Governor 601

Chapter 601, The Princess

Arno accomplished a major feat in the Alfonso Star Domain: he mobilized massive resources to rescue Sebastian Moro.

Not only did he call upon the personnel of the Central Investigation Bureau to which he belonged, but he also united the Alliance's other two major external intelligence agencies, and even the Demon Hunter units.

At the same time, he leveraged the connections he had built in the Alfonso Star Domain through the rivalry between the pigeon and hawk factions.

But even so, Moro was an extremely significant figure and was bound to be detained under the strictest security.

To succeed in the end, meticulous preparation and careful planning were indispensable, but a bit of luck at the critical moment was inevitable as well.

Through harrowing dangers, stumbling and struggling, aboard the tiny vessel carrying both Arno and Moro, they managed to slip past the Wenqi-Wuqi corridor undetected and enter Alliance-controlled territory.

Subsequently, the Alfonso Mechanical Cult's pursuing ships even charged in and clashed with the Alliance fleet stationed in the Wuqi Star System.

Of course, they didn't stand a chance.

And just like that, Moro entered the Alliance's jurisdiction.

Gu Hang took this matter very seriously.

Before his capture, Sebastian Moro had been the Founding General of Founding World – Yalong Star, bearing the title of Sage, ranking among the top five figures within the Alfonso Sect.

At the same time, he was also one of the most critical members of the pigeon faction. Precisely because of this, Waluk had aggressively captured him, using his imprisonment to ruthlessly suppress the pigeon faction.

Now that he had fallen into the hands of the Alliance, it meant that if the Alliance were to launch an offensive into the Alfonso Star Domain in the future, the pigeon faction within the Mechanical Cult could very well be swayed by Moro's influence and defect directly.

Of course, this would also depend on Moro's own willingness to cooperate with the Alliance.

Coercion wouldn't work.

The good news was that his willingness to "escape prison," to follow Arno into the Alliance's de facto territory, was in itself proof of his stance.

Gu Hang hoped this man could play a significant role in the future, to justify the Alliance's heavy investment in the intelligence network within Alfonso, which had suffered severe damage in the process of rescuing him.

This matter was supposed to end here; for him to be of use was the responsibility of the intelligence department, and later when the time came for the offensive, he would need to be brought along.

However, this former Founding General strongly insisted on meeting Gu Hang in person after arriving in Alliance-controlled territory.

Moreover, Arno had specifically conveyed a strong recommendation through the intelligence framework to Governor Gu, emphasizing the importance of meeting Moro, claiming that Moro had highly critical intelligence he was willing to share only with Gu Hang.

It pertained to the Insect Race.

This piqued Gu Hang's interest.

Critical intelligence about the Insect Race from a high-ranking figure within the Alfonso Sect was bound to have credibility.

If they were to meet, then so be it.

…

Seated in a high position, Gu Hang finally met the former Founding General.

Sebastian Moro looked remarkably disheveled.

He wore a red-and-black robe, but his body looked… far too small.

Based on Gu Hang's understanding of the high-ranking members of the Mechanical Cult, each of them, regardless of their specific direction of development, would end up modifying their bodies into increasingly bizarre forms.

Even Wu Jiarong was no exception to this trend.

They carried far too many items at all times — not just weapons, but also an array of scientific equipment and tools.

These modifications weren't made all at once. Often, they began by replacing an eye or turning a finger into a drill, perhaps altering their digestive system to eliminate the need for eating… Gradually, their transformation into non-human forms became more and more extreme.

As the number of modifications increased, these elite "mechanical enthusiasts" naturally grew far larger in size.

By the time they reached Moro's level, their physiques should have been vastly different from those of ordinary humans. Yet now, Moro appeared almost like a regular person — even smaller than average.

This was mostly because, during his imprisonment by Waluk, his "weaponry" had naturally been confiscated. The majority of the mechanical modifications previously integrated into his body had been stripped away. Detaining a Founding General with all his enhancements intact would have left him with far too many ways to cause trouble or stage an escape.

This particular vulnerability was something Arno exploited during the rescue. After Moro was taken out of the prison, a rudimentary humanoid frame was installed to disguise him as a common mechanic. They managed to elude capture for a period of time. The subsequent cat-and-mouse chase across the Star Sea left them with neither the conditions nor the time to provide him with a new set of enhancements.

From this perspective, Moro's current appearance — resembling a normal human — was indeed quite pitiful.

Gu Hang withdrew his scrutinizing gaze, offering a faint smile. "Welcome, Sage Moro. I deeply sympathize with what you've endured in the Alfonso Sect. Together, we must condemn the traitorous acts of those who betrayed the Empire, the Divine Emperor, and the God of All Machines. However, before we proceed, you should first take some time to recover."

"I have critical intelligence that must be delivered to you in person," Moro said.

"Then, what is this intelligence?"

Moro did not respond further. Instead, he began fiddling with something under his robe.

Gu Hang patiently waited.

Underneath the red-and-black robe, he could sense that Moro's hand seemed to reach into his chest cavity and move upward toward the back of his head before pulling something out.

As Moro's hand emerged from beneath his robe, his palm held a piece of dark, black stone.

Chapter 601, Princess _2

Gu Hang stared at the shard of stone: "This is what you're giving me?"

"Yes."

Moro didn't adopt an air of superiority; he wasn't in any state to do so now.

He respectfully raised both hands, adopting a posture of offering.

Invisible tendrils of spiritual energy extended from Gu Hang's consciousness, gently curling around the black shard in Moro's hands before pulling it to his front.

Upon closer inspection, it seemed unremarkable, just an oval-shaped piece of stone, precise and polished. At most, its smooth and glossy surface made it somewhat appealing.

But in truth, it was surely not that simple.

Bringing it closer to his face, Gu Hang carefully examined it, only then detecting a faint trace of spiritual energy response.

Seeing that Moro made no move to explain, Gu Hang decided to probe deeper into the shard with his spiritual energy.

Suddenly, his vision blurred, and the scene around him changed.

He seemed to be in some kind of illusion, where everything he saw rippled like waves across gelatin.

One scene after another, recorded within the shard, flashed before his eyes.

These incidents clearly happened at different times and places, yet their narratives were surprisingly interconnected.

The earlier images appeared to be within a Starport, where Interstellar Warriors in Iron Armor Battle Group insignias were exchanging goods with members of the Alfonso Sect.

The goods consisted of warehouse upon warehouse of Void Insect Species corpses.

The bug corpses floated in varying sizes of specimen tanks, representing all kinds.

Later scenes flashed by, showing what was in the tanks evolving—from corpses into living Void Insect Species specimens.

Following this were fragments showing Alfonso researchers dissecting and studying these corpses.

There were also scenes where they reported their findings to members of the Iron Armor Battle Group.

Seeing this, Gu Hang felt nothing out of the ordinary.

Over the long span of time, the Iron Armor Battle Group had been stationed within the Princess Star Domain, tasked with combating the Void Insect Species continually emerging from there. Capturing corpses or living specimens during these wars and sending them to allied Sect of Mechanics researchers for study—what was so unusual about that?

Using such images to convict the Iron Armor Battle Group was nonsense.

They could even argue that these studies were simply conducted to better understand their enemies, aiding in more effective combat against these aliens.

In truth, that might actually be the case.

Gu Hang himself engaged in such research, and the Alliance still kept live samples of Green Skins in their labs.

There was nothing particularly surprising about it.

Even when Gu Hang saw the living specimen of a Brain Bug Tyrant he recognized being transported over, he wasn't startled.

Utilizing alien power was officially labeled taboo within the Empire, but in practice, who hadn't done it?

If such matters warranted shock and served as definitive evidence of the Iron Armor Battle Group collaborating with the insects, even Gu Hang would find it unconvincing, let alone using it to persuade others.

This wasn't what Gu Hang had hoped to see.

But just as he began to feel a tinge of disappointment, the final image unfolded.

It was a massive square-shaped specimen tank, around thirty meters on each side. In the purple semi-transparent preservation liquid within, a single insect floated, occupying nearly the entire tank.

If it were merely large-bodied and alive, it wouldn't have startled Gu Hang.

Large Void Insect Species specimens were nothing new in preceding images. There were prized samples, including live examples like living cannons, swarm tyrants, and assassin insects—all transported intact enough to serve as experimental materials.

Alive insect specimens were rare, yet not unheard of.

The attention-grabbing feature of this particular insect instead lay in its form—it lacked the defining fangs, claws, and signature armor shell typical of its kind. Judging by its appearance, it seemed entirely unfit for combat.

On the contrary, it resembled a juvenile organism—a juvenile that required a thirty-meter cubic tank to contain.

Gu Hang didn't comprehend its significance at first, but then realization dawned: it wasn't simply about what sort of creature could have a juvenile stage so massive; the more pressing issue was whether Void Insect Species could even have juvenile forms.

Based on Gu Hang's understanding of this mortal enemy of humankind, they were bioengineered weapons born directly from incubation pools. Regardless of their classification, they emerged fully grown and functional from the moment of birth. Typically, their roles were predetermined—some were designated for combat, others for consumption and transport to digestion pools. Often, upon completing their assigned tasks, they would themselves leap into digestion pools, being reduced to biological matter before being channeled through living pipelines back to incubation pools for rematerialization.

No reports had ever indicated that individual Void Insect Species organisms could reproduce. Their prolific reproduction relied not on individual capability but as a collective swarm, utilizing biological matter to form incubation eggs or physically construct bodies.

Under these circumstances, could Void Insect Species exist in juvenile stages?

Could it be that Gu Hang's knowledge of them was insufficient, leading to a misunderstanding?

Gu Hang couldn't help but doubt himself.

Utilizing his spiritual energy, he froze the frame of the image and attempted to zoom in on the peculiar insect for closer observation.

But in the next moment, with everything within the frame static, the countless eyes of the "juvenile insect" suddenly snapped open, all focusing intently on Gu Hang.

In an instant, an overwhelming sense of terror surged through him.

It wasn't merely that Gu Hang was frightened.

His consciousness was abruptly withdrawn from the illusion.

Under the sudden outburst of uncontrolled spiritual energy, the black shard flew from his grip, crashing into the hall's wall before rolling to a stop after several spins.

Meanwhile, Gu Hang sat in his chair, gasping for air.

Simple emotional shifts wouldn't have triggered such violent physiological reactions.

There—it was… spiritual energy.

This spiritual energy caused a tremendous mental jolt in Gu Hang.

For a weaker Psychic, this level of shock would have been enough to completely obliterate their brain.

Some guards started toward Gu Hang but were stopped by his gesture.

He carefully relished the flavor of this spiritual energy that had surged within his mind just now.

He realized it was something he had personally experienced and confronted before.

This occurred during an encounter with the Alfonso Fleet—specifically with that Neuron Progeny, imprisoned aboard their War Ark and enslaved by the Sect of Mechanics.

The spiritual energy signature of the Neuron Progeny matched what he had just felt identically.

But this juvenile insect was unquestionably not a Neuron Progeny.

Gu Hang could sense that the two were… vastly different.

In fact, he had a faint intuition.

The spiritual energy he just experienced wasn't stored within the shard, lying in wait for an ambush. Instead, it resembled a warning traveling an unfathomable distance through the shard as a medium.

It was as if, upon Gu Hang witnessing the creature—even if only through remnants of recorded past events—it, from countless worlds away, had simultaneously seen Gu Hang and "greeted" him warmly.

If this theory were correct, then it was truly terrifying.

What kind of insect could possess such fearsome spiritual energy?

Leaning back in his chair, Gu Hang remained silent for a long while before finally speaking: "Sage Moro, do you know what that creature at the end was?"

"That is the 'Princess.'"

"Princess? Could you elaborate?"

"I'd love to explain more, but… I'm sorry, there's much that I don't know myself."

"No problem. This matter is extraordinarily important. Tell me everything you know, including your speculations."

“Understood.” Moro replied, “The ’Princess’ was named by Humphrey Paolo. It was captured 180 years ago, regarded by the Iron Armor Battle Group as the ultimate key to permanently ending the Void Insect Species threat within the Princess Star Domain. Humphrey brought the ’Princess’ to Alfonso, hoping we could assist in the research…”

Chapter 602, Lord of the Insect Swarm

In Moro’s narration, Gu Hang heard a story.

In this story, the Iron Armor Battle Group was not very different from the many other Loyalist Battle Groups within the Empire.

They were brave and wise, and together with the Furyflame and Bedrock Shield battle groups, they firmly held the region known as the ’Insect Disaster Star Zone’ in the Princess Star Domain.

This was a star sector originally named ’Ankaya’, which was long destroyed. An insect disaster erupted here, and from the void, an Insect Race Fleet appeared, destroying this star sector in a short time. The Iron Armor Battle Group, whose home star was within the Princess Star Domain, responded to the call for help and defeated this not-so-strong Insect Race Fleet.

But the crisis had just begun; what they had repelled was merely an advance fleet.

