Governor 501

Chapter 501, Busier After Peace

At the meeting, many senior officials of the Alliance were still arguing incessantly.

But Gu Hang's mind had already wandered far away.

The war within the Dragonhawk Star Domain, no matter how you put it, was largely over.

There might still be remnants of the Green Skins on various planets; there were also hastily retreating Furyflame and their allies, who were very likely to seek revenge, and in the northern part of the Eastern Cosmos Domain, the Spiderweb Domain, Tie Nu Shi might possibly start a major war…

The shadow of war was still looming.

But no matter what shadows, what remnants of Green Skins, overall, one could say that peace had roughly descended.

Don't expect a regime spanning four hundred worlds not to have any disputes at all, that's unrealistic.

As long as there are no crises affecting multiple worlds at the same time, it could already be called peace.

And after peace had arrived, Gu Hang found that he and the entire Alliance had more concerns and were busier.

In Gu Hang's view, the current situation in the entire Alliance, where only two centers were making money while the vast majority of worlds were operating at a loss, was fundamentally due to the administrative capacity of the Alliance not keeping up with the expansion of its political structure.

Yunluo Star was even more developed than Flying Wing Star and was not designated as a Level 5 development, but Level 4 instead.

Richer, yet it had to pay less tax. This was clearly something that the previous Star Domain Government had cooked up.

With so many years of accumulation and the three star sectors behind it as a major rear, the resources were quite abundant; it should not be much lower compared to the newly developed Seven Horse Territory, which had only been developed for a few years, a decade or so.

In fact, although the output of Yunluo Center was much higher, its fiscal contribution was not high enough.

Similarly, those worlds operating at a loss had many objective conditions for their deficits, but if the administrative capability of the Alliance could keep up, then the costs of establishing and maintaining control should not be so high.

Of course, this was not just a problem of the Alliance itself. Gu Hang had just previously praised the Alliance Government for its good work and was not about to suddenly denounce them and think their work was subpar.

This problem is widespread throughout the entire Human Empire.

The jurisdiction is too vast.

Not to mention the Empire, just the four hundred worlds of the Alliance, trying to establish a unified, centrally controlled government controlled by the Alliance Government is quite difficult, and the maintenance costs are escalating significantly.

What if one day, the control of the Alliance extends to four or five thousand worlds in the entire Eastern Cosmos Domain?

By then, it might not just be a matter of money.

From this perspective, Gu Hang could actually understand why the Empire turned out this way.

Holy Terra might not have figured out up till today how many worlds within the current Empire's territory are under its jurisdiction; this number changes every day, with new incorporations, losses, rebellions, resolutions of rebellions…

And these changes are not just happening at the frontier. Due to the specialty of the Star Realm Tunnel, sometimes, a star system originally situated in the hinterland suddenly becomes a frontline because a new Star Realm Tunnel was discovered.

Not even knowing exactly how many Empire Worlds there are, only knowing that it's roughly a million or so.

The same goes for the military aspect; the Empire might barely know how many Star Realm Armies and the Imperial Navy formations it has, but these are also just nominal formations, and the actual situation is unclear. There are too many departments and institutions with the authority to form new Star Realm Armies and Navies, and it's impossible to keep an accurate count.

Not even these basics can be ascertained, let alone the population and industrial situation of various worlds.

If the basic information isn't even clear, how can governance be possible? Govern my ass!

Under such objective conditions, the Empire's current top-down five-level structure—Holy Terra, Cosmos Domain, Star Domain, Star Sector, Planet, coupled with various regions having strong autonomous political systems, was also an inevitable choice.

Within this structure, the most independent entities are the Planetary Governors; on their own planets, they can almost do whatever they want. The only reason stopping them from doing so is simply that the power of a single planet is not strong enough.

The Star Zone Leader is a pasted-paper craftsman, not worth mentioning;

The Star Domain Head is a heavyweight.

Among the three middle-tier structures, the most significant one is the Star Domain Government. Very independent, it can retain Imperial Tax, control appointments within its various Star Sectors, and can deploy Star Realm Armies and Navies within the Domain.

Each Star Domain Government is like a powerful regional vassal.

And the higher-up Space Domain Government is somewhat like an Alliance Leader.

Generally, a Space Domain Government occupies the most developed Star Domain, which is already the richest and most powerful local vassal, and with added administrative authority, various Star Domain Governments also have to follow orders to some extent, much like an Alliance Leader, but the Space Domain Government finds it hard to directly control every Star Domain, Star Sector.

The whole structure is somewhat like a feudal system, but also quite different from feudalism as the official appointments still come from the Holy Terra Government, and there is no autonomous inheritance of power.

Of course, Gu Hang doesn't like this setup; his Alliance always insists on a high degree of centralization, and as the Central Government, the Alliance Government has a high degree of control over the areas it directly governs.

But now, with reality bearing down, it seems that some compromises must be made.

Chapter 501, Busier After Peace_2

During his contemplation, Gu Hang also vaguely formed some ideas in his mind.

Just then, someone at the meeting called him.

Gu Hang came back to his senses.

Although he had been distracted earlier, he was actually listening to the fervent discussions at the meeting.

At this point, when people called him, it naturally meant that the discussion had reached an impasse and required him, the leader, to make the final decision.

After all, everyone's opinions had been clearly expressed in the previous debates.

So, Gu Hang did not hesitate or struggle any further and directly stated his opinion:

"I roughly understand everyone's thoughts: to increase investment in deficit worlds, build them up as soon as possible, and make them profitable sooner by swapping short-term large losses for rapid development. In the future, these worlds can be self-sufficient, break free from long-term deficits, and even make a profit."

"The other extreme would be to completely abandon these worlds, maintain the Empire's conventional ruling method, appoint Planetary Governors, forcefully demand a 10% Imperial Tax, and not intervene in other resources unless the entire planet reaches a state of destruction. The Alliance will not interfere with local conditions but will leave them to the local governors."

"I also fully understand everyone's thoughts, but I believe that these two directions are not entirely conflicting, and we can implement them simultaneously."

"I agree with Jason Morgan's opinion; we need to analyze the situation one region, one planet at a time, to determine how exactly to proceed."

"We'll discuss the areas separately…"

Gu Hang began an extensive discourse.

During his speech, everyone else remained mostly quiet, listening intently to the opinions of the supreme commander of the Alliance. Only when Gu Hang asked questions did the designated speakers respond.

Gu Hang first defined the development targets for the Seven Horse Territory.

The entire Seven Horse Territory has been identified as a core area of the Alliance.

Not just the Tianma Star Sector, but the remaining six sectors also need emphasis on development.

These seven Star Sectors total 88 worlds with a population of 187 billion; it is currently a profit-making area. Although the main profit comes from the Alliance's foundational Tianma Star Sector, its development will eventually reach its limit.

Of course, this limit is not static; once a certain development level is reached, the pace of development will inevitably decrease. Also, because advanced industries occupy a lot of manpower and production ratios, the population that the planetary environments can sustain will reach a limit—Gu Hang does not want to build a world like Holy Terra; it's too terrifying.

Once this soft limit is reached, the Star Sector will continue to develop, especially in advanced, high-tech industries. But some outdated capacities will definitely be phased out.

The Seven Horse Territory is the best place to take these on.

Moreover, during the previous wars, these 88 worlds were already under the control of the Alliance, and the Seven Horse framework and the economic community framework have been fully implemented in these worlds. Now, the timing has matured to entirely transform into the Alliance system.

These 88 worlds are also where the Alliance plans to invest heavily.

Upon inquiry by Gu Hang, the Alliance Premier, Ms. Oseina Qin Ke, after consulting with her staff and several senior officials of the Alliance for a few minutes, gave Gu Hang a definite answer: The industrial and economic development of the Seven Horse Territory can maintain an annual growth rate of 10% for the next five years.

After five years, the total output value of the Seven Horse Territory should increase to over 300 billion.

…

The second area discussed is the Yunluo Center.

This will be a key area to establish the rule of the Alliance.

These forty-plus worlds are populous and economically developed; running at a loss is unlikely. However, Gu Hang is not satisfied with merely making a profit in these places.

What Gu Hang wants is for these 54 worlds, housing 2500 billion people with a 6300 billion output value, to fully integrate into the Alliance system, just like the Seven Horse Territory.

Only then, in the future, will it be convenient for Gu Hang to bring various high-grade technologies and industries there for production. This will further boost the output value of these places; and besides, the Alliance believes that these worlds have such high output values and the Imperial Tax isn't even that much. Why is it that the financial contribution they provide each year is only so little?

Changing to the Alliance system, Gu Hang hopes to achieve the following: no large-scale turmoil occurs, the living standards of the vast majority of Empire citizens do not generally drop, and the industrial economy should at least not decline. On these bases, the control of the Alliance over these areas should significantly increase, with a clear rise in fiscal contributions,

Regarding this, Oseina appears troubled.

Many of these points are contradictory.

Alliance integration and the absence of unrest are contradictory. Alliance integration will inevitably lead to losses for the intervening consuming class, although according to Alliance policy, these business owners, former local officials, as long as they cooperate with the Alliance integration, can receive a relatively high grade. But the high grades of the Alliance, for common people, truly elevate life to the skies, but compared to the past where they had great power and control over all industries, it's not the same concept.

Without removing these consuming classes, how can there be a significant increase in fiscal income, without increasing output value and without lowering the living standards of the populace?

The knife must fall on these people.

Chapter 501, Busier After Peace_3 People will resist, and unrest may arise; even if they don't openly resist, simply adopting non-violent non-cooperation tactics, due to the lack of cooperation from local governing officials, the Alliance's work will suddenly become difficult.

This is much more aggressive than the personnel replacement approach previously used by the Alliance.

But it seems that Mr. Gu has made up his mind.

Gu Hang also provided his reasons: "No matter how the future unfolds, the Seven Horse Territory and Yunluo Center are core regions that we must rely on. In the foreseeable future, our neighbors to the north will take significant action. Whether we like it or not, we will have to face it. While there is still time, we must resolve issues in our rear security. I don't wish to be under great pressure on the front lines and have the rear fall apart."

Osenia expressed her understanding.

And this time, she spent a longer period of time discussing with the Alliance Government team.

In the end, their response to Gu Hang, or rather the 'kpi' set for themselves, was that within the next five years, in Yun Luo Four Districts, all other economic and livelihood indicators are to remain the same, and fiscal revenue contribution is to increase by 30%, ideally without causing unrest.

Gu Hang believes that Yunluo Center has even more potential, but he reluctantly expressed satisfaction with this figure.

Then, it was onto those deficit Star Sectors.

Different regions have different conditions.

In the Eastern Star Domain, formerly under the control of the Alliance, there are 8 Star Sectors, including Golden Pass, Copper Barrier, etc., with 94 worlds, but the population is only around 88 billion. These Star Sectors share a common trait: before the outbreak of the Iron Tooth Orc's Green Tide, they were

worlds surrounding the fallen areas and were part of the ‘Iron Tooth Defense Line,’ enduring wars for many years;

During the Green Tide, they either fell entirely or partially.

After the Green Tide, during the standoff between the Alliance and Furyflame, they were under the control of the Alliance.

The industrial foundations and social order of these worlds were almost all disrupted to varying degrees by the Beastman war, with massive population losses and government dysfunction.

