Governor 611

Chapter 611, Picking Up a Battle Group for Free

Amanda's eloquence was naturally impressive.

However, in persuading the Spear of the Dragon King to surrender, the key factor wasn't eloquence. It was Amanda's meticulous groundwork and precise grasp of the Spear of the Dragon King's thoughts.

With these preparations complete, the next step was simply to articulate what the Spear of the Dragon King had been thinking but was reluctant to express aloud—or perhaps hadn't fully clarified for themselves—in a crisp and straightforward manner.

Tai Shichen remained silent.

Afterward, Amanda outlined some of the conditions that the Alliance could offer.

Though the Spear of the Dragon King wasn't a primary core rebel group like the 'Iron Fury Stone' triad, nor were they traitorous backstabbers like the New Dawn Torch that severely harmed the Empire, they were, undeniably, guilty of rebellion. This was an indisputable fact that required consequences.

Still, Amanda conveyed Gu Hang's stance to the Spear of the Dragon King: a guilt expedition was inevitable, and forfeiting their home planet was unavoidable.

But with a guarantee:

1. The duration of the guilt expedition would not exceed fifteen years;

2. The guilt expedition could be carried out within the Alliance's territory under the Alliance's guidance;

3. During the guilt expedition, the Alliance would provide sustained support to the Spear of the Dragon King, covering everything from weapons and equipment to cooperative units of Mortal Troops, fleet support, and even new recruit reinforcements—all handled by the Alliance.

With these three conditions, the guilt expedition for the Spear of the Dragon King would be entirely different from what other battle groups subjected to this punishment typically faced.

Other than losing their home planet, it was almost as if nothing had happened.

Additionally, a battle group's home planet fundamentally served as their origin, their base, their place of recuperation, and a significant source for their development resources. But with the Alliance providing full coverage for resources, there was no need to worry.

As for defending the home planet… honestly, if they didn't surrender, could they truly protect their home planet?

On the contrary, by surrendering, they'd have the chance to return with the Alliance and retake their home planet.

After quietly listening to all these conditions, Tai Shichen still did not clarify his stance.

But Amanda knew that the leader of the Spear of the Dragon King battle group was undoubtedly intrigued.

Thinking calmly, this was almost the most favorable treatment the Spear of the Dragon King could hope to receive.

Amanda recognized Tai Shichen's interest because after hearing the conditions, he requested Ricardo Lazio to take him away and imprison him.

His attitude was actually quite clear.

Earlier he had talked about execution, but nothing of the sort was carried out. Instead, Amanda was allowed to finish her speech. Once she was done, execution was no longer mentioned, and Tai Shichen only called for imprisonment—entrusting Ricardo, who had already defected to the Alliance's side, with Amanda's detention…

What else was there to say?

It was merely that Tai Shichen still needed some time to convince himself.

Ricardo felt a sense of relief.

He nodded and 'escorted' Amanda out of Tai Shichen's office, accompanying her to meet with many members of the battle group.

Two days passed, and Tai Shichen remained inactive.

He had yet to make any explicit statement but had also been indifferent as Amanda, who should have been confined and restricted, privately collaborated with Ricardo to network and lobby various company commanders, Sergeant Majors, priests, technical officers, and others within the battle group.

Amanda then decided that she could afford to be bolder.

She went so far as to contact Matins, informing him of the situation and urging him to swiftly dispatch a force to occupy the planet where the Spear of the Dragon King was currently stationed.

Matins was initially bewildered upon receiving the message.

He had been preparing defensively, strategizing how to counter the incoming attack from this rebel battle group in the Thistle Muster Star Field.

In his estimation, it would likely be a fierce battle. While his forces were numerically superior, they had been severely stretched thin. A significant part of his army was scattered across over 200 worlds in the Alliance-occupied Thistle Muster Star Field, suppressing local unrest; numerous ships were allocated to these planets to provide ground support for the land forces. Even the Interstellar Warriors had to spread their units, stationed on the worlds facing the most critical crises. Even if only one or two squads were stationed per planet, limited to areas where Mortal Troops couldn't handle the issues, this still tied down over 1,500 Interstellar Warriors.

The Blood Shark and Phoenix forces totaled only around 2,000 warriors.

This left Matins scrambling for capable forces to fend off the rebels.

Relinquishing control of numerous worlds throughout the Thistle Muster Star Field was something Matins was reluctant to do—particularly the worlds in the most precarious situations. If their defenses were withdrawn, all the previous investments would be undone.

Take, for instance, the operations he personally led to annihilate the planet-level apex organism on Tingzhen IV. While the situation had greatly improved, removing a group or two of its stationed armies or withdrawing the 50 Phoenix stationed there could potentially lead to failing to suppress the Insect Swarm or Cult activity. If that happened, another planet-encompassing apex organism might quietly emerge, undoing all prior efforts.

Matins's original plan was to set layer after layer of defensive lines—using minimal forces in a resolute manner to delay and lengthen the battlefront, looking for opportunities. If the enemy truly advanced deep enough, revealing a critical weakness along the drawn-out battlefront, he'd promptly decide to mobilize forces from various planets for a swift, decisive strike. His hope was to deliver a single devastating blow to the enemy. Even if he couldn't achieve total annihilation, his fallback aim was to inflict severe pain and fear, crippling their ability to attack.

But no matter what, speed is of the essence. The mobilized forces must quickly return to their original battlefield to fulfill the duties that remain unfinished.

In this plan, the delay in the front followed by rapid strikes at the back are both anticipated to involve tough battles.

How many lives will be sacrificed, how much will be paid, and how many worlds occupied by the enemy during the delay will suffer worsening insect swarm disasters due to the lack of suppression?

And now, he's told that none of this needs to be worried about, that the battle hasn't even started on the other side, and they've already surrendered?

All I need to do is go there, and I can occupy it?

The Spear of the Dragon King won't resist?

That Alliance agent named Amanda... is that capable?

She alone can stand against a thousand troops, is that it?

If that's really the case, then of course, it's a cause for celebration.

But as the supreme commander of the Thistle Muster Star Field, entrusted personally by Governor Gu, Matins dared not show the slightest carelessness.

What if Amanda had been deceived?

What if Amanda had been turned against them?

What if the Spear of the Dragon King went back on their word?

...

There were countless potential scenarios.

Matins couldn't risk betting everything on a single move.

But he also wouldn't let excessive caution cause him to miss an opportunity.

He developed a meticulous 'occupation plan.'

First, the main mobile forces were assembled. Five hundred Interstellar Warriors, as well as the flagships of the Phoenix and Blood Shark battle groups, were present. They would march toward the target star system, but not at full speed. Along the way, they would inspect the status of each star system, leaving observation posts and patrolling fleets to ensure safety along the route and avoid enemy ambushes.

The entire main fleet would concentrate its actions to prevent being picked off one by one.

Before entering the target star system, Matins stationed the Blood Sharks in the rear. This group of killing machines wasn't particularly good at communication or diplomacy, and such political and diplomatic phases had little to do with the Blood Sharks. The two hundred Blood Sharks, along with their flagship 'Ghost Evil Shark' under Commander Youwin's leadership, would stay one star system away.

If nothing happened, they could continue their assignments; if something did, they could leverage the Blood Shark Fleet's speed advantage to quickly break into the battlefield and support Matins.

As for Matins himself, he would approach the Spear of the Dragon King as the theater commander and Battle Group Leader, acting as Gu Hang's representative. He would carry out the occupation of the target star system and oversee the disarmament of the Spear of the Dragon King. Following that, everything would wait for further orders from Governor Gu.

Throughout the occupation and takeover of this planet, Matins remained extremely cautious.

The 'Burn Feather' carefully approached the planetary perimeter. Observations showed that the Spear of the Dragon King's Battle Group Fleet hadn't moved a single ship. Their flagship, a combat barge, and all their other vessels, were docked at the Starport.

An Alliance destroyer advanced cautiously and approached the Starport.

No attacks were made.

Fifty Phoenix warriors and over a thousand Navy Marine Corps personnel boarded assault ships and entered the Starport.

They encountered no resistance.

They encountered the Spear of the Dragon King's Interstellar Warriors, who neither attacked them nor even raised their weapons.

The Phoenix warriors, encountering such a scenario for the first time, also maintained a very polite demeanor—though they were entirely surrounded by the numerically superior Dragon Spear Warriors. Just because the Dragon Spears didn't attack didn't mean they couldn't win the fight.

It was at this moment that Amanda came forward. Along with several Dragon Spear company captains, she mediated and convinced the Dragon Spear warriors to lay down their arms, remain peacefully in designated areas, and refrain from taking any actions. Meanwhile, the Phoenix warriors and Marine Corps secured control over the Starport's firepower systems and docked ships.

Simultaneously, they immediately requested reinforcements from Matins.

Controlling those strategic points with just this limited number of troops was far from sufficient.

Matins responded decisively.

At this stage, the chances of a trap were minuscule. Still exercising some caution, he deployed another hundred Interstellar Warriors. However, he committed a much larger portion of elite Marine Corps and army forces.

Not only did he dispatch 10,000 elite Marine Corps personnel, but he also sent over 200,000 army troops in the first wave aboard assault ships into the Starport. Additional second and third waves would follow...

The more forces committed to controlling the key positions of the Starport and several starships, the better.

It also diminished the likelihood of unforeseen reversals.

By the end, the Starport was nearly fully secured. A headcount revealed that there were nine hundred Spear of the Dragon King warriors inside the Starport, all of whom had been completely disarmed.

To show respect, they were not asked to remove their power armor.

Following a thorough safety inspection, no self-destructive explosives or related threats were found within the Starport, eliminating those risks entirely.

Only then did Matins personally lead the remaining Interstellar Warriors to enter the facility. His first priority was to hold a very cordial meeting with the company captains of the Spear of the Dragon King. But before that, he met with Amanda.

Amanda guided him to meet the captains, briefing him quickly on some key issues along the way.

By the time they met, Matins already had an idea of what to say.

He refrained entirely from mentioning words like surrender or betrayal, terms that might provoke the Spear of the Dragon King. Instead, he emphasized their loyalty to the Empire, their service to the Emperor, and how their actions indirectly saved countless lives. The entire Thistle Muster Star Field, with its potentially hundreds of billions of inhabitants, stood to benefit indirectly from their decision.

These words were much more palatable to the Spear of the Dragon King warriors.

No matter how justified their reasons might have been, the essence of their actions—surrendering without a fight—was unmistakable. For Interstellar Warriors, who placed supreme value on honor, this was a shameful act. Only a few dishonorable groups, like the Old New World Torchbearers, would stoop so low.

Reiterating their loyalty to the Empire and humanity as a greater honor effectively mitigated their resentment.

After appeasing the Dragon Spear warriors, Matins learned that the Spear of the Dragon King's leader, Tai Shichen, was still on the planet's surface, accompanied by two hundred Dragon Spear warriors.

The entire force of the Spear of the Dragon King amounted to just 1,100 individuals.

At their peak before the war, their total strength had been 1,400. They believed their actions didn't violate the sacred tenets of the Empire, as 400 of them were reserve recruits meant to replenish the battle group's losses, a routine practice.

But after years of continuous warfare, they had lost 300 warriors and were now down to 1,100.

When Matins descended to the planet's surface to locate Tai Shichen, they were in the middle of an operation.

It was a remarkably well-executed assault against a Cult infestation.

The planet's infestation by insect corruption wasn't particularly severe. Large-scale insect swarms hadn't appeared yet, but parasitic infections were a major problem in densely populated urban centers.

Tai Shichen's team had launched a sudden raid on the local powers colluding with the Cult, eliminating the infected ruler and swiftly destroying the Cult's headquarters, rescuing a large number of civilians.

Matins, after some thought, chose to lead his team to join the battle.

Although the Dragon Spears didn't need assistance, Matins saw this as an opportunity to foster closer relations between the two sides.

Following Amanda's guidance, Matins treated the Spear of the Dragon King more as allied forces rather than surrendered enemies.

In truth, if this were just about surrender, Matins would only solve a potential external threat to the Thistle Muster Star Field.

Furthermore, these 1,100 prisoners—fully equipped Interstellar Warriors—were a tremendous destabilizing factor. Even if they were disarmed and stripped of their power armor, a significant force would be needed to monitor them.

But if they could be smoothly integrated as allies, even if they refused to fight against the Ironclads as turncoats or betrayers, they could still be immensely useful in addressing the insect swarm crises across the Thistle Muster Star Field. This would directly free up manpower from the Phoenix and Blood Shark battle groups.

