the time has come to deal with them."

"Gu Hang, what you're about to take on is no small feat."

Everyone's gaze turned towards Gu Hang.

The price came.

Ou Juren would help him resolve issues brought about by the Silver Tribunal and Fury Flame Battle Group, at least from a legal standpoint.

With this assurance, Gu Hang no longer needed to worry about being declared a traitor by the Silver Tribunal, nor the Alliance becoming an illegal organization.

If the Silver Tribunal really proceeded like that, then it would mean they had missed their last opportunity, they would surely be counted among those wishing to deal with the 'Iron Fury Stone', as mentioned by Ou Juren.

For the Silver Tribunal, this would be a disaster.

This is a good opportunity for division, the Silver faction would not miss it.

Even if they missed it, the Empire would likely immediately deny the Silver Tribunal's judgment. In any case, there is no need for Gu Hang to worry.

At the same time, Gu Hang could also discern the implications in their words, that the 'Alliance', a multi-star political entity previously crafted by Galaraldo using his power, was now considered 'legitimate'. The Legal Department should subsequently provide additional documents to further secure the Alliance's legal status.

And all these consequences meant that Gu Hang would be pushed to the frontline against the 'Iron Fury Stone'.

Was Gu Hang willing to accept this?

Of course!

He was already on the frontlines.

Did he even have a chance to switch sides?

If he could not escape this maelstrom, only a fool like Gu Hang would side with the Iron Fury Stone!

Disregarding past grudges, and simply considering from the angle of who would most likely be the ultimate victor, that would not be Iron Fury Stone.

They had been too arrogant for many years, while the Empire tiptoed around; but once the Empire truly resolved to eliminate this malignant tumor, Gu Hang did not believe the victory would go to the widely despised Iron Armor Battle Group.

Gu Hang nodded and said: "I have a duty to perform!"

Galaraldo suddenly clapped his hands, excitedly saying: “That old fool Norberto, if not for his interference, Wang Suan would have stepped down, and I should rightfully have the position of Deputy Premier! Since he is in the way and being so unwise, it’s time for him to step down!”

Chapter 488, A Fatal Game

Ou Juren needs to deal with ‘Iron Fury Stone’, and Gu Hang thinks it’s only natural.

This aligns with their centralized political ideology.

At the same time, after arriving at Holy Terra, Gu Hang realizes that tackling the ‘Iron Fury Stone’ also brings significant political dividends. If someone could rise to the top a hundred years ago by ‘suppressing’ rebellions, then after a century, of course, someone can do it again to gain huge merits.

Even more so, this is not a solo act driven by Ou Juren and Galaraldo. Gu Hang believes that their mention of ‘multiple parties’ is genuine.

Behind the scenes, the shadow of the Imperial Prime Minister cannot be ignored.

After the death of the Sun Lord, the current Prime Minister, named Zebert, holds theoretically the highest position in the Empire. The position of Prime Minister is not only one of the thirteen High Lords but also the highest responsible person of the Empire Government, and all four chief ministers have to report to him.

Once the ‘Iron Fury Stone’ is finished, the Silver Tribunal will be in big trouble if they pick the wrong side, and even if they choose correctly, they can’t avoid being severely damaged. Ou Juren could take over a lot of the Legal Department’s powers overlapping with the Tribunal across several Cosmos Domains in the East.

At the same time, Norberto, who rose to prominence during the big Cercis Flower rebellion, would also be purged, and his entire faction might be uprooted.

The many vacancies that arise are spoils of war for the factions involved. Among them, the most coveted is the position of Military Affairs Department’s Chief, which Galaraldo drools over.

Everyone has a bright future, needing only for ‘Iron Fury Stone’, the Silver Tribunal, and Norberto to ‘contribute’ themselves.

But their results are also from their own doing. The expansion and dominance of ‘Iron Fury Stone’ are simply too outrageous.

In this matter, Gu Hang is merely a pawn, a knife in the hands of those ‘big players’ behind the scenes.

The huge benefits are taken by them, but the desperate struggle is left to himself?

Gu Hang doesn’t feel too unbalanced about it.

First off, he will not be, nor is he willing to be, on the front line against the Iron Armor Battle Group.

Fighting Furyflame is different from fighting Iron Armor.

To enter into the tightly controlled Princess Star Domain and face potentially tens of thousands of Interstellar Warriors, along with billions of specialized forces coordinating with the Interstellar Warriors?

Gu Hang definitely won’t agree.

According to intelligence from all parties, the auxiliary forces of Iron Armor might even be of higher quality than those of the Imperial Star Realm Army. Naval-wise, they blatantly possess 18 battleships and 3 Zhuge-class aircraft carriers, staggeringly powerful.

What can the current Alliance put against that?

However, dealing with the ‘Iron Fury Stone’ isn’t about jumping straight into action now. The bigwigs of Holy Terra still need time to unify thoughts, remove ‘Iron Fury Stone’s’ protective umbrella, and mobilize forces to prepare for war.

Perhaps by then, the Alliance's forces will be one of the participants, but they shouldn't be the main force, and Gu Hang is not willing to be that main force.

It should be well compensated.

However, the first to fire the shots should be the Alliance.

In the secret meeting, after Gu Hang declared 'irrefutable duty', Ou Juren and Galaraldo had already indicated that before acting against 'Iron Fury Stone', Furyflame must be eliminated first.

Conveniently, their main forces, at least the official ones, are in the Dragonhawk Star Domain.

Conveniently, they are confronting the Alliance.

Conveniently, they already have ready-made accusations of 'manipulating Star Domain Government' and 'fabricating evidence to slander Imperial Loyalists'.

Taking down Furyflame, for Gu Hang, was indeed an irrefutable duty, he would do it even without payment.

Let alone, there is a payment.

Other issues can be ignored, but the recognition of the Alliance as an officially sanctioned entity by higher authorities, no longer the temporary political structure previously orchestrated by Galaraldo, immediately legitimizes it.

At least, no one would be able to trouble him in this matter anymore—unless the Central Empire issues a decree terminating his position.

If that really happens, it would either mean a fallout between Gu Hang and the political faction of Ou Juren and Galaraldo, or that this political faction has been overturned.

Currently, neither seems likely.

Thus far, the purpose of Gu Hang's visit to Holy Terra has almost been fully accomplished.

The only remaining task is to patiently wait for the Marshal's inauguration ceremony in a short while.

After that, he can return home with his Marshal's baton and then strike hard at Furyflame.

…

The Marshal's inauguration ceremony was grand and prepared swiftly.

