Governor 641

Chapter 641, How Does Corruption Occur?

The Empire's Northern Front and Southern Front War Zones, there has been some verbal conflict between the commanders of the two sides.

Honestly, in the public opinion field within the entire Empire, Gu Hang is definitely at a disadvantage.

What kind of reputation does the Fleet Marshal of the Black Cross Army have compared to Gu Hang?

Although, in terms of status, both are war zone commanders; the actual power they possess differs significantly. Gu Hang mustered all his resources here, unlike Leroux, who is basically in a provisional role as the Alliance Hierarch. Leroux does have the strong Black Cross Army behind him, but he isn't the Supreme Marshal of the Black Cross Army, whereas Gu Hang genuinely commands three star domains and is about to conquer two more, controlling over two thousand worlds under his banner, definitely stronger than Leroux.

But, he is an Interstellar Warrior, a renowned Fleet Marshal of the Black Cross Army, his combat figure appearing in many places within the Empire, his combat stories widely spread and recognized.

In this regard, Gu Hang falls far behind.

Galaraldo did use various methods on Holy Terra to promote Gu Hang. Stories like him defeating the Great Demon, saving worlds, and defeating the Green Skin Orcs are indeed quite good, even artistically arranging his actions, emphasizing heroism.

Yet, the Empire's people love the brave and fearless warrior more.

Interstellar Warriors are cooler than Psychics; pure military commanders are more welcomed than politicians standing behind, possibly hiding numerous conspiracies.

Moreover, Gu Hang's feats are limited to the eastern part of the Imperial's Eastern Frontier, unlike the Black Cross Army, who flaunt their prowess everywhere.

They are a battle group with thousands of years of history, the reputation accumulated over countless years, which Gu Hang cannot compare with.

Gu Hang's influence can't compete with the other.

However, Gu Hang did the right thing: he avoided the pitfall of defensiveness.

In situations of 'debate', one must avoid defending. If others criticize, and you reply saying that's not true, I'm not like that, stop talking nonsense, then you'll be scorned forever.

When the speaker opens their mouth, the defender has to break their mouth speaking.

Especially when there's a disparity in influence between both parties, it's even more true.

Upon hearing Leroux criticize Gu Hang, various commanders from different battle groups, different Star Realm Army units, and the Tribunal will react immediately...while Gu Hang speaks, only his subordinates can hear, his external influence is minimal.

That's when you have to retort back, directly at them.

If you say I'm hoarding power, preserving strength, then I'll criticize you for pursuing battle merits without considering consequences, risking failure.

It's not merely about mutual accusations, Gu Hang truly thinks so.

Ever since the Iron Armor Battle Group shattered the Phoenix of the West Line and invaded the Magrey Cosmic Domain, their actions, from Gu Hang's perspective, seemed quite odd.

In terms of offense, indeed there is; they've swept through thousands of worlds in the Magrey Cosmic Domain in a short time, seemingly dispersing their main force, striking here and there.

The momentum is grand, especially leveraging the previous victory over the Phoenix, genuinely making others surrender at the mere mention.

Yet Gu Hang finds it peculiar, their grand momentum is like rootless duckweed without a strategic focus, merely enlarging the attack area blindly, soon enough, they'll have to retreat from what they've conquered.

Even though Gu Hang can understand they're spreading the Insect Race's infestation, turning more worlds into direct biomass resources, they indeed achieved it to some extent. However, each planet resists, unwilling to be consumed easily, and Iron Armor, overly dispersed, finds difficulty in suppressing resistance of many worlds swiftly.

How much can the Insect Race's infestation spread? How much biomass can they absorb?

Facts prove Gu Hang was right.

When the West Line was reorganized, with Salius leading the Otaubis Battle Group as the core, returning to the battlefield, the vast areas of the Magrey Cosmic Domain were quickly regained, Iron Armor was pounded into silence.

According to reports from the West Line, they claimed Iron Armor's forces were greatly dispersed, catching Iron Armor several times in small battlefields, most ending in victory.

But upon carefully analyzing their reports—the reports obtained from Galaraldo—Gu Hang believes the situation on the West Line is far less optimistic than what Salius has reported.

Iron Armor was silenced indeed, the main force of the West Line did progress triumphantly, nonetheless, hidden beneath those glorious battle reports, is the fact they've never annihilated the main force of Iron Armor in a decisive battle, even those victories in small skirmishes, upon closer inspection, were mostly against local rebels, cultists, and infected groupings. Few records exist of engagements with the elite of the Princess Legion let alone with Iron Armor's Interstellar Warriors, and such records are glorified extensively, yet upon closer inspection, terms like disperse and drive off are frequent whereas eliminations or kills are less common.

This still without considering the possibility of embellishment in reports, is what Gu Hang observed.

Is it possible for the reports to be unembellished? Honestly, even the disciplined Alliance Army can't achieve that.

Let's not even discuss intentional embellishment, battlefield statistics are inherently complex, with various situations, sometimes requiring estimates—which to put bluntly means fabrication.

Chapter 641: How Does Corruption Happen?_2

Even for Gu Hang, holding the Alliance's war report, he had to compare it with the war report provided by his system after each war to confirm some data.

Gu Hang didn't find the report submitted by Salius to be particularly reliable.

Combined with the information Gu Hang obtained from Waluk, he pieced together what was likely a solid fact.

There was definitely a significant issue with the insectoid queen larva the Iron Armor Battle Group acquired back then.

After it was handed over to Waluk for research, indeed, some initial results were achieved. The increasingly mature queen seemed to be controlled by the equipment developed by Waluk and could, as hoped by Iron Armor and the Alfonso Sect, help humans control the insect swarm, forming a chain where humans control the queen, and the queen controls the swarm.

From that point onwards, Iron Armor gained unprecedented development. They could use the threat of the insect swarm to garner massive resource support from the Empire, while comfortably establishing their own independent kingdom within the Princess Star Domain, and across various locations within the Spiderweb Domain.

If anyone disobeyed or wasn't compliant, they would unleash the insect swarm.

The insect swarm's cooperation was naturally due to their control.

The same went for the Central Empire.

Holy Terra doesn't believe in the threat posed by the swarm? Then let us show you.

Once convinced, the necessary resource allocations were made, allowing Iron Armor to step in—not even needing to fight desperately, merely using the queen to redirect the swarm.

At this stage, both Iron Armor and Alfonso felt everything was under their control.

They didn't plan to expand the swarm to its limits, nor did they revere the swarm. From Iron Armor's perspective, the Void Insect Species was simply a tool, a biological weapon. Alfonso regarded it as a source of immense technological progress, gaining precious biological materials by studying the swarm's structure and breeding them; acquiring new technological inspirations from the swarm's organizational methods; and advancing research significantly in areas like biochemical machines and spiritual-energy machines by studying the swarm's ultimate individuals, whether powerful Insect Nest Tyrants or Brain Bug Tyrants.

Some of the biotechnologies developed by Waluk even leaked externally.

Members of the Mechanical Sect always tend to modify their own bodies. A typical sect considers mechanics as beauty, binary information as noble evolution, and flesh as insignificant. However, some sects skilled in genetic and biochemical modification veer towards mutation.

The original Alfonso Sect was a more typical mechanical sect, but the widely spread high-level biotechnologies intrigued many people, leading them to create biological and mechanical body structures using cultivated insect race materials to modify their bodies.

The sect also developed some injections that significantly enhance physical fitness and mental focus, granting incredible strength almost without side effects. These precious injections became a type of combat drug used internally by the Iron Armor Battle Group.

Until this point, everything seemed fine.

But in Gu Hang's ears, it left him feeling somewhat chilled.

Using insect race bodies, gene segments, and constructing materials to modify themselves... using insect race genes to create injections to strengthen their bodies...

My God!

If you aren't corrupted, who is?

Hearing this, Gu Hang wasn't surprised at all by the subsequent complete loss of control.

But in truth, no one knows when exactly things went out of control.

It's not like one day, suddenly, the queen broke free of control and started reverse-controlling everyone.

Gu Hang speculated it was more like a silent and gradual process.

Utilizing the swarm to pressure the Empire was always disgraceful, kept highly confidential within Iron Armor and Alfonso, accessible to only a few. And it was precisely these top power layers that were the first to be corrupted.

Their perception of the queen transformed from being merely a tool, a biological weapon, treated with caution and vigilance, to respect, seeing its usefulness, with the queen always being gentle and controllable, then to worship, considering the power of the Void Swarm as tremendous, finally leading to complete control, calling that queen 'Princess'.

Naturally, with a Princess, there should be something higher.