Matins was working toward this goal.

And Tai Shichen's actions on the planet—attacking the parasitic menace—was, in a sense, making a statement of allegiance.

...

When Gu Hang, far away in another Star Domain, received the news, he couldn't hide his delight.

Another battle group acquired, and for free!

Chapter 612, West Line, North Line

The Spear of the Dragon King restored order and caused a significant impact.

A force composed of 1,100 interstellar warriors, a direct auxiliary army of millions, one combat barge, and six Strike Cruisers forming the Battle Group Fleet constitutes an immense power.

If they continue to antagonize the Alliance, the war in the Thistle Muster Star Field will become grueling. Securing the entire Star Domain would almost be impossible, the suppression of infestations in occupied zones would slow down, countless worlds might remain in ruin for a prolonged period, becoming sustained bleeding points for the Alliance; and untold numbers of lives would indirectly be lost.

Now, not only is the war averted, but the entirety of the Spear of the Dragon King has, under Gu Hang's authority as Commander and in cooperation with Flash Judgement Court, witnessed by Blood Shark and Phoenix Battle Group Leaders, been sentenced to a fifteen-year redemption expedition and immediately started to fight.

The Alliance allowed them to retain all their weapons, equipment, and fleet, only requiring them to hand over their entire Genetic Seed inventory. The Alliance pledged to safeguard these seeds and utilize them to replenish troops for the Battle Group during periods of attrition.

The total number of these seeds amounts to 600.

Currently, Gu Hang already possesses unused Genetic Seeds amounting to 1,200. 600 from the Giant Dragon Legion seeds, and 600 Punisher Legion seeds, originating from the inventory surrendered by the Spear of the Dragon King and retrieved from Furyflame's corpse.

These resources are entirely non-renewable.

Regarding the 600 seeds from Furyflame, Gu Hang momentarily decided against utilizing them. On paper, the number of interstellar warriors he can deploy is already at full capacity, so he figured he'd store them for now—they certainly won't expire anyway.

As for the 600 seeds from the Spear of the Dragon King, Gu Hang resolved to keep his promise and not touch them, fully reserving them for the Spear of the Dragon King's exclusive use.

They have shown considerable cooperation in surrendering and assisting the Alliance by abiding by Matins, the Commander's, directives. As long as they're not asked to directly engage Ironclad, they execute all other missions flawlessly and efficiently, striking everywhere they're ordered.

Given such compliance, Gu Hang takes pleasure in dealing honorably.

However, there's a slight pity—while the Spear of the Dragon King now operates under the Alliance's orders, the system has not recognized them as loyal to Gu Hang. Unlike Phoenix, or Torch of the New World which has completely surrendered and is at Gu Hang's discretion, the Spear of the Dragon King remains independent.

Without system recognition, their Genetic Seeds can't be redeemed, rendering Gu Hang unable to expand the redeemable seed inventory.

But that's not a problem.

Just like Blood Shark, as long as they're fighting under his command, there will be opportunities in the future; there's no need to rush.

After the Spear of the Dragon King's surrender, the situation in the Thistle Muster Star Field abruptly improved.

A new powerful force was introduced to stabilize the domain and enabled Matins to ambitiously extend his strategic plan to encompass the entire Star Domain.

The additional 200-plus planets, which Matins originally planned to tackle gradually, could now be swiftly conquered. He now wields sufficient power to utilize increasingly mature strategies to save worlds.

He is now veritably a true savior; the Thistle Muster Star Field's total 422 worlds are waiting for him to bring salvation.

He even considered extending his efforts into the Princess Star Domain.

But that notion was stopped by Gu Hang.

The situation in the Princess Star Domain is far worse.

Some Alliance agents had been dispatched into the Princess Star Domain, but operations within were increasingly challenging.

The environment within the Star Domain was extremely dire, raising the survival difficulty for agents significantly. The number of agents lost during the intelligence-gathering phase in the Princess Star Domain was multiples higher than that of other deployments.

Whether exposed, brainwashed by the Cult, or infected by parasites—their fate upon encountering adversities never ends well.

Consequently, intelligence gathering within the Princess Star Domain remains the hardest.

Yet, even the scarce information retrieved suggests that every world within the Princess Star Domain is akin to the worst-hit worlds of the Thistle Muster Star Field.

And that's easy enough to imagine.

The Princess Star Domain is Ironclad's stronghold. Humphrey Paolo's ideology has permeated all 550 worlds of the Princess for over 200 years. Here, every planetary government has fully embraced the infestation Cult. Large-scale infections have become uncontrollable. The Insect Swarm has appeared in significant sizes, planetary ecologies are collapsing irreversibly, and the immeasurable planetary resources are being absorbed by the spreading insect Swarm's flesh carpets. On some of the most deteriorated worlds, massive hatchery pools have already spawned bio-organic ships for the swarm!

For this reason, Matins sought to enter the Princess Star Domain, reasoning that making an early move—even rescuing just one world—would be worthwhile.

It would also suppress the emergence of the Insect Swarm.

At least among the Alliance's high-ranking officials, a consensus has essentially been established: an epic war against the genuine Insect Swarm is inevitable.

Saving one world now not only preserves its population and productivity for use but also reduces the portion of the swarm they'll have to contend with later.

On such premises of urgency, the crisis within the Princess Star Domain necessitates intervention. Otherwise, relying solely on limited planetary resistance while their ruling classes intentionally facilitate the infestations, planetary extinction and swarm expansion could occur swiftly.

Chapter 612, West Line, North Line_2

We must act now, or it will be too late!

This was Matins' thought.

Gu Hang agreed with everything he said—except for the last point.

He believed it was already too late.

The Alliance simply lacked the strength to independently intervene in the affairs of the Princess Star Domain. Under current circumstances, preventing further deterioration in the Thistle Muster Star Field was tough enough. Even if they actively entered the Princess Star Domain, how many worlds could they save with their current forces?

Every one of those worlds would be akin to the worst planets within the Thistle Muster Star Field—worlds the Alliance could not handle.

Perhaps some could be salvaged, but what about the presence of Ironclad? Should that not be considered?

Ironclad is known to still have a force of tens of thousands of Interstellar Warriors.

The Bedrock Shield forces numbered three thousand.

Recklessly entering the region would not save many worlds and would likely cost them their own forces as well.

A coordinated advance of armies from three directions would be the only viable solution.

The current situation looked decent, at least on paper.

On the Western Front, after Otaubis led the Solar Fleet, the Solar Auxiliary Army, and several allied battle groups into the Magrey Cosmic Domain, the situation there stabilized.

However, several planets had paid a heavy price. Populations infected by parasites and Cult followers suddenly vanished overnight. Entire surface regions were left as desolate wastelands. Imperial scholars hypothesized that this was the work of the Insect Swarm. Understanding that they couldn't fully "consume" entire worlds before Imperial forces arrived, the Swarm resorted to consolidating and retreating. Any gains they had made would have to be relinquished once the Empire's forces moved in.

Thus, they decisively cut their losses, digesting infected populations and territories, compressing them into basic biomass, and then taking it all with them. The mess they left behind was the Empire's problem to deal with.

It was nauseating.

Yet, from an objective perspective, E'er Ganglong Battle Group Leader's operation on the Western Front was highly significant. Ironclad was now reduced to "shearing the sheep" instead of outright draining blood. Without such aggressive actions, they might have simply pillaged these worlds completely.

In fact, similar "shearing" tactics had been observed in the Thistle Muster Star Field.

Matins' fleet, primarily composed of agile fast-response ships, intercepted a parasite-infected Cult fleet. Almost all crew members were infected, and their ships were loaded with biotic material.

Matins subjected them to purification.

The damage was already done, but the good news was that the biomass was not transported away and wouldn't spawn future waves of insects. Additionally, forcing the enemy into such desperate measures was proof of the Alliance's effective efforts in the Thistle Muster Star Field—it pressured the enemy into cutting their own losses.

Subsequently, after stabilizing the Magrey Cosmic Domain on the Western Front, the forces pushed back into the Spiderweb Domain, reaching the westernmost region of the domain: Tangu Star Domain.

Here, Jerry E'er Ganglong's progress noticeably slowed.

The challenges here were unlike the relatively unstable occupation zones in Magrey Cosmic Domain, which Ironclad had not controlled for long. On the contrary, Tangu Star Domain's situation was at least as complex as that of the Thistle Muster Star Field.

E'er Ganglong's forces became increasingly scattered, worsening their operational effectiveness.

Eventually, they suffered a sudden major assault from Ironclad's main forces.

The losses were significant.

Fortunately, E'er Ganglong had always been prepared for such an attack from Ironclad's main forces. His swift and well-coordinated countermeasures prevented a complete disaster and even managed to strike back at Ironclad, inflicting a degree of counter-damage.

Though progress was painstakingly slow, E'er Ganglong advanced with steady determination.

As for the Northern Front, there were breakthroughs as well.

A detachment of the Black Cross Army arrived, adding a thousand Interstellar Warriors to their ranks. Additionally, the Anti-Extraterrestrial Alliance provided substantial reinforcements: more than fifteen hundred Silver Watch Warriors and a large number of Elite Tempest Soldiers. With the Tribunal Fleet also joining the fray, the Northern Front's strength saw a significant boost. To top it off, the Agra Snow Iron Guard Legion from the Star Devouring Cosmos, a famed Star Realm Army Corps, joined the order of battle. This prestigious corps, once known for using purely mortal troops to repel an entire Star Domain's Chaos incursion, brought substantial land-based combat capability to the Northern Front.

They achieved progressive victories.

In the Le Buddh Star Domain, they managed to sustain combat against the Insect Swarm. With the Silver Watch at the forefront, the tides began to turn as several large-scale annihilation battles dealt notable damage to the Swarm. Moreover, they opened up a second front, launching a decisive assault in the Sword Gate Starfield. Originally a region with relatively muted insect activity, the strike was a tremendous success. Not only did they eliminate two Insect Nest Fleet divisions, but they also deployed a force led by the Black Cross Army with Agra Snow Iron Guard as the backbone into the Princess Star Domain.

As a result, they became the first to penetrate the Princess Star Domain.

Gu Hang, however, was indifferent to this achievement.

The Black Cross Army seemed to love the spotlight—eager to be heroes, to take the lead role in the narrative.

Such "first to breach the core of enemy territory" accolades were exactly the kind of fame they chased.

In Gu Hang’s view, however, the actual strategic significance was limited.

Prioritizing the expansion of Imperial-controlled zones in the Sword Gate Starfield to safeguard more worlds from insect invasion was vastly more critical.

Gu Hang even drafted a letter to Marshal Leroux of the Black Cross Army. He began with flattery, praising their substantial breakthroughs on the Northern Front. Then, in more subtle terms, he suggested that a people-first approach might be more prudent, emphasizing the importance of securing the Sword Gate and Le Buddh Star Domains.

Unfortunately, Gu Hang got a firsthand look at Marshal Leroux’s arrogance. While Leroux did not outright ignore Gu Hang’s transmission—after all, Gu Hang was the Southern Line Commander, who single-handedly transformed the overlooked Southern theater into a major victory zone—the respect given was perfunctory at best.

Leroux's tone was hardly cordial, bluntly stating that he had the Northern Front entirely under control and did not need Gu Hang's unsolicited advice. Furthermore, he issued requests of his own, urging Gu Hang to resolve the issue in the Alfonso Star Domain swiftly, at the very least holding back the rebellious Sect of Mechanics. Additionally, in the Thistle Muster Star Field, the Alliance needed to be bolder and advance directly into the Princess Star Domain. This would allow both fronts to aim for a decisive rendezvous within the Princess Star Domain.

At that point, the Western Front could pin down Ironclad's main forces while the Southern and Northern fronts converged in the Princess Star Domain, crushing Ironclad's stronghold, eliminating the insect threat in the domain, and thwarting Humphrey Paolo's schemes. Would that not be a glorious victory?

Reading this proposal, Gu Hang immediately lost all interest in engaging further with Leroux.

Reckless, overly optimistic—such was Gu Hang's assessment of Leroux.

But there was no way he could alter the mindset of this arrogant Black Cross Army Marshal.

He sent a carefully-worded response, full of superficial praise, but artfully vague, essentially deflecting the matter entirely.

Gu Hang then shifted his attention away from developments on other fronts, focusing exclusively on the situation in the Alfonso Star Domain.

