Chapter 51 - Chapter 51: Chapter 51, Phoenix on the Brink of Death

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In a void of the universe infinitely distant in physical space, a fiery red spaceship was sailing.

It was scarred, it was not huge, and it carried a battle group on the brink of death.

The Phoenix Battle Group had ended their long redemption expedition and now their glory had been restored.

The Tribunal of the Eastern Star Domain, representing the Central Empire, personally announced this to the world.

But what of it?

“We have won the victory of the hundred-year redemption expedition and achieved the victory we most desired, yet we are about to be annihilated,”

Salas Matins, the leader of the Phoenix Battle Group, would always think sorrowfully.

He was the 64th leader of the Phoenix Battle Group. This battle group, with its countless glorious histories, was very likely to come to an end in his hands.

What was life like for the battle group before the redemption expedition?

Back then, the Phoenix Battle Group was glorious and powerful, they guarded their mother star, received the worship of countless mortals, selected the most excellent youths from among them, subjected them to gene seed modifications, and turned them into one of their own.

All the manpower and material resources of the entire planet were at their disposal. Besides being responsible for the defense of their mother star, they would also answer the call of The Emperor, heading to all corners of the universe, participating in one glorious and great war after another. They either crushed each of The Emperor’s enemies to dust or defended one world after another on the brink of destruction.

He and his brothers were called The Emperor's Angels.

This glory, accumulated over thousands of years, came to a sudden halt a hundred years ago.

Matins bore no resentment.

In the 'Crape Myrtle Catastrophe,' the Phoenix Battle Group found themselves on the wrong side. By the grace of the Divine Emperor, they were not purged as traitors, but they were still guilty, and the Tribunal sentenced them to a hundred-year redemption expedition.

The so-called redemption expedition meant sending the convicted battle groups on the most difficult and casualty-heavy assault missions without support, supplies, or reinforcements. Once assigned, the mission could not be refused and must be carried out with all effort until death.

The vast majority of battle groups sentenced to a redemption expedition could not even last until the end of their punishment.

But the Phoenix, true to their name, were indomitable—they miraculously endured the redemption expedition.

They fought in one brutal war after another for a hundred years. During these days, they were still fighting for the empire, but without any honor to speak of. Their battles were for redemption, for a death sentence.

During the century-long expedition, the leader of the battle group changed hands six times, and it finally fell to Matins—a man who considered himself of little talent.

A few months ago, in the final battle of the redemption expedition, the previous leader launched a suicide charge with the last of the battle group's elite. They won, but the cost was that no one survived except for Matins and six others who had been left behind.

He would always remember the look in his mentor's eyes when he passed on the medal symbolizing the leader of the battle group before the charge. It was a look filled with expectation, with hope; the future of the battle group weighed heavily on his chest.

He was determined to rebuild his battle group, yet he didn't know how.

Their homeworld had long been assigned to another battle group; the fleet had all been destroyed, leaving only the 'Burn Feather,' a small spacecraft that could not even be considered an escort ship; power armor, the armory, the gene seed vault—all had been lost with the crash of the flagship...

Perhaps no battle group has ever been in a more miserable state than they were.

They could only drift aimlessly in the cosmos like headless flies.

Indeed, there were many forces that wished to ‘help’ them. However, Matins could see through the malicious intentions of those people. They only wanted the seven remaining members of the Phoenix Battle Group to serve as their high-level enforcers.

There was no glory, let alone any hope to speak of.

Matins thought of the chance to rebuild the warband, the opportunity to continue fighting with honor.

Unfortunately, those who tried to help them fell silent when these topics came up.

Recently, their spaceship had passed through a Spirit Network tunnel, aimlessly arriving at the Tianma Star Sector. It was just like many other star sectors they had drifted through over the past few months, nothing special.

However, it was then that the warband’s priest approached him, claiming that during prayer, he had received a revelation: the hope for the Phoenix Battle Group’s rebirth was right here.

Hope rose in Matins’ heart, like a drowning person clutching at a straw.

Rationally, he knew he shouldn’t believe it.

What was so special about the Tianma Star Sector? An obscure star sector with neither special resources nor a glorious history, nor had any other warband ever been stationed there.

How could the hope for the warband’s rebirth lie here?

Yet emotionally, he almost instantly believed it.

It was only a matter of months, trivial compared to the modified, elongated lifespans of interstellar warriors, but he felt he had already endured an endless ordeal. This emptiness was even more painful than the punitive expedition.

Given the chance, he was eager to seize it.

The warband’s priest, also his most trusted battle brother, had been holed up in the prayer room for two days without any sign of activity.

Matins’ anxiety gradually intensified.

But now, at this moment, the anxiety found its outcome.

He heard heavy footsteps, turned his head, and saw someone clad in the distinctive black power armor of a priest, with a helmet shaped like a skull, and large shoulder pads painted in the warband's fiery red colors and the Phoenix design, symbolizing their identity.

It was Rizzo, the eldest of the surviving seven, who had fought with the warband for four hundred years. He was supposed to have joined the final battle to the death, but the former warband leader had forcefully held him back. The warband needed his experience, to assist Matins.

"Priest Rizzo, you've finally emerged. Was your prayer fruitful?"

"Yes, warband leader," Rizzo's voice was tired but also held a hint of anticipation, "I have received a more precise revelation. The Phoenix's chance of rebirth lies right here!"

The priest's finger came to rest on the star map.

There, was Rage Owl Star.

Matins looked bewildered, scouring his memory and coming up with nothing special about this world.

He couldn't help asking, "Are you sure there's no mistake?"

"I'm certain," Rizzo confidently replied, "The Divine Emperor's revelation states that the chance for the Phoenix Battle Group's rebirth is there—at the hands of that world's governor."

Matins paced back and forth, then finally made a decision, "Alright, change course. To Rage Owl Star, we go!"

The revelation received by Priest Rizzo was the only opportunity in the past few months that Matins had been looking forward to.

Although he had never heard of the world of Rage Owl Star having any particular significance, since it was a revelation by the Divine Emperor, surely it meant a powerful governor, who might be willing to help the warband in its reconstruction!

Chapter 52 - Chapter 52: 52 chapters, not considered a beating

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After activating the event “The Phoenix Shall Die,” Gu Hang had 36 grace points left.

Not few, but not enough.

For a moment, he was itching to use these grace points for drawing cards.

A 40% chance of winning, could he really not get it after three draws?

Impossible! Absolutely impossible!

But in the end, he chose not to do it.

He still wanted to level up. He would wait for the monthly fixed income to be disbursed, and along with these 36 points, it would be enough. If he spent the grace points now, he wouldn’t be able to level up in a few days.

Finally, he suppressed the urge to draw cards.

...

After Gu Hang had sorted out the various system functions, he had also rested quite well.

Although his head still hurt a bit, it was much better compared to when the battle had just ended.

This also reassured Gu Hang quite a bit: it seemed that the previous depletion of his spirituality was not severe and didn’t affect his foundation.

Leaving the combat vehicle, the work of cleaning up the battlefield continued.

The soldiers had collected a large number of monster corpses, or the remnants shattered in the battle. There was too much to transport in one go, so the leftovers were piled up to be transported later.

These were all raw materials for the synthetic starch production line.

In other places, “corpse starch” might be a dark term, but for Gu Hang, it seemed literal...

Despite the fact that people starving in the wastelands might not care about this, as long as they faced no illness or not too severe an illness from eating it, anything was better than hunger. But Gu Hang still strived to keep this information concealed. It wasn’t entirely secret, but he definitely wouldn’t promote it actively.

After all, it wasn’t something glorious.

While the troops were busy, Yan Fangxu came to find him again.

Seeing the Captain with a slightly crooked nose and a bruise above his left eye, Gu Hang was taken aback for a moment: “How did you get injured like this? That doesn’t seem to be the kind of injury a pus monster could cause, right?”

“Uh... it’s nothing much...”

“Oh!” Realizing something as he looked at the captain’s embarrassed face, Gu Hang suddenly understood and remembered something he had almost forgotten, “Were you beaten up by your former subordinates?”