Waluk termed it 'Supreme Mother'.

He repeatedly claimed that the Supreme Mother is about to descend upon this universe, devouring everything and taking away all living beings. Everyone who worships the Supreme Mother will be part of her, obtaining immortality, everyone becomes an ascending deity, never fading. Those who do not worship the Supreme Mother are the base pests, destined only to be devoured, digested, and ultimately erased from existence in this universe.

All this information was extracted by Gu Hang from Waluk.

The extraction process was quite challenging.

Initially, Gu Hang intended to use spiritual energy to directly scour this Great Sage's mind, but he failed.

As a Great Sage, Waluk's body modification was immensely high. Generally speaking, the Mechanical Sect is lenient towards body modifications, the baseline being not to modify one's brain, only allowed to attach chips inside. Of course, secretly crossing the line might not be uncommon, but if discovered, it surely becomes a big issue. However, as long as one's brain's contents aren't exposed too overtly, who's going to perform a brain surgery check?

Who would dare check a Great Sage?

Waluk's brain had long changed form, having applied the biological technology derived from the swarm to his own brain.

The dissected form was completely unlike a human brain's shape.

Moreover, he—or rather 'it'—could no longer be found with a distinct soul. Its original projection in Subspace resembled a cloud, a black hole, a part extracted from Subspace, unlike a normal creature with its soul tethered to a material basis.

Different biological structures, lacking a soul, made it impossible for Gu Hang to piece together the facts entirely from his memory.

Thankfully, the guy had been gradually growing crazy since his capture. Though communicating was somewhat difficult, often speaking incoherently and confusing at times, the best part was one could still converse with him, asking questions, and he would always respond from bizarre angles.

The aforementioned pieces of information were painstakingly pieced together through these difficult inquiries and bits of madness.

There will undoubtedly be many areas inconsistent with the reality. However, all in all, the credibility should be fairly high.

During Gu Hang's last exchange with Galaraldo, he shared these acquired pieces of information with his political ally on Holy Terra, expressing concerns.

The two discussed and made a decision.

First, a ship would come from Holy Terra. An elite team from the Legal Department and Military Affairs Department would come to take away Great Sage Waluk. The Mars Church expressed great interest in him, while the High Lords of Holy Terra were keenly interested in publicly trying and punishing such a major traitor.

A living Waluk can fetch a high price. In this rebellion, his value might be second only to Humphrey Paolo, the major traitor.

Additionally, Galaraldo also took Gu Hang's warning seriously.

However, he subtly mentioned that he couldn't control the actions on the North Line and West Line. The authority of the two commanders was the greatest. He could only repack these intel and inform them.

Chapter 642

Gu Hang instructed Galaraldo to convey the situation of the North and West lines, including the process of corruption and some speculations about the current status.

In today's situation, the enemy should no longer be recognized as merely a group of rebels; rather, they should be treated as a cult infected with the insect virus.

Although this 'cult' is special, not only having a large number of interstellar warriors but also expanding to thousands of worlds, they are still a type of insect-infested cult. This will directly reflect in their motives showing massive differences. Their ultimate goal is not occupation, but annihilation followed by consumption.

With this understanding, the Empire's two-line strategy is undoubtedly foolish.

Especially the North Line.

Holding the idea of stepping into Reiaductus first and regarding Iron Armor as a Starfighter Battle Group to deal with, thinking that reaching their home planet would force them to abandon everything and return, is simply foolish.

Besides sounding a bit better, the rest are all shortcomings.

Gu Hang judged that Leroi is bound to suffer greatly.

Comparatively, the situation on the West Line is somewhat better, but not by much.

Although on the western battlefield they have targeted many worlds, conducted insect infestation clearance, and even employed some effective methods which Gu Hang learned and used, he inevitably shares a mindset similar to Leroi.

The arrangements on the West Line can only be said to be slightly better than the complete disregard seen on the North Line. But there are issues, too, as the Star Devouring Cosmos on the North Line, after all, still retains some strength, and the invasion situation is not that severe, allowing them to clean up their own mess. Magrey Cosmic Domain is completely wrecked, and Salius scarcely manages it, even drawing resources from the domain itself to support his expedition, indicating potential problems within the domain.

Both the West Line and North Line have their respective predicaments.

Gu Hang does not wish to hurriedly rush to the Princess Star Domain like them, and this is the reason.

He does not deny having a mindset influenced by local power leader's divisive thinking, which he cannot admit externally, though there is no need to deceive himself, nor is there any shame in it.

However, putting those aside, purely from a commander's perspective, Gu Hang believes that stabilizing the rear situation, strangling the potential gains of biomass behavior by insect race enemies, and cautiously advancing step by step is a more reliable choice.

Impulsively entering the Princess Star Domain is truly unwise.

The main forces on the West and North Lines likely face the situation of encountering a wasteland filled with worlds already consumed clean by the Princess, alongside a vast, countless insect swarm; while behind them, the overlooked problems erupt, cutting off their retreat with newly spawned insect swarms.

Gu Hang has already sent out this warning, and Galaraldo also stated that he would help in warning the two commanders of the West and North Lines.

In this aspect, he feels that he is indeed too selfless. Even despite conflicts with Mathieu Leroux, he does not forget to remind and warn.

However, Gu Hang is actually rather pessimistic about the effect of the warning.

Salius might be slightly better, as Gu Hang has not had much interaction with this individual and doesn't know their disposition, but it's unlikely to be worse than Mathieu Leroux's.

As for the latter, Gu Hang is ninety percent sure that this person would not heed advice at all.

Moreover, it’s not just the commanders of the West and North lines who refuse to listen. As the messenger, is Galaraldo truly sincere in speaking for Gu Hang?

Their relationship is good, and they are steadfast political allies with broadly aligned interests, which is undeniable.

But broadly aligned does not mean completely aligned.

For instance, on this matter, there will be some disagreements between the two.

...

"Report to the Prime Minister! The warning has been transmitted to Commander Salius and Commander Leroux!"

"Good." Galaraldo responded simply while tidying his appearance.

The secretary hesitated slightly but still spoke: "Is that enough? I’m afraid they won’t take it very seriously... Are you sure you don’t need to make a personal communication? It would be much more persuasive."

"No need." Galaraldo’s attitude remained quite casual, "This is just a reminder, transmitting some opinions of the Southern Commander for the commanders of the North and West lines to see, just to keep them informed. Don’t treat it as something too serious, and certainly not as a suggestion to the front-line commanders, let alone a command. Let them handle it on their own."

"If that’s the case, I’m afraid the two battle group leaders on the front line will not take Mr. Gu’s opinions seriously and will continue to attack..."

"What’s the harm in that?"

Galaraldo’s rhetorical question left his secretary momentarily stunned.

Who doesn’t know that our Prime Minister’s closest political ally and also the largest local supporter is none other than Mr. Gu?

Previously, the secretary had listened to every word of the conversation between Galaraldo and Gu Hang.

Didn’t he agree sincerely to help persuade Mr. Gu?

Galaraldo sighed and earnestly said: "Little Gu’s ideas aren’t lacking, after all, being cautious is wise. However, such large-scale military operations, ultimately, depend on the front-line commanders’ own decisions. The Empire has commissioned them as commanders, thus trusting their judgment. If Gu Hang believes he should be cautious on the Southern Line, then he should act cautiously, moving step by step, which is perfectly reasonable. As for the other two, if they receive Gu Hang’s intelligence and speculations and still decide to continue their attack, then we should also trust their judgment. Gu Hang’s worries are valid, but we must also trust Sallius Warlord and Marshal Ruwa."

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After saying these things, he looked at his secretary: "There’s no reason for the Southern Commander to decide the overall strategy of the Western Line and Northern Line, nor for us to sit on Holy Terra and directly interfere with frontline command decisions. That would be a grave mistake."

"Moreover... attacking early and resolving the issues with the Princess quickly is also very important. If I go to persuade the two now, and the Prime Minister and other High Lords become aware of it, what will they think? The Prime Minister didn’t directly interfere with military command, should I take the lead here?"

"The Prime Minister strongly supported the reconstruction of the main forces on the Western Line. He is eagerly anticipating that Sallius Warlord will lead the Sun Legion to achieve the most significant honor and achievements. If Leroux takes the glory away, it would once again elevate the reputation of the traditional Interstellar Warriors, and the Prime Minister will not be pleased."

Upon hearing this, his secretary suddenly realized.

If this consideration is factored in, indeed, persuasion should not be attempted.

Moreover, he can deduce and realize another matter.