The Alliance needed to adhere to its own established strategies.

Chapter 613, Founding World

The force that entered the Alfonso Star Domain was the main fleet personally led by Gu Hang.

In terms of fleet strength, it was significantly more powerful than what was left in Matins' hands. Additionally, there were two visible battle groups, one Shadow Battle Group, and a large number of Alliance Army troops.

Such strength was aimed at resolving the issues in the Alfonso Star Domain swiftly and decisively.

Especially to secure control over the three Founding Worlds, which represented immense wealth.

The reasons for investing such overwhelming forces into the Alfonso Star Domain primarily boiled down to two:

First, leveraging Sebastian Moro’s influence to quickly draw the Dove Faction to their side.

War is the fiercest form of politics. Achieving an objective solely through martial means is exhausting.

Success is uncertain.

Even if success is achieved, the costs—both in resources and time—are unpredictable.

Using political strategies to recruit forces that originally did not align with oneself, or even were antagonistic, to one’s camp is undoubtedly the optimal course.

However, the so-called Dove Faction, even if opposed to Waluk’s Hawk Faction and the latter’s behavior of aligning with the "Insects," and even if oppressed by the Hawk Faction, is not necessarily inclined to side with the Alliance.

As the prestigious leader of the Alfonso Dove Faction, Moro could serve as a cohesive figure, organizing the entire strength of the Dove Faction. However, aside from being a leader, he also needed significant backing.

Moro himself certainly lacked such backing. Having fled to the Alliance alone, what resources or power could he retain?

His strength now lay solely with the Alliance.

Only if the Alliance demonstrated overwhelming strength as his support could others see potential in following him, thereby enhancing his ability to unite forces.

Moreover, Gu Hang had a weapon specifically designed to target the Sect of Mechanics—the Black Box.

Of course, it wouldn't be necessary to resort to using the Black Box initially. Gu Hang would only reveal this device when absolutely necessary.

There was no need to worry about what would happen after Black Boxes were handed out.

The Black Boxes Gu Hang would offer as gifts were technologies thoroughly understood by the Alliance, their practical significance now near null.

Offering a few Black Boxes wouldn't attract undue attention. The days of caution were long past. What would the various sects of the Sect of Mechanics do upon learning that Gu Hang possessed Black Boxes? Aside from the Martian Sect—which might pose a real threat—Gu Hang had no concerns about the mid- to small-sized sects.

Even the Martian Sect, being far away, posed minimal threat. They wouldn't come and provoke him over a few Black Boxes alone.

Unless Gu Hang publicly claimed he possessed hundreds of Black Boxes, some containing advanced, cutting-edge technologies, that would be another matter entirely.

Members of the Sect of Mechanics were known to be obsessed with Black Boxes—not just for the technologies they represented, but for the Black Boxes themselves. As products of humanity's Golden Age, they were seen as sacred artifacts brimming with profound truths, holding both scientific and religious significance for the Sect.

Thus, even a Black Box that produced simple materials, like plastic steel, would fascinate them—not for the material itself, but for the novelty of the Black Box artifact.

In reality, the Black Box was indeed a crucial tool.

By late November, the Alliance Main Fleet entered Alfonso, encountering Dove Faction forces surrendering en masse, while Hawk Faction forces retreated.M

Across the worlds of the Alfonso domain, instances of corruption were observed—but conditions were far better than those in the Thistle Muster Star Field, though slightly worse than the Proudclaw Cosmos, remaining within acceptable limits.

By late December, the Alliance had occupied over sixty worlds.

Meanwhile, a Protectorate Army of the Sect of Mechanics had formed to the Alliance's rear. This force consisted not only of elite Protectorate troops and automatons but also included one Knight Order!

Shockingly, despite not having conquered a single Founding World, the combined forces drawn from the ordinary Alfonso Worlds controlled by various sects amounted to such formidable strength.

Among these sixty worlds, Hawk Faction forces had been either expelled, exterminated, or... converted into Dove Faction forces.

In fact, the distinctions between "Dove" and "Hawk" Factions were never rigid. They were originally part of the same sect, differing only in political views. When orders from Great Sage Waluk arrived, the centrists joined in persecuting staunch Dove Faction members; now, with the Alliance Army's arrival and Sage Moro stepping up as a leading figure, the centrists quickly switched sides.

Such shifts in alignment were entirely ordinary.

This allowed Gu Hang to extract Mechanic Sect forces from these sixty worlds to assist in combat.

Gu Hang had no intention to send them against his strongest adversaries, wary of their fickleness.

Instead, he planned to deploy them to various worlds to suppress insect infestations.

After all, these Mechanic Sect troops had been recruited locally. In worlds with favorable conditions, the Alliance needed only minimal interference—sometimes none at all—merely unifying the governing ideology at the highest level would suffice for the worlds to address their issues independently. They might even have surplus forces to contribute to the Alliance.

The troops recruited from these situations were then dispatched by Gu Hang to worlds facing more severe challenges.

Chapter 613, Founding World_2

It also saved Gu Hang the trouble of stationing occupation forces on each world, thereby dispersing his troops.

His main forces, at the beginning of January, arrived at the first key target of the Alfonso campaign: Alamita.

This was one of the three major Founding Worlds of the Alfonso Sect, and once the place where Moro served as Founding General.

Gu Hang remained cautious.

Even though he had encountered little resistance and captured sixty worlds along the way, it was worth noting that the Alfonso Star Domain was quite expansive—larger than the Dragonhawk Star Domain, with seven hundred worlds, less than a tenth of which had been taken by the Alliance.

Moreover, the Alfonso Sect was still formidable.

Even though Sage Dubo led a major wave of defeats, the sect still retained a substantial amount of power.

In terms of ships, they still had at least two Mechanical Arks: Alfonso I and Alfonso III.

They also had at least two battleships remaining.

Of course, this strength was significantly diminished compared to the expedition to the Proudclaw Cosmos.

However, on the ground, their troop strength remained considerable.

If the Alliance wanted to seize a Founding World and the opposition was resolutely defensive, the amount of force that would need to be deployed to ground combat would be enormous.

Even orbital support would be difficult to execute.

The Alliance wasn't like the Green Skins, who could bomb everything to rubble and still find a way to thrive amidst the wreckage. Destroying a Founding World would negate Gu Hang's purpose of fighting a ground war.

What he sought was the productivity of the Founding World!

Nevertheless, the fight had to happen.

They started with an initial attempt at persuasion, but the results were unsatisfactory.

The entire outer defenses of Alamita, including the planetary surface's orbital cannons, were fully prepared for war.

Despite internal pest infestations, as a proud Founding World, they would not surrender easily without a fight.

Gu Hang expressed patience and refrained from launching a military offensive, opting instead to maintain pressure by besieging the area.

Dragging the conflict out was not realistic.

From Gu Hang's perspective, he consistently avoided committing troops for an all-out battle across the entirety of Alamita.

However, he had to display such an intention, and even more importantly, demonstrate the capability to execute it, in order to truly avoid a war of attrition.

The failure of the first wave of persuasion was not a problem; the Alliance's hundred-plus agents who had infiltrated Alamita ahead of time were already highly active.

Their situation provided great reassurance to Gu Hang.

They were close to operating openly.

By all logic, with the enemy's forces besieged, shouldn't they have purged the agents planted within their ranks?

If the agents had remained too well-hidden, it would have been impossible; however, with them essentially operating out in the open and yet not being apprehended—or more likely, with no ability to apprehend them—it revealed a lot of underlying issues.

There were bad actors among their populace.

It was inconceivable that no one was sheltering or protecting these Alliance agents.

Furthermore, it wasn't just one or two individuals, nor limited to the lower and middle ranks. Otherwise, the Alliance agents wouldn't be conducting relatively public political networking activities without being arrested.

Beneath Alamita's defiant facade of resisting to the end, turbulent undercurrents surged.

A solid fortress is always easiest to breach from within.

The Alliance Intelligence Center, right under Gu Hang's nose, was conducting intense operations. They continually compiled and analyzed directives from the ground, received from agents, turning them into actionable professional insights.

For instance, identifying targets who could be swayed, who could provide sanctuary for the agents, who could help the agents access higher-ranking figures, who were wavering in their stance...

Such directives, in turn, guided the agents' actions.

Among them, individuals originally belonging to the Alfonso sect's "mechanics" played a significant role.

If not, even with the Alliance's intelligence capabilities, they could not have uncovered so many secrets of Alamita or identified so many personnel in such a short time.

Wasn't Moro still around?

Having served as Founding General of Alamita before, he knew far too much.

Moreover, it wasn't just him alone.

The people gathered by the Alliance along the campaign included many former "mechanics" of Alamita, ranging from Mechanical Priests to Dominant Bishops, across various hierarchical levels.

Most of them shared one characteristic: being labeled as Moro Lineage.

After the Great Sage Moro was captured and imprisoned, many of these people naturally underwent their own round of purges.

As a Founding General, Moro had plenty of loyal followers, and even after one round of purges, many remained untouched.

Later, when Arno rallied his loyalists to rescue Moro and succeeded, Moro himself fled, but many of his followers left trapped in Alamita had to endure yet another round of purges.

And this time, the purge was especially severe.

Many were executed, many imprisoned, yet a significant number—uncertain whether connected to Moro Lineage or not, but suspected to be—were exiled.

From the sixty Alfonso worlds the Alliance captured, many of these exiles were rounded up.

While they might not have been staunch Moro loyalists in the past—because if they were, they'd either be dead or in prison—they certainly were now.

After all, they'd already been branded as Moro Faction by Alfonso; what more was there to worry about?

Previously, it had been a disaster;

Now, it was an opportunity!

And these individuals, living in Alamita for countless years, naturally provided a wealth of suggestions to the Alliance's intelligence department, aiding their operations.

Unfortunately, the current analysis suggested that directly securing Alamita's peaceful surrender remained highly unlikely.

It was the Hawk Faction, under the will of Great Sage Valuk, and their two major purges that had severely weakened Alamita's Moro-affiliated political and military powers.

Following this, Valuk had dispatched his own people to replace key positions across the planet. Attempting to turn them was highly challenging.

Even though Alamita seemed abandoned and Alfonso fleets had not stationed significant mobile forces here.

However, it was rumored that fleets were already being assembled from Bostan Star—the largest of Alfonso Sect's three Founding Worlds.

Meanwhile, the sect had already reached out to the Princess Star Domain for reinforcements, with Humphrey Paolo promising to send support.

The longer Alamita managed to hold its ground, the more reinforcements would arrive from all sides.

Thus, they possessed both the will and the value to resist, making those Hawk Faction "mechanics" unwilling to surrender, bent on holding out to the end.

Alongside this analysis, another action proposal was delivered to Gu Hang's desk.

After reading through the action plan, Gu Hang sent copies to Moro, two Battle Group Leaders, and the Chief Glory Guard Officer, asking them to review it and convene for a meeting to share their opinions.

Half an hour later, the meeting began; an hour later, the resolution was issued:

Screw them!

The operation leader was New World Torch Battle Group Commander Leo Moratti, who strongly recommended himself and requested to personally take part in the fight.

Gu Hang considered carefully and granted his request, but also assigned his highly trusted Chief Glory Guard Officer, Eeyore Lacroix, to assist with the operation.

Lacroix's role was to collaborate alongside Moratti, though he was effectively tasked with overseeing Moratti on Gu Hang's behalf.

To be blunt, although Moratti held the title of Battle Group Leader, his experience was sorely lacking. He had only recently become an Interstellar Warrior, about half a year ago. While he was already the first among New World Torch warriors, had the veteran Wang Mengsong as an advisor, displayed tremendous talent, transformed subpar recruits into squad champions, and even inspired breakthroughs nearing Battle Group Champion-level performance...

Nonetheless, he couldn't escape the reality of his inexperience. Although Wang Mengsong had ample experience, Gu Hang simply didn't trust him.

Yet opportunities for growth had to be provided, and Gu Hang was willing to give them.

Of course, it wasn't blind trust—Lacroix was the contingency plan.

Though an ordinary human, Lacroix's combat prowess already rivaled that of some skilled Interstellar Warriors.

Chapter 614, The Original Sin of the Torch Warrior

Piece by piece, Lacroix calmly donned his equipment.

Although their manpower was scant, they had already infiltrated Alamita, the enemy's core world. Their mission was to eliminate key personnel and seize strategic points deep behind enemy lines—a task fraught with peril upon peril.