In the 14 worlds of this Insect Disaster Star Zone, insects continuously emerged. It seemed as if a huge Insect Race Tentacle Fleet was on its way, wave after wave, navigating the cosmos without using the Star Realm Tunnel, surging towards the ’Insect Disaster Star Zone’.

The Iron Armor Battle Group steadfastly stood guard here, diligently and carefully.

They built a defense line in the ’Insect Disaster Star Zone’, and when the enemy was few and weak, they could contain the situation within this star sector. But during severe conditions, the defense within the star sector would collapse, and the enemies would ravage the entire star domain, even expanding to the cosmos domain.

First, the Space Domain Government, then the Imperial Central Government began to gradually pay attention to the persistent ailment in this area. Various parties started to persistently increase and

fortify defense investments in the Insect Disaster Star Zone, with the Iron Armor Battle Group, who was always fighting on the frontlines, being the first to receive priority support naturally.

Moreover, the Empire knew from the beginning that there was an issue of surplus numbers in the Iron Armor Battle Group. But they turned a blind eye because it was necessary.

First, the Iron Armor were always losing lives, making sacrifices, and hence their forces needed constant replenishment. The support from the Empire included providing population resources from various regions, allowing them to better screen new recruits, permitting them to recruit in every world of the Princess Star Domain. It's impossible to strictly keep the number at one thousand, otherwise after a major battle, if hundreds are lost, temporary replenishment would be impossible.

Second, strictly limiting it to a scale of one thousand would not control the situation within the Princess Star Domain. Either the Empire would have to invest more resources, more battle groups, and more fleets, or allow the Iron Armor to exceed numbers; a choice had to be made. The result was obvious: the Empire chose the latter, not pursuing Iron Armor's overbirth activity but providing more support, as long as they can hold back the Insect Race for us.

The practical situation was as expected by the Empire; the Iron Armor Battle Group, including at most a few allied battle groups in the vicinity and the strength of the Princess Star Domain, managed to hold back the Insect Disaster.

Similar-scale disasters often required the Empire to pay a far higher price to quell. Not to mention, the Insect Disaster Star Zone here was a persistent disaster. Without a dark expedition against the source of the Insect Swarm Fleet, targeting the dark outer domain not connected by the Star Realm Tunnel, and eradicating the problem, the swarm here seemed to refresh continually, in various sizes.

If they could manage with this minimal cost, it couldn't be better.

The Alfonso Sect also during this period, funded by the Empire, provided resources to the Iron Armor, and subsequently established a fairly good trade relationship with the Iron Armor Battle Group. Their stronghold Alfonso was just next to the Princess Star Domain and had to rely on Iron Armor to hold back the insects. Additionally, the vast amount of void insect beasts' bodies, even live specimens, provided by Iron Armor, were highly desired by the Alfonso Sect.

These peculiar creatures with strong and inspiring body structures were greatly helpful to the Alfonso Sect for conducting some special research. Even collecting some of the lower-tier insect race corpses had significant bio-material value.

Some armor units produced by the Alfonso Sect were made using the chitin exoskeletons of the insect race, which were comparable to steel, and then remodeled and crafted.

They continued this long-term cooperation and their relationship grew increasingly better.

In such a situation, the Empire was not overly concerned about things getting out of control. Though the Iron Armor received acknowledgment, even extra support, had a star domain as a backing, and had a powerful Mechanical Sect with three founding worlds as allies, the threat of the insect nest they faced was ever-present and extremely severe. Their strength was constantly being depleted, roughly equal to the reinforcements they received.

Compared to them becoming increasingly dominant, the Empire was more worried for a long time about whether Iron Armor was getting sufficient support to resist the insect threat.

Iron Armor itself was also concerned about this.

Of course, at that time, Humphrey Paolo might have already harbored some ambition.

Things changed one hundred eighty years ago when they captured a… peculiar larva.

Later, the Alfonso Sect's research on it suggested that it was a larva of a Queen, or rather a mother insect of the Void Insect Species.

The birth method of the Void Insect Species primarily depended on the Queen, who designed and produced all the void insect beasts in an entire Insect Swarm Fleet, including the Living Vessels of the insect race.

The Queen is also the core of the Insect Nest Fleet. Once she is eliminated, it means that this Insect Nest Fleet will lose its ability to reproduce. Neither the living ships nor the hatching pools deployed on planetary surfaces will function anymore.

At the same time, she is the highest-tier organism in the entire Insect Nest Fleet. Her demise also means that, on a macro level, the entire Insect Nest Fleet will lose its unified coordination and command. Lower-tier organisms like Insect Nest Overlords, Insect Nest Tyrants, and Neuron Progeny can still command their respective units, but they will no longer have the capability to coordinate effectively. They will lose the agility to support one another, making the Insect Swarm highly susceptible to being divided and annihilated.

Of course, the Insect Swarm has its own mechanisms of response.

Before her death, the Queen would hatch multiple larvae. These larvae are currently the only known Insect Race organisms that exhibit a juvenile stage.

These larvae remain dormant while the Queen is alive. Once the Queen dies, they become activated and begin competing and devouring one another. Eventually, one of them evolves into a new Queen.

The lower-tier Swarm organisms will quickly reconnect to the new Queen, signifying that the new Queen has taken over the entire swarm of her predecessor.

It was under Humphrey Paolo's personal leadership that the Iron Armored forces launched a raid on the core of an invading, albeit small-scale, Insect Nest Fleet. They were incredibly brave, even described as death-defying, as they boarded the largest Insect Race ship.

Calling it a "ship" is perhaps misleading; in reality, it was a massive, specialized living organism, colossal like a starship—but alive. Boarding it was akin to throwing oneself into the belly of a gargantuan beast.

Inside, they not only had to face the massive number of enemies spawning from the hatching process but also the living ship itself, which was altering its internal structure with the sole objective of killing them. For instance, spraying highly corrosive acid without warning or launching bone spikes…

No one knows exactly how Humphrey Paolo managed it, but he accomplished what was deemed an almost impossible task: he beheaded and eliminated the Queen of this Swarm and successfully returned alive.

This provided the opportunity to completely annihilate the Insect Nest Fleet, granting humanity another glorious victory.

However, very few people know that upon his return, Humphrey Paolo also brought back a larva.

They killed all the other larvae and took this one away before it could mature and take over the Insect Nest Fleet.

After the Swarm was destroyed, the remaining larva no longer had any subordinates to command. Its development was severely stunted due to malnutrition. Without additional biomass to supply her with, enabling her to produce Insect Beasts, she was essentially rendered inert and was ultimately imprisoned and sent to the Alfonso Sect.

They called her the 'Princess.'

The Alfonso Sect regarded her as a priceless treasure, but she was not a gift from Paolo. Instead, she was part of a top-secret mission: to study the Queen in order to control the swarm.

…

This, to the extent of Sebastian Moro's knowledge, is the full story.

As one of the Alfonso Sect's upper echelons and one of the three Founding Generals, even Sebastian only knows about this incident that occurred 180 years ago.

In fact, aside from the imagery he shared with Gu Hang, which he personally witnessed, much of the other information was pieced together through his own investigations or even speculation and may not be entirely reliable.

But roughly, this is how things unfolded.

As for what happened afterward, he has no concrete intelligence or evidence.

Great Sage Martin Valuk personally took over the research, with only Sage Dubo assisting him in this project.

At the same time, the Great Sage declared it the utmost secret of the Sect. Of those who accompanied him in handling the captured larva, apart from the three Founding Generals and one Principal Sage, the rest had their self-awareness and memory centers of their brains surgically removed, turning them into machine-servants to ensure no information would be leaked.

In other words, within the entire Alfonso Sect, only those five individuals knew about it—oh, now it should be four, as Sage Dubo was killed during the Sect's campaign in the Proudclaw Cosmos.

Still, not knowing the exact situation didn't prevent Moro from speculating.

What if the larva's cultivation failed? But this possibility now seems extremely unlikely.

Where did the Neuron Progeny imprisoned aboard Alfonso II's War Ark come from? And where did the technology to enslave and control it originate?

Undoubtedly, it must be a result of the Queen research.

But was the Queen merely used as a basis for developing and applying these technologies?

Moro didn't believe so.

He surmised that the Great Sage had not declined Humphrey Paolo's request and mission. Technologies related to the Void Insect Species, including the Neuron Progeny, were likely just byproducts of the research. The ultimate goal of the project was producing and controlling an entire Insect Swarm.

Not just one or two insects, but an entire swarm.

This, of course, was exactly what Humphrey Paolo wanted!

It would directly solve the problem his war legion currently faced.

Being able to control a Queen meant raising an army of Swarms to combat the invading Insect Race. Faced with their invasion, having one's own Queen could even seize control of the lower-tier organisms within the enemy's Swarm.

Beyond solving the current predicament, how could that possibly be the limit?

Controlling a Queen and wielding an ever-expanding swarm meant the possibilities ahead were limitless.

Chapter 602, Master of the Insect Swarm_3

Judging by the current situation, it's highly possible that Waluk's research has already succeeded.

With that as a premise, it explains the questions Gu Hang had been pondering earlier.

The North Line is blocked by the Insect Swarm, the West Line faces the extraordinary 'Mortal' units, and the Southern Line has encountered enslaved Neuron Progeny…

And why Humphrey Paolo is going all out against the Magrey Cosmic Domain.

From a logical standpoint, it would indeed be difficult for him to quickly convert Magrey's productivity and population into war potential. But if we consider the possibility that he can command an Insect Swarm, it's a completely different story: unleash the swarm, let them feast on a massive scale, and the resulting swarm would be unimaginably strong.

Gu Hang couldn't even dare to think about it!

Why hadn't the Iron Armor Soldiers brought out such a trump card earlier? A possible reason is that this idea is utterly reckless. Letting the swarm ravage the world would severely destabilize the Iron Armor base, or perhaps they still had some moral boundaries.

But as the war situation worsened, if the Iron Armor Soldiers did nothing and relied solely on their original strength, that clearly wouldn't suffice.

To defeat and crush Phoenix on the Western Line was undoubtedly a move that crossed their bottom line. The power of the Insect Race was undeniably involved.

However, the extent of that involvement might not have been substantial, perhaps only deployed during key battles. Many survivors from the Empire's side during those battles could only provide ambiguous information afterward—they hadn't witnessed it directly.

Yet, breaking the bottom line won't stop at just one time.

After defeating Phoenix, what comes next for them will be the even fiercer wrath of the High Lords, the united forces of the Otaubis Battle Group and other battle groups, the Empire's Star Realm Army, and the Solar Fleet's counterattack—all of which will exert even greater pressure.

Conversely, the Iron Armor Soldiers suffered significant losses even in their victory.

Amid this give-and-take, why would they attack Magrey? For fun?

Gu Hang could already envision countless digestion pools, hatching pools, rising like world trees across Magrey, engulfing the Empire's worlds in deathly silence, and the Insect Swarm being spawned in their place.

…

Letting out a long sigh, Gu Hang bid farewell to Sebastian Moro.

He began organizing the materials himself. Which pieces of information were confirmed intelligence, and which were speculation—all needed to be clarified.

He had to distribute these as detailed reports to the Central Empire and the Northern Line warfront.

You all figure it out yourselves.

If the sky collapses, the taller ones will hold it up.

So, you taller folks better prepare yourselves mentally.

Although Gu Hang had warned them before, at that time, it was merely conjecture—just a possibility. But now, it could almost be confirmed, and he roughly deduced the measures they might employ and inferred their strategic goal in the Magrey Cosmic Domain.

The argument was much more convincing now.

And another task at hand was the propaganda war.

Humphrey Paolo and Martin Waluk might not care, but does every Iron Armor Soldier below them know?

Do all the battle groups allied with Paul know?

Do all the worlds under Iron Armor's control know?

The bugs eat people.

Now, with the powerful allies you're following, in the tough times of war, how do you think they'll feed their swarm?

The Alliance’s intelligence organization needs to start taking action.

At the same time, Gu Hang had to reconsider whether to persist with the one-and-a-half-year-long plan he had shelved before.

The intelligence brought by Moro was of extraordinary value.

Chapter 603: Parasitic Infection

The reason Gu Hang insisted on waiting for a shipbuilding cycle no matter what before was because the Alliance’s war potential exceeded that of Iron Armor, a fact that could not be changed. Under this trend, Gu Hang was confident, no matter what changes happened outside, I remained unshaken, ensuring strategic stability.

However, strategic stability is not about having a plan and sticking to it blindly, completely ignoring any changes in the situation.

Due to the arrival of new intelligence, the issue of war potential must be reassessed.

Include the insect swarm, who dares to say Iron Armor, which is expanding everywhere in the Magrey Star Dominion, is inadequate?

After receiving Gu Hang’s warning, the Empire was somewhat flustered. They dispatched people to confirm the accuracy of the information, avoiding the possibility of Gu Hang speaking recklessly. Envoys from both Mars and the Holy Terra Government were rushing to meet Sebastian Moro.

But to be honest, sending envoys is not very important. The journey is long, and even if they hurry, it will take a year to arrive, and by the time everything is verified, it might be too late to act.