Through the ‘Economic Community Act’ in the early days and later by directly dispatching Alliance officials to manage, the Alliance has basically firmly grasped these worlds in its hands.

In these worlds, there are no rebel forces. On the contrary, they are very grateful to the Alliance, which rescued them from warfare, and the entire social atmosphere is pro-Alliance, thanks to the efforts of the Alliance Propaganda Department.

There is not much governance cost here; the main reason for the deficit is due to the war: too many people died, and various productions were destroyed; they’re now especially poor.

The problems with these worlds are relatively easy to resolve. Invest money, and it will have an effect.

And Gu Hang’s intention is that these worlds can afford financial investment.

In these 94 worlds, the Alliance estimates that an investment of about 20 to 30 billion per year will yield good results.

In fact, after the arrival of peace, these 94 worlds have already experienced a baby boom, and it is foreseeable that the population will rapidly recover.

Osenia is most confident about the work plans for this region; she even dares to guarantee that in five years, the total output value of these eight Star Sectors could rise from 67 billion to surpass the 100 billion mark. The population could also increase from 88 billion to 95 billion.

The remaining areas are the ones that truly need to be tackled.

Chapter 502, Financial Distribution The previous problems were not particularly difficult.

Seven Horse Territory is the basic foundation.

The eight eastern Star Sectors can be considered as the foundation in poverty. With increased investment and development, prosperity will follow. Moreover, building something from scratch to self-sufficiency is relatively easy and quick with external help, and the Alliance has experience in this.

Yunluo Center has a complex political situation, and it's easy for chaos to arise, but at least its economic foundation is solid, people won't starve, and with military forces backing, even major chaos can't turn things upside down.

But the next two areas are really tough nuts to crack.

First are Jiang Meiyu, Iron Pass, Kuoluo, and Silver Pass, these four Star Sectors.

These areas have been under the control of the Beastman Empire for decades, almost devoid of human presence. Although, on these planets where the Beastmen are most densely populated, they were directly hit by the Alliance's Extinction Order, and the remaining worlds still suffer constant orbital bombings.

A significant part of the Alliance Land Forces has already entered the surface, conducting rotational combat—training troops while also wiping out the Green Skins' living forces.

Eventually, the day will come when the Green Skins in these four sectors will be completely eradicated; for now, the Alliance has already arranged for immigrants to enter these four Star Sectors.

These immigrants aren't there to develop the planets; rather, they serve as a permanent force, establishing fortresses on the planets and also setting up munition factories and food factories to supply the local Alliance troops directly, reducing logistical pressure.

But regardless, across the 42 worlds in these four sectors, it's estimated that there are still about three to four hundred billion Green Skins active on the ground.

Due to the bombings and extermination operations, these Green Skins hid in mountains and dug tunnels, essentially doing everything possible to survive.

Even with continuous bombings and continuous dispatches of ground troops for extermination, according to estimates given by the Military Affairs Department and the Alliance General Staff Department, it will still take about three to five years to mostly complete the cleanup.

It can't be said completely, actually, any world that has suffered a large-scale invasion of Green Skins, it can't be declared completely free of Green Skins for a long time. Persistent prevention is absolutely necessary. The moment laxity occurs, Green Skins might just crop up from some unknown corner, giving a huge 'surprise'.

But at least, once the eco-system and the vast majority of adult Green Skins are wiped out, these planets regain their value for reuse.

However, the rebuilding process is considerably long, and essentially starting from scratch, population needs to be relocated from the exterior.

The Alliance shouldn't expect any profit from these forty-some worlds for several foreseeable decades, likely the figure will remain rather dismal.

The substantial cost invested now is actually aimed at eradicating the Green Skin threat. Otherwise, leaving six hundred billion Green Skins on more than forty worlds to breed uncontrollably might bring about another large-scale Green Skins surge like the Iron Tooth Ork Empire in a few decades.

These forty-some worlds are entirely loss-making, with no visible solution in sight, so we can only hope for a quick cleanup.

Additionally, in the western part of the Star Domain, apart from the four Star Sectors of Yunluo Center, another 11 Star Sectors are in a state of total loss.

These sectors are real trouble.

No governance foundation, and almost no contact with the Alliance in the past;

Suffered from war to different extents, originally underdeveloped and now deteriorated even further;

Political forces that previously cooperated with Furyflame are widely present;

These challenges need to be tackled one by one.

The Alliance will appoint successive Star Zone Leaders.

But these Star Zone Leaders won't be the traditional 'pasted-paper craftsmen' in the imperial sense; the Alliance will grant them significant authority.

They will control various resources the Alliance invests into this sector, and with the support of military forces, need to undertake the classification of the planets within their jurisdictions.

For those with salvageable value, actively aligning with the Alliance, and having low governance costs, establish Alliance-controlled direct governments, develop whatever necessary, and ensure the basic livelihood of the people according to the Alliance's standards. Limited economic aid received within the sector should be invested into these worlds to develop them as quickly as possible and get out of the loss condition.

Chapter 502, Financial Allocation_2 Just pay the damn taxes.

Anyway, the Alliance now controls the Star Domain Government, which can retain 30% of the Imperial Tax. Under such circumstances, the Alliance hasn't invested a penny in the planet, so taking 30% of the tax revenue is nothing unacceptable.

If things are done too poorly, leading to the inhabitants of the planet being unable to survive, then the Alliance would have an excuse to intervene, following the Imperial rules to forcibly evacuate and start anew, without getting entangled in local interest groups. By confiscating all private property on the planet and establishing an Alliance-style government while maintaining military control.

If things go well… wouldn't everyone be happy? The tax rate could be raised, and once things reach a certain level, the Alliance could certainly think of other ways to pluck the ripe fruit.

However, this kind of situation is probably one in a hundred planets.

With this arrangement, the Alliance's fiscal income and expenditure have reached a balance.

An annual fiscal surplus of around 150 billion, plus 390 billion that can be used from the total Imperial Tax of 1,300 billion.

That's a total income of 1890 billion.

Maintaining and building the military roughly requires an investment of about 1,000 billion, constituting 52.9% of the budget, which could be described as exorbitant militarism, but there's no helping it – that's the way of this universe. Actually, the Alliance's proportion might even be considered modest.

The Navy wants new ships, even new fleets; the Land Forces aim to expand to two billion regular soldiers. Since the Alliance now governs many planets directly, the construction of these planets' Defense Army also falls under the Alliance's responsibility, which is another significant expenditure…

Everyone is crying poor.

Although 1,000 billion is a lot, it still feels like scraping by.

Around 400 billion for maintaining governance, including staff expenses, government spending, and public services;

Around 490 billion as government-led economic production reinvestment, including infrastructure construction and industrial production investment…

And the good news is that some of the Land Forces can be converted to the Star Realm Army. The military expenses for this part can be claimed from the Empire.

This was a condition he negotiated when he returned from Holy Terra.

But it can't be too excessive.

He was supposed to pay 910 billion in taxes to the Empire each year; exceeding this number is definitely not okay, the Empire won't provide additional funds; even pushing the limit of this number is not acceptable, it would seem too greedy.

Gu Hang plans to start with 25 Army Groups in the first year, which is 300 billion Tax Currency. Then he would also incorporate the entire existing Dragonhawk Legion into the Rage Bear Legion.

Thus, the new Rage Bear Legion would have a force of about one billion, equivalent to 50 Army Groups. The annual maintenance fee could be further reduced by about 100 billion.

He won't bother with the Navy; Gu Hang isn't keen on placing the warships he painstakingly amassed into the Imperial Navy's roster.

The Tianma Fleet and Yunluo Fleet are already in the Navy's sequence, and there is no other way but to rely on his wife, the Admiral, to centralize power; however, the current Alliance Fleet has already surpassed them. A single Retribution-class Battleship is already something the Tianma and Yunluo Fleets cannot match, not to mention that the Alliance is about to continuously complete the construction of Battle Cruiser.

Gu Hang has even started the construction of two new Battle Cruisers at the same time. One shipyard is on Rage Owl Star, and the other, on Yunluo Star.

The one on Rage Owl Star is managed with technology Black Boxes, which the Alliance has experience with. But the Black Box can only support the construction of one shipyard at a time, after all, those important production parts can only be made one by one.

The one on Yunluo Star will have to rely on the technical blueprints, implemented by the shipbuilding engineers on Yunluo Star.

This is exactly why Gu Hang has to ensure that Yunluo Star, including the entire core area centered around Yunluo, is well settled.

Only with Yunluo's level of development can it support the construction of production lines for advanced technical products solely based on technical blueprints, independent of the Black Box.

Once the shipyards for these two Battle Cruisers are completed, it will not only greatly promote economic development, but also, a construction speed of three Battle Cruisers every five years is quite satisfactory. Many Foundry Worlds don't have this production capacity. Give Gu Hang a bit more time, and even without proper Battleships, he can amass a powerful, luxurious Fleet!

Moreover, who says the Alliance can't produce Battleships?

Gu Hang currently has quite a few Grace Points at his disposal!

…

After wrapping up this lengthy, boring, but necessary meeting and establishing the development path for different blocks and directions within the Dragonhawk Star Domain, Gu Hang went to 'rest.'

The Star Domain Government buildings on Yunluo Star are quite elegantly constructed, with an Eastern charm reminiscent of Gu Hang's impressions.

Aromatherapy turns into a gentle waft of smoke that not only pleases the nose but also possesses unique effects. These are produced by a special plant from a neighboring planet and come in many different varieties. During meetings or work periods, energizing and mind-clearing types can be utilized.

And in places like the entertainment lounge, rest lounge, and bathhouse, the air is filled with aromatherapy that relaxes the mind.

After the meeting ended, Gu Hang soaked in a hot spring. The scent of aromatherapy, mixed with the fragrance of flowers in the hot spring, created a very comfortable atmosphere.

Even Gu Hang felt this was a form of enjoyment.

However, though he was soaking in the bath, he wasn't completely relaxing.

On the contrary, with his eyes tightly closed, Gu Hang was actually dealing with very important matters in the depths of his mind:

Spending his Grace Points.

In the last two years, he had accumulated a considerable amount of Grace Points.

Currently, his monthly income of Grace Points had reached 170,000/month.

This was more than 2.5 times what it was before Gu Hang set off for Holy Terra.

The main reason for such a significant increase was, of course, the expansion of the Alliance's control, which almost encompassed the entire Dragonhawk Star Domain.

Of course, due to some issues with governance intensity, there might be some numeric erosion. Moreover, the increase in monthly Grace Points due to expansion in the scope was not linear; double the size did not equate to double the growth. Instead, it was more like climbing up slowly, milestone by milestone, as if on an exponential curve.

But overall, by expanding the scope, through the improvement of the Alliance's productivity and despite the slow pace of public living standard improvement, it was truly on the rise.

These factors still had the ability to affect the monthly income of Grace Points.

Of course, the income level of 170,000/month had only increased recently; it wasn't this high before.

Even so, Gu Hang had now accumulated more than 2.2 million Grace Points.

However, in these two years, in clearing out the Green Skins, especially in those four overrun Star Sectors, sweeping them in about two years contributed about nine million additional Grace Points to Gu Hang.

At this rate, with five to six hundred billion Green Skins left in those four Star Sectors, completely eradicating them could potentially earn Gu Hang another seventeen to eighteen million Grace Points.

By adding a bit more to the monthly income, Gu Hang could accumulate about ten million Grace Points' worth of income every two years.