Yet, he found little to be anxious about.

This was far from the most dire battle he had faced.

In fact, even during the most critical battles, he maintained his characteristic calm.

Still, he couldn't help but notice the big man beside him seemed tense.

Moretti Battle Group Commander’s breathing was audibly heavy.

After a moment’s thought, Lacroix spoke up: "Try not to be too nervous—it might lead to mistakes."

The young commander turned his head to gaze at Lacroix, who barely reached his stomach in height, yet bore no trace of disdain in his expression.

How could he dare to look down on him? This fifty-year-old veteran, though merely human, had earned a reputation that spread widely throughout the Alliance. He was a hero who had fought alongside Mr. Gu on Rage Owl Star, surviving life-or-death battles and achieving great feats across countless warfronts.

The elite Mortal Troops of the Glory Guard Legion, evolved from the former "Tenth Special Warfare Brigade," had even been modeled after him.

Though Lacroix had always refused to assume the role of commander or leader—positions held by others in the Glory Guard Corps—it was undeniable that he was still the most renowned Honor Guard warrior, hailed as the "Chief."

In fact, during the founding phase of the Neo Torch Warriors, when 800 recruits had just completed implantation procedures and commenced intensive training, Lacroix served as their instructor for an entire month!

Even now, despite having fully developed his superhuman organs and rising as the most distinguished Alliance Warrior among the 800 Neo Torch recruits, handpicked by Mr. Gu to be the Battle Group Commander, Moretti still felt compelled to show respect to Lacroix.

He took deep breaths, trying to calm himself down.

It helped slightly, but not much.

Lacroix pondered for a moment before asking, "Tell me—why are you feeling nervous? This is just another battle. Considering the lifespan of you Interstellar Warriors, you’ll face countless battles like this in the future."

"But this one is different!" Moretti insisted. "This is my first major operation as Commander, and it’s also the Neo Torch’s first significant battle since our rebirth!"

"Not really," Lacroix replied. "You’ve already fought for the Alliance in previous engagements."

He referred to several ground skirmishes the Neo Torch undertook shortly after entering the Alfonso Star Domain.

"But those were different! Those couldn’t even be called battles... those..." Moretti protested.

"Every battle is important. Keep your mindset balanced," Lacroix advised.

Moretti remained silent for a while before exhaling deeply and responding, "Instructor Lacroix, what you said makes sense, but... you don’t understand."

At this point, Lacroix could see Moretti clenching his teeth: "You truly don’t understand. We, the Neo Torch Warriors, were born with original sin. Our ancestors committed grave crimes—they betrayed the Empire, allied with the Alliance, and even repeatedly backstabbed comrades on the battlefield. The hundred-year redemption campaign they were sentenced to feels far too lenient in my eyes!"

"Frankly, many of the brothers in the group have grumbled, wondering why we weren’t assigned to Phoenix instead. We’re all children of the Alliance, raised under Mr. Gu’s leadership, and have consistently proven ourselves exceptional, eagerly awaiting every opportunity to pledge loyalty to him. Yet, when the time came for us to serve the Alliance and Mr. Gu, we were designated to a battle group tainted with sin, born without honor..." Moretti continued.

"But I won’t say it’s unfair. This was our choice—to become Interstellar Warriors, eternally serving The Emperor and the Alliance, is an unparalleled honor."

"What we can do is to achieve greater feats and demonstrate unwavering loyalty to prove to the world that the Neo Torch Warriors are completely severed from the sins of the past. I will achieve indisputable results to silence all critics!"

"Those small-scale skirmishes weren't enough. Anyone could've handled them—it wouldn't have made a difference to send in the Glory Guards, or even just special forces from the ground army. Our deployment was merely an exercise, a test for a newly formed unit... but that's not what we aspire to."

"Alamita is what we want. We know this battle will be dangerous, and many of us may lose our lives here. However, each and every one of us is fully aware and ready! Some stains can only be wiped clean through achievements earned with blood!"

"Now you see how crucial this operation is for us, don't you? We cannot fail—failure is not an option!"

Lacroix nodded slightly before shaking his head and saying, "I understand. But what I want to emphasize is that, while I may not fully grasp your concepts of honor, there's one basic fact: the less composed you are now, the higher the odds of failure. You are the commander. Focus on planning the battle, scrutinize every detail—don't dwell on things like meaning, value, accomplishments, or shame."

These words were spoken with genuine intent.

Lacroix had always been a pure soldier.

Moretti nodded, though his tension hadn't significantly eased.

Lacroix added, "You can consult Wang Mengsong for advice."

Moretti's response was resolute: "No! Absolutely not! He's a criminal who dragged the Neo Torch into the depths of the abyss. The mere fact that he's alive and allowed to shed his last drop of blood in the redemption camp is already a lavish reward from Mr. Gu. His opinions hold no worth!"

Moretti showed no signs of relenting.

Lacroix chose not to press further. Instead, he said, "Alright, then. How about you walk me through your plan from start to finish?"

"Will you help me correct it?"

"I’m not capable of that," Lacroix admitted. "But by recounting it multiple times, you might discover any points you’ve overlooked."

"And if I don’t find any?"

"Then it means there’s no problem—you’re the best." This statement was delivered in a dry tone, paired with Lacroix’s stoic expression, creating an unusual effect.

"Haha..." Moretti chuckled softly. Despite the hint of sarcasm and ambivalence, his mood unexpectedly improved.

As Lacroix suggested, he began verbalizing the plan, step by step.

Thinking as he spoke.

Lacroix sat silently, the most patient listener.

Before long, the appointed hour arrived.

"Then let’s move out."

Moretti’s nerves had peaked, but at this point, there was no turning back.

With his eyes closed, he issued the command for the troops to mobilize.

Leading by example, he was the first to dash out and climb into an armored vehicle.

The convoy began to roll out, heading into the industrial district's core thoroughfares in the Alamita Casting World.

Their target—the newly appointed Alamita Founding General—had just concluded an inspection of the industrial zone and was en route to leave.

According to intelligence, the general would traverse ground roads for approximately 15 minutes before exiting the sheltered areas of the manufacturing zones, where his hovercraft would then be able to take off.

And thus, their window of opportunity was set.

Chapter 615, Assassination

If there's a problem that's hard to solve, what should you do?

Then solve the person who caused the problem.

The Alliance's action against Aramita came from this very logic.

Based on combined intelligence from various sources, the Alliance formulated seven assassination targets.

The others are manageable, but there are two Principal Sages who seem impossible to deal with using the forces the Alliance can mobilize on the planet. If agents take direct action, their numbers and combat abilities are insufficient to eliminate the targets. Utilizing the Sect of Mechanics elements that have turned to the Alliance doesn't seem feasible either.

Moro's hardcore loyalists were largely cleaned out in earlier waves, and while the remaining individuals can provide assistance and harbor secret dissatisfaction with Waluk, they are unwilling to personally participate in assassination operations.

The Alliance doesn't dare let them act, either.

Distrust.

Should the operation fail and alert the enemy, the Alliance would then have to pay a heavier price later on.

It's unnecessary.

Still, their assistance is indispensable.

Otherwise, how did those small ships carrying Interstellar Warriors manage to land on Aramita's surface?

Without help from insiders, even small ships would have a hard time landing undetected on the planet's surface.

After all, it's no longer peacetime.

The entire planet is enclosed by a massive Void Shield. Though the shield wasn't fully activated yet due to the war not officially beginning, it was operated with minimal energy to ensure it could be immediately triggered when needed.

Encircling the planet, Aramita Starport, along with the Star Fortress and groups of Armed Space Stations, almost completely shrouded the planet. The radars, running at full capacity, were primarily monitoring the Alliance's main fleet, but any small ship attempting to intrude during this time would be easily detected.

Only with insiders' help, exploiting a brief crossing point between a space station and Star Fortress's orbital paths, could the cloaked ships quickly enter the atmosphere.

Of course, during this process, Aramita's defensive systems did detect these dozens of uninvited visitors.

However, under the suppression of some strange force, the responses were silence and inaction, turning a blind eye.

A total of 1,200 elite troops, including 800 Torch Warriors and 400 Glory Guards, thus entered the planetary surface.

The operation was divided into eight segments.

Five of them involved 10 Interstellar Warriors working alongside 30 Glory Guards in each team. Their targets were all figures of the Dominant Bishop level.

The Alliance agents provided intelligence support.

A quick strike to execute the kill—nothing more.

The other two segments were slightly more challenging.

These, respectively, targeted two Principal Sages.

At least 100 Interstellar Warriors were assigned to ensure their elimination.

Particularly for the newly appointed Founding General, named Anthony Farai, not only were 100 Interstellar Warriors allocated to this mission, but Moretti Battle Group Commander and Lacroix were also personally involved.

Success had to be guaranteed.

Meanwhile, 500 additional Interstellar Warriors had another mission: they had already concealed themselves and awaited orders within the ground facilities underneath Aramita Starport. At the start of the operation, they would immediately board the Space Elevator arranged by the insider defector mechanics and ascend to the Starport.

This was an extraordinarily dangerous assault. Sage Farai's control over the Starport was of critical importance. Even the Alliance agents and members of the Moro Faction on Aramita did not have enough trusted personnel to infiltrate it in advance. The only way was to take the illegal Space Elevator as soon as the operation began and force their way through.

Assassinating Farai and storming the Starport were the two hardest steps of the mission.

After issuing the operation orders, Moretti still harbored concerns about whether the assault on the Starport might encounter unforeseen complications.

However, upon Lacroix's reminder, he realized that the matter over there was no longer within his jurisdiction and that he had to trust his comrades.

His most important task was to ensure that his mission succeeded.

Anthony Farai's convoy had appeared within visual range.

In an instant, at least 60 surface-to-air missiles were launched from multiple ambushing Torch Warriors. Numerous vehicles in the convoy were destroyed in violent explosions, while faint traces of violet ripples emanated from the central core vehicle.

That was the Void Shield.

There was no doubt that Farai valued his safety greatly. Having a Void Shield installed on his convoy was entirely to be expected.

However, the type of small Void Shield that could fit inside a floating vehicle was bound to be limited in performance.

After six missile impacts, it had already turned a glaring red, nearing overload.

These weren't ordinary missiles—each one was top-of-the-line in the category of portable missiles.

Even Farai hadn't anticipated being subjected to such a ferocious ambush on his own planet.

Following the missiles was a torrential barrage of Heavy Bomb Gunfire.

The dense hail of bullets further strained the overloaded Void Shield, making it grow dimmer and redder. At this stage, some bombs were already piercing through the weakened Void Shield and striking the floating vehicles within.

The armor on the vehicles was thick, but ultimately, they weren't military-grade and couldn't withstand such ferocity.

What's more, Farai inside the vehicle had sensed an even greater danger.

He was like a sitting duck. Staying in the vehicle exposed him to sustained attacks, ensuring his eventual demise.

To survive, leaving the vehicle immediately was actually the best choice. The Void Shield on the verge of shattering likely wouldn't save his life.

The door of the vehicle was thrown open the next moment, and a hunched figure leaped out from the gaping side door.

Instantly, the firepower from the Interstellar Warriors focused on the figure, tearing it apart mid-air.

But at that moment, a second figure jumped out.

Lacroix responded the fastest. His high-energy plasma sniper rifle, already aimed and charged, struck the second figure with impeccable accuracy.

Violet Void Shield energy shimmered momentarily, absorbing the plasma discharge.

The Interstellar Warriors redirected their concentrated firepower, and a salvo of bomb attacks caused continuous ripples across the personal micro Void Shield.

However, the earlier distraction from the decoy meant that their redirected firepower wasn't quite sufficient to break the shield.

The figure managed a successful landing and darted swiftly into a nearby ground workshop.

Simultaneously, Moretti received a warning in his earpiece from an Alliance agent:

"They've activated the lockdown signal—you need to hurry up!"

Chapter 616, The Death of the Founding General

Five minutes—time is tight.

But overall, it's still within Moretti's contingency plans.

If Farai could have been killed during the hover convoy stage, that would have been ideal.

Though they failed to kill him outright, at least they forced him out into the open.

This predesignated battleground had already been thoroughly scouted by the Interstellar Warriors. The place Farai fled to was the safest location nearby, but it was also the spot Moretti had studied most carefully.

In fact, prior to the ambush, a squad from the New World Torch had already been stationed there in advance.

Farai running in there? He fell right into the trap.