This confirmation only matters if Gu Hang is found to have been talking nonsense. Now, all parties of the Empire must act on the premise that the intelligence provided by Gu Hang is accurate.

The most prominent change is the strengthening of the North Line. Originally just making up the numbers and assisting was the nature of the Extraplanar Tribunal, but now they are highly interested. They dispatched more Silver Watch Warriors and brought out many techniques against the insect race, guarded by teams of Stormtroopers led by judges, to reinforce the frontline.

The main goal is to strengthen the offensive on the North Line, hoping to help Marshal Mathieu Leroux to quickly resolve the insect swarms on the North Line and officially initiate an offensive against the core areas of the Iron Armor Battle Group.

At the same time, their manpower is pouring into the Magrey Cosmic Domain to investigate and even prevent the Iron Armor Battle Group from possibly releasing insect swarms to devour world after world, as guessed by Gu Hang.

The Solar Fleet, which had been in a state of gathering, finally departed. Some ships had not yet arrived, and some Star Realm Army Corps were not fully staffed, but the situation had reached such a critical point that there was no condition to wait any longer.

They halted the gathering work and hastily set off for the Skywatch Starfield, continuing to maintain the connection between Skywatch and the Spiderweb Domain while also launching an attack on the Magrey Cosmic Domain. The follow-up troops were still on their way, which could only be supplemented later in the line.

Honestly, this is quite a risky decision.

But fortunately, the worst-case scenario did not occur.

The leader of the Otaubis Battle Group, Lu Salis personally led the team and opened the Star Realm Tunnel from the Skywatch Starfield to the Magrey Cosmic Domain. Iron Armor had indeed occupied this place first, but their stationed forces were insufficient, and even the two worlds connecting the tunnel were not fully pacified by Iron Armor. Under the strong assault of the Otaubis Battle Group, they were quickly repelled.

Salius Warlord then further dispersed his troops, surrounding the Star Realm Tunnel connected to Skywatch, controlling more than a dozen worlds, striving to establish a strategic buffer, providing a relatively stable base for his entire force.

Meanwhile, they also dispatched ground troops into these worlds. The judges of the Anti-Extraterrestrial Alliance were particularly important. They needed to evaluate whether the surfaces of these planets had suffered invasion by the insect race.

The results indicated there was indeed invasion.

They discovered signs of insect infestation on almost every world.

This is very bad news, even though Gu Hang was prepared, his heart sank when he learned of it.

Even the worlds near the Skywatch Starfield in the Magrey Cosmic Domain have been infected? The Iron Armor Battle Group had just reached these worlds not long ago! Their movements were incredibly fast.

Even more worrying is if these peripheral areas are like this, what about those worlds already captured by Iron Armor? How about the major bases like the Princess Star Domain?

Of course, people can't only think of the worst. Among these bad news, there is relatively better news, which is that these worlds are not severely corrupted. In general, only some cults supported by Iron Armor or organizations secretly spreading insect corrosion under the guise of the Imperial State Religion exist. Insect eggs parasitize humans, fostering symbiotic insects, which alter human physical forms and thoughts.

Infected individuals are essentially beyond saving and would spread further, infecting more people.

But fortunately, the number of infections is not too high and can still be managed.

The most severe worlds merely have wide-spread issues, in addition to a few Void Insect Species' digestion and incubation system hiding beneath Nest Capitals and in mountain forests, cultivating some insect armies.

Even in the worst-affected worlds, the local governing institutions are still functioning. After Iron Armor was driven away and these worlds were reclaimed nominally by the Empire, the native forces, having

received imperial aid, especially after understanding the true nature of those so-called sects that Iron Armor previously suppressed to prevent them from addressing, and fearing their upcoming fate, began self-rescue actions.

Local forces were assembled, guided and supported by the Imperial Army as the backbone, with a national resistance against insect infection as the primary objective, initiating large-scale global actions.

After obtaining this intelligence, Gu Hang felt a bit relieved.

The leader of the Otaubis Battle Group, Lu Salis, still proved to be quite reliable and clear-headed.

Gu Hang was worried that with such a top-tier Interstellar Warrior as the commander, they might become irrational. Many Interstellar Warriors considered themselves above mortals, indifferent to them, focusing solely on eliminating the Empire's enemies. As a result, they act rashly and confusedly, causing chaos.

But luckily, Salius is not like that.

His approach aligns with Gu Hang's ideas. Resolving the various degrees of insect corruption and preventing the swarm from ultimately consuming an entire world cannot rely solely on the power of the Imperial Central Army.

If it were, a cosmos domain with thousands of worlds would render any amount of forces too dispersed, unable to solve the problem.

It's essential to mobilize the local powers of these worlds, making the local inhabitants aware they are in a life and death crisis, to inspire them to resist, that's the chance for victory.

And the central army's primary task is to drive away Iron Armor's forces, ending their occupation, preventing Iron Armor from suppressing the native forces' self-rescue actions;

Secondly, to tackle resistant areas, making local resistance smoother.

Also, providing abundant resources to support the local forces of each world, enhancing their resistance capabilities.

Seeing Salius accomplishing these aspects quite well, Gu Hang felt assured.

In fact, he was also preparing to do the same.

The Alliance's army has entered the Thistle and Mustard Star Field and the Alfonso Star Domain.

Finally, Gu Hang concluded the strategic stability he had previously insisted on.

Even though a shipbuilding cycle in the rear was nearing completion, he could no longer wait.

Now, capturing one world a little earlier means fewer insect swarms to face in the future.

Chapter 604, Taking the Initiative

By the eighth standard Terra month of the year 10328, the situation in the 'Iron Armor War' suddenly became turbulent.

In fact, the entire year had already been eventful.

In February, the Western Line collapsed, the Lord of the Phoenix disappeared, and the Phoenix Legion suffered a devastating blow. This marked one of the rare moments in the Empire's history where an initial legion took such a heavy loss. However, the remaining Phoenix warriors were already few in number. The acting Battle Group Leader had just been chosen, making any attempts at revenge highly challenging. They could only rely on their subsidiary groups to contribute whatever efforts they could. Unfortunately, the Phoenix lineage lacked sufficient offspring.

Six months after the collapse of the Western Line, the Magrey Cosmic Domain descended into chaos. The Iron Armor forces were expanding at a maddening pace, caring little about their degree of control over the worlds they occupied.

In fact, even the term ’occupation’ was up for debate. For some less significant planets, a single Iron Armor ship would arrive, declare that the world had been ’liberated,’ and leave. The inhabitants and rulers of those worlds were often left in bewilderment, unsure whether they should resist the Iron Armor occupation and pledge loyalty to the Empire or simply surrender to the inevitable.

And just like that, the Iron Armor forces left.

What kind of ’occupation’ was that?

Yet, this often marked the beginning of rapidly developing Cult activities and a cascade of bizarre incidents.

Fortunately, the Imperial Central Army, led by Salius, arrived, bringing some hope of stabilizing the Western Line.

While striving to restore order to more worlds within the Magrey Cosmic Domain, Salius was consistently searching for the main forces of the Iron Armor Battle Group. Whether to pursue a decisive battle was another matter, but at the very least, it was critical to determine the whereabouts, current activities, and condition of the Iron Armor’s main force after their victory over the Phoenix Legion.

The Northern Line, bolstered by significant support from the Anti-Extraterrestrial Alliance, began accelerating the clearing of Insect Swarms. Several worlds had successfully resisted the Insects, and the situation was improving.

One company of Infinite Warriors stationed on the Northern Line even broke through numerous obstacles, advancing the frontlines to the Sword Gate Starfield.

This location was already adjacent to the Princess Star Domain.

Meanwhile, on the Southern Line, Gu Hang also made his move.

Although the current shipbuilding cycle had not been completed, and waiting another six months would allow six massive warships to join the Alliance Fleet, Gu Hang could not afford to wait any longer.

Fortunately, the ships previously captured had already been repaired.

The Alliance's attack targeted both the Thistle and Mustard Star Field and the Alfonso Star Domain simultaneously.

Gu Hang's strategy involved a significant leap from initial passivity to an aggressive two-front offensive.

Of course, this did not mean dividing forces evenly.

At the outset, the Alliance concentrated its fleet in full force and first captured the other side of the Star Realm Tunnel leading to the Thistle and Mustard Star Field.

The previous decision not to seize this location was not due to an inability to capture it but rather to avoid excessively provoking the enemy.

But now, who cared about such concerns?

The battle for the Star Realm Tunnel went relatively smoothly.

When Gu Hang personally arrived and the Alliance Fleet launched a full-scale assault, relying solely on a complete, formidable planetary defense system meant little. Lacking strong garrison forces, flexible fleet protection, and above all, resistance to the Spiritual Energy wielded by Gu Hang's Storm Mage Corps, their attempts at steadfast defense were utterly meaningless, barely delaying the assault.

After successfully seizing the Star Realm Tunnel, the Alliance adopted a strategy closely resembling Salius's approach in the Magrey Cosmic Domain.

However, the circumstances they encountered were markedly different.

The Magrey Cosmic Domain was newly occupied by the Iron Armor forces, and many of its planets were barely considered 'occupied.' Even though they had spread the corruption of the Insect Swarm, the

extent of corruption was manageable. In many cases, merely mobilizing local governments and encouraging the native population to take the issue seriously was sufficient to resolve problems on their own.

In contrast, the situation in the Thistle and Mustard Star Field, adjacent to the Princess Star Domain, was entirely different.

The Thistle and Mustard Star Field had been directly occupied and governed by the Iron Armor forces. Since the start of the Iron Armor War eight years ago—and even as far back as two centuries ago, when Iron Armor expanded its influence centered around the Princess Star Domain—it had been spreading its reach to surrounding star fields.

After Iron Armor took control of the Thistle and Mustard Star Field, resistance sentiments within the region remained relatively low, unlike in the Magrey Cosmic Domain.

The Thistle and Mustard Star Field, comprising hundreds of worlds, had local governments that cooperated extensively with Iron Armor.

The opportunities for Iron Armor to spread Insect Race corruption throughout the Thistle and Mustard Star Field were plentiful, and the history of such corruption had likely been extensive.

Even in the early days of rebellion or in the initial stages, Iron Armor dared not openly spread corruption, but in the past six months, having abandoned all restraints, their spread had likely reached unimaginable levels.

Indeed, the Alliance's intelligence agencies had already detected signs of this.

Although the Alliance had not launched proactive offensives in recent times, intelligence operations targeting the Thistle and Mustard Star Field—a clear next strategic objective—had long been underway.

Even before they uncovered any connections between Iron Armor and the Insect Swarm, they had already noticed the severe presence of Cults and insurgent forces within many planets in the Thistle and Mustard Star Field.

At the time, they had not found it particularly significant. Cults and insurgents were hardly unique to any Empire World.

Even within the Alliance's core worlds like Korolya—reformed through Alliance systems and decentralization—there were still occasional reports of local judicial bodies and garrison forces dismantling small-scale Cult organizations. After all, with a population of 40 billion and dozens of Nest Capitals, eliminating every issue was impossible.

If Korolya had such occurrences, one could hardly expect anything different from the broader Empire Worlds.

While the Cult organizations within the Thistle and Mustard Star Field were relatively numerous and showed signs of collusion—if not overt cooperation—with local ruling classes, most fell under the category of 'heresy.'

Among these Cults, only a few had connections to the Chaotic Abyss, and intelligence operatives had not identified any major concerns in this regard. Most Cults tended to distort or misinterpret the doctrines of the Imperial State Religion, which, relatively speaking, was more tolerable.

Initial assessments suggested that the risk posed by Cults was high but within acceptable limits.

However, in hindsight, it became clear that the initial investigations had taken a somewhat misguided approach.

The Alliance's experience dealing with disasters like the Insect Swarm was relatively limited. When they thought of Cults, their primary concern had always been Chaos corruption.

But when viewed through the lens of parasitic infection by the Insect Swarm, the gravity of the situation skyrocketed!

Not to mention the Thistle and Mustard Star Field, even within the Proudclaw Cosmos, such issues were becoming increasingly prominent.

The internal problems within the Proudclaw Cosmos are relatively easier to resolve.

After all, it is separated from the Princess Star Domain, the heavily fortified stronghold, by the Thistle Muster Star Field, and the influence it has endured over the past century is not as severe as that of Thistle Muster.

More importantly, when Ironclad abandoned its bottom line, the Proudclaw Cosmos was already under the Alliance's control, and thus never experienced the largest-scale spread of corruption that other regions faced.

On the contrary, as soon as the Alliance received intelligence, it immediately established a "Pest Control Office" on every planet in the region.

Alliance-dispatched specialists directly took charge, and local planetary governments were required to fully cooperate with the Pest Control Office's work. This cooperation was even incorporated into core performance assessments—those who performed well were commended, their ranks and status elevated, and they accrued merits for future position advancements. Poor performers or those who caused issues were swiftly dismissed without exception.

Rewards and punishments, however, were secondary; the critical component was ensuring effective propaganda work.