The Western Line represents the Prime Minister, the Northern Line represents the prestige of traditional Interstellar Warriors within the Empire, determined by the composition and organization of the main forces of the two lines. So what does the Southern Line represent? Gu Hang from the Southern Line certainly represents Prime Minister Galaraldo.

And precisely because of this, the secretary was previously concerned for Galaraldo.

Both lines are advancing toward the core area of the Ironclad, while the Southern Line lingers under Commander Gu's command. Once victory is achieved, won't all the credit belong to others?

Since Mr. Gu is unwilling to advance, there should be a way to hold back both the Western Line and Northern Line, to let them 'advance steadily', then that would be ideal.

But upon further contemplation, it seems not to be the case.

Indeed, Gu Hang represents Galaraldo for the Southern Line, but does the Western Line merely represent the Prime Minister?

No.

The opportunity for the reconstruction of the main forces on the Western Line came when Galaraldo defeated former Minister of Justice Ou Juren. This maneuver was achieved with the support of Prime Minister Qi Bodu, and after Ou Juren's downfall, Galaraldo seized a seat among the High Lords, serving Qi Bodu fervently. During the formation of the Western Line's main forces, under the auspices of the Military Affairs Department, they were close at hand, and considerable effort was exerted.

From this perspective, the success of the Western Line equally signifies Galaraldo's success.

Given this, why persuade?

Clearly, this is currently the best scenario!

If Leroux leading the Northern Line eradicates the Princess rebellion and receives the highest honor, not only will the Prime Minister be displeased, but Galaraldo will also be unhappy. In the absence of trust in Gu Hang, relying on the indeed stronger Sallius is entirely justified.

Moreover, should the situation change—if the war conditions of the Princess Star Domain indeed turn out to be a trap as Gu Hang predicted, with considerable threats from the rear leading to a worsening of the situation—Galaraldo can accept it: I did warn the two commanders to be cautious; it's their fault for not listening!

Also, at that time, only the Southern Line remains standing, coincidentally, my good brother Galaraldo!

Even if we take a step back, should the least desirable outcome occur—Leroux achieving the highest honor—what difference does it make?

The Western Line cleaned up the mess left by Phoenix; that credit is not lacking, and it belongs to Galaraldo.

The Southern Line destroyed the Alphonso Sect, which is an accomplishment already secured, regardless of the circumstances, ranking as the second major achievement in the entire campaign.

Simply put, Galaraldo remains the most stable individual, irrespective of the circumstances.

What is there to worry about under such conditions?

Having figured all this out, the secretary also felt much more at ease.

He relaxed his brows, smilingly followed Galaraldo out of the room, all the way to the terrace, and then proceeded to the hangar where an air car was already waiting.

Once aboard the air car, it took only a moment before they arrived at a banquet hall.

Following behind Galaraldo, the secretary observed the Minister of Military Affairs engage in cordial conversations with one Holy Terra official after another. He would occasionally mention Gu Hang, complimenting his victory in Alphonso, praising his foresight, steady approach, and ability to consolidate a line.

Upon mentioning Marshal Leroux's criticism of Gu Hang, Galaraldo would skillfully defend Gu Hang from multiple angles, incidentally praising Sallius, suggesting that it remains uncertain who will win Reiaductus, and Leroux might indeed suffer as Gu Hang warned.

The more the secretary listened, the more he felt assured about his Prime Minister.

...

Previously, the secretary had heard every single word during the conversation between Galaraldo and Gu Hang.

Wasn't there a promise to help persuade Mr. Gu?

Galaraldo sighed, speaking earnestly: "Young Gu's thoughts are not without merit; stability above all. However, in such a large-scale military operation, ultimately, it is about the frontline commanders' own judgments. When the Empire appoints commanders, it should fully trust their judgment. Gu Hang decided to be cautious on the Southern Line, so he ought to be cautious, and proceed steadily, which is only right. As for the other two, should they decide to continue attacking after receiving Gu Hang's intelligence and presumptions, we should also trust their judgment. Gu Hang's concerns are justified, but we also need to have faith in Sallius Warlord and Marshal Leroux."

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After saying this, he looked at his secretary: "There is no reason for the Southern Commander to decide the overall strategy for the Western and Northern Lines, nor is there a reason for us sitting on Holy Terra to directly interfere with frontline command decisions; this is a major taboo."

"What's more... advancing early and solving the Princess's issue early is also very important. Now if I go to persuade the two of them, what will the Prime Minister and other High Lords think if they find out? Even the Prime Minister hasn't directly intervened in military command, should I be the one to do it?"

"The Prime Minister has strongly supported the reconstruction of the Western Line main force, and he expects Sallius Warlord to lead the Sun Legion's loyalists to achieve the most important honors and achievements. If Leroux takes it away, it will again boost the reputation of the traditional Interstellar Warriors, and the Prime Minister will not be pleased."

Upon hearing this, his secretary suddenly understood.

If this aspect is considered, it is indeed inappropriate to persuade.

Moreover, he could also think deeply and understand another matter.

The Western Line represents the Prime Minister, the Northern Line represents the prestige of the traditional Interstellar Warriors within the Empire. This is determined by the way the two line main forces are organized and the composition of the troops. So what does the Southern Line represent? Of course, Gu Hang of the Southern Line represents Prime Minister Jia Lerd.

Precisely for this reason, the secretary was previously worried on behalf of Jia Lerd.

Both lines are about to advance into the heartland of the Ironclad, while the Southern Line is still dawdling under Commander Gu's command. After the victory, wouldn't all the credit go to others?

Since Mr. Gu is unwilling to advance, he should find a way to hold back the Western and Northern Lines, letting them also 'proceed steadily,' which would be preferable.

But upon deeper reflection, it seems not to be this way.

Gu Hang of the Southern Line indeed represents Jia Lerd, but does the Western Line only represent His Excellency the Prime Minister?

No.

The catalyst for the reconstruction of the Western Line main force was exactly Jia Lerd's defeat of former Minister of Justice, Ou Juren. This was accomplished with the support of Prime Minister Qi Bodu, and after Ou Juren's downfall, Jia Lerd smoothly secured a High Lord seat. During the process of organizing the Western Line main force, with the Military Affairs Department being particularly close in proximity, considerable efforts were expended.

From this perspective, the success of the Western Line also signifies Jia Lerd's success.

If so, then why persuade?

Clearly, this is the best scenario!

If Leroux's leadership in the Northern battlefield to quell the Princess's rebellion is considered the most significant achievement, not only the Prime Minister will be unhappy, but Jia Lerd will also be displeased. In the absence of reliance on Gu Hang, it is reasonable to pin hopes on the indeed more powerful Salius.

And if the situation changes, and the situation in the Princess Star Domain is indeed, as Gu Hang predicted, a trap with a significant threat at the back, ultimately leading to a worsening situation, Jia Lerd can also accept: I'm the one who replaced Gu Hang and issued a warning to the two commanders; it's all your fault for not listening!

Moreover, at that time, the Southern Line will be the only one left, and it just so happens to be my brother, Jia Lerd!

Even if the worst-case scenario, which is least desired, occurs, whereby Leroux secures the highest honor, so what?

The Western Line picking up the mess left by Phoenix will inevitably have credit, which involves Jia Lerd.

The Southern Line eliminating the Alfonso Sect is a real achievement already secured, and it is undoubtedly the second greatest achievement of the entire rebellion suppression campaign.

In simple terms, Jia Lerd is the most stable person in any situation; he won't lose out no matter what.

In such a situation, what is there to worry about?

Understanding these matters, the secretary also felt much more at ease.

He relaxed his brow, smiling as he followed behind Jia Lerd, who had already stepped out of the room, and moved to the balcony, then stepped out. There was already a hovering vehicle waiting on the tarmac.

Once on the hovering vehicle, in just a moment, they arrived at a banquet hall.

Following behind Jia Lerd, the secretary watched the Prime Minister of the Military Affairs Department engage in friendly conversations with various high-ranking officials on Holy Terra. He heard him speak of Gu Hang from time to time, praising his victory in Alfonso, commending his far-sightedness and steady approach, and his ability to stabilize a frontline.

When discussing Marshal Leroux's attacks on Gu Hang, Jia Lerd would cleverly defend Gu Hang from multiple aspects while also praising Salius. By then, it's uncertain who will take down Reiaductus; Leroux might indeed—just as Gu Hang warned—suffer a great loss.

The more he heard, the more the secretary felt a sense of admiration for his Prime Minister.

Chapter 643: Strict, Severe, Swift

After assigning tasks to the intelligence division, Gu Hang immediately devoted himself to major military and political affairs.