Still, they couldn’t afford to let their guard down just yet.

The combat capabilities of a Sage of the Sect of Mechanics varied significantly. Their actual battle potential depended on the extent of their body modifications. After all, a considerable number of Mechanical Sages modify their bodies for advanced research or intricate manufacturing purposes rather than combat, which isn’t their forte to begin with.

Of course, attachments and modifications to their bodies aren’t fixed like a normal human’s flesh; they can be adjusted on the fly. A Sage conducting intense lab work might equip an entirely different set of modifications when venturing out to participate in war or adventure.

Had Farai already transformed himself into "combat mode"?

No intelligence had mentioned such a thing.

But taking an expansive, worst-case-scenario approach when dealing with the enemy wouldn’t harm them.

Ten Interstellar Warriors, even if all were veteran sergeants, might not be enough to take down a Sage in full combat mode.

Moretti and Lacroix, leading their forces, advanced rapidly to encircle the industrial zone.

From Neili’s direction came the sounds of battle.

But it was growing faint.

Moretti had a bad feeling about this.

The original plan was to wait for the other battle-brothers to arrive, seal off the industrial zone, and only then move in. The ten veterans inside were only intended to hold Farai off for the time being.

But it seemed that plan wouldn't hold—they couldn't afford to wait any longer.

If the brothers inside were wiped out, Farai could escape from any of the exits before the encirclement was complete. At that point, they'd be mired in a pursuit battle, which would make it hard to estimate how long it would take to resolve the fight. Whether they could finish this in five minutes would become uncertain.

Although failure at the five-minute mark wouldn't mean immediate mission failure—they could still press on, enduring wave after wave of reinforcements from the enemy while attempting to take down Farai—it would undoubtedly increase the difficulty and the risk of failure.

After exchanging a quick word with Lacroix, Moro led his trusted aides and stepped into the battlefield first.

And as soon as he entered, he knew he had made the right decision.

Of the ten Interstellar Warriors, only two were still standing. They were struggling to hold on, and without reinforcements, they wouldn't last much longer.

At this moment, Farai was undoubtedly in combat mode. The black-and-red Alfonso Sect robe he usually wore was nowhere to be seen, leaving his massive frame fully exposed. His lower body resembled a giant serpent, slithering across the ground in a peculiar manner, stretching and contracting with astonishing agility.

His upper body, though roughly humanoid in shape, sprouted numerous arms extending from his torso, each equipped with various types of weaponry.

The most striking of these were two weapons resembling the bladed forelimbs of a mantis. These were unlike the conventional weapons commonly wielded by Mechanical Sages. They were not forged from steel but seemed to be constructed of some sort of biological material, distinctly reminiscent of mantis blades.

Additionally, one of his hands clutched a long staff that appeared to be a living organism—a writhing, elongated insect whose head was still squirming. Spiritual Energy emanated from the staff, casting a debilitating effect on the Interstellar Warriors fighting him, making their movements feel heavy and sluggish, as though their bodies were rusting.

As Moretti charged forward with a roar, one of the two remaining veterans was immobilized by the Spiritual Energy emanating from the Insect Staff. An acidic spray followed, hissing as it made contact with his Power Armor. Then, the two bio-mantis blades came slashing down in a cruel arc. The toughened Terminator Armor had already been weakened by the corrosion and was no match for the devastating power of the giant mantis blades. The warrior clad in Ironclad Terminator Armor was sliced into three pieces.

"Traitor!" Moretti bellowed in fury, but what greeted him were consecutive blasts of concentrated firepower.

From Farai's body, three or four living cannons extended outward. The bio-organic beams they fired produced not only intense explosive impacts but also a corrosive effect that further increased their lethality.

Even as Moretti charged at full speed, he managed to anticipate the emerging cannon barrels, dodging on reflex and slashing at unavoidable beams with his Phase Sword to dissolve them mid-air.

But the trusted aides following behind him were not so fortunate. Those clad in Terminator Armor fared better; the corrosion left small craters on their armor, which wasn't life-threatening unless they were hit repeatedly. However, the Interstellar Warriors wearing standard tactical Power Armor stood no chance—they were killed outright after being struck multiple times.

Meanwhile, their Blast Bomb Guns returned fire, but the rounds struck harmlessly against Farai's Void Shield, producing only ripples without penetrating it.

Firepower alone wasn't going to work. With the Void Shield protecting Farai, breaking through it would take far too long. Adding to that, Farai's firepower as an individual was likely stronger than the combined might of the entire squad of Interstellar Warrior aides charging in. His unique bio-mechanical beams were an enigma that defied understanding.

Moretti realized this from the very beginning, and he never stopped moving forward, his goal was to charge at Farai and end this battle with his Phase Sword.

Seeing that the bio-ray couldn't stop Moretti, Farai grew a bit anxious.

He half-turned to prepare for confrontation, but at that moment, the only survivor among the ten Interstellar Warriors previously stationed in this factory area suddenly leaped up and slashed at him with a Chain-saw Sword.

Farai could not dodge it, but he managed to take the damage at a position near his shoulder blade. The blade then stabbed straight, piercing through his waist and abdomen, injecting biological toxin, making it almost certain that this warrior was as good as dead.

The intense paralysis from the biological toxin would cause him to completely lose all motor functions within a few breaths; following that, his heart, muscles, blood vessels, and brain, all forcibly stabilized, would be disabled for a permanently lethal amount of time without an antidote.

But before the paralysis took full effect, he struggled to pull out the plasma pistol strapped to his thigh. It was too late to charge it up, but with the distance so close, the muzzle was even inside the Void Shield, wielding considerable power.

Farai, with a hole blown through him, couldn't care less about his own injuries. He tossed aside the doomed Interstellar Warrior and turned his head, slashing at Moretti with his pair of Mantis Blades, attempting to force him back.

Yet at this moment, a ghostly figure appeared beside Farai.

It was Lacroix, clad in the Servant God's Power Armor.

Using Moretti's charge and the temporary counterattack of the Interstellar Warrior, Lacroix quietly approached from a blind spot unseen by Farai.

By the time Farai realized it, Lacroix was already closer than Moretti.

The explosive force he displayed in an instant was even more shocking!

Almost in a moment, he stepped right up to the Void Shield.

A charged High-Energy Plasma Rifle extended its muzzle into the Void Shield, then fired.

The plasma beam precisely pierced through Farai's body.

Not fatal, but it damaged the Void Shield Generator.

A small explosion occurred inside Farai. Simultaneously, amidst the smoke, the previously futile grenades fired by the Interstellar Warriors blasted onto him, rendering all Farai's prepared defenses and counterattacks useless.

Under the suppressive fire, Moretti delivered the final blow.

The Phase Sword swung several times in an instant. It first severed the pair of Mantis Blades, then cut off Farai's head, then split it in mid-air into two before landing several more slashes on his body, thoroughly dismembering him.

The series of actions took only a few seconds, and this Sage of the Alfonso Sect, the General of Alamita Casting World, met his end.

With a slight pant, Moretti glanced over the battlefield.

The ten warriors previously stationed there, all perished.

But at this cost, securing Farai's life was still worth it.

Only, the biggest target of the ground operation had been taken care of.

Next, he methodically communicated with all parties.

On one hand, he needed to know how the other battlefronts were faring.

On the other hand, he had to inform the Alliance agents that their mission was completed. Next, they needed to figure out how to extract their people.

At this moment, reinforcements from the Sect of Mechanics arrived. They launched a fierce attack on the Interstellar Warriors guarding the factory, and the ninety Torch Warriors and dozens of Glory Guards held their ground valiantly.

Despite being outnumbered, with many elite mechanical forces among the attackers, and even after repelling an assault, there was another wave of fierce artillery fire from above, nearly covering the entire factory...

But by the end of the battle, the casualties among the Interstellar Warriors were still low.

The bodies of the elite from the Sect of Mechanics littered the ground, exchanged for the deaths of seven Glory Guards and nine Torch Warriors.

Moretti was pondering whether to continue holding out or to lead a breakout.

At this moment, a reply finally came from the Alliance agents.

"Throw out Farai’s body, they’ll understand when they see it."

The fierce assault from the Sect of Mechanics also ceased at this point.

It seemed to be handled.

Moretti stepped out personally, dragging out a heap of bodies with his Torch Warriors.

On the Sect of Mechanics' side, the floating, reconnaissance servo-skull saw this scene and faithfully transmitted the image back.

Subsequently, the Protection Army began to retreat.

At this point, Moretti could finally breathe a sigh of relief.

Soon after, a series of good news followed.

All assassination missions on the ground of Alamita were successful.

Including there, the total casualties for New Era Torch did not exceed forty.

Although the casualty count evoked some sorrow, Moretti still smiled.

The first significant battle to wash away the sins of New Era Torch had a very good start!

However, his good mood did not last long.

Bad news arrived:

"Our attack on the Starport isn't going well, we need support!"

...

...

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Chapter 617, The Skills of the New World Torch

Wang Mengsong observed the battlefield with cold detachment.

What could he possibly say? He was merely an ordinary warrior in the battle group's Redemption Camp, the one who led the group to commit its grave crimes. What right did he have to speak?

No one would listen.

And Wang Mengsong himself was caught in a rather awkward state of mind.

The Alliance was surrendering, and he had surrendered as well. He had even participated in a decisive betrayal against the Fury Flame Battle Group on Phantom Moon.

The Alliance sentenced the entire battle group to a Redemption Expedition, and he accepted it—after all, crimes had been committed. Besides, this supposedly punitive expedition under the Alliance's protection was not much different from their usual missions; it wasn't especially grueling.

The Alliance stripped him of his Battle Group Leader position, forbidding him from continuing to command and lead the group, and instead relegated him to the Redemption Camp. He accepted that too. Gu Hang wouldn't trust him; it was entirely understandable. Moreover, he had assured himself that

everything he did was selfless and solely for the survival and development of the group. Not being the Battle Group Leader was fine; being a regular warrior in the Redemption Camp didn't matter. For the group, he would do anything.

But then, things started happening that made him feel uneasy.

The battle group was replenished with personnel at an astonishing speed.

The speed was so incredible that it left him baffled!

As someone who had once held command over the entire battle group, he knew better than anyone how troublesome and drawn-out the process of replenishing the group truly was.

And yet, the Alliance had somehow effortlessly found eight hundred young individuals who were perfectly suited for the Genetic Seeds surgery?

And in a mere six months or so, all of them had successfully undergone Genetic Seeds implantation and developed superhuman organs?

The Alliance must be hiding something—a huge secret!

And now, they weren't even bothering to conceal it, putting it right out in the open!

Were these really offspring of our New Torch?

He was absolutely unconvinced.

There couldn't possibly be that many Genetic Seeds!

He even secretly contacted the battle group's Pharmacist—who had also been relegated to the Redemption Camp with him—and managed to acquire some biological samples from these "New Torch" recruits for testing.

They really were seeds from their battle group, with no trace of doubts in terms of bloodline.

Moreover, these "new recruits" were demonstrating remarkably high levels of competency. Despite having only recently become Interstellar Warriors, they were as skilled as—if not more skilled than—the group's senior warriors of the past.

The new Battle Group Leader, a man named Moretti, was particularly extraordinary. If someone like him had emerged within the group before, Wang Mengsong would have been ecstatic. His greatest concern had always been the lack of successors in the group. He himself had barely managed to grow into his role, but even then, he could hold his own against the champions of other groups. Yet the absence of new talent within their own group had weighed heavily on him.

Now, with a capable new Battle Group Leader in place, Wang Mengsong felt more at ease, but deep down, there was no denying an underlying bitterness.

Although he didn't want to admit it, during the lonely hours of the night, he had indeed imagined one scenario: the group being composed entirely of inexperienced recruits, suffering setback after setback in their missions. And he, as the former Battle Group Leader, would receive at least a shred of respect and be asked for his input...

However, that situation never came to pass.

The Redemption Camp—true to its name—was a place for sinners.

The fresh blood of the group despised them.

They hated Wang Mengsong in particular.

These new recruits fully embraced their identity as "New Torch," exuding a strong sense of honor and dedicating themselves to restoring the group's glory. But for this very reason, the traitorous acts the group had been condemned for—particularly the two incidents of treacherous backstabbing against friendly forces—had left their reputation in ruins, and the instigators of those acts were naturally loathed.

The harsh treatment and ostracism made Wang Mengsong and the others feel terrible.