The first task of the specialists sent from the Alliance's central government to these local regions was often to educate the ruling class about the threat of infestations, exposing the terrifying reality of how this calamity unleashed by Ironclad would escalate into a Cosmos Domain-level catastrophe of unparalleled horror.

A multi-pronged approach!

First, make people realize that this is a massive disaster capable of obliterating entire worlds. When the Insect Swarm devours worlds, no one can escape. This is the survival of the species tied to the survival of individuals.

Then, utilize the Alliance's internal reward-and-punishment system to manage daily operations and ensure that the measures are carried out effectively. Relying solely on appeals to morality would be insufficient; after all, disasters don't manifest overnight, and there will always be those who believe it's not immediately their concern and thus choose to muddle through.

And this addresses the issue of motivation.

If anyone remains unmotivated and drags their feet, they're either foolish or malicious. Malicious actors should first and foremost be suspected of infection; if confirmed, they are to be eliminated immediately. Fools, while not eliminated, are nonetheless removed from the team.

Ultimately, successful actions still rely on the entire society's mobilization capacity and governance standards.

Some worlds fared quite well; others were in such a chaotic mix of feudal systems and slave societies compounded by the disarray of corrupt capitalism… It became an unmanageable mess. Expecting them to accomplish major operations or effectively control the spread of infestations was a naive dream.

In such cases, the Alliance can hardly afford the luxury of proceeding gently. The Alliance system was forcibly advanced under the conditions of military support and an intense existential crisis, which, objectively speaking, ironically became an ideal opportunity to promote the Alliance's system.

These backward societies, a mix of feudal and capitalist structures, were being propelled headlong into the Alliance system era.

Recently, those corrupted cults have been running rampant. Many people have gone missing, natural ecosystems have rapidly shifted, and the cult organizations have militarized, resisting official purges. On some planets, large-scale infestations of the Insect Swarm have directly emerged—in the lower levels of the Nest Capital, in slums, in desolate wilderness areas, and even with hatcheries being discovered!

Turbulence became inevitable across all the worlds of the Proudclaw Cosmos.

But under the Alliance's diverse measures, and with the thorough mobilization of local planetary forces, most issues could be suppressed independently in the majority of cases.

On planets with relatively better conditions, counter-cult operations were the primary focus, led by the Legal Department with military support, functioning almost like a “counterterrorism war” model.

On planets with more severe situations, actual conflicts that could be classified as warfare broke out, and the Defense Army was capable of exterminating the enemies.

In essence, the most formidable weapon of the Insect Swarm is their sheer numbers. However, on any of the planets in the Proudclaw Cosmos, they’ve yet to procure enough biomass to generate a sufficient number of Swarm members or parasitic infected. Before their numbers rise, as long as the authorities treat the issue seriously and respond with full force, the threat posed by the infestation can be effectively controlled.

Overall, the situation in the Proudclaw Cosmos could be described as chaotic but improving.

But just across the border in the Thistle Muster Star Field, the situation was entirely different.

The connecting point between Proudclaw and Thistle Muster, He Mountain Star, was relatively better off. Perhaps it was due to the fact that this world was a Fortress World, dominated by military bases, with a small civilian population. The socio-ecological framework was primarily designed to support military life and needs, and even civilians were managed under militarized systems. In such an environment, the spread of infestations and cult activity was minimal, and the scale of infected individuals was kept small.

After the Alliance’s main forces captured the entire planet, the minor issues were quickly resolved.

Ironclad’s spread of infestations wasn’t entirely without benefit.

To find some silver lining, it significantly reduced human loyalty to Ironclad in the occupied territories, which made it much easier for the Alliance to reclaim these worlds.

This wasn’t particularly noticeable on He Mountain Star. After all, the infestation wasn’t severe. Although the Alliance dismantled the orbital defenses with overwhelming military power, and subdued

resistance through orbital bombardments and ground troops, the remaining resistors went underground, and the rest largely surrendered en masse.

The remaining resistors distrusted the Alliance's propaganda, claiming it was all lies. Even among those who surrendered, there were whispers of suspicion—"Are they deceiving us?"

However, as more and more reports from other, wider-ranging worlds in the Thistle Muster Star Field began to circulate via various channels, credibility grew. The Alliance's control and administration thus became smoother, and the rebuilding of the planet as a Fortress World progressed with the cooperation of local defectors, making the process more seamless.

Chapter 605, Thistle and Mustard Strategy _2

Of course, these tasks fundamentally fall to the local officers and political commissars.

The Alliance's main forces cannot remain on He Mountain Star for too long.

After conquering He Mountain, the Alliance's main fleet immediately departs, moving deeper into the Thistle Muster Star Field.

The worlds ahead will not enjoy the stable, long-term military governance seen on He Mountain Star; the corruption caused by the insect infestation, in Gu Hang's view, is exceedingly severe.

However, for the vast majority of worlds, things haven't yet reached the point of complete annihilation.

In those worlds, the Alliance must gradually exert its influence and take action.

The branch fleets dispersed from the main fleet can often establish cooperation with local forces.

These worlds also have the desire for self-rescue.

The first step in cooperation is to eliminate the influence of the Ironclad forces on these planets.

Kill or capture the Ironclad representatives stationed on native worlds. These might be detachments of the Princess Legion, administrative officials embedded in local governments, or individuals in native governments closely allied with the Ironclad forces.

At the same time, establish ’Pest Control Offices’ on various planets.

This step was largely completed in the Proudclaw Cosmos.

But in reality, there are significant differences.

The most notable difference is that many worlds in the Thistle Muster Star Field can no longer rely solely on their own strength to resolve internal issues.

The Insect Swarm howls in the wild, launching periodic attacks on human settlements; within human society, Cults spawned by the infestation have corrupted every aspect of social order.

In fact, compared to the corruption of the upper echelons of society or the ruling elite, the more terrifying issue is the large-scale corruption at the grassroots level.

The former, while troublesome, is easily identifiable due to its high visibility and is straightforward to clean up. Once dealt with, the Alliance simply replaces them with its own personnel.

But widespread corruption at the grassroots level—now that’s a major headache.

Simply put, no matter what policies are devised or solutions proposed, they all rely on grassroots administrative bodies for execution and implementation. If the foundations collapse, then everything falls apart.

The Alliance is capable of resolving this. They can distinguish between high-ranking, mid-level, and grassroots personnel, or even isolate an entire region for direct military governance—relatively crude, but effective.

However, the Alliance has always strived to avoid such situations, but in the Thistle Muster Star Field, this approach is evidently unavoidable.

Severe illness demands strong medicine.

Of course, this drastically drains and disperses the Alliance's strength.

This also drives the Alliance's strategic command staff to madness.

The Alliance cannot realistically march through hundreds of worlds, conquering each one and then sending troops to resolve each planet's local issues. That's simply not feasible. Even if they managed to do so, the Alliance would likely be bogged down in the Thistle Muster Star Field for untold years.

That is absolutely unacceptable.

Fortunately, conquering planets is not particularly difficult. When the Alliance fleet approaches a world, it is greeted with gifts, cheers, and welcoming celebrations akin to receiving a liberating army. In fact, some planets not even on the Alliance's planned offensive routes would hurriedly send signals, asking, "When will the Alliance arrive? We surrender! Please send troops to help us deal with the insect infestation!"

As for troop distribution, it is indeed necessary to divide forces.

But they cannot be equally distributed.

And that's where the work of the Alliance's strategists comes into play. Using the detailed intelligence collected below, they must discern which planets require urgent, significant reinforcement and which can afford to receive fewer resources for the time being.

For regions relatively better off, sending an Alliance Army Group will generally suffice.

One million troops, supplemented by emergency administrative officers recruited from Alliance homeworlds, will form the core of the 'Pest Control Office.'

A million-strong Alliance Army can serve as a stabilizing force, ensuring peace in one area. Using them as the nucleus, they work to purify and rebuild the local grassroots administration, while recruiting local forces to expand their military and administrative capabilities to cover larger areas.

As for any local factions foolish enough to oppose them, those will be destroyed. If one Army Group isn't enough, reinforcements will be sent immediately.

However, if such situations arise, the strategist who made the initial assessment will face reprimand or even demotion.

Analyzing the cooperativeness of local forces is one of their key responsibilities, after all.

Overall, in the four months since the Alliance advanced into the Thistle Muster Star Field, they have conquered roughly over 200 worlds—about half the star field.

Approximately one-third of these worlds are relatively better off.

The remaining two-thirds fall into categories of either poor or extremely dire conditions.

On some worlds, both the upper and grassroots levels of society have nearly collapsed, necessitating massive Alliance intervention to rebuild from the ground up. However, even these are considered the "better" cases. The solution boils down to a stricter application of the 'Pest Control Office' model, entirely abandoning reliance on local forces and starting over.

The initial work will be grueling and resource-intensive. But with the moral high ground of "saving the world," ordinary civilians and reorganized local militias will ultimately accept Alliance rule and actively participate in the mission.

These cases are the relatively easier ones.

A much worse scenario is when local forces are strongly loyal to the Ironclad, exhibit extreme independence, or have shortsighted, selfish rulers who refuse to cooperate with the Alliance for any reason.

In such places, the infestation and Insect Swarm numbers may still be within a manageable range. However, the problem lies in that upon arriving, the Alliance will have to contend not only with actual insects but also with “human pests.”

Some hot-headed Generals propose radical solutions: lump these opposing factions together with the insects and eliminate them all at once!

However, Gu Hang vetoes these ideas.

The issue is not one of kindness or compassion but practicality—spending precious resources and manpower on such worlds is simply not worth it.

In these cases, the next Army Group may not even be deployed. Instead, only a few observation posts are established, quietly monitoring developments on the planet.

If local forces manage to resolve the situation themselves, that’s ideal—less trouble for everyone, even if they reject Alliance rule. It doesn’t matter. A single planet poses no threat to the Alliance across the vast Star Sea. They can be left on their own until the Alliance has the resources to deal with them later.

These are internal disputes within the species.

If they can’t manage, the Alliance’s ambassadors will increase contact and involvement. Ultimately, it comes down to one question: “Have you stopped being stubborn?”

If they relent, then the Alliance proceeds with established methods. If not, the Alliance won’t let them perish entirely. They will evaluate the situation and send major reinforcements to resolve the planet’s issues, while eliminating the obstinate or malicious factions in the process.

Once all planetary issues are classified, the Alliance's most crucial and elite forces can focus on approximately 30 worlds with the most severe crises.

These planets have already descended into hell on Earth.

While complete extinction of populations may not yet have occurred, there has already been large-scale loss of life. Cultists infected with parasitic insects dominate mainstream society, and they've bred enormous numbers of genuine Insect Swarms.

For these worlds, the 'Pest Control Office' model alone is inadequate to save them. On-planet enemies are numbered in the billions or even tens of billions.

In such cases, nothing short of a full-scale, apocalypse-level war is required. Massive ground forces, Interstellar Warriors, and orbital ships providing fire support—every asset must be deployed. Only with this mindset can the problems on these planets be resolved.

Chapter 606, Nodal Organisms

The drop pods slammed violently into the fleshy carpet of the Insect Swarm, splattering juices everywhere.

Four doors opened from all sides of the pod, and Matins stepped out alongside three warriors who served as his trusted aides.

Though their heavy Terminator Armor made no effort to mute their steps, the sound of their boots on the fleshy ground was absorbed into the carpet, becoming softer and more muffled, only to be drowned out by the screeches of Insect Beasts.

Matins paid no attention to the disgusting energy-digestive-corrosive tri-structure of the Void Insect Species beneath his feet. His first priority was to raise his left arm and unleash destructive volleys from his rotary heavy bomb machine gun, sweeping annihilation across the surroundings.

Countless insects suddenly emerged from the crevices in the flesh carpet and darted in from afar. Most were units like Blade Bugs and Rifle Bugs.

Matins' rotary heavy bomb machine gun roared like a harbinger of death, shredding every Insect Beast charging toward them into fragments. His trusted aides, clad in Terminator Armor, mirrored the Battle Group Leader's actions, displaying astounding combat prowess. With the overwhelming sweep of explosive bombardments, entire waves of Insect Beasts were obliterated.

The battle was unimaginably intense, and within moments, the corpses of the Insect Beasts had formed a mountain.

However, the Void Insect Species harbored no fear. Their duties remained methodically organized: some dragged their kind's corpses away to consume and recycle the biomass for reuse in distant areas, while the majority plunged headlong toward the Interstellar Warriors.

Matins and his three trusted aides were quickly submerged in the encroaching Swarm.

Their weaponry was potent, but their ammunition reserves were limited. Despite the Terminators being capable of carrying a substantial volume of ammunition, even that paled in comparison to the overwhelming numbers of the Swarm.

To conserve ammo and avoid squandering it entirely on the low-level insects, they deliberately reduced their firepower output, focusing their heavy bombs on selectively targeting larger, stronger individuals hidden among the throng.