Gu Hang said that the Alliance currently has no spare strength to enter the Princess Star Domain and needs to stabilize the occupied territories. This was not merely an excuse, but truly necessary.

That is not an easy task; there are too many matters to handle.

Just in military terms, there are already plenty.

This is even with the large-scale actions in the Thistle Muster Star Field, which do not require much of Gu Hang's management, otherwise, he would be even busier.

After he directly defeated the main fleet led by Waluk himself, it certainly caused a huge stir throughout the Alphonso Star Domain.

Upon this, who in the Star Domain doesn't know that the Alfonso Sect has become a thing of the past?

Waluk himself has been captured and sent by Gu Hang to Holy Terra to stand trial. What is there left to hesitate over?

Of course, this only affected those within the normal range of Sect of Mechanics believers. For those already infected, such an impact doesn't exist.

They have become slaves of the void Insect Swarm; their remaining personal will is just an illusion before the transformation, no hope of surrender from them.

The current issue is, how severe is this situation throughout the Alphonso Star Domain?

As facts have proven, it is quite serious.

During this period, the diplomatic department of the Alliance and the Alamita Sect led by Moro have been tirelessly contacting every planet within reach in the Alphonso Star Domain. Not only to disarm and cease resistance but also to make them realize the grave crimes committed by Waluk and that he has dragged the entire sect into an abyss. Those modified and corrupted individuals are not just betraying the Empire and the God of All Machines; they have lost self-awareness and become enslaved by the Insect Race, a fate far worse than death.

Whether the members of the Sect of Mechanics whose minds are still clear or the planetary governors, government organizations, or ruling classes not directly controlled by the sect, they can understand and accept this view, willing to stand on the side of the Alliance.

No matter if they genuinely believe it or are forced to by the Alliance's victory and Alfonso's inability to resist between the stars; as long as they are willing to accept, it's enough.

But the problem lies in the scale and extent of the infection, which exceeds imagination.

Primarily, it exceeded Moro's expectations; the Alliance had a certain psychological preparation for this.

More than four hundred planets experienced direct unrest. When loyalty factions decided to correct the chaos, the infected no longer hid.

Widespread rebellion broke out on various planets.

Initially, Moro's report claimed it was due to aggressive actions during internal cleansing on individual planets.

But soon, his cover-up was exposed.

Those planets that underwent cleansing, despite experiencing rebellion, were at least controllable.

Those acting slowly saw more severe rebellions, to the extent that relying solely on planetary power couldn't resolve them.

Gu Hang called Moro over, paying no mind to be lenient with the Founding General who had defected, and harshly reprimanded him.

For those infected, is there any point in appeasement? If not cleansed, would they be grateful?

Impossible.

Hence, it must be severe, significant, and swift!

Moreover, the Alliance fleet dispatched everywhere. The main fleet remained idle, but often a single cruiser or even a destroyer, accompanied by some escort ships or patrol ships, would head down to each planet's orbit to provide orbital support or assist local forces in reclaiming systems occupied by the infected.

Furyflame and New Century Torch battle groups also split into individual strike teams, following fleet operations.

Salius's method used on the western front, expanded in the Thistle Muster Star Field, was readily adapted by Gu Hang throughout the Alphonso Star Domain.

Special envoys were dispatched to establish the "Pest Control Office" to coordinate native planetary forces with dispatched military forces from the Alliance to solve insect threat issues.

These are verified, relatively mature solutions.

For minor issues, a few Alliance ships make rounds, send down thousands to tens of thousands of personnel to demonstrate presence; for severe matters, deploy an army group, fleet for permanent stay, and interstellar warrior precise strikes...

In any case, there are ways to deal with them.

The biggest problem pertains to over fifty worlds outright ignoring communication from both the Alliance and Alamita Sect.

Assessment suggests these worlds are likely considered completely fallen.

It’s not that no loyalists exist inside anymore, all have been corrupted, or infected, but at least the ruling class has fallen.

In other planets, there are situations of traitor-infested highest management layers, even widely visible. However, on those planets, one ruling class, one interest group, or even one hero can emerge to lead the loyalists to rally together, resist traitor-infected, and contact the Alliance and Alamita Sect, accepting assistance on behalf of the planet.

These completely disconnected worlds can’t even do that.

This indicates either the entire world is severely corrupted, and the loyalists can only exist obscurely, unable to form a reliable force; or, despite the presence of representative loyalist forces, the planet is heavily sealed, rendering them unable to contact the Alliance and Alamita Sect.

Additionally, there’s a shared characteristic among them; they are close to the other two Founding Worlds of Alphonso, even surrounding the core worlds next to the Founding Worlds.

The severity of corruption was anticipated.

Under such circumstances, the mature solution of the "Pest Control Office" can’t be implemented. To solve these planetary issues, the Alliance must muster courage and attack each planet one by one in unfamiliar scenarios lacking intelligence support.

Even for the Alliance’s current national strength, it cannot support simultaneous, sizable warfare on fifty worlds.

Neither naval power nor troop transport capability is sufficient.

Resources aren’t enough; the Alliance can’t afford this expense.

But not solving it, would that work?

Those planets might harbor Insect Swarms, wherein once digestive pools open, meat carpets spread, infected individuals sent one by one, breeding massive insect swarm armies, even biological ships via meat carpets and hatchery pools...

That would be a major disaster.

Chapter 644, Subspace Lost

This is the dilemma facing Gu Hang: fifty severely compromised worlds, and if you count in those two Founding Worlds, the problem is extremely serious.

If we want to manage it, at the same time taking action on these worlds, we don't have the money and resources. The 'Pest Control Office' model, with the Alliance playing a leading role, uses Alliance troops as a force to break the balance, essentially relying on local planetary power as a foundation, integrating armies on-site, recruiting soldiers, and producing resources needed for military purposes to eliminate serious or not serious infection groups.

But on worlds where the 'Pest Control Office' model does not apply, the Alliance's Expeditionary Force must not only tackle the tough battles and fight key battles but also take on the comprehensive annihilation battles.

That's too difficult, the Alliance can't afford to simultaneously engage in so many intense battles on so many worlds.

But if we choose to concentrate our forces, tackling one world at a time, then when will we finish conquering these fifty worlds?

But we can't ignore it, otherwise, if something major really happens later, it will be too late to regret it.

So it seems that conventional methods do not have any good solutions.

But who would have thought something good would be drawn out before?

At this point, virus bombs will play a huge role.

When there’s really no option, virus bombs can even be used as weapons for an Extinction Order.

Although its explosion coverage area is just a unit of 100×100 kilometers. But even the crudest ship cannon barrage, as long as the planet’s surface is bombarded inch by inch, can be considered executing an Extinction Order. The explosion range of ship artillery might not be as large as a virus bomb, and it lacks a spreading effect. As long as there are enough virus bombs, using them as Extinction Order weapons, deploying one every few dozen kilometers, counts as an Extinction Order.

And it’s still the ’green version’. The virus bombs targeting the infected by pests have very little effect on ordinary people.

But this is destined to be a fantasy.

At least for now, it’s like this.

This is a newly developed technology, the production line of the black box has just laid out its first one, and the production from the finished black box is not enough.

Wanting to use it as a final method to resolve everything is definitely not feasible.

Moreover, even if future production is laid out, the cost of this thing is still here, if used as ship artillery to enforce an Extinction Order, the price is far too expensive.

The virus bombs produced now basically can’t solve any problems.

To insist on using it to solve problems, it would take another one to two months.

This time, the Alliance can still afford to wait.

The first batch of virus bombs is not for those fifty completely fallen worlds, but for those two compromised Founding Worlds.

No matter what, it's better to solve these two worlds first, to solve other problems.

The remaining main fleet of Waluk has already hidden in the orbit of those two Founding Worlds. Their numbers are not many, but if relying on the strong defensive capabilities of the Founding Worlds, they still have a very strong defensive capability. If left unchecked, these remaining ships can still come out from the orbit of the two Founding Worlds at any time, giving the Alliance a heavy blow.

The Alliance's combat staff department has also formulated a series of battle plans to study how to break through the outer defenses of the two Founding Worlds to throw down the costly and rare virus bombs.

But at this fourth stage, another thing happened: a Founding General found a way to get in touch with the Alliance.

'Barrocia' is one of the three major Founding Worlds of the Alfonso Sect, and its Founding General was not infected.

Of course, he was not like Moro, an opposition. Previously, he supported Waluk's actions, but when undergoing biological transformation income, he held back slightly and was not infected. After Waluk's defeat, this person thought twice and thought that continuing to follow this group of infected people would end badly sooner or later, so while pretending to be confused with the infected ones, he reached out to the Alliance, requesting the Alliance to hurry to Barrocia.