This was equivalent to ten consecutive draws of million-grade technology!

At present, Gu Hang just went ahead and made the draw.

This ten-draw yielded steady profits.

One Apocalypse-level Technology, plus three Epic Technologies.

The other six are not worth mentioning.

The three Epic Technologies drawn were: ['Valkyrie' Mecha], ['Eden' Ecological Technology], ['Command-class' Aircraft Carrier].

The Command-class, alongside the Moon-class currently held by the Alliance, both belong to the cruiser grade; however, their design styles are entirely different.

The Moon-class is a typical all-rounder, a standard omnipotent battleship, lacking any standout features, but easily constructed, which offsets all its shortcomings.

Moreover, being a jack-of-all-trades is not necessarily a bad thing. With no strengths, it also has no significant weaknesses. It could hold its own against any kind of opponent.

The Command-class is entirely different.

Its firepower is less than the Moon-class, even less than some destroyers; its speed is also slower; it has thicker armor, but not by much compared to the Moon-class.

Its greatest advantage lies in the massive number of weapon fittings that have been converted into flight decks.

This is a youth-version of a cruiser-grade aircraft carrier.

Chapter 503, Zhuge-class Star Mothership In the midst of space warfare, the most critical capability of an aircraft carrier is to safely deploy various types of space fighters, from the small Wind Falcon to the large Dragon Elephant, via the launch deck to the vicinity of enemy warships. This allows the fighters to fully utilize their potential and strike against enemy ships.

Otherwise, the exchange of fire in space can easily extend out to tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands of kilometers, which would require the fighters to fly for an inordinately long time on their own.

If refined further, a towing system would be equipped that could pull back the fighters from a considerable distance that has been locked in by the towing force before the battle.

However, this is considered a luxury.

After all, according to the style of the Empire, sometimes treating the fighters launched for missions as disposable, no different from how other warships view their fired shells, is not surprising.

It's just that these shells are packed with iron and flesh.

Of course, Gu Hang does not plan to operate this way. He insists on meticulously installing the towing retrieval function, and whenever possible during combat, recovering the fighters is prioritized; treating them as expendable like shells is too costly.

Not only in terms of equipment costs, a skilled pilot is also a valuable asset.

With a few hundred space fighters aboard a 'Command-class' and the ability to deploy these fighters effectively, the impact would be substantial.

This complements the naval system of the Alliance well.

Having an additional cruiser-grade ship is advantageous. Even though the Alliance does not focus on developing an aircraft carrier system as its main force, possessing this set of Black Box technologies is akin to picking up a shipyard for free, thus allowing the construction of a cruiser-grade ship every few years.

Moreover, with the coordination of Moon Class defenses, a 'Command-class' ship equipped with several hundred space fighters could potentially yield a unique strategic value.

…

[Eden Ecological Garden], in Gu Hang's view, is a high-grade ecological agricultural base.

With this technology, the construction of such ecological gardens can yield significantly high agricultural output, and their internal environments are comfortable and suitable for residence, allowing for the building of mansions and villas.

Constructing an Eden equates to creating high-end residences, ecological tourism, and high-quality agricultural output.

From this perspective, it seems wonderful!

It's ecological, enhances the environment, and produces high yields.

If combined with Planetary Climate Modification Technology, wouldn't it be possible to mass-produce Garden Worlds?

However, after a detailed understanding, Gu Hang realized that things are not that simple.

Theoretically, it is indeed feasible.

But no one can ignore the cost issue.

Not to mention how much money the planetary climate modification would cost, even constructing one Eden on a planet with relatively good basic conditions entails a high construction cost.

High construction costs alone are concerning, but more importantly, the maintenance cost after construction is also hefty.

This reflects in two aspects: manpower and energy.

It requires a large workforce to perform basic labor tasks; numerous biologists are needed to maintain ecological conditions.

In terms of energy, it consumes vast amounts of Energy Crystal Blocks to sustain the ecological state of Eden.

Purely from an agricultural output perspective, although the yield is significant, it is actually not cost-effective when compared to the investment.

There are two profitable aspects: superior residential experience and high-quality agricultural product export.

If viewed from the perspective of addressing food and basic food supply, building Eden is clearly not cost-effective. However, if aimed at providing high-quality enjoyment, then Eden is unparalleled.

Is it valuable?

Of course!

The Alliance still needs such a facility.

Gu Hang has always been concerned about the corruption amongst bureaucrats wielding power.

This concern has become increasingly severe as the Alliance progresses.

Gu Hang is always aware: relying solely on ideals cannot sustain a political regime in the long term. Tangible benefits are fundamental to every Union Citizen. Human desires are infinite.

In poverty, having enough food and clothing is already great; once the issue of food and clothing is resolved, people naturally demand better and higher living standards, especially the new generation growing up in a satiated environment. In many well-developed areas within the Alliance, these young people no longer know the taste of hunger, nor will they remain forever grateful to the Alliance for solving food and clothing issues.

It is only natural for the people to demand a higher standard of living.

Even if wars are always present, the Alliance still strives to improve the living standards of its people under limited conditions as much as possible.

This directly reflects in the gross industrial output, where the figure related to consumer spending, regardless of the world, is steadily rising.

In the process of rapid economic growth, this issue has been well concealed. The rise in gross output, even though Imperial Tax and the Alliance's fiscal revenue have increased, still leaves some developmental dividends for the public to enjoy.

A more tangible manifestation is that the average grade level of Union Citizens in most worlds experiencing peaceful development is consistently rising.

With clear promotional pathways and improving living conditions, this is the core reason the Alliance gains widespread support.

The longer a world is under Alliance control, the rule of the Alliance will become more stable as living conditions continue to improve.

Chapter 503, Zhuge-class Star Mothership_2 To maintain the current state, the Alliance must ensure two things: first, economic development must continue without regression; second, the benefits of development that should be enjoyed by Union Citizens cannot be too little.

These two points impose stringent demands on the Alliance's vast bureaucratic system.

The first demands the capability of the bureaucrats; the second demands their integrity.

Currently, the issue of economic development appears very promising. Through the education system, which the Alliance values highly, and Gu Hang's use of Grace Points to enlighten and cultivate key personnel, it is ensured that the capabilities of Alliance officials are generally on par, at least far exceeding the average level across the Empire.

However, Gu Hang always has doubts regarding integrity.

The Alliance has many institutions in place to ensure this, but Gu Hang remains suspicious.

He cannot deny that, after the establishment of the Alliance, a massive bureaucratic class has indeed formed.

Even more, this bureaucratic class plus the class of military merit now constitutes the ruling class of the Alliance.

Governments, state-owned capital, and civil service units, all members within these systems are viewed as a unified class, broadly defined as the bureaucratic group, holding the greatest power and interests in the Alliance.

Though they factually control the vast majority of the Alliance's assets, under the Alliance's system, these assets are publicly owned, constituting national capital. This system prevents them from truly possessing this wealth.

While the bureaucratic class certainly possesses a much higher status than the general populace and enjoys enriched material conditions, like the ever-growing demands of the populace, these bureaucrats have their own.

Would they pursue more benefits? The positions they hold already fail to satisfy their appetites, would they start to tamper with state-owned capital? The bother of climbing ranks for a minuscule increase in earnings pales in comparison to engaging in more embezzlement and corruption.

Strong anti-corruption agencies vigorously crack down, reinforced ideological education prevents issues from the outset, and the establishment of a public oversight system… Of course, all these conventional preventive measures must exist.

Besides crackdown and prevention, some sweeteners are also necessary.

'Eden' seems like a fairly good method.

Establish high-end communities, allow outstanding, loyal, and honest persons to have better living conditions;

Even those who can't quite live there, those working at grassroots level, they also have the right to vacation, seeing this can also give them something to strive for;

Eden's superior, high-quality goods, from delicately crafted food to luxury leather goods and artisanal wines, can serve as shopping benefits for high-ranking officials. This allows them to spend their allowances in a way that genuinely improves their quality of life.

And then some high-end products can be branded and placed on Alliance-wide store shelves, allowing the ordinary populace to occasionally purchase them to somewhat improve their living conditions.

To expect these to bring in heavy profits is unrealistic. However, it can maintain stability and improve the satisfaction of residents, especially the ruling class.

Since Gu Hang can see, and also admits, that a massive bureaucratic class exists within the Alliance and has indeed become the ruling class, Gu Hang indeed needs this class to manifest his will. If this class revolts, at the least development would stall and societal corruption ensue, at worst, local rebellions might even lead to the disintegration of the Alliance.

That seemingly unbreakable Alliance which Gu Hang remembers ultimately moved towards disintegration; factors related to this likely played a significant role.

Thus, Gu Hang, in terms of internal governance, cannot solely rely on oppression, and must genuinely consider the interests of this ruling class.

Eden is a new experiment.

Gu Hang will build these high-energy-consuming ecosystems on many planets. He defines the value of 'Eden' as fulfilling the pursuit of a higher quality of life by Union Citizens, especially high-ranking citizens (the ruling class).

…

Valkyrie Mech is another matter altogether.

This device, essentially, is a type of power armor similar to a Terminator, akin to how the Servant God and Commander types of Feedback-Type Power Armor differ from real Interstellar Warrior Powered Armor; Valkyrie also is a Terminator that isn't necessarily exclusive to Interstellar Warriors.

But, the distinction lies in some… structures on the Valkyrie that Gu Hang cannot quite understand.

Those elaborate patterns need to be crafted from gold.

But why? Merely for decoration?

If it's just for decoration, why is it then marked as essential in the construction process?

Placing the Energy Crystal Block as the power source in the back, along with the prayer process.

From these perspectives, Gu Hang immediately associated it with Spiritual Energy.

Moreover, it was not just normal Spiritual Energy, but a kind specifically related to a religious attribute.

Just like Galaraldo back in the day, who after being 'trapped' in Subspace by him, managed to survive for a prolonged period without perishing. He wasn't even a high-grade psychic, nor did he possess the power of Spiritual Energy. He was merely an Apostle of War, a messenger of the Sun Lord. After the Sun Lord's death, Galaraldo's power rapidly declined, and he would have been done for had Gu Hang not rescued him.

Where did the power of the Sun Lord originate?

Undoubtedly, it came from the Emperor.

With the Emperor's favor, the priests, nuns of the Sisterhood, and figures like the Sun Lord, who were dubbed as 'Divine Chosen', could obtain powers akin to Spiritual Energy solely through blessings—regardless of how these blessings came about, once they had them, they could harness them.

And the ‘Valkyrie Armor’ had a bit of that implication.

He recalled that within the normal Imperial System, the ‘Valkyrie Mech’ was seemingly only used by the Sisterhood.

Logically speaking, the Battle Nuns are also mortals.

Initially, Gu Hang thought it was because the Sisterhood was wealthy, and the regular Star Realm Army couldn’t afford such high-end equipment. However, he later discovered that was not the case.

They could use it, but the regular soldiers probably could not.

Valkyrie Armor required some theological power to operate.

Gu Hang felt a bit helpless but also somewhat fortunate.

Helpless because the technology had a limited scope of use; fortunate because, after all, he had an organization under him that could utilize it.

Sainte-Lys Nun Association.

Strictly speaking, they are not technically members of the Alliance.