Some warrior bugs and even assassin bugs were concealed within the swarm. The latter's carapaces bore a layer of camouflage, making them appear indistinguishable from scores of ordinary minor insects.

These two types of insects were comparatively rarer within the swarm, but held the potential to threaten the lives of the Interstellar Warriors.

Assassin bugs, in particular, exhibited combat capabilities roughly equivalent to those of ordinary warrior bugs in head-on battle. Yet their elusive and unpredictable movements could be brutally troublesome. Detecting and eliminating them in advance was undoubtedly the ideal outcome.

If not… well, it mattered little to Matins or his three comrades—all were the most elite warriors of the Phoenix. Even in close-range combat, they weren't helpless. The only question was whether to use explosive rounds or handle the matter with Power Swords or Phase Swords.

As for the other numerous cannon fodder, they were swept away in swaths.

Even the vast numbers of Rifle Bugs firing symbiotic weapons in concentrated volleys from afar were no cause for fear.

Their projectiles posed minimal threat to Terminator Armor, let alone to warriors like Matins and his team, who were never stationary targets. Their rapid maneuvers in combat often positioned nearby Blade Bugs as shields, making it exceedingly difficult for the Rifle Bugs to land a hit on the Interstellar Warriors.

Despite the battle's ferocity and the enemy's overwhelming numbers, neither Matins nor his warriors seemed to show signs of fatigue.

Their mission was to pave the way for more Interstellar Warriors to descend. They were like indomitable wedges driven deep into the enemy ranks.

Under their disruption, the scope and distribution of the enemy swarm gradually became clear.

Soon after, more drop pods plummeted from the heavens.

The Interstellar Warriors emerging from the pods wore the crimson armor of the Phoenix and the gray-black armor of the Blood Sharks.

This was a coordinated operation between the Phoenix and Blood Sharks.

In no time, the total number of Interstellar Warriors deployed reached two hundred.

With two full companies of troops, the Swarm's numbers began to diminish at an accelerated pace.

Even an elite Insect Nest guard leading a squad of warrior bugs was caught off guard, its formation shattered by a charge from several Blood Sharks. A Power Axe tore its massive body to shreds.

Despite the swarm's vast numbers, the significant losses sustained within a short period visibly thinned their density in this sector, making them noticeably sparse to the naked eye.

The Interstellar Warriors continued to slay enemies with incredible efficiency. Yet, Matins personally leading the charge was evidently about more than simply reducing the enemy's combatant forces.

For the Swarm, mass slaughter of mid- to lower-tier fodder insects held little strategic importance.

Even the fallen cannon fodder, including the corpses of enemies, could be consumed or dragged away by other insect units to digestion pools or fleshy carpets, where both the insects themselves and the biomass they brought back were recycled via digestive systems. Soon enough, they would be reincarnated as newly hatched bugs.

The cycle was absurdly short. While it took humans nine months to bear a child, years to grow to adulthood, and additional time for training and equipping soldiers for war, a Blade Bug or Rifle Bug with combat power comparable to that of an ordinary human militia could be hatched in merely ten days. What's more, it didn't require the relatively sophisticated industrial facilities necessary for humans to mass-produce firearms and war equipment. As insects hatched, symbiotic weapons spontaneously emerged alongside them, ready for combat use.

Of course, recycling incurs losses. Bodies that are too damaged in battle and parts that can't be collected in time will be lost.

But having such a mechanism already ensures the quantity of the Insect Swarm.

Not to mention, if they achieve ultimate victory over this world, with flesh carpets covering every inch, all biomass absorbed and sent to digestion pools, ultimately living ships will hatch and ascend, then evolve into massive capillary towers connected to the orbiting Insect Nest Fleet. These are responsible for transporting resources collected from the planet's surface upward. Finally, the newborn Insect Nest

Fleet will leave with a small number of insects and a large amount of biomass, leaving behind a desolated Dead Silence World.

This is one of the secrets of the endless Insect Swarm.

This system is nearly impossible to counter.

Unless all Insect Swarm members are killed off in a short time, preventing them from rehatching. Meanwhile, quickly destroy most of the flesh carpets, hatcheries, and digestion pools… In essence, make their replenishment unable to keep pace with the losses. Only then can the Swarm be crushed and eliminated head-on.

But this method is almost a joke.

Even the Green Skin Orcs can't outlast the Insect Race in terms of attrition.

Unless this is done when the Swarm is still particularly small, otherwise the odds of success are very low.

But the Swarm also has weaknesses—perhaps not purely weaknesses, but strengths as well.

The Swarm has no concept of morale. Green Skin Orcs might face morale collapse in particularly dire situations, but the Swarm will not. These instinct-driven beasts lack even the ability to think, knowing only slaughter and devouring.

The Insect Beasts fight fearlessly, capable of battling to the last soldier, and when needed, they will cover the retreat swiftly and efficiently.

With this advantage comes the downside.

Low-level Insect Beasts lack thinking abilities, naturally requiring higher-level Insect Beasts for command, coordinating the actions within an entire region's Swarm.

These are referred to as Node Creatures.

A Node Creature doesn't have to belong to a specific kind of Insect Beast. Theoretically, any insect, even the lowest level one, can be a Node Creature. As long as it is bestowed with the rights of a Node Creature at hatching, or has a 'brain,' it can undertake this role.

They can downwardly manage a group of indefinite size of the Insect Swarm, acting as the common brain of the Swarm; upwardly, they can communicate with higher-level Node Creatures, taking orders and commands.

When a Node Creature is eliminated, its affiliated Swarm is akin to having its brain removed, losing all cognitive ability, reverting to a horde of disorganized creatures driven by basic instincts of devouring and slaughter. They will eliminate all non-Swarm units around them, then remain bewildered in place, growing hungrier until they start to slaughter each other, eating and drinking their fill, then sitting still… This cycle continues, leading them to self-destruction without external attacks.

Unless a new Node Creature emerges from the hatchery to take control of the out-of-control Swarm.

It is harder to grow a brain than a body; creating a Node Creature takes a considerable amount of time, during which a significant number of insects may starve, kill each other, or be exterminated by human forces. If the hatcheries are destroyed and there are no Insect Nest Fleets to deliver, cutting off the Insect Race's ability to recreate Node Creatures, then the Swarm's crisis can be considered resolved.

Of course, parasitic hosts are not included in this category, as they use the brain of the parasitized. To eliminate them, another method is required.

And now, led by Matins, the joint action between Phoenix and Blood Shark, each deploying a battalion, naturally does not aim to kill the Swarm's active forces, but to eliminate the most crucial Node Creature on this planet named 'Tingzhen IV.'

It's already nearby.

The Think Tanks of the two battalions spent two weeks cross-referencing ground intelligence to roughly locate it. Then, Matins made the decision, and the two battalions descended from the sky, bringing the fire of destruction.

Two hundred elite Interstellar Warriors practically cleared an open space in the core area of the Swarm.

Although insects still came endlessly from all directions, for the time being, the number of enemies in this area has greatly decreased.

With fewer enemies, the two Think Tanks that landed were also less disturbed while searching for the precise location of that most important Node Creature.

Meanwhile, the Interstellar Warriors, under Matins' command, partly formed a defensive formation to protect the Think Tanks; the rest spread out to slaughter more Swarm creatures.

The entire process wasn't overly difficult. The immense Swarm came in waves, and the Interstellar Warriors killed them wave after wave. Amidst the flying flesh and blood, bodies of insects piled up everywhere, and as time slowly passed, more and more high-grade Insect Beasts began appearing in scale. Groups of warrior bugs charged behind the cover of cannon fodder, instantly surrounding a squad of Blood Sharks with over twenty of them.

Yet, after a fierce bout of flesh and blood, numerous cannon fodder, over twenty warrior bugs, and even an elite large-sized one were all chopped down. The Blood Sharks only lost two.

Then, a group of Sky Ghost Insects attacked. These winged flight units, with torsos the size of young bulls, rained down machine gun-like blasts from the sky.

Several Blood Sharks pulled out sniping blast bomb guns with long barrels and scopes, firing shot after shot, taking down the Sky Ghost Insects.

The variety of enemies increased, numbers began to swell, and the Interstellar Warriors faced rising pressure, with casualties gradually appearing.

But overall, they were still far from the point of being overwhelmed.

At this moment, the Think Tanks' search yielded results.

As soon as the report reached Matins' hands, he immediately commanded the entire army to launch a strategic assault on the target location.

Despite the five-kilometer distance and obstruction by the Insect Swarm, the Interstellar Warriors, with their capabilities, would crash through in merely twenty or thirty minutes.

Their assault direction alarmed the node organism.

Finally, it stopped hesitating, prioritizing escape over the destruction of the Interstellar Warriors.

Simultaneously, the aerial units that had only been harassing from above initiated fierce dives, synchronizing with the ground swarm in a full-scale counterattack.

A Blood Shark Think Tank suddenly unleashed its Spiritual Energy, sending an invisible wave in a semi-circular arc sweeping through the air. A large batch of insectoid flying units was knocked away.

The units weren't killed—the Think Tank was clearly experienced.

Killing enemies is arduous, but for aerial units far weaker than ground ones, targeted strikes to cripple wings or destroy flight organs can neutralize threats more efficiently.

The Phoenix warriors and Blood Sharks fought side by side—Phoenix warriors led to crush masses of enemies; Blood Sharks periodically accelerated outside the formation to eliminate high-threat units, while retreating inside to snipe targets with pinpoint firepower as support.

Their advance even outpaced the node organism's escape!

Matins' hawk-like eyes were astoundingly perceptive, sensing the panic of the node organism. The chaos within the swarm wasn't a random frenzy but rather that of mindless disarray. The organism was desperately trying to break free from the battlefield's constraints, attempting to flee into deeper hive depths.

Ultimately, the monstrosity was intercepted.

Facing the Interstellar Warriors, it revealed its terrifying true form: a towering six-meter predator with immense power. Its grotesque alien head opened into rows of sharp fangs, with six pairs of predator eyes scattered across its head, ensuring precise enemy tracking. Eight forelimbs armed with various weapon types, massive recurved hind legs facilitating rapid movement, and a long, barbed tail trailing behind—all turned it into a creature of pure lethality.

Its appearance was utterly horrifying!

At this moment, the Insect Nest Tyrant finally realized escape was futile. It turned its colossal body, radiating despair and wrath, leading an elite squad of insect beasts charging aggressively at Matins.

The swarm surged forth like a tide, but against the firepower of the Interstellar Warriors, they were no more than suicidal ants. The cooperation between Phoenix warriors and Blood Sharks was impeccable—their tactical synergy seamless, as if they'd been battling side-by-side for years under identical training.

To some degree, that wasn't entirely wrong; the Blood Shark Sect's squad mainly consisted of new recruits drawn from the Alliance through blood taxes.

Despite merely half a year within the battle group, those rookies distinguished themselves with an astonishing level of performance, albeit only on simulation ranges. By the Blood Shark Sect's standards, growth isn't complete without baptism by the life-and-death struggles of real battlefields.

This didn't bother Matins, though. When Blood Sharks insisted on sending such a team for joint missions, he didn't complain about getting mere rookies; rather, he felt relieved.

These Blood Sharks… how to put it—they seemed like Phoenix warriors specializing in different areas.

Each bore distinct bloodlines, their Genetic Seeds shaping contrasting styles and techniques, yet their core spirit was strikingly unified—fighting for the Alliance. These quiet, young Blood Sharks, with full morale, eagerly followed Matins' commands.

Besides, rookie or not, Matins knew their capability was unquestionable—on par with experienced Blood Shark veteran squads.

If given veteran Blood Sharks instead, surprisingly, they wouldn't be as effective as these rookies.

Under Matins' orders, the Interstellar Warriors adopted defensive stances. Matins himself stood prominently at the forefront, ready to confront their leader head-on.

Each step of the Insect Nest Tyrant resonated through the ground, its antennae thrashing as if attempting to tear apart the sky. Following it, a pack of savage elite insect beasts with eyes of cold instinct and burning hunger surged forward.

Two armies faced each other, forging a battlefield of inevitable death.

While the Interstellar Warriors clashed against elite Insect Nest Guards and warrior bug formations, Matins personally advanced to confront the Tyrant. In his grip, the Phase Sword glowed a ghostly green—a blade forged from pure energy, sharp enough to slice through all matter.

The Tyrant roared deafeningly with its wide maw, while Matins wordlessly countered, his decisive actions speaking louder than words. Navigating the battlefield at lightning speed, he evaded each of the Tyrant's attacks, each agile dodge marking opportunities for his Phase Sword to strike.

The battle was fierce and merciless; every strike from the Tyrant possessed the force to obliterate all in its path. Yet Matins narrowly escaped each assault, wielding a swordsmanship of devastating ferocity—every swing severing chunks of the Tyrant's flesh.

Finally, in a perfectly timed strike, Matins lunged with precision—his Phase Sword slicing through the Tyrant's shell, embedding into its vital core. The Tyrant's massive frame convulsed violently, collapsing as it released a final anguished cry before crumbling completely.