Even if, according to the usual practice of Redemption Camps, they were assigned to the most brutal battles as expendable forces for punishment, they might have been able to endure it to some extent.

But that didn't happen either.

The new warriors saw every battle as an opportunity to redeem their sins and achieve honor, striving to execute each mission flawlessly, regardless of the cost. Under these circumstances, how could they possibly allow the Redemption Camp to participate? That would only tarnish their achievements!

The feeling of being ignored and marginalized was even more excruciating.

Furthermore, the internal culture that had developed among these new recruits was... unusual.

In terms of tactical style, they had never accepted guidance from the Old Torch veterans, yet they naturally adopted a fighting style that resembled the old group's. This was logical—same bloodline, same seeds, so their strengths and weaknesses were bound to align, resulting in similar tactical tendencies.

However, aside from tactical style, the rest of the battle group's culture had diverged drastically.

The Old New Torch hadn't paid much attention to such matters; their relationship with ordinary humans was neutral, neither hostile nor particularly friendly, and the internal atmosphere of the group was relatively amicable and respectful.

But the new group's internal atmosphere was rigidly hierarchical, with an air of solemn bitterness among its members.

What's more, they had deeply integrated the Alliance's ethos into their structure. The group's Priest functioned in a role similar to that of political commissars within the Alliance Army. The entire battle group displayed fervent loyalty to the Alliance, believing that they were born tainted by original sin and that all sacrifices were merely their due.

Chapter 617, The Skills of the New World Torch_2

Such sacrificial spirit, with such a strong inclination toward martyrdom, is completely different from the New Generation Torch of the past.

Wang Mengsong had significant opinions about this, believing that this was nothing like the New Generation Torch anymore. He even lamented that the New Generation Torch was already gone, that what existed now was merely a loyal dog of the Alliance, resurrecting through the corpse of the New Generation Torch.

Of course, what he thought didn't matter at all, nor did it have any significance.

Accepting his fate, he lifelessly followed the warband and descended onto Alamita's surface to carry out the mission.

Moretti had rarely chosen to bring them along.

After all, the difficulty of the mission was evident, and its significance was beyond question. He had to employ the full strength of the warband, even including those from the Redemption Camp.

Wang Mengsong was like an ordinary soldier—well, that's exactly what he was—fighting alongside the warband.

First, they forcibly entered the Space Elevator, a step prepared in advance by Alliance agents, with assistance from the local machine oil enthusiasts.

The next step was to launch a swift assault after the elevator arrived at the Starport.

This mission was divided into three parts:

First, expand the scope of combat, draw attention, and create chaos.

Second, occupy key areas as much as possible. This aspect could be coordinated with the first point.

Third, decapitate a Hawk Faction Sage of the Sect of Mechanics who was managing operations at the Starport.

Of course, Wang Mengsong wasn't fit for the third task and could only handle the first and second tasks.

To be frank, he did a decent job.

He and his old comrades in the Redemption Camp killed many enemies and captured multiple key points. Among those, they seized a command center, crippling communication across vast enemy areas.

He had completed his mission.

It was the supposed elite of the warband, tasked with the decapitation effort, who encountered difficulties.

The elite forces of the Sect of Mechanics weren't as easy to deal with as expected.

The Sage, upon realizing what was happening, displayed formidable combat skills. A fully armed Mechanical Sage was no easy opponent.

Meanwhile, large numbers of Protection Army elites had erected a powerful defensive line, fiercely holding back the New Generation Torch's advances.

The Second Company Commander, in charge of operations, had clearly lost his cool.

He began recklessly pushing the warband's forces forward, disregarding casualties, losses, or consequences as he ordered a frenzied assault.

Wang Mengsong couldn't hold back and took a squad closer to the scene.

He didn't participate in the battle directly—after all, he hadn't received orders, and he couldn't act without authorization.

He could only watch from afar as, one by one, the New Generation Torch warriors were mowed down by the dense firepower net of the Protection Army.

Those strong machine fighters supported by the Knight Titans, alongside the modified human units of the Protection Army, demonstrated immense combat prowess.

Their lines were continuously pressured, and while the New Generation Torch's assault achieved significant results through enormous sacrifices, it was evident to the experienced Wang Mengsong that this was intentional on the enemy's part. They were using space to trade for the lives of the Interstellar Warriors.

For every step forward the New Generation Torch took, the blood price was far too steep.

Fighting like this wouldn't work.

But what could be done?

Should he continue watching coldly?

He thought he could maintain an indifferent heart as he watched these new recruits, who hated him, die one by one—even if they all perished, it wouldn't matter.

After all, in his view, he didn’t even think these people, whose warband culture and atmosphere were completely different from the old Torch, deserved to be called the New Generation Torch. Their extinction wouldn’t be any great loss.

Moreover, he hadn’t received any orders. Even at such a critical juncture, the Second Company Commander hadn’t tried to summon those from the Redemption Camp to assist.

Serves him right!

He thought bitterly, yet every time a New Generation Torch warrior perished before his eyes, his brow couldn’t help but twitch.

In the warband’s communications channel, he heard the new warriors yelling one phrase after another:

"For the Alliance!" To this, Wang Mengsong scoffed disdainfully.

"For the Empire! For the Emperor!" This held little resonance with him. The New Generation Torch had been shouting this same phrase for centuries—he was tired of hearing it.

"For the New Generation Torch!" Hmm, that had a bit more meaning.

"To atone for our sins!" Who are you talking about?

"With my blood, forge history!" That seemed to be a newly invented warband motto. Was it necessary?

...

Behind an expressionless face, Wang Mengsong clenched his teeth.

He still refused to admit he had been wrong in the past. After all, without his decisions, what would the current New Generation Torch look like? Probably long erased from history.

Had he not turned against Iron Armor's rebellion, would Iron Armor have spared them? The war situation seven or eight years ago wasn't like today. Back then, the Empire's powers hadn't yet converged, and during that period, with the strength of the New Generation Torch, resisting Iron Armor would have been certain death, leading to total annihilation.

Well, backstabbing allied forces, destroying one warband, and shattering the first batch of troops belonging to the Heretic Tribunal was... a bit messed up.

And even though he backstabbed again on Phantom Moon days later, wasn't that to correct the chaos and earn the Alliance's favor? Surely that couldn't count as personal sins?

Although it had ruined the warband's reputation...

And what were these young new blood warriors doing now?

The reason they were born carrying so much suffering, why the warband's entire atmosphere was so serious and emphasized sacrifice—what was it all for?

Even if he didn't want to admit it, he had to face the truth: It was all to fill the many pits left by the seeds he had sown.

Why did the new-new New Generation Torch cry out 'With my blood, forge history'? Because their past was nothing but disgrace.

No matter how many objective reasons Wang Mengsong could provide to justify himself, the disgrace existed all the same.

And now, could he truly feel at ease sitting here, watching his differing, even hostile juniors sacrifice themselves one after another?

He slowly raised his hand and opened the communication channel: "This battle plan is untenable. I suggest pulling back temporarily to rest. Keep some forces here for distraction while seeking breakthroughs from other directions."

"Shut up, traitor, you don’t have the right to speak here."

It wasn’t at all surprising that the Second Company Commander, who was seeing red, would react that way.

Despite the rebuke, Wang Mengsong had already made his choice.

"Redemption Camp, follow me. Let’s show these young cubs what the true capabilities of the New Generation Torch are!"

Chapter 618

The various founding battle groups, from their inception, exhibited different styles due to subtle differences in their genetic seeds.

Of course, these differences, overall, are relatively minor, especially when viewed on an individual level. For instance, the Phoenix Legion has always been renowned for its exceptional swordsmanship and unparalleled single-combat capabilities, but even then, the top duelists in the arena may not necessarily be swordsmanship champions from their ranks. These differences are primarily reflected at a larger, more general scale and are, by no means, drastic.

Thus, it’s hard to say whether these styles are a result of genetic seed differences, varied abilities, or battle group cultural distinctions, which influenced preferences in training new recruits and talent selection, thereby accentuating stylistic uniqueness.

When the original major military corps were subdivided into countless battle groups, these groups generally inherited the characteristics of their parent corps, and over the long years ahead, they further differentiated and developed unique battle group traits from this foundation.

Take Phoenix as an example: inheriting the Legion’s strong single-combat prowess, Phoenix didn’t push this ability to an extreme, but instead developed generally superior physical endurance and stalwart will.

However, the New Torch did not have that luxury.

Their genetic seeds originated from the Infinite Corps, whose hallmark lies in having... no hallmark. They excel in no particular direction but also reveal no obvious inadequacies. Moreover, their genetic seeds are highly adaptable, enabling rapid mobilization; combined with strict discipline and exceptional tactical acumen, they embody the quintessential image of the Interstellar Warrior.

The New Torch, or at least the Old Torch, followed this pattern as well.

But these new iterations of Torch Warriors might, in the future, develop a rabid, high-sacrifice, more ferocious battle style.

This transformation might stem from the guilt they consciously bear, potentially evolving into a distinct battle group culture over time.

However, that's a matter for the future.

For now, the Old Torch warriors under Wang Mengsong's leadership remain in their conventional mold.

Wang Mengsong holds no official position—not even the Redemption Battalion falls under his direct command. Instead, two New Torch warriors act as the battalion's two company commanders.

Ordinarily, the Old Torch warriors are obedient enough—they follow the instructions of the new commanders without question.

Wang Mengsong is no exception.

Yet, in moments of critical importance, when Wang Mengsong speaks up, who do these Old Torch warriors ultimately listen to?

Of course, it's him.

The Old Torch warriors wouldn’t outrightly confront the New Commanders. They simply devised some tricks, slipping away during missions under the cover of other Old Torch comrades, eventually regrouping with Wang Mengsong.

At this point, the two New Commanders discovered that approximately seventy to eighty percent of the Redemption veterans under them had mysteriously disappeared.

They quickly reported this information. The Starport operation coordinator, the battle group’s second company commander Leo Erich, furiously messaged Wang Mengsong, whose earlier suggestions were dismissed:

"You traitor! What are you trying to do? Is ruining the battle group once not enough for you? You want to destroy it a second time? Let me tell you—you won’t succeed! When this mission is over, I’ll join the Battle Group Leader in cutting off your head!"

But Wang Mengsong didn’t respond.

Gathered around him were one hundred forty-four Old Torch warriors.

Under Wang Mengsong’s command, they maneuvered to the other side of the frontline battlefield.

It was here that Wang Mengsong identified a risk that Erich had overlooked.

And when they arrived, the risk materialized.

A unit of over six hundred Elite Protectorate Army troops was rapidly advancing through a narrow Starport passage approximately 12 meters wide.

Every single one of them was equipped with \"Dragon Cavalry\" mecha.

Tall and extremely mobile, armed with beam lances effective at close and long range alike, these units posed lethal threats to Interstellar Warriors and even Terminators.

This Dragon Cavalry Corps was indisputably a trump card.

Erich's forces on the frontline numbered merely three hundred, fully committed to combat. If a highly mobile elite unit like this were to launch a surprise attack on his flank, coordinated with the Protectorate Army's main force on the frontline, New Torch would suffer devastating losses.

If the casualties proved too staggering, the entire operation might very well collapse.

But Wang Mengsong keenly identified this threat and had managed to intercept the Dragon Cavalry.

Now, it was up to the Torch Warriors to launch an assault on these Dragon Cavalry units as they moved at full speed.

The frontline featured two squads tasked with intercepting the Dragon Cavalry, using their firepower to pin them down.

Despite the advantages in firepower and mobility, the Dragon Cavalry's defense was far from impressive.

Therefore, interceptions couldn't rely on mindlessly blocking their path—lest the six hundred cavalry units, with just two rounds of beam lance volleys from their vanguard, blow everyone to pieces.

The two squads employed ambush tactics, concealing themselves and unleashing rapid bursts from their Blast Bomb Guns once the Dragon Cavalry passed; they swiftly charged into close range.

Even though the Dragon Cavalry's beam lances could be switched to melee mode during close combat for even greater power, close-quarter combat still slightly favored the Interstellar Warriors.

More importantly, when the melee battle ensued, the surrounding Dragon Cavalry units not only failed to advance further but also struggled to find opportunities for clustered attacks against the two-meter-plus Interstellar Warriors amidst their ranks of towering four-meter mechs.

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The Dragon cavalry besieging them turned into cover instead.