But… at this juncture, the Sisterhood being situated in the core territories of the Alliance, their economic, political, and self-development all relied on the Alliance, which had become an objective reality. In practice, they were no longer involved in anti-heretic activities like they were decades ago when they had to collaborate with Korolya.

Currently, the work of the Sainte-Lys mainly involves serving as enforcers for the Alliance’s spy agencies and judicial institutions, and they often liaised with the Alliance’s legal center. When there were

problems or a lack of high-end military force, Demon Hunters would often call upon a few nuns to cooperate and handle the situation.

Also, there was the war.

During the Iron Teeth War, the Sainte-Lys Nun Association consecutively deployed over a thousand Battle Nuns to cooperate with the Alliance Army and many were sacrificed.

Their relationship with the Alliance had grown significantly close, especially during the recent confrontation with the Silver Tribunal, where Sainte-Lys provided substantial military support and many of Silver Tribunal's covert agents were eliminated by the nuns.

This clearly indicated their stance. Having tested them through this ordeal, Gu Hang indeed felt they could be considered as one of their own.

Valkyrie Armor was best utilized by these Battle Nuns; naturally, it was equipped for them as compensation for their dedicated service to the Alliance.

…

As for the last and most crucial technology that Gu Hang cared about, it was the Apocalypse-level Technology.

[Zhuge-class, Heavy Space Aircraft Carrier]

This is a Battleship-class vessel, exceedingly rare within the Imperial Navy.

Partly because the construction cost is high, approximately double that of a Retribution-class Battleship; additionally, within the internal circles of the Imperial Navy, there is a disliking for using Aircraft Carriers.

Or rather, the Carrier Faction is not the mainstream within the Imperial Navy.

Big ships and heavy guns remain the mainstream, followed by the Battlecruiser Faction; the Carrier Faction has the least influence.

Chapter 504, How strong will the Alliance Fleet be after 4 years? The Empire doesn't favor aircraft carriers, but Gu Hang has no prejudice against them.

Or rather, he isn't in a position to be prejudiced right now.

After all, the Zhuge-class is a warship of battleship caliber.

What's wrong with aircraft carrier types? What's wrong with being expensive? What's wrong with not conforming to the mainstream?

The class speaks for itself!

If Gu Hang wants to build a ship of this caliber, it's unlikely to happen until he amasses another million-grade ten-consecutive draw.

Moreover, just because it doesn't conform to the main style of the Imperial Navy doesn't mean it's weak.

Similar to the previous Retribution-class, the core components of the Zhuge-class also include catapult decks, used for 'launching' fighters directly in the enemy's face.

However, unlike the lighter Retribution-Class aircraft carriers, the heavy-duty star space Zhuge-class carriers can launch more than just three types of fighters of different sizes.

It can catapult patrol ships right into the enemy's face.

How do small ships defeat larger ships and achieve miraculous victories?

Standing off at a distance and exchanging fire would be like sending waves of sheep to the slaughter, not even able to break through defenses, and with one enemy shot, you'd be completely shattered, both ship and shield.

But if you get up close and personal, that's a different story. Slow-firing heavy torpedoes are lethal, and the closer the range, the harder they are to intercept.

And if push comes to shove, a patrol ship could just ram into it, which is much harder to deal with than getting bombarded with any shell.

Even push it to the limit, build it excessively, and the Zhuge-class can even launch a destroyer!

Gu Hang actually did the math according to the technical specs, and the largest catapult deck can indeed launch the most commonly used Frenzy Shark-class destroyer of the Alliance Fleet.

The Frenzy Shark is about five to six kilometers long, while the Zhuge-class is even larger than the twenty-one-kilometer Retribution-class, reaching twenty-six kilometers in length. Its hangar and catapult deck retrofitted, it could potentially swallow a Frenzy Shark.

If a Frenzy Shark is actually sent to the enemy's face, it might be more than just a big scare for a legitimate battleship; there's a high probability of sending the Frenzy Shark away.

The cost, however, is considerable. It's bad enough that destroyers are expensive, but the Zhuge-class, when retrofitted to launch destroyers, is an extreme case. To adapt to this, there wouldn't be room left to house any other combat forces. After launching a destroyer, the remaining space utilization would be too small. Turning combat into a one-hit affair with no staying power is not ideal.

Conversely, what a Frenzy Shark can do, a few more patrol ships could achieve as well.

However, to pair with the carrier's ship-launching capabilities, the warships that are launched need some special design considerations.

Firstly, there has to be a focus on agility and speed; after being launched, they're not immediately going into the enemy's energy shield or void shield. Patrol ships, with their small and agile nature, need to find a better position for offense, or even penetrate into the enemy's large ships' shields.

Secondly, firepower must be explosive. It can completely sacrifice the sustainability of firepower and ammunition capacity, as these are pointless; survival time is extremely short, so it's better to carry something substantial that can deal a severe blow in one go to a larger ship.

Defense can also be forgotten, just give a nominal thought to energy shields and hull armor, and don't get easily destroyed by enemy interception fire. Otherwise, no matter how well it's done, it's still just a small patrol ship, and being sent into the midst of the enemy fleet, no thickness of shield or armor makes a significant difference.

As long as the patrol ship manages to fire off all the firepower it carries, it's fine by me if it gets destroyed.

Under such a strategic concept, the Alliance will soon standardize a new patrol ship model named the 'Swordfish-class.'

Simply put, it's a suicide ship—thin-skinned, fast, and agile, but not durable, lacking even long-distance navigation and Star Realm Tunnel traversing capabilities. Its sole advantage lies in being able to unload all its onboard firepower in a matter of minutes. This firepower includes 8 Sky Cleave Axe Missiles, 4 Scorching East Winds, and two torpedo missiles modified from the Scorching East Wind.

These torpedo missiles have weak armor penetration, but if released at close-range, their hit rate is guaranteed, adept at piercing shields and armor. Most crucially, the explosive power is nearly five times that of a regular L-grade Scorching East Wind missile.

This means, if not intercepted, a single hit could destroy a cruiser; and, if hitting a large battleship, would also inflict severe damage.

From this perspective, a Zhuge-class that can continuously launch 8 patrol ships and thousands of fighters is indeed formidable.

If it came down to a one-on-one confrontation, Gu Hang doesn't believe that the current flagship of the Alliance, the 'Firebath Nova,' could withstand an attack from the Zhuge-class—it would almost certainly be devastating.

Unless both sides have a massive escort fleet, then maybe the outcome could still be uncertain.

However, the construction cost of the Zhuge-class is even more expensive than the Retribution-class; if the cost of those thousands of fighters and eight kamikaze ships are accounted for, the price would nearly reach 80 billion per aircraft carrier.

The construction time is eight years.

Even with the first one benefiting from the Black Box, it would still take four years to complete the first Zhuge-class carrier.

However, considered this way, the Alliance Navy's strength will see a huge, leapfrogging enhancement after four years.

If all shipbuilding plans proceed smoothly, by then, the Alliance will have five top-of-the-line capital ships. Among the battleship class, there will be the 'Firebath Nova' battleship and the yet-to-be-named first Zhuge-class carrier. Additionally, there will be three battleship cruisers, two of which will be the Alliance's newly built Holy Grail Class; and one is the current flagship of the Yunluo Fleet. Although officially part of the Imperial Navy, in practice the Alliance is unlikely to give up the Yunluo Fleet that it has already absorbed.

It's a 'Long Dragon-class' Battleship Cruiser, whose overall performance isn't too different from the Holy Grail Class, a bit slower but with thicker armor.

Besides these five capital ships of the battleship, aircraft carrier, and battlecruiser categories, the Alliance will also have around thirty Lunar-class cruisers by then, taking into account the Tianma Fleet, Yunluo Fleet, Alliance Fleet and newly produced ships.

Not to mention the various destroyers and escort ships.

Such a fleet would, honestly, be very formidable.

Gu Hang wonders, four years from now, can the main fleet of the Eastern Cosmos Domain muster a fleet that can stand against mine?

Tie Nu Shi, can you come up with five battleship class vessels?

Err… Probably, but at least the Alliance Navy will then have the capability to engage in a decisive battle with the opponent.

Content with this thought, Gu Hang now only wants to focus on developing quietly.

He wants to fully assimilate the Dragonhawk Star Domain, save money, and exchange time for an improvement in naval quality, which coupled with an increasingly strong land force, and complemented by the Phoenix Battle Group, Sainte-Lys Nun Association, Glory Guards, and Storm Mage Corps… the Alliance will also have a series of high-quality troops at its disposal.

Additionally, with an integrated Dragonhawk Star Domain enriched and strengthened by various blessings from Gu Hang's Grace Points, he will become the powerhouse of this entire region.

However, the peaceful development time Gu Hang desperately sought did not come.

Merely three months after his return to the Dragonhawk Star Domain, the 'Princess's Grand Rebellion' officially broke out.

Chapter 505, The Princess's Great Rebellion The "Princess Major Rebellion" actually broke out a bit later than Gu Hang had estimated.

Previously, he even thought that by the time Tie Nu Shi made its move, he might not have returned to the Dragonhawk Star Domain yet.

In this regard, he believed that the Alliance had made great contributions.

If not for that bloody duel that had broken the backbone of the Fury Flame Battle Group and rendered the ‘Fury’ in Tie Nu Shi temporarily unusable, the Princess Major Rebellion might have been launched even earlier.

Although he really did not want to go to war, this matter was not up to him.

By thrashing the Fury Flame Battle Group and stalling Tie Nu Shi for several months, it was actually quite an accomplishment.

Logically thinking, the current choice of ‘Tie Nu Shi’ was within expectations.

Everyone knew they were going to rebel, and they knew that everyone else knew as well.

The atmosphere had been elevated to such a degree that they had no choice but to rebel.

However, no one expected the situation to be so explosive.

The great rebellion stirred up by Tie Nu Shi was as fierce as fire!

In the 230th year of the 10th millennium since the establishment of the Empire, in February, the Princess Major Rebellion broke out.

Tie Nu Shi issued a public declaration, making it clear that they were the protectors of the entire Princess Star Domain, even the guardians of the entire Spiderweb Domain. All 14 star domains from the Princess Star Domain to the Spiderweb Domain should listen to the Iron Armor Battle Group’s orders and coordinate with the Iron Armor Battle Group’s actions.

“This is for the benefit of the Empire.”

That’s what they said.

The government of the Sacred Terra Empire immediately declared the Iron Armor Battle Group, Fury Flame Battle Group, and Bedrock Shield Warband traitors to the Empire.

The Spiderweb Domain Government immediately followed suit and called for the Empire forces within the space domain to stand guard over their territories; the assembled Star Realm Army and the Imperial Navy began to launch probing offensives towards the Princess Star Domain.

From this perspective, the Empire was clearly prepared.

In fact, the entire political faction led by Minister of Justice Ou Juren had been preparing to militarily eliminate Tie Nu Shi for a long time. However, in earlier years, Holy Terra had not yet reached a consensus, with support factions like Norberto, so the necessary preparations simply could not be fully launched. Ou Juren and his faction were only able to mobilize their own strength, at most making some defensive arrangements.

By the time Norberto was eliminated and the war between the Empire and Tie Nu Shi became inevitable, although the Empire had finally reached a consensus and could prepare for military actions against Tie Nu Shi, the bloated and inefficient political and military institutions of the Empire were simply not capable of acting swiftly.