Standing over the Tyrant's corpse, Matins' breath was visibly uneven.

The Insect Nest Tyrant was no trivial opponent; it had records of single-handedly defeating Battle Group Champions and Battle Group Leaders in duels.

Matins himself bore several injuries, the most severe being a brutal strike from the Tyrant's barbed tail.

Fortunately, Matins possessed not only champion-level combat prowess but also elite equipment, ensuring ultimate victory was his.

With the fall of the node organism, the swarm abruptly lost its cohesion, scattering aimlessly. Stripped of coordinated strategy, the swarm's numbers remained, but their menacing precision was now drastically diminished.

Chapter 607, Busy Saving the World

After eliminating the Insect Nest Tyrant that served as the node biological creature, the remaining bugs still besieged Matins and his group.

However, beasts relying solely on instinct to fight, no matter how fierce, posed significantly less of a threat.

Once the Interstellar Warriors cleared out the nearest enemies, there were no more monsters coming their way.

No commands, and no capacity for independent thought—what else could one expect?

Soon, two transport ships appeared in the sky and took the Interstellar Warriors away.

Moments later, the firepower from orbit rained down, blanketing the entire area.

This served not only to exterminate the Insect Swarm that had lost its commander but also to cleanse the massive hatchery nests in the region.

…

Back aboard the starship, Matins instructed someone to draft the battle report, which needed to be sent to Governor Gu later. Meanwhile, he established contact with Yeerma Youwin.

Though Matins was now the overall commander of the Thistle Muster Star Field's war zone, in charge of an Alliance Fleet, hundreds of millions of Alliance Army troops, the Defense Armies of various worlds in the Thistle Muster Star Field, and the Blood Shark Battle Group—at least in theory—all of these forces fell under his command. However, managing other forces was one thing; when it came to Youwin, Matins had to tread carefully and could not truly treat him as a subordinate.

The reality was indeed so.

The Blood Shark Battle Group operated as a relatively independent combat force. In fact, Youwin's main force was not even nearby but en route to another critically endangered planet.

The two men briefly discussed the current situation on Matins' end before exchanging views on the broader strategic developments. Then, Youwin posed a question: "How are those hundred new Blood Sharks performing?"

"Of course, exceptionally well. They are outstanding warriors," Matins replied.

Youwin paused in silence for a moment before asking, "Are all the recruits the Alliance provided of this quality?"

After a moment of thought, Matins answered truthfully, "Yes."

"It's truly… unbelievable," Youwin remarked. "No wonder the Phoenix Battle Group has recovered so quickly."

“The Blood Sharks will recover too,” Matins said. “The addition of three hundred new recruits not only compensates for your combat losses but also resolves previous issues of under-strength units.”

“Indeed, I never thought it would be so easy to replenish troops,” Youwin said. “They’re all good lads—brave, resilient, loyal, and filled with conviction…”

At this point, he swallowed the words he originally wanted to say—”too filled with conviction.”

“At the end of the day, it’s a good thing. As long as you maintain cooperation with the Alliance, the Blood Sharks will continue to thrive,” Matins said.

Youwin couldn’t help but mutter, “But by then, will the Blood Sharks still be the Blood Sharks?”

Matins chuckled lightly and asked, “Do you think the Phoenix Battle Group of today is still the Phoenix of old?”

Before Youwin could respond, Matins continued, “In my eyes, it is. Our Genetic Seeds are being preserved, our battle group’s culture is being preserved, and we are still fighting for humanity and for The Emperor. How is that any different from the Phoenix of the past?”

Youwin fell silent, unable to argue.

Changing the subject, he asked, “Where is Commander Gu’s fleet now?”

“The latest intelligence suggests they should be arriving at Wuqi soon,” Matins replied. He then took the opportunity to make a request: “We still need to accelerate our progress. There are some worlds you can leave to others. The Blood Sharks’ primary mission remains to block the passageway to the Princess Star Domain as soon as possible. The vanguard fleet has detected signs of enemy forces coming through from the Princess Star Domain into Thistle Muster. The intelligence is still being confirmed, but there’s a possibility it could be a traitor battle group.”

“The Governor has taken most of the main forces, leaving us with limited strength and too many chaotic worlds dragging us down. Our burden is still heavy. If a traitor battle group indeed enters the Thistle

Muster Star Field, we need to intercept them at a suitable location. Otherwise, much of our work will be undone."

Youwin listened silently before replying, "Understood, don't worry. But relying solely on the Blood Sharks may not be enough. You need to resolve issues quickly and catch up soon."

"I will," Matins assured.

…

After ending the call, Matins once again turned his attention to the battlefield at hand.

Garden IV.

Garden IV was one of the two hundred-plus worlds in the Thistle Muster Star Field already captured by the Alliance, and it was among the worst situations.

A rough estimate suggested there were more than one billion Insect Beasts on the planet's surface; meanwhile, a Cult of parasitic-infection hosts had virtually supplanted the planetary rulers, taking control of over 70% of cities and major settlements. Under their domain, they maintained order in the cities and continually hosted various religious ceremonies, claiming that only by worshiping their 'god' could salvation be attained.

These so-called gods were either entirely fabricated or, more often, grotesque imitations using The Emperor's image.

The latter posed a certain degree of deception.

In truth, these religious rituals were merely a means to infect more people.

The parasitic infection operated differently from traditional viruses. Its core purpose was controlling thoughts rather than merely causing illness. According to Imperial research on Insect Race parasites, their infection method involved special Spiritual Energy techniques unique to the Insect Race.

Only through what appeared to be religion—a group-based Spiritual Energy infection—could humans be effectively infected, persuading them to 'sincerely' believe in the so-called god.

Whether it was a fabricated entity or the Four-Armed God Emperor, the infected would begin to fully devote themselves to such beliefs. Simultaneously, their physical bodies would start undergoing changes: skin tone, teeth, skull shape, additional limbs…

As for the so-called salvation or Heaven?

Oh, that's real enough.

The Insect Race's digestion pools, of course.

But before entering the digestion pools, they'd still remain busy spreading their religion and fueling their 'revolutions.'

Garden IV had an estimated pre-war population of 4.5 billion, qualifying it as an industrially advanced civilization. Currently, it is estimated that about 40% of the population, roughly 1 billion, remain under Cult control.

This figure fluctuates because, during the brief six-month outbreak, roughly 2 billion lives were lost on this world alone.

The remaining approximately 1.5 billion individuals are scattered across the planet in various ways. Among them exists a barely functional resistance force, though corruption from the Cult exists within its ranks too. If not for their connection with the Alliance, these resistance bases likely would not have lasted long under the triple threat of the Insect Swarm, the Cult, and internal corruption.

The Alliance remained determined to reclaim this world.

The 2.5 billion living souls were the primary reason. Even within the Cult's grip, the billion-strong population was not entirely unsalvageable. Only about 10–20% of them were genuinely infected. If left unchecked, all would eventually succumb to corruption, but this had not yet occurred.

Secondly, saving this industrialized planet would provide a significant boost in manpower and industrial output, playing a crucial role in the wars to come.

These factors, stemming from local conditions alone, ruled out the possibility of employing an Extinction Order technique.

On a broader scale, the use of an Extinction Order would have massive political repercussions.

Criticisms from the Central Empire, investigations by the Tribunal—those would be the lesser consequences. Destroying a world via the Extinction Order would make other worlds in the Thistle Muster Star Field hesitant and mistrusting. If the response to any major Insect threat is annihilation, Cults in nearby worlds would gain fertile ground for recruitment and expansion. Consequently, it would be much harder for the Alliance to subdue these planets later with swift and decisive action.

Nonetheless, being the overall commander of the Star Domain's military efforts, Matins couldn't stay on Garden IV indefinitely.

Still, the planet's situation had seen an initial breakthrough.

The largest node biological creature on the planet had been destroyed, which meant that the Insect Swarm had lost its ability to coordinate on a unified scale.

Sure, there were still some lower-tier node biological creatures, but they lacked both sufficient authority and intellectual capacity. They could only control their immediate sub-swarms. This meant that when human forces launched their counterattacks, targeting a specific sub-swarm, other swarms wouldn't realize it—or if they did, they wouldn't coordinate reinforcements. Those lower-tier nodes could only command their respective insect units, and they would operate based solely on pre-determined objectives, without enlarging the scale of the conflict or exhibiting strategic initiative.

This would remain the case until a new planet-scale node biological creature emerged, capable of reuniting and guiding the disparate swarms.

Humanity's task, therefore, was to prevent the emergence of such a creature while continuously eliminating Insect Swarm numbers until they were fully eradicated.

In addition to exterminating the Insect Swarm, their other critical objective was to liberate Cult-controlled territory, reclaiming the population. By stopping further infection and freeing those enslaved by the Cult, this population could rejoin the production force and form local armies.

In summary, the challenges on Garden IV were far from fully resolved.

But Matins no longer had the luxury to remain here.

Fifty Phoenix warriors would stay behind to continue the task.

Assisting them would be three Alliance Army group armies, totaling 60 million warriors.

The overall command would be handed to an Alliance lieutenant general.

As for Matins himself, he had to head to the next crisis-ridden world.

His itinerary included four worlds that required his immediate personal oversight to resolve crucial issues.

Once those worlds were stabilized, the rest would be left to the Alliance Army and Navy Task Forces, with instructions to mobilize local forces for defense.

At most, four units would be left behind, on duty to put out fires.

As for Matins himself, he would lead six other units and urgently regroup with the Blood Sharks.

The enemy forces advancing from the Princess Star Domain were not to be underestimated. Protecting everything they had gained in the Thistle Muster Star Field meant he couldn't allow those traitors allied with the Insect Swarm to wreak havoc.

Greater battles awaited him.

A month later, intelligence about this enemy force was confirmed.

The bad news: it was indeed a traitor battle group.

The good news: it wasn't the Ironclad.

Chapter 608: Advancing on Alfonso

Gu Hang, who was currently en route to the Alfonso Star Domain, had also received the news.

The Alliance's ultimate strategy was still to engage on both fronts.

The situation in the Thistle Muster Star Field was simply too shocking, and Gu Hang was deeply concerned.

What would the state of the Alfonso Space Domain be? Although it was never part of the Ironclad's occupation zones and had always been the territory of the Sect of Mechanics, the problem lay in the fact that the Alfonso Sect had been allies of the Ironclad for over a century.

Due to the unique nature of the Sect of Mechanics, they were relatively independent. Moreover, although the members of the Sect of Mechanics could still be considered human, the higher their rank, the less human their physical form appeared. Additionally, regardless of these traits, they were, after all, a religious organization, worshipping the God of All Machines—a being considered one with the Divine Emperor…

For a variety of reasons, objectively speaking, the corruption within the Alfonso Star Domain might be relatively limited.

But that didn't mean there weren't problems.

The Great Sage Waluk, the highest leader of the Alfonso Sect, was, unfortunately, the very individual who first came into contact with the Queen's larvae and personally conducted experiments on them.

At a time when the Dove Faction within Alfonso seemed on the verge of gaining the upper hand, he suddenly declared his stance with brutal decisiveness, even going so far as to take down the high-ranking Sage Sebastian Moro. This left no doubt about where he stood.

He was the greatest traitor.

Under his influence, even though the Sect of Mechanics had objective conditions to better resist corruption, the problem of having a leader actively causing trouble could not be overlooked.

The dire state of the Thistle Muster Star Field struck fear into Gu Hang. He did not want the Alfonso Star Domain to suffer the same fate, especially since it still hosted three Founding Worlds. Such invaluable assets—if they were destroyed by the insectoids, it would be a devastating loss.

What? Those are the Alfonso Sect's assets?

That's irrelevant. Governor Gu is a benevolent man and cannot stand to see major imperial properties destroyed.

Thus, he acted quickly. Once the general situation in the Thistle Muster Star Field was mostly stabilized, he immediately led the Alliance Main Fleet back to the Proudclaw Cosmos and then moved directly toward the Alfonso Star Domain, all to preserve those three Founding Worlds of Alfonso as much as possible.

He also brought along Sebastian Moro. As a Founding General, Moro held considerable prestige within Alfonso, even considered the leader of the Dove Faction. If he reappeared to reveal Waluk's

experiments—betraying the God of All Machines and seeking to turn the sect members from machine-men into insectoid abominations—it was likely to draw a significant number of people to the Alliance's side.

Of course, there was also the possibility that the machine-men themselves didn't care much whether they had mechanical bodies or insectoid ones. After all, genetic and biological technologies were widely accepted. But the problem was that turning into insectoids would also cost them their minds.

Without the ability to conduct research or worship the God of All Machines, such a transformation was unthinkable.

Beyond the differences between life and death, following the Alliance's "Return to Loyalty" movement offered the Dove Faction a clear advantage: they could legally seize the Hawk Faction's wealth and technologies.

Granted, when faced with overwhelming disparities in power, that might not be feasible. However, with the Alliance providing strong external support, their courage—and ambitions—could grow substantially.