The reason why this Founding General can hide among a group of infected people is mainly because he developed a technology to deceive those infected, the Insect Swarm, disguising himself as part of the infected.

However, this disguise also has certain limitations. In the message to the Alliance, he mentioned that he couldn't keep the guise much longer. With the unified will of the Insect Race gaining more control over the infected, his disguise has an increasing risk of being exposed.

He could help some small-scale ships of the Alliance bypass the orbital defense system and reach the surface; he could also at crucial moments have some of his subordinates launch an insurrection,

sabotage the defense systems of the Starport and Star Fortress, inciting chaos for the Alliance forces to break in.

This is very good, the series of plans previously made by the Alliance Staff Department can be set aside. Making plans with the premise that there's an insider in Barrocia would significantly reduce the difficulty of the campaign.

But Gu Hang only glanced at it and didn't bother further.

It's not that he does not take it seriously, on the contrary, at first, he put a lot of effort into the strategic plans of various places of Alfonso.

However, an unexpected incident suddenly drew his attention away.

Initially, he saw a new message pop up on his system panel, which hadn't had any movement for years.

It was news about the Phoenix Legion.

[As one of the founding legions, the Phoenix Legion, famous throughout the entire Empire, is facing one of the greatest crises in its millennia-long history. Their Battle Group Leader, along with the renowned Glorious Queen-class battleship, was forced to activate the Subspace engines in a chaotic defeat, tearing the veil of reality and jumping into Subspace, attempting to evade the pursuit of Ironclad. This is an ancient technology with extremely high risks. Now, they are lost in Subspace. Your Spiritual Energy can contact them.]

[Please cautiously decide your actions. Your actions determine the next development of the event.]

[Event Branch: Unknown.]

...

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[Event Branch: Unknown.]

Chapter 645, The Phoenix's Destiny

"Hello, Battle Group Leader Su Lie."

When Su Lie heard this greeting, he suddenly opened his eyes, and in front of him was a man dressed in a uniform of gold and red.

He recognized that face.

It was the commander of the Empire's Southern Line during the Iron Armor War, Marshal Gu Hang.

Though it had been a long time since, he still remembered. Although they had never met in person, Su Lie had indeed seen photos of Gu Hang.

He sighed and said to Gu Hang, "Are you really out of other options? Have you resorted to this sort of thing that has nothing to do with me to try?"

As he spoke, he picked up the sword by his side.

It was a Fine Work Dynamo Sword, its purple-gold color unfaded by millennia of frost and winds. At the pommel was a soaring Phoenix, the first inheritor of the Battle Group's gene, the first Phoenix, the Emperor's own offspring, and a jewel crafted with his own hands. This was a long-held treasure of the Phoenix lineage, an undisputed Holy Artifact of the Battle Group, simply called the 'Phoenix.'

"Deceiving me with lies, I can see through it."

"Deceiving me with illusions of battle brothers, I can still see through it."

"Even if you transform into the image of the Divine Emperor to beguile me, it will not shake my resolve."

"Let alone your current form."

As these words were spoken, Su Lie's pace quickened, the Phoenix in his hand raised high, and a fierce purple flame surged from the sword's edge, slashing fiercely towards Gu Hang.

In the next moment, Gu Hang's figure shattered like an illusion, appearing behind Su Lie.

As if prophetic, he swung his sword backwards.

Even with a seemingly thirty-meter distance, the phantom blade of purple fire, like a sword aura, instantly reached Gu Hang's chest.

This strike indeed caught one off guard.

Gu Hang's spiritual energy violently released, forming a psionic sphere, clashing with this 'sword aura.'

For a while, even Gu Hang's complexion changed.

He initially thought that the so-called sword aura was merely a special ability of Su Lie's weapon, capable of releasing energy strikes.

But it seemed that was not the case. Its intensity was as powerful as a full-force strike from an S+-level Psychic!

Spiritual energy is the extraordinary force of emotion and soul. From this sword aura, Gu Hang could even sense Su Lie's unwavering determination and mind.

This strike, naturally, could not harm Gu Hang. However, though currently in Subspace, they were quite distant from Gu Hang's power source—the Storm God Kingdom. The power being unable to transmit meant Gu Hang was not at peak strength. Even if Gu Hang could withstand Su Lie's strike, it was far from comfortable.

With difficulty, scattering it away, in a blink of an eye, Su Lie was already in front of him, the Phoenix Blade in his hand slashing down with brilliant flames.

"Wait!... "

Gu Hang shouted while resisting with spiritual power.

Finally experiencing firsthand the combat power of a top-level Interstellar Warrior.

In his previous concept, Matins and the former Battle Group Leader Erso of Furyflame were the most top-tier he had seen in combat. However, in front of Su Lie, those two were inadequate, with significant differences.

Battle Group Champion?

Perhaps this title no longer suffices to describe Su Lie.

Moreover, facing such a top-tier warrior, Gu Hang had a sense that when his spiritual energy was applied to him, it would be countered by another spiritual force.

This was very unusual.

Gu Hang could confirm that Su Lie did not possess any spiritual energy powers; he should be a pure warrior. However, beyond his incredible physical strength that exceeded ordinary humans and even Interstellar Warriors, top warriors like Su Lie also possessed terrifying mental will.

The role of mental will is not only that they are not defeated by difficulties. One cannot overlook that in this universe, mental will itself is inherently powerful.

Their strong, tenacious spirit naturally comes with a formidable psionic potential.

This is why if Interstellar Warriors are trained to become Psychics, or so-called 'Think Tanks,' they often become more powerful than mortal Psychics.

Even if they do not become Think Tanks, or are said to lack 'psionic talent,' the strong willpower of Interstellar Warriors grants them substantial psionic resistance.

In ordinary Interstellar Warriors, this might not be very obvious, but once one reaches the level of a veteran, it becomes a bit different. The psionic force that can crush ordinary mortals might only be a strong shockwave on a veteran Interstellar Warrior.

And for a Sergeant, Sergeant Major level, it would take the kind of power that can crush a Lion Tank to psionically kill a Sergeant.

Reaching the rank of Company Champion, it becomes even more difficult.

By the level of a Battle Group Champion... regular spiritual energy becomes almost ineffective against them. Even for Gu Hang, dealing with a Battle Group Champion in one-on-one requires significant effort—of course, effort, not impossibility.

But when strength reaches another height, like with Su Lie's so-called 'Emperor Champion' level, even Gu Hang finds it difficult to control him with spiritual energy.

Especially since he currently cannot borrow the power of the Storm God Kingdom.

Previously, Gu Hang was not only resisting the sword aura slashed by Su Lie but also trying to use spiritual energy to create a force field, attempting to bind Su Lie for some proper communication between the two of them.

Chapter 645, The Fate of the Phoenix_2

However, Gu Hang had to admit that he underestimated his opponent a bit. The spiritual energy that formed the field didn't have any effect at all and was easily broken by Su Lie. Then, a series of extremely fast and fierce sword strikes left Gu Hang momentarily at a loss, to the point where when Su Lie closed in again, he found himself unable to defend.

Nevertheless, even though he opened his mouth to call for a stop, Su Lie clearly had no intention of halting.

When one strike was blocked, Su Lie didn't press further but instead withdrew his longsword. Then, with even greater speed and ferocity, he launched fifteen consecutive strikes against the spiritual energy shield in front of Gu Hang.

No matter how strong a spiritual energy shield, it couldn't withstand such an assault from an Emperor Champion, ultimately shattering into nothing amidst a sharp screeching noise.

However, when the sword struck Gu Hang again, it hit nothing but air.

Gu Hang's body dispersed like foam and reappeared dozens of meters away.

Su Lie's reaction speed was extremely fast. He turned his body and charged once more.

Having suffered multiple losses and personally felt the top-level combat strength of this Battle Group Leader of the original group, Gu Hang no longer dared to show any disregard.

He stirred up his spiritual energy, summoned a lightning spear with all his might, and thrust it viciously towards Su Lie.

The charging Lord of the Phoenix swung his sword fierce and wide. The purple-gold longsword cleaved through the lightning, and as it was about to strike Gu Hang again, a more ferocious thunderstorm group erupted directly in the rear.

This time, even Su Lie couldn't withstand it; he was blasted dozens of meters back, crashing into the wall.

He wasn't severely injured, just felt a strong impact. He could still fight.