Over the past year, a lot of time had been wasted on meetings and discussions.

After finally deciding which forces could be dispatched, and having their leaders accept the orders, the process would get stuck again when it came time to gather supplies for them;

Holy Terra had sent envoys to contact some other battle groups within the Spiderweb Domain, excluding Tie Nu Shi, but many of those envoys had not even reached the Spiderweb Domain yet;

There have been multiple inquiries from within the Tribunal institutions to the Silver Tribunal, especially from the Heretic Tribunal and the Vigilance Tribunal, which strongly demanded the Silver Tribunal cut ties with Tie Nu Shi and conduct self-inspections and internal purges.

They did clean up, but there was no movement.

An elite team from the Iron Armor Battle Group interfered with the Silver Tribunal's internal purge, with politically Empire-leaning factions being eliminated instead. Along with that, a squadron of Battle Nuns and a company of Loyal Heir Stormtroopers sent by the two tribunals, as well as their Judges, were all wiped out.

The Heretic Tribunal and the Vigilance Tribunal were furious, and although they had stepped up the recruitment of new forces, it was difficult to respond to the situation for the time being.

This was the situation on the Imperial Side for the past few months: preparations had indeed been made.

They hadn't prepared well, but what could they do?

Did the Empire itself know about this situation?

Actually, they had an idea.

They knew that the current preparations were definitely not enough, so often, they were hoping that Tie Nu Shi could start the rebellion later; that the forces within the Spiderweb Domain, and even Princess Domain, could hold back Tie Nu Shi for a longer time.

But… the situation still collapsed.

And it was more catastrophic than even the pessimists had imagined.

It was originally thought that there would still be some forces loyal to the Empire inside the Princess Star Domain. Even if these forces were ultimately inescapable from being purged by Tie Nu Shi, shouldn't they at least be able to hold on for a while?

Eh? No.

They couldn't hold on at all.

That month, a total of 472 worlds in the entire Princess Star Domain almost unanimously declared a change of allegiance and sided with Tie Nu Shi.

All Star Realm Army and Imperial Navy units were transferred under the command system of Tie Nu Shi.

Resistance?

It was not completely absent.

But Tie Nu Shi's preparations for this were too ample. This was their stronghold, where they had operated for too long, and even the slight resistance was expected by them. They knew exactly where problems would arise and had people in place in advance. Upon issuing the declaration, as soon as these issues started emerging, they moved in and quashed them.

The entire Princess Star Domain just switched allegiances like that.

If the Empire could barely accept this turning point, then the events that unfolded next exceeded everyone's expectations.

By the third month, within the Spiderweb Domain and around the Princess Star Domain, two more star domains almost entirely switched allegiances and joined Tie Nu Shi.

It wasn't as straightforward as the Princess Star Domain; in fact, there were brutal bloody clashes. But Tie Nu Shi acted quickly and forcefully; even in intense combat, they wanted to handle it with overwhelming military strength and a tough stance.

A United Fleet formed by the Spiderweb Domain, under high-level command in the hope of containing the over-spreading tide triggered by Tie Nu Shi, hastefully entered Tie Nu Shi's controlled area along with several Star Realm Army Corps, attempting to check Tie Nu Shi's spread.

However, this fleet disappeared just eighteen days after entering.

It was encircled by Tie Nu Shi's fleet, and small-scale skirmishes broke out. Then Commander Paulo, without an escort, without weapons, boarded the flagship of this fleet in a small boat and had a talk with the commanding Admiral.

Then, this commander and his Fleet… joined…

Chapter 506, Watching and Helping Each Other? Gu Hang was dumbfounded when he heard that the fleet organized with great difficulty by the Spiderweb Domain was persuaded to defect en masse by Humphrey Paolo's lone arrival, including the onboard Star Realm Army.

Especially when some detailed rumors came through, they were even more unbelievable to Gu Hang.

The name of the surrendering Admiral was Bowen Melandri.

The Tribunal imprisoned and interrogated his family, friends, and searched his residence and office, uncovering some confidential and non-public information in the subsequent investigation of Admiral Melandri.

It was mentioned that Melandri had known Paul from before, and they had fought alongside each other. According to his relatives, Melandri had a very favorable impression of Paul, describing him as a "resolute, inspiring, and trustworthy leader."

Precisely for this reason, when Paul and his Iron Armor Battle Group were declared traitors by the Empire, Melandri was shocked. In his view, Paul was the paragon of an Interstellar Warrior, maintaining peace in one area and fighting against the Void Insect Species for centuries. The Princess Star Domain, and even the entire Spiderweb Starfield, enjoyed tranquility because of him, without suffering from the invasions of the Void Insect Species.

"How could such a man betray the Empire?"

This was a question Melandri had once voiced to his family.

Having said such words already, how could they let such an apparent sympathizer of the Empire's traitor hold such an important position?

— They obviously overlooked what Melandri had said after that: "I want to personally capture Paul and bring him to Holy Terra, to repent before the Divine Emperor's Golden Throne!"

His attitude may seem problematic, but overall it wasn't entirely unacceptable. Gu Hang was more curious about what exactly the group leader Paul said when he came to persuade Melandri, managing to make him lead his team to defect on the spot?

Even the term "defection" is not quite accurate.

It ought to be called "turning coats."

From the information gathered from various sources, Humphrey Paul seemed to be an extremely charismatic leader, with his charm attribute maxed out.

…

As such a high-ranking officer, Melandri's defection was a great crime, and someone had to be held accountable.

His family and many friends who had been close to him were executed; several high-ranking officials from the Spiderweb Domain who had recommended his appointment to lead the fleet also got implicated.

Setting aside the political upheaval, the key point was that after Melandri switched sides, the defensive forces of the Spiderweb Domain were almost entirely depleted!

The situation was already very dire, and in an instant, it became rotten.

Of the fourteen star domains in the Spiderweb Domain, the southeastern three had already fallen into the hands of Tie Nu Shi; of the remaining eleven, the defenses that are still standing now are significantly inadequate.

Although there are still some navies and Star Realm Armies present, their numbers are even fewer than those who defected.

Going forward, defense will likely mainly rely on the hastily mobilized Planetary Defense Forces from various planets as the main force, then bolstered by the Protection Army sent from two of the Sect of Mechanics' Foundry Worlds, as well as a large contingent from the Blood Rose Sisterhood dispatched by the Tribunal. In this universe, there are many Battle Nuns working for the Tribunal, possibly even more than those directly under the command of the Empire.

It looks like some main forces still exist, but in reality, they are considerably weak.

However, in the Spiderweb Domain, there is still a powerful force present: seven Starfighter Battle Groups.

These seven battle groups are not transferred from outside but are widely distributed across the Spiderweb Domain. After all, this is a vast area consisting of eight thousand worlds, and it makes sense to have seven battle groups – in fact, on average, not even one world could afford an Interstellar Warrior.

Moreover, these seven battle groups might not even all be at full strength.

Looking at it this way, the inner power under the Empire within the Spiderweb Domain does still possess certain strength. Seven battle groups, along with the Sisterhood and a portion of the Protection Army, plus the sizeable Planetary Defense Force Cluster… are not weak.

If this force could all be rallied together, with one heart, acting under a unified command system, then they might not be able to completely stop the invasion of Tie Nu Shi, but they could at least turn the entire Spiderweb Domain into a quagmire of war, dragging Tie Nu Shi down with it.

In that case, the situation would be much improved for the Imperial Side. If Tie Nu Shi could be stalled in the Spiderweb Domain for a few years, even if the ultimate cost is turning the Spiderweb Domain into wasteland, it would buy time for the Empire to muster more forces.

However, the situation the Imperial Side hoped for did not occur.

Why would those planets want to turn themselves into wasteland?

Surrender, then, became a very rational choice.

Resistance is only valuable if there's a chance that the Empire will come to the rescue and you can hold out until then.

This is also the most significant reason that most planets face in interstellar wars: when facing foreign enemies, there's no question but to fight or be annihilated; when there's a clear hope of rescue from the Empire, then it's also viable to resist and wait for salvation.

But in this war, there was nothing. Not against foreign enemies, there are benefits for surrendering; don't count on being saved if you resist to the end. It's clear that the Empire is treating these planets as a 'line of resistance,' hoping to trade space for time, and to delay as much as possible, so don't expect rescue.

Chapter 506, Watching and Helping Each Other? _2 Who would even care about you then?

It can't even be said that they are disloyal.

Some, more loyal to the Empire than their own hometowns, lead their planets in rebellion, only to be wiped out by teams of Iron Armor Interstellar Warriors, who clandestinely grouped together under the command of the Iron Armor Battle Group; while others, perhaps quite loyal to the Empire, chose to surrender 'painfully' considering the preservation of their hometowns.

The other seven trustworthy Battle Groups, the Battle Nuns of the Blood Rose, and the Protection Armies of the Sect of Mechanics, were originally seen as the backbone.

However, their situations varied.

One Battle Group faced a rebellion towards the Iron Armor on its Mother Planet. When the Battle Group was sent to suppress the rebellion, they were unexpectedly overwhelmed on the ground by three times their number of forces from an alliance of the Iron Armor and Fury Flame, which had slipped through the intelligence network of the Battle Group. Only a few managed to escape.

Two other Battle Groups, together with the Blood Roses, formed a combat unit to rescue a world called Tianyuan VI, which was struggling under the attack of the Iron Armor Battle Group.

However, upon arrival, they discovered it was a carefully laid trap to encircle and suppress reinforcements. During this pivotal war, one of their Battle Groups switched sides on the spot, leading to an internal uprising. Together with an overwhelming number of Ironclad Interstellar Soldiers, this elite unit was annihilated on Tianyuan VI.

The Blood Rose suffered heavy losses in this battle.

Meanwhile, from the other four Battle Groups, two sided with them after being persuaded by the ‘succubus’, Humphrey Paolo.

The last potential threat that could have caused significant trouble for the Iron Fury Stone was two Foundry Worlds from the Sect of Mechanics, both part of a system named the Alfonso Sect.

They, of course, also received orders from the Empire to contribute personnel, efforts, and resources to resist the Iron Fury Stone.

However, their performance was somewhat ambiguous.

The orders were followed. The Protection Armies were dispatched, and the equipment and arms were provided.

But the Protection Armies were not dispatched in sufficient numbers, and they operated independently without taking orders from anyone else. During the war, they hardly engaged in any critical battles but just tinkered around the edges.

Strangely enough, the Iron Fury Stone didn't provoke them, mainly avoiding the locations defended by the Protection Armies during their offensives.

It was as if there was some kind of unspoken agreement between the two.

The Alfonso Sect declared, "This extent of jurisdiction is mine; the two Foundry Worlds, plus some core mineral worlds within my Cosmos Domain, provide me with resources. Don't provoke me, and I'll ignore you in return. Although I've deployed troops, I am protecting my own domain; and though I've also supplied equipment to the Imperial Side, you must understand, it's a necessary compromise."

The Iron Armor Battle Group also declared, "I respect your jurisdiction, you keep to yours, but don't interfere with my plans. You can provide equipment and arms to the Empire, but keep the quantities limited; if I have needs and want to buy, you must also sell to me."

Naturally, these statements were not evidenced, merely some alleged 'suspicions' voiced by the Heretic Tribunal when accusing the Alfonso Sect.

But, evidence or not, Gu Hang, as an observer and third party standing next to a Star Map discussing it, felt as if he heard the two parties converse exactly in that manner.

Gu Hang couldn't help but marvel, this Humphrey Paolo truly is formidable.

'Succubus', that was Gu Hang's jesting evaluation of Paolo privately.

But in fact, it contained a considerable amount of wariness from Gu Hang.

This man's charisma is indeed off the charts. Most crucially, the Iron Armor Battle Group has been very powerful over the past centuries and has established its influence everywhere. Although there are

examples like the Cercis Flower Rebellion, which opposed the Iron Fury Stone, many indeed have received their help and stood by their side.

Certainly, mere relationships and past interactions might not be enough. Beyond that, it came down to Paolo's diplomatic skills and the exchange of interests.

Relationships are the foundation; diplomatic ability and leadership charisma are the means and methods; the essence lies in the exchange of interests.

What benefits, after all, could those who surrendered or defected expect to receive by siding with the Iron Fury Stone?

Simple benefits would surely be insufficient. No matter how eloquently Humphrey Paolo could speak, he couldn't change the fact that the Iron Fury Stone was fomenting a rebellion, nor could he shift the increasingly stern warnings issued by the Holy Terra.

No matter how plentiful the immediate benefits, if the ultimate outcome was defeat, then it was all for naught.

Clearly, Paolo made many believe that he could ultimately succeed.

This success may not be about overthrowing the Empire.

That would be too dreamlike.

But at the very least, it could prevent Imperial interference within regional boundaries; then the Iron Armor would be considered 'victorious'.

The Purple Gold Flower rebellion over one hundred and twenty years ago serves as a good example.

Although the scale of their current actions is much larger than before, making it harder for the Empire to compromise; the large scale also means the situation has become more frightening, and the ‘united front value’ achieved could be extremely high.

As long as there are a series of military victories, and an increasingly strong momentum, more and more people will believe that the Iron Armor Battle Group can ultimately win.

Moreover, sometimes when Iron Armor strikes right in the face, many factions are left with two choices: death, or believing that Iron Armor can win.

Which one to choose?

Naturally, it tends to be the latter.

Again, it must be emphasized that this is ultimately a ‘civil war’ among humans, not a total massacre after losing to the Green Skins; not full corruption into madness after losing to the Abyss Demons, which eventually leads to a total sacrifice; it’s not like losing to the Void Insect Species, where the entire planet turns into food…

External wars must be resisted till the end. In the end, not resisting would mean death as well, so you’d definitely bite back before dying.

In a civil war, if you surrender, the nobles remain nobles, perhaps even with more power; civilians can also survive, leading to a significant reduction in resistance.

…

Things have gone rotten in the Spiderweb Domain.

Gu Hang sees this and is truly shocked in his heart.

Sometimes he can't help but wonder, if it were him, if it were the Alliance, making a move like this in the Eastern Cosmos Domain, could they create an impact like the 'Iron Fury Stone'?

Probably not.

Firstly, there is still a gap in raw strength. The naval resources that the Alliance would take four years to accumulate, Iron Fury Stone has now, and even more robust. After gaining the fleet that Melandri led in a defection, it became even stronger, almost incomparable.

In terms of ground forces, the comparison might be possible. While Iron Armor might have tens of thousands of interstellar warriors, Furyflame and Bedrock Shield definitely have more, potentially each having upwards of two to three thousand, collectively amounting to over fifteen thousand interstellar warriors.

This is still a conservative estimate.

The Phoenix the Alliance can bring to bear strictly adheres to the regulations of the Star Warrior Codex, honestly not exceeding a thousand.

However, in terms of quality, after that deadly and bloody battle with the Fury Flame Battle Group, no one dares to underestimate it.

Moreover, Gu Hang is confident that the quality of the Alliance Army far surpasses that of the infamous Auxiliary Army of Iron Armor.

However, there is one thing, something in which Gu Hang and his Alliance can never surpass Iron Armor: centuries of accumulated reputation.

This is something that even with a master diplomat with full charisma attributes, Gu Hang cannot make up for.

Without reputation, Gu Hang would find it difficult to convince many to stand by his side, to believe he could achieve ultimate victory, and thus not resist the Empire to the end.

His Alliance, like Iron Fury Stone, if rebelling, cannot afford to be dragged into a quagmire of war in their own core regions.

From this perspective, the Alliance really might not opt to rebel and achieve an effect like Iron Fury Stone.

And the reason Gu Hang is starting to think about this issue stems from a recent personal letter he received from Humphrey Paolo.

In it, Paul invites the Alliance to start an uprising in the south.

Paul assures that he will absolutely not head southwards; both parties can engage in trade, and even provide mutual assistance!

Chapter 507, Heartthrob “Humphrey Paolo has been in touch with you, hasn’t he?”

Communications with Holy Terra through Star Speech remains as difficult as ever. Virtual imagery displays suffer severe flickering, obscuring visibility to nearly nothing; it’s better off not used at all to save on data.

It was because of this that Gu Hang could discern the weariness and hesitation in Galaraldo’s words.

“Yes,” Gu Hang replied candidly. “He sent me a letter.”

“I knew it.” Galaraldo sighed, then continued with an ironic tone, “The grandees on Holy Terra, each and every one of them is now scared like quails by the mere mention of Tie Nu Shi.”

In saying this, he completely forgot that as the newly appointed head of the Military Affairs Department, he was one of those ‘grandees’ himself.

He went on to say, “Even Ou Juren is terrified, living in constant fear. What if we can’t beat Tie Nu Shi? What if another figure like Norberto from a hundred years ago emerges? By then, he would be the one

held accountable, bearing the brunt of all responsibilities—political career over, and perhaps even his life at stake! Haha…"

He even began mocking his own 'boss' along with the rest.

Yet, Gu Hang could sense a hint of fear within Galaraldo's words—or at least anxiety.

And the reason? It was all laid out in his words.

Would not the scenarios Ou Juren might face also befall him? If it truly came to that, he might face death even more swiftly than Ou Juren!

Should the Empire find Humphrey Paolo's actions overly troublesome, could voices for appeasement really emerge?

Indeed, they might.

Especially after several sizeable defeats in a row, an appeasement sentiment could very well surge forth.

Under normal circumstances, it might not be a big deal, but with Tie Nu Shi, there can be no complacency.

Humphrey Paolo is a master of diplomacy, and as for his mindset… well, how should I put it, he dares to openly rebel today, and a hundred years ago, dared to single-handedly instigate the great Cercis Flower rebellion. These acts seem like those of a madman.

However, looking closer at Paolo's conduct in these series of events, one sees a veteran politician capable of playing the game—knowing when to be firm and when to relent.

He can even disregard personal hatred. The Fury Flame Battle Group should have a blood feud with Gu Hang by now, yet he still reached out with an invitation.

Regardless of the sincerity, such a gesture is rare.

Moreover, it signifies strong leverage.

Otherwise, would he dare invite the Alliance?

Otherwise, the Fury Flame Battle Group might turn against the Iron Armor even before the Alliance gives an answer.

It must mean internal issues have been resolved, ensuring that even if the information leaks, or even if the Alliance insanely agrees, the Furyflame won't retaliate.

From this perspective, Gu Hang believes that Paolo must have a way to smoothly end this war.

Rapid expansion, sweeping through great swathes of Empire territory with resounding victories… all of it becomes immense pressure on the Holy Terra Government. Internally, with the appeasers cultivated or inherently from Tie Nu Shi jumping around, and with Paolo willing to make concessions and sacrifices…

Is it really impossible to have peace talks?

That's not necessarily the case.

Gu Hang fully recognized the nature of the Imperial Central Government; nothing they might do would surprise him.

From this angle, Paolo's earlier letter to Gu Hang really did intrigue him.

Don't get me wrong, Gu Hang had no intention of heeding the letter's suggestion, to rise in rebellion and create some sort of north-south coordinated resistance with Tie Nu Shi.

Wouldn't that be insanity?

Furthermore, Paolo's intent wasn't really hoping for Gu Hang to take his side.

He is essentially expressing a certain goodwill towards the Alliance: I won't come south to cause you trouble if you don't move north to bother me; let's keep the peace as it is.

Gu Hang would naturally be tempted by this.

What he wanted was to have a longer time for rest and recuperation, wasn't it?

What he feared the most was that, after Tie Nu Shi's rebellion, they would come straight south without a word and attack him.

There are only three Star Domains between them!

It used to seem like a distant gap.

But now, this distance doesn't seem safe.

Even within the northern part of the Dragonhawk Star Domain, in the Menghe Star Domain which belongs to the Eastern Cosmos Domain, the Fury Flame Battle Group actually has a lot of influence. They have been operating in the Eastern Cosmos Domain for over a decade, with Meng River being the main activity hub. Their work in Meng River has been prolific, followed by the outbreak of the Iron-tooth Green Tide, and the Fury Flame took advantage by pushing south, preparing to move into Dragonhawk.

If it weren't for the Alliance, it might have already happened.

In a situation where they are not neighbors yet not far away, if Paul truly moved south, even if it wasn't with his main force but just a side division, the development momentum of the Alliance would be interrupted. They would be forced into a state of war to face the enemy.

The main problem is the navy's deficit; it's too difficult to fill.

Now, Paul says as long as the Alliance doesn't move north, he won't come down… Isn't this exactly what we want?

To develop peacefully for a bit longer, ideally for four years.

Even if Tie Nu Shi is formidable, is it possible for them to overturn the Empire's situation within four years? Impossible.

After developing for four years, the strength of the Alliance will have greatly increased.

Then we can confront Paul!

As for whether we'll fight against Paul or alongside him at that time, well… it depends on the situation.

In the political and interest arenas of this starry sky, where are there eternal friends?

Friends and enemies can be interchangeable.

This is one consideration that Gu Hang has indeed included in his scope of thinking.

Galaraldo was also worried about this possibility.

He came to vent to Gu Hang about the situation in Holy Terra, hinting and discussing many things indirectly, with the core goal of wanting to see what stance Gu Hang would take.

Gu Hang gave him a reassurance right away.

After patiently listening to him vent, Gu Hang said: “Don’t worry, the traitor Humphrey Paul will definitely not succeed. What happened one hundred and twenty years ago will not be replicated today. The Alliance will be their biggest enemy.”

After feeling reassured by Gu Hang’s words, Galaraldo rejoiced: “Worthy of you!”

After his delight, Galaraldo, somewhat embarrassed but also with a serious tone, posed a very realistic and specific question:

“So… what kind of help would your Alliance need if it were to mobilize now? Put forth any requests you have without hesitation! As the head of the Military Affairs Department, I can arrange anything for you, brother.”

Gu Hang smiled.

Of course, he understood the subtext:

‘Don’t just talk the talk, show some real action!’

Chapter 508, Cold and Heartless Person Hearing Galaraldo’s words, Gu Hang did not answer immediately.

Galaraldo waited for more than ten seconds without a response, feeling a bit uneasy.

“You…”

Just as he began to speak, Gu Hang also spoke: “You are also aware of the situation of the Alliance.”

“When I left Holy Terra, the task you and Prime Minister Ou gave me was to defeat Furyflame in the Dragonhawk Star Domain, and block the Iron Fury Stone’s path of expanding south.”

“My Alliance has excellently completed this task.”

"…" Galaraldo felt somewhat embarrassed.

Gu Hang was right; before returning from Holy Terra, the Alliance's task was indeed only to drive away the Fury Flame Battle Group from the Eastern Cosmos Domain.

But, who could have expected this outcome?

The Alliance drove away the Fury Flame Battle Group almost without any cost. Even, the Dragonhawk Star Domain, which was originally expected to be the first battlefield against the rebel alliance of Iron Fury Stone, could have been destroyed.

However, that situation did not occur.

Since the Fury Flame Battle Group was driven away through a bloody duel, the Dragonhawk Star Domain did not even experience any war afterward and remained in very good condition.

Under these circumstances, the strength of the Alliance also greatly increased, much stronger than originally estimated.

Conversely, after the Iron Armor Battle Group initiated the rebellion, the situation changed too quickly. First, three star domains were swept through, then Melandri led the large forces to surrender, followed by the Heretic Tribunal and Blood Rose Battle Sisterhood, along with two Loyalist Warbands, being ambushed and massacred on Tianyuan VI…

Thus, the situation in the entire Spiderweb Domain was basically doomed.

This was completely different from what the Central Empire had initially anticipated.

Why give Gu Hang so many benefits? Wasn't it in hopes that the Alliance would be the forerunner, fighting against Iron Fury Stone on the frontline, and buying more time for the Empire to gather forces later?

Now, the Alliance is okay, the Dragonhawk Star Domain is okay, but the Spiderweb Domain's fourteen star domains and thousands of worlds are in a critical situation.

The Empire hasn't even been able to gather enough forces to launch an attack.

In the entire Spiderweb Domain, the only reliable force that might be able to make a difference seems to be the Alliance, which should have been the first to fight!

Gu Hang was absolutely right; he fulfilled his promise when he left Holy Terra.

However, the task given to him was to essentially hold down and contain a part of Iron Fury Stone's forces, not to let him recuperate here.

What does the Empire need you to recuperate for?

Hurry up and go to war!

However, toward Gu Hang, his 'good brother,' Galaraldo would not be too harsh.

He said: "Consider my difficulty, I can give you a lot of exceptional support, which I have justified in many ways, so you should give me some support too."

"I understand," Gu Hang's tone softened a bit, "I am very willing to support you, but…"

Gu Hang sighed and continued: "Bochoya, if you insist, I will of course launch an offensive."

"But, are you sure you really want me to do this?"

“I am your undoubtedly most steadfast supporter, the Alliance’s current situation simply does not have the capability to resist against Iron Fury Stone. If I rashly move, leading troops to the Princess Star Domain, the results are almost certain, it’s bound to be a total slaughter. Even after that, Iron Fury Stone won’t have any reservations about the south. Losing the main forces, especially the main fleet, if Paul sends a small army south, my Alliance will be completely crushed.”

Galaraldo remained silent.

This was indeed a very likely situation.

“I am your most steadfast supporter, your brother, and after giving everything away, just to buy a little time?”

“When the time comes, if the most difficult part is taken over by us, the Empire can indeed accumulate some force. But not to mention whether we can achieve the ultimate victory, even if we win, what does that have to do with us? At the time, who knows which marshal or which faction will reap the richest fruits of victory?”

His words made Galaraldo fall into deep thought.

Gu Hang casually picked up a cup beside him and took a leisurely drink. This was a rhetoric he had prepared early, and it was the most suitable to use on Galaraldo.

Bochoya Galaraldo, is he some greatly loyal Imperial Loyalist?

Obviously not.

This guy has always been profit-driven.

Even his fairly good and close relationship with him should not be persuaded from an emotional perspective.

This man has a cold heart, and talking about emotions could easily make him feel: you wronged me.

It's not that it can't succeed, he is still likely to succeed; yet, once it fails, no matter how good their previous relationship was, it is easy to reach breaking point; even if it succeeds, it will leave hidden dangers, and cracks will appear in the relationship.

But if it's about interests, staying in a rational and mutually beneficial phase instead has a smaller impact on the relationship.

To put it bluntly, for someone like Galaraldo, his previous help to Gu Hang was fundamentally because: you are my good brother, a trustworthy person, helping you up is also beneficial for me.

Now, Gu Hang's argument really mattered to Galaraldo.

He thought for a while and realized Gu Hang made a lot of sense!

Sending the Alliance to annihilation, even winning is a blood loss!

The Alliance belongs to Gu Hang, isn't that almost like it's his?

Thinking this way, the loss feels painful.

The key is, after sending the Alliance to its doom, what are the gains?

That might be quite beneficial for the Empire, beneficial for Ou Juren, but not necessarily for him, Galaraldo.

Even if Iron Fury Stone is ultimately defeated, the credit goes to the whole faction. He, as the current second in command of the faction, certainly can share quite a lot, but…

Where is the joy in having all war credits for oneself?

However, Galaraldo had one last doubt.

He carefully weighed it in his heart.

At this moment, Gu Hang's voice rang in his ear: "Of course, I know you are also under pressure, and I fully understand that. For this, we must definitely take some actions."

"I will send some troops northward, this way, it will shut some people up in Holy Terra."

Hearing this, Galaraldo, who was in Holy Terra, finally showed a smile.

Chapter 509, Southern Theater Command General Upon hearing Gu Hang say that he would at least deploy some troops and take some actions no matter what, Galaraldo had basically no objections left.

Preserving strength and showing attitude, what's not to like about that?

Even the old timers on Holy Terra, if they want to criticize, they would have to consider what the others are all about.

With all other imperial regional forces in disarray and everywhere being severely rattled, it's rare to find a direction without major incidents; they should be content and not force others into a death trap—Is Galaraldo, the newly appointed head of the Military Affairs Department, incapable of wielding a sword?

Even now, his thinking was beginning to shift:

"We should probably pay attention to risk management, right? What if we lose…"

"Don't worry," Gu Hang said, "On one hand, I won't be reckless; on the other hand, the troops heading north won't be our main force. For now, my forces can't reach the Spiderweb Domain yet. The primary target is the Menghe Star Domain in the north, where we will stop the influence of Tie Nu Shi from spreading in the Menghe Star Domain and completely eliminate their influence to avoid what has happened in the Spiderweb Domain."

“Next, we will strive to fortify the Copper Bottle Star Region, which is the northeastern gateway of the Eastern Cosmos Domain. Under the current circumstances, our initial focus will be on defense, cutting off the southward advance of the Iron Armor Battle Group—this too represents a significant accomplishment.”

“I believe the various powers of the Empire will understand. On every other front, the Empire is in retreat, only we have held the southern part of the Spiderweb Domain, yet now we are the ones blamed, which is unreasonable.”

“If everything goes smoothly, our vanguard forces will attempt to scout into the Spiderweb Domain, starting from its southeastern corner, to launch some attacks on the actual control area of Tie Nu Shi.”

At this point, Gu Hang felt the time was ripe.

He said, “I also need your help here.”

Galador quickly responded, “You say, whatever help I can provide, definitely!”

“I wouldn’t be polite with you,” Gu Hang said with a laugh, then his tone became serious again, “Frankly, the performance of the Spiderweb Domain in this catastrophe has been too terrible. Overall, with Melandri’s fleet and the accompanying Star Realm Army, as well as multiple Battle Groups collaborating with the Tribunal and Battle Nuns, along with a vast number of Native Defense Forces and thousands of worlds as support, it shouldn’t have ended up like this.”

“The problem lies in the fact that this force is issuing orders from different quarters, each faction is very independent. When facing the strong force led by the Iron Armor Battle Group, which now already has six Battle Groups combined, the fragmented forces cannot be united; it is inevitable that they will be defeated one by one, eliminated one by one.”

“Moreover, I don’t trust any of the other Imperial generals at all; I will not entrust the precious power of the Alliance to others for command—that’s out of the question.”

Galaraldo's voice came through, "I understand, and placing a Supreme Commander above you wouldn't be conducive to establishing your position."

Hmm, it wouldn't be convenient for claiming credit afterwards either.

"I will endeavor to obtain a position for you as the Supreme Commander in the Southern War Zone. Although there isn't such a war zone yet, once you engage the Iron Armor Battle Group in the southeast of the Spiderweb Domain, I will fully promote the establishment of this war zone, and you will be the top responsible person here."

This was exactly what Gu Hang wanted.

But it still wasn't enough.

Gu Hang said, "Galaraldo, my brother, just being a Supreme Commander is not enough. Take for example what has happened over the past year, isn't there unified command among those forces gathered in the Spiderweb Domain? It's not the case, for instance on Tianyuan VI, it was the Grand Judge of the Heretic Tribunal who was in charge. But this kind of leadership is too weak, more like a coordinating alliance, at most a general commander in battle, barely able to mobilize the forces of each side…"

Galaraldo seemed puzzled and asked, "Isn't that enough?"

"Not enough," Gu Hang said, "Absolutely not enough. How can such a situation ensure that my commands as the overall responsible person and Supreme Commander of a war zone are fully implemented? An organization whose decisions need to be discussed and agreed upon by everyone, where a commander's orders can be discounted and even rejected, cannot fight a war effectively. What I need is to truly integrate all forces, twisted into a single rope. Every troop, regardless of its origin or identity, must resolutely carry out my orders once received."

"This requires that, in addition to having the nominal title of a Supreme Commander, I also need stronger measures. Any troops allotted under my command, I demand absolute control over them. Not only must they obey my military orders, but I also need the personnel authority to appoint officers in these troops; I also need the power to discipline, and even execute anyone in these troops."

Upon hearing this, Galaraldo found it a bit tricky.

“This…”

Gu Hang was not finished yet.

“It’s not just the military, you know that the military is only part of the war. Under such large-scale total war, we must fully rally all forces, implementing a grand strategy. This requires that if a Southern War Zone is established, then at least the entire Eastern Cosmos Domain should be fully prepared for this war. These preparations involve everything from start to finish. The entire domain’s resources should be available for my use, and I should also have direct control over the administrative power within the domain.”

Having reached this point, Gu Hang was almost laying all his cards on the table.

“This…”

Galaraldo continued to hesitate.

The command of the military forces, he could manage.

But the matters that followed, those were a bit beyond reach. When it comes to appointing and disciplining military personnel, for instance, if Gu Hang were to demote or even execute a general of the Star Realm Army, technically as a Supreme Commander, that wouldn’t be acceptable.

The Military Affairs Department couldn’t grant Gu Hang that power either. That power resides within the Star Realm Army or naval system.

Not to mention possibly reallocating other forces, like a troop from the Tribunal; the Military Affairs Department granting Gu Hang the authority to demote or execute a Judge, what about the Starfighter Battle Group?

Impossible, the Military Affairs Department doesn't have that authority!

And when it comes to the matter of local governments later, that's even more so the case—it's the job of the Administrative Department.

Gu Hang, puzzled, asked, "Isn't it supposed to be like this? Hasn't there been such a precedent within the Empire?"

Chapter 510, Empire Alliance Act? When Gu Hang asked if there was no precedent for doing so, Galaraldo didn't know what to say.

Precedent?

There were some indeed.

In the vastness of the Empire, anything you can think of has happened before.

And speaking of precedents, wasn't Galaraldo's previous loyalty to Sun Lord Solakium the biggest example?

Even without Solakium, in many military operations of the Empire, the Supreme Commanders would do this to some extent. War is so cruel; how could one win without sufficiently mobilizing all forces?

Among them, in particular, the Starfighter Battle Group and the Tribunal liked to do this.

They, along with a few others who did the same, were usually temporary;

After wielding great power for a while, when the war ended, those rights would end as well.

Some didn't care about the power, like the Battle Group and the Judges, seizing it truly just to get things done. Once finished, when it was time to leave, they naturally relinquished everything they had to.

Some cared but could not move it.

Some moved it and were later killed.

Of course, there were also those who moved it and continued to maintain it.

All sorts of situations existed, and examples for each could be found.

Which one did Gu Hang want to become?

Galaraldo believed he understood Gu Hang pretty well; he didn't even need to say that what Gu Hang sought was definitely to hold on to this power permanently.

He understood that this was Gu Hang's request.

Not just a request in response to this war but also a claim to the spoils after the war.

You can't let all the benefits be taken by those old gents up in Holy Terra, while I, who is desperately fighting on the front lines with my neck on the line, gain nothing, right?

Having said that, Galaraldo was not averse to Gu Hang reaping some rewards.

But he also made it very clear to Gu Hang:

"This matter must be approached step by step. The role of Southern Theater Command General will certainly be yours, I can make that decision. In addition, I can try to secure some more tangible benefits for you. You can confidently and boldly spend the Alliance's local taxes to fund the Rage Bear Legion, as well as the construction of the Tianma Fleet and Yunluo Fleet, which Yelisia now controls. If the Alliance's taxes are not enough, I can even increase the tax revenues originally destined for Central Empire from the Eastern Cosmos Domain, including the planned budget for the construction of the local Star Realm Army and Navy, and give it all to you."

These were tangible benefits, actual money.

Even if the Alliance's production capabilities were insufficient, wasn't the Mingyang Sect, a force of the Sect of Mechanics, present in the Dragonhawk Star Domain? The Jindi Star had substantial production capacities; with money, you could certainly place orders with them.

Moreover, these were indeed within Galador's authority; as the head of the Military Affairs Department, he could make these decisions.

"The personnel appointments you want, the power to arbitrarily punish without cause, I cannot decide on that, but I can discuss it with Star Realm Army and Navy. The complete management rights of the troops dispatched to your command will be handed over to you, no problem. However, if it involves the Battle Group, the Tribunal, or the Protection Army, that's not possible, there's absolutely nothing that can be done. Unless I forcefully declare on your behalf that anyone unwilling to accept your control should not go to the Southern War Zone. But by doing so, the external support you might have originally received will diminish, and you have to be clear about this in your mind."

Hearing this, Gu Hang roughly understood that this was indeed the limit of what Galaraldo could do.

He thought for a moment and then replied, "Let's do it this way, I would rather not have those who may not come, or if they do come, I'm not sure if they're there to help or to cause trouble. I must ensure I have full control."

"Alright, then we'll do as you say." After agreeing, Galaraldo began to sigh and complain, "At most, at most, I can give orders as the head of the Military Affairs Department to have the Star Realm Army and Navy within the Eastern Cosmos Domain assemble to the best of their abilities and follow your command."

"But even so, this still has to go through the Star Realm Army and Navy Headquarters, and also the Legion Commanders and Fleet Commanders; the local governments, whether it is the Space Domain Government or the Star Domain Government, will not let go so easily… There are endless difficulties! I can only promise to do my best in allocating resources to you and ensuring their logistic support."

Gu Hang said, "Getting to this point is already quite good; I don't expect more reinforcements."

“You understand my difficulties, which is good.” After sighing, Galaraldo began to talk about the third aspect of Gu Hang’s requests:

“As for the administrative authority over local governments, you asking for the entire administrative power of the Eastern Cosmos Domain, that’s impossible. Even if the war really requires the whole Cosmos Domain to provide logistics support to you, handing over administrative management to you would be too excessive.”

“This matter is not just difficult; it’s also met with great resistance. Forcibly pushing forward not only has little chance of success, but it also creates enemies easily. It’s impossible for the head of the Administrative Department to agree to this separation from the government’s administrative hierarchy; the Prime Minister will not agree either. In addition, it’s not only in Holy Terra that work will become difficult, but even our own people, Zuo Zhaofeng, Chairman Zuo himself, will not agree because that would be infringing upon his rights.”

Chapter 510, Empire Alliance Act?_2 “I can only go as far as to send a message to Zuo Zhaofeng, to mobilize as much manpower and resources from the entire Cosmos Domain to assist you. However, I cannot guarantee it will be everything, nor can I promise you will have all the privileges.”

At this point, Gu Hang felt somewhat dissatisfied.

But then another promise from Galaraldo turned his anger into joy.

“However, as compensation, I can think of other methods. For example, in the midst of the war, those worlds already under the control of the Empire cannot be given to you; but those ‘liberated’ worlds originally belonging to the Alliance can be managed by the Alliance. As for the reasons, they are already in place. After all, the Alliance is the liberator, and there were no original owners of those places to begin with. It’s only fair for the Alliance to temporarily assist the Empire, being responsible for the security and civilian management of the recovered areas. As for the people of these planets feeling grateful to the Alliance for their rescue and returning to the Empire’s embrace, and their initiative to join the Alliance, that too is understandable.”

“For planets in the liberated areas during the war, they can be included in the wartime political structure of the combat zone, and the Supreme Commander of the combat zone will have complete wartime management authority. I will work hard to secure this for you.”

If this step is taken, it would indeed be quite satisfactory.

Anyway, Gu Hang had no intention of really getting hold of the entire Eastern Cosmos Domain just by word of mouth, which is impossible. Even the Iron Armor Battle Group wanted a Cosmos Domain as a reward, and they haven't got it even after openly rebelling.

It's just an outrageous initial demand.

And Galaraldo's counteroffer was indeed not bad.

No matter how grandiose the embellishments, the bottom line is, the territory you conquer is yours. This concept interested Gu Hang quite a bit.

However, up until now, this is all just Galaraldo's unilateral statement.

What's said verbally isn't completely dependable. Gu Hang needs a concrete document, a statement.

This is the most important thing for the Alliance to legally expand.

Moreover, it would be best if this statement or document did not come from Galaraldo or Ou Juren. Even if it were from the current Prime Minister of the Empire, Mr. Zebert, it wouldn't suffice.

It shouldn't just be someone's word.

The legitimacy of the 'Alliance' itself has always been the subject of controversy and challenge over the years, primarily because the Alliance's founding was originally based on the golden words of the 'Apostle of War'. If it were just an Alliance of a few planets, naturally nobody would care; but now, the Alliance has inflated to its current size, and even Galaraldo's own status has risen with the tide, the legitimacy is still not sufficient.

In the future, if the Alliance really does acquire new territories as Galaraldo said, then in the upcoming great war, the Alliance's loss would spell the end of everything, no need to discuss further; but if the Alliance wins, and indeed conquers vast lands during the war, expanding its scale further across multiple

Star Domains, then its volume might even surpass that of the openly acknowledged strength of the Iron Fury Stone before the rebellion.

By then, whether it's an individual or a group issuing documents or commands in their own name, it's probably not enough.

What Gu Hang needs is an 'Imperial Alliance Act' clearly approved by 'Human Empire, Holy Terra Central Government', after deliberation by the 'Supreme Lord Council', the highest authority of the Empire, confirming the legitimacy of the Alliance.

That way, Gu Hang's Alliance would no longer have to worry about its legitimacy.

At least, no one would be able to attack him on the legality of the Alliance.

Of course, this still cannot replace the importance of the Alliance's own strength. If the Alliance is weak, even with full legitimacy, it will be seen as prey and become a target for powerful factions.

But at least, if the Alliance is strong enough, and also has this layer of 'loyal,' 'legitimate' protection, then it's truly safe.

You can't win the argument; the Alliance is bigger than you.

That's the safest way.

In the subsequent conversation, Gu Hang in principle agreed to the conditions put forth by Galaraldo, but also emphasized his own demand: a clear act that confirms everything.

At the same time, Gu Hang also analyzed the importance and the potential role of this 'act' for Galaraldo — from Galaraldo's perspective. If the Alliance becomes strong and legal in the future, then it will become Galaraldo's most important support point outside of Holy Terra.

In the future, whether it's to support Galaraldo's return to his rightful seat on the Supreme Council as the head of the Military Affairs Department, or to aim even higher, the Alliance will be his powerful support.

Galaraldo understood and acted accordingly.

But he also made it clear that this matter was difficult to handle.

It wasn't something that could be negotiated just by talking.

He needed the Alliance to take some actual action and find the right 'timing' to successfully resolve this issue.

What exactly were these actions?

That would, of course, be the Alliance's movement of troops to the north.

But that alone was not enough.

If they were winning easily, how would that demonstrate the importance of the Alliance? How would it justify the great price paid by the Alliance?

It had to be that on all other fronts, they were being battered to a pulp, only the south was faring well, creating a stark contrast, and making the old masters on Holy Terra feel that the southern Alliance was their only lifesaving straw.

If the Alliance became too dissatisfied and halted in place, or even worse, struck some disastrous agreement with Iron Fury Stone behind the scenes, then truly, the heavens might fall…

Only at such a time could they drive a higher 'price'.

Gu Hang understood this.

And he felt that such a situation was by no means difficult to come about.

He indeed almost had no way to influence the movements of the Iron Armor Battle Group on the Northern and Western Fronts.

But it just so happened that the Empire was performing extremely poorly on these two fronts; the entire rebellious faction led by Humphrey Paolo was also too fierce.

Looking at the current situation, things were indeed developing in that direction.

…

Two months after Gu Hang's conversation with Galaraldo ended, the Alliance prepared a vanguard fleet and entered the Menghe Cosmos in the northern part of the Dragonhawk Star Domain. With the support of the Alliance's intelligence agencies, which had taken the lead, they expelled and imprisoned several planetary observers left by the Fury Flame Battle Group and punished numerous planetary governors and small trade caravans that traded strategic materials with 'Iron Fury Stone'.

This was a clear gesture made by Gu Hang: I've started working.

However, Galaraldo brought bad news to the Alliance.

Gu Hang's other demands were not too problematic, but the specific 'Alliance Bill' he wanted was not passed. In the end, only the Military Affairs Department and the Legal Department would issue a joint document in support of this.

In simple terms, it was Galaraldo and Ou Juren, the two of them, standing with him.

Gu Hang immediately refused to accept this.

The vanguard that had just entered the Menghe Star Domain also stopped in their tracks.

Then, in the third month, Iron Fury Stone made significant progress again.

They captured the capital planet of the Spiderweb Domain on the Western Front. There, they indeed faced fierce resistance, but after at least four thousand Interstellar Warriors carried out a ferocious orbital airdrop, in eighteen days, they dissolved the defenses of the capital planet.

On the Northern Front, they broke through the entire Spiderweb Domain, and their blades had already entered the territory of the Star Devouring Cosmos. A Loyalist Warband, heeding the call of the Star Devouring Cosmos government and engaging in an ambush, managed to briefly thwart Iron Fury Stone's advance, but nine days later, they suffered a powerful retaliation. Over six thousand Interstellar Warriors, aboard a vast fleet, raided the warband's mother planet and destroyed the Warband Monastery.

And during the furious counter-attack from the Loyalist Warband, they completed an ambush en route.

The warband was almost completely wiped out.

At this point, the Empire was truly in a panic.