The Dove Faction within the Alfonso Sect already had countless reasons to go head-to-head with the Hawk Faction. Once Gu Hang's Alliance Main Fleet entered the Alfonso Star Domain and Sage Moro rallied the Doves with his call to arms, there was a significant chance of seeing the Doves rise in rebellion.

Gu Hang wasn't fantasizing. This strategy had the backing of Moro's guarantees and the Alliance's intelligence analysis and assessments.

So, there was no reason to delay.

Of course, the Thistle Muster Star Field couldn't be ignored either.

Nearly the entire Phoenix Battle Group was left behind, with Matins appointed as the commander for the battles in the Thistle Muster Star Field. The Blood Shark forces, acting as allied troops, were tasked with full cooperation.

Additionally, in terms of warships, the “Firebath Nova” battleship, along with the “Furious Owl” and “Winged Flight” battlecruisers, were also left behind, placed under Matins’ command.

Combined with the Blood Shark flagship “Ghost Evil Shark” and the Phoenix flagship “Burn Feather,” two combat freighters, they now had a formidable fleet of five capital ships.

This fleet was already quite substantial. Except for the “Firebath Nova” battleship, which might show some sluggishness in action, the other four ships were capable of swift and flexible maneuvers critical for special combat missions.

Incidentally, the Phoenix flagship, the so-called “Burn Feather,” was originally the Fury Flame Battle Group’s flagship—”Triumphant Flame.” During the war, the Alliance seized this combat freighter, and after repairs, it was now fully operational.

Conventional human navies could never fully harness the unique capabilities of an interstellar warrior’s combat freighter, barely managing to operate it. Thus, Gu Hang had simply reassigned it to the Phoenix Group as their flagship.

Five capital ships, along with over 180 additional vessels of various sizes, composed a fleet of considerable strength.

The presence of two fully-manned battle groups ensured that their elite forces would not lag behind.

Even if an Ironclad main fleet emerged from the Princess Star Domain, it was expected that Matins’ forces could at least retreat and ensure their own survival, if not claim a victory.

The remaining ships, however, accompanied Gu Hang.

As for the interstellar warriors by Gu Hang’s side, he didn’t lack for them.

The “New Torch” and “Fury Flame” Chapters, for instance, were now following him.

Both battle groups had surrendered to the Alliance on the Phantom Moon and were sentenced to Atonement Expeditions of 100 and 200 years, respectively. The verdict bore the joint signatures of the Flash Judgement Court and Gu Hang, and after being reported to Holy Terra, it became official.

Indeed, some in Holy Terra argued that these traitors deserved execution and demanded that Gu Hang eliminate them all.

But Gu Hang couldn't care less.

Reporting to them was out of courtesy; if they wanted to make it difficult, Gu Hang would simply ignore them.

Thus, the two Atonement Battle Groups joined Gu Hang's operations.

And they were both fully staffed.

Though created from seeds of "subpar infinite warriors," whose main flaw lay in limited potential—the proportion of Sergeant-level Warriors they could produce was minimal, to say nothing of elite champions whose numbers in these groups rarely exceeded twenty per Chapter. In comparison, the Phoenix fielded 100 to 200 champions per Chapter, making any comparison absurd.

Even when ostensibly placed on the same level, these new warriors couldn't match the combat prowess of the Phoenix or Blood Shark forces.

But that didn't matter—they weren't leagues apart.

Against non-interstellar warrior enemies, the difference was negligible.

The only downside was that achieving the same battle results would cause higher casualties.

But Gu Hang didn't mind that.

Although Gu Hang had already led the main force to the Alfonso Star Domain, that didn't mean he didn't care about the situation in Thistle Muster.

He had analyzed in advance that Ironclad likely didn't have spare strength to intervene in the Thistle Muster conflict.

Ironclad's main forces were still stationed on the Western Line; that was the primary battlefield, whether during the previous Phoenix-dominated era or the current Otaubis-dominated era.

Of course, just because their main forces weren't present didn't mean Ironclad would entirely disregard the Southern Line.

But even within the Southern Line, there were distinctions. Although the Thistle Muster Star Domain was near the Princess Star Domain, its internal situation had already descended into chaos due to the corruption brought by the Insect Swarm—the entire region was a chaotic mess. The Alliance's forces were bogged down here.

While it was a strategic choice by the Alliance, objectively speaking, the troops led by Matins barely had the ability to launch an offensive against the Princess Star Domain. They were already struggling with suppressing and addressing the internal problems of the Thistle Muster Star Domain, lacking the manpower and forced to stretch their forces across numerous fronts.

By comparison, the Alliance's military actions against the Alfonso Star Domain posed a far greater threat.

The interstellar warrior units participating in this campaign consisted of the two Atonement Battle Groups formed by defeated forces. In principle, their morale should be low and their ranks incomplete. However, these were still battle groups. Moreover, the Alliance's main fleet was dispatched, featuring numerous ships, large vessels among them, led personally by Gu Hang. Their offensive intent was significantly more proactive.

The importance of the Alfonso Star Domain itself was also much higher. Even if it were entirely devoured by the Insect Swarm, the Founding World would still hold immense strategic significance. Letting this territory fall into Gu Hang's hands would dramatically boost the Alliance's war potential.

When it came to the threat to the Princess Star Domain, the Alfonso Star Domain provided a direct route to the Princess's territory.

If Ironclad were to strongly intervene in the Southern Line's battle, whether by reinforcing their defenses or launching proactive strikes, Alfonso Star Domain would undoubtedly be the better target. It wouldn't be worthwhile to launch extensive operations targeting Thistle Muster Star Domain.

Precisely for this reason, Gu Hang was more concerned about the prospect of a major battle in the Alfonso Star Domain. To prepare for this possibility, aside from the 2,000 personnel from the two Atonement Battle Groups, he also brought an additional 1,000 warriors from the "Shadow" Battle Group, created using the Phoenix Gene. They could be considered akin to another Phoenix Battle Group, possessing extraordinary strength.

Of course, it would be ideal if he didn't have to deploy them. However, Gu Hang suspected that such a scenario was unlikely.

He had already found reference to a battle group named the "Yellow Springs Gull" in historical records.

Initially, he thought locating one of these lost battle groups would be simple, but he soon discovered some challenges. The main issue was the scarcity of Phoenix subgroups. Although pretending to be Phoenix descendants wasn't always necessary, sometimes the warriors of the Phoenix lineage exhibited characteristics resembling the Phoenix itself. To avoid unnecessary complications, it was naturally easier to choose a lost Phoenix subgroup.

Additionally, the battle group needed to be categorized as "missing" rather than officially documented as annihilated. Otherwise, it would be hard to explain how they suddenly "came back to life," making the story harder to rationalize.

Another factor was ensuring that this "missing" group wouldn't resurface unexpectedly. Avoid situations like the Blood Shark battle group, which wandered outside the Empire's borders for an extended period only to return later—such conflicts would be disastrous.

After much deliberation, he settled on the "Yellow Springs Gull."

Seven hundred years ago, this group had disappeared during a war against the Chaos Demons. The Yellow Springs Gull suffered devastating losses, and the last three ships, possibly carrying 300 warriors, were swallowed by the twisted Subspace vortex unleashed by horrific Chaos Spells.

In theory, being swallowed by Subspace didn't necessarily mean complete doom, especially for a fleet of three ships. If the Star Realm protective field were activated, the ships could navigate within Subspace—getting lost still constituted navigation. With some luck, they might find a route connecting back to the physical universe and emerge.

In practice, however, survival was exceptionally difficult. Finding a route within Subspace was inherently challenging, not to mention that they had been thrust into it during a battlefield encounter, forced in by Chaos Spells. Most likely, as soon as they entered Subspace, countless Chaos Demons would relentlessly attack their ships.

Even if they managed to fight their way through the encirclement and locate a return path, they wouldn't know when—or where—they would emerge from Subspace.

Their chances of returning to the Empire's light were slim.

Seven hundred years of silence was sufficient evidence.

Pretending to be the Yellow Springs Gull presented another challenge: their armor and insignias. Without accurate design schematics, physical samples, or even visual references, the only recourse was descriptions in text—dark red and dusky yellow gradients for their colors. The chestplate was described as dusky yellow, gradually transitioning outward until the hands, feet, helmet peak, and shoulder armor edges shifted to dark red. The chest bore the regular Imperial Eagle insignia, while the shoulders featured a seagull head adorned with a red spider lily-shaped crest.

The textual description seemed detailed enough, but in practice, execution proved problematic. The gradient's precise degree, the emblem's intricate details—all posed challenges.

Seven centuries had passed; few living witnesses had seen the original Yellow Springs Gull—although some still existed. If the imitation failed to match the original, it would be at risk of being exposed.

Nevertheless, this was the plan with the lowest risk.

He decided to proceed. If issues arose… they could be solved as they came.

The fabricated story went like this: “After drifting through Subspace for hundreds of years, recently finding their way back to the physical realm, and traversing the Dark Outer Territories for years before returning, the Yellow Springs Gull firmly accepted the summons of Imperial Commander Gu Hang, joining the war effort without hesitation to counter Ironclad’s rebellion.”

Chapter 609_2

As for why they were lost for hundreds of years, going from three hundred people to a thousand… of course, it was because during those years navigating the Dark Outer Domain, they encountered some human worlds, supplemented their numbers, and preserved the Genetic Seed Bank of the Chapter fairly well.

For more detailed matters, the clerks of the Alliance will concoct a very reliable history. Though unprovable, it’s equally irrefutable.

That’s enough.

Overall, the combat strength Gu Hang acquired from Alfonso is quite sufficient.

However, before he reached the Alfonso Star Domain, news came of a defector Chapter from the Thistle Muster Star Field. Initially somewhat concerned, he later learned this Chapter was named the ’Spear of the Dragon King’ and its bloodline stemmed from the founding legion, the Giant Dragon Legion.

Coincidentally, the Alliance’s Intelligence Department had some analysis concerning this Chapter.

The Spear of the Dragon King Chapter was also a group originally stationed in the Spiderweb Domain, having quite amicable relations with the Iron Armor, frequently aiding each other. When the Iron Armor rebellion first broke out, they were bewildered, even confusedly considering the Iron Armor’s statements reasonable—that indeed Holy Terra was being nonsensical, that the Iron Armor Battle Group

was the persecuted party, hoping to fight as a means to foster peace, to help Iron Armor clear their grievances.

They weren't even that opposed to Holy Terra!

Unlike the New World Torch, they hadn't engaged in any backstabbing, massacres on battlefields or such actions. On the contrary, this Chapter still maintained quite a good relationship with civilians, holding a decent reputation.

Once embroiled in the war, their battles were somewhat chaotic. Eventually, they couldn't stop themselves as records show multiple activities on the Western Front, fiercely fighting against the Battle Nuns of the Blood Roses.

But as the war progressed, warriors of the Spear of the Dragon King gradually began to realize.

No, this rhythm is… a deathmatch, fundamentally not the mere internal military conflict they initially thought.

Under such circumstances, the Spear of the Dragon King started to waver.

Especially after the onset of infestation corruption, heavily propagated by the Alliance and the Empire, their hesitation grew even larger.

Several times they volunteered to suppress the infestation corruption, only to be rejected by Humphrey Paolo, after which they began to act on their own.

Humphrey Paolo simply transferred them away.

This time, arriving at the Thistle Muster Star Field was not on anyone else's orders, but their own doing.

Coming to surrender?

Not really.

They just heard of fierce fighting by the Alliance in the south, and with nothing else to do, they decided to come and see if they could guard.

And why does Gu Hang understand the Spear of the Dragon King's motives and thoughts so clearly?

That's because an operative from the Alliance Foreign Intelligence Bureau, a woman named 'Amanda', is acting alongside the fleet of the Spear of the Dragon King.

In fact, in the latest report, Ms. Amanda applied, hoping for enough negotiation authority to promise things beyond her original capability to win over the Spear of the Dragon King.

Precisely, she wanted to induce the Spear of the Dragon King to defect at the critical moment!

The Foreign Affairs Bureau supported its agent's idea; Director Chen Shu sent a letter to Gu Hang, believing the success probability is quite high and the value very substantial.

Gu Hang didn't think long and replied:

"Yes."

This affair indeed bears no cost.

If successful, not only would it avoid battle, but also earn a Chapter in return, an enormous joy.

If failed, losing a spy already placed at the enemy's core, though regretful, remains a bearable loss.

So why not?

…

Amanda herself felt her experiences were somewhat too legendary.

Her initial mission was merely to cautiously navigate through the vast cosmos on a small craft, head to the Western Front to try gather intelligence.

Many agents like her were deployed by the various intelligence agencies of the Alliance.

It was nothing more than a small-scale traveler, equipped with anti-surveillance features.

Such a craft might be only eighty meters long, comparatively minute against the Star Domain Battleships, often several kilometers, even tens of kilometers long.

It wasn't even as large as some substantial aerospace fighters.

Within such a small frame, nearly all space and energy were devoted to the equipment needed to traverse the Star Realm Tunnel, and a relatively powerful engine, along with anti-surveillance gear.