At this moment, Gu Hang's voice, carrying a hint of helplessness, sounded again: "Battle Group Leader Su Lie, I know you've been under immense pressure for a long time, but I believe with your mental will, you should be able to discern what is an illusion, what is the temptation of the Subspace Evil God, and what is truly real and unobstructed."

Landing from the wall, Su Lie did not charge in immediately again.

Gu Hang breathed a sigh of relief and noticed a few elite members of the Phoenix Guard hearing the commotion were entering with guns. Feeling a bit heated, he waved his hand, sending a shockwave that knocked them back, conveniently locking the door.

Turning his gaze back to Su Lie, seeing that the Lord of the Phoenix had not made any more aggressive movements, it was clear that he also realized Gu Hang's move just now would cause no substantial harm to his subordinates.

At this point, Gu Hang breathed another sigh of relief.

He continued: "Let me reintroduce myself, I truly am Gu Hang."

Su Lie did not attack but also did not speak, merely scrutinizing Gu Hang with a strong sense of vigilance in his eyes.

How could he not be cautious?

The Phoenix Legion and their flagship, the Glory Queen Battleship Phoenix Crown Feathers, had been drifting in subspace for ten years.

The time the Phoenix Legion went missing from the real universe wasn't actually that long, only about three years.

However, subspace is a magical place. Time and space are distorted here. The clocks on the Phoenix Crown Feathers, the time logs, and the time experienced by the interstellar warriors all clearly show that they have actually gone through ten years.

In the real universe, three years being distorted into ten years is actually considered relatively mild in subspace; they have to thank the protective field on the ship, which is ancient technology, the so-called 'Geller Field', rather than the currently common Star Realm Protective Field used primarily for safer navigation through the Star Realm Tunnel. Otherwise, the situation would be much worse.

This includes the spaceship's ability to navigate through subspace, which is a technology that existed before the Emperor ascended.

In that era, there was no such thing as a Star Realm Tunnel; for faster-than-light travel across galaxies, subspace navigation, which was very dangerous, was the only choice. Ships were equipped with subspace engines and Geller Fields for protection within subspace. However, the hazards of subspace are far greater compared to the Star Realm Tunnel.

Time during navigation in subspace is unstable.

In modern Star Realm Tunnels, one clearly knows which location to exit from when entering a galaxy and how long it takes. But primitive subspace navigation had no such certainty; perhaps it would take three to five days, or maybe one couldn't emerge for three to five years; most likely, the destination was correct, but there was also a considerable chance of getting lost to an unknown location, even with navigation.

Such instability in navigation alone was already deadly. Despite the Empire's current administrative inefficiencies, they were even more pronounced in that era due to communication and transportation issues.

Moreover, there were also the risks inherent in the navigation itself. The whispers in subspace would tempt, drive the crew insane, and even allow Subspace Demons to invade the ship. The Geller Field could protect against most such occurrences, but occasional unusual subspace forces would intrude without warning.

Occasionally, there would be reports of a ship emerging from subspace, and upon reaching the port, everyone on board had transformed into mutants, but each of them still believed themselves to be human; once this belief was shattered, they would lose all reason and become completely berserk.

These occurrences gradually became history after the Emperor ascended, and Star Realm Tunnels formed widely. Subspace engines and Geller Fields gradually disappeared from the stage, only retaining those ancient and now practically useless things on ships built during that time.

The Phoenix Crown Feathers is one such battleship that emerged from that era.

It is worth mentioning that the Empire today no longer has the ability to construct Queen of Glory-class ships. Currently, all Queen of Glory-class ships in the Empire were built in the era before the Emperor ascended, each incorporating some design personally crafted by the Emperor, making them undoubtedly the most powerful warships of the Empire.

Even though the subspace engines and Geller Fields on the Phoenix Crown Feathers had not been used for thousands or even tens of thousands of years, when cornered with no other escape from pursuit and encirclement, these two devices still loyally performed their intended functions.

Otherwise, the Phoenix Legion would have been finished, unable to hold out for ten years so long.

Nonetheless, problems of the Geller Field being unmaintained due to its age still exist, and the Phoenix Legion has endured tremendous pressure over these ten years.

Subspace Demons frequently invade the ship, being dealt with by the surviving three hundred Phoenix Warriors. But during this process, losses are unavoidable. Up to now, nearly half of the Phoenix manpower has been sacrificed.

Among these sacrifices, not everyone died in battle. Instances of being tempted, mutated after subspace forces invaded, and then being tearfully executed by their own battle brothers also happen occasionally.

Even worse, it seems something in subspace has taken notice of them.

The unspeakable entity is most interested in none other than Su Lie himself.

Su Lie often hears 'Its' voice.

It promises him that as long as he nods, he can immediately gain eternal life, perfect eternity, eternal pleasures, and ascend to 'Prince'.

And each time, he firmly refuses.

No matter what sweet words that entity whispers in his ear or what beautiful illusions it constructs before him, he remains unmoved.

When Gu Hang appeared, he thought it was another of 'Its' temptations.

Although it didn't quite feel like it, the fact that Gu Hang suddenly appeared on the Phoenix Crown Feathers, which was within subspace, was even less like reality.

Chapter 646

Su Lie could actually detect the 'realness' of Gu Hang.

When he appeared, he didn't seem like an illusion. Although he had a strong Spiritual Energy reaction, it was distinctly different from a demon and didn't resemble a demon's disguise.

Before this, illusions created by 'It', or demons that listened to 'Its' instructions and disguised themselves in various forms before him, were all different from the current state of Gu Hang.

Moreover, the Spiritual Power used by Gu Hang was violent and fierce, yet it lacked the disturbing, nauseating, and inexplicably desirable wicked feeling of a Subspace Demon. On the contrary, it even seemed to cleanse evil.

These qualities aligned with the legitimate Psychic from the legends about Gu Hang.

Even though he noticed these things, he was still afraid to believe.

Rather than believing that Gu Hang, disconnected from him and from countless star systems away, would appear here to save him, it seemed more likely that this was a new tactic devised by the enemy. All his real feelings were simply a further advancement in the opponent's deception technologies.

However, after trying it firsthand himself, his thoughts began to change.

Gu Hang demonstrated exceedingly powerful strength.

In the brief yet intense battle with Gu Hang, Su Lie assumed he had exerted his full strength, yet he still couldn't do any harm to Gu Hang. Gu Hang seemed a bit battered, but Su Lie could feel that it was because Gu Hang underestimated him in the beginning.

If both became serious... Su Lie felt he had a chance to win, but not a very big one.

From this point of view, it proved that the person before him was indeed the incredibly powerful Psychic, Gu Hang of the legends.

Although there remains the possibility that a powerful demon had disguised itself as this form, upon further thought, that seemed unlikely too.

High-intensity battle makes it difficult to continue disguising. Like Gu Hang, who initially tried controlling him with field Spiritual Energy, but when realizing his mistake, had to rely on his true expertise — those raging thunders.

It’s a logical conclusion.

Even a Great Demon, Su Lie was skeptical that under his pressure it could maintain a disguise without showing some real abilities.

From every perspective, objective facts compelled Su Lie to believe.

But ten years of continuous temptation and deceit kept him from blindly trusting.

Misplaced trust in this Subspace would mean eternal damnation.

However, they indeed were close to that brink of eternal damnation.

Ten years of journey in the Subspace, the engine that hadn’t started in a long time was already malfunctioning, and the Geller Field was gradually losing power.

These were actually normal circumstances, but the more troublesome issue was that a direct Subspace-based cosmic navigational era had passed over ten thousand years ago. While the maintenance technology for these devices remained on the ship, the operators had changed over hundreds of generations and nobody among the living maintenance staff had ever actually operated or maintained these ancient devices.

Everything depended on flipping through those ancient technical documents to learn and use them on the spot.

Learning, of course, involves paying a tuition fee.

Although the maintenance personnel and monks of the Sect of Mechanics were becoming more adept, there were inevitable costs during the process of skill acquisition, and under current circumstances, these losses were essentially insurmountable — they could not find a place in Subspace for thorough repairs.

The problems were not only with the ship's equipment but more so with navigation.

The Astronomican on Holy Terra was still burning, observable within Subspace. But using the Astronomican for navigation in Subspace also required very rigorous technical qualifications, and over the millennia, this profession vanished as well.

The Think Tank of the battle legion, along with the Star Speaker and Psychic aboard the ship, were all brought out to perform this job.

It was like forcing a duck onto a perch, but there was no other option.

For a decade, they diligently sought routes for the legion to return to the Real Universe, but nearly every attempt failed. More often than not, the path not only failed to bring the Phoenix Crown Feathers back to the Real Universe but also drew them deeper into the Subspace.