While they were thrown into chaos because of twenty Interstellar Warriors, dozens of Interstellar Warriors suddenly appeared at the tops of the fifteen-meter-high walls on either side. Holding Blast Bomb Guns, they began an overwhelming barrage from above at the Dragon cavalry. Simultaneously, dozens of warriors leapt over the high walls under the cover of firepower, wielding close-combat weapons such as Chain-saw Swords and Chainsaw Axes, and charged into the enemy ranks.

Wang Mengsong personally led a squad and participated in this battle.

Incidentally, he also recorded a short video of the situation here using the helmet's visor recording feature and sent it to Leo Erich.

...

Erich was silent.

Cold sweat seeped down his back.

The combat on the flank—he could sense it even without Wang Mengsong's report.

He visualized what it would be like: six hundred Dragon cavalry charging from the rear without warning, firing particle guns in a barrage from behind, followed by a direct assault.

Under a scenario of being attacked from both front and rear, not only would their offensive fail, but they might lose over a hundred bodies right here.

They had already suffered over fifty casualties, and with such heavy losses, sending out over half their forces would make it almost impossible to breach Aramita Starport's defenses.

At that point, they wouldn't just fail their mission target but might even lose the strategic positions they'd previously secured.

He had to admit that Wang Mengsong, whom he'd just furiously berated, had saved their mission.

Erich opened his mouth, but no words came out. He simply buried himself in directing the troops, continuing his frontal assault.

Meanwhile, on the other side, Wang Mengsong, leading the veteran Torch Warriors, swiftly decimated the six hundred Dragon cavalry.

These attackers, with high offense but fragile defenses, posed a significant threat when they used their mobility to launch a surprise attack from the battlefield's rear. However, when caught in a preemptive ambush where the Interstellar Warriors held the upper hand, their fragility became glaringly apparent. Moreover, the Torch Warriors engaged in close-quarters combat, maximizing their advantages while exacerbating the Dragon cavalry's weaknesses.

Only a small portion of the defeated Dragon cavalry managed to escape.

Wang Mengsong did not pursue them.

Chasing down those long-legged mechanical creations would only waste time unnecessarily.

He regrouped his forces and counted the casualties.

The situation was manageable; the team still retained substantial combat capability.

The operation had to continue, of course.

Wang Mengsong planned to open up a second battlefield on the flank—the origin of the Dragon cavalry's route—to attack the enemy's position.

He shared his plan with Erich.

Erich did not reply.

As the overall commander, he did not oppose it, since Wang Mengsong's earlier actions had demonstrated sharp judgment, correctness, and had indeed saved the team. Moreover, launching an attack from the flank, regardless of its success, would greatly assist Erich's own operations in the main battlefield.

Nonetheless, no matter how right it was, Wang Mengsong's unauthorized troop maneuver was technically an illegal action. Coupled with past prejudices, Erich was unwilling to endorse his behavior.

Wang Mengsong didn't care either.

Whether or not Erich approved, he was going to act.

If Erich coordinated with the frontal battlefield, that would be ideal; even without coordination, Wang Mengsong would execute his plan, doing everything possible to ensure mission success.

"Let them see, that we veterans, despite the blemishes on our record, are undoubtedly capable!"

Following the route of the Dragon cavalry's assault, he and his men fought their way back, encircling to attack from another direction near the Starport Command Tower.

Leaving only twenty men to guard the rear and block reinforcements, the remaining hundred-plus men were committed entirely to the assault.

This wave of attacks brought tremendous pressure to the Protection Army defending the Command Tower. Clearly, they hadn't anticipated Wang Mengsong's troops to suddenly emerge from what was originally their offensive direction.

When the last reports from the defeated Dragon cavalry mentioned their retreat toward this area, the Command Tower hastily gathered troops for defense.

These troops had barely arrived when they encountered the ferocious assault of the veteran Torch Warriors.

With insufficient defensive strength and no time to establish stable positions, they faced their first major challenge.

Next, the defenders made their second significant mistake: misjudging the tactics of the veteran Torch Warriors.

They failed to anticipate that these warriors, despite wearing identical Power Armor with identical markings, had an entirely different combat style! Using the same approach as they had against the newer Torch Warriors, the defenders paid dearly.

Their combat style was starkly distinct from the reckless, sacrificial, and rabid approach seen on the frontal battlefield from the newer Torch Warriors.

The veterans were noticeably calmer and more methodical.

While this approach isn't always advantageous, in this situation, it proved highly effective.

Against powerful berserk fighters, the best method is certainly not direct confrontation.

The Protection Army of the Sect of Mechanics layered their strategies with intricate obstacles. Whenever the Interstellar Warriors pushed forward aggressively, the defenders would abandon their positions, leaving behind sentry traps in the ruins of buildings, small rooms, and blind corners. Deploying

three to fifty soldiers at a time, they'd reappear behind the advancing warriors, firing heavy munitions at their rear.

This tactic ensured that captured positions were restless and required forces to be spared for guarding them, significantly reducing the strength allocated to forward assaults.

Such gradual attrition worked well on the frontal battlefield but proved less effective on the flank.

The veteran Torch Warriors did not engage in reckless, sacrificial assaults nor excessively brutal offensives. Instead, they exhibited much higher organization and discipline.

This led to positions being prematurely abandoned due to misjudgments, surrendering strategic resources faster than anticipated. Furthermore, arsenals hidden within these positions were swiftly cleared by the Torch Warriors with considerable expertise.

The veterans were cautious not to overextend themselves recklessly. After consolidating their positions, they'd return to continue the pressure.

Eventually, the defenders lost their positions but failed to bog down the Torch Warriors in a protracted engagement. The scattered forces hid within positions were swiftly eliminated instead of achieving their intended impact.

This further exacerbated the defenders' shortage of manpower on the flank battlefield.

By the time they realized this problem, it was already too late.

Even though elite reinforcements from the frontal battlefield—Serpent Mecha Soldiers, Heavy Hammer Mecha Soldiers, and augmented human units—were hurriedly deployed, their piecemeal approach turned into repeated defeats, resembling a futile attrition campaign.

In battle, Wang Mengsong's performance as a former commander was especially remarkable.

Being at the level of a Battle Group Champion, elite units of the Protection Army, even Knight Titans, could be swiftly taken down by him in single combat.

His precision in neutralizing high-threat targets sped up the flank assault beyond expectations, outpacing the defenders' ability to respond with reinforcements.

And so, they reached the base of the Command Tower.

Their target—the Sage orchestrating the defense of Aramita Starport—was inside.

All they had to do was breach the Command Tower, kill the Sage, and the mission would be complete.

Wang Mengsong would unequivocally earn the greatest honor.

But he refrained from doing so.

Not because of any personal consideration, but because of discipline.

He left most of his forces outside to secure the Command Tower's outer gate.

Personally, he led a small elite team to the frontal battlefield to provide support.

Under their influence, the frontal battlefield began to crumble as well.

Erich's forces, after sacrificing over a hundred Interstellar Warriors, finally breached the Protection Army's defensive line.

Chapter 619: The Battle of the Command Tower

Erich looked at Wang Mengsong, his expression quite complex.

What should be done now?

Should Wang Mengsong be stripped of his command, and this overly assertive guy be taken down?

Not to mention Wang Mengsong's contributions to the battle, just considering the cost of taking him down, it's unacceptable.

The old Torch members around Wang Mengsong were clearly all united with him. If force is used, will conflict arise between the two sides?

At such a critical moment, would there be internal strife?

That would be outrageous.

Erich maintained a cold face, but in truth, he was quite at a loss inside.

Since internal strife is out of the question, then... should we ask Wang Mengsong how the next actions should proceed?

That would be somewhat too humiliating.

In the midst of this dilemma, Wang Mengsong spoke up.

There was no pretense, just straight to the point, and he offered tactical suggestions for the next steps.

Then, the new Torch members began to take action.

There were still troops left outside; they needed some forces to guard the periphery of the command tower to prevent the Sage from escaping. To ensure that if he tried to flee from the top of the command tower using an aircraft, they could intercept immediately.

The firepower for interception wasn't just near the exterior of the command tower but also included several high-level platforms nearby. The Interstellar Warriors could ensure that no aircraft could approach or leave the command tower in a short timeframe.

If the Sage left by air, it would actually be easier to handle.

But clearly, he intended to die defending.

...

Antoine Delaroch was already aware of Farai's assassination.

He even received messages from various parties, hoping he would surrender. Wouldn't it be better for everyone to switch sides together, share in the great cause, and return to the Empire? There's no need for such fierce conflict, making the battle so brutal.

But Delaroch refused them all, and even furiously cursed those people.

Moreover, Delaroch felt he was far from losing yet.

Although the Interstellar Warriors attacking the Starport initially caused massive chaos with their strong individual abilities, as he reacted, the battlefield situation had already been brought under control.

Had it not been for an unexpected incident from the flank causing him misjudgment, he would still be calm and collected now.

But even now, it wasn't the end.

The command tower, though called a tower, had quite a large internal scale. In his hands, he still had thousands of elite troops, fortified within the command tower, defending over a dozen floors.

He did not expect these few thousand to repel the Interstellar Warriors alone. But as long as they could hold them off, the million troops within the Starport would continuously come for reinforcement to repel these Interstellar Warriors.

And as long as he held firm, the fence-sitters on the planet would not dare to completely side with the Alliance.

The Alliance agents were active, and they were somewhat stunned by the Thunder Operation. But given enough time, once they reacted, even if Farai died, he had enough prestige to turn the tide.

Delaroch stood up and paced, contemplating countermeasures. He knew the situation was extremely severe, but he wasn't without the power to fight. His body had been significantly modified for combat, and in terms of combat configuration alone, he believed he was even stronger than Farai.

He could hold on.

However, the terrible news kept coming in.

Several troop carriers fully loaded with elite forces, under the escort of fighter jets, were ready to enter the command tower from the air. Although Delaroch had declared no evacuation, it would still be good to have more reinforcements from the air.

But these attempts all failed.

Nearly a hundred Interstellar Warriors guarding the perimeter were not pushovers. They not only possessed complete anti-air infantry weapons but also had good effects using several anti-air firepower platforms, previously belonging to the Sect of Mechanics, captured in the surroundings.

Even with fighter escorts, it was useless. The troop transportation ships, capable of large-scale deployments, were still too fragile and easily shot down.

Moreover, the supporting forces from the ground perimeter all faced interception and couldn't reach their destination.

Troops numbering over ten thousand were often blocked directly by just a few Interstellar Warriors, unable to break through. The terrain within the Starport was very similar to the densely constructed surface Nest Capital, and in the narrow environment, the troops couldn't fully deploy. At the same time, the number of people confronting the Interstellar Warriors was limited. If the elite level was insufficient to break through, it was meaningless to have more people behind them.

Even using heavy firepower wasn't effective. Artillery was not usable inside the Starport, and using missile attacks and then employing tanks or other heavy armored units to approach for direct fire could indeed repel a few blocking Interstellar Warriors, but the passage would also collapse, preventing rapid troop movement. Detouring or clearing debris would take more time, during which they would face continuous harassment.

At times, when the New Era Torch warriors felt they couldn't hold on, they would even proactively destroy buildings, blocking roads in the structure of the Starport.

Of course, objectively, these were temporary difficulties. The news coming from all directions indicated they were trying every means to rescue the command tower. The number of Interstellar Warriors stationed outside was ultimately limited, and reinforcements would come eventually.

As long as he held on long enough.

Chapter 619: The Battle of the Command Tower_2

But the question is, can they hold out that long?

It seems... unlikely.

Ever since the Interstellar Warriors officially began their assault on the interior of the command tower, it didn't take long for De la Roche to start receiving reports one after another about certain layers and specific positions of the defensive lines being breached.

Simultaneously, he received real-time battle damage reports from various mechanical units, directly fed to the processing center in his brain.

He could almost "see" with his own mental vision how his elite units under his command were being rapidly annihilated in ferocious combat.

If things kept progressing at this pace, they were bound to be hit right in the face, and there was no avoiding it.

After a few moments of thought, he made a daring decision: to launch a counter-offensive!

The Interstellar Warriors, aiming for efficiency, didn't consolidate all their troops for a slow and steady advance. Instead, they split into multiple groups, probing the defenses within each layer to find the weakest areas. They would then execute a single-point breakthrough followed by a full-scale penetration.

Layer by layer, this was how they had been advancing.

Staying on the defensive would only allow the Warriors' relentless breakthroughs to squeeze out all remaining room for survival.