Mainly because, despite few mentions, there are actually quite a number of Marshals of the Empire. Each Cosmos Domain, including both the navy and the Star Realm Army, has at least two to three, and up to five to six Marshals, possibly more in key areas. Across the entire Empire, there are about three to five hundred Marshals.

Though it might appear plentiful, it corresponds to the Empire's endless territories, limitless population, and infinite armies. From a proportional perspective, it is quite rare.

At least, the status of an individual Marshal is not inferior to a senior commissioner of one of the Central Government's four major departments.

Moreover, most of these Marshals have military achievements, so a special, grand inauguration ceremony is only appropriate.

The grandeur and quick preparation are naturally due to a dedicated team within Terra Imperial Palace responsible for this task. There is a specially constructed majestic structure called 'Marshal's Terrace' designed for this purpose.

All necessary preparations had been long completed, and even if needed, they could immediately pull out the whole setup and set it up quickly.

Chapter 488 the game is deadly_2

Today, Gu Hang is fully dressed in marshal's attire. The grandiose yet solemn military uniform in bright red is paired with black long boots and white pants, adorned with numerous medals on the chest, a ceremonial sash crossing his torso, and golden tassels and ribbons that intricately embellish the outfit.

Gu Hang has already grown accustomed to this attire.

As the supreme ruler of the Alliance, it is inevitable that he wears such clothing at many formal occasions.

Whether he likes it or not.

Sitting in the hover car heading to the 'Marshal's Terrace', the speed is not fast and it will take a while to arrive.

Gu Hang started thinking about the process of becoming a marshal.

Though he had the reassurance from Ou Juren, the matter had faced some obstacles a few days ago.

According to Galaraldo, his supervisor Mr. Norberto, the Minister of Military Affairs, fiercely opposed the idea.

Norberto argued that Gu Hang, with shallow experience, never truly led a real Star Realm Army, never fought for the Star Realm Army, was just a local force issue and even his legitimacy was questionable, to give him the title of Empire Marshal was surely a joke!

If someone like Gu Hang could be granted the title of Marshal of the Star Realm Army, then what would those veteran generals think, who have been stuck at the rank of grand generals for many years and have fought across countless battlefields and wars throughout the Imperial Territory?

In some ways, his point was valid.

Compared to most of the Star Realm Army generals, who have spent years leading troops and fighting battles, only to earn ranks like upper generals, Gu Hang's involvement in just one star domain and one battle, despite his significant contributions, was not enough to deserve the rank of Marshal of the Star Realm Army.

Certainly, that wasn't enough.

If Gu Hang were really just a Star Realm Army general, his achievements at most would allow him to rise from upper general to grand general, and that's it. If he were a grand general, he could at most receive an honorary rank.

But now, Gu Hang's rank was about to jump directly from major general to marshal.

Gu Hang did not deny this.

But of course he deserved it.

His marshal rank, heroic deeds were only a small part of it, more importantly was the power he held.

This differed from Star Realm Army generals, whose power came from the Empire. The Central Government, such as the Military Affairs Department or the central command of the Star Realm Army, if they think you're unfit, they can strip you of your power, leaving you with nothing. But Gu Hang was different; he possessed actual power, managing tens of billions of Alliance Army troops, equating the level of the Star Realm Army, and even a hundred billion Defense Army, and the Empire had to recognize and officially grant him the marshal title.

The nature of these two differed completely. If one day the Empire withdrew Gu Hang's marshal position, it would not affect his control over his troops in any way.

Thus, Gu Hang also felt no guilt about this.

Didn’t the Minister of Military Affairs understand this principle?

He understood, very well indeed.

But for that reason, he had to oppose.

‘The reality exists’, and then giving him ‘the title’, aren’t you elevating him too high?

Still, an adversary.

Of course, he would oppose it to the death.

And the granting of marshal could not avoid this Minister of Military Affairs.

This issue even escalated to the Supreme Council.

In the Supreme Council, according to Galaraldo’s account, after intense debates, the promotion of Gu Hang to marshal was passed with six votes in favor, four abstentions, and three opposed.

For a marshal’s commission to be decided by a vote in the Supreme Council was quite rare.

Gu Hang carefully inquired about the composition of these thirteen votes.

Those who voted in favor were: the Imperial Prime Minister, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Taxation, the State Religion Representative, the Supreme Grand Marshal of the Imperial Navy, the Interstellar Warrior Representative.

The four who abstained were: the Administrative Bureau Prime Minister, the Chief Judge of the Supreme Tribunal, the Sect of Mechanics Mars Representative, and the Provence Cosmic Domain Chair Representative.

The three who voted against were: the Minister of Military Affairs, the Supreme Grand Marshal of the Imperial Guards, the Northern Border Devouring Stars Sector President Representative.

From these votes, Gu Hang could roughly gauge how different major forces in the Central Government perceived the handling of the 'Iron Fury Stone' issue.

Speaking of this, it's also necessary to mention the origin of these Supreme Council seats.

There are indeed only thirteen seats in the Supreme Council, but actually, there are about twenty different types of seats. Some seats are permanent, although not explicitly stipulated, but present every term, such as the Imperial Prime Minister, the Mars Representative, the State Religion Representative, the Tribunal Representative, and the like.

But such seats are relatively few; most, like the Empire Commerce Guild Representative, the four great ministers of the government, the Interstellar Warrior Representative, the Psychic Cultivator Assembly Representative, are sometimes present and sometimes not.

Whether a permanent seat or a non-permanent seat, to occupy one of the thirteen seats undoubtedly means having sufficient strength. First, there is real power and influence, then comes the seat.

Permanent seats certainly mean these forces are strong, and continually so; the changes in non-permanent seats might show transitions in influence among some forces.

Those who voted in favor did not necessarily have good intentions towards him, perhaps even disliked Gu Hang's extraordinary fast-tracked military promotion. However, they are definitely involved in the 'Iron Fury Stone' issue up next, or are sharing interests in this matter, having reached certain benefit agreements with the political factions of Ou Juren, Tang Mili, and Galaraldo.

Chapter 488, Gambling with Your Life_3

The representative of the Interstellar Warriors is usually a Battle Group Leader elected by the major Battle Groups when they have a seat. The current representative is Jerry Earl Ganglong, the Battle Group Leader of the Death Angel Battle Group. His Battle Group was reorganized from the first legion of the past legion era and belongs to one of the initial Battle Groups.