Although there was no proof, Su Lie remained suspicious that aside from the navigators' lack of skills, there were certain malicious entities deliberately misleading their Psychic.

But even if so, what could be done?

Whenever the Think Tank and Psychic claimed they found a suspected route, no matter the extent of his doubts or number of inspections, as long as it was confirmed that the Psychic who proposed the plan hadn't been tempted or corrupted, they would generally proceed according to their proposed path.

But who could guarantee a review would certainly uncover corruption? And even if uncorrupted, who could say the Psychic wasn't deceived? Even though neither corrupt nor deceived, who could ascertain the navigator didn't make a mistake?

With so many layers of risk filtration, it really was life-threatening.

Despite Su Lie maintaining unwavering faith and ensuring the more than a hundred surviving Phoenix warriors also upheld the same strong beliefs, the mortals on the ship couldn't be aided solely by

inspiration. Amidst the occasional whispers and frequently occurring spooky and paranormal events on the ship, it was unavoidable for the mortal crew members to gradually edge towards a breakdown.

Chapter 646_2

The ship's problems, the navigation problems, the morale problems... all of these weigh heavily on Su Lie's mind.

He knows that no matter how determined they are subjectively, objectively they can't hold on any longer, and are headed towards inevitable destruction.

He's even prepared for the worst, planning to kill every collapsing person on board and every demon invading the ship at the last moment. He will stay with his most resolute warriors on his ship eternally until they too perish from lack of supplies, reinforcements, under relentless enemy attacks, meaning his duty to the Emperor will be fulfilled.

But at this time, Gu Hang appeared.

He can now likely believe that it's not a deception, not an illusion.

Could it be... a turning point?

Even though he's prepared for the worst, being able to lead the battle group out is certainly better.

Though his face still shows caution, internally his heart is stirred.

...

Opposite him, Gu Hang, seeing that the Lord of the Phoenix finally didn't charge at him again without reason, also breathed a sigh of relief.

He seized the moment to explain the situation.

Gu Hang didn't mention how he found the Phoenix Crown Feathers. He couldn't speak about the system, but if he didn't, he would have to lie. Gu Hang felt that in such a situation, lying would definitely be a very bad choice.

He'd rather frankly say, this matter can't be spoken.

The key point afterward was mainly how Gu Hang planned to help Su Lie.

In short, Gu Hang could give the Phoenix Crown Feathers a subspace navigation coordinate—actually his Storm God Kingdom.

Once near the Storm God Kingdom, Gu Hang could tear open subspace and take them out.

It sounds simple, and actually... it is quite simple.

The premise is that Su Lie must believe.

Sure enough, after Gu Hang finished speaking, Su Lie didn't say a word, just staring intently at him.

Gu Hang felt quite uncomfortable under that gaze.

He realized that ever since their meeting, their exchange, and the subsequent conversation, it had always been him speaking, while Su Lie had never opened his mouth, leading one to wonder if he was mute.

At this point in their conversation, Gu Hang also had nothing more to say.

He too fell silent, just staring at Su Lie.

After a long while, Su Lie finally spoke: "I'll have my people try."

"What?" Gu Hang was momentarily stunned.

But he quickly realized: "That would be best, as soon as possible. I hope you can catch up to the final battle."

Speaking of this, Gu Hang casually briefed Su Lie on the current state of the Iron Armor War, while also complaining somewhat about his successor and the North Line commander being too reckless.

Su Lie listened intently but gave no comment.

He rarely comments on things he is not deeply familiar with.

...

Upon returning to the real universe, Gu Hang's mood was generally quite good.

Although there was a fight with no victor, he wasn't there to brawl but to rescue people.

Even if he couldn't recruit the Phoenix under his command, it was at least an allied force. Over a hundred interstellar warriors, even if they were elite of a pilot battle group, Gu Hang didn't care too much. No matter how skilled they were, could they all be battalion champions? The pilot group couldn't manage that.

However, this Glorious Queen battleship is incredibly tempting. Saying a duel is pointless, but if there's an entire escort fleet protecting it, a single Glorious Queen could easily defeat ten battleships.

Gu Hang wondered how the Phoenix, possessing a Glorious Queen, could lose the war against Iron Armor. He wanted to ask, but the mood of the previous meeting wasn't right, Su Lie hadn't fully trusted him, and it wasn't the right moment to inquire.

No worries, there will be opportunities to find out later.

This Glorious Queen, even if not acquired, being able to utilize it temporarily in the war, is a significant advantage.

However, Battle Group Leader Su Lie appears somewhat hesitant.

Before leaving, Gu Hang met with Phoenix's think tanks, leaving a navigation marker. In subspace, the Storm God Kingdom doesn't have much presence and doesn't serve a navigational function like the star beacon projecting the Emperor's Golden Throne on Holy Terra. But Gu Hang as Lord of Divine Country left a specific navigation route that couldn't be extensively used but could provide a reliable approach path to a single ship.

Correcting the navigation path, the Phoenix Crown Feathers can travel to the Storm God Kingdom. In between, Gu Hang's spiritual energy clearly guides the way, as long as their navigator resolutely follows this direction, there is no mistake to be made.

But realistically, there are two problems.

First, will they indeed resolutely follow?

To this point, they have yet to proceed along the navigation left by Gu Hang.

If they utterly refuse to follow the route Gu Hang provided, determined not to believe... then let them be.

It only means the situation isn't desperate enough, that they can still endure, have options. When truly cornered, whether they want to or not, they must proceed.

Anyway, Gu Hang is not in a rush.

But the other point concerns Gu Hang even more.

That is, the one who had set sights on Su Lie and the Phoenix.

Initially, Gu Hang thought it was an ordinary subspace demon or an inferior deity.

That level of enemy didn't worry Gu Hang.

However, when he truly sensed those ethereal eyes looking his way, he changed his perspective.

That's by no means an ordinary entity.

The feeling it gave to Gu Hang was akin to that of 'Father', existing on the same level!

It is one of the most grand, unspeakable of the four evil gods in subspace!

It remains distant, and whether it's the Phoenix Crown Feathers or Su Lie as the battle group leader, though they are greatly desired, ultimately they are possessions of the Emperor, shrouded by His mighty protection.

The Prince of Desire cannot directly seize, fearing provocation; nor does it focus fully on this space, merely tapping on the periphery.

Yet, while it fears the Divine Emperor, it evidently harbors no fear of Gu Hang.

If Gu Hang simply brought the Phoenix Crown Feathers near his Storm God Kingdom, wouldn't he also lead the Prince of Desire's gaze there?

His Divine Country couldn't withstand the scrutiny of a true great evil god!

Honestly, he's been through this once. That was when destroying and devouring Unclean One Gowaga attracted the Father's attention.

Gu Hang had to thank the Emperor, likely it was the Emperor who helped shield his Divine Country from the Father's gaze. Otherwise, Gu Hang wouldn't have peacefully developed, his Storm God Kingdom would have faced endless Plague Demon assaults.

This time, if he thoughtlessly brings the Phoenix close, letting a peer level existence see it, Gu Hang's Storm God Kingdom will likely face the wrathful onslaught of desire demons.

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Chapter 647, Sending Message

The two indirect methods that Gu Hang thought of have both been used.

First employed, were the Priests.

How to communicate with a deity? The most straightforward method is, of course, through his clergy, which are his priests.

According to the National Church doctrine, every citizen of the Empire should devoutly believe in the Emperor. In this way, every thought and prayer of the people can be heard by the Divine Emperor. With enough sincerity, they may even receive a response.

Of course, whether this is really the case is another matter.

But the point Gu Hang can be sure of is that sincere prayers of believers can truly be heard by the deities.

Gu Hang has experienced it himself in the Storm God Kingdom.

And while the priests may not all be extremely devout, statistically speaking, they are indeed more devout. Moreover, some of the prayer rituals they perform can enhance the connection with the deities.

Of course, Gu Hang himself doesn't care for listening to those so-called prayers, and he has never shown himself as a deity within the Alliance's territory, nor has he developed any heretical religions, so he doesn't hear much, making it easy to block.

And what about the situation with the Emperor?

Gu Hang does not know. After all, he hasn't reached that level, where millions of people chant day and night like the Emperor, naturally, he isn't sure if under such circumstances you can still block things out? Can you accurately hear the useful ones amidst the countless voices?

Nonetheless, it's an attempt.

What if he hears?

Gu Hang has already instructed the priests on his ship to pray and has also told Su Lie to let the priests on his legion's ship to pray.

Even Gu Hang himself has started to pretend to pray.

