Governor 541

Chapter 541

Wang Ningyi ultimately chose to surrender.

No matter how stubborn, reality is harsher.

The Starport had been conquered by the Interstellar Warriors at almost all critical points. The Princess Legion soldiers had no way of reclaiming it; the firepower launched from the Starport destroyed the external Star Fortress and Armed Space Station.

The orbital defense system of the entire planet was virtually in ruins.

Once the main fleet of the Alliance cleared the orbital threats, the remaining ground cannon batteries would undoubtedly be unable to confront the main fleet of the Alliance.

If the Alliance were more ruthless, they could clear ground cannon battery fortresses corresponding to a sector of space, ensure no interception, and deploy Skyburn Torpedoes, achieving a one-time solution.

In his view, the war was already over. The subsequent battles were meaningless.

As Hussepe said, fewer casualties might be a good thing.

Moreover, although the surrender was unconditional, Hussepe also hinted that they would not be overly harsh on surrendering traitors. They would still enter POW camps, but the conditions in the Alliance's POW camps were quite good, living standards were guaranteed, and the Alliance Army was highly disciplined, without mistreatment of prisoners.

Of course, some necessary labor was unavoidable.

In the future, if the war was won, the prisoners might be released back to their homelands; if the war continued, there might be a prisoner exchange plan; if all else failed, the captives could join the Alliance, which was always open to them.

As for Wang Ningyi personally, the terms of surrender weren't bad. Although he couldn't continue being a general or hold high position and authority, the personal living conditions promised by the Alliance were quite good.

All these factors combined led the captured Wang Ningyi to finally agree and issue a surrender declaration for the entire planet from within the Starport.

However, even though he was the overall commander of Shangdong Star's defense forces, surrender wasn't something that would simply happen because he called for it, leading billions of warriors worldwide to surrender.

Impossible.

The 200,000 soldiers stationed at the Starport mostly didn't cause any major trouble. After Wang Ningyi declared surrender, the defensive forces at strategic points guarded stubbornly by the Phoenix Interstellar Warriors unwillingly followed the general's command. They allowed an Alliance ship to approach, letting the Alliance soldiers disarm them.

Various Armed Space Stations and even the last surviving Star Fortress, feeling besieged from all sides, also turned off defenses and surrendered, allowing the Alliance soldiers to take over facilities.

However, compared to the straightforwardness of the defense forces in orbit, the traitors on the ground were more hesitant.

After initial chaos subsided, some units decided not to resist as instructed, but soon, local officials of Shangdong Star and a general of the Princess Legion made a joint statement, declaring Wang Ningyi a 'coward', a 'traitor', and issued a statement to the entire planetary military, demanding the continuation of the resistance.

Moreover, they indeed mustered part of their forces to attack a surface fortress group.

The forces under their control started firing fully into space, bombarding Alliance ships and landing craft.

Their actions did cause significant casualties on the Alliance's side.

A dozen landing crafts were shot down, leaving three vanguard divisions intended to land heavily damaged; several infantry regiments that had just taken control of fortresses faced siege; the soldiers who had initially surrendered within also started stirring, and the situation turned dire for a moment.

General Wang Ningyi, still in the Starport, felt his heart heavy with sorrow.

He faintly regretted.

Having already made so many mistakes, should he end it all at the critical moment? Originally using the lives of many soldiers as an excuse to comfort himself. But now, it seemed everyone was determined to resist to the end, after all.

However, on the whole, he still held a pessimistic view of the resistance on the planet's surface.

Now they might fight fiercely, but that only caught the Alliance Fleet slightly off guard. Once the Alliance's main force recovered and began orbital bombardment, lacking orbital defensive forces, with only orbital cannon battery protection, would probably not withstand. Even if at first they could hold back, as more ground fortresses were destroyed and more Alliance Army soldiers landed, the resistance would eventually be wiped out.

And then, from the observation window of the high tower at the Starport, he clearly saw the main force of the Alliance arriving at the orbit of Shangdong Star.

First, a battlecruiser, then another battlecruiser, and then… nothing more.

Was that it?

A stunned Wang Ningyi suddenly turned his head, looking at Hussepe standing beside him, face twisted: “You deceived me?!”

Earlier, Hussepe had said the main force of the Alliance fleet was just outside the orbit!

That should have been eight giant ships, dozens of cruisers, a massive fleet totaling over five hundred!

But now, as he saw it with his own eyes, there were only two battlecruisers on site, and the total number of vessels had shrunk tenfold!

Having fifty Alliance ships participating would be impressive!

At this point, how could he not realize he had been deceived earlier?

Now he only felt regret, immense regret.

If only he’d known earlier, the Alliance’s main fleet wasn’t here at all, merely this handful of ships, especially just two battlecruisers, the most threatening Retribution-class Battleships and Zhuge-class Aircraft Carriers among them weren’t here… With this fleet capability, they had no ability to conquer Shangdong Star!

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Even if the interstellar warriors breached the defenses, captured the Starport, and even used its firepower to attack our orbital defense facilities from behind, as long as resistance continued, and the ground-based orbital cannon groups were promptly activated, the combined firepower could still resist the Alliance’s attack.

As long as there was decisiveness, if the ground-based orbital cannon groups fiercely destroyed the Starport, then without the Starport’s firepower attacking from behind, Shangdong Star’s remaining orbital defense facilities, in coordination with ground firepower, could still repel the Alliance’s not so powerful fleet!

However, the surrender of Wang Ningyi almost destroyed this possibility.

The self-destruct system of the Starport was also controlled by the interstellar warriors, but what if the remaining soldiers dared to place bombs everywhere and directly self-destruct?

If they didn't have his headshot order, wouldn't the ground-based orbital cannon groups fall into chaos immediately?

But in any case, it seemed he was doomed.

Thinking of this, he wasn't actually so angry inside.

But on the surface, he still had to maintain an angry demeanor.

Hussepe did not expose him either.

He said with a gracious smile, "You are so loyal and brave; I can only resort to this lower plan. But you need not be too angry, Shangdong Star will inevitably be conquered by the Alliance in the end. Your wise decision has already preserved the lives of millions responsible for defending the space orbit; those who stubbornly resist on the ground are the most foolish, as they will drag countless people into the flames of war, but will ultimately change nothing."

…

The resistance on the ground of Shangdong Star did indeed stir up quite a few waves, but the significance was actually not too great.

Without the coordination of the Starport and Star Fortress, relying solely on ground-based orbital firepower is insufficient.

After all, ground cannon groups cannot be moved, and the space area they can cover is relatively limited.

The Alliance fleet just needs to avoid the strong areas.

The Alliance ships can easily clear a relatively safe space using the power of two battlecruisers in an area where ground firepower is not that strong.

Then, land troops and start a ground assault.

With orbital control lost and the highest commander surrendered, these would deliver a substantial morale blow to the ground defenders. Their will to resist wouldn't be that strong.

The core loyalist forces from the Princess Star Domain's rebels might still be relatively fierce. However, Shangdong Star was said to have hundreds of millions of defense troops, but the core loyalist rebel forces total only about ten to twenty million, a considerable part of the elite still stationed in the orbit, have surrendered.

The bulk of the remaining defense forces was conscripted from Shangdong Star and even from surrounding areas by the Fury Flame Battle Group before Shangdong Star was besieged.

Their combat power and combat will are even more concerning.

In this situation, the Alliance's offensive on land quickly gained ground after overcoming the initial difficulties.

Especially when the two main elite units of the Alliance joined the ground battle, it was even more so.

This was the three hundred interstellar warriors led by Kalduce.

The simple defense of the Starport did not require them. The ground battle could better utilize their capabilities.

Besides Kalduce's interstellar warriors, another elite was the Alliance National Knights.

Named the Knight Order, but in truth, it's the Titan Legion.

Centered around one Warlord-Class Titan, with over twenty Warhound-Class and Predator-Class Titans as the main force, plus more than seventy various Knight Mechas, forming the Iron Giant Legion.

In conjunction with the Alliance Armored Divisions gathered over, with Lion King Tanks and Lion Tanks leading the charge, and an occasional few thousand armored vehicles, with a few hundred air force combat aircraft constantly patrolling above.

The powerful iron torrent crushed one ground-based orbital cannon fortress after another.

Under tremendous military pressure, the Alliance's psychological warfare never ceased.

For the past few months, they've been continuously broadcasting various lies such as Furyflame is already finished, and the Alliance has penetrated the core area of the Spiderweb Domain; even under Hussepe's persuasion, General Wang Ningyi, who understood again, also repeatedly worked on the ground with his old subordinates, persuading them to surrender.

Often, the main force of the Princess Legion on the ground, accompanied by a large contingent of the Planetary Defense Force, would guard a key fortress which the Alliance found difficult to tackle. At times like this, Wang Ningyi would directly call the fortress garrison commander's channel to have a sincere talk with him.

Talking several times might sometimes directly persuade a surrender.

Even if not directly persuaded to surrender, it could at least sway the opposing forces' morale.

This is considered a good achievement.

From this perspective, Wang Ningyi was quite useful.

Hussepe couldn't help but praise him, saying one person can match a thousand troops!

He also said he must report his merits.

While keeping a sullen face, Wang Ningyi sometimes had a little bit of anticipation in his heart.

What if… what if the Alliance really offered me a high rank and rich rewards, letting me work smoothly within the Alliance?

Should I agree? Or agree? Or agree?

…

Completely conquering Shangdong Star obviously still requires time.

But this result is already determined.

In fact, after the overall situation was decided, the two battlecruisers ’Flying Wing’ and ’Korolya’ withdrew.

The remaining matters the army could handle; there was no need for the two giant ships to continue staying on Shangdong Star.

The next target is Guangfeng Star.

The Alliance hopes to replicate the strategy.

Guangfeng Star is also completely cut off from external communications by the Alliance; they don’t know what happened at Shangdong Star, so they won’t have any prior defenses against such tactics.

However, like Wang Ningyi communicating with the Alliance and eventually getting captured to choose surrender, these are honestly unexpected events with low replicability.

The rebel commander of Guangfeng Star has consistently refused to communicate with the Alliance, nor allowed any ships, even non-combat ones, to approach.

This makes it difficult.

But despite this, the Alliance still found an opportunity.

The third week after Flying Wing and Korolya's arrival, they seized a chance.

They discovered ships from Guangfeng Star were operating in low orbit.

It seemed to involve large-scale planetary level material transfer and allocation.

After a brief discussion, the two battlecruisers spearheaded an assault.

Facing threats from the orbital defense system and ground cannon groups, the battlecruisers destroyed the starfleet operating in low orbit over Guangfeng Star.

Those weren't any large or strong ships.

However, it was one of the rare main forces within Guangfeng Star.

Previously, when the Alliance's main ships were operating in the Proudclaw Cosmos and could not attend to Guangfeng Star and Shangdong Star, small fleets hidden within the orbital defense systems of these two planets conducted stealthy sorties, ambushing the Alliance's logistic fleets, achieving some results.

Now, having eliminated this small fleet meant Guangfeng Star lost all abilities for proactive strikes.

Leaving them be wasn't a big problem either.

After all, the other side, Shangdong, had already been taken.

While the war raged on Shangdong Star, the Alliance's engineering teams had actually also landed on the ground to start storage construction simultaneously.

In the future, Shangdong would become the logistical base for the Alliance's offensive into the Proudclaw Cosmos.

Including many newly trained troops from Alliance's homeland, who will also be transported here in large batches.

Chapter 542, Battleship Technology

When Gu Hang learned that the issue with the strategic Shangdong-Guangfeng choke point had been resolved, he allowed himself a slight smile.

The passage from the Menghe Star Domain to the Proudclaw Cosmos is a crucial route and the lifeline for subsequent wars, not something that can be taken lightly.

Connecting the warp points on both sides only means the road can be traversed; until now, it's only relatively clear, and not much of a threat needs to be worried about.

For Gu Hang, if the Fury Fleet were stationed on Guangfeng Star, relying on comprehensive planetary defense facilities to hold firm, he truly wouldn't dare to charge ahead recklessly, and the war situation would turn out differently.

But the current situation might not necessarily be better than that unmanifested scenario.

After all, if the Fury Fleet and the core of their Battle Group gathered on Guangfeng Star, Gu Hang could adopt a decisive battle strategy to counter. The battle itself would certainly be much harder, but once won, the Proudclaw Cosmos would be smooth sailing for Gu Hang to traverse.

Unlike now, after securing just a few star sectors, risks need to be considered, forcing a halt to digest gains. Only after eliminating hidden dangers and risks as much as possible, can the advance continue.

Since this is the phase of consolidating gains, Gu Hang also decided to use his Gift Points to make some enhancements.

The amount of Gift Points he currently holds is significant.

Over the past few years, the Alliance's monthly Gift Points have been steadily increasing. The primary growth factor is the Dragonhawk Cosmos's planets and star sectors, where post-institutional reforms, the centralization and the Alliance's control over regions have been growing stronger.

This, in turn, propelled the Alliance to better allocate resources and develop economic construction tailored to each planet.

The Alliance's rank system effectively enhances the living standards of the populace.

Enhanced control, increased productivity and economic levels, and improved living standards of the populace.

These are the most crucial three factors for the monthly Gift Points income.

Additionally, a significant income source comes from controlling the Menghe Star Domain.

Although in terms of control, development, and living standards, the Menghe Star Domain doesn't fare well, the sheer size with hundreds of worlds combined can still provide a substantial number of Gift Points.

To date, the monthly Gift Points income Gu Hang can observe has reached a level of 330,000 per month.

This is already twice what it was four years ago.

Over the past four years, simply the fixed monthly income has seen Gu Hang earn over 12 million Gift Points.

However, these Gift Points are mostly not saved up.

The past four years have been years of preparation by the Alliance for war. Gift Points obviously couldn't be kept, spending followed acquisition.

And mostly they were spent on various military training and exchanging for productivity-increasing buildings, many expenses were made.

As for technology investments, only 4 million were spent, conducting four million-grade lotteries.

These four times, the Apocalypse-level wasn't hit.

The million-tier's Apocalypse-level technology lottery probability is just ten percent.

However, two Epic-level technologies were acquired.

They are [Engineering Technology Research Facility] and [Phase Weapon].

The former is used for engineering technology research and can help the Alliance build better research facilities. Its greatest help is enabling the Alliance to better and more quickly digest various black box technologies, ensuring continuous production even after these new technologies are out of the black box.

Previously, Gu Hang had also drawn this kind of item, but it was in the biochemical technology research direction.

Biochemical technology is certainly important, but relatively speaking, engineering technology is still the most crucial.

The manufacturing industry of various machinery, from tanks to Mechas, from Titans to Starships, falls under the larger framework of engineering technology.

With it, the Alliance's own technological level will see a significant upgrade, allowing for reverse-engineering of many items currently only producible via black box methods.

As for the second Epic-level technology, the [Phase Weapon], it's formidable.

Prior to this, the Alliance had never heard of such an item within the Empire's conventional technological arsenals.

However, records and texts collected by the Alliance intelligence department occasionally mention this object.

In some Battle Groups, and within very secretive Empire forces, this green-glowing weapon occasionally appears.

Mostly, they appear in the form of melee weapons, not projectiles; but their destructive power is astounding. Swords forged with this technology can almost disregard all material defenses, directly destroying parts the wielder wishes.

In other words, if at the time of the blood feud between the Phoenix Battle Group and the Fury Flame Battle Group, the Fine Work Dynamo Sword in Matins' hand were replaced with a phase sword, the battle wouldn't have dragged on until both were exhausted. When a weapon in hand can bypass the protection of the Terminator Power Armor and directly damage the flesh inside, Matins might have long dispatched his opponent.

Of course, the same would apply vice versa.

However, Gu Hang wasn't overly excited about this.

He reviewed the detailed technical details and discussed with the engineers at the Alliance's Secret Research Institute, and it was basically determined that this weapon couldn't be mass-produced by the Alliance.

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Even with black box technology, it's not feasible.

The basic materials it requires, the Alliance simply lacks the capability to process. Even if the production line is set up, without the preliminary processed parts, it's impossible to produce.

It can only be made through a finished black box, producing one per week.

This limits its application greatly.

Not to mention large-scale outfitting, even equipping the Phoenix Battle Group would take twenty years.

Of course, this issue is actually linked to the [Engineering Technology Research Facility] technology that Gu Hang mentioned earlier.

Engineering technology research is aimed at solving such problems.

However, Gu Hang didn't demand a large amount of research resources be invested in this project.

As a melee weapon, despite its immense power and significant impact in crucial battles, its usage is quite limited. Having a finished black box for small-scale equipment is sufficient.

There are many other important technologies that require the Alliance's technical personnel to work on. The priority for phase weapons is not high.

The expenditure of Gift Points over the past four years was roughly like this.

However, although none of the monthly fixed income was saved up to form any significant reserves, one cannot overlook that fixed income is only part of Gu Hang's Gift Points revenue.

His other main source of revenue comes from wars.

In the early years, the war to conquer the entire Menghe Star Domain didn't provide much income for Gu Hang.

Mainly because claiming Menghe, though large-scale and involving a whole star domain, the intensity of warfare wasn't high. The Alliance's annexation actions relied more on political methods. The enemy's resistance wasn't strong.

In such circumstances, naturally, the saved Gift Points wouldn't be much.

However, when the Fury Flame Battle Group, leading the rebellion, moved south and both sides were stuck in stalemate battles in the northern Menghe Star Domain, the war began to significantly increase the Gift Points income.

When the Alliance's main force broke through the Shangdong-Guangfeng corridor and recovered two sectors within the Proudclaw Cosmos, the Gift Points revenue from war saw even greater growth.

Although during this process, the Alliance never found an opportunity to engage in a decisive battle with the Fury Fleet, nor could they eliminate the main forces of the Fury Fleet. Still, the sheer scale of war speaks volumes, whether it was destroying those space defense systems around several Star Realm Tunnels or the battles to conquer Shangdong Star, or the suppression of those twenty worlds in the Proudclaw Cosmos…all contributed to the accounts.

All the Gift Points from these wars, Gu Hang didn't waste; he saved them all.

Up till now, this income has accumulated to over ten million.

Perfect, time for a grand ten-time draw at the million-point tier!

Apocalypse-level Technology, with a 10% chance of dropping in the million-point tier, has a pretty high probability of yielding results in ten tries!

And indeed, as Gu Hang anticipated, a result came out.

And it was exactly one of the things he most wanted:

[Apocalypse-level Technology: Retribution-class Battleship]

Gu Hang's face once again wore an unrestrained smile!

The long-awaited battleship technology had finally arrived!

Although now that the technology has been drawn, it can't be put to use immediately. After all, from dock construction to the lengthy manufacturing cycle of the starship itself, it's not simple for the Alliance to produce its own Retribution-class Battleship.

However, this is a promising start!

Gu Hang almost immediately communicated the corresponding technical information, using the most secure level of star language communication, to Wu Jiarong.

Ms. Wu Jiarong, as one of the Sages of the Mingyang Sect, and now an important participant in the close cooperation between the Sect of Mechanics and the Alliance, had become a resident of Rage Owl Star.

Simply put, she had returned.

Circumstances had changed, previously Gu Hang considered whether he needed to create an offshoot Sect of Mechanics as a cover for black box technology.

But now it seems unnecessary.

The Mingyang Sect has a high level of cooperation.

The Mingyang Sect, in the context of the whole universe and the entire Empire, of course, is a rather obscure and weak little sect. Nonetheless, they possess an enduring history, and Jindi Star as a Founding World has been developing for over three thousand years, with some level of foundation.

Possessing such a foundation, albeit with a generally modest actual influence, their core influence lies within the Dragonhawk Star Domain, the Alliance's home base, with a maximum coverage of half of the Eastern Cosmos Domain…such a sect is truly perfect.

The diplomatic exchanges carried out via the black box four years ago were rather successful.

In this situation, Gu Hang suspended the idea of having Wu Jiarong break off and start her own sect. Using her standing as a Sage in the Mingyang Sect, continuing development under the guise of the Mingyang Sect was fine.

However, simply notifying them about the Retribution-class Battleship information clearly wasn't sufficient.

He exchanged the two related black boxes for this technology — the auxiliary dock construction and the finished black box for directly manufacturing core components of the Retribution-class Battleship. He tore open a Subspace Rift and tossed the items into his Storm God Kingdom.

The majority of the black boxes owned by the Alliance are housed within the Black Box Workshop in the Storm God Kingdom. These two black boxes will be no exception.

The spirits at the Black Box Workshop will work earnestly, according to the institute's requirements, produce items, and regularly deliver them from the Secret Research Institute on Rage Owl Star.

According to Wu Jiarong's assessment, considering the dock construction, that critical components can be directly manufactured by black boxes, the first Retribution-class Battleship autonomously produced by the Alliance should be completed in six years.

Subsequently, they should be able to maintain a pace of producing two every eight years.

It's worth noting here that producing two every eight years doesn't mean one can be produced every four years.

A single Retribution-class Battleship's production cycle of eight years is actually already quite commendable. The most the Alliance can manage, with the help of black box technology, is to start construction on two simultaneously, and delegate some highly technical and time-consuming steps to the finished black box to handle.

Following this construction rhythm, eight years later, the Alliance will have two more Retribution-class, one Zhugexia-class, two Holy Grail-class, and two Drachenfang-class purchased from the Mingyang Sect.

Adding these to our current fleet of eight, the number of main battleships will soar to fifteen!

If it progresses smoothly to this scale, even facing the Iron Fury's main fleet in a major battle, the Alliance has hope!

After all, the Iron Armor Battle Group officially has only 21 battleships plus carriers, about thirty battlecruisers.

But they can't possibly bring all their ships to the south, otherwise, things won't go well in other directions?

Alas…

No matter how optimistic Gu Hang is, he dares not claim to know what this war will look like eight years later.

Perhaps, the war might drag on long enough to reach that point.

But will the Iron Armor Battle Group really allow the Alliance eight years of uninterrupted development in the south?

It seems unlikely.

Moreover, the Alliance itself needs more adjustments to its economic structure. Starting two more battleship production lines might overwhelm Rage Owl Star's economy. More population migration is needed, and more consumer goods must be imported at the planetary level to sustain it.

However, Gu Hang doesn't consider the situation too regretful.

Acquiring battleship technology has, in any case, greatly enhanced the war potential on our side.

Chapter 543: The Direction with the Most Battle Achievements

On Rage Owl Star, Wu Jiarong joyfully received a message from Mr. Gu, eagerly preparing to construct the Retribution-class Battleship. Meanwhile, the Alliance's military operations also advanced to the next stage.

The two star sectors in the southern part of the Proudclaw Cosmos, occupied by the Alliance, had not been fully assimilated.

In fact, it's not that easy. After all, the time has been short, the area is still a war frontline, and it was once enemy territory. The acceptance of Alliance rule by these two star sectors could not be very high.

The local forces there would not easily accept complete Alliance integration.

This is different from the situation in the Alliance's home territory.

On the home planets of the Alliance, the local forces do not have the conditions to resist; the Alliance has many ways, through both gentle and forceful measures, to deal with them.

But here, many of the gentle, political methods have significantly diminished usefulness.

These local forces have very likely had quite deep ties with Iron Wrath Rock in the past; even if they are currently temporarily submitting under military pressure, it's hard to avoid the thought that the Alliance will eventually be driven out, enduring the humiliation for now.

In such an external environment, coupled with internal contradictions, the Alliance could not complete internal integration within just a few months.

But… just enough is sufficient.

Some industrial strength could be extracted for the Alliance's use;

A few key transportation planets have completed initial fortification construction;

On most planets, using soldiers recruited locally and some additional units from the 'Pact Army' from the homeland, they could carry out internal suppression on planets and blockade opposition forces.

At this extent, it's adequate.

The Alliance's main troops launched further attacks, continuing to advance northward.

The goal for this stage was still two star sectors, a total of twenty-nine worlds.

The Fury Fleet remained elusive, causing some harassment to the Alliance's main forces but consistently avoiding a full-scale confrontation.

This allowed the Alliance to relatively smoothly take the twenty-nine worlds again.

The Alliance once again adopted a methodical and stable approach, halting the offensive posture and starting to assimilate the gains.

But this time, the Fury Flame Battle Group did not remain idle.

They were not impatient but rather, after the Alliance controlled four star sectors within the Proudclaw Cosmos, totaling fifty worlds, they had more paths to raid the Alliance's occupation zones.

After all, within the Star Domain, the connections between the star sectors were not like between the Meng River and Proudclaw domains, linked by only two worlds and the Star Realm Tunnel.

At least a dozen routes could enter these four star sectors, and the Alliance couldn't possibly allocate enough troops to guard all of them.

This led to several battles where the Alliance suffered losses.

The Fury Fleet raided the orbital planet with a shipyard previously captured by the Alliance, destroying several warships that were under repair;

They attacked a transport fleet, not only destroying the escort vessels but also half of the transport ships, causing the deaths of tens of millions of Alliance soldiers waiting for transport, and escaped before the enraged Alliance Fleet arrived.

They even attempted to reinforce Guangfeng Star, trying to send a detachment into the orbital defenses of Guangfeng Star. On one hand, it could enhance the defense of Guangfeng Star and offer the ability to take proactive strikes; on the other, it could transmit intelligence and bolster the morale of the besieged planet, preventing situations like those on Shangdong Star.

Fortunately, in this attempt, they were not successful, being forced to retreat by the Alliance fleet besieging Guangfeng.

Nonetheless, the impact was extremely negative.

The space battles occurring in the local Star System could be observed by the Observatory on Guangfeng Star. Even though the Fury's ships failed to enter the planetary orbit and join the local garrison, and even their communications attempts were intercepted by the Alliance, their very presence in the star system delivered a significant morale boost to the defenders on Guangfeng Star.

The most direct impact was that the local garrisons, whose attitudes were previously wavering and less firm in rejecting communication from Alliance diplomats, suddenly became closed off and refused all contact with the Alliance. This was evident as observations from outer space indicated that a city on the surface was holding some sort of celebration, prompting the furious Alliance Navy to fire a shot at them—of course, it was intercepted, effectively creating a fireworks display in the night sky to their delight.

The Alliance also thought of ways to deal with the Fury Fleet.

But multiple ambushes and lures ultimately did not have much effect.

In one ambush encounter, the Alliance fleet took quite a bold action. After an unsuccessful ambush, six gathered giant ships launched a pursuit against the Fury Fleet.

Within the Fury Fleet, the Retribution-class Battleship moved slowly, but the Alliance also had a Retribution-class ship 'dragging behind'.

In the chase and escape, both sides ended up several star systems away.

At this point, the formation of the Alliance fleet became somewhat spread out. The Firebath Nova lagged behind, desperately trying to catch up; the Eagle Horse-class barely kept pace, but there were few opportunities for engagement as the enemy avoided combat; the four battlecruisers could keep up but couldn't win the fight.

If the pursuit continues like this, there should be some gains. There's no need for the battlecruisers to fight desperately; just grind away at the smaller ships in the fleet, occasionally overtake and hunt them, and delay effectively.

Emphasize a strategy of harassing the retreating enemy.

Once the opponent's main battleships go mad and try to fight desperately, the battlecruisers can also choose to retreat, and the opponent won't catch up.

Even if they don't want to retreat, and decide to engage a while, the relatively faster Eagle Horse will soon arrive at the battlefield; with a little more persistence, the Firebath Nova will also be there.

As long as we continue pursuing a little longer, this situation is bound to happen.

However, in the end, Admiral Yelisia, commanding the Alliance Main Fleet, ordered the pursuit to stop.

They had already chased too far out, beyond the Alliance's control area, and pursued through several star systems.

In these unfamiliar star systems, every Star Realm Tunnel jump is a huge gamble.

Even with a Star Speaker to explore the situation across the Star Realm Tunnel beforehand, there are still methods to obscure their investigation.

The risk is certainly there.

Who knows if the next jump will lead to a thrilling chase or an ambush of eight battleships waiting on the other side?

Naval main fleets can't afford such bets.

Even if the Army suffers heavy losses, reinforcements can be pulled from the rear, and even if they're not well-trained, arming them to maintain army size is possible—albeit with more severe casualties.

But warships are too valuable, taking years to build even in bulk, and if destroyed now, there would simply be no ships to use at the moment.

At this stage, the Alliance's main fleet opted to pull back conservatively.

From this, many senior Alliance officers sensed a whiff of danger.

The spread is getting larger, the deeper the penetration into enemy lines, the greater the risk.

The simple truth is that the Fury Fleet isn't strong enough, but their strategy of trading space for time and opportunities has indeed worked.

In such circumstances, the Alliance convened several military meetings.

Ultimately, it was Gu Hang who made the decision.

"For now, we cannot claim that the second phase of the war has ended. Although we anticipated gaining control over two star sectors and twenty-nine worlds, thus reinforcing our influence in the Proudclaw Cosmos, the expanded scale of battle has also exposed our slightly vulnerable flank. The second phase requires everyone to stay vigilant until we secure a definite victory."

"For this situation, we need a change in strategy. Shift from comprehensive control and full defense to focused area control. Many planets can remain under ground control only. Would Politos come back to reclaim these planets? It's pointless as we could easily take them back, and they risk capture in the process."

"He won't do such a foolish thing. But if he does, it's a good thing indeed."

“Conversely, for key worlds, like crucial transportation hubs or worlds with significant industrial output or shipbuilding capability, prioritize defense and fortify these worlds. Ensure they don’t fall immediately under attack and can hold until our fleet reinforcements arrive. Our fleets should also escort our priority transport teams through star sectors. By reducing the key worlds needing construction and defense, our transport ships won’t have to risk traveling to different locations, which also facilitates main fleet patrols and escort duties.”

After the defense layout was explained, everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

Currently, the Alliance occupies nearly fifty worlds in the Proudclaw Cosmos. According to Gu Hang, they would abandon around thirty, focusing on defending just under twenty.

While abandoning doesn’t mean Furyflame will retake them, giving up thirty worlds in essence, even if it’s a very correct decision—since Mr. Gu is personally here, only Mr. Gu has the authority to make this decision; the others are unworthy.

Still, how to defend is a matter for now, albeit not that critical.

The Alliance remains the stronger side, surely capable of defending.

What’s most crucial is the question of the upcoming third phase of warfare.

The Alliance will surely continue to advance; otherwise, did they rally such a massive force just to capture fifty worlds in the Proudclaw Cosmos?

Clearly not.

The Alliance’s war progress has slowed, and playing safe by consolidating has revived political pressure that was waning due to the Alliance’s deployment.

Not as severe as before, but steadily increasing.

Under these circumstances, the Alliance's war pace cannot falter.

But the larger the scope, the higher the risk—this is an undeniable fact.

What approach should they take moving forward?

Continued fighting in this manner?

They've already stabilized the situation; what more could they do? Yet the further they advance, the more precarious the situation becomes.

It still requires the commander, Gu Hang, to make the decision.

Gu Hang evidently had thought this through:

"First, stabilize the second phase, fortifying key worlds' defenses and fortifications, then take a different approach in the third phase. After two phases of offensives, we have secured a foothold in the Proudclaw Cosmos, with solid positions and room to maneuver, allowing us to take some risks."

"We no longer need to control every star system in the offensive path, but rather adopt a focused offensive approach. The command central has set three key targets in the Proudclaw Cosmos: Hewang VIII, Mentus II, and Proudfang."

Everyone was slightly surprised.

The latter two worlds were understandable, but for Hewang VIII to be one of the three main targets?

It seemed strange.

Proudfang is the capital world of the Proudclaw Cosmos, making it a reasonable primary attack target;

Mentus II is an important hub world located in the central Mentus star sector of the Proudclaw Cosmos. It not only features a large starport, but more critically, it has the rare distinction of having eleven Star Realm Tunnels connecting to other worlds, making its position on the star map extremely important. Capturing it would be of significant strategic value.

As for Hewang VIII… that's a bit odd.

It's a feudal world, under considerable control by the Alfonso Mechanical Sect. Distributed across the planet are numerous small feudal baronies, ruled by small Knight Families. They almost all have various types of Knight Mechas and are at the ready for ecclesiastical summons.

When gathered, they form the 'Alfonso Third Knight Order'.

The planet has excellent natural conditions, with very favorable agricultural conditions. The serfs under the feudal system not only support the Knight Families but also engage in extensive grain trade.

The primary trade partner, or tribute recipient, is the Alfonso Sect.

Moreover, the planet is rich in mineral resources, including three precious adamantite veins, protected by the Knight Order, with the Sect of Mechanics placing Protection Army troops long-term in these mining areas.

Such a world that combines 'Knight World', 'Resource World', and 'Agro-world' is central to the Alfonso Sect's core interests.

The Alfonso Sect has always claimed to be aligned with the Empire; no matter how ambiguous their stance, they've not openly raised their flag.

Rationally speaking, Hewang VIII, being core to Alfonso's interests, could be ignored.

To target it as one of the three main objectives?

There's a deeper implication by Mr. Gu in this move.

Gu Hang did not elaborate on this reasoning but continued: "We won't pursue controlling every star in the offensive route as long as a star does not provide a hiding place for enemy ships, skipping over them and targeting our three planned main objectives. Once taken, we can immediately declare we've conquered the Proudclaw Cosmos. From this perspective, we'll have achieved the most results among the three fronts in the South, West, and North!"

Chapter 544, Whose Side Is Time On?

Gu Hang certainly wasn't talking nonsense.

If, as he said, the Alliance really did conquer the Proudclaw Star Domain, and even pushed further into the Thistle Muster Star Field, then never mind the battle report; that could be misleading.

But the battle lines don't lie.

They were indeed the force pushing the battle lines closest to the Princess Star Domain.

On the North Line battlefield, there were the Black Cross Army, the Infinite Warriors, and the Bats; all were well-known battle groups or even newly-formed ones. In addition, there were newly added forces like the Extraplanar Tribunal and the special battle group Silver Watch.

On the West Line, there were the Phoenix, the elite Heretic Tribunal and the massive Battle Nun Battalion, and the famous Star Realm Army – Death Legion.

Both these lines are filled with famous generals and renowned legions, and what was the outcome?

They were still stuck at the edges of several star domains bordering the Spiderweb Domain; not a single one had broken through. In fact, the West Line was even being pushed back at times; they couldn't establish a foothold within the Spiderweb Domain and were being forced into the western Magrey Cosmic Domain.

No matter if the Southern front is the primary battlefield or not, the question is whether the battle line is closest to the enemy's core region?

At this level, the Alliance could fully stand straight and face any political criticisms against it.

Talk about me?

Let's see how those other big shots performed first!

As for capturing three key worlds, whether or not it counts as conquering the Proudclaw Star Domain…

Even if it is considered conquering the Proudclaw Star Domain, whether the Alliance has any strength left to fight further…

We'll see about that.

We can't really expect the Alliance alone to handle everything, can we?

If there were no major changes in the North and West Line battles, after capturing the three key worlds and declaring the conquest of Proudclaw, Gu Hang would no longer advance.

He was also wary of provoking Ironfury's mindset too much.

If, by then, in their fury, they disregarded the West and North Line opponents and concentrated forces southward solely against him, that would be truly disastrous.

In fact, that's also why Gu Hang intended to at least secure either the Shangdong or Guangfeng stars.

If it came to that scenario, Gu Hang would have no choice but to abandon all results and retreat with his main fleet to defend Shangdong.

With Shangdong's comprehensive orbital defense system — the Star Fortress had been destroyed, but the Alliance was bringing new ones to replace them — plus the Alliance's own eight main warships, as long as Ironfury didn't go all out, he could still hold the line.

…

The second phase of the Alliance's war lasted several months.

It only ended after solidifying twenty important worlds out of the four star sectors in the occupied zone, making them impregnable fortresses.

During this period, the Fury Fleet repeatedly attempted raids.

But after the Alliance had shrunk its forces to this extent, they could gain no advantage.

Recently, they also quieted down.

Though the Fury Flame Battle Group calmed down, the Alliance had no intention to do the same.

The third phase of Gu Hang's war plan began execution formally.

The main fleet that the Alliance deployed was a 1+1+3 combination.

One battleship, one carrier, and three battlecruisers.

Additionally, there were three battlecruisers guarding the rear. If Fury Flame made a desperate counterattack into the Alliance's controlled zone, having three battlecruisers coordinating with the built-up space defense line wouldn't pose much of a problem, and they could even engage in tactical maneuvers using their mobility.

The main force, on the other hand, had the power to crush Fury Flame directly.

They made a direct assault on Mentus II, a crucial hub world.

As a core hub world, Mentus II had rather superior defensive capabilities.

Not on par with Guangfeng Star since it didn't have a Void Shield covering the whole planet; but not much worse than Shangdong Star, with a simple, yet firm and useful defense system combining well-rounded ground artillery and orbital Star Fortresses.

In theory, the Fury Fleet could mount a strong defense here, with Mentus II's complete defensive conditions, against the Alliance Main Fleet.

However, they still abandoned Mentus II and resolved not to engage the Alliance in a direct decisive battle. Since they abandoned Guangfeng Star, which had even more complete defenses, they wouldn't hold this comparatively lesser Mentus II either.

Politos still hadn't been forced into a must-fight situation.

In reality, within the Alliance's high-level military discussions, it was gradually understood that not just for the loss of a single city or territory, but even losing the entire Proudclaw Star Domain might not provoke the Fury Flame Battle Group into a confrontation with them.

Adler Politos could be called cowardly or that after the bloody death struggle years ago, his spine had been broken. However, one must admit, his rather indecisive and sticky combat approach was indeed annoying.

The more practical threat was that Gu Hang felt time was on his side. With battleship technology extracted and the production capacity of Holy Grail-class and Zhuge-class being gradually expanded, along with purchasing Dragonserpent-class battlecruisers from the Mingyang Sect… the Alliance would grow stronger over time.

After all, although the war began, the Alliance's homeland never ceased its developmental stride. The external war might indeed have some dampening effects on domestic economic growth, especially on the everyday life standards of the populace, inevitably causing a decline due to war and material allocations.

However, if military production capacity was also included, then undoubtedly, the war could strongly stimulate this aspect of production.

The Alliance made efforts to expand its military production capacity, which would grow stronger over time.

But the key point was, Politos didn't know this, or wasn't as clear about it.

Just as many of the Alliance's senior generals believed time was on the Alliance's side, Politos might have thought the same.

He traded space for time, willing to lose more territories to allow the Alliance's advance to endure more significant risks, and was also biding his time, waiting for Humphrey Paolo to allocate more warships to him.

It didn't matter if these ships were allocated from the West or North Line battlefields, or new ships produced by Ironfury's core shipbuilding industry; his fleet would become stronger subsequently.

In comparison, it was really hard to say who had the correct understanding and couldn't be sure on whose side time was ultimately standing.

Perhaps, it stood on both sides.

After all, the next batch of battlecruisers, carriers, battleships for the Alliance would generally take six to eight years to build. By then, the number of main warships of the Alliance could nearly double.

However, would the war drag on until then?

The possibility remained relatively high, given such a war involving multiple cosmic domains and various major powers participating, fighting for a dozen years, or even decades, wasn't rare.

However, what the war situation would evolve into six to eight years from now was anyone's guess.

Maybe by then, the Alliance might have suffered major defeats? Or perhaps the war situation would have improved to the extent that there'd be no need to increase the number of warships?

As for Politos, perhaps after a few months? One or two years? His fleet might receive reinforcement.

Politos might consider finding a favorable location to engage the Alliance in a significant battle at that time.

Clearly, he wouldn't do that now.

For the Alliance fleet, however, Mentus II was a world no longer skipped.

The Alliance didn't treat it like Guangfeng or Shangdong by setting it aside but launched a strong attack on Mentus II.

Against the Star Fortresses surrounding Mentus II, the 'Firebath Nova' led a very aggressive assault as the main force. Under the cover of Escort Ships, relying on its formidable defensive capabilities, it endured orbital and ground assaults while fiercely pouring its firepower onto the Star Fortresses. It also provided solid cover for the three battlecruisers and 'Eagle Horse' behind it.

The significant role of the battleship was undoubtedly evident at such moments: they were the most resilient, most reliable space fortresses and the core of offense and defense.

In the initial battle, the Alliance's result was destroying four space stations and causing some damage to the Star Fortresses.

The price was losing a small ship, but multiple Escort Ships had their shields depleted, retreating to the rear, and most importantly, the shield on the Firebath Nova had also depleted to the brink of overload.

At this point, the Alliance fleet withdrew.

The Alliance certainly wouldn't trade inefficient losses with cheap space stations and Star Fortresses from the opposition.

That would be highly uneconomical.

A Star Fortress, in weight and firepower, was comparable to a battleship, only slightly weaker; but at a cost perhaps less than a twentieth of a battleship's.

Exchanging fire here was a fool's errand.

Mobilizing a battleship meant holding the initiative in deciding whether to engage in battle.

Chapter 545, The Battle of Mentus

Utilizing the ships relative to the planetary defense system, the Alliance's ships engage in tactical tug-of-war maneuvers repeatedly.

This is an effective strategy.

As long as the fleet's strength, compared to the planetary defense system, isn't too disparate, this tactic becomes a legitimate means to take down a well-defended planet.

Of course, it's no good if you can't withstand even one round of enemy fire without collapsing, and your fleet's firepower must be able to inflict definite damage on the defensive system's space stations and star fortresses during brief exchanges. In this way, the defense facilities in the planet's orbit can be gradually worn down.

However, adopting this method means that while the fleet's losses are manageable, they are not insignificant. After all, in war, any unexpected events may occur. In the Alliance's first wave of attacks, they unexpectedly lost an escort ship that was hit continuously by the star fortress's main cannon.

This is unavoidable.

On the other hand, slowly grinding away like this is extremely time-consuming.

According to the estimations by navy staff officers, purely using this method to take down the outer orbit of Mentus II would take over a year.

This doesn't even include the cleanup of the anti-orbital systems on the ground.

Gu Hang wasn't particularly pressed for time, but he also didn't want the time required to conquer a planet to be dragged out indefinitely.

Many known and unknown changes could arise.

And a too-hasty attack would result in significant losses.

The solution isn't just a fleet firepower showdown.

Three months later, through repeated erosion, the Alliance managed to take out about 20% of Mentus II's orbital defense facilities during this period and caused significant damage to one of the three star fortresses, forcing it to be pulled into a lower orbit for urgent repairs and maintenance.

Seizing this opportunity, the Alliance suddenly launched a fierce offensive.

Initially, the defenders of Mentus II did not feel anything unusual, thinking it was the same old battle of attrition over the past three months, aimed at depleting strength.

But what startled everyone was that this time the Alliance fleet wasn't standing afar, forming lines for a firefight showdown.

They accelerated and charged towards the orbital defenses of Mentus II.

This was an absolutely resolute stance, like a giant hammer coming to crush the planetary orbital defense system to pieces, caring little that they might get smashed along the way.

"Fire!"

'Fire!'

"Fire with full force!"

Across the communication signals of the space stations, star fortresses, starport, and ground fortresses of Mentus II, various voices were vehemently expressing the same intention.

They were ready to counter the attacking Alliance fleet with the most ferocious firepower.

The defenders of Mentus II realized this time seemed different, yet they weren't sure if the planetary defenses could hold against the Alliance fleet's relentless assault.

However, they had no other choice but to pour out all of their firepower.

Simultaneously, the defense commanders felt puzzled: why did the Alliance act this way? Are they really going to pit their precious naval warships against orbital defense facilities far less valuable?

Regardless of winning or losing, it's a great loss!

But soon enough, they understood why the Alliance was being so fierce.

On the side of the planet's surface facing the oncoming Alliance fleet, all the deployed orbital cannons fired. However, the Alliance fleet hadn't entered the near-earth orbit domain yet, and since it was still a bit far, the ground cannon groups' deterrent force greatly exceeded their direct destructive power. Their hit rate couldn't be guaranteed.

During this phase, reliance was mainly on the orbital defense facilities.

However, among the most crucial starport fortress and three star fortresses, only the hastily deployed one with previous significant damage successfully fired.

The starport and the other two star fortresses, which should have formed the core of the defense, were simultaneously silent.

Upon witnessing this scene, the ground commanders anxiously observing the battle felt a chill in their hearts.

What's happening?

What's going on?

Messages were sent up one after another.

They urgently wanted to know why the orbital facilities, meant to exert maximum effect, did not respond.

However, they received no response for a long time, only watching as the Alliance ships, with the 'Firebath Nova' battleship at the core, swaggered to utterly destroy the already severely damaged yet isolated star fortress, simultaneously eliminating numerous armed space stations.

The defense commanders closed their eyes in pain.

The orbital defense system of Mentus II was finished.

The Alliance fleet also paid a price, but it was far less than what they should have.

The major warships were undamaged; at most, they lost a cruiser and damaged a few more.

This loss was significant but well within acceptable limits for the Alliance.

Until then, the ground command center finally received a reply from the starport:

The enemy had infiltrated.

…

The defensive preparations across Mentus II were quite adequate.

However, they lacked a critical aspect: defense against spiritual energy.

Chapter 545, The Battle of Mentus_2

And this ability, when facing the Storm Mage Corps personally led by Gu Hang, demands extremely high standards.

What happens if the standards are not met?

It is like Mentus II.

Directly tearing apart a Star Fortress or Starport-class space facility with Spiritual Energy is not impossible.

If Gu Hang fully expands the Storm God Kingdom, elevating his spiritual energy to Alpha-level or even slightly higher, he could forcibly tear apart a Star Fortress.

However, this requires him to be on a ship, getting closer. Otherwise, at the cosmic scale, with such vast distances, there's considerable attenuation in the projection of spiritual energy.

In other words, although Gu Hang's spiritual energy is powerful, its 'range' is nowhere near as far as a ship's cannon.

Moreover, even if he takes the risk to get closer and tears apart a Star Fortress with spiritual energy, it's not worthwhile. Going all out would heavily deplete Gu Hang. After one such effort, he might not have enough strength for a second round.

But the enemy still has at least one Star Fortress and an even larger Starport Fortress.

Effortful, unnecessary.

Is spiritual energy such an inconvenient thing?

There's no need to be so violent; there's a smarter way to use it.

For example, leading the Storm Mage Corps to stir up the waves of Subspace, completely blocking the communication between the Starport, Star Fortress, and the ground, and even severely disrupting the internal communications of the Starport and Star Fortress themselves.

Then, using spiritual energy teleportation, deploy the strong ground forces of the Alliance directly into these space facilities.

Aerial drops and boarding operations are dangerous missions, with the most perilous stage being while still in space before reaching the destination.

If a landing craft carrying dozens of Interstellar Warriors is intercepted midway by a shot, the loss would be enormous.

Actually, spiritual energy teleportation is also quite dangerous. Transmissions over tens of thousands of kilometers can easily go awry; if something goes wrong or the other side's spiritual energy interference causes the transported to lose their way in Subspace, it's fatal.

But isn't it because the defenders of Mentus II have almost no adequate spiritual energy defense capability?

Originally, they did have it, but earlier, it was requisitioned by the Fury Flame Battle Group to enhance their own anti-Gu Hang capabilities.

The Fury Fleet itself enhanced its spiritual energy resistance, but Mentus II was left suffering.

They couldn't interfere with the Alliance's teleportation tactics at all.

Couldn't even detect them.

On those two intact Star Fortresses and Starport Fortress, preparations for firing were still being busily made. But in a blink of an eye, blue teleportation arrays appeared before them. Before they could react, often two red-armored Interstellar Warriors would partner up and spring out.

Such situations happened in many strategic points within the Star Fortresses and Starport.

Control panels, communication centers, command hubs, heavy artillery platforms…

Numerous teleportation arrays scattered and deployed numerous Interstellar Warriors.

But after these teleportation arrays completed the teleportation of the Phoenix, they didn't stop working.

Then, squad after squad of elite soldiers walked out from them.

Three Light Infantry Skeleton Divisions were specially mobilized and stayed on standby aboard the Firebath Nova. After the Interstellar Warriors had led the way, these three Skeleton Divisions were systematically teleported into the Starport and Star Fortress to assist the Interstellar Warriors in combat, simultaneously securing the key points taken over and freeing up the Interstellar Warriors for more critical missions.

The so-called Light Infantry Skeleton Division is based on the regular Skeleton Division but has mostly removed heavy vehicles.

Of course, it's not just a simple removal. Otherwise, aside from having more elite personnel, how would they differ from a regular large infantry division?

The difference is that the removed heavy vehicles were replaced with many lighter armored units that can operate in narrow and complex spaces. Such as more Sentinel Mechas, more Feedback-Type Power Armor configurations, and some rapid assault vehicles like Armed Hoverbikes, Hover Rapid-Fire Self-Propelled Guns…

It's equivalent to spending money on tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery, reallocating it to these smaller, more flexible armored units.

In a frontal battlefield, this light Skeleton Division going against a proper Skeleton Division would be seeking death for sure.

For the same investment value, a single Lion Tank can easily defeat five or six Sentinel Mechas; a Lion King Tank can obliterate a Knight Mecha.

However, Lion King Tanks cannot maneuver within environments like Starports and Star Fortresses.

A light Skeleton Division has its dedicated combat environment.

When accompanying Interstellar Warriors in an assault, these troops, absolutely considered elite among Mortal Troops, played a critical role.

The number of Interstellar Warriors is ultimately limited. The occupation of the entire Starport and Star Fortress still requires more numerous ground forces or Navy Marine Corps.

In short, the Marines deployed by the Alliance through spiritual energy teleportation quickly dismantled their armaments at the very beginning of the battle, before the three Star Fortresses and Starport could deliver strikes against the Alliance's rampaging fleets.

Then, the Starports and Star Fortresses, having been fully occupied, began to turn their firepower towards other remaining armed space stations.

However, during this phase, some unexpected events occurred.

The ground defenders, upon receiving reports from the Starport and seeing the Starport and Star Fortresses begin attacking their remaining space stations, made a very decisive decision.

The ground fortress artillery batteries began focusing fire on the Starport and Star Fortresses.

These units seized by the enemy, since they could no longer serve as the defenders' assets and instead became enemy strongholds, had to be eliminated at all costs as if cutting off a gangrenous limb.

Moreover, the side of the Starport and Star Fortresses facing the ground wasn't well defended, not to mention their proximity to the surface and lack of maneuverability, making them easy targets.

Inside the Starport and Star Fortresses, further damage inevitably happened due to the struggles and skirmishes with the Alliance's boarding forces.

Due to these various circumstances, the two Star Fortresses and Starport couldn't last long under the bombardment of the ground orbital artillery batteries and were soon destroyed.

The Alliance lacked some means to respond to this.

But fortunately, before the Starport and Star Fortresses were destroyed, the Alliance urgently evacuated its landing troops.

One after another, landing craft and small ships swiftly flew to the Starport and Star Fortresses, rushing to bring the people back.

Of course, retrieving people is definitely not as convenient as teleportation.

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Chapter 546, Breakthrough Capability

During the capture of the Starport and Star Fortress, the Alliance's teleportation boarding troops did not suffer many casualties. Instead, when the enemy launched an orbital bombardment counterattack, striking the Starport and Star Fortress and destroying them, the casualties were actually greater.

Twelve Phoenixes and over ten thousand soldiers failed to withdraw in time.

Such losses were unexpected.

After all, although the strategists had contingency plans before the war, mentioning the possible actions of the enemy, their decisiveness and speed in choosing to destroy the lost Star Fortress and Starport were somewhat beyond expectations.

Coldly speaking, even with these unexpected casualties, it was still worth it. The sacrifices made by the Alliance, compared to the outcome of destroying the enemy's most important orbital defense facilities, were definitely worthwhile.

Besides, this is just the beginning, isn't it?

Since the start of the attack on Mentus II, the Alliance has lost a total of nine warships. Among them were four escort ships, two patrol ships, one destroyer, and one cruiser.

Not to mention the value of these ships, the personnel loss due to ship explosions has exceeded 150,000.

Moreover, the current results of the Alliance are still limited to the planetary orbit.

The rebels have not yet been defeated; they still have solid defenses on the planet.

Of course, that being said, the capture of Mentus II is already a foregone conclusion.

Later combat on the planet's surface will require significant forces; the rebels still have dense clusters of ground fortresses and cities, which can serve as areas for fierce urban combat, needing both sides to fight hard for control. The conglomerations of reinforced concrete can themselves be seen as giant fortresses, providing great geographical advantages for the defenders.

But overall, the outcome of the ground battles won't have much suspense.

After essentially clearing the orbital defense system of Mentus II, the Alliance Fleet did not rush to take the next step. Instead, they temporarily withdrew to rest and regroup the fleet, restoring the Void Shield.

The shield can be restored, the ships can be repaired, but the orbital defenses of Mentus II are gone for good.

Two weeks after the rest, the ground offensive finally began.

First, under the achievements of ground artillery groups, with massive fire projection, the orbital bombardment destroyed two nearby fortress clusters.

With this action, part of the area on the edge of the Arctic Circle of Mentus II was cleared. When the Alliance ships operated in the orbit corresponding to this area, due to angle issues, only a small part of the orbital firepower deployed elsewhere by the rebels could tilt at an angle to attack, making it inaccurate and sparse.

After establishing a certain safe zone, the Alliance Army began deploying troops to the ground through landing craft, transport planes, and drop pods.

At this time, amidst the howling wind and snow, and the covered fortress ruins, many rebel forces emerged, launching a fierce attack on the landing Alliance Army.

This brought considerable trouble to the Alliance's landing operations.

So far, Gu Hang believes that the rebel general tasked with defending Mentus II is quite skilled.

Although his efforts cannot alter the outcome of Mentus II falling into the hands of the Alliance, it is hard to blame the general of Mentus II's defense forces.

The gap between the strengths of the two sides is too large.

When the Alliance is willing to pay a certain price, less concerned with casualty figures and ship losses, it is like a crushing battle.

It is impossible to reverse such a vast disparity in strength merely with the commanding ability of a general.

Nevertheless, the defenders still managed to cause as much trouble for the Alliance as possible.

Whether it was the decisive destruction of the captured Starport and Star Fortress, or at this moment, arranging a considerable number of troops to infiltrate and ambush amidst the ruins and snow amidst the orbital bombardment that flattened the fortress clusters, and inflicting substantial damage while the Alliance Army was not yet fully established…

He caused the Alliance significant trouble.

However, as the Alliance ships began to provide strong orbital support, the rebel's anti-landing operations quickly collapsed.

On one hand, the National Knights' Regiment deployed several Titans along with a large number of Knight Mechas. These elite troops transformed what was previously an unstable foothold into a very stable one.

On the other hand, although the orbital Alliance ships were not convenient for conducting large-scale bombardment below, mainly because of their own landing troops, they did possess the ability for precision strikes.

Mainly utilizing M-class and even S-class specifications firepower, emphasizing ground forces' guidance.

To avoid striking the wrong targets, ground force commanders could call in orbital fire via laser guidance and other means.

It's on-demand, with the permissions even lowered to the battalion level.

Once the guidance beacon was launched, there would typically be a response within about a minute. Either a light spear would sweep down, or a Heat Hammer Macro Cannon would strike down, depending on the specific target situation.

If enemy heavy tanks appeared, the light spear worked well—fast and accurate; if the enemy launched a group attack or held a stubborn defensive position, the Heat Hammer Macro Cannon would certainly crush it.

The most common and frequently used were the Scalpel Missiles.

Accurate, with a broad bombardment area and high power.

Soon, the losses suffered at the start of the landing were over.

The elite rebels who infiltrated were wiped out. They were annihilated, with hardly any units able to escape intact.

After securing the foothold, the Alliance soldiers in the snowstorm began to move southward, directly targeting multiple fortress clusters.

With artillery bombardment and armored units forming a steel flood, once the ground forces arrived, the Alliance's main fleet in orbit would follow immediately…

Under the three-dimensional strike, one fortress cluster after another on Mentus II that seemed solid was resolutely and boldly devoured by the Alliance.

Subsequently, the Alliance opened a second landing zone in the desert area of the planet's southern hemisphere and a third landing zone in the temperate region of the northern hemisphere…

Fire and battle engulfed the globe in just a few months.

In the seventh month after the Battle of Mentus began, the entire planet was declared to be under Alliance control.

Although some guerrilla units were still hiding in the mountains and ruins, stubbornly resisting, the vast majority of the production foundation and population had fallen under Alliance control. The most stubborn traitors were at best a minor nuisance, no longer a major problem.

The Battle of Mentus showcased the Alliance's clear offensive capability.

In contrast to the Fury Flame Battle Group withdrawing and handing over key areas, and shocked by the Alliance's determination to conquer the heavily defended planet, nearly a dozen surrounding worlds simultaneously capitulated.

As soon as the Alliance's envoys arrived, they switched allegiance.

Chapter 547, Poking Through the Window Paper

On the many worlds that have changed flags, there are still Princess's Rebel Armies stationed on their home planets.

Moreover, the governors of these planets who have shown a willingness to surrender aren't necessarily wholeheartedly aligning with the Alliance.

The main reason is the repeated retreats of the Fury Flame Battle Group in the Proudclaw Cosmos, which has left the domain's governors and leaders quite dissatisfied.

You have your grand strategy, but we bear the hardships!

Once again drawing resources and troops, and as soon as the Alliance arrives, they retreat directly, yet demand that we resist to the end with the Planetary Defense Force… Why?

The lives of the Defense Army also matter!

Faced with dozens of worlds as living examples, people couldn't help but waver.

But is the Alliance really any better?

In the regions they occupy, they don't hesitate to purge native forces, instilling fear; but thankfully, if you cooperate relatively well, it seems they don't treat you too harshly.

They also compress their defensive line under Furyflame's harassment and attacks, abandoning peripheral worlds. By then, if Furyflame returns, how will they treat these surrendering governors?

It's a dilemma on both sides.

So they can only sway toward whoever comes.

But even if they have a tendency to surrender to whoever comes, they can't be die-hard followers.

The general attitude is: Come if you must, I'll provide the resources you want, but if you want me to fight desperately, I'll just feign compliance…

The most direct manifestation of this is that these planets, which have changed flags toward the Alliance, haven't even suppressed or eliminated the small contingent of loyal Princess Legion rebels originally stationed on the planet.

The Alliance's high-level officials are essentially aware of this situation.

Therefore, the Alliance hasn't pressured these places too much.

The Alliance adheres firmly to its strategy, once determined, by executing it with resolve.

For those sitting on the fence and wavering, the Alliance merely sends envoys to force them to declare allegiance, collects some resources and troops, and then issues orders to eliminate rebels and defend their homeland—orders that probably won't be strictly followed—and then leaves them be.

The Alliance's main force is nestled on Mentus II. Most of the troops are resting. The army is stationed, resting, on vacation, replenishing supplies, hosting some internal activities; in short, boosting morale.

The fleet is docked near the repaired remnants of the Starport, repairing ships. Of course, those that require major repairs need to be sent to the shipyard. Fortunately, there is a shipyard within the Alliance-controlled area of Proudclaw Cosmos that can undertake this work.

The technical level of that shipyard is not great; it's a small facility. But there's no other choice. If not used, it would have to be sent back to the Alliance's mainland, with the nearest being the Grannga Shipyard in the Menghe Star Domain.

Outside of the resting troops, only a small portion of the army, in cooperation with some minor ship activities, purged any remaining rebel forces on the planet, but this wasn't the main focus on Mentus II.

The rest period lasted for a month and a half before the Alliance's main force set out again.

This time, they included two worlds as stops along the way, slightly fortified them, and then pounced on Proudtooth Star.

As the Starfield Capital, Proudtooth Star's defense level was also not bad, at least on par with Mentus II.

However, under the complete abandonment by Fury Fleet, Proudtooth Star's fate was similar to that of Mentus II.

Indeed, the facts confirmed this.

Four months later, Proudtooth Star was recaptured.

This victory further shook the entire Proudclaw Cosmos.

Presumably, as the Alliance proceeds to reclaim other worlds in the Proudclaw Cosmos, it will become much easier.

Just as after taking Mentus II, they could secure nearby areas with just an announcement.

Although the worlds aren't fully submissive, Gu Hang himself didn't have high expectations. As long as they don't cause trouble and can provide some resources, it's certainly much better than normal circumstances.

So far, two out of the three major target worlds mentioned in the previous military council of the Alliance have been captured.

With Mentus II and Proudtooth Star, the entire Proudclaw Cosmos is almost covered.

The final remaining target is Heyang VIII.

This world is relatively isolated. Apart from having abundant resources, it doesn't have much strategic value. Unlike Mentus II and Proudtooth Star, bringing it down would cause surrounding star systems to waver and surrender.

Capturing Heyang VIII doesn't have this effect.

The abundant resources of the planet are, relatively speaking. If the Alliance only wanted resources, hundreds of worlds in the Proudclaw Cosmos are at their disposal, and there's no necessity to trouble Heyang VIII.

The Alliance's reason to trouble this planet is actually quite clear: to provoke the Alfonso Sect behind it and see what their attitude really is.

There was indeed opposition from the Alliance military leaders.

We've chased and made the enemy's Fury Fleet flee, showing a significant strength gap, but weren't we always vigilant that Iron Fury's main force would march southward?

Wasn't it agreed that time was on our side, and after taking the Proudclaw Cosmos, we would temporarily hold off?

Then why trouble Heyang VIII?

Testing and determining the Alfonso Sect's stance is important. Various diplomatic means have been countered by those slick politicians with all sorts of excuses. This direct threat to their core interests will have a more noticeable effect.

But what if we truly push the Alfonso Sect to Iron Fury's side? If we force them to enter the fray, what will we do?

Gu Hang criticized these arguments in the council.

“Don’t have such wishful thinking.”

“Will the Alfonso Sect be neutral? Will they stand on the Empire’s side?”

“It’s impossible. Their binding with Iron Fury is so deep and steadfast. Without their strong support, how could Iron Fury have grown strong for so many years? Even after the Iron Armor Battle Group explicitly turned, no matter how many excuses or explanations the Alfonso Sect gives, their actions speak for themselves. Not only have they not stopped supplying weapons to Iron Armor, but they have even increased the supply.”

“They are a typical enemy. At the moment, they haven’t clearly raised their flag, but that’s only because the pressure isn’t there yet. We must recognize that from start to finish, Alfonso’s goal will never be one we can strive for; they are a tangible enemy.”

Someone raised another thought: Since they haven’t clearly raised the flag, and the pressure isn’t there yet, why do we need to give them pressure and break this illusion?

Gu Hang immediately retorted:

“If we don’t break it, will they not attack us?”

“If we let Heyang VIII, a planet with abundant resources, continuously supply blood to the Alfonso Sect, and with a mighty Titan Legion in preparation, and the existence of Alfonso’s Mechanical Fleet, how many troops do we need to defend around Heyang VIII? If we ignore this planet, then when we battle Fury Flame or even the main force of the southward Iron Armor, and they come out to attack from the side, what will we do?”

“When a determined enemy appears on our flank and might cause us trouble, we cannot ignore it.”

Then no one spoke further.

Gu Hang’s authority was upheld.

However, as the Alliance's main force was about to reach Heyang VIII, trouble struck from the rear.

Chapter 548, Hunting Time

When the Alliance Main Fleet led by Gu Hang pierced into the enemy's heart like a sharp sword, Adler Politos and Wang Mengsong, with their Fury Fleet, were not idle.

They abandoned one strategic stronghold after another, yet quietly launched their counterattack within the Alliance-controlled zone.

They bypassed the Alliance's reconnaissance, moving like phantoms through the boundless darkness, entering areas controlled by the Alliance.

Their target was the three battlecruisers left guarding the rear of the Alliance.

They indeed couldn't withstand the spearhead of the Alliance's main forces and were unwilling to engage in a strategic showdown. However, after the main Alliance forces had left, relying on two combat barges and a Retribution-class Battleship, they were fully capable of sneaking up from behind the Alliance.

The additional combat barge was the flagship of the New World Torch: 'Torchlight'.

It had been under repair all along and had only recently returned to the battlefield.

The three main ships had a substantial advantage in direct combat power over the three battlecruisers left behind by the Alliance.

If they lined up for a direct broadside, a single Retribution-class could topple the three battlecruisers, not to mention the two combat barges.

However, the maneuver advantage of the battlecruisers still existed. The Alliance Navy would have to be incredibly foolish to choose direct confrontation with the Fury Fleet.

Relying on their mobility, the three battlecruisers wouldn't be easy to catch.

Politos also knew that successfully luring and surrounding the three Alliance battlecruisers was by no means an easy task.

But it could be attempted, and if successful, the rewards would be tremendous.

A squadron composed of several smaller ships chose an Alliance transport fleet for harassment.

This was a common tactic, and both sides had clashed over such attacks and counterattacks many times over the past few months.

But this time, the Fury Fleet decided to ramp up their efforts.

Within the attacking squadron were two Lunar-Class Cruisers, posing as though they knew the Alliance's escorting forces had strengthened, so they too increased their force allocation.

The attacked Alliance transport fleet ran towards a heavily fortified planetary orbit on their route under the cover of the escort fleet and stood their ground.

Generally speaking, at this point, the Fury Fleet should have obediently withdrawn.

The Alliance escort fleet was not that powerful, and the combat effectiveness of some armed merchant ships was poor, while the planetary orbit defense system hastily constructed over the past few months was quite imperfect…

But still, it represented a complete set of defensive measures. It was difficult to gnaw through with just two Lunar-Class as the main force, at least not quickly.

Over time, there might be a chance; but before then, the Alliance's remaining battlecruisers would have arrived.

If they delayed, the Lunar-Class, which was not a high-speed cruiser or a light cruiser, would have a hard time escaping once caught by the battlecruisers.

However, this time, the marauding fleet of the Fury showed some impatience, relentlessly attacking the deeply entrenched Alliance transport fleet.

Until they detected that the battlecruisers were already transitioning through the Star Realm Tunnel at this star system, they reluctantly gave up and turned tail to escape.

But before they reached the jump point, three Alliance battlecruisers arrived and charged at them fiercely.

The two Lunar-Class ships presented a highly attractive target for the resting Raving Crow, Winged Flight, and Korolya.

This was a rare opportunity to eliminate part of the Fury Fleet's strength and weaken its overall power. The Lunar-Class Cruiser was also a valuable large ship. Destroying two would significantly harm the fleet's capabilities.

However, this was only the first step of the Fury Fleet's plan.

The 'panicked' two Lunar-Classes, along with their squadron, hurriedly made their way to the jump point, barely managing to make it into the firing range of the three Chalice-class before initiating their jump.

In the process, several warships had already been shot down and destroyed.

Then, the captains of the three Chalices that reached the jump point held a brief exchange, and finally, Fleet Commander Major General Bai Qifan made a decision:

Pursue!

They had considered the possibility of a trap but quickly dismissed it.

Their enemy's panicked retreat did not seem feigned.

Moreover, if it were truly bait to lure them deep, there should be a trap on the other side.

But the opposite side of this jump point was also within Alliance-controlled territory. They had received no reports of enemy fleet activity there and had conducted a stellar communication with the spatial station set on the opposite jump point without any reports of enemy presence.

Under such circumstances, the risk of pursuit seemed low.

Thus, the three battlecruisers and their smaller companions also initiated the jump.

After about three Terra Days, they had almost traversed the Star Realm Tunnel, about to exit, returning to the real universe.

However, at this moment, the psychics serving as navigators on the ships suddenly issued dense warnings: they detected enemy vessels at the jump point, including three massive ships!

At this point, the captains of the three Chalice-class cruisers were all in panic.

Had they stepped into a trap after all?

But at this point, there was no turning back.

If they had known this information a few or ten hours earlier, they might have had time to abort the jump and retreat.

But now, it was too late.

There was no time to ask why the observatory towers of this star system had not detected the enemy main fleet's presence in this star system in advance, nor could they question why the jump point's warning space station had not relayed any information.

These questions were significant before, but at this moment, they mattered little.

What they had to consider was how to survive the trap.

The only solace was that the Fury Fleet did not want to alert the Alliance ships by coming out of ambush prematurely; they lifted their silence and showed up only when the Alliance ships were at a point of no return in their jump, then swiftly headed towards the jump point.

Under these circumstances, the three Chalice-classes of the Alliance wouldn't immediately face widespread cannon fire right after re-entering the real universe, before switching from jump engines to conventional ones, and having yet to activate their Void Shields in vulnerable stages.

Yet, the situation remained extremely dire.

Just as the Alliance ships completed their shield activation and engine startup, the enemy ships had already arrived.

Should they immediately initiate a jump again to escape?

They quickly dismissed this option.

During the phase of jump initiation, under the firepower of three massive ships, at least two of the Chalice-classes, with their fragile frames, would perish during the jump initiation process.

This was unacceptable.

If two battlecruisers were lost, whether or not Fleet Commander Bai Qifan died here, he would undoubtedly face a military tribunal afterwards.

Forget about other small vessels, they could be sacrificed, but the large ships had to be preserved!

The three Chalice-classes began maneuvering at full power!

Chapter 549

The three Strike Cruisers at full throttle, picked a direction to retreat.

To be honest, their retreat looked quite embarrassing.

The enemy's firepower was a bit too fierce.

When they had not yet escaped the enemy's fire range, the firepower of the Retribution-class Battleship and the two combat barges added up to about 2.5 times that of the three Strike Cruisers. After being fiercely attacked, one Strike Cruiser that was targeted, its Void Shield directly overloaded and shattered. The hull also took two shots from the Loyal Rage Macro Cannon.

Fortunately, the Strike Cruiser class is fragile only in comparison with battleships. Compared to a typical Lunar-Class Cruiser, its armor thickness is still superior, so it couldn't be destroyed by just two Loyal Rage shots.

The hull was damaged, but not fatal; at least it didn't damage the propulsion system.

This is crucial.

Fighting is definitely out of the question, so now, the best they can rely on for survival and keeping the ship intact is the propulsion system.

The fleeing Alliance Fleet also employed a strategy of spreading out their forces. Several Lunar-Class Cruisers along with some smaller ships chose many different directions to run.

However, for these distractions, the Fury Fleet simply ignored them. Despite having an overwhelming number of ships, they had no interest in splitting forces to hunt, their eyes fixed on the three battlecruisers of the Alliance.

The biggest fish had already been lured out, so naturally, no one wanted to look at the small fry.

Bai Qifan could only find some comfort in the thought that with a dozen or so ships running in different directions, some would definitely survive.

As for the three battlecruisers directly under his command, they did not choose to scatter.

If they split completely in three different directions, with the speed of the battlecruisers, it was indeed possible for one or two to escape. However, just as he did not immediately activate the warp drive sacrificing one or two to escape to the other side, Bai Qifan so far still sought to preserve all three warships.

If they separated while fleeing, the lack of mutual cover might still result in losses.

This was something Bai Qifan did not want to see.

He did not deny stepping into a trap, he had to take responsibility; but precisely because of this, he had to personally lead the troops out of the trap.

The three battlecruisers gradually picking up speed, covering each other, broke out of the firing range of the Retribution-class Battleship with the strongest firepower at the cost of one shattered shield.

Once the Strike Cruiser class revs up speed, the Retribution-class definitely couldn’t catch up.

However, the two flagship combat barges belonging to the two Starfighter Battle Groups of Furyflame and New World’s Torch, were not slowpokes.

Combat barges are rare ships within the Human Empire that only Interstellar Warriors use, serving generally as flagships for battle groups. They don't follow standard designs but are custom-made according to each group's needs from friendly and well-connected Founding Worlds.

Some combat barges pursue speed and agility, similar to battlecruisers in this respect; some pursue robust ship structure and heavy firepower, akin to typical battleships; some have tendencies towards carrier design.

Due to their custom build, many of the ships' performance attributes vary widely. Some powerful combat barges, ready to spend the money regardless of cost efficiency, can even achieve carrier projection capabilities, battleship-level firepower, with decent speed.

Of course, to achieve this, first, the Founding World accepting the custom order must have excellent technical capabilities; on the other hand, such piled-up performance on a single ship certainly has worse cost efficiency than using the same money and resources to build two or even three similar-class ships.

Moreover, combat barges, or all Interstellar Warrior-exclusive ships including Strike Cruisers, have one feature: designated Interstellar Warrior crew positions. From firepower to ship management to communication command, there are dedicated roles allowing the Interstellar Warriors to connect directly like using a genetic neural interface to handle black shell armor.

This way, the ship's performance can be further enhanced beyond the original hardware baseline.

In any case, human crew's manual level is definitely not as good as Interstellar Warriors' direct neural connections.

Furyflame and New World's Torch's two combat barges were not taken to such extremes.

Bai Qifan, through brief observation, roughly judged that the performance of these two combat barges was between that of a battlecruiser and a battleship. The firepower was a bit less than that of the Retribution-class, but they also had two X-class colossal cannons; the speed was a bit slower than battlecruisers but not by much, they could at least keep up.

In space, this resulted in a long, see-saw chase.

In the chase, Bai Qifan successfully led the three battlecruisers to another warp point and performed a warp towards the southern part of the star map.

Just before they entered the warp state, the two combat barges arrived at the warp point with their destroyer groups.

They couldn't catch up.

After entering the Star Realm Tunnel, Bai Qifan's heart, which had been tense for days, could finally relax slightly.

Should be safe?

But soon, the navigator conveyed a message.

The enemy hadn't given up the pursuit.

They followed right behind, also activating their warp drive, entering the same Star Realm Tunnel.

In the Star Realm Tunnel, the two sides wouldn't fight. There's no space concept within the tunnel, the ships supposedly in the same tunnel actually cannot meet.

However, this raised another issue: the time to complete the star realm warp no longer depends on the ships' normal speed or maneuverability but solely on the warp engine's specifications and efficiency.

The three Alliance-built Strike Cruiser classes used high-quality warp engines. But restricted by the power module of the battlecruisers themselves, not as large as battleships, they had to make trade-offs in normal engines, firepower output, warp engines, energy shields, etc.

In this situation, the material quality of the warp engine is good, but the specifications are somewhat limited.

Generally speaking, the warp engine is important, but it is not the most important. With trade-offs, mono-purpose warp engines tend to have their specifications reduced, sacrificing some performance to save more energy supply for other systems.

This was also done during the design of the Strike Cruiser class.

So, the question becomes, did the two combat barges on the other side, and the Retribution-class that would reach the warp point latest half a day later, also have reduced warp engine specs?

They shouldn't complete the Star Realm warp before us despite our earlier start, should they?

If that happens, it's all over.

By then, the enemy, with their Void Shields on and firepower ready, will start scanning, locking, and firing the moment we appear in the real universe, to deliver the most severe blow to our fragile battlecruisers, before they can even raise their shields.

Information searches and probes within the Star Realm Tunnel are not easy. However, no matter how difficult the objective conditions are, under Bai Qifan's stern orders, the navigation psychics and Star Speech Psychics on the three ships tried all they could to detect and explore the enemy's situation.

During the approximately two-day-long Star Realm warp, Bai Qifan's mood fluctuated greatly.

The main reason was the varying reports they received.

At one moment, the enemy's warp situation seemed problematic, estimated to arrive at the target point a day later than us. But before Bai Qifan could rejoice, the next updated information revised the estimation, showing the enemy's speed is faster than theirs, causing worry and tension again.

Sometimes, Star Speakers and Navigators would give different situation reports.

Once the warp journey was about to end, the information gradually became unified: both parties should arrive at the destination point almost simultaneously.

Bai Qifan was not very satisfied with this answer.

What does “almost” mean?

How much time is “almost”?

After the warp completion, the time is extremely precious. A difference of five to ten minutes may not sound like much in normal times, but in this golden moment, it is the difference between life and death.

Whoever arrives ten minutes earlier will have the enemy fleet with shields raised by the time they exit.

If it’s ten minutes earlier, not only could the shields be activated, but with the switch to normal engines, there would be ten extra minutes to pick up speed, making it harder for the enemy fleet to catch up.

However, the psychics really had no way to provide a definite time.

Bai Qifan also couldn’t continue to press them.

What’s the point of pressing?

With a knife to their throat forcing them to report a time would just lead to fabrication. Making decisions based on inaccurate information would lead to bigger problems.

He could only prepare for the worst-case scenario.

And at the moment the warp completed, and the ships entered the real universe, this worst-case scenario indeed unfolded.

The enemy ships were right in front of them.

The Fury Fleet's two combat barges, along with their fleet group, arrived first!

Seeing the figures of those two massive ships appearing on the observation screen in the bridge command center, Bai Qifan nearly faced a cardiac arrest.

But in the next moment, he realized there was still hope.

The enemy ships' shields were not up!

Only a few patrol ships had their shields activated!

This means the enemy might have arrived only a short while before them!

There's still a chance!

Standing at the bridge's center, he clenched his fists tightly.

He remained silent, not issuing any command at this moment.

Because there was no need. Contingency plans were all set in the previous days. At the instant they enter the real universe, the shield system and engine system were already fully operational. Everyone on the ship knew what they had to do and understood it was a race against time between life and death.

If the ship is destroyed, no one survives.

At the critical moment, although the opponent hadn't activated their shields yet, their cannons fired first, launching a barrage towards the Alliance ships!

The other side chose to prioritize firing systems first!

Chapter 550, Unknown Battle Group

Under the fierce firepower of two combat barges, three Alliance battlecruisers were hit again.

Instead of prioritizing engines and shields, the enemy chose to first focus on powering up their weapon systems, completing target locks and concentrated fire, which is very impatient.

However, it was also effective.

In the damaged state, Bai Qifan, as the Fleet Commander, realized the situation had almost reached desperation.

Although the three battlecruisers subsequently activated their engines and shields, the Flying Wing among them suffered significant damage in the previous strike.

Moreover, unfortunately this time, the damage to the Flying Wing indeed affected its speed.

After launching their engines, the three battlecruisers began to flee, while the two combat barges of the Fury Fleet pursued closely, fiercely firing before the distance widened.

Of course, the three battlecruisers were not just fleeing without fighting back.

Weren’t you taking risks by activating firepower and engines first, which delayed your shields?

This was also a great time for a counterattack.

The two combat barges also took several solid hits.

However, the flagships of these two battle groups do not lag in armor compared to proper battleships; even without shields, one endured one shot and the other two shots without any particularly apparent issues.

Afterward, with the shields activated, it was even more so.

This further proved Bai Qifan's previous judgment completely correct: relying on three battlecruisers was not enough to confront the enemy head-on.

But worse, in the subsequent chase and escape, the Alliance's damaged Flying Wing not only failed to resolve the issue but its damage situation became increasingly dire!

According to the report, in the most recent shot, not only a power bay was damaged, but several regions where pipe repair crews were stationed were affected by internal explosions, with severe personnel casualties.

The lack of available personnel made it impossible to control the ship's losses immediately, and with the intense operations of subsequent ships, they continued to spread wide.

In the current situation, a very painful choice lay ahead of Bai Qifan: Should he abandon the Flying Wing?

If the Fury Falcon he personally occupied and the Korolya next to him moved at full speed, they could escape the Fury Fleet's pursuit. But doing so would surely doom the increasingly damaged Flying Wing left behind.

But if they continued to cover for each other, the entire fleet severely impaired by reduced speed would be endlessly entangled by those two Interstellar Warriors' combat barges, all the way to the warp point, without any chance of shaking them off.

Before the warp point, they might barely linger at the enemy's extreme range, making it so that the enemy's overall hit rate wasn't too high. But reaching the warp point and entering warp state, switching engines, would be the critical moment.

If they couldn’t escape the enemy, it could end with all three ships going down together!

What to do?

Abandon one ship to save the other two or risk taking all three together?

Bai Qifan’s anxiety made him feel somewhat numb all over his body.

Then, an unfamiliar communication request came through.

“Are you Alliance ships?”

A somewhat strange, raspy voice rang out in the bridge center as the signal connected.

Simultaneously, in front of Bai Qifan, the speaker’s ’face’ appeared on a virtual screen.

The quotes because the face was obscured by a helmet; yet the helmet itself was already very recognizable:

It was the helmet of an Interstellar Warrior MK.8, Sky Eagle Type Power Armor.

However, this set of paint was something Bai Qifan had never seen before.

The only Interstellar Warrior he ever encountered was Phoenix. Each of his three battlecruisers housed a hundred.

At this moment, the head that appeared in front of him, with only part exposed, showed a silver-gray helmet with a streak of blood-red at the forehead.

The unfamiliar Interstellar Warrior, and its cold, emotionless words, made Bai Qifan, amid nervousness, feel hope from this peculiar change.

He admitted, “Yes, we are the Alliance. May I ask…”

Before he could finish his question, the other party interrupted, proposing the next question: “Are those pursuing you the traitor Fury Flame Battle Group and New World Torch Battle Group?”

Upon hearing the word ’traitor,’ Bai Qifan felt further at ease.

He replied, “Yes, may I ask…”

Yet again, before he could finish, the other side silently cut off the communication.

Bai Qifan was bewildered, what was going on?

He could infer from the term ’traitor’ that this group of unknown Interstellar Warriors must be on his side.

But apart from that, he knew nothing about them.

Who are they? Where did they come from? What’s their purpose? How strong are they? Can they help him?

All of this remained unknown.

But the unknown can also have its benefits.

In the current fleet’s situation, any help was good.

Five minutes after the communication ended, the Star Speech Psychic transmitted information: a rapid fleet was suddenly detected appearing on the flank of both fleets.

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