Proactive action was necessary!

Discarding his cumbersome Sage robes, De la Roche, now donning his combat gear, sprang into motion.

His augmented body didn't appear particularly exaggerated, nor was it exceptionally tall—it maintained a humanoid form. However, the purple-black bioengineered skin made him stand out unusually.

Taking advantage of the Warriors' divided units, De la Roche launched a surprise attack on the eleventh floor of the command tower, targeting a New World Torch Team that had just completed a single-point breakthrough.

The ambush was highly successful.

Surrounding him was an elite force from the Sect of Mechanics. To ensure maneuverability, units like colossus-grade combat machines and Knight Mecha could not accompany him. Instead, his troops included two elite squads of Protection Army warriors, more than thirty specialized combat Electrolyte Prophets—engine Prophets designed for warfare—and double their number of Iron Titan units acting as escorts. Together, this force posed a significant challenge for the Interstellar Warriors to confront.

Of course, if the force relied solely on those troops, they might successfully hunt down one Warrior squad, but losses would be inevitable—and possibly substantial. In a second operation, their diminished strength might result in failure.

De la Roche couldn't assemble another elite unit like this. The high-ranking Rangers in those Protection Army squads and the dozens of Electrolyte Prophets were not easily replaceable.

The solution lay in himself.

From his back, running along his spine, extended eight jointed arms resembling those of an arthropod, enabling him to move with incredibly exaggerated agility. Beneath his bio-engineered skin, purple-gray electronic tendons provided immense strength.

This combination turned him into a ruthless close-quarters killing machine. Long-range attacks would struggle to hit him; even if they did, his miniature Void Shield and reinforced physique would absorb the damage. He could often withstand such firepower and rush directly into the opponent's face. There, his twin blades and eight limb-like razor-sharp claws would wreak havoc. At blistering speeds, he could shred a Terminator Armor to pieces in mere seconds, or at most, a dozen seconds.

When he personally joined the fray, the elite troops accompanying him became more like luxury spectators.

That description might be exaggerated—they weren't literally spectators. They fought with all their might, and their efforts objectively diverted the Warriors' attention, creating a better combat space for De la Roche.

But it was undeniable that he was the one handling the most challenging battles.

Using this method, he secured his first victory, eliminating a ten-man tactical team from the New World Torch Squad with minimal losses.

Soon after, he retreated quickly, leaving the reinforcements from the Warriors' main force arriving too late, effectively catching them off guard. He then took the opportunity to assault another ten-man tactical group. Unfortunately, this time he only managed to kill six, as the other four escaped.

Avoiding prolonged combat, De la Roche calmly chose to retreat, sidestepping any further counterattacks from the larger forces.

He understood that his appearance on the frontline, with his formidable combat prowess, had significantly bolstered their defensive positions. But his presence meant he was also the main target of the Warriors. For the New World Torch's forces, there was no longer a need to fight their way up layer by layer. All they had to do was seize an opportunity at this level to encircle and eliminate him.

He had to be extremely cautious.

Otherwise, his proactive tactics, meant to resolve their plight, could backfire as a method of delivering himself into their hands.

However, he ultimately fell into a trap during his attack on the third Warrior squad.

...

Two squads down, and sixteen Warriors lost in a short period—that was already a significant casualty.

After all, aside from the troops stationed outside to block reinforcements, there were only about two hundred Warriors in total advancing into the command center.

Should De la Roche continue his hunting spree, slaying several more squads, the Warriors' offensive would undoubtedly slow down due to depleted numbers. At that point, the Sage could comfortably remain in the rear, confidently watching the Warriors grind through layer after layer of defenses, potentially wasting untold amounts of time.

They had to seize this opportunity to eliminate this unexpectedly powerful foe.

It was a perfect moment, though Erich—despite his arrogance—was still a rookie. His attitude toward Wang Mengsong primarily stemmed from resentment over the Battle Group's history, rather than personal disdain.

But now was not the time to concern oneself with such grievances.

Erich approached Wang Mengsong, seeking advice on what to do.

Wang Mengsong generously provided the answer: pit strength against strength.

Deploy a squad that looks like an easy target for De la Roche to hunt, but contains a powerful fighter capable of countering him. Delay his progress, hold out until the main force arrives for support, and ideally incapacitate or kill him outright. That would be the optimal solution.

Upon hearing this, Erich felt hesitant.

The New World Torch Squad seemed to lack such formidable individuals.

Reports from brothers who had survived previous battles confirmed that De la Roche was highly skilled. Perhaps Battle Group Leader Moretti could achieve Wang Mengsong's proposed result?

Even that wasn't certain.

At the very least, among the Torch Squad present, the strongest, Erich himself, couldn't guarantee such success.

In the end, Wang Mengsong pointed to himself.

After all, as a Battle Group Leader, he was no ordinary combatant. The New World Torch Squad may not have been renowned for individual combat prowess historically, but he personally could easily rival any Battle Group Champion from other squads!

The question was whether Erich dared to trust him.

...

There was no hesitation to be had.

A ten-person squad launched what appeared to be a reckless assault that would have caused massive casualties without intervention from the Protection Army. The Warriors' main force was clearly positioned farther away, requiring time to arrive as reinforcements...

With all conditions perfectly aligned, De la Roche predictably took the bait.

His move was natural; there was no reason for him to suspect a trap.

But this time, it was indeed a trap.

Wang Mengsong, adorned in nothing but standard tactical Power Armor—not even the Terminator variant—engaged De la Roche the moment he appeared.

His sharp swordsmanship not only saved the first brother targeted by De la Roche but also taught the battle-hardened Sage a painful lesson: two of his joint limbs were severed.

Then, an unrelenting storm of fierce sword strikes enveloped this so-called combat-specialized Sage in a deadly whirlwind!

Chapter 620, Loyalty, or Destruction!

Wang Mengsong's offensive immediately caused significant trouble for De la Roche.

This Sage, whose body had been extraordinarily modified for combat, had personally killed over a dozen Interstellar Warriors in the previous hunting operation. To him, the abilities of Interstellar Warriors seemed to be nothing special, nowhere near as exaggerated as the legends claimed.

He, of course, found this very normal.

No matter how formidable Interstellar Warriors are, just look at their Power Armor, isn't it only fifty thousand tax credits a set? Or a hundred thousand tax credits a set?

What matters is the person inside.

But how much more valuable can that person be?

As for himself, this set of equipment on him, developed from studying the Alien technologies of the Insect Swarm, cost thirty million tax credits just to manufacture.

And that's just the manufacturing cost, excluding the expenses during the research phase.

Research is an endeavor far more costly than manufacturing.

Moreover, even after it was produced, not just anyone could undergo such modifications; it required someone like him, a Sage with the necessary capability to handle this modification technology.

With such a significant gap, was it not natural for him to crush ordinary Interstellar Warriors?

The concept of a Demigod merely bestowed some peculiar qualities upon Interstellar Warriors within a religious context. Their superhuman bodies are indeed remarkable, able to maximize the value of their

Power Armor, but they cannot contend with Sage-level full body modifications that exceed their worth a hundredfold.

Except for the top-notch Interstellar Warriors.

De la Roche felt immense pressure.

He even suffered a loss at the very onset.

Wang Mengsong, relying on his initial sneak attack, had the intention of directly killing him. Therefore, from the first move, he exerted full force. The weapon in his hand had already been switched to a Phase Sword.

Originally, he certainly wasn't qualified to use such a top weapon, not yet mass-produced by the Alliance. Throughout the entire battle group, there were only a few of them. The one he was using now was entrusted to him by Erich, just to increase his chances of victory.

The Phase Sword truly was top-tier; without the assistance of such a superior weapon, even a Champion Swordsman would find it hard to sever a pair of De la Roche's limbs in one strike.

Having suffered a loss at the start, under the swift and fierce slashes, De la Roche found it increasingly difficult to contend.

Deeming himself a combat-specialized Sage, he had not, when modifying himself, opted for the typical methods of making himself larger, sturdier, and more fortified with firepower. Instead, he prioritized agility, skill, and strength, maintaining a roughly human-sized form.

But in reality?

At the end of the day, he was still a Sage of the Sect of Mechanics, a non-combatant, a researcher. His so-called training was just that—training, lacking the experience of life-and-death struggles on the front line.

With his advantage in powerful and expensive equipment, he had appeared invincible in the past few sporadic battles. He had even come to believe himself to be a combat master.

But when he truly faced a Champion Swordsman among the Interstellar Warriors, in his first life-and-death battle, he realized what terror was.

Objectively speaking, Wang Mengsong's various physical attributes were inferior to De la Roche's.

A champion-level Interstellar Warrior, despite having the same equipment, possessed a bodily strength that far surpassed ordinary Interstellar Warriors.

However, compared to De la Roche's body, in hard metrics, it still couldn't compare.

In terms of strength level, speed, and agility, theoretically, he should have been one tier above Wang Mengsong.

However, the reason they were called champions was due to their overwhelming experience, technique, tactical proficiency, and swordsmanship.

And De la Roche, in terms of actual combat skills and experience, was far inferior to even an ordinary Interstellar Warrior.

His abilities and bodily functions in hard metrics could not be utilized more than thirty percent against someone like Wang Mengsong as a champion.

He fought very awkwardly, and several times, even his futile attempts at using a life-risking method were effortlessly neutralized by Wang Mengsong.

After sustaining several cuts, when even the self-healing of the Void electronic tendons began to falter, he finally calmed down.

He began to attempt to escape.

But each time, he was intercepted by Wang Mengsong.

Frantically looking around, he hoped his powerful and luxurious entourage could provide some assistance.

But they could not.

The entourage, which in principle should have been able to crush the remaining nine Interstellar Warriors, though indeed at an advantage, were far from being able to completely resolve their opponents to come to his aid.

The Torches' warriors participating in this operation were all meticulously selected.

Although the rate at which they produced squadron champions was more than five times less than that of the Phoenix, within five hundred people, they still managed to assemble ten squadron champions.

They certainly didn't possess the level of Wang Mengsong, but they weren't weak either.

De la Roche expected others to help him? Impossible. In fact, a Torch Warrior, confident in his skills, even took a shot at him during the battle, unafraid of accidentally injuring Wang Mengsong during the high-speed combat.

The shot did not miss, rather it accurately coordinated with Wang Mengsong's strike, causing De la Roche to pause and providing the Champion Swordsman a great opportunity to thrust the Phase Sword into De la Roche's chest.

De la Roche swiftly retreated, the sword withdrawing from his body.

This wasn't a fatal wound for him; the biological tissue developed from the Void Insect Species technology quickly repaired the damage.

In a moment's time, he would be restored to health.

However, right at that moment, another sword struck him from behind.

Erich had arrived!

More Interstellar Warriors were converging from behind, but the second company commander of the battlegroup could not wait any more and rushed over immediately upon receiving the message.

With rather strong skills, even among the squadron champions, he was able to play a significant role in the battle!

Receiving several more sword strikes, though the Power Sword was not as fierce as the Phase Sword, De la Roche finally managed to force Erich back slightly by bearing injury, but he couldn't withstand Wang Mengsong's swift follow-up.

Under siege, De la Roche became increasingly incapable of resistance.

Ultimately, his quickly repairing body, after being slashed into countless pieces and then burned again by a thermal melter, could no longer reassemble.

...

After De la Roche's death, although the war did not immediately cease, the intensity significantly decreased.

Until this point, most of the high officials of the Hawk Faction had perished, and the Local Faction and Fence-Sitters, who vastly outnumbered them, recognized the situation more clearly.

Under their exertion, the Protection Army no longer came to court death.

With Sages already dead, why continue fighting?

Indeed, on Alamita, many Dominant Bishops of the Sect of Mechanics had already organized a temporary council and contacted Gu Hang, hoping the Alliance would send an envoy so both sides could discuss matters amicably.

This was an exceedingly clear signal; everything was negotiable, and there was no need to fight anymore.

Unexpectedly, Gu Hang rejected this proposal.

Moreover, the entire Alliance Main Fleet suddenly pressed forward aggressively.

His voice also spread through various channels of Alliance agents, broadcasting publicly to the entire Alamita:

"Unconditional restoration of order, I welcome every individual uprising in battle, you have demonstrated your loyalty to the Empire."

"And those still oblivious by now, I will, on behalf of The Emperor, on behalf of the God of All Machines, impose the harshest punishment!"

"Loyalty, or destruction! Your choice."