Yan Fangxu immediately became anxious, “What beating up? How could you say it was a beating? I just... just accidentally lost one or two moves... It’s not a beating...”

“Hahaha!” Gu Hang laughed, “Right, right, not a beating, just a small beating.”

Yan Fangxu fell silent.

He didn’t want to talk to the governor anymore, but couldn’t help feeling eager.

He hesitated and nonetheless couldn’t resist saying, “That... Governor... regarding that intensive training... I...”

He was somewhat embarrassed to fully express his request.

Having been beaten by his former subordinates, and then having to ask the governor for special intensive training felt somewhat embarrassing to him.

Gu Hang patted Yan Fangxu on the shoulder and said, “How could I refuse such a small request? Not now though. You have greater potential, and you deserve more rigorous, more valuable training.”

Yan Fangxu’s eyes lit up, “Thank you, Governor!”

“Don’t be haste to thank me, but let me be clear, with gains come sacrifices, nothing in this world comes without a price. If you want to receive my grace, you should serve me with even greater sincerity.”

Yan Fangxu understood Gu Hang’s meaning.

But he dared not agree.

He was a member of the Imperial Navy, his future still lay in the stars and the vast ocean. Should he transfer allegiance to a planetary governor and join the Planetary Defense Force?

There is a disparity here.

The Imperial Military's system is roughly divided into three parts: the Imperial Navy, the Imperial Star Realm Army, and the Planetary Defense Force (PDF). The first two are direct imperial forces with relatively higher status, theoretically taking commands directly from Central Empire and receiving supplies from it. As for the PDF, it's just a planetary-level defense force, established and led by the planet's governor.

The Empire does not take care of the training, equipping, or supplying of the PDF, but sometimes it would draft the PDF into the Star Realm Army, or when Imperial taxes evaporate. Often in intense interstellar wars, the PDF would also be used as cannon fodder by the Empire's main forces.

Would those Navy bigshots even deign to glance at the Star Realm Army's grunts, let alone a mere PDF?

Compared to a captain in the Imperial Navy, who would be stupid enough to choose the former?

But what if it were a general from the Planetary Defense Force compared to a Navy captain?

Well... that's not so easy to say. A captain from the Navy Marine Corps, like Yan Fangxu, at his peak, only commanded a special Marine company, with just over a hundred men; now, he has even fewer, only thirty. But if he became a general, he might be able to become a pivotal figure on this planet.

But could he really become a general?

Relying on the governor would mean betting everything on this one person being able to win.

Yan Fangxu was a bit hesitant to wager.

He wasn't a barefooted man, unlike the native residents on Rage Owl Star.

Watching Yan Fangxu, who was caught in a dilemma, Gu Hang did not press him. He smiled and patted Yan's shoulder, saying, "Don't rush, there's still time. You don't have to make a decision now. No matter what, you are my subordinate right now, you follow my orders. As for the future, I believe when it comes, you will make your decision."

Yan Fangxu breathed a sigh of relief, looking at Gu Hang with gratitude.

Thankfully, the governor didn't force him to make a choice right there and then.

He was afraid of choosing wrongly.

"Alright, let's not talk about this anymore. What do you need to see me for?"

“Actually, there is an important issue. A contingent from Revival City has approached our location. They seem to bear no hostility, and the person leading them claims to be the grandson of Lambert Hodgson from the Alliance Council, coming to ensure the governor’s safety.”

Gu Hang wore a strange expression, his tone somewhere between sarcasm or sigh, “A force from the Alliance Council... Whether they come with ill intentions or indeed to protect me, their arrival is a bit too late.”

“What should we do now? Drive them away?”

“No,” Gu Hang waved his hand dismissively, “The affair has concluded. I’m curious to see what they really want. Take the 3rd battalion up there, disarm them all, and then bring them here. The battlefield needs more people for cleanup, and I also want to meet this grandson of the Council Chairman to see what news he brings me.”

“Yes!”

Yan Fangxu went to work.

He didn’t keep Gu Hang waiting long, and soon he brought the people.

About five hundred soldiers, empty-handed and honestly started cleaning up the battlefield, moving monster corpses alongside Gu Hang’s own warriors.

Also, a young man dressed in military attire was brought before Gu Hang.

“Lambert Hodgson,” Gu Hang read his name.

The young Lambert saluted Gu Hang and greeted loudly, “Good day, Excellency the Governor!”

“Why have you come?”

“I have come to protect the Governor.”

“Does your grandfather know you’re here?”

“I’m here on the orders of the Chairman of the Council!”

“Then your timing is rather fortuitous, my battle has ended, and the enemy has been eliminated. You should have arrived earlier, no matter what you intended to do.”

Lambert said, “I apologize, Governor, for our tardiness... I understand your suspicions. But please believe that we indeed came to protect you. My men and I will unconditionally obey any of your orders, without complaint or regret.”

Gu Hang smiled.

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Gu Hang revealed a smile.

He stepped forward and gave Lambert a big hug, “I’m willing to trust you, welcome aboard, young comrade.”

Lambert’s expression was sincere, but Gu Hang didn’t completely trust him either.

After all, the guy brought a group of people with him, surrendered his weapons when asked, and worked when told; what was there to worry about?

Gu Hang didn’t expect much from them, nor would he use them for important tasks. Just let them clean up the battlefield, carry loads—who couldn’t do that? Using them was simple.

As for trust, that wasn’t something to be shown through words.

With more time and more shared experiences, he would eventually show his true colors.

Moreover, this guy brought Gu Hang an even bigger surprise.

Following him, apart from five hundred armed soldiers, there were also more than two thousand refugees.

According to Lambert, these were the people he had recruited from outside the city when he set out.

The reason he did so was that he had heard of a merchant named Dennison Henry who had recruited refugees for the governor. Figuring there was a significant labor shortage here, he did the same upon departure.

Not only that, he also arranged for people to carry out long-term resettlement propaganda outside Revival City, promoting that the governor’s place offered good jobs, treatment, and enough food and clothing to live on.

Wow, the young man was on the right track.

Gu Hang was overjoyed in his heart.

Because of this, he even felt embarrassed to chastise Hodgson when he was on the phone with him.

But, in fact, there wasn't much to criticize.

The attack shouldn't have had anything to do with them, at least currently there was no evidence to prove this. It was the cultists who took action, and the powerful Storm Sorcery made it very clear.

Moreover, before the attack, it was Hodgson who had given him the warning in advance.

Now, Hodgson also said that they had made further progress in their crackdown on the cult. They had captured two mid-level missionaries of the Primordial Wrath Owl Sect, and had learned that this cult organization was indeed secretly stepping up its actions in Revival City and that there might be a plan underway. If followed up, there should be more to be gained.

In addition to the cult issue that Gu Hang used to leverage against the Alliance Government, Hodgson's performance in other aspects also satisfied Gu Hang.

Sending a grandson over, whether to serve him or to be a hostage, was in itself a statement on the attitude. Practically, he also made his stance very clear. The five hundred soldiers and two thousand refugees might not mean much; Hodgson had already implicitly promised that he would act in accordance with Gu Hang's instructions within Revival City and cooperate with the governor.

But Hodgson also said that he needed the governor to understand his difficulties. He was the Speaker of the Council, but not an autocrat. Directly providing resources, promoting a law, replacing a councilman, or moving the military on a large scale... all these ultimately required discussion by the entire council and the formation of a resolution.

Gu Hang didn't press the issue any further.

There was no point in pressing.

Currently, Hodgson could be considered on his side, at least that's what his attitude suggested. Pressuring him was meaningless. On the contrary, Gu Hang needed Hodgson's help to push the other councilmen.

This time, Gu Hang had a long talk with Hodgson.

They discussed what Gu Hang needed Hodgson to do, what support to provide, how to progressively advance Gu Hang's will, and under what conditions Gu Hang would consider moving back to Revival City. They even briefly touched on some of the policies and

reforms he would implement as head of the Alliance, how to ensure the planet could pay taxes in two years while still guaranteeing its development...

The conversation wasn't deep, and most topics were just touched upon. After all, Gu Hang didn't fully trust this council speaker who had expressed his willingness to side with him. But the fact that they could discuss such issues so extensively meant that Gu Hang, to some extent, had accepted the council speaker.

For now, Gu Hang did not plan to visit Revival City anytime soon.

The cult issue had not been resolved, and his safety in Revival City was not guaranteed; power was not yet fully centralized, and without this concentration of power, he would not be as effective; his own power reserves were also not yet sufficient, and without them, he would not be able to exert full authority once in Revival City...

But that time won't be too far away.

...

Revival City, inner city district, a private club.

Three individuals, famous throughout the entire Alliance, were gathered here.

These three were Alliance Councilmen, and each owned significant industries within Revival City.

However, their expressions were very grim.Bradford spoke, "The recording, everyone has listened to it. Don't be silent, let's discuss our thoughts."

He was a business tycoon in Revival City. While he didn't own many industrial businesses, he had strong commercial channels to the east, south, west, and north. Many products from Revival City had to go through his channels to be sold; things that Revival City did not produce needed to be purchased through his channels.

In Revival City, a place centered around commercial hubs, his status was evident.

After Bradford had spoken, the old man sitting beside him shook his head and said, "I just can't understand why Hodgson would do this. Is he not afraid of the same situation that the second Governor-General faced?"

This man was Norris, his family were industrial magnates in Revival City. Their enterprises included food, chemical, and textile factories, among other important categories, and they were also involved in the medical industry. He was an important ally of Wohan, and the collapse of Wohan's industries after his death had also significantly impacted him.

When he mentioned ‘the situation of the second Governor-General,’ the other two’s expressions became even darker.

They all simultaneously recalled that dreadful era.

Twelve years ago, the second Governor-General arrived at Rage Owl Star aboard an escort ship. At that time, the Alliance was very powerful. Although its structure was somewhat loose, it was suited to the reality of Rage Owl Star, where the major powers, if not absolutely obedient, would at least respond to the requests of the Alliance Government.

This was the solid foundation built by the first Governor-General.

However, this foundation nearly collapsed within a mere six years.

Upon taking office and seizing the reins of the Governor-Generalship, he did not follow the previous Governor-General’s approach of recuperation and development above all. He believed that it was due to the mercy and weakness of the previous generation that tax revenues were insufficient. The natives of Rage Owl Star were disloyal and needed to be punished with the harshest attitudes to make them pay their taxes.

He held this position for six years, in the first two of which he managed to collect enough imperial taxes through plundering and coercion. However, his tyranny also sparked unrest that swept across the entire world.

Rebellions flared up everywhere, some powers withdrew from the Alliance, some paid lip service while defying in secret, some resisted violently, and some were destroyed... The population of the entire planet suffered a huge loss in those six years. This loss included a large number of people who were handed over as imperial taxes and many who died due to the unrest or starved or froze to death due to the shortage of supplies...

The seventeen years of recuperation by the first Governor-General on Rage Owl Star were almost destroyed in an instant. And the second Governor-General, naturally unable to sustain the third tax collection, died at the hands of the Imperial Taxation Department.

Those six years were a time that no person on Rage Owl Star ever wanted to live through again.

Whether poor or rich.

The last of the three, stood up.

He was burly and still wore camouflage military uniform even when meeting with friends.

He was Mondok, a general of the Alliance. Inside Revival City, those constantly ready ten thousand soldiers, those more than twenty aircraft, those seventy tanks, in theory, were all under his command.

“Everything must get back on track. Hodgson’s mistakes must be corrected.”

“Impeachment in the council? I remember the next council meeting is in four days, but we might not be successful. Hodgson has been operating for many years and has quite a few supporters; it would take us a long time to coordinate...”

“No,” Mondok rejected the idea, “That’s too slow, we need a faster way.”

The other two were stunned.

They saw Mondok’s somewhat ferocious expression.

Chapter 54 - Chapter 54: Chapter 54, activate this girl for me

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The situation in Revival City was tricky, and Gu Hang could guess a bit, but he couldn’t know too explicitly.

He also didn’t have the inclination to bother with it.

He was still squeezing every bit of progress out of the entire territory.

The replenishment work of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions continued, and Gu Hang planned to conscript another infantry battalion.

The new migrants were an important source of soldiers.

When he had a choice, Gu Hang always strived to avoid having soldiers from the same source within a single unit. But now, all the other groups under his command had been mobilized several times already, making it hard to draw more hands.

Therefore, Gu Hang simply took the three hundred newly conscripted soldiers, spent 3 points of grace for their initial training, then drew some veterans from the 2nd and 3rd Battalions and mixed them into the 4th Battalion.

By now, the total population under Gu Hang’s command had reached eight thousand, with one thousand one hundred soldiers.

The manpower gap was still large.

However, the preparations made by Hodgson and his grandson were gradually beginning to have an effect.

Apart from the over two thousand migrants who arrived with Lambert, every day migrants kept coming in trickles, drawn by the propaganda about the Governor's Camp, bringing their families along for the migration.

This allowed Gu Hang's forces to grow by a few dozen to a couple hundred people every day.

Though it was not quite quenching the thirst, having a steady supply of water was a good thing.

One by one, smelting furnaces were being produced by the Black Box Mother Machine and sent to the Abandoned Cave Society; carts of calcined lime, metal scrap, and metal ores were transported from Rubbish Town and delivered into the smelting factories.

The alloy steel fabricated at the Abandoned Cave Society was partly sent to Revival City to be sold through Dennison Henry's channels, partly remained at the Abandoned Cave Society to be fashioned into armored vests, prioritized for the Governor's newly conscripted soldiers, but also partly sold in Rubbish Town. Another part of the alloy steel entered the newly established G9 Gun Family workshops, being processed into various parts before being assembled again...

The G9 Gun Family had gradually begun mass production within Gu Hang's territory, no longer relying solely on production from the Mother Machine as before.

The population of the Abandoned Cave Society had even surpassed that of the Governor's Camp.

Heavy industry was like a black hole for population; it seemed as if no matter how many people were thrown into it, it could consume them all.

Here at the Governor's Camp, however, the development of light industry was not as rapid. The textile factory and the synthetic starch factory had started operations. But the latter did not have enough machines, and the technicians who had come down from the starship had not yet cracked the way to manufacture the synthetic starch machines based on the current industrial foundation. Currently, only two production lines were operating.

The former, in theory, should have been able to absorb a lot of people, but according to the plan, the heavy industry of the Abandoned Cave Society had a higher priority when it came to recruiting workers, which meant that the textile factory here could only recruit female workers—even many of the female workers had gone to the Abandoned Cave Society.

Meanwhile, there was also a high demand for construction workers in both places.

Factories needed expansion, residences needed enlarging, and besides these, structures like shops, distribution centers, canteens, schools, and administrative bodies... all required construction. And the corresponding facilities needed more people to fill them.

Population, population, and still population.

The unemployment rate within Gu Hang's forces was nearly zero.

This also meant that every citizen who arrived at the Governor's Camp was warmly welcomed. The heads of factories, production lines, and departments were scrambling to recruit people. Men went to the factories, women to the textile mills, children were taken care of collectively, with educational institutions; even the elderly who could still walk were always given some work to free up another labor force...

At a time when the forces under him were running as if wound up by a spring, Gu Hang also welcomed the settlement of his second month after arriving at Rage Owl Star.

[Current Grace Points: 88]

[Monthly Fixed Income: 56]

[Governor's Temporary Camp: 17/Terra month]

[Abandoned Cave Society: 39/Terra Month]

The fixed monthly income was distributed.

Previously, he had 36 points of grace left. After replenishing troops for the 2nd and 3rd camps and establishing the 4th camp, a total of four hundred new soldiers needed training, which cost 4 points of grace. With the 56 points issued this month, the total was now 88.

Here in the monthly income figure, the development speed was quantitatively compared. About half a month ago, this number was just over twenty, and now it had more than doubled.

This was already the limit under the current population size. To increase it further, a significant rise in population was necessary while still maintaining an extremely low unemployment rate and a relatively high production efficiency.

With this in mind, Gu Hang looked at the hundreds of thousands of impoverished people outside Revival City and felt it was a sheer waste of resources.

With this scale of population, what a terrifying figure it could be if everyone was utilized to their full potential?

To let them suffer outside the city from unemployment, hunger, and cold was an immense loss.

However, coming back to the development of his own power, Gu Hang felt that his thinking had expanded after meeting a certain individual.

That person was named Osenia.

It was after the battle in the alien woodland that he noticed her appear on the [Hero] interface, a person who could be awakened as a hero.

Initially, Gu Hang thought that this girl, who did not seem like a warrior at all, might possess some spiritual energy talent and could awaken as a spiritual energy wielder after being activated in the [Hero] interface.

Spiritual energy talent was one in a million among the human population. But after all, he had eight thousand people under his command; wouldn't it be reasonable for one to emerge?

But after meeting her in person, Gu Hang was initially a bit disappointed.

The girl did not have the spiritual energy talent he had imagined.

As a spiritual energy master himself, he was able to make that judgment.

But after in-depth interaction, and even getting to know what the girl had done after joining the textile factory and becoming a management member, Gu Hang realized he might have picked up a treasure no less valuable than a spiritual energy wielder.

To put it plainly, there wasn't anything too extraordinary. Osenia hadn't improved any processes; she simply reorganized the entire factory's work system according to her own ideas and trained a few deputies to implement and execute the system with her.

Accounting records, work plans, incentive policies, result assessments, execution efficiency... When all these things were put into practice, one after another, the management efficiency of the textile factory was tangibly improved. The inevitable chaos and rudimentary practices during the rapid development of his territory were effectively mitigated.

This made Gu Hang realize that maybe the limit hadn't been reached. Even without an increase in population or equipment, the establishment and continuous reform of administrative management systems could still enhance productivity.

The relationship between the economic base and the superstructure?

Gu Hang pondered wildly in his head.

To be honest, these jobs, these systems and policies, if Gu Hang were to do them himself, of course, wouldn't be bad. But he was the Governor, the ruler, with all matters of military, politics, and finance to consider. Getting bogged down in the details of every little thing was unrealistic.

It might still be manageable now, but in the future, as his power grew even larger, it would become increasingly impossible for him to do so.

He needed an efficient administrative system, bureaucrats, civil servants; these roles were essential.

And this girl seemed like a good choice. Her potential had even been recognized by the system.

With that, Gu Hang didn't have many other hesitations.

System, activate this girl for me!

Chapter 55 - Chapter 55: Chapter 55, Excellent Government Officer

Chapter 55: Chapter 55, Excellent Government Officer

Osenia felt somewhat dizzy as she left the Governor's residence—really just a big house.

At first, when she learned that His Excellency the Governor wanted to see her, she was quite nervous.

She was naturally poised and graceful, and after several months of hardship, she had added a wildcat's tenacity, willing to fight and desperate to survive.

Yet she still felt nervous, at a loss.

The ordeals of those months were deeply etched in her heart, so much so that upon arriving at the Governor's Camp and settling into a stable life where she no longer needed to worry about tomorrow's food or safety, she cherished it immensely.

She worked hard at her job, entering the textile factory and, because she could read the most, she became a manager. She did her utmost to put forth and implement her ideas and experiences, as well as the knowledge from books she had read before the war.

She felt she was doing quite well, but admittedly, in some areas, if not ‘heretical’, at least she was different from other factories and units.

Could it be that His Excellency was angry about this?

With a heart full of trepidation, she met with the Governor.

This was her first time seeing the Governor up close.

She had expected him to be a dignified man, but to her surprise, he was quite young, not much older than herself. He had a handsome face, wore a golden, gorgeous, crisp military uniform, but his smile was quite amiable.

The Governor first inquired about her living situation and her past experiences to which she answered one by one. As the conversation progressed, her mood eased slightly. They then discussed her work at the textile factory and her thoughts, and while listening, he would occasionally pose more in-depth questions and suggestions.

Osenia found her exchange with the Governor very pleasant. She discovered the Governor was a great listener and posed appropriate questions. At the same time, she also found the Governor’s insights profound, providing her with much inspiration.

It was a great harvest.

And after their conversation concluded, something completely unexpected happened.

His Excellency mentioned establishing a new department, named ‘Production Department,’ aimed at overseeing all the factories, setting production plans, and optimizing systems.

And she was to be appointed as the acting head of the Production Department.

Osenia was stunned.

Her first doubt was whether her ears were broken and she had misunderstood.

After confirming it was correct, she began to wonder if there was something wrong with... oh, such thoughts were disrespectful.

But that was more or less the gist of her concerns.

How could she, a little white rabbit who knew nothing, suddenly take on such an important job?

Gu Hang did not give her the power to refuse.

Nor would she refuse.

She felt flustered and panicked, at a loss. If this had happened a few months earlier when she truly was a young lady, she might have chosen to flee out of fear of not being able to handle it. But now, after months of hardship, she understood that every opportunity had to be fought for, had to be grasped.

His Excellency had given her the opportunity, and she was fully aware of what the position, this job, meant.

She had no idea what she was doing, but it did not prevent her from trying to convince herself that she had to try to do it, she had to change her own destiny.

She couldn't waste the chance given by the Governor, she had to be worthy of his trust, only then could she take her fate into her own hands.

And besides... it wasn't as if she really lacked the ability to do it.

The past her, probably wouldn't have been up to it.

But now, after her talk with the Governor, as she walked out, her mind kept churning. His words seemed to have turned into some strange, massive, and useful knowledge.

Many things that previously stumped her, that she didn't know how to handle, now seemed to click, and she was able to find suitable methods to deal with them; many areas that she thought were well-handled before now seemed to have better solutions to improve the outcomes.

She had sensed this during her conversation with the Governor.

He wasn't quite sure why that was the case and casually expressed his wonder.

Then he saw the governor reveal what seemed to her a rather strange smile:

"Under normal circumstances, perhaps this is The Emperor's revelation."

"This is your revelation," she complimented thus.

Gu Hang burst into laughter at the time and waved his hand dismissively, "Don't, please don't say that. I can't shoulder such a responsibility."

...

[Hero Activated: Osenia (N)]

[Level: lv1]

[Physique 4, Spirituality 5, Command 7, Politics 9]

[Trait:]

[Excellent Civil Servant: Skilled in statistics, arrangement, and planning of political and economic affairs. Placing her in a suitable position can enhance administrative efficiency. Politics +1]

…

Looking at the ‘n,’ Gu Hang had an awkward expression.

Above the ‘n,’ shouldn’t there be ‘r’, ‘sr’, ‘ssr’ too?

Turns out this wasn’t some farming system, nor was it a war system, but a gacha system, right? And it even includes elements of character development.

So far, three features with a random element had appeared in his system.

Gu Hang complained inwardly.

However, being able to activate Osenia was quite good.

It was even more valuable than activating Yan Fangxu.

Within the current scope of Gu Hang’s influence, there was a shortage of population, but an even greater shortage of talent.

On the military side, it might be slightly better. After all, the Army Badge System could provide a training bonus for the entire troop, and there was Yan Fangxu, the bona fide captain of the Imperial Navy. Even without activating him as a hero, he still had exceptional military command skills.

Put simply, he was serviceable.

On the other hand, for administrative work, Gu Hang really didn’t have any suitable candidates under his command.

Until now, he had only been able to use his little attendant Zhang Chao and Patel to manage the entire camp’s affairs.

This was a lot of pressure for both of them.

Zhang Chao did a passable job, without any major mistakes, but that was also because Gu Hang did not have many expectations for him. If there were any further demands, it would likely be too much for Zhang Chao to bear.

Additionally, Patel, the former leader of the Abandoned Cave Society, was currently in charge of their heavy industry conglomerate. He was learning while doing the job, and his past experience was far from sufficient to deal with the various emerging issues during the rapid development of the Abandoned Cave Society's heavy industry. He was working hard, but it was also tough, and even with such efforts, it was very difficult to elevate his own skills to the necessary level.

Now that he had Osenia on his team, Gu Hang could be a little more at ease with the administrative work.

As for promoting someone to such an important position so quickly, which might seem like rushing things and, in the future, possibly leaving no room for promotion... that was possible, but Gu Hang didn't have the luxury to worry about that now.

First solve the immediate problems; the right way to use people, later, will do.

————

Osenia now had a picture too!

Chapter 56 - Chapter 56: Chapter 56, Draw Cards! Engine!

Chapter 56: Chapter 56, Draw Cards! Engine!

In the process of activating Osenia as a hero, Gu Hang also discovered a hidden mechanism within the system.

It seemed that the individuals who could be turned into heroes were not fixed.

Osenia had not been at his camp from the very first day, but it was only after she exhibited exceptional abilities that the system detected her potential and determined that she could be activated.

Then, as people like Patel and Zhang Chao gained more work experience and improved their insights, was it possible that their potential could rise and they could become candidates eligible for activation?

Even Osenia, who was initially designated as the lowest 'N' rarity, could there be a chance for her potential to increase in the future?

Gu Hang felt it was very likely.

The real world was not a game; people change. Those with outstanding talents might fall short, and those with less talent might one day have a sudden epiphany; all of this was unpredictable.

...

After spending ten points of favor on Osenia, Gu Hang still had 78 points in hand.

Without a doubt, he spent 50 points directly on himself.

Level up!

[Level-up successful, Physical attribute +1, Spiritual attribute +1]

[Please choose one new talent from among Physical, Spiritual, Command, Leadership, and Unique directions.]

Gu Hang, as usual, tried clicking on Unique, but nothing came of it.

With no other choice, Gu Hang could only take the path laid out before him.

What to choose, he had already made up his mind—it was still the Spiritual path.

[Telekinesis Control: You can now use Spiritual Energy to directly manipulate physical objects. Spiritual +1]

This Spiritual Talent was quite plain and unadorned. Gu Hang remembered that many Psychic Casters had their Psychic Talents manifest in this way, which was quite conventional.

But conventional didn't mean weak.

On the contrary, it was a very powerful talent, especially when a Psychic Caster's own Spiritual strength was sufficiently substantial.

It was indeed a bit of a pity not to have drawn an even more awesome and powerful Psychic Talent, but the result itself was not bad.

Subsequently, his overall attributes became as follows:

[Hero: Gu Hang (Faction Leader), LV3, insufficient experience to level up]

[Physical: 9, Spiritual: 17]

[Traits: Psychic Caster, Governor of Rage Owl Star]

[Talents: Protective Spiritual Energy, Telekinesis Control]

...

A special note on attributes: Gu Hang had now figured out that the average level for a healthy average person was around 5. Take Osenia as an example; she was somewhat frail, had normal Spiritual Energy similar to an average person, had decent Command ability fit for leadership, found military command challenging but could manage logistics without much trouble. Her highest attribute was political, making her more suitable as a high-quality civil servant.

Gu Hang's own traits, however, did not display Command and Political points. It seemed the system was reluctant to quantify his abilities in these two aspects. On the other hand, his Physical and Spiritual abilities, being objective, would each increase by one point with every level he gained.

Every point represented approximately a 1.5 times growth.

Now, his physical attributes, from strength to resilience to neural response speed... a range of abilities, together, were approximately five times that of an ordinary person.

And his spiritual attribute had reached 129 times that of a normal person!

If before, his total spiritual strength could only be considered that of an excellent Psychic Caster, now it could be regarded as powerful.

Who isn't a master of spiritual energy now?

Gu Hang was quite satisfied with this.

If he were to go back to the battle in the alien forest a few days ago, it would become incredibly easy. When those three cultists rode out of the woods on their storm birds, he could have crushed the trio mid-air, without having to wait for them to get within a certain range as he did before, or rely on the elite land troops that had been enhanced to assist him.

In fact, he had almost figured it out by now; things like spiritual talent were just icing on the cake. What truly made a decisive difference was the spiritual attribute itself. This factor determined the overall strength of spiritual energy. As long as it was high enough, even the most rudimentary methods of use could be decisive at critical moments.

A single stroke of strength defeats ten sessions of training; that's the idea.

Having completed his self-improvement, Gu Hang still had 28 points of grace left to spend.

After some thought, he couldn't resist and spent them on drawing a technology card.

This time, with a 40% chance, he struck gold on the first try.

Gu Hang let out a long sigh of relief; if he had missed twice in a row, he would have called the police.

He couldn't wait to see what the newly drawn technology was.

[Basic Technology: 'Whetstone' Hybrid Engine]

[The most frequently used engine within the limitless boundaries of the Empire World. It can adaptably utilize a variety of power sources including diverse types of biofuels, fossil fuels, and batteries. Configurable and scalable, while not advanced or powerful, it's remarkably versatile and is seen in countless Empire Worlds.]

Gu Hang was ecstatic.

Technology cards always bring out the good stuff!

Uh... given the current ragged state of the forces under his command, it seems that anything drawn would be impressive.

But regardless, the 'Whetstone' Engine still had an irreplaceable role.

As the system description says, this thing is not exactly cutting-edge. At least compared to those mighty engines that utilize matter reactors, energy crystals, or super-compressed energy sources, it falls far short. But if Gu Hang were given one of those high-end engines, he wouldn't be able to use it.

He had no access to adequate, quality nuclear fuels, couldn't mass-produce energy crystals, let alone super-compressed or spiritualized energy sources.

And even if he had these advanced energy sources, they would be of little use. These more powerful sources of energy are used in power armors, Titan Mechas, mobile fortresses, and various starships.

Gu Hang couldn't build any of that.

The low-end properties of the 'Whetstone' Engine were just right.

Its most outstanding feature was its indifference to the type of fuel used. Hook it up to a battery, and it works; fill it with diesel, gasoline, or kerosene, and it works; toss in some biomass fuel, throw in some firewood or crops, which after pyrolysis or gasification produce liquid or gaseous fuel, and it still works.

Moreover, its range of application is very wide. It can be configured to be small, rudimentary, and durable—like a tricycle; or a bit larger and more powerful for making tanks; or even larger, set up as a power group to drive cargo ships; or made lighter and of higher quality, with better fuels, to serve as an aviation engine...

It's incredibly suitable.

With it, the construction machinery and vehicle manufacturing industries under Gu Hang's command have found their solution.

He had been thinking that, as the territory developed and transportation demand grew, the brute oxen strength he had "extorted" from Revival City and subsequently commandeered during material transportation was becoming increasingly insufficient, and he was considering where to get some more oxen.

Now, he need not worry about that anymore.

Who still uses outdated animal power! At most, it would be used in some rough terrain where vehicles couldn't run, to make some use of the remaining heat.

Chapter 57 - Chapter 57: Chapter 57, The Curious Engineer

Chapter 57: Chapter 57, The Curious Engineer

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Having an engine doesn't mean you have a car or construction machinery.

Chassis, moving parts, suspension systems, transmission systems, body design, control systems... to build a good car, many things are needed beyond just the engine.

However, the issue of quality can be solved later; having an appropriate power source marks the beginning of everything.

To put it bluntly, if you take alloy steel to make a frame, a transmission rod, some wheels, and create a running tricycle, then pull a flatbed cart behind it, it's already a big step forward from relying on human or animal power.

Now that we have the engine, if we could also pull out some vehicle or construction machinery design, the heavy industry of Gu Hang's territory could take a big step forward.

Before that, Gu Hang planned to first find someone to design a simple, functional vehicle to improve transportation efficiency, and incidentally, to explore some export possibilities. If the production volume is sufficient and the performance adequate, creating a small three-wheeled truck to equip his troops would result in a motorized infantry battalion.

Gu Hang arrived at his secret base, where a basement was dug, walls erected, and the loyal and reliable mech-servant soldiers, having received strict orders, guarded the place, allowing no one to enter.

Of course, Mr. Gu could enter at will.

Here, the two previously extracted technologies and four Black Box Manufacturing Machines were present.

In addition, a lot of space was reserved. On one hand, to accommodate the feeding and production of the existing four machines; on the other hand, to facilitate the placement of more machines in the future.

He configured the new two machines that had been set up.

This secret factory also employed workers. Due to the high security level, they lived in the factory with strict orders not to let information leak, were not allowed to go out without special circumstances, and were monitored when they did go out.

They poured the raw materials into the production Black Box for engines, and quickly, under Gu Hang's initial setup, two engines, one large and one small, that met his requirements were produced.

These two engines would be sent to the research institute, where the technician from the Quintet would study them.

After all, there was no clear path to conquering the production line for synthetic starch; it was difficult to craft. The industrial and scientific research foundations under Gu Hang were shabby, and even the more basic technologies on the scale of the imperial civilization were hard to achieve.

This also indirectly proved how valuable the technological capabilities within Gu Hang's system were.

Frankly speaking, if Gu Hang wanted to meet the imperial taxation every two years, it would be crucial how well he could utilize the technological offerings from the tech panel.

If Gu Hang managed to transform Rage Owl Star into a mini casting world, then the lowest tier of imperial tax would no longer be a concern.

Back to the present.

He first used the Black Box to make two completed engines. Once the research institute had a specific application plan, they could produce more.

There was also no rush to start the production line Black Box; similarly, it would begin operating at full capacity to produce engines once the application plan was in place.

All these didn't need to be rushed.

...

The person Gu Hang had high hopes for, who was to ponder how to overcome the challenges of synthetic starch technology and come up with an application plan for the 'Whetstone' Engine, was now using a mechanical hand to scratch his head, contemplating his secret factory.

Wu Jiarong was just too curious.

She came from a casting world and was a technical officer who might have been promoted to mechanics.

But... the infighting within the Sect of Mechanics was much more severe than outsiders could imagine. She lost the fight, not only failing to get promoted but also losing all her possessions and knowledge to others, along with her personal freedom, and was traded as imperial tax.

But after that, she couldn't say her luck turned, but at least things didn't get worse.

She was at least a technical officer and not a slave worker, and when the Tianma Fleet needed more personnel, she was thrown onto the Quintet, where she remained for ten years.

She had already resigned herself to that fate.

“`

Having left the casting world and the system of the Sect of Mechanics, she was unlikely to have any room for advancement anymore. Even aboard the Quintet, she was not the only technical specialist; several tech-priests were present, but it was difficult for her to be taken on as a student and have the chance to be taken off the starship and develop further in the future.

Over time, she even began to think that her current life wasn't so bad after all.

It wasn't too busy, there was no need for cutthroat competition, just do her own job well, maintain her portion of the starship's structure—especially the logistical system. She still had a group of slave laborers and junior specialists under her to manage and allocate.

As for herself, she also had some free time when she was off work to research things she was interested in and tinker with little gadgets, which was quite entertaining.

Life didn't seem too bad at all.

Just when she had almost accepted her fate, an order from Colonel Yelisia transferred her, along with a few junior specialists and the production line and spare parts for synthetic starch, to the surface.

The good days were over.

That's what she thought.

Wu Jiarong found that it seemed she could never entertain the thought of resigning to her fate. The moment she did, fate would immediately slap her in the face, press her down further, and see if she still accepted it.

Ten years ago, she hadn't won the fight, she admitted defeat, and planned to think about promotion next time. She was thoroughly defeated, became untouchable in the empire, and could never return to it; now, she no longer struggled, thinking that spending the rest of her days on the starship was quite good, even considering marrying a man and having a child while her body modifications hadn't extended to her belly yet, only to be assigned to the surface of Rage Owl Star.

After all, there's always a lower bottom.

But what could she do about it?

She could only endure and work hard without complaint.

However, after arriving on the surface, she discovered... things didn't seem as bad as she had imagined?

She knew that Mr. Gu, the governor, could almost be said to have started developing this place from scratch. The industrial and research foundations were virtually nil.

But beyond that, everything else seemed to be a benefit!

She had no worries about food and clothing, and even ate better than on the starship; although she followed the governor's orders to research how to realize synthetic starch technology under limited conditions, she herself didn't have to eat synthetic starch.

According to the work points system devised by the governor, her work points were quite high, and the allocation quota and quality were not bad either.

In the daytime, she could bask in the sun, and at night she could enjoy the breeze, none of which the starship had.

And more importantly, she had found a long-lost ‘goal’.

This thing, seemingly abstract, but when it comes down to reality, it’s just one point: knowing the significance of her own work.

Seeing the hungry looks of the refugees from Revival City, she honestly didn’t have much sympathy for them, but her research could help them get food, and that couldn’t be considered a bad thing. Eventually, she would see people’s happy faces, receive praise from the governor, and know that her work was truly making a difference.

Unlike on the starship, day after day, year after year, without seeing a clear work achievement. Those cannons, those machines, maintaining them daily or every so often seemed to make no real difference.

Besides, the task of synthetic starch given by the governor was quite interesting in itself.

It was challenging, yet it seemed to be within her capabilities.

She was motivated to do her job well.

And apart from motivation and goals, she had rediscovered another thing that had been missing for a long, long time:

Curiosity.

She was very curious about what the governor’s secret factory was all about.

Chapter 58 - Chapter 58: Chapter 58, indeed, one must not accept fate.

Chapter 58: Chapter 58, indeed, one must not accept fate.

Was the power under Governor Gu Hang truly a technological wasteland?

Yes, but not entirely.

In most places, the conditions were so primitive and backward that they were unspeakable.

Yet, Wu Jiarong was able to see the finest alloy steel materials here.

These were not the ones produced by the so-called Abandoned Cave Society's alloy factories, but rather special supply alloys that the Governor had specifically had transported for her.

Others were not aware, noticing only that these two types of materials seemed more attractive and probably better to use, but beyond that, they couldn't articulate the specific differences. But she understood clearly that this kind of alloy steel could be considered special materials.

Not to mention a dilapidated place like Rage Owl Star, even many areas with strong industrial foundations were unable to produce this type of special alloy steel. Even in the casting world where she used to stay, the production of this material was very low, and it was often a great challenge to apply for or purchase it for research or production work.

She did not believe that this was locally produced in Rage Owl Star.

There had to be some secrets unknown to others inside.

She had inquired about it, but didn't dare make too much of a fuss.

Initially, she thought the Governor might have hoarded a batch of high-performance materials when he arrived at the planet, and they just hadn't been used up yet. But later, when the G9 rifle began to appear, she knew things couldn't be as simple as she had imagined.

And now, the Governor had sent her two 'Whetstone' Engines of different specifications.

These engines, while not particularly high in technological content at the level of the entire Star Sea, were not advanced products. However, like the special alloy steel, what was most valuable was the craftsmanship they contained.

Grindstone Engines could be made anywhere, but to make them this well was something Wu Jiarong had never seen before.

It was as if someone had dedicated their entire life to study how to properly make an engine that could only power a tricycle.

It was absurdly outstanding.

A bold idea formed in her mind.

She tossed and turned, unable to sleep, feeling at one moment that she was just wildly speculating, but at another thinking that maybe it was true, as no other explanation seemed to fit.

How could a governor without any real power on a barren planet possibly have something like a Black Box Manufacturing Machine? If you said that Mr. Gu's family from the Tianma Star Sector, the powerful Gu Family, had treasured one, that might be slightly possible—just slightly.

Could it be that his family had brought it for him?

It still didn't seem realistic.

Wu Jiarong still couldn't understand it, but she didn't dare to think further.

It could be deadly.

Indeed, she had already started to regret why she inquired about the secret factory in the first place.

What should she do next?

This restless state of mind continued into the next day, making her somewhat uneasy while at work.

Then, she heard a piece of news that made her even more unsettled.

"What? The Governor is coming?"

"Yes." One of her apprentices, a junior commissioner, didn't quite understand why his mentor seemed so troubled by the news.

What's so abnormal about that?

Seeing the apprentice's confusion, but having no desire to explain, Wu Jiarong said nothing.

What could she say? That your mentor suspects she's stumbled upon the Governor's secret and now fears he might silence her?

She could only hurry to prepare.

Truth be told, the new assignment given by the Governor for her to come up with two schemes to utilize the large and small 'Whetstone' Engines was not difficult. With her expertise and the provision of excellent materials, designing two operational vehicles was quite easy.

However, time was short and recently she had been restless, so she hadn't been able to work on it properly.

The governor was coming soon, and she had no other choice; she couldn't just say she hadn't done anything lately. She gripped at straws, hoping that even if she couldn't present a design plan immediately, at least when Mr. Gu asked later, she would have some thoughts and a few sketches to show.

As it turned out, her advance preparation was indeed valuable.

When Governor Gu Hang arrived, she could talk quite freely, and she could present small parts she had just crafted by hand with tools, along with the design diagrams, discussing her ideas.

At first, she was somewhat stuttering because the thing she hastily brought out felt a bit rough to her, only just runnable at best.

But as she saw Governor Gu Hang continually nodding, she gradually relaxed.

I still have standards, after all. Mr. Gu's requirements aren't that high.

With her mood lightened, she was able to more effortlessly exhibit her technical prowess to the governor.

This one aspect was her only source of pride since arriving on Rage Owl Star. In the past, whether in the forging world or on a starship with technical priests, her technical level was nothing to mention. Only on the surface of Rage Owl Star was she truly unique.

As she watched Governor Gu Hang continuously nodding and listening intently, Wu Jiarong's mood improved even more.

She even began to feel that leaving the starship for the surface might not be such a bad thing. Here, nobody could overshadow her. She was the most trusted technical staff by the governor—of course, that was because nobody could compete with her. But wasn't that a good thing? Why join the chaos with other technical giants when she could reign supreme and lead?

Just as she entertained such thoughts, Gu Hang spoke again:

"Specialist Wu, I have another question."

"Please, Mr. Gu, any doubts you have, I can certainly help you with," Wu Jiarong confidently offered.

"Why are you so curious about the secret factory?"

Wu Jiarong felt as if plunging into an ice cave.

Her only thought now: one really shouldn't resign oneself to fate.

Every time she resigned herself, it never ended well.

The last thing she wanted to face still happened.

At that moment, she couldn't even remember the various excuses she had agonized over when anticipating interrogation.

Seeing Wu Jiarong flustered and at a loss for words, Gu Hang revealed a gentle smile instead.

"Specialist Wu, don't be so nervous. You have some speculations, right? Just speak your mind."

Hearing Gu Hang ask in such a manner, Wu Jiarong seemed to deflate.

"Yes... The Black Box Manufacturer is in your secret factory, isn't it?"

"Indeed, it is," Gu Hang admitted with a smile.

Wu Jiarong received the answer to the question she was so curious about, confirming her speculation. But under the current circumstances, she didn't feel happy at all.

Wu Jiarong sighed deeply: "I wish you hadn't told me that. You could have just told a simple lie, and I would have believed it."

"But there was no need, right?" Gu Hang said as he stood up and looked out of the window, "Look at this place, just two months ago, it was still a wasteland. And now, it already looks like a town. The Abandoned Cave Society farther away, you've seen it too, is thriving even more."

"Perhaps to many people, this doesn't seem like something a governor should be doing, but I am convinced that I am on the right path."

"Here, I want to create a seed that will eventually take root and sprout throughout the entire Rage Owl Star."

"The future I envision is a Rage Owl Star with production power as strong as the forging worlds, with a living environment like the Garden Worlds."

At this point, Gu Hang turned his gaze back to Wu Jiarong:

"Do you believe in it?"

Chapter 59 - Chapter 59: Chapter 59, from the Golden Age

Chapter 59: Chapter 59, from the Golden Age

“Do you believe it?”

Wu Jiarong did not.

A productivity on par with Forge World? Possible;

Living standards comparable to Garden World? Such examples were not unheard of.

But to possess both?

That was a joke.

Garden Worlds boasted beautiful environments, ample resource supplies, and superior quality of life; they usually served as administrative planets or trade hubs. Forge Worlds, on the other hand, often did not enjoy pleasant environments. The entire world would resemble a massive factory, where countless people had to toil and contribute not just sweat but blood and flesh.

Could these two things be simply merged?

Among the myriad stars within the empire’s domains, how many such examples could be found?

Could even the imperial capital Holy Terra achieve what Mr. Gu described?

She did not know.

Propaganda would say yes, but without having been there to see it with her own eyes, she dared not believe it readily.

If she couldn’t trust Holy Terra to be as Mr. Gu had said, much less could she believe it of this desolate backwater wasteland planet.

Rationally, she felt that Mr. Gu was just talking nonsense, pie in the sky.

The pie was big and round, yet so far-fetched and illusory it was almost laughable.

Yet, emotionally, she could sense Mr. Gu's grand ambition.

Ambition, of course, couldn't put food on the table. She once had aspirations to become a mechanic, or even go further to advance to a Mechanical Priest; but in the end, wasn't she merely used to pay the empire's taxes?

However, she felt she could believe in Mr. Gu's ambition.

Believing he was ambitious was one thing; believing that the ambition could be realized was another.

But just believing in Mr. Gu's ambition, she could roughly paint a picture in her mind that her Mr. Gu wouldn't just tinker along, only thinking about scraping by, aggressively levying taxes, and skimming off the empire's taxes every two years while enjoying the rest of the time.

Working under such a Mr. Gu seemed, maybe, and probably... to be a good opportunity she never had before?

Ten years ago, on a Forge World, she considered herself exceptionally talented and gifted. But back then, she only aspired to become a mechanic; aboard a starship with a dead end, her only thought was to find a decent man to marry, have children, and then coast along. Maybe retire when old and frail, but more likely, she might be destroyed along with "Quintet" in some battle, turning into just another piece of space debris.

Following a Mr. Gu and becoming his most crucial technical staff, her future achievements might not just be a mere mechanic or Mechanical Priest. Perhaps, she could have the chance to become a Mechanical Bishop, or even...

She dared not think further, ascending to a Sage was too difficult. Wasn't such idle fantasy just as empty as Mr. Gu's dreams of turning Rage Owl Star into a combination of Forge World and Garden World?

All of this was still far off, yet not so distant.

Indeed, Mr. Gu was currently impoverished and commanded a population barely breaking ten thousand, and even his administrative powers couldn't reach the entire planet. But on the other hand, if Mr. Gu wielded great power now, would he even notice someone like her, a small technical officer? Surely it would be easy to attract a host of higher-level experts.

It was precisely now, in the early stages, that there was an opportunity to gift coal in snowy weather, to grow as Mr. Gu's power expanded.

Besides, Mr. Gu still had the Black Box Manufacturer...

The value of this device was immeasurably precious.

Legend has it that they come from the distant Golden Age, a time before the Empire was even established, almost impossible to verify. It is said that, at that time, humankind was the master of the entire universe, and every human being had dignity, enjoyed the finest life, and could pursue any profession according to their interests, or choose not to work at all without any consequence.

The Black Box Manufacturer was a product of that era, designed to ensure that humans could easily and quickly acquire products in any environment. Interstellar colonizers, with only a black box, could swiftly establish suitable homes on a new desolate planet.

It was also with the help of black boxes that humans in the Golden Age managed to spread their footprints across the entire universe and maintain a fairly consistent level of technology in every world.

And now, the Empire's technology is starkly different from that of the Golden Age.

Scientific research depends on archaeology; this is no joke.

A study that might take a forging world a hundred years to crack could be solved overnight with just a hint from some ancient ruins discovered one day.

In fact, many of the various technologies now widely used in the Empire have been restored through archaeology, yet they are not even one percent as advanced as those from the Golden Age. The precious Titan Giant Armor might have just been the kind of vehicle a lumberjack drove back in the Golden Era.

And the likes of the Black Box Manufacturer are, well, the utmost priority in archaeological... er, I mean scientific research.

This device can directly produce finished goods and also has extremely high research value.

Although the three types of black boxes that seem to have appeared in Mr. Gu's hands only produce items that are already commonplace within the Empire, having no value in themselves. After all, which decent world can't produce rifles, alloy steel, or Grindstone Engines now?

However, it is the black box itself that is tremendously valuable.

The output isn't that important, but the technology from the Golden Age that is encapsulated within the black box itself is enough to drive the Mechanical Church mad.

...

Gu Hang was listening carefully as Wu Jiarong briefed him on the situation.

Some things he knew from rummaging through his memories, others he did not.

These messages were important, but perhaps not so crucial.

According to Wu Jiarong, he had virtually dismissed the idea of selling black box manufacturers. It's not that he couldn't sell them at all; after all, it would take effort for others to forcibly take them. Buying them could also be seen as a more efficient approach.

However, Gu Hang would not sell them.

It was too dangerous.

Compared to the Sect of Mechanics, whose power is immense across the entire Empire, he, a mere governor, was insignificant.

What's more dangerous was that if he sold a few units, wouldn't the Mechanical Church keep an eye on him? Desire to acquire more? Or eager to find out how exactly he obtained the precious black boxes?

As for why this wasn't such an important matter, it's because Rage Owl Star was too remote, too inconspicuous. It was difficult for anything that happened here to reach the ears of the Sect of Mechanics.

For now, Rage Owl Star's interstellar communication was solely with Quintet. If the news wasn't leaked to the skies, it's as if it never happened.

Moreover, Gu Hang wouldn't ignore the essentials and chase the trivial, not using the black boxes when he had them.

He had been cautious before, but inevitably, some things would slip through the cracks as long as they were put to use.

In the future, he would be even more careful.

At the same time, he also needed someone to lend him a hand.

Gu Hang's gaze turned towards Wu Jiarong, filled with expectation.

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Today, one thing that delighted Gu Hang in his exchange with Wu Jiarong was the attitude of this female technician.

Although she didn't answer his previous question about "whether she believed or not," she expressed her stance through her subsequent explanation.

And in the end, the meaning became even clearer:

"If Mr. Gu trusts me, I can work in the secret factory. That will be your research and development center, where all your future technological outputs will have a plausible explanation."

Wu Jiarong's attitude was modest.

Gu Hang looked at her, full of smiles.

"Very good, I am very satisfied with your suggestion. I hope you can fulfill all that you have promised, and I, in turn, assure you to get what you desire."

Wu Jiarong felt a jolt in her heart but soon calmed down again.

She was confident that Mr. Gu had understood the implication of her words.

Working in Mr. Gu's secret factory would indeed allow her, in the future, to attribute all exceptional outputs to herself. On top of the regular secrecy mechanisms, by creating an illusion of a talented technical master working for Mr. Gu, it would be a good rationale for the outputs of the secret factory—or rather the future Wu Jiarong Research Institute.

Thus, if outsiders wanted to uncover this secret, they would first have to break through the confidentiality measures and methods, and then they would see her. Only after dealing with her would they be able to discover the secrets of the black box.

The level of security was greatly increased.

But at the same time, she could gain even more.

She would become Mr. Gu's most important technical advisor. Even if more outstanding technical experts were to arrive in the future, she wouldn't have to worry about being replaced; even if she did nothing, a continuous stream of technical knowledge would be attributed to her, and various technological achievements would be credited to her mind, especially as Mr. Gu's territory developed and more and better new technologies emerged. She might truly become a Sage while lying down and doing nothing.

Moreover, being able to closely study the black box technology from the Golden Age was something the past her could not even imagine. With her former status, she could never have had access to such top-level research materials.

She knew she wasn't capable of dismantling the black box and comprehending what was inside. The Sect of Mechanics, with so many top Sages, hadn't figured it out, so she, a mere technical staffer, was even less likely to understand it.

But what if she could gain even a little bit of insight or inspiration?

Just a tiny bit of the essence might be equivalent to the results of her long period of technical study in the past.

She was determined!

...

The arrangements were made swiftly. After Gu Hang left, Wu Jiarong immediately took her team, under the escort of Mr. Gu's loyal mechanical soldiers, to settle in the secret factory.

The place was renamed a research institute, although, unfortunately, it did not carry the name 'Wu Jiarong Research Institute' as she had hoped, but was nameless.

But she didn't mind.

She already saw a bright future, and this directly maxed out her motivation to work.

She quickly came up with the application scheme for Mr. Gu's demanded 'Whetstone' Engine.

It was not the rushed, rough-hewn creation made to appease Mr. Gu that day, but a proper, earnestly crafted one.

Still not advanced—something too advanced was beyond her capability. But Mr. Gu's requirement was not for advancement but for sufficient reliability and relatively low mass production difficulty.

In these aspects, she had already achieved the ultimate.

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She believed that, among her peers at the technician level, no one could do better than her.

After all, she had almost been promoted to a mechanic, had her promotion not been thwarted due to a failed struggle. She had always felt that her true skills had already reached the level of a mechanic.

What she presented was not merely a set of design plans, but also included two prototypes.

One was a three-wheeled cart with a cargo bed capable of carrying three people, including space on the side of the small bed to mount a machine gun.

A military tricycle had just emerged.

The larger engine was used to build a truck tractor. It was also compatible with multiple types, such as cargo beds and flatbeds, that could be hitched to the back of the tractor. It could be used for transporting goods or as a troop carrier truck.

Having seen the final products and even personally test-driving them, Mr. Gu was very satisfied with Wu Jiarong's work!

He designated model names for the two vehicles.

The tricycle was named 'Scout-XL100'.

The truck tractor was called 'Iron Bull-RN100'.

These two types of vehicles would definitely undergo further iterations in the future.

Wu Jiarong had already completed the plans for mass production of these vehicles, and subsequent related work would be handed over to the Abandoned Cave Society.

The alloy and plastic steel processing plant would undertake the production of some parts and components; a new vehicle factory would be built, with the production line set up under the guidance of Wu Jiarong's processes, to start trial mass production.

The engine plant was in no hurry, as the mother machine's black box could directly construct production lines for two different specifications of Grindstone engines. There was no need to rush now, as they were not immediately needed. If the engines were produced too quickly and there were not enough vehicles to equip, the excess engines would just gather dust.

Afterward, Wu Jiarong continued to ramble on to Mr. Gu about many other things she planned to do.

Refining the black box, improving technological proficiency without disassembly, perfecting theory, researching the various products of the black box... these were her own "cultivation" and not worth going into detail about.

Additionally, she would also make the ‘research institute’ worthy of its name.

Going forward, she planned to work on developing propellants and projectiles.

This should be easy to manage, as the G9 Gun Family production line obviously included cartridge manufacturing processes, and propellant was a key component among them. However, the production line created by the black box was purely for the G9 Gun Family and not quite suitable for artillery. But since the production process was already there, it was only appropriate for Wu Jiarong, with her capabilities, to appropriate the propellant production segment for dedicated production.

Combined with the production of warheads and explosive charges, they would soon be able to produce their own artillery shells, so Mr. Gu needn’t worry about running out of mortar shells in the future, turning his mortars into empty racks.

And it wasn’t just mortar shells, manufacturing rocket shells was also possible.

With the capability to produce shells, artillery had to be scheduled next. Unlike mortars, according to Wu Jiarong’s design, she planned to create real, large-caliber artillery pieces.

Artillery is the god of war!

She envisioned a 155 mm howitzer, with a process still tailored to local conditions, focusing on ruggedness, durability, high reliability, and simple manufacturing. Of course, this might affect precision, but that was a minor issue.

This was in line with the Sage’s philosophy of ‘solving for existence first, then for quality’.

In addition, man-portable rocket launchers and rapid-fire rocket nests would also be scheduled.

In time, paired with the ‘Iron Bull’ truck, perhaps with some improved models, there would be rocket nest launch vehicles, towed artillery, and even self-propelled artillery among such heavy armaments.