Gu Hang has a feeling in the back of his mind that maybe he has caught the attention of the Divine Emperor. The matters he's been causing are being expressed through prayers; perhaps the Divine Emperor can truly hear them.

Anyway, it doesn't cost anything, treating a dead horse as if it's alive, maybe it'll work?

The second method is a bit more direct.

Previously, when the Storm God Kingdom was cloaked by a Subspace Shadow, he illuminated the Storm God Kingdom several times, making it flicker. On the one hand, it was to temporarily disperse the shadow and ascertain the position and situation of the mastermind, and on the other, it was to report to the Emperor, turning himself into a noticeable dummy.

Later, truly, golden-armored Angels and black-armored warriors suddenly appeared in his Divine Realm, helping him in battle.

Afterward, Gu Hang was also worried that since the Emperor saw, could other Subspace Powerhouses see too?

Especially those with vendettas.

Afraid of repercussions.

But afterward, nothing happened, which boosted Gu Hang's confidence in the Emperor even more.

Using this, Gu Hang's more direct approach is to let the Divine Realm flash once more.

But after a bit of thought, doing this causes a commotion.

To make less noise, he tries to use the messenger sent by the Emperor to see if he can convey a message.

Among the golden-armored Angels who once came to help, two stayed after the battle.

The other helpers quietly disappeared after the battle ended, only these two remained silently in the Storm God Kingdom, casually staying in a spot.

They said nothing, did nothing, standing there just like two golden statues.

Gu Hang didn't dare to do anything about them, and even after careful consideration, he didn't test them.

Just let them be statues wherever they want.

Gu Hang doesn't feel there's a secret he needs to hide from the Emperor.

Oh, it's also impossible to hide.

From this perspective, having these two 'statues' here seems to have only benefits and no downsides.

Before, Gu Hang wasn't sure what specific benefits were.

But now, isn't one coming?

After praying in the Real Universe, Gu Hang went to his Storm God Kingdom and started rambling in front of the two golden-armored Angels again.

Strangely enough.

After Gu Hang murmured a few times, the two golden-armored Angels, who had always been like sculptures, simultaneously turned their heads to look at Gu Hang, their mouths slightly opened, and from them came layered voices:

"I understand."

Gu Hang was stunned for a moment, then was overjoyed.

Next, he noticed movement in the Spiritual Energy marks left on the Phoenix Crown Feathers.

Perhaps their legion's priests also received orders from the Emperor? In any event, the Phoenix Legion's flagship began a difficult maneuver through Subspace along the guiding coordinates he left.

By now, Gu Hang's heart was already at ease, with no more major worries.

Returning to the Real Universe, Gu Hang found that good news comes in torrents.

The Founding World 'Barrocia' had been conquered.

Moreover, the cost was not high.

Loyalist survivors contact came from the planet secretly transported several viral bombs inside.

Temporary viral bomb production was all used here.

One exploded at the Starport; one at the Star Fortress; one exploded near the important fortress clusters, precisely calculated to cover three orbital cannons; one exploded within the core city, causing massive casualties and temporarily paralyzing the major Nest Capital, naturally rendering air defense facilities ineffective.

Seizing the chance, the Alliance Fleet launched a fierce attack.

Taking down a Star Fortress and a Starport, before the ground orbital defense system had a chance to patch the substantial vulnerabilities, the Alliance Fleet first dispatched forces, occupying the Starport, Star Fortress, orbital cannon groups, and the upper layers of the Nest Capital.

Fairly smooth, apart from being intercepted by surviving orbital defenses and anti-air systems, they encountered little resistance upon landing.

The viral bomb's effect was outstanding, ensuring less than 1% of infected survivors in the blasted areas. The casualties among regular humans were below 5%.

The landed forces, stationed at the Starport and key regions, began holding these critical zones. Meanwhile, the Starship, amid weakened enemy orbital defense systems, began eliminating other orbital defense facilities, as well as ships docked in Barrocia orbit.

Most of these ships fled after the Alamita campaign, but this time, it seems they can't escape.

Loyalists surviving within Barrocia also staged a massive uprising, answering the Alliance's calls.

Although the battle hasn't ended yet, the hardest part is over; ultimately taking Barrocia is likely just a matter of time.

As for the last Founding World - Feng Ao, after multiple evaluations, this world is truly beyond saving. There's not even a shadow of loyalists inside, and it's the one Founding World that has gone the furthest in self-biological body modifications using Insect Race materials, with Waluk perpetually residing here.

Gu Hang issued the Extinction Order against it.

Chapter 648

When Gu Hang issued the Extinction Order for the Founding World of Feng Ao, he was actually quite distressed.

On Alamita, he had already realized how precious the industrial base of a Founding World could be.

The technical difficulty of the virus bomb was not low, but beyond the black box, these greaseheads quickly came up with a production line, capable of small-scale mass production.

Otherwise, it wouldn't have been so smooth on the Barrocia battlefield.

The same could be said for Gu Hang's homeland, where he had developed the Rage Owl Star-Flying Wing Star-Korolya line for decades. It's improbable that the Alliance's ruling core could come up with something so quickly.

Cutting-edge facilities, complete industrial chains, abundant high-level talent... these are the unique advantages of a Founding World, difficult for other places to compensate for in a short time.

When the output of a Founding World is fully unleashed, it can equal an entire Star Domain.

Barrocia was quite regrettable already, with great personnel losses. The members of the Sect of Mechanics all ended up killing themselves, with few loyalists surviving. The planet's vast industrial facilities will likely suffer significant damage during the war.

But regardless, some foundation will remain, and although rebuilding will take effort, it can be accomplished as long as peace prevails.

If there wasn't a dire situation, Gu Hang wouldn't have resorted to dropping an Extinction Order on Feng Ao.

The problem is, there were truly no loyalists found on Feng Ao. They might exist, but being out of contact and unable to exert influence is as good as non-existent. And if the Alliance were to face its complete defensive facilities head-on, attacking would be almost impossible.

It could be done, but the cost would be too great, the time too long, and the damage to the planet would be immense, with rebuilding costs being even higher than Barrocia.

Furthermore, the number of infected on Feng Ao was massive; they were all former Sect of Mechanics members, controlling a vast number of production facilities that can continuously produce powerful weapons, arming the infected, and even constructing ships.

Threats like this are numerous enough, but what's more worrying is if they begin transforming into the Insect Swarm entirely. Hundreds of billions of people, using all organic matter on the planet, what would that strength look like?

Considering all factors, the Extinction Order became an unavoidable choice.

Thankfully, the Space Decimation Bomb wasn't used.

It's not produced yet.

And it's not necessary.

The Skyburn Torpedo suffices.

But the greater issue is, how to deploy this Extinction Order weapon.

Simply throwing it down would surely be intercepted.

The Alliance Fleet besieging Feng Ao applied for reinforcements. The Aircraft Carrier Eagle Horse, carrying most of the Storm Mage Corps, was redeployed from Barrocia.

The Alliance ships launched a fierce attack on Feng Ao, drawing most of the orbital firepower. Subsequently, numerous ground bombardment missiles, disguised as Skyburn Torpedoes, began to be deployed onto the ground.

These bombardment missiles attracted most of the defensive firepower.

Although the infected on the surface were unaware they were being targeted by an Extinction Order, they knew these destructive missiles were aimed at the surface artillery groups. Landing one would diminish their anti-orbit cannon system considerably.

When Feng Ao's firepower had been sufficiently drawn away, the Eagle Horse dispatched a cruiser to the extreme proximity of Feng Ao's surface, and only then was the real Skyburn Torpedo deployed.

It wasn't just one. Although the Skyburn Torpedo is expensive, and only one explosion would achieve the desired effect, ensuring annihilation justifies the cost. After all the preparations, insurance measures are necessary during this final deployment stage.

This deployed cruiser launched two. Moreover, three were mixed into the ground attack missiles.

Ultimately, which Skyburn Torpedo exploded in Feng Ao's atmosphere can hardly be confirmed, but detonating one meant mission accomplished.

The Alliance Fleet suffered heavy losses in this attack. For example, the cruiser that fired the Skyburn Torpedo at close range from Eagle Horse was destroyed by the surface orbital system.

During the comprehensive assault by the Alliance Army to draw sufficient firepower, one battleship was damaged, and two cruisers were destroyed due to proximity.

But at least the threat from Feng Ao has been entirely removed. The Alliance can gaze from space, watching the planet turn into a massive fireball within hours.

Blazing flames burned throughout the planet's atmosphere, reaching and scorching its entire surface. The temperature soