Governor 571

Chapter 572, I've Had Enough of the Red Tape

The sound of the door to the Progeny Chamber being breached was heard by Sage Dubo.

Despite always being meticulous about security and guards, he never expected that someone could actually make it to his doorstep.

Clearly, there were tens of millions of Elite Protectorate Army aboard the ship. The most elite core units were stationed outside, and he even directly had a Dominant Bishop guarding the door…

Yet they still broke through.

Why?

Just because they are Interstellar Warriors?

Sage Dubo had seen many Interstellar Warriors before. So what if there were eight hundred of them? Could eight hundred Interstellar Warriors breach his mechanical ark?

That was impossible!

No Battle Group could achieve that!

There were countless spiritual warriors opening a frontal battlefield to divert the Protection Army's attention, and it still didn't help. The forces he left behind for defense could withstand a full-scale board-and-jump assault from an entire Battle Group without a problem.

In fact, it should be more than enough.

However, the reality was, they overcame all the barriers Sage Dubo had set up and forcibly made it to his front door.

And now, the sound of the door being breached came from those Interstellar Warriors.

The door to the Progeny Chamber was crafted from a high-strength alloy and was incredibly heavy, making it extremely difficult to open.

A door in a completely locked state couldn't be opened by technical means in a short time; even brute forced, the craftsman who built the door promised that even if the entire War Ark were destroyed, this door would survive intact, though it might become space debris, at least the door would remain whole.

Bah.

It's just talk.

Having come this far, would they really be stopped by a useless door?

That was indeed the case.

From the sound of the explosion outside, Sage Dubo could tell they were using the most primitive method:

Thermite bombs.

Why does everyone use this method?

Isn't it because it works well?

A single thermite bomb wouldn't burn through his alloy door, but what about two? Three?

By burning one spot, the characteristic of melting heat alone would be enough to breach the door.

As for the boastful craftsman's claims, just listen with a grain of salt.

It's not about boasting or harsh critiques, but rather, no matter what the data indicators are, they aren't placed there for people to casually burn through; everything can eventually be breached.

If those Interstellar Warriors couldn't be eliminated or driven away, no matter how solid the door, it was inevitable that it would finally be breached.

And at this moment, within the Progeny Chamber, there was no armed force left.

Except for the neuron progeny at the center, as large as a Warhound Titan, held captive by countless energy beams, the only living beings left were him and six Dominant Bishops aiding him.

What other options were there?

Could he count on the guards outside to drive away the Phoenix before the door was broken?

Throughout the entire previous process, he had ordered Boreson countless times to send reinforcements, which he indeed did; even he himself, along with other Principal Sages on the ship, were on the way.

If they arrived in time, there should still be hope, right?

Thinking this, he once again heard the sizzling sound.

This time, clearer than any before.

“It’s over.”

Just as this thought crossed his mind, he saw that the supposedly indestructible door of the ship had a roughly one-and-a-half-meter diameter area turn red and then irresistibly penetrate.

Following that, a large foot kicked through, creating a hole in the door.

The size of the hole, compared to the size of the entire door, was actually quite small.

However, it was enough for an Interstellar Warrior to enter.

Even if the Interstellar Warrior had to bend down to do so.

“Sigh…”

Sage Dubo sighed.

He stepped down from the control platform, allowing his red and black robe to slip off, revealing a body that, when extended, was indeed no smaller than a Warhound Titan.

This was his battle form.

His gaze focused on the Phoenix Battalion Leader Matins entering from within, he slowly spoke: “I’m really surprised, I can’t understand how you made it here.”

“I must admit, you are strong, really strong.”

“When Humphrey Paolo spared you Phoenix, sentencing you to the Penance Crusade, it was a grave mistake. They should have wiped you out completely a hundred and thirty years ago, then today’s issues wouldn’t exist.”

“You have indeed succeeded, making me step down from the control platform. With this, the powerful spiritual energy of the neuron progeny is unmanaged, perhaps during this time, your so-called strongest psychic in the East, Governor Gu Hang, might have the opportunity to destroy a few of our warships.”

“But it doesn’t matter, the final result is nothing more than us having to pay a higher price to completely eradicate your fleet.”

“No difference will be made.”

“And you will go no further.”

Matins’ hand gripped tightly on the sword hilt.

He felt his entire being trembling.

The strongest enemy he had ever encountered in his life was undoubtedly the former Battle Group Leader of the Furyflame, Kazimir Ersu.

No matter what the scenario, he had to admit, Ersu was an outstanding warrior.

He still vividly remembered the internal alert when fighting Ersu. As an Interstellar Warrior, the sense of danger was almost entirely warning him that Ersu was a formidable adversary.

Yet, that feeling couldn’t compare to now.

Looking at this figure that extended like a Titan, with countless steel limbs, flexible structure, able to float and twist in mid-air, this Principal Sage, Matins could clearly feel he was no match.

This being had long surpassed the realms of ’human’ and even ’superhuman.’

Even though Matins had reached a level considered superior among Battle Group Champions, there was still no hope of defeating the opponent.

Just like no champion, no matter how strong, could independently and directly confront an army-level Titan.

That was not the same concept.

But this was no reason for Matins to surrender.

He focused solely on the mission Governor Gu Hang entrusted to him.

Even if he could not defeat this formidable foe and would die here, he should at least fall in battle.

However, just then, Matins' eyes widened slightly.

He saw an unbelievable sight.

Chapter 573, Protozoan Riot

Anton Dubo didn't need to observe to realize that forcing himself—and the kind of superior existence capable of single-handedly reaching Titan-level capabilities—was being immobilized. This could only be achieved by a neuron progeny with Alpha-class Psychic strength.

But… why?

Wasn't the neuron progeny under tight control?

How could it suddenly break free?

Indeed, he had stepped down from the control console, but that only meant temporarily relinquishing his manipulation and utilization of the neuron progeny's powers. In this case, he also forfeited the advantage required for psionic confrontation against Gu Hang in space, allowing Gu Hang to act at will.

That didn't mean the neuron progeny had lost its restraints.

Before the war even began, Dubo, as Fleet Commander-in-chief and the highest-ranking among the seven Principal Sages, was certainly not confined to the progeny chamber, accompanying this creature at all times.

In peacetime, his visits here were few and far between.

Normally, the neuron progeny remained securely controlled within this chamber built with the peak of Alfonso Sect's technological capabilities. Its sole purpose was to ensure the neuron progeny stayed firmly restrained.

Theoretically, even in the absence of personnel, as long as the equipment remained operational, the progeny shouldn't have had any chance of escaping.

Let alone the fact that the chamber wasn't empty at this moment.

Though Dubo had stepped away from the console, six Dominant Bishops were still operating the control and restraint systems.

How could this happen…

Wait a minute?

When he stopped controlling the neuron progeny's powers, did that leave Gu Hang unopposed?

Was it Gu Hang?

But how could he possibly direct his psionic force with such pinpoint precision to this location?

The distance between the two sides was measured not just in thousands of kilometers but exceeded several planetary diameters. Utilizing psionic force to tear through a ship's Void Shield was still within the realm of understanding, as there were prior examples. But to accurately target a specific chamber within a ship, channel force through the Void Shield, and precisely deactivate the neuron progeny's restraints—rather than simply causing destruction and havoc…

Could a Psychic achieve this? Could a human achieve this?

Am I truly up against a Demon God?

Questions swirled in Dubo's mind, but no answers emerged.

Matins wouldn't let this moment pass.

Although he too was shaken by the neuron progeny bursting free of its restraints behind Dubo, he didn't find his own body immobilized. Evidently, the neuron progeny hadn't targeted him.

Still, whatever the reason, seizing this opportunity to cut Dubo down was paramount.

But just as Matins was about to step forward, Gu Hang's voice echoed in his mind.

"Your mission is complete. Assemble your battle brothers and prepare to retreat."

Matins froze for a moment before snapping to realization.

The neuron progeny wouldn't spare the mechanical sage before it.

Though it appeared restrained by some force, the mechanical body's durability was beyond question.

There still might be an opening for escape, and their confrontation could well become a fight between dragons and tigers.

However, to Matins, the two were both enemies. If they fought each other to death, it would be optimal.

If they didn't withdraw now, what were they waiting for?

So, Matins quietly climbed back out through the "dog hole" burned into the alloy door by seven or eight Thermite Bombs.

No obstacles awaited him.

Clearly, the neuron progeny wasn't targeting him, allowing him to retreat unhindered.

Outside, battles still raged against the Protection Army. Several of Matins' group guarding the "dog hole" couldn't help but glance back.

"?"

The Battle Group Leader crawling back out looked somewhat ridiculous…

But that wasn't important!

Larson couldn't help but ask, "Battle Group Leader, what happened inside? I felt an incredibly terrifying surge of psionic force…"

"The neuron progeny has broken free. Our mission is complete. Gather the troops and prepare for retreat. Also, get ready to carry out psionic teleportation back to the Eagle Horse."

“As expected of the Battle Group Leader!” Larson praised, “Even breaking the neuron progeny’s seal!”

“Uh…” Matins felt a bit awkward as he thought to himself, I didn’t do anything except crawl through that dog hole in and out…

However, he kept this thought to himself. Now wasn’t the time to speak of such matters!

Larson reported another issue: “The distance is too great, and there’s heavy psionic interference…”

As he spoke, they felt a sudden tremor shake the alloy door behind them. Though the door hadn’t broken, flames were visible through the “dog hole.”

“…Because of this,” Larson added. “I can’t complete the targeting for teleportation.”

“It’s fine. Just prepare; the Governor will handle it.”

With this assurance, Larson relaxed.

The team near the alloy door mobilized again, this time solely focused on gathering their battle brothers entrenched in skirmishes.

One of the Terminators beside Matins raised a war flag high.

This visible marker helped their allies converge.

The time allotted for their regrouping wouldn’t be long.

Gu Hang, now operating at full capacity, had already begun tearing down Alfonso II’s Void Shield.

Once the Void Shield shattered, the next stage would be a full-scale fleet bombardment.

Although the War Ark's armor was undoubtedly heavy, relying solely on its plating for defense clearly wouldn't suffice.

This War Ark would likely be devastated soon.

Matins had no desire for his battle group to perish alongside it.

Moreover, with the passage of time, the neuron progeny behind the alloy door would soon eliminate Anton Dubo. It shouldn't take much longer; that alloy gate likely couldn't hold this top-tier Insect Tyrant for long.

It was only a matter of time before it burst out.

When unleashed, the enraged insect beast's level of destruction—and whether the Phoenix warriors would be caught in the crossfire—remain uncertain.

Thus, in roughly fifteen minutes, the Interstellar Warriors had reached the necessity of retreat.

This regrouping only brought together fewer than five hundred warriors. However, they successfully merged with the group protecting the critically wounded.

Larson led the team in preparing psionic teleportation.

The destination was pre-assigned as the Alliance's aircraft carrier, the Eagle Horse. Despite the immense distance, even Larson could only vaguely perceive it.

At such strength, successful psionic teleportation was practically impossible. Forced execution would only scatter all five hundred of them to an unknown location.

Despite this, out of trust in the Governor, Larson gritted his teeth and executed the teleportation.

The weightlessness unique to psionic teleportation rapidly engulfed them. Once senses returned, the Phoenix warriors anxiously opened their eyes.

They had returned to their starting point.

Psionic teleportation had succeeded. They were back on the Eagle Horse.

Safe at last.

Chapter 574, Blown into 5 Pieces

After Phoenix withdrew, Gu Hang only 'looked' at them briefly, then ceased paying further attention.

The losses were still deeply painful.

Eight hundred went, only five hundred returned. Everyone was injured, and among them, there were dozens of critically wounded.

Though these critically wounded were beyond saving by mortal standards, for the Interstellar Warriors, the situation was different.

If a warrior truly couldn't be saved, they could still be placed into the Fearless Iron Coffin, continuing their service to the Legion and the Alliance in the future.

Of course, in actuality, the Alliance also supported allowing severely injured warriors to retire, offering strong life-support systems so they could enjoy a different lifestyle after retirement. After all, Interstellar Warriors live extraordinarily long lives and could still have plenty of 'good days' ahead.

Truth be told, being placed into the Fearless Iron Coffin was not a comfortable experience by any stretch, especially since once inside, there was no coming out for the rest of their lives.

Yet, thus far, there hasn't been a single Phoenix Warrior who opted for retirement after being critically injured—all have chosen the Iron Coffin.

The three hundred Interstellar Warriors lost weren't necessarily all killed in action. It's possible some surviving Phoenix warriors were scattered across Alfonso II and engaged in combat at various locations. Due to the insufficient time for assembly, they couldn't make it back in time.

But there was genuinely no way to manage this now.

When Matins breached the main gate, Gu Hang's power, through their deep connection as Interstellar Warriors, could stealthily infiltrate the Progeny Chamber.

Dubo, who was absent from the control panel, had a significantly lower sensitivity to Spiritual Energy. He failed to notice Gu Hang's power slipping in.

Then, pinpointing and precisely severing the restraints and controls binding the Neuron Progeny to liberate it presented a real challenge. Gu Hang had to carefully identify the weak points of the energy bindings on the Neuron Progeny and sever them one by one.

During this process, Gu Hang needed to operate his power with pinpoint accuracy from such a vast space distance while remaining completely undetected—a task of considerable difficulty.

Any misstep, if detected by Dubo and prompting him to return to the control panel, would spell major trouble.

However, throughout the entire process, Gu Hang performed flawlessly.

No errors, no hesitation—Gu Hang accomplished what he needed to do.

But it wasn't over yet.

Freeing the Neuron Progeny merely neutralized the entity that had been engaging in relentless psychic combat against Gu Hang.

Dubo, the supreme commander, was presumably dead; the War Ark onboard was now overrun by the rampaging Neuron Progeny. Simultaneously, the Valor Spirit Legion unleashed by Gu Hang hadn't retreated, leaving the War Ark in a severely crippled state.

As the flagship of the Mechanical Fleet, it could no longer fulfill its role as a command vessel, because it couldn't issue effective orders to the other ships within the fleet. Moreover, as the most formidable warship in their fleet, it was rendered impotent amidst the chaos, unable to act as the backbone of the operation.

Conversely, as the War Ark was effectively immobilized—despite its Void Shield—it was now under tremendous risk. Without movement or maneuvering capability to evade incoming fire, it became a sitting target incapable of absorbing sustained bombardment, even with its Void Shield.

To protect the flagship, many Escort Ships—and even a Retribution-class Battleship—closed in, attempting to provide cover. They used their firepower systems to intercept some of the Alliance's incoming projectiles, and when necessary, even positioned their own hulls to shield Alfonso II.

This proved immensely helpful for Alfonso II, but within the broader context of the fleet's decisive battle, the overall combat power of the Mechanical Fleet suffered greatly. Those vessels that diverted to protect the flagship rendered themselves essentially insignificant threats to the Alliance Fleet.

As a result, the Alliance experienced a dramatic reduction in firepower pressure.

The sacrificial boarding operation carried out by the Valor Spirit Legion and Phoenix had achieved its value here.

Furthermore, this was merely the immediate benefit to the Alliance Fleet.

The greater significance lay in the developments that followed.

The sacrifices of the Interstellar Warriors had created such an invaluable tactical opportunity—how could Gu Hang possibly let it go to waste?

Initially, Gu Hang planned to deal with the War Ark first to avoid prolonged complications. However, since other vessels dared to intervene, targeting those first became a viable option.

Without further obstructions, Gu Hang unleashed his Spiritual Energy power without restraint.

The Retribution-class Battleship that dared to shield Alfonso II instantly became Gu Hang's target.

The Void Shield didn't last long before it was completely torn apart.

Then, the Alliance Fleet, far superior in operational coordination compared to the Mechanical Fleet, immediately launched focused volleys of attacks.

The sheer number of projectiles was one thing, but in this instance, the main assault came from the Zhuge-class Aircraft Carrier 'Eagle Horse.'

Three patrol ships were launched and propelled forward at near-bullet speeds, only marginally slower than actual artillery shells, directly delivering them to the enemy battleship.

Conventionally, the Alliance's Blackfish-class patrol ships accommodate around 1,200 crew members. The specially modified Blackfish launched at the enemy, however, carried only about 400 crew.

This number barely sufficed for minimal operational staffing and was slightly inadequate; for sustained operations, it wouldn't even cover essential positions that require constant monitoring—after all, humans do need rest.

Today's battle situation, however, required no such considerations.

Even vessel control itself was largely irrelevant at this critical juncture.

As long as the weapons systems functioned properly, that was sufficient.

Another noteworthy point was that every crew member aboard carried the designation of a death soldier. Each one was prepared for the reality of never returning.

Launching small ships at point-blank range toward a battleship was already an extremely dangerous mission. Even though Zhuge-class Aircraft Carriers were equipped with recovery systems to retrieve launched small vessels, the likelihood of their survival was low.

And their task was straightforward: to fire all the missiles onboard the specially modified Blackfish before their destruction.

Missile-based weaponry posed an inherent disadvantage—it was easier to intercept compared to artillery shells or laser spears.

By placing aircraft and patrol ships in close proximity to enemy vessels, the Alliance aimed to resolve this issue: firing at point-blank range reduced the interception difficulty drastically.

Moreover, Blackfish-class patrol ships were significantly larger than even the largest Dragon Elephant War Machines. The suicide-modified Blackfish ships underwent customization solely to maximize missile capacity, disregarding everything else.

Each of the three Blackfish carried 18 Scorching East Wind missiles and required only two firing cycles to offload their entire payload—a process that wouldn’t exceed six minutes.

This meant that each Blackfish simply needed to survive for six minutes to accomplish their mission.

From the first salvo, 27 Scorching East Winds missiles were launched successfully.

Six were intercepted, while 21 struck squarely against the Retribution-class Battleship whose Void Shield had been torn apart.

Twenty-one colossal explosions bloomed on the battleship, inflicting catastrophic damage.

Soon after, one of the Blackfish ships was destroyed, but the remaining two launched their second round of Scorching East Wind missiles—all 18.

The Retribution-class Battleship was blown into five fragmented sections.

Chapter 575, Hijacking the Boat

After completing two volleys and firing all their missiles, the two Blackfish ships had accomplished their mission.

The strike was highly effective, and since their ammunition was fully depleted, there was no further reason for them to remain. The aircraft carrier's tractor system activated, and the two Blackfish vessels began retreating at a starting speed no conventional ship could match.

In just a short while, they would be pulled away to safety.

However, before the retreat was complete, yet another Blackfish was destroyed.

Ultimately, only one Blackfish managed to retreat successfully.

The sacrifice was worth it.

Trading two Blackfish ships and the lives of over a thousand people aboard them for a battleship was absolutely worthwhile.

With the destruction of that Retribution-class Battleship, Alfonso II's defenses were completely exposed.

The next target would be it.

After clearing several Escort Ships that stood in the way, Alfonso Sect's most formidable War Ark was left without any protection.

All it could rely on now was its thick armor.

But armor alone, how could it possibly be enough?

A warship's survival in space naval warfare depends on four damage mitigation strategies: maneuvering evasion, interceptive firepower, Void Shield/Energy Shield, and armor.

Missing just one severely weakens a ship's survivability.

And now, Alfonso II was lacking all three, save for armor.

Due to the assault by the shipborne spirits; due to the actions of the Neuron Progeny wreaking havoc after Dubo was neutralized, unleashing their spiritual power across the vessel and killing indiscriminately, Alfonso II's maneuvering and firepower interception capabilities were rendered inoperable. After all, these functions require humans to operate. When the crew are all slaughtered, or the control rooms and command centers destroyed, how can they function?

The Void Shield had also been torn apart by Gu Hang.

Left with only armor, no matter how thick, it was useless.

Not long after the preceding Retribution-class Battleship was destroyed, Alfonso II, under relentless firepower, was also blown into countless fragments.

The next target was the only Zhuge-class Aircraft Carrier remaining in the Alfonso Fleet.

Once that was dealt with, the next target would be a Dragon-Serpent-class Battlecruiser.

At this point, the Alfonso Fleet was visibly collapsing.

As of now, their flagship “Alfonso II” War Ark, an aircraft carrier, a battleship, and two battlecruisers—a total of five primary capital ships—had been destroyed.

In contrast, the price paid by the Alliance so far was predominantly various small and medium-sized ships. Among the larger ships, six Lunar-Class Cruisers had been lost; and as for true capital ships, one battlecruiser—the Korolya—had been destroyed.

This was undoubtedly a significant loss, especially the destruction of the Korolya, which was a severe blow to an Alliance that had only eight capital ships in total.

Alongside the loss of these ships, at least a million crew members and Navy Marine Corps personnel had perished.

This was the nature of fleet warfare.

At this scale, when both sides are determined to see victory and fight to the death, this is the outcome.

What’s more, the Alliance was already at a disadvantage compared to the Alfonso Fleet in terms of fleet strength, at least one rank below. It was solely because of Gu Hang and the boarding actions of the Interstellar Warriors that the tide of the battle was turned to what it is now.

But even with the tide turned, losses were still inevitable.

And this was still not the end.

The decisive battle had yet to conclude, particularly as Gu Hang had issued an order for the fleet to advance as a whole.

As the distance between the two sides decreased further, hit probabilities from firepower would increase accordingly, while the difficulty of evading incoming fire through maneuvering would also rise. The intensity of space combat would further escalate.

Of course, with Gu Hang present, the Alliance Fleet would maintain a greater advantage throughout this process.

After all, the Alliance Fleet's entire strategy fundamentally revolved around maximizing the power of Gu Hang's immense spiritual energy. His actions in tearing apart enemy warships' Void Shields acted as a signal; the fleet would then coordinate in concentrated fire to effectively annihilate the enemy's most critical combat assets.

Gu Hang was already prepared to endure greater losses, such as the potential destruction of one or two more battlecruisers, or even losing either the "Eagle Horse" or the "Firebath Nova."

He was resolute about completely annihilating the Alfonso Fleet here.

On the opposite side, the Alfonso Fleet had clearly sensed Gu Hang's uncompromising resolve.

Were they equally prepared to fight to the bitter end, even at the cost of complete annihilation, just to make the Alliance suffer?

Did they have the courage to risk utter destruction here, solely to inflict pain on the Alliance?

Their actions clearly suggested otherwise.

The entire Alfonso Fleet had lost its leadership, its backbone.

Although there was still a Principal Sage aboard the Emperor-class Battleship, who was supposed to take over command of the fleet, he had not succeeded in doing so.

The fleet's performance did not improve in any noticeable way.

In fact, under the pressure of the advancing Alliance Fleet, he made a particular decision: ordering the fleet to retreat!

This sparked an uproar, while also highlighting the Principal Sage's weak control over the fleet after the destruction of the War Ark. Certain ship captains did not agree with his orders.

After all, regardless of the losses, they still had their Emperor-class Battleship, as well as another Retribution-class Battleship. They were not entirely without the ability to fight back. Even if victory seemed impossible, turning and fleeing was not an option.

Chapter 575, Hijack Boat_2

Their concerns are not without merit. If they were to retreat entirely from battle, the Alliance Fleet would inevitably launch a relentless pursuit, leading to considerable losses of vessels.

Retreat—where could they even retreat to?

The entire Proudclaw Cosmos offers very limited choices for sanctuary.

Heading to Heyang VIII? That is certainly their hub, but the Alliance has already swept through it once, utterly annihilating the orbital defense system. Going there would be no different from lingering in the deep void.

Going to the Wenqi-Wuqi line? That would be an excellent option—if they could actually reach it. Leveraging the robust defense systems along this key transport corridor between Proudclaw Cosmos and Alfonso Star Domain would not only provide a reprieve but also link them directly to the Alfonso Star Domain for reinforcements from their home base.

However…

It's too far.

With the Alliance Fleet constantly snapping at their heels, how many ships could realistically make it back to the Wenqi-Wuqi line alive?

No one could say for sure.

There's another potential destination, however, that might be suitable—Phantom Moon.

That was where the Fury Fleet, cornered and desperate, had chosen to take refuge in the star system.

Originally, they were there waiting to rendezvous with the powerful Alfonso Fleet, selecting Phantom Moon as a place with reasonably intact orbital defenses to make their stand.

Their plan was simple: hold out and avoid annihilation until Alfonso's main forces arrived—that would suffice for success. But to their surprise, the Alliance ignored them entirely and instead focused their efforts on targeting Alfonso's reinforcements.

Now, the Fury Fleet likely has not received the news about the enormous fleet battle that unfolded in the Bowang Star System.

Regardless, Phantom Moon remains home to Interstellar Warriors—two entire battle groups, giving Alfonso's forces a better capacity to counter boarding operations. Although Fury Fleet had been utterly crushed by Phoenix in the Dragonhawk Star Domain years ago, those were still Interstellar Warriors!

Moreover, they still have a battleship and a combat barge in tow. With the addition of those two capital ships, the fleet's overall strength would see a small uptick.

Yet… venturing to Phantom Moon would mean plunging deeper into Proudclaw Cosmos, making any retreat even more tenuous.

Even if they managed to regroup with Fury Fleet and the two battle groups of New Torch, could they truly regain an upper hand in their struggle against the Alliance?

Most likely not.

A combat barge paired with a Retribution-class battleship pales in comparison to a War Ark, a Retribution-class, a Juggernaut-class, and two Drakeships.

Even Alfonso Fleet's peak condition hadn't stopped them from catching a brutal beating.

Unless Gu Hang's Spiritual Energy pressure could be neutralized, strengthening the fleet's combat prowess would hold little meaning. By now, Alfonso Fleet's captains recognize that Gu Hang's abilities can elevate the balance of power between two opposing fleets by an entire tier.

Unless the enhancement reaches an overwhelming level—the point where even without Void Shields, they could crush the Alliance Fleet—it would all be futile.

Every option is fraught with difficulty, and the captains hold contradictory opinions. The lone remaining Principal Sage does not command sufficient authority to unite contrasting viewpoints quickly and decisively in the aftermath of Dubo and War Ark's destruction.

These compounded factors have instead exacerbated the chaos within Alfonso Fleet, leaving it in worse disorder than before. The fleet's collective will is fragmented; a minority wishes to fight to the end, while others are open to retreat—but cannot even agree on the direction for said retreat.

Throughout this deliberation, the Alliance Fleet has been relentless, pressing closer and closer; Gu Hang, too, has shown no mercy, wreaking havoc by ripping Void Shields off one ship after another before utterly destroying them.

At this juncture, Alfonso's Emperor-class battleship could no longer muster the patience to argue with its comrades.

The Sage aboard the vessel issued one final order to all ships: follow him to break through, with the Wenqi-Wuqi line as the target.

Though called an order, it was more like a formal announcement.

The fleet's other captains persisted in their squabbles, debates, and attempts to push forward their own suggestions. But the Emperor-class battleship ignored them and withdrew independently.

Some ships followed, but the rest grew increasingly hesitant and descended into utter disarray.

By this point, everyone knew that remaining behind to fight to the death was no longer a viable strategy. The departure of the Emperor-class battleship had already marked the complete collapse of the "fight to the last man" plan.

Those captains who initially intended to fight to the end could only curse relentlessly before hastily turning their ships around and fleeing.

And so, the entirety of Alfonso Sect crumbled.

Splintering into a multitude of directions, they formed various groups large and small in a desperate attempt to escape the battlefield.

At this stage, the Alliance had undoubtedly emerged as the victors.

The battle could be declared won.

But the war was far from finished.

Victory is only one part of the equation; it's the sweet aftermath of triumph—the spoils—that most tempt the heart.

After expending so much effort and incurring significant costs, there's no way the Alliance Fleet would settle for merely "winning." They must seize the moment to eradicate as much of Alfonso Fleet's remaining combat power as possible.

The Alliance, after losing Korolya and subsequently Steel Wing, was left with only six capital ships. By a strict count, they were still weaker than Alfonso Fleet. Should Alfonso regain its footing, the tide of battle could easily shift again in unpredictable ways.

Of course, a fully intact Alfonso Fleet probably doesn't exist anymore. In their scattered retreat, the fleet had already fractured.

Nonetheless, even in defeat, Alfonso Fleet retained immense strength.

After all, they still possess one Emperor-class, one Retribution-class, and six Drake-class battleships.

Against such an adversary, it's impossible for the Alliance to launch separate pursuits.

Otherwise, any fleet daring to split off without Gu Hang's aid would likely crumble under Alfonso Fleet's counterattack.

In the end, it's likely many Sect of Mechanics fleets would manage to escape.

Recognizing this inevitability, the priority must be to focus on catching the "big fish."

Medium- and smaller-sized ships will be disregarded outright—Gu Hang wouldn't even waste the effort on battlecruisers, being of lower value and notoriously difficult to chase down given their high speed.

Meanwhile, "catching fish" must also be done with sustainability in mind. Prioritize those heading toward Phantom Moon; it's closer, and if Mechanics ships manage to regroup there with Fury Fleet and New Torch, it won't necessarily be unachievable to deal with—but it'll be a lot messier.

As for ships heading toward the Wuqi-Wenqi line, like the Emperor itself, those can be deprioritized for now.

The long journey ahead leaves ample opportunities for pursuit later.

Following this logic, Gu Hang first targeted the largest cluster of ships headed toward the Phantom Moon Star System.

This group of mechanical ships was led by the sole surviving Retribution-class battleship, flanked by three Drake-class battlecruisers.

The outcome of being targeted by Gu Hang was grim: one of the Drakeships was destroyed first, and the other two, sensing grave danger, abandoned their teammate and accelerated to flee.

Battlecruisers are fast, making them temporarily hard to pursue.

However, the stranded Retribution-class battleship was a slow runner—short-legged and incapable of escaping quickly.

After the surrounding Escort Ships were systematically eliminated, only the lone Retribution-class ship remained.

Its Void Shield had already been breached. If the Alliance Fleet wanted it dead, its thick armor and immense firepower would ultimately not save it.

Yet, Gu Hang gave in to greed.

The Alliance's sole Retribution-class battleship, "Firebath Nova,"—how did they acquire it?

It was stolen!

With such a golden opportunity, how could Gu Hang resist another heist?

And not just the Retribution-class. The Emperor-class fleeing toward the Wenqi-Wuqi line—Gu Hang had his eyes on that one too.

Chapter 576, Blood Shark? Cute!

Silently retrieving his axe, Yeerma Youyin's gaze couldn't help but drift to the side.

Fighting alongside him were not only the Grey Armor Warriors of the Blood Sharks but also some Interstellar Warriors clad in red helmets and red armor.

To be honest, this wasn't their first encounter.

Back during the 'Purple Flower Rebellion,' it was the Blood Shark Battle Group's return to the Empire.

That decision was made by Youyin.

The battle group's campaign in the outer regions had lasted for an exceedingly long time. Most of the warriors in the battle group, including Youyin himself, only knew they belonged to the Empire and fought for The Emperor through the historical scriptures of the battle group or the oral accounts passed down by the older generation.

But what was the Empire?

All they had were historical records and occasional ventures into Imperial Territory to collaborate with a few Founding Worlds for resources, before quickly retreating back to the outer regions.

After such a lengthy passage of time, when Youyin had been a Blood Shark for four hundred years and a Battle Group Leader for eighty years, he made a decision that defied ancestral tradition: he boldly led the Blood Sharks into the Empire to announce their return.

He wasn't trying to overturn the survival doctrine that the battle group had upheld since its inception; he merely wanted to lead his brothers-in-arms to take a proper look at the Empire they fought for. He sought to bring the battle group back into the public eye, reminding people of the sharks who prowled silently beyond the borders of Imperial Territory, fighting for the Empire.

Thus, he chose the moment of the Purple Flower Rebellion, 130 years ago, as his opportunity.

Upon hearing the Empire's call to suppress the rebellion, he led the Blood Sharks into Imperial Territory, answering the summons and participating in the counter-insurgency.

It was during that war that they encountered the Phoenix.

To be frank, Youyin and his sharks didn't care whether the Phoenix or the other two battle groups involved were truly traitors. If the Central Empire declared them traitors, then so be it—fight first, worry later.

But at the same time, to be honest, he didn't find any of the battle groups he encountered within the Empire particularly impressive.

They didn't even compare to the genuine renegades he'd occasionally stumbled upon in the dark outer regions.

From the Blood Sharks' perspective, these Interstellar Warriors who grew up in 'greenhouses' couldn't compare to them. Whether it was the Ironclads and Furyflame who fought alongside the Sharks at the time or the Purple Flower Battle Group on the opposing side, each looked more polished and meticulous in their tactical precision. But when things got down to the grit, how could they ever match the bite of the sharks' teeth?

The Phoenix was no exception.

That was their impression of the Phoenix.

But now, he had no choice but to update his view of this group of red-armored warriors.

In the Alliance combat roster, the Blood Sharks were considered ally forces. They acknowledged Imperial authority and naturally recognized Gu Hang, whom the Empire had appointed as Southern Commander, and were willing to cooperate in battle.

Still, they strictly adhered to their identity as 'allies,' not subordinates.

Combat orders were followed, recorded quietly for future recompense; unreasonable orders were subject to their discretion to comply or disregard.

Helping the Alliance's three battlecruisers escape peril while dealing a blow to the Fury Flame Battle Group was something they were glad to do, and so they did.

However, they were opposed to this fleet-wide decisive battle.

Although their objections were overruled, and they ultimately joined the fray, in reality, they remained on the edges of the battlefield, ready to retreat immediately once the Alliance's gamble inevitably failed.

But when they heard the Phoenix Battle Group was heading for jump boarding onto the Sect of Mechanics' flagship War Ark, it only added to their sense of impracticality.

Youyin's perception of the Phoenix remained rooted in the past. Judging others by his own standards, even the Blood Sharks had no confidence in carrying out Gu Hang's orders, especially attempting a boarding assault of a core Sect of Mechanics flagship that housed millions of elite personnel.

To Youyin, it was a suicidal move.

If the Blood Sharks couldn't achieve it, how could the Phoenix possibly manage?

Jump boarding via Spiritual Energy teleportation? That was a fool's errand.

But then, the course of battle far exceeded Youyin's expectations.

He didn't know what had transpired aboard Alfonso II, but the end result was clear: the War Ark was destroyed from within, losing most of its combat capabilities before it was annihilated, becoming paralyzed in the process.

Youyin was all too familiar with a ship in this condition. From his combat experience, every vessel boarded and dismantled from within by the Blood Sharks ended up in this exact state.

For this reason, Youyin was astonished.

Could those Phoenix warriors actually pull it off?

A feat beyond what the Blood Sharks themselves could achieve, accomplished by the Phoenix?

Youyin was skeptical.

Belief stemmed from undeniable facts, for it was impossible to ignore the evidence laid bare before his eyes.

But doubt came from wondering if there were hidden truths behind this episode—perhaps internal strife among the Sect of Mechanics personnel aboard the War Ark?

Unable to figure it out, he soon had an opportunity to witness firsthand.

As the enemy fleet scattered and broke apart, this particular battleship, now targeted by the Alliance Fleet, was certain to be seized.

It seemed that the Phoenix had suffered some losses during the earlier boarding operation, resulting in fewer personnel available for this boarding assault.

Chapter 576, Blood Shark? Cute!_2

So, Gu Hang personally made contact, hoping the Blood Sharks would step in.

Youwin agreed.

He personally led 200 Blood Sharks, arriving a few minutes earlier than expected via the specialized spiritual energy transmission device, entering the Retribution-class battleship.

Then, following orders, he began to seize critical objective points.

The Blood Sharks, along with the Phoenix warriors, had the same primary mission: to spearhead the assault.

They needed to establish a landing zone to facilitate the subsequent arrival of the main forces for the actual landing operation.

After all, it was unrealistic to rely on just a few hundred Interstellar Warriors to eliminate the tens of thousands of Sect of Mechanics crew members and Protection Army troops aboard the ship.

Not to mention whether it's feasible, whether it's necessary, or whether it's even worth it—these are more pressing concerns.

When critical tasks requiring a small but elite combat force are at hand, deploying Interstellar Warriors is rational; but to send them against thousands of times their own number solely because they are strong is foolishness.

Sacrificing numerous Interstellar Warriors for such operations is entirely unnecessary.

Youwin would never accept such irresponsible missions.

Their current objective was primarily ensuring the safety of a specific area, eliminating substantial amounts of enemy firepower interception, and even directly severing the coordination capability of the ship's interception system—paving the way for the main forces to land.

They performed admirably.

The Blood Sharks are skilled in this type of blitz warfare, and under their rapid attacks, even the elite forces within the Protection Army—some units matching the strength of an ordinary Interstellar Warrior—were quickly neutralized under the brutal onslaught of the Blood Sharks' axes.

Of course, if it were only the 200 Blood Sharks, the ease of the battle would be far from assured. With their small numbers facing numerous critical targets, excessive dispersal could lead to situations where objectives are unattainable or entire squads suffer heavy casualties.

But with the addition of over 300 Phoenix warriors, things were different.

Their numbers not only greatly offset the Blood Sharks' manpower shortage but also provided Youwin, the Battle Group Leader, with an opportunity to observe the unique traits of these Phoenix Interstellar Warriors.

Hmm… nothing special.

No unusual tactics, no incomprehensible weapons—everything appeared ordinary.

Except they were extraordinarily skilled fighters.

In the 130 years since the Violet Goldflower Rebellion, while Youwin's primary activities were still within the dark outer territories, his incursions into Imperial zones had significantly increased in frequency and duration. During this time, he encountered various Interstellar Warrior battle groups.

From these experiences, he developed a relatively clear sense of his Blood Shark Battle Group's power level: they were strong, far superior to most groups.

Perhaps it was the genetic seeds? Or perhaps their prolonged battles in the dark outer territories provided them with harsher combat experiences than those stationed within the Empire?

These could be reasons.

Youwin often felt proud of this, occasionally fostering a subtle disdain for the Imperial battle groups: “They’re not much to speak of!”

However, today, the Phoenix warriors he witnessed completely shattered his perception.

Their average power level was immensely impressive.

The 200 Blood Sharks deployed—a handpicked team of veterans among the elite—could easily annihilate 500 warriors of the New World Torch Battle Group based on their prior encounters.

Yet, though Youwin disliked admitting it, the red-helmeted and red-armored warriors before him exceeded the Blood Sharks in strength.

In terms of average combat capabilities, if it were a 200 vs. 200 scenario, his estimated victory rate was less than 20%—and that was with some mental weighting to favor his battle group.

This realization wasn’t just limited to Youwin; all 200 Blood Sharks deployed had noticed it as well.

The Blood Sharks, accustomed to operating solo, rarely coordinated with allied forces. Their extended presence in outer territories minimized contact with Imperial groups, and their formidable strength nurtured a pervasive arrogance, dismissive of and indifferent to others.

Now, they had no choice but to reevaluate.

If you can’t beat them, what’s the point of arrogance?

Furthermore, the Phoenix warriors weren’t the only ones deserving of attention.

Was the Phoenix the Alliance’s only strength?

No.

Once the landing zone was secured and the Retribution-class battleship's firepower interception systems were significantly weakened, a massive fleet of Alliance landing ships arrived carrying enormous Alliance Army forces.

Battalions of Saintly Lily Battle Nuns, Alliance Naval Marine Corps, airborne infantry from the Army, and the independent Glory Guard Corps… Waves of military units, larger in number and better suited for large-scale warfare, descended upon the battlefield.

Indeed, these were mortal troops.

However, even these mortal units earned the Blood Sharks' admiration.

Leaving the Battle Nuns aside—these divine arts-blessed warriors were often compared to Interstellar Warriors—the regular mortal military forces exhibited striking competence.

Especially the Glory Guard Corps.

Fully equipped with Feedback-Type Power Armor—that alone makes them notable, though the Blood Sharks have encountered affluent mortal units equipped similarly before.

No matter how fancy the equipment, it doesn't override incompetence.

But the critical factor is that these Glory Guard soldiers demonstrated exceptional qualities, such as psychological resilience and tactical proficiency, rivaling that of ordinary Interstellar Warriors in many respects. They only lacked superhuman physical prowess and neural control of their power armor.

A mere dozen Glory Guards could pose a challenge to a Blood Shark; with twenty or thirty, the victor between the two was uncertain.

The Blood Sharks Battle Group, with less than 700 active warriors and rarely at full strength, found itself dwarfed by an initial landing force exceeding 15,000 Glory Guards.

Was this the entirety of the Alliance's Glory Guard Corps?

Likely not.

Even excluding the airborne infantry from the Army and elite Naval Marine Corps, compared to the Blood Sharks' auxiliary troops forged through repeated trials and actual combat, these units were superior.

Moreover, for these forces, over 20% were outfitted with Feedback-Type Power Armor—a luxury the cash-strapped Blood Sharks could only envy.

Silently, the Blood Sharks completed their tasks and synced their operations with the Alliance troops.

Silence was their nature, and prior to deployment, Alliance forces, including the Phoenix warriors, had been briefed on it. They were cautioned to maintain a safe distance from these sharks. The Blood Sharks' scant combat records revealed their extreme disregard for allied mortal troops.

If an ally blocked their line of fire, they'd shoot without hesitation; if someone obstructed their advance, they'd stomp onward without a thought for mortal lives.

The Alliance soldiers boarding the enemy vessel were somewhat intimidated, carefully adhering to their orders.

Still, combat required collaboration, and in the thick of battle, such reservations inevitably dissipated.

Over time, the Alliance soldiers no longer felt as tense.

They found the Blood Sharks, aside from their quiet demeanor and blood-soaked combat style, weren't all that intimidating.

Watching those dark gray helmets adorned with a smear of blood-red on the brow… why did they seem kind of endearing?

Chapter 577

Youwin had silently reassessed the Alliance's strength in his mind.

They could no longer be underestimated.

He had to consider how to handle future relations with the Alliance moving forward.

Since the Blood Sharks had accepted the summons to participate in this rebellion incited by the Iron Armor Battle Group, seeking vengeance for a defeat dealt by the Iron Armor one hundred and thirty years ago, it was evident they would need to cooperate with the Alliance for quite some time.

This counter-insurgency war did not appear to be something that would conclude in the short term.

Governor Gu Hang, a powerful psychic and the ruler of the Alliance who should not be taken lightly, as well as the Southern Theater Command General of the counter-insurgency war, was clearly someone Youwin would have to deal with regularly for the foreseeable future.

As the Battle Group Leader of the Blood Sharks, Youwin naturally had to handle this relationship carefully.

Preoccupied with his own thoughts, Youwin, together with the Phoenix and the Alliance Army, completed the task of taking over the entire battleship.

The Alliance promoted policies of accepting and even treating prisoners humanely; Interstellar Warriors led the way, Battle Nuns provided support, and the Glory Guards served as the main force, repeatedly thwarting attempts by diehard Alfonso loyalists on the ship to sabotage it before their demise.

Ultimately, the Retribution-class Battleship came fully under the Alliance's control.

Crews, along with a complete command system, boarded the vessel and began debugging operations.

Soon, the Retribution-class Battleship, which had once belonged to the Alfonso Fleet, was operational again.