In this affair, it's unclear how much political benefit the Interstellar Warriors can glean, but certainly, their political will is to eliminate nuisances like Iron Armor, which severely tarnish the reputation of the Interstellar Warriors and blatantly violate the regulations of the Star Warrior Codex.

The Interstellar Warriors have always been a rather delicate presence at the heart of the Human Empire, being both admired and feared. Created with the Emperor's genes as a template, they were led by the Emperor's adopted sons to establish this vast empire in the form of legions, but they also nearly tore apart and destroyed the Empire due to a great rebellion and mutual opposition that arose after the Emperor Ascension.

Since then, the Interstellar Warriors have had to abide by various restrictions of the "Star Warrior Codex" and largely withdrew from the central power sphere of the Empire.

Confronting a situation-breaker like Iron Armor, all major Battle Groups would naturally abhor it.

The Minister of Taxation and the State Religion hold similar views. The Star Domains taken by Iron Armor report taxes capriciously, paying as they wish—wouldn't we need to take action? Not allowing us to preach, causing serious conflicts with our churches, and even expelling clergy. Up to now, the situation with the churches in the Princess Star Domain is still incorrect, and the dismantling continues; their attitude towards the State Religion is much worse than that of the Alliance.

As for the other votes of agreement, they are generally those who want to profit from this situation, such as the Imperial Prime Minister Qi Bo, Minister of Justice Ou Juren, and the Imperial Navy, among others.

Those who cast abstention votes are generally unrelated to this matter, like the Provence Sector President, for example.

Outside the Supreme Council, there is another parliament within the Empire with a strong presence—the Presidium Council. Composed entirely of over fifty Cosmic Domain Chairs of the Empire, they represent the collective of the most significant local powers. They elect some among themselves to become one of the High Lords. The specific number of seats depends on the situation at the time; this term has two.

Of course, just like the Interstellar Warriors, these Cosmic Domain Chairs or Battle Group Leaders cannot personally fulfill their duties as High Lords on Holy Terra. They will appoint representatives to act on their behalf.

The Provence Sector is part of the Western Empire Border, unrelated to the Empire's Eastern Frontier, so it directly abstained.

The Mars Representative and the Administration Bureau are almost the same.

The Tribunal must be mentioned. The Silver Tribunal stands with Tie Nu Shi without a doubt, but the Tribunal as an organization is fragmented. For instance, the Heretic Tribunal is highly dissatisfied with the actions of the Iron Armor Battle Group; the Internal Court of Judgment, a faction that specifically oversees Judges, is also investigating numerous overreaches of the Silver Tribunal and is covertly looking to make a big scoop.

The chaotic and loose internal structure prevents the Grand Judge from being able to clearly articulate a position.

Among the three opposing parties, Norberto certainly needs no further explanation as he is the big fish that's about to be consumed, and he naturally resists.

The Supreme Marshal of the Star Realm Army, however, does not necessarily stand with Tie Nu Shi. He simply needs this dissenting vote to show a stance to the countless Marshals and Generals under his command. Otherwise, if Gu Hang, a man who has never mixed in the Star Realm Army System, became a Marshal and he did not voice any objection, it certainly wouldn't be good.

However, Galaraldo has also conveyed to Gu Hang that this is just a stance, and in reality, there have been private communications. The Supreme Marshal will not actually impede the process.

The attitude of the Devouring Stars Sector President is rather intriguing. Their proximity to the Spiderweb Domain and their relationship with Tie Nu Shi is certain, but is it so strong as to support Tie Nu Shi?

Gu Hang analyzed that it is likely they do not want a large-scale war.

In a conflict, the Star Devouring Cosmos might very well become part of the front line, and a significant amount of resources would need to be levied from their lands. If the Iron Armor Battle Group strikes preemptively, the Empire's main forces may not have completed their assembly yet, and the Star Devouring Cosmos might suffer.

But their attitude is also irrelevant now.

The three opposing votes cannot halt the overall situation.

The formal procedure for Gu Hang to become an Empire Marshal has also been completed, and with considerable force: approved by the vote of the thirteen-member High Lord Council!

How many things in the vast Empire could be taken to this council for a vote?

Very few! And each one is a major matter!

An ordinary Marshal would not receive this treatment. Approval by the Military Affairs Department and the Navy or the Star Realm Army would suffice.

Yet, Gu Hang's Marshal position also comes with a complication.

The two departments that should logically be the most concerned, the Military Affairs Department and the Supreme Marshal of the Star Realm Army, both oppose his promotion.

Nevertheless, Galaraldo has also relayed that the Supreme Marshal of the Star Realm Army will attend the conferral ceremony and personally award the title.

After making his position clear, he will have explained to those below: this is a decision by the highest authority of the Empire, and I can do nothing about it.

Then he can happily interact with Gu Hang, the newcomer.

Gu Hang expresses full understanding of this.

Norberto, who was supposed to attend as well, will certainly not come. One of the deputy prime ministers, the former Chair of the Eastern Cosmos Domain and Deputy Minister of the Military Affairs Department, Wang Suan, has already stepped down due to serious illness, and his life may only last another year or two; another deputy prime minister, a close ally of Norberto, will also not attend. But Galaraldo will come, the presence of the Executive Minister is barely adequate.

Chapter 488, Gambling Will Cost Your Life_4

…

As he thought, the towering Marshal's Terrace had already come into view.

He would soon arrive at the scene.

At last, with the help of a fellow servant in the car, Gu Hang adjusted his appearance to ensure there wasn't a single flaw.

However, just at that moment, Gu Hang's heart tightened, and a sudden palpitation swept over him.

He sensed immense danger; his Spiritual Essence was frantically warning him.

Instinctively, he wanted to deploy his Spiritual Energy Shield, however, the black stone bracelet on his wrist was suppressing his Psychic Powers.

But he did not hesitate for a moment.

Despite the potential trouble, he still summoned a small Subspace Rift.

He certainly chose to trust his spiritual intuition; no consequence could be severer than his own death.

Tearing open a Subspace Rift was difficult, especially since the Terra Imperial Palace was a place that strongly repelled Subspace Powers, and Gu Hang's psychic abilities were still being suppressed by the black stone bracelet.

But just a slight Subspace Rift was enough to enhance his strength slightly, allowing his already near-threshold Psychic Power to exceed the limits set by the black stone bracelet.

The black stone bracelet shattered, and the Spiritual Energy Shield unfolded around Gu Hang.

The next moment, the car window broke, and a bullet shot towards Gu Hang's head.

The bullet, intercepted by his Psychic Power, stopped less than three centimeters from his temple.

Using his Psychic Power, he gently moved the bullet in front of his eyes.

It was a bullet approximately the length of a palm, as thick as a thumb. The bullet head was made of some verdigris metal, and the tail was a complex mechanical device supporting a transparent tube filled with some green liquid.

Gu Hang had no doubt that if the bullet had hit him, he would undoubtedly be dead.

Indeed, this sniper bullet, coming from nowhere, put tremendous pressure on him.

This was no ordinary sniping. Freed from the black stone bracelet, blessed by Subspace Power, his Psychic Power suddenly reached Alpha-level. A regular sniper rifle could not possibly penetrate his defense.

A term flashed through Gu Hang's mind:

Assassin Court.

This was a mysterious organization Within the Empire, as its name implied, specialized in assassination. Their targets were mostly traitorous elements within the Empire; occasionally, they would assassinate Alien or chaotic leaders.

They operated in secrecy, and anyone Within the Empire, including the High Lords of Terra, could potentially drop dead at any time, with diverse manners of death. Whenever such incidents occurred, it likely meant the Assassin Court was at work.

The assassins of the Assassin Court, each possessing unique skills, had undergone extensive biological enhancements and, since they had “special permission to use any means or tools to complete tasks,” they always had various advanced tech or Alien equipment at their disposal.

This bullet, and the gun that fired it, were very likely one of those, possessing strong penetration abilities against psychic defenses and physical armor, and contained a deadly poison.

Had Gu Hang’s Psychic Power been slightly weaker, not reaching Alpha-level; had he hesitated initially because tearing open the Subspace would lead to uncontrollable consequences; had he doubted his spiritual warning for even a moment… he would have been dead.

However, the crisis was not completely over yet.

The driver of the Hover Car, in panic, stopped the car and attempted to land; the accompanying cars did the same.

But Gu Hang, now fully unleashed, could sense several powerful presences appearing on the ground. Moreover, another bullet was shot from afar.

This time, the bullet wasn’t poisoned, but a High Explosive Bomb.

The bullet caused a violent explosion, blowing the armored Hover Car carrying Gu Hang into pieces in mid-air.

Chapter 489, Fatal Assassination

The limousine exploded violently, the vehicle instantly torn apart, debris flying everywhere.

But amidst the flames and debris, a blue sphere of light flew out, naturally, that was Gu Hang with his Spiritual Energy Shield.

With his full strength deployed, he wasn't so easy to eliminate.

The assassins clearly hadn't given up. Their assassination attempt on Gu Hang included the initial highly penetrative toxic bullet and the subsequent high-explosive bullets, along with personnel arranged nearby for aftercare.

Suddenly, four individuals wearing optical camouflage acted. They were nearly invisible before due to their optical camouflage making them visually disappear, as well as scent-masking, thermal energy covering, and Spiritual Energy shielding.

While they remained completely still, almost no one could detect them.

Even now as they moved swiftly and their various camouflage devices were less effective, it was still quite difficult to capture their movements.

The four fired a shot each.

Their target was not aimed directly at Gu Hang, but at the empty ground around him.

Four dark green threads shot from their locations and interconnected, instantly forming a dense net.

Gu Hang suddenly felt an intense suppression of Spiritual Energy.

The assassination was clearly targeted.

These assassins had a high level of intelligence on him, knowing full well he was a formidable psychic. Even though Gu Hang surely wore the Black Stone bracelet when entering the Terra Imperial Palace,

they still prepared more potent Spiritual Energy suppression techniques, in case the initial assassination attempt failed.

This assault was truly fierce.

Evidently targeting a top psychic, even as Gu Hang tore through a Subspace Rift and demonstrated Alpha-level Spiritual Energy, he still couldn't break free.

His Spiritual Energy Shield flickered twice, on the verge of collapse, the fireworks from the exploded limousine again cloaked his body; he couldn't even maintain his levitating posture, almost falling back into the fiery scene.

Seeing the next fatal strike about to follow, Gu Hang had only one move left.

He hid inside the Subspace.

The anti-magic net aimed to suppress Spiritual Energy, but it couldn't completely close off the Subspace Rift, allowing Gu Hang to slip in.

His presence out of the real world nullified all incoming attacks.

However, Gu Hang couldn't stay in the Storm God Kingdom for too long. He counted a few seconds in his mind, simultaneously summoning power within the Divine Realm, enhancing himself with lightning to form a lightning shield, then he emerged again.

The powers brought from the Subspace were still suppressed by the anti-magic net, but not instantly dissipated, providing some protective effect.

Regrettably, the Subspace Rift emerged exactly where it opened; Gu Hang couldn't immediately tear another entrance elsewhere, otherwise, he could've teleported directly.

Upon re-emerging, Gu Hang felt a surge of high temperature.

This was not from the flames produced by the limousine explosion, but from a heat melt!

In the few seconds he was missing, the assassins hadn't been idle! They directly used heat melt weapons, covering the area where Gu Hang was previously.

If Gu Hang didn't have this layer of thunder protection, he would likely have been incinerated upon exit.

But the good news was, Gu Hang felt that the intensity of Spiritual Energy suppression had significantly decreased.

Looking up, he saw among the four assassins, one lay in a pool of blood. His invisibility cloak was still in effect, but could not prevent the blood seeping out, staining him in a vivid red.

Lacroix had killed this assassin.

Gu Hang did not come to Holy Terra alone.

That would not be fitting for his status as a strong local leader. In fact, on his journey here, a whole team served him. This included a daily life team handling his everyday needs and an entire secretary team assisting his work. He often communicated in Star Speech with the Tianma Star Sector, guiding the development direction of the Alliance. The Star Language Tower on Flying Wing Star was of high standard, and Gu Hang's ship also had a high-grade onboard Star Language Tower, combined with his own high-level Spiritual Energy and increasingly skilled Star Speech communication, he could establish a stable communication line with Flying Wing Star in about an hour.

Besides these life and administrative secretaries, Gu Hang also brought a bodyguard team.

When departing, Commander Matins had proposed sending a squad of elite veterans to take care of Gu Hang's security. However, this proposal was declined by Gu Hang.

It was a bit too conspicuous.

Instead, Gu Hang selected some skilled members from the newly formed ‘Glory Guard Corps’.

All members were equipped with ‘Servant God’ Powered Armor, all trained beyond T1 level, and had also been enlightened in the [Heroes] template.

The combat strength of these Glory Guards could basically match an Interstellar Warrior Recruit in single combat, even slightly better. If they encountered veterans, they could still compete.

Additionally, a small squad from the Storm Mage Corps also arrived.

They were, besides the Phoenix Battle Group, the highest level organized force under Gu Hang’s command.

Chapter 489, Deadly Assassination_2

Lacroix is one of the standouts, this recipient of the Alliance Hero Medal is almost one of the earliest combat heroes to be enlightened. Currently wearing Powered Armor, his personal strength is even stable enough to surpass a Phoenix Veteran.

Of course, this is almost the upper limit for normal mortals, even with the [Hero] template enhancement, it couldn’t be elevated further. Lacroix, being a mortal, and his Feedback-Type Power Armor is different from the real Interstellar Warrior Powered Armor; he couldn’t possibly catch up to an Interstellar Warrior in terms of hard conditions. What he could rely on are his powerful combat skills and excellent battle intelligence.

At this moment, Lacroix used these aspects to the fullest.

While Gu Hang was traveling to the Marshal’s Terrace in a ceremonial car, Lacroix as a bodyguard, also brought two squads of warriors, following in four Hover Cars alongside Gu Hang’s ceremonial car.

The moment Gu Hang was attacked, the elite warriors had already reacted.

Lacroix especially swiftly.

The four assassins mainly focused on targeting Gu Hang, and were somewhat inadequate in dealing with Gu Hang's bodyguards.

Moreover, objectively speaking, there is a huge difference in the combat abilities between the two sides. The equipment on the assassins is clearly very sophisticated and expensive, but their main skills are focused on concealing themselves. For attributes needed in direct confrontations like physical enhancement and protective capabilities, they are definitely insufficient.

At least not comparable to the legitimate Feedback-Type Power Armor 'Servant God'.

And, they clearly did not expect that these mere mortal bodyguards around Gu Hang would have such strong combat abilities.

Especially Lacroix.

After he quickly got out of the car, with his Precision Bombard Gun, he delivered bombs to an assassin in a very precise manner.

The assassins were surprised to find that their disguises had almost no effect.

However, these assassins were also extremely agile and exquisite in their movements. The one targeted by Lacroix was caught off guard and injured at the beginning but was still able to dodge. Of course, he couldn't dodge the bullets, but he could catch the rhythm of Lacroix's shooting and dodge in advance.

Yet, this was still within Lacroix's expectations.

He maintained running while shooting, and his shooting was forcing the assassin to move closer to himself while dodging. The distance between the two rapidly closed under this double approach.

That assassin certainly realized this, but was not afraid.

Lacroix's shooting skills exceeded his expectations. He was eager to enter into close combat, even if he couldn't quickly defeat, he could tie down this unexpectedly skilled bodyguard to buy as much time as possible for his teammates.

The strong camouflage coats and their outstanding agility and flexibility made their movements resemble a dance. This technique and skill, acquired from a group known as 'Spirit Race', could be utilized to a certain extent by these specially modified assassins.

During the 'dance', however, he only saw a flash of the blade, and his body was cut diagonally into two sections.

Lacroix's Fine Work Dynamo Sword was like lightning, unavoidable. His Spirit Race War Dance seemed to have had no effect at all.

The assassin's gaze remained astonished as if to express his complete disbelief in how lethal Lacroix's gaze was and how fast his blade was, even more outrageous than any Interstellar Warrior he had encountered.

But Lacroix would not give him any answers.

Currently, his heart filled with immense urgency, his Bombardment Gun was already firing at another assassin.

And this, was the scene Gu Hang saw when he reemerged from Storm God Kingdom.

After an assassin died, the magic-inhibiting net that sealed off the space around Gu Hang instantly became unstable.

At least, it could not lock down an Alpha-class Psychic.

Gu Hang, freed from constraints, raised his Spiritual Energy Shield, replacing it to withstand the heat, burst out of the heat meltdown area, while also summoning lightning, locking down two assassins. Lightning struck from nowhere, killing these two assassins who realized their mission failed.

And the last one was left by Gu Hang on purpose.

He attempted to keep a living captive, seizing the assassin with his psychic power.

With the magic-inhibiting net completely collapsed, Gu Hang could control every inch of the guy's muscles, ensuring that he couldn't make a single move.

However, moments later, that assassin still died.

Inside his body, there seemed to be some special mechanism that triggered automatically under Gu Hang's control, eliminating his life from within.

Dropping this corpse, Gu Hang looked into the distance.

That was where the initial two sniper bullets came from.

There were five assassins in total.

Gu Hang looked in another direction, three rays of golden light were rapidly approaching. Those were the Imperial Guards riding hover motorcycles.

Inside Terra Imperial Palace, without a doubt, it was the domain of the Imperial Forbidden Army, who are fully responsible for the security work of Terra Imperial Palace.

Terra Imperial Palace is certainly not an absolutely safe place. As the core of the Empire's power scene, assassinations and coups happen frequently. Most assassinations are conducted covertly. Poison, daggers in the dark, a silent bullet from nowhere, leaving behind just a corpse after the deed.

Chapter 489, Deadly Assassination_3

This situation is of no concern to the Imperial Guard.

What exactly does The Imperial Guard protect within the Terra Imperial Palace? No one knows, but it isn't the High Lords, let alone ordinary Empire officials.

But who was responsible for turning the assassination against Gu Hang into a forceful killing?

The initial bullet did conform to the definition of an assassination. A sniper, hidden in the shadows, fired a silent and deadly bullet. If it had been successful, Gu Hang would have ended up like the countless Empire officials who had died within the Terra Imperial Palace that covered the entire Tibetan Plateau. Whatever storms the future would bring, it would no longer be the concern of the dead.

But that bullet did not succeed, nor did the second one that destroyed the entire limousine, neither did the four waiting experts.

The commotion was getting bigger and bigger.

A silent assassination can be ignored by the Imperial Guard, but explosions, earth-shattering bombardment gun fire, these cannot be ignored.

Moreover, there appeared such a strong, unrecorded Psychic Power reaction!

There are indeed Psychics within the Imperial Palace who do not wear the black stone bracelets. After all, there are some Psychic devices within the palace that require maintenance, especially the Star Language Tower Cluster and the Imperial Star Torch.

However, those who are legally permitted to employ Psychic Power within the Terra Imperial Palace have all been approved and registered.

And what's happening now was definitely not on the register.

The Imperial Guard's response was already very fast. It's only been two minutes since the assassination attempt began. The Imperial Guard was nearly on the scene.

Should these Imperial Guard be trusted?

Gu Hang hesitated slightly, then turned into a bolt of lightning, heading towards the previous sniper's position.

The target was also retreating, invoking all possible invisibility tactics. However, an enraged Gu Hang still managed to find him and again used his Spiritual Power to attempt to take control.

This time, he changed his approach. Controlling the body would trigger suicide, so what if he switched to a Soul Spike, aiming to knock out the assailant?

It still didn't work.

The self-awareness mechanism had still kicked in.

Gu Hang could only regretfully bring the corpse back to the scene of the crime.

At this moment, three Imperial Guards arrived.

They were confronting Lacroix and the Glory Guards, loudly ordering them to lay down their weapons. Of course, Lacroix and the others would not disarm so easily, arguing about something.

Gu Hang quickly persuaded Lacroix to comply.

What are you resisting the Imperial Guard for?

Keep jabbering, and these gilded warriors won't go easy on you.

With Gu Hang's command, Lacroix and the others laid down their weapons.

However, the three Imperial Guards did not relax their guard. Their gaze was all fixed on Gu Hang.

They noticed the shattered black stone bracelet on Gu Hang's wrist, appearing both astonished and wary.

Breaking free from the black stone bracelet was not something an A-grade Psychic on Gu Hang's registration could do. In fact, not even S-grade, it had to be Alpha-level.

But, the Psychic Power of an Alpha-grade was something that humans cannot stable control; Alpha-grade Psychics were unstable entities.

Yet Gu Hang did not seem to show such signs.

At this moment, though the Spiritual Power on him seemed mighty, it had not reached the Alpha Level.

The Imperial Guards dared not be careless. The leader commanded Gu Hang, "Cease any attempt to resist and accept our investigation."

"Of course," Gu Hang complied readily, dissipating his Spiritual Power.

However, as the Imperial Guard took a step forward, Gu Hang also stepped back.

He spoke, "No offense intended, but I've just faced an assassination attempt. I won't question why there was such a security breach within the Imperial Palace, but please forgive my caution. How can I be sure that you truly are the Imperial Guard and not impostors?"

"You have no right to resist."

These golden warriors really had some nerve.

But Gu Hang didn't intend to have a standoff.

“I will not violate your rules and will cooperate with your investigation. I have no intention to resist, but please consider my proposal: Let’s all wait here. With such commotion, the news must have spread. Once more people arrive, we should be able to clarify the whole situation.”

Speaking to this point, Gu Hang paused slightly, not intending to show complete weakness, revealing a bit of firmness, “Otherwise, I can only assume that you are in league with the assassins.”

The Imperial Guard indeed hesitated.

“Everyone stay put. Nobody leaves the scene!”

“Of course, I have no intention of leaving.”

…

Afterward, Gu Hang, Lacroix, and a group of guards, along with the three Imperial Guards, were left staring at each other in silence, waiting.

The three Imperial Guards called for higher-level support, while Gu Hang didn’t need to do anything; the Marshal’s Terrace was so close that they must be aware of the incident here.

During the waiting, Gu Hang’s mind raced, contemplating the current situation and how it might evolve in the future.

Undoubtedly, this time Gu Hang had faced a lethal threat. The Assassin Court’s actions were fierce, fully orchestrated as if assassinating a controllable Alpha-class Psychic.

This was an outrageous arrangement already; openly Gu Hang’s Psychic strength was grade A. Although, with a bit more intelligence, knowing his feats in the Dragonhawk Star Domain, they would know he’s more than A. But at most they could guess he was S, or S+, not more.

Alpha-grade Psychics are uncontrollable; that's an iron law.

Yet the Assassin Court still acted as if treating Gu Hang as an Alpha-grade, which could be called overly cautious.

If Gu Hang were a regular Alpha-grade, he would have died under the third wave of anti-magic web and thermal melting combination.

Was this the Assassin Court's limit?

Obviously not. If they wanted, they could organize many similar actions, even more threatening ones. Could Gu Hang withstand them once or twice, could he stand up to countless assassinations by the Assassin Court?

Impossible.

Chapter 490, I Became an Investor in Assassin Court?

This assassination aimed at him, the mastermind behind it doesn't even need thinking about, it definitely is Norberto.

But the mastermind behind the scenes is no longer important, what Gu Hang cares about is the executor of this assassination: the Assassin Court.

Indeed, they are just a tool, but this tool is very important.

Assassinations are their specialty.

Gu Hang kills these elite assassins like slaughtering chickens, and the direct combat capabilities of these elite assassins are just so-so. He can easily crush them with his hand freed.

But the problem is, when the assassin carries out the assassination, the most important thing is to create unfair, indirect actions.

Today, the most important actions of those assassins are all centered around blocking Gu Hang's Spiritual Energy abilities. First, by utilizing the presence of the black stone bracelet for long-distance sniping; if that fails, then they turn to sealing the Spiritual Energy and using thermite.

These tactics are adopted against a powerful Psychic like Gu Hang; however, if they were dealing with powerful warriors, even top Interstellar Warriors, they would employ different methods.

Accurate intelligence, sufficient targeted methods, powerful technology, fearless elite modified assassins…these are the secrets to the success of the Assassin Court.

Their failure this time was also due to insufficient intelligence. But next time, with experience, they certainly won't treat Gu Hang as just an Alpha-level target. They might instead use poisons, blow up spacecraft, or similar methods. Even if they detect and intervene in subspace failures, it's very likely they will bring out some black technology, derived from aliens or from prehistoric archaeological findings, to temporarily block subspace and proceed with the next action.

In short, if the Assassin Court wants to kill someone, if they spare no expense, the success rate is very high.

Gu Hang managed to handle it once, but it's impossible for him to handle it every time.

However, the Assassin Court, after all, is also a well-defined institution within the Empire; their actions are not without cost.

The leader of the Assassin Court, known as 'Great Master,' is also a candidate who could occupy a seat on the Supreme Council. Although not this term, throughout history, they often have been one of the High Lords.

Even, during a murky part of Imperial history, there was a time when the Great Mentor of the Assassin Court governed with terror, violence, and assassination, completely controlling the Supreme Council.

Although that period was brief, after various forces resisted, the Assassin Court was quickly crushed by direct forces like the Interstellar Warrior and the Star Realm Army, thus swiftly ending their reign. But this event still had a deep impact.

Since then, the Assassin Court cannot act independently.

In theory, for the Assassin Court to act, authorization is needed. Depending on the target, the level of authorization required varies.

This means that deploying the Assassin Court as a weapon is not easy.

Gu Hang can think of three possibilities for Norberto and the Iron Fury Stone interest group letting the Assassin Court act:

Either Norberto himself gave independent authorization, and the Assassin Court took action.

This scenario is the simplest, but the least likely.

Norberto should have a certain level of authority as one of the High Lords, especially now when the Assassin Court is relatively weak.

But the target cannot be Gu Hang.

Someone like Gu Hang, requiring a vote in the Supreme Council for appointment, is currently a focal point in the Imperial Political Arena. The decision-makers of the Assassin Court, with a bit of political sensitivity, would know not to act.

This possibility is rather low.

Second, there might be changes in the Supreme Council. Perhaps right after the last meeting ended, another meeting was convened, or there was a secret resolution, overturning the previous resolutions, with several High Lords signing authorization at once. Even if Ou Juren and Galaraldo did not sign, they might default to abandoning Gu Hang.

But Gu Hang quickly dismissed this possibility.

He had previously analyzed that against the ‘Iron Fury Stone’ interest group with Norberto, it’s a major trend of the Empire itself. Whether with or without Gu Hang, it doesn’t affect.

Without the Alliance, they would just substitute another knife to do the job.

Gu Hang’s existence, rather, benefits the propulsion of the larger plan; otherwise, the Supreme Council wouldn’t have granted special approvals for his unsuitable appointment as Marshal, passing with high votes.

A reversal of the basic situation in just a few days, abandoning Gu Hang? This isn’t realistic, it doesn’t make sense, it absolutely doesn’t match the situation of the Imperial Political Arena.

Thirdly, Norberto has his own forces within the Assassin Court, or collaborators. He skipped the usual processes, directly ordering the assassination through collaborators.

This, of course, breaks regulations, but…Gu Hang doesn’t believe that if someone dares act, they would leave very obvious traces, easy for others to catch.

What needs to be settled, would probably be already settled.

After carefully thinking through these possibilities, Gu Hang felt a slight relief.

As long as it’s not the second worst scenario, he shouldn’t continue being targeted by the Assassin Court. If it really were that case, Gu Hang would have to consider fleeing Holy Terra at light speed, or even directly fleeing into the Storm God Kingdom and finding a way back from the subspace to his old lair, then prepare to raise the flag in rebellion.

But the probability of that is extremely low.

The first scenario is also unlikely;text.

Of course, these were all speculations. Although Gu Hang was fairly certain, when it came to his own life, he couldn't afford to be careless.

In the following period, he was extremely cautious.

…

During the wait, the expected visitors arrived one after another.

The fastest were the Imperial Guards, including a Centurion; then, those at Marshal's Terrace, or who were supposed to go to Marshal's Terrace, also arrived.

Galaraldo, Ou Juren, and Supreme Marshal of the Star Realm Army Xue Yongsheng came to this place.

The expressions on their faces were all very grave; the bodies of the five assassins lying on the ground, which became visible after the camouflage failed, were very iconic, and they recognized the situation immediately.

Galaraldo quickly stepped forward, walked up to Gu Hang, and looked around: "Are you okay?"

"No problem, standing here fine, no need to worry too much."

"That's good." Galaraldo sighed in relief, "I was very angry when I heard the news, but the best news is that you're unharmed."

Speaking of this, he still couldn't suppress the anger in his heart and cursed: "Some people have broken the rules, and they will pay the price!"

On the other side, after chatting with the Imperial Guard's Centurion, Ou Juren also came over, with a gloomy face, saying to Gu Hang: "Galaraldo is right; someone will definitely pay the price."

Everyone knew whom he was referring to, and Gu Hang just smiled.

The attitudes of Galaraldo and Ou Juren roughly indicated that this situation wasn't about being abandoned, the most dreadful second possibility was essentially ruled out.

He felt quite relieved.

Gu Hang then turned his gaze towards the other Imperial Guards, his eyes filled with questions.

"Cough cough…" Ou Juren seemed a bit embarrassed, as if the communication with the Centurion of the Imperial Guards was not too smooth.

He had intended to dismiss the Imperial Guards directly, but clearly, the Emperor's Imperial Guards did not heed him.

Even the High Lord had no effect!

"Gu Hang, you might need to go with this Centurion of the Imperial Guards. This incident is rather significant, and the Imperial Guards need to conduct a thorough investigation; you need to cooperate. However, I assure you, there won't be any issues. The Psychic Cultivator's Association will provide you with the Spiritual Energy inspection certificate, and the Supreme Council won't just stand by."

"Moreover, going with the Imperial Guards now is also a good choice. There, if someone tries any tricks, it will be even less likely to succeed."

Gu Hang nodded slightly: "Alright, no problem."

He was psychologically prepared for this; having revealed his Psychic Power, the Imperial Guards would certainly not just turn a blind eye.

Actually, having Psychic Power exceeding the registered level isn't a big issue, it isn't a serious matter. Under normal circumstances, he is only S-level, a legal psychic level, and he had reported A-level because he hadn't updated his information at the Psychic Cultivator's Association for a while.

This matter on someone else might be a crime, but not on Gu Hang.

As for breaking the blackstone wristband, that required Alpha-level, and that I, Grand Marshal, am not aware of. Perhaps I was agitated in the life-and-death moment, but now you can check all you want, I definitely don't have Alpha-level, certainly not to the extent of needing constant surveillance in the black prison.

However, what Gu Hang was most reluctant to face was the issue of the Subspace Rift.

Although he had only opened a small gateway, the Imperial Guards arrived too quickly, and Gu Hang did not have time to deal with the traces.

However, the Imperial Guards are not Psychic Experts. Under the exhibition of regular high-intensity Psychic Power, he hoped they hadn't detected the lingering presence from Subspace.

In conventional terms, Subspace = Demons.

If implicated, Gu Hang would have much more trouble ahead. The Tribunal might even get involved.

But for now, it seemed alright.

Gu Hang reassured Lacroix and the others, and compliantly followed the Imperial Guards first.

The few people left on the scene included Xue Yongsheng, whose eyes flickered.

He wasn't guilty, as he truly knew nothing about this event and had not participated in it.

But like everyone else, the mastermind behind this assassination operation was too obvious. He had a good relationship with Norberto, but still did not expect that the old man could bypass the Supreme Council and initiate such a high-quality operation.

These five dead assassins were probably among the elite of Assassin Court, quite valuable.

Norberto was not to be underestimated.

But that Gu Hang, even more capable!

Under such an assassination, he still survived and even managed to kill all five top assassins on the spot.

This capability belonged to top-tier psychics.

Moreover, since Gu Hang did not die, with the assassins' bodies laid out here, Xue Yongsheng knew by looking at Ou Juren and Galaraldo's faces, that there would be a storm of strife and bloodshed ahead.

He involuntarily shivered.

He decided in his heart to clearly separate himself from Norberto in the future.

Although their relationship was good, certain tacit agreements existed—like voting with Norberto in the Supreme Council this time. However, they were not deeply tied political allies.

Seeing Norberto in big trouble, Xue Yongsheng decided to distance himself, to avoid any splashback.

After thinking, Xue Yongsheng did not hastily bid farewell but stepped forward to chat with Ou Juren and Galaraldo for a while.

During the conversation, he subtly conveyed a few messages.

Firstly, this matter is unrelated to me; let the one responsible bear the debt, don't pin it on me.

Secondly, I have no grievances against Gu Hang, see, I even attended his commissioning ceremony. If there is a continuation of the ceremony later, I will still attend, and I will help smooth out some discontent within the Star Realm Army regarding Gu Hang's promotion to Marshal.

Chapter 490, I Became an Investor of Assassin Court?_3

Thirdly, I too am outraged by what Norberto has done. If you need any help, just say the word.

This was undoubtedly an offer of goodwill.

Ou Juren and Galaraldo politely responded with a few words.

After Xue Yongsheng left, Ou Juren said to Galaraldo, "I didn't expect the unexpected benefits. Norberto… ha, he really shot himself in the foot this time."

Galaraldo's face didn't show a hint of a smile, as he stressed, "That old bastard must pay the price!"

"I know you're angry, but calm down," Ou Juren said. "Patience. A noose tightens gradually, not all at once."

Galaraldo whipped his head around, "Gu Hang nearly died! And you're telling me to be calm? How can I be calm!"

He seemed to realize that he had lost his composure, but his emotions refused to settle. He added, "He's a crucial part of our plan. According to our idea, he would have fired the first shot, he was supposed to annihilate the Fury Flame Battle Group! If he had died, with my understanding of the Dragonhawk Star Domain situation, that alliance would inevitably collapse, and all of our plans would go awry!"

"We must make Norberto pay a sufficient price. Otherwise, what if next time the target is you or me? Are we confident that we can block an assassination of this magnitude?"

This time, it was Ou Juren who fell silent.

After a moment of quiet, he said, “Alright, I’ll think of something. Clement is also implicated in this matter; he has to give us an explanation.”

…

Jefferson Clement, though not one of the High Lords, still held a status that was lofty and unique as the Great Mentor of the Assassin Court.

He was capable of obtaining a seat. And even without such a seat, the Assassin Court was not an entity to be taken lightly.

And yet, such a person now could only sit in front of Gu Hang, issuing an apology.

Certainly, it wasn’t a matter of groveling, Gu Hang hadn’t reached that extent.

But, at least the manner was sincere.

“Marshal Gu…”

“Not yet.”

Clement smiled and said, “Soon enough. I have to admit to you, the operation went seriously awry due to a significant issue within the Assassin Court. An assassin instructor named Naldo Kero violated the Court’s rules and issued an operation order on his own, leading to this incident.”

“I won’t shirk the responsibilities that the Assassin Court should bear and will offer you appropriate compensation.”

“On behalf of the Assassin Court, I sincerely invite you to become a sponsor of the Court. From now on, you can donate funds to the Assassin Court, the specific amount being up to you.”

“You will also automatically obtain the authority to assign tasks to the Assassin Court. Of course, you still need to abide by the Empire’s laws. The Assassin Court will review whether you have the authorization to assign tasks to a particular target, based on the situation. Given your rank, the Empire Marshal and Star Domain Head—I well know you’re not there yet, but you soon will be—you have actually a pretty broad choice of targets for the Assassin Court’s assignments.”

“Moreover, the Assassin Court has an iron rule: we do not kill sponsors.”

“I wonder if my sincerity meets your satisfaction?”

Gu Hang did not immediately respond.

But in fact, he was quite satisfied.

This ‘sponsor’ identity didn’t require much investment—merely a few million or tens of millions at most, a symbolic rather than substantial significance.

The Assassin Court wasn’t short of money.

It’s the attached powers that mattered most: after ‘investing’, Gu Hang could assign tasks to the Assassin Court.

Plainly put, it meant hiring killers.

Despite the fact that Gu Hang had to observe restrictions related to the assassination targets’ authority level. For instance, if he were to give the Assassin Court a task to kill Norberto right now, it would be impossible. No amount of money would help; the authority level isn’t high enough. However, once he gets the Marshal’s title and establishes himself as the Dragonhawk leader, giving an order to kill the former leader, Tan Jiuyi, would certainly suffice.

And the use of the Assassin Court goes beyond just internal strife.

In the event of a situation like the Iron Teeth War against the Green Skin invasion, he could assign the Assassin Court to assassinate the Green Skin leaders.

The Assassin Court has the capability, and there are success stories.

Of course, the Assassin Court would pay a substantial price for this, and Gu Hang would have to pay as well—this is the concept of a sponsor. Give money, and the Assassin Court helps you kill anyone within your authority.

Despite having to pay and face authority restrictions, the Assassin Court doesn't take just anyone's business; many would covet such access but never have the chance.

This was an unexpected gain.

Although the people Gu Hang wanted to kill couldn't be touched by them now, this rare access might come in handy at any time in the future.

Having personally experienced the 'services' of the Assassin Court once, Gu Hang was quite 'satisfied'.

Furthermore, the iron rule of the 'Assassin Court does not kill sponsors' also caught Gu Hang's attention.

Although, this didn't mean an absolute talisman of protection. After all, the unsaid subtext was: once you're no longer a sponsor, you can be killed.

And it's not like a sponsor status couldn't be revoked.

However, should the sponsor status be canceled, the individual would be notified. If in the future, a higher-level decision mandated the Assassin Court to take action against Gu Hang, the Court couldn't refuse, but they would inform Gu Hang beforehand that his sponsor status had been revoked.

In other words, they would subtly notify him: we have no choice but to act, so be on your guard, and let's see how it plays out.

This was actually quite disadvantageous for the Assassin Court.

The best way to complete an assignment, of course, would be if the target was unaware of the impending assassination; conversely, once prepared, the difficulty of the mission would greatly increase.

But even though Gu Hang was quite satisfied in reality, he did not respond immediately.

There was something else he cared about:

"So, Great Master Clement, may I ask where is this Naldo Kero now?"