Only such a craft could facilitate the agents' work.

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So why not?

…

Amanda herself felt her experiences were somewhat too legendary.

Her initial mission was merely to cautiously navigate through the vast cosmos on a small craft, head to the Western Front to try gather intelligence.

Many agents like her were deployed by the various intelligence agencies of the Alliance.

It was nothing more than a small-scale traveler, equipped with anti-surveillance features.

Such a craft might be only eighty meters long, comparatively minute against the Star Domain Battleships, often several kilometers, even tens of kilometers long.

It wasn't even as large as some substantial aerospace fighters.

Within such a small frame, nearly all space and energy were devoted to the equipment needed to traverse the Star Realm Tunnel, and a relatively powerful engine, along with anti-surveillance gear.

Only such a craft could facilitate the agents' work.

With this specialized spacecraft, agents could navigate enemy-controlled cosmic space without worrying about being caught.

On one hand, it was fast and nimble, making it difficult to intercept with conventional ships.

On the other hand, and most importantly, it was barely tens of meters long, combined with anti-detection equipment, truly making it vanish without a trace.

Anti-detection equipment aboard normal ships generally doesn't have a significant effect. Those ships are too large, and while it's fine during normal navigation, during Star Realm traversals, if the observing Star Language Tower isn't too rudimentary and if the Star Speaker's abilities aren't entirely subpar, the equipment's usefulness becomes limited. At best, it could delay observation results or cause minor discrepancies in precise positioning.

However, on these specialized agent vessels, the equipment practically renders the ship invisible.

As long as they don't pilot their vessel directly in front of enemy ships, issues generally do not arise.

Even during a Star Realm Tunnel traversal, even if the opposition has checkpoints or even Star Fortresses stationed at the jump point, traversing a "point" isn't straightforward. In reality, these points span a range that could encompass seven to eight stars at its smallest or dozens of stars layered together at its largest.

Checkpoints and Star Fortresses cannot cover all possible positions.

If a large ship traverses through, it is bound to be detected; but a small, 80-meter vessel equipped with anti-detection equipment, operating from several stars' distance away, is genuinely difficult to pinpoint.

Of course, nothing is absolute.

Several of Amanda's colleagues got discovered during such traversals.

However, getting discovered doesn't necessarily mean getting captured. These nimble, compact, and fast agent ships are not built for combat, but as long as they can put some distance between themselves and the pursuers, the anti-detection systems can typically disrupt the lock and facilitate their escape.

In truth, only a few dozen unlucky agents ever died on the spot; none were ever captured.

Amanda herself faced a few precarious moments but ultimately reached the Western Front safely.

The agent ship could silently infiltrate certain planets with less rigorous defense measures. After all, most planets lacked surveillance systems capable of covering all orbital regions. By piloting the ship covertly and leveraging stealth functionality, moving at relatively low speeds to enter the atmosphere, finding an uninhabited area to land, activating the camouflaging system, and gathering local materials to conceal the ship, the operation could generally succeed.

There wasn't just Amanda onboard the ship—there were five agents in total, each specializing in different skills, and hailing from disparate departments. Amanda didn't know them personally.

This didn't hinder their shared fate—united on the same rope, reliant on each other. Amanda herself was, in fact, the team leader for this operation.

The five agents began their mission, utilizing advanced Star Language equipment to eavesdrop on Star Language communications; they stopped at key locations on the planet to observe; they attempted to integrate into the local society to gather intelligence…

Upon completing the intelligence collection for a planet, they would retrieve their hidden vessel, depart, and head to the next destination.

This process usually did not take much time. Most worlds hold no major intelligence value—they were simply assessed, documented, and the findings sent back to headquarters.

Amanda's original mission was supposed to lead her to the Magrey Cosmic Domain, where she would collect firsthand intelligence. Otherwise, the Alliance's awareness of Magrey's domain would rely solely on information supplied by the Empire. Beyond questioning the reliability of such data, the lag in timeliness was unacceptable to the Alliance.

It was far better for the Alliance's agents to gather intelligence tailored to their needs.

However, en route, they passed by a planet temporarily occupied by the Spear of the Dragon King. Amanda became intrigued by this battle unit and decided to integrate into the local society, fabricate an identity, and, under this guise, infiltrated the Spear of the Dragon King as it recruited personnel on the planet. She joined as a battle unit servant and civilian consultant.

Her actions carried high risk, but she did not fear. Her four teammates had already departed on the spacecraft, leaving her alone. Even if she failed, it wouldn't expose the others.

Becoming a servant in a Starfighter Battle Group was quite dangerous. Even excluding those groups that disregarded human life entirely, most still showed indifference toward civilians. Attempting to accomplish anything within such groups was challenging. However, Spear of the Dragon King was

different. Its lineage traced back to the Giant Dragon Legion, who respected civilians, much like their parent group. This provided Amanda with an opportunity.

Her fabricated identity was, in truth, quite susceptible to exposure—but, upon thorough analysis, that hardly mattered. As long as she successfully infiltrated the battle group, she would leave the planet soon thereafter. Once exposed, local civilians revealing her would be inconsequential.

Of course, there was also a chance she wouldn't succeed in infiltrating the group. But even so, she possessed far greater advantages than most candidates on the planet. She was, after all, a highly-trained elite agent cultivated by the Alliance, with a proven track record—including having orchestrated the overthrow of a planetary government, with outstanding results.

It wasn't arrogance—it was genuine confidence. She asked herself: on this ordinary, electrically-powered civilization, how many elites like her could they possibly produce?

Chapter 610, For Whom Does the Dragon Spear Fight?_2

Throughout the entire Alliance, she is a rare talent!

And indeed, she was successfully selected. Armed with extensive knowledge, former experience working for the Empire Commerce Guild, and traversing countless worlds, she had a broad perspective and profound insights that managed to capture the attention of a captain within the Chapter. She shed the usual status of mortals serving as Chapter attendants and, as a consultant, was frequently summoned by the upper echelons of the Spear of the Dragon King.

Initially, most consultations revolved around local customs and the cultures of nearby worlds. For these matters, Amanda answered fluently—the intelligence she had gathered from various planets on her journey played a reliable and crucial role at this stage.

Later, her profound understanding of the prevailing circumstances, particularly her exceptional familiarity with the Alliance, made her stand out even more. The Interstellar Warriors were astonished to discover that this consultant not only provided intelligence but often offered highly valuable opinions on the state of affairs and on problems that puzzled the Interstellar Warriors.

They began consulting Amanda on more matters. While they did not strictly follow her advice, they found it worthwhile to listen, as it often sparked new ideas.

During this process, Amanda gained considerable insights into the Spear of the Dragon King.

She unraveled the reasons and consequences behind their involvement in this war;

She comprehended the Chapter's history and understood its culture. These two factors were critical, as they enabled Amanda to grasp the mindset of the Spear of the Dragon King.

As a result, Amanda could perceive the dilemma they faced and the internal struggles within their hearts.

The Spear of the Dragon King never intended to be part of this war. From the very beginning, they merely sought to mediate, assist Ironclad, and engage with the Empire in 'reasoned dialogue.' They had never intended to engage in a life-or-death battle against the Empire's myriad forces that sought to annihilate them.

Simultaneously, Ironclad completely concealed their use of the Insect Swarms from them. In fact, the mindset of the Spear of the Dragon King also shifted as the incidents of swarm corruption unfolded across regions.

At first: 'Large-scale swarm corruption is impossible; this must be slander maliciously aimed at us.'

Later: 'It appears to be true, but it couldn't be Ironclad's doing. The threat of the Insect Race is growing; everyone should stop fighting.'

Recently: 'It might have been Ironclad's doing… but that doesn't seem right. What should we do?'

This encapsulates their evolving mindset.

Amanda seized the opportunity.

In reality, the Spear of the Dragon King's voluntary descent southward, without orders, was greatly influenced by Amanda's persuasion.

Along the way, witnessing the horrific aftermath of swarm infestation and noting how Ironclad's main force remained elusive, their mental wavering intensified.

Now, Amanda believed the timing was right.

…

Walking along the pathway toward the throne room of the battleship, Amanda's mind repeatedly weighed the words she was about to say.

Before she knew it, she stood before the imposing, heavy doors.

The Interstellar Warrior who escorted her the entire way stopped in his tracks, turned his head, and hesitated as he said, "Amanda, have you truly thought this through? Once you take this step, there's no going back. I can't predict what the Battle Group Leader will do—he might kill you outright."

The person issuing this warning was Ricardo Lazio, captain of the fourth company of the Spear of the Dragon King.

Amanda had already disclosed her identity to this captain.

He was the target she had carefully chosen. Among the Chapter's upper echelons, Ricardo was the most wavering. From the very beginning, he opposed siding with Ironclad in defying the Empire. Moreover, he was likely the most soft-hearted of all the Spear of the Dragon King.

She was confident that there was an eighty percent chance Ricardo would not betray her and might even actively aid her, provided she refrained from harming the Spear of the Dragon King—or if she did, he remained unaware.

Indeed, Amanda's assessment proved accurate.

Ricardo did not report her. Moreover, he was deeply interested in establishing contact with the Alliance, believing it to be an opportunity for the Spear of the Dragon King to correct course.

To him, this was a chance to save the entire Chapter. Following Ironclad down an irredeemable path would only lead to inevitable destruction.

Thus, he was willing to assist Amanda in spreading such ideas throughout the Chapter.

The results were remarkable. They managed to sway several individuals. Those who accepted their philosophy occasionally ingrained these thoughts into others, even before the Battle Group Leader of the Spear of the Dragon King, Tai Shichen.

This was one of the reasons Amanda decided now was the time to reveal her hand.

The groundwork had already been laid extensively.

Looking up at Ricardo's troubled face, Amanda revealed a resolute smile: "Of course, I know exactly what I'm doing."

"Sigh… Then I wish you the best of luck."

With that, Ricardo turned around and pushed open the doors.

Amanda nodded slightly, then strode confidently inside.

The master of the 'Dragon Spear,' Tai Shichen, was seated at his exclusive desk. Upon hearing the sound of the door opening, he looked up, saw Amanda, and beamed: "Our all-knowing consultant has arrived, along with dear Ricardo. Greetings to you both."

His demeanor was courteous.

“Battle Group Leader Tai Shichen, good day to you.” Amanda bowed slightly, an expression of respect.

“What brings you here today? Something to share with me?”

“Indeed.” Raising her head again, Amanda said, “I am here on behalf of the Empire Marshal, the Imperial Southern Front General Commander, and Alliance Governor Gu Hang. I implore the Spear of the Dragon King Chapter to halt further advancements and safeguard the safety of the neighboring human worlds. Wait for the arrival of the Alliance Army, who will take over these planets. The Spear of the Dragon King Chapter will then receive a fair trial.”

After hearing this, no matter how mild-mannered Tai Shichen might be, the smile faded from his face.

He sighed: “Sigh… Ms. Amanda, to think you’re a spy for the Alliance is truly unexpected for me.”

Then he paused, his gaze shifting to Ricardo Lazio, who stood behind Amanda like a bodyguard. He asked, “How many of you have aligned with the other side?”

He was clearly no fool.

Ricardo’s demeanor said it all.

For Amanda to show her cards now surely meant she had leverage.

Ricardo looked awkward, opening his mouth to speak but was stopped by Amanda’s raised hand.

Amanda said, “Please don’t misunderstand, this is by no means a rebellion. I harbor no malice whatsoever. If the Battle Group Leader decides to treat me as a spy, I will accept it without contention—execution, if necessary.”

Her statement successfully drew Tai Shichen's gaze back toward her. He responded, "I will do so. Regrettably, Ms. Amanda, you should not have stood before me to confess everything. Now, let me hear what you wish to say before your death."

Despite his threatening words, he made no move.

The fact that Tai Shichen had not immediately executed her reassured Amanda that she was halfway to victory.

"I am indeed a spy. Yet, throughout this time, I have reflected deeply and haven't done anything to betray the Spear of the Dragon King. From mingling with you day and night, I've come to understand thoroughly who you are. You are neither enemies of the Empire nor traitors to humanity, nor have you defied the Emperor."

"On the contrary, to me, each warrior of the Spear of the Dragon King is extraordinary. You are guardians of humanity, companions even; you are passionate, fearless, and steadfast in upholding justice."

"It's precisely because of this that the Spear of the Dragon King must not be broken here."

"If the day ever comes when the Spear of the Dragon King faces extinction, how would you want history to remember you?"

"During Ironclad's grand rebellion, as betrayers of the Emperor, as traitors who fostered atrocities, aiding the cruel Humphrey Paolo in spreading insect hive plague among countless human worlds, as accomplices to the devouring of numerous human worlds, as despicable collaborators with the Insect Race's aliens in consuming humanity?"

"Or as correctors of course who made the right choices, warriors who fought alongside the Alliance to save countless lives from falling victim to the insect scourge, ultimately redeeming your sins?"

"The choice is entirely yours to make. Who does the Dragon Spear fight for?"