However, now it belonged to the Alliance.

Following convention, the Alliance named the massive warship “Iron Horse,” after a Star Sector within the Dragonhawk Star Domain.

Its condition was less than ideal; the previous space battle had caused some damage, and the boarding operations conducted by the Blood Sharks, the Phoenix, and the Alliance Army had inflicted additional harm from within.

Alliance engineers and accompanying Technical Priests from the Mingyang Sect were already conducting a comprehensive inspection of the ship’s various systems.

For now, the situation appeared optimistic.

The Iron Horse would not require a full-scale overhaul at the shipyard, at the very least.

Taking it to a well-equipped starport and spending a few months on repairs should be enough to restore its full combat capabilities.

At this point, the mission of the Interstellar Warriors was considered fully complete.

Youwin was preparing to lead his battle brothers back to his flagship, the “Ghost Evil Shark.” But just then, he spotted a warrior in crimson Terminator armor approaching him.

Youwin recognized him.

His name was Kalduce, a captain in the Phoenix Battle Group and the commander of the three hundred Phoenixes who had been operating on the ship.

This fierce-looking Interstellar Warrior had left a strong impression on Youwin. He tended to instinctively assess others' strength relative to his own based on their performance. In his opinion, this Kalduce was slightly weaker than himself but comparable to the Blood Sharks' own Company Captain.

That was impressive.

Some leaders of lesser-known and mediocre battle groups might not even possess such strength.

Criticism directed specifically at the Torch of New Dawn.

However, the Phoenix captain's expression was not pleasant. His gaze toward Youwin carried a hint of hostility.

Why?

Youwin quickly understood: they bore no particular grudge against the Phoenix, but the Phoenix certainly harbored animosity toward them.

During the great Bauhinia Rebellion one hundred and thirty years ago, although their primary target was the Bauhinia Battle Group, they had also killed a fair number of Phoenixes in the process.

Yet he felt no guilt or remorse for this.

Back then, they had been at war. The Phoenix had been officially labeled as traitors by the Empire, so the Blood Sharks' role in eliminating them as part of the counter-insurgency was justified and a matter of duty. On the battlefield, it is a matter of life and death—there are no two ways about it.

If the Phoenix still bore a grudge, they should direct it at those who had branded them as traitors of the Empire, not at him.

Even in terms of blood vendettas, the number of Phoenixes killed by the Blood Sharks was surely fewer than those killed by the Furyflame and Iron Armor groups.

Regardless, if the Phoenix insisted on harboring animosity toward them, there was nothing more to say. If things escalated and Governor Gu Hang, due to his closer ties with the Phoenix, made unequivocal choices that left no room for compromise, then it could only be regrettably declared that they would become enemies.

With that in mind, Youwin calmly stepped forward to meet Kalduce.

Kalduce examined him from head to toe, his expression remaining sour, even letting out a cold snort through his nose.

But in the end, he refrained from any rash actions and gruffly said:

“The Governor invites you to meet him.”

…

Youwin wasted no time; without hesitation, he boarded a shuttle and made his way to the Alliance aircraft carrier “Eagle Horse,” where Governor Gu Hang was located, to meet him in person.

Gu Hang was nothing like Kalduce, who only had a sour face.

He welcomed Commander Youwin with a warm smile and a pleasant demeanor. A simple tea service for the two of them was placed on the table by attendants, and Gu Hang invited Commander Youwin to have a taste.

Youwin remained impassive, even showing slight discomfort with the setting, the ceremony, and the small talk coming from Gu Hang.

To be honest, Youwin had no experience handling such situations. He was neither skilled at them nor fond of them.

Gu Hang quickly noticed this.

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He chuckled softly, as expected.

Because he'd already anticipated this, Gu Hang didn't let anyone make a fuss over it.

As for himself, after some brief pleasantries and probing, he quickly cut to the point:

"I hope the Blood Shark Battle Group and the Alliance can form a much closer alliance."

"Not just for this war, but also for the future after the war ends."

"I understand Blood Shark traditions, as well as the existence of gray tax and blood tax. None of this is a problem; I fully acknowledge them. But I must say, the Alliance cannot allow the Blood Sharks to collect gray tax and blood tax through violent and unilateral means without consultation. Moreover, I believe such methods are highly inefficient and wasteful."

At this point, Gu Hang paused momentarily to observe Youwin's expression, uncovered by a helmet.

There was no expression.

Interstellar Warriors have always been like this, not to mention the Blood Sharks, who are notorious for their reserved, non-expressive demeanor within various battle groups.

But the fact that Youwin didn't storm out in anger upon hearing this from Gu Hang—that was already a positive outcome.

After all, the Blood Sharks had a history. Their conflict with the Ironclads had sprouted from this very issue.

Even if there was a risk of offending the Blood Sharks, Gu Hang had to draw a clear line from the outset.

“Very well, it seems we’ve reached a basic consensus on this principle.”

“I recognize the Blood Sharks’ right to collect blood tax and gray tax. These are your rightful rewards for fighting side-by-side with the Alliance and achieving war victories. You also recognize that collecting these taxes requires the Alliance’s facilitation, rather than unilateral violence. With mutual respect, we now establish the foundation for cooperation.”

“Based on the victories secured by the Blood Sharks, the Blood Sharks have the right to present a series of supply and personnel demands to us. Starting with the gray tax according to Blood Shark tradition: In the past, when trading with the Sect of Mechanics, what was the price? The price the Alliance offers for recovering technology and equipment from the Blood Sharks will always exceed theirs by at least 20%.”

“As for the blood tax, it can be discussed in two parts. Blood Sharks need excellent reserve personnel as a source of new blood for the development of their battle group. I promise, whenever the Blood Sharks have a need, regardless of war merits or victories, if you require new recruits, all you need to do is tell the Alliance a number, and the Alliance will provide that number of outstanding young people.”

“The second part of the blood tax: Blood Sharks need ordinary humans to serve as auxiliary forces, battle group fleet crew, and subordinate personnel for the group. The Alliance can also provide this, entirely free of charge. However, under this premise, the Blood Sharks must agree to a series of conditions: the ordinary humans provided by the Alliance will have service terms, basic treatment, and the right to fundamental protections. Their lives must not be casually disregarded; they should be treated with a basic level of respect.”

“Wait…” At this point, Youwin couldn’t help but interrupt Gu Hang’s speech.

He stared at Gu Hang, without even asking a question.

He trusted that Gu Hang understood what he meant.

The Blood Sharks have never regarded ordinary humans as people.

Not the enemy, not allied forces, and certainly not their own auxiliary troops or human subordinates.

This isn't just a matter of tradition; it's a matter of ideology. They don't care, and they believe that only those who survive the trials of blood and fire are worthy of serving as their auxiliary forces, which essentially means becoming high-level cannon fodder. If one doesn't survive the trials, then so be it. Sacrificing oneself in the glorious cannon fodder duties is their best possible end.

And now, Gu Hang was saying they should respect those ordinary humans?

Even pay them wages? With service terms and the chance to retire?

Youwin hoped his gaze could convey to Gu Hang just how ridiculous this sounded.

But Gu Hang didn't back down on this issue.

"If you want the traditional blood tax, it's not impossible. I can provide it from the prisoner-of-war camps; however, no world declared as Alliance territory will provide such rights-deprived 'slaves.'"

"But hear me out; this arrangement also has its advantages. Wages won't come out of your pocket; the Alliance will pay. But precisely because of this, they will remain part of the Alliance, so you cannot trample on their lives and dignity. Moreover, I'm confident that during this time, you've seen the heroic demeanor of the Alliance's ordinary warriors. Allow me to brag for a moment: many of their elites, though they haven't had the opportunity to be implanted with Genetic Seeds and don't possess superhuman physiques, are technically skilled and mentally resilient on par with any Interstellar Warrior."

"Like your Glory Guards, perhaps?"

"Precisely. Of course, I cannot guarantee that among the tens of thousands you're provided, every single one will reach that level. But I will guarantee that among them, there will be such elites, and their

average level will not be inferior to the Star Realm Army of the Empire. You should understand how valuable this is."

Youwin once again fell into silence.

This time, he was truly thinking.

He absolutely understood what such value meant.

For years, the Blood Shark Battle Group's blood tax collections had taught them many lessons. Among the 'slaves' forcefully seized, those who truly survived their so-called 'blood and fire trials' to reach the auxiliary force standards they accepted were fewer than one in ten, possibly fewer than one in a hundred.

Therefore, they needed to constantly collect blood tax. On one hand, they do require an enormous amount of cannon fodder. On the other hand, they need large numbers of cannon fodder from which to eventually refine enough auxiliary troops.

But if the Alliance directly provided them, why would they need that much cannon fodder anymore?

Moreover, low-quality cannon fodder actually doesn't align well with their combat style. They specialize in rapid responses and swift strikes; what use is cannon fodder? For direct engagement and mutual attrition?

More elite auxiliary forces would evidently better assist them in battle.

Even if there are times when they need ordinary infantry to hold the enemy's attention on the front lines, creating opportunities and space for rear assaults, using cannon fodder wouldn't be as effective as elite auxiliary troops holding the enemy in place on the front lines.

It sounds quite beneficial.

The only problem is that the battle group would need to alter their traditions, their beliefs, and their mindset.

That's a challenging proposition.

"Let's set that aside for now." Youwin chose to pause this particular dispute and said, "From start to finish, your terms sound excellent. More gray tax transactions, blood tax freely provided by the Alliance. So, what's the price?"

"What does the Alliance want from the Blood Sharks?"

Gu Hang displayed a broad smile, nearly blurting out 'everything.'

But he held back.

He replied, "Allies. We need long-term, dependable allies who will establish a unified command structure and act toward unified objectives."

"Just allies?"

Gu Hang's smile remained unchanged: "Indeed, just allies. These are the Alliance's only terms. Do you have any further questions after hearing them?"

Chapter 578, Capturing the Protozoan

Youwin did not give Gu Hang a direct response, claiming he needed to return and discuss the matter with his battle brothers.

In reality, that wasn't the case.

Youwin's prestige within the battle group was significant, and Blood Shark didn't have things like a Council of Elders, veteran groups, secret gatherings, or inner circles—what he said went.

However, in this particular matter, there were many things he hadn't yet figured out. He needed the opinions of some veterans and squad leaders for reference, and additional time to fully understand Gu Hang's proposal.

His extensive experiences over his prolonged lifespan had taught him that there was no such thing as a free lunch in this world.

The conditions proposed by Gu Hang, even including elements that challenged the traditions of the battle group, were undeniably generous.

He also believed that the strength demonstrated by the Alliance was capable of fulfilling Gu Hang's promises.

But precisely because of this, he felt extremely cautious.

And yet, he couldn't identify many pitfalls within these conditions.

Would becoming "close allies" with the Alliance mean they'd lose control and fall under Alliance command? Unlikely. The conditions didn't involve command ranks within the battle group. As for the new recruits, no matter their past experiences, it's nothing more than a decade at most. Compared to the nearly limitless lifespan of Interstellar Warriors, they'd be gradually steeped in the culture of the battle group for at least several decades. Their former lives would hardly matter.

Isn't this the way all Interstellar Warriors are? After undergoing modification with Genetic Seeds, over the long passage of time, they gradually forget their brief experiences as mortals, ultimately becoming loyal warriors of The Emperor.

Would becoming allies lead to the Alliance forcing assignments onto them?

Again, unlikely. The terms stipulated equality on both sides, a collaborative relationship. Requests from the Alliance would be just that—"requests," not "orders." They could certainly refuse them.

As for deliberate betrayal… that would constitute malicious behavior. Blood Shark wasn't a bunch of rookies—they'd investigate intelligence on their missions beforehand. It was impossible for them to trust the Alliance blindly—at least not until sufficient trust was established.

So where was the problem?

Youwin couldn't think of one.

He decided to give a preliminary, limited agreement for now.

This matter wasn't about sealing an eternal, unbreakable alliance in one go.

At present, both sides were already on the same battlefield. Gu Hang was still the nominal commander of the theater, so to some extent, they were already following his orders and direction.

Why not test the waters during this war first?

Evaluate the results, then decide whether a more enduring agreement was necessary after the war concluded.

Youwin's decision was quickly validated.

In the recent large-scale naval battle, Blood Shark's fleet had participated and, following unified commands and orders, significantly impacted the battle's outcome.

In the operation to seize the now-dubbed "Iron Horse," a Retribution-class Battleship, they had also taken part and played an important role. Although their achievements were slightly overshadowed by Phoenix, they weren't far behind.

Going further back, Blood Shark had rescued three Alliance battlecruisers and destroyed the flagship "Torchlight" of the New World Torch Battle Group.

Overall, they had already played a substantial role in this war.

And suffered considerable losses. Especially in the campaign to destroy Torchlight, they had gone head-to-head against the New World Torch Battle Group, losing over one hundred Interstellar Warriors.

For Blood Shark, this was the largest loss they'd sustained in the past twenty years.

If Gu Hang was genuinely committed to honoring his promises, wouldn't it be time for him to offer rewards?

Of course, there was no issue with that.

But not yet.

Gu Hang proposed waiting until the war was over, to tally things up more conveniently.

After eliminating the majority of Alfonso's fleet heading toward the Phantom Moon Star System, there was still another group requiring attention.

The only remaining Principal Sage, aboard an Emperor-class Battleship, was charging at full speed along the Wuqi-Wenqi line.

They were running quite swiftly.

Gu Hang certainly wouldn't let them escape.

He coveted that Emperor-class Battleship immensely. If the circumstances allowed, he'd definitely try to seize it by force.

In terms of value, the Emperor-class might not surpass the War Ark destroyed by the Alliance earlier. However, their roles were entirely different.

The War Ark, fundamentally speaking, was still a Sect of Mechanics “Ark”-type vessel. Essentially, it served as a core base for space warfare. Most Arks function as mobile factories. Although the War Ark had removed many functions for production, living, and research to focus on combat, it still carried the essence of an Ark.

Its inherent size, complex structure, and enormous capacity for personnel greatly exceeded that of the Emperor-class, equivalent to specialized giant transport ships like a “Juggernaut.”

Additionally, due to the Mechanical Ark’s characteristics, a significant number of operations required personnel from the Sect of Mechanics.

Capturing it, of course, would carry significant value—at the very least, the Mingyang Sect would grovel before Gu Hang to beg him to sell the ship to them. However, it wouldn’t directly enhance the Alliance’s combat strength, and it housed tens of millions of Protection Army troops as well as a Neuron Progeny, making the task of seizing the ship exceedingly difficult.

But the Emperor-class was different, with only seventy thousand or eighty thousand personnel at most inside?

And its versatility was high; it wasn’t an exclusive vessel of the Sect of Mechanics.

If captured, repaired, and fully operational, it could genuinely elevate the Alliance Navy’s fleet strength to a higher tier.

Chapter 578, Capturing Protozoa_2

It’s definitely something that needs to be seized.

However, before taking the ship, Gu Hang had one more task to handle.

In the Bowang star system, amidst the wreckage from the previous space battle against Alfonso, Alliance utility ships responsible for cleaning up the battlefield sent a message that caught Gu Hang’s attention:

They discovered the Neuron Progeny.

It wasn't dead.

Gu Hang was somewhat surprised.

Good lord, could this thing really have such tenacious vitality?

It was aboard Alfonso II—the War Ark decimated in the battle, obliterated without additional defenses by the concentrated firepower of the Alliance Fleet.

Generally, in naval battles, once a ship explodes, it's almost impossible for lifeforms onboard to survive.

Even if they didn't die immediately, with the ship disintegrated into fragments, the life-support systems ruined, and trapped in the airless, foodless, freezing void of space, how could any lifeform sustain itself?

Unless they were exceptionally lucky, surviving in a relatively intact compartment.

But even then, it wouldn't last long.

Reflecting on this, Gu Hang thought to himself—if it were him, though he had methods to survive, like escaping into subspace, the Neuron Progeny certainly wouldn't have had such options. Under normal circumstances, survival seemed exceedingly difficult.

The Neuron Progeny didn't survive due to luck.

Its formidable vitality, especially its immense Spiritual Energy, allowed it to endure the bombing, detonation, and disintegration of the ship, and continue to exist in the void.

In fact, according to the latest report, the Neuron Progeny had even detached itself from the ship's wreckage, propelled by Spiritual Energy, moving aimlessly through the empty void.

The Alliance ships were in pursuit.

The Neuron Progeny appeared to be severely injured—or perhaps it was simply relying on Spiritual Energy to drive its movement—flying at a slow pace that the ships could keep up with.

But they didn't dare get too close.

Two Black Fish Patrol Ships had already fallen victim after approaching too near, ensnared by the Neuron Progeny's Spiritual Energy.

First, their Energy Shields were torn apart. Then, their engines malfunctioned inexplicably. Subsequently, the crew onboard began to lose their minds, attacking one another. One individual stormed into the energy chamber and caused an explosion…

Just like that, two vessels and their combined crew of over a thousand were lost without clear reasoning.

With these lessons learned, the Alliance utility ships scavenging the wreckage were now far more cautious. The remaining two patrol ships tracking the Neuron Progeny could only observe it from a considerable distance.

Lacking major fleet ships and without explicit orders from higher-ups, the patrol ships refrained from initiating direct attacks.

To clarify, they had tried firing at it once, but it was evident that standard patrol ships—unlike the one-off specialized Black Fish launched at max capacity—lacked sufficient firepower. Their conventional weapons posed minimal threat to the Neuron Progeny.

Ultimately, they reported the situation.

Their aim was to request stronger reinforcements, perhaps larger warships to take down this entity. Yet, unexpectedly, higher-ups ordered them to continue tracking it, avoid approaching, and ensure they didn't lose sight of the target.

When asked how to deal with it, the higher-ups didn't conceal the truth, informing them: the Governor would personally resolve the matter.

…

Gu Hang, aboard the Wrath Owl, soon arrived at the Bowang star system and located the Neuron Progeny that the Alliance ships had been tailing.

In reality, they were separated by an enormous distance. Despite the Neuron Progeny's massive size, it was still a biological entity, making it nearly impossible to observe with the naked eye.

The warships maintained constant radar lock on it, despite the Neuron Progeny's attempts at interference. The signal was quickly reacquired.

For Gu Hang, the process was even simpler—he could directly sense it using Spiritual Energy.

The Neuron Progeny was highly responsive to Gu Hang's emanated Spiritual Energy, immediately channeling its own power to contend with him.

It was still remarkably strong, with Spiritual Energy reaching S-class intensity. However, though equivalent to top-tier Psychics among humans, could it really resist him?

During the previous 'Bowang Sea Battle,' members of the Sect of Mechanics manipulated and enslaved its power, enabling it to unleash Alpha-level strength—perhaps even surpassing that threshold slightly. Even when Gu Hang fully opened subspace rifts, utilizing his most potent force within the physical universe, he could only achieve a stalemate in head-on confrontation.

Granted, part of this was because Gu Hang was simultaneously manifesting multiple heroic spirits, but the Neuron Progeny was also imprisoned at the time, its power reduced and not fully engaged in its own defense.

The two were evenly matched.

It shouldn't have been so weak as it appeared now.

Gu Hang ordered the warship to move closer.

With him present, a Neuron Progeny displaying power below Alpha-level posed no threat to the Wrath Owl.

As the distance closed substantially, drawing near the target, the Neuron Progeny remained obediently stationary.

—It had no other choice, suppressed entirely by Gu Hang's overwhelming Spiritual Energy.

When Gu Hang finally observed the creature's form via the visual screens from the bridge, he understood the source of its current weakened state:

It was damaged.

The ship's disintegration likely didn't leave it in a safe zone; it may have even been directly struck or suffered secondary impacts during the breakup.

Despite its Spiritual Energy protection mechanism, its biological structure sustained extensive damage.

Gu Hang surmised that it had likely pushed its Spiritual Energy to the brink, enduring until the last moment, but the Spiritual Energy Shield ultimately failed. Explosions, wreckage collisions, and intense energy waves—these residual effects harmed its body.

However, its physical durability was resilient enough to survive and even regenerate new shields in time.

It didn't perish in the explosion, and it now landed in Gu Hang's hands.

Determining what to do next, Gu Hang hesitated.

While exploiting the creature might yield benefits, he was reminded of Alfonso Fleet's fate.

The War Ark was originally Alfonso Fleet's most formidable ship, yet if it hadn't been for Gu Hang detonating the "Neuron Progeny bomb" from within, even Gu Hang at full strength would have had to expend considerable effort to defeat it.

Although Gu Hang was confident in his ability to suppress this entity, could he guarantee being at his absolute peak at all times?

Furthermore, even if restrained, would it not still be a liability when dealing with formidable foes and also worrying about this thing?

That would be quite maddening.

But… as one of the top-tier biological entities of the Void Insect Species, there were no records of it being captured by the Empire—though perhaps kept classified.

The value of studying it as well as finding means to exploit it was immense.

Risk versus reward.

These two heavy weights caused the scales in Gu Hang's mind to waver back and forth.

It was frustrating.

Luckily, he didn’t need to decide immediately.

He could capture it first and store it in a secure location.

For most factions, creating a cage capable of absolutely safeguarding against the Neuron Progeny would be exceedingly difficult. The Alfonso Sect had achieved this through extensive research, but the Alliance? Hardly capable.

Yet what the Alliance couldn’t do, Gu Hang could.

He happened to have a particularly safe repository.

His Storm God Kingdom.

Once he imprisoned the Neuron Progeny within it, future research and exploitation would still require releasing it. However, if only considering its containment and transportation, security wouldn’t be an issue.

The Divine Realm’s power could perpetually punish the Neuron Progeny, while its millions of heroic spirits—not merely figurative—could guard it effectively, being undying and eternal.

If it truly revolted, Gu Hang would be well-placed to personally subdue it.

In the Divine Realm, his power far exceeded that of the material universe.

He’d killed the Great Demon within it—taking care of the Neuron Progeny would be no exception.

Chapter 579

Inserting the neuron progeny into the Storm God Kingdom was initially just a temporary measure by Gu Hang to transport and contain this dangerous beast.

However, he stumbled upon an unexpected discovery.

After completing the containment, he boarded the Fury Owl and continued his journey.

But within just a day, he sensed that something unforeseen was unfolding within his Storm God Kingdom.

Without hesitation, he interrupted a meeting he was conducting, retreated to his private chamber, and activated a subspace rift to enter the Storm God Kingdom.

Now, the Storm God Kingdom he owned was far from the barren wasteland it had been when it was under the dominion of the Primal Fury Owl. Though its dark, cloud-laden skies remained as oppressive as ever, and the gray-white, blue-black interspersed land retained its heavy, stifling atmosphere, the entire Storm God Kingdom could no longer be described as desolate.

The primary credit belonged to the numerous heroic spirits who, over the years, had worked tirelessly to reshape the once-wasteland, constructing countless artificial structures.

In Gu Hang's Storm God Kingdom, a city had already risen.

The two most central zones of this city included, firstly, the place where Gu Hang had once vanquished the Great Unclean One—Ge Wajia—and spent considerable time digesting its essence. That site had been fashioned into the likeness of an altar. While it had little functional utility, it held profound symbolic significance for the heroic spirits.

The second key area was the black box factory.

The practical importance of this place was immense.

Previously, when the neuron progeny was captured by Gu Hang, it was thrown onto the altar. This was the most suitable location to imprison such a monstrosity.

A total of twenty-three massive steel spikes were driven into its body, pinning it firmly to the ground. Thick chains connected the spikes, binding its form completely.

In this condition, even if the neuron progeny could still utilize its inherent spiritual energy, breaking free was nearly impossible—let alone the fact that its spiritual energy was in a state of total suppression. The chains were conduits for terrifying thunder-like divine power, keeping its spiritual energy confined within its body, rendering escape futile.

It was, for all intents and purposes, an airtight containment.

And yet, the current situation was something of an anomaly.

On the bound neuron progeny's body, points of light began to emerge continuously, floating into the air and gradually dissipating.

The neuron progeny was disintegrating.

Gu Hang found this rather astonishing.

How was all of this happening?

He had taken no deliberate action.

Yet, what was happening to the neuron progeny bore a striking resemblance to the scene years ago when Ge Wajia, the Great Unclean One, was defeated by Gu Hang within the Divine Realm, and the Storm God Kingdom had "absorbed" it.

Its body was collapsing, there was no doubt about that; the parts breaking apart were transformed into pure energy and absorbed by the Divine Realm.

Gu Hang could then distinctly feel the entire Storm God Kingdom's power surging rapidly!

To be honest, this kind of growth was something Gu Hang had not experienced in a long time.

The Storm God Kingdom had been growing all along, this much was true. Its growth primarily relied on the expansion of the Alliance, the enlargement of the Alliance's system, and Gu Hang's image as the Alliance Governor becoming deeply ingrained in people's minds—at least within some of the Alliance's core ruling territories.

Faith could influence subspace.

As the owner of the Storm God Kingdom, the "faith" of the Alliance's hundreds of billions of people in his governance became the source of the kingdom's growth.

However, the sentiments of those under Alliance rule hardly constituted genuine faith in Gu Hang.

Moreover, Gu Hang himself was reluctant to actively cultivate true worship toward him.

The National Church was no pushover; doing so would be tantamount to treason. It would severely undermine his ruling foundation and trigger widespread internal upheaval.

When Iron Wrath Stone staged rebellions, their rallying cry was "Purge the Emperor's Court," accusing the bureaucrats on Holy Terra of idleness and failure to faithfully execute the will of the Emperor.

Even Humphrey Paolo, an unabashedly ambitious man, dared not echo the slogans of those Chaos Traitors, like calling the Emperor a "false deity."

Gu Hang stood even less of a chance of attempting something similar.

Beyond these pragmatic factors, in terms of Gu Hang's understanding of subspace, widespread, religious-style worship was not an unalloyed good.

True, it would greatly amplify the Storm God Kingdom's power, thereby tremendously increasing the strength of the spiritual energy Gu Hang could wield and command.

But the problem was that this faith brought not just power—it also brought "influence."

The intentions, desires, and negative emotions of the believers could infect Gu Hang as the master of the Divine Realm. This contamination would be a long-term, gradual process. Gu Hang's way of thinking would change over time, and ultimately, his personal will would be slowly dissolved and replaced throughout the process.

Once the process was complete, the being that existed in this world would no longer be the current Gu Hang but a purely role-bound version of himself as the Alliance Governor.

In other words, he would evolve into a construct of subspace.

He was deeply cautious of this.

Thus, while the expansion of the Alliance and the increasing "faith" of its citizens in him had indeed grown, the overall magnitude still remained limited. Compared to the surge of growth after absorbing Ge Wajia back then, the current growth of the Storm God Kingdom's power was at best around five percent in total.

Chapter 579_2

In short, the growth isn't too significant.

However, if the current situation continues, once this neuroparasite is fully absorbed, the growth of the Storm God Kingdom may well rival that from absorbing Ge Wajia, the Great Unclean One.

This means that Gu Hang's Storm God Kingdom could see an increase of more than 30%!

Gu Hang estimated that by then he would be able to control psychic power comparable to Alpha-level on a regular basis. If he fully tore open the subspace rift and unleashed the power of the Storm God Kingdom, during the Bowang Sea Battle, there wouldn't have been any need for other tactics; right from

the beginning, he could have crushed the psychic power of Dubo's neuroparasite during the psychic confrontation.

The strengthening of the Storm God Kingdom and the enhancement of psychic energy—these are undoubtedly exciting developments.

After all, ever since his personal level had been raised to LV9 on the system's personal panel, growth had hit a bottleneck beyond which he could no longer ascend. Further power-ups relied on absorbing Ge Wajia, the Great Unclean One, which had nearly doubled the strength of the Storm God Kingdom.

This time, 'devouring' the neuroparasite resulted in an additional 30% increase.

While the neuroparasite has definitively met its end, further utilization and research on it are out of the question. But if Gu Hang were to choose for himself, he would undoubtedly prioritize strengthening himself.

In his view, its value as something to be 'devoured' far exceeded its value as a mere research material.

While his strength has been clearly boosted, Gu Hang couldn't help but feel a pang of curiosity—how did this come to pass?

Why?

Gu Hang couldn't figure it out immediately.

The Great Demon was absorbed because it possessed 'subspace essence.'

Pure psychic power, or subspace energy, holds little significance for the Storm God Kingdom. Subspace energy can be considered boundless, but to utilize this power, the key missing component is 'permission.'

The existence of the Storm God Kingdom stems from the accidental subspace transformation of a primordial deity; devouring Ge Wajia was possible because it possessed ’subspace essence’ or, put metaphorically, higher-level permissions. Absorbing Ge Wajia merged two sets of ’permissions.’

Does the neuroparasite possess the same attributes?

It’s not impossible to consider that.

At the level of the neuroparasite, it would be implausible for it to wield such vast psychic power without possessing subspace essence.

But how did the Void Insect species accomplish this?

Their methods of harnessing subspace energy are rather intriguing.

Nonetheless, this sparked some inspiration in Gu Hang.

From this angle, if Gu Hang seeks to grow his own power safely in the future, without resorting to the replacement of personal will with ’faith,’ actively pursuing entities with strong psychic power might be an effective approach?

After all, entities below Alpha-level psychic—or other users of psychic power—are essentially ’conduits.’ But based on current observations, entities surpassing Alpha-level possibly all possess some form of subspace essence.

This presents a pathway.

Though upon further reflection, it seems challenging.

A Great Demon? A neuroparasite? An Alpha-class psychic?

Hunting them?

It’s already difficult enough to find one alive!

…

Gu Hang didn’t dwell too much on boosting his personal power.

What laid before him now was another crucial matter: capturing the runaway Alfonso Sect Emperor-class battleship.

Among the medium and small ships escaping along the Wenqi-Wuqi line following the Emperor-class battleship, there aren’t many. But aside from the Emperor-class, the primary targets include three Dragon-Serpent-class battlecruisers.

The Emperor-class isn’t like the crippled, slow-legged Retribution-class. While its speed can’t match that of the battlecruisers, within the battleship category, it’s undoubtedly among the faster ones.

In fact, pretty much every parameter of the Emperor-class rates as one of the top tiers among battleship models.

Furthermore, the Alliance was preoccupied with dealing with the remnants of its predecessor, the ’Iron Horse,’ which gave the Emperor-class additional time to escape.

Still, the pursuit time remains ample.

After all, the Wenqi-Wuqi line is quite distant, and it’s typically normal to take two to three months to traverse.

The pursuit fleet has been streamlined significantly.

Retribution-class battleships cannot be relied upon at all—let alone the newly captured 'Iron Horse,' which is still undergoing maintenance. The 'Firebath Nova' suffered considerable damage in the previous sea battle, where it fully embodied the tanking role for battleships, and now requires repairs as well.

Thus, it might as well focus on repairs and skip the pursuit entirely.

After all, it can't keep up anyway.

The Zhuge-class can manage decent speed, though slightly slower than the Emperor-class, but it's good enough to trail behind.

The main force for the pursuit remains three relatively intact battlecruisers.

Notably, the distinctively faster Holy Grail-class battlecruiser, the 'Angry Falcon,' compared to both the Yunluo and Ronglin Dragon-Serpent-class ships!

The only vessels capable of matching the speed of the Holy Grail-class are a few Strike Cruisers built by the Alliance and the entire Bloodshark Fleet.

This Bloodshark Fleet, on the whole, could hardly be described as destitute.

While they may appear lacking in standard equipment, they certainly don't lack valuable assets.

Otherwise, how could they end up with a combat barge capable of keeping pace with a Holy Grail-class cruiser?

In terms of overall quality, Gu Hang considered that the flagship of the Bloodshark Fleet, the 'Ghost Evil Shark,' might not even be inferior to the Emperor-class.

Truly tempting… or rather, enviable.

Twenty-three standard Terra Days later, the fastest pursuit team—composed of the ’Angry Falcon’ and the ’Ghost Evil Shark’—caught up with the enemy fleet.

The enemy fleet’s combat capabilities far exceeded those of the Alliance and Bloodshark. The firepower of just one Emperor-class battleship equated to that of both the ’Angry Falcon’ and the ’Ghost Evil Shark’ combined.

Yet, upon discovering the approaching Alliance ships, their only thought was to flee.

Curiously, despite clearly being outmatched, the ’Angry Falcon’ and ’Ghost Evil Shark’ initiated an active assault.

Of course, it wasn’t an all-out offensive—it merely aimed to slow down their retreat.

Particularly as they tracked them to the jump point, continuously harassing and attacking to delay their progress towards the Star Realm Tunnel jump.

Relying on their superior agility and speed, the remnants of Alfonso’s fleet truly had no effective countermeasures against the pursuit.

Even if they gritted their teeth and thought to fight desperately before the Alliance’s main battleships arrived, they wouldn’t get the chance.

The two fast ships weren’t about to engage directly with the Emperor-class.

Should they attempt counter-pursuit, the Emperor wouldn’t catch them, nor would the three Dragon-Serpents.

Even among battlecruisers, the Holy Grail-class was more expensive, though slightly less armored, yet faster than the Dragon-Serpent-class.

More so, those ships wouldn’t dare venture far from the Emperor-class’s protective umbra.

Gu Hang flashed his strength conspicuously, making his presence felt and instilling fear.

In truth, during the Bowang Sea Battle, Gu Hang had expended tremendous energy. He supported hundreds of thousands of heroic spirits to cross the Star Sea and combat enemy ships; engaged in psychic confrontation with the neuroparasite; followed by relentless assaults to breach the enemy ships' Void Shields, even including massive vessels such as the War Ark and Retribution-class battleships.

However, after devouring the neuroparasite, Gu Hang enjoyed a significant regenerative boost.

If those Dragon-Serpent-class ships belonging to the enemies dared to break away from the Emperor-class and approach, it would instead simplify matters.

Later, with the Alliance's fast ships persistently harassing them, the escape fleet of Alfonso Sect was substantially delayed in movement.

This allowed the Alliance's subsequent ships to finally catch up.

Indeed, during the Bowang Sea Battle, Gu Hang had expended tremendous energy. He supported hundreds of thousands of heroic spirits to cross the Star Sea and combat enemy ships; faced off against the neuroparasite's psychic power; and continually tore through the Void Shields of enemy ships, including colossal vessels like the War Ark and Retribution-class battleships.

But thanks to devouring the neuroparasite, Gu Hang enjoyed a major replenishment wave.

If those enemy Dragon-Serpent-class ships truly had the nerve to break away from the Emperor-class and engage, it would instead save him a great deal of trouble.

Eventually, with the Alliance's fast ships relentlessly disrupting the Alfonso fleet's retreat, their escape was considerably delayed, allowing the Alliance's main fleet to finally catch up.

Chapter 580

The follow-up main force of the Alliance, to put it bluntly, only consists of the Ronglin and Yunluo, two Dragon-Snake Class Battleship Cruisers.

Of the six battleship cruisers in the Alliance, the Winged Flyer is under repair, the Steel Wing and the Korolya were lost in the Battle of Bowang Sea. The only fast ships that can currently be deployed are these two Dragon-Snakes, plus the Fury Owl that has already been in position, making a total of just three.

Such firepower alone is fundamentally incapable of engaging the opposing fleet head-on.

Even with Gu Hang, it is no exception.

An Emperor leading three Dragon-Snakes could already blow up three battleship cruisers without even using shields.

Only with the addition of Blood Shark's 'Ghost Evil Shark' does the fleet's frontal combat capability manage to barely hold its ground.

Moreover, this battle has its key points.

First, the Alliance Fleet charging in aggressively with full force would not actually close the distance too much to engage in a direct broadside exchange with the opposing fleet.

Engaging from quite a considerable distance allows their ships to maximize their agility and maneuverability, relying on those to avoid damage as much as possible.

Of course, while it's harder to get hit this way, it also becomes harder to hit the enemy.

But it doesn't matter.

The fleet's firepower is fundamentally not the key to the Alliance's victory.

During the battle, two of the enemy's warships suddenly fell silent.

One of them was the Emperor-class Battleship; the other was a Dragon-Snake Class Battleship Cruiser.

Almost simultaneously, these two ships suffered fierce boarding assaults.

Or to be more precise, the Dragon-Snake Class ship was the primary boarding target. Blood Shark and a portion of Phoenix warriors relied on Spiritual Energy teleportation to break through the enemy's teleportation jamming and launched a murderous rampage.

Three hundred warriors from Blood Shark and two hundred from Phoenix boarded the ship.

Although five hundred warriors were not enough to take complete control of an entire warship, it was sufficient to throw the interior of the Dragon-Snake Class Battleship Cruiser into utter chaos.

This was the reason for its silence.

On the other hand, on the Emperor-class Battleship, Gu Hang nominally ordered four hundred Phoenix warriors led by Matins to board and attack.

But in reality, they did not immediately execute a boarding operation.

The chaos aboard the Emperor-class Battleship was caused by the Eidolons.

The reason for concealing this was that revealing the Eidolons to the wider audience would be incredibly problematic; it would appear far too similar to alien or heretical behavior.

In fact, up until now, the only ones within the Alliance who had fought side-by-side with the Eidolons were the Phoenix warriors.

Showing the Eidolons to them carried relatively manageable risks. After all, the Phoenix warriors and Gu Hang were closely bound together, and every member had undergone “commissar” training, earning trust in their loyalty and resolve.

Gu Hang would absolutely not allow the Blood Shark crew to witness the Eidolons firsthand.

As for the Blood Shark crew, upon learning that just four hundred Phoenix warriors had subdued the interior of an Emperor-class Battleship — a vessel significantly larger than a battleship cruiser — they might find it unbelievable… but let them think whatever they want.

Once the two primary enemy warships, especially the Emperor-class ship, were silenced, Gu Hang gave the command. The three battleship cruisers, along with Blood Shark’s combat ship, pushed their engines to full throttle and charged forward.

The rapidly closing distance made both sides’ firepower significantly more effective.

When the Alfonso Fleet had overwhelming firepower, it fought a guerrilla engagement skirting the periphery; now, with two of its main ships silenced, the Alliance Fleet began fighting ferociously. The remaining two Alfonso battleship cruisers found themselves unable to receive immediate support from their flank. Furthermore, one of them had its Void Shield ripped apart after briefly flickering. Unsurprisingly, it became the primary target of the Alliance’s assault.

Under the concentrated fire from three battleship cruisers and the Ghost Evil Shark, that Dragon-Snake Class Battleship Cruiser struggled to its limits. It maxed out its maneuverability and point-defense systems, hoping to somehow survive.

But all its efforts merely prolonged its survival by a short margin; it couldn’t change the ultimate outcome. Under the relentless assault, it was utterly destroyed.

Next, the sole remaining battleship cruiser met the same fate not long afterward.

Following that, the Alliance Fleet began mopping up the other medium and small ships — the cruisers and heavy destroyers.

Of course, while this makes it harder to be hit, it also makes it difficult to hit the enemy.

But that's okay.

The fleet's firepower was never the key to the Alliance's victory.

During the battle, two enemy warships suddenly went silent.

One of them was the Emperor-class battleship; the other was a Dragon-Snake Class Battleship Cruiser.

These two ships were subjected to ferocious jump boarding attacks almost simultaneously.

To be more precise, the Dragon-Snake Class was the primary target of the boarding operation. The Blood Sharks and part of the Phoenix unit used Spiritual Energy transmission to break through the enemy's teleportation interference and unleashed chaos.

The Blood Sharks sent in 300 warriors, while the Phoenix unit deployed 200.

Using just 500 warriors to take over an entire warship was somewhat challenging.

However, it was enough to throw the interior of the Dragon-Snake Class warship into utter chaos.

That's the reason why it went silent.

On the other side, aboard the Emperor-class battleship, nominally Gu Hang ordered 400 Phoenix warriors, led by Matins, to carry out a boarding operation.

But in reality, they didn't board the ship immediately.

The ones who plunged that Emperor-class battleship into turmoil were the Englings.

The reason this was concealed was that the Englings, if revealed to the masses, would indeed be difficult to explain away. They looked too much like something alien, an act of heresy.

In fact, until now, the only Alliance members who had actually fought alongside the Englings were the Phoenix unit.

For them, witnessing the Englings posed relatively controllable risks. After all, the Phoenix unit was deeply bonded with Gu Hang, and every member had undergone “commissar” training, making their loyalty and willpower trustworthy.

Gu Hang would certainly never let the Blood Sharks witness the Englings firsthand.

As for the Blood Sharks, when they learned that only 400 Phoenix warriors managed to suppress the interior of the larger-than-Battlecruiser Emperor-class battleship into silence, their disbelief… well, they could think however they wanted.

After the two main enemy warships—especially the Emperor-class battleship—went silent, Gu Hang issued an order. Three Battlecruisers, along with the Blood Sharks’ combat barge, pushed their engines to full throttle and charged at maximum speed.

The rapidly closed distance made both sides’ firepower far more threatening.

The Alfonso Fleet, fierce in its firepower previously, relied on skirmishing tactics at the periphery. Now, with its two key warships silent, the Alliance Fleet became aggressive. The remaining two Alfonso Battlecruisers couldn’t get timely support from nearby ships, and one of them even had its Void Shield flicker and then shred away, disappearing completely. Predictably, it became the Alliance Fleet’s primary target.

Under concentrated firepower from three Battlecruisers and the Ghost Evil Shark, the Dragon-Snake Class Battleship Cruiser was on the verge of complete collapse. It maxed out its mobility and firepower interception systems, desperately trying to survive.

Yet all these efforts merely extended its survival by a little longer. Ultimately, under relentless fire, it was completely destroyed.

Shortly thereafter, the only remaining Battlecruiser also met the same fate.

Next, the Alliance Fleet began cleaning up the remaining medium and small-sized ships like cruisers and heavy destroyers.

The Alliance's follow-up main force ultimately boiled down to the Ronglin and Yunluo Dragon-Snake Class Battlecruisers.

Of the Alliance's six Battlecruisers, the Feiyu was under repair, while the Steelwing and Korolya were lost in the Battle of Bowang Sea. The only deployable rapid warships now consisted of these two Dragon-Snakes plus the long-stationed Wrath Owl, making a total of three.

With such limited firepower, they were fundamentally incapable of directly contesting the enemy fleet.

Even with Gu Hang involved, the situation was no exception.

A single Emperor-class battleship with three Dragon-Snake Class ships could already destroy three Battlecruisers without using its shield.

Only with the addition of the Blood Sharks' Ghost Evil Shark could they barely match the opposing fleet's head-on combat power.

Additionally, this battle had its key highlights.

First, the Alliance Fleet, charging aggressively at full speed, wouldn't engage in a close-range firefight with the enemy fleet.

Engaging from a fair distance allowed them to maximize the advantage of their warships' swifter and more agile maneuverability, leveraging their mobility to avoid damage as much as possible.

Of course, while this strategy reduced the chance of being hit, it also made hitting the enemy much harder.

But that's okay.

The fleet's firepower was never the key to the Alliance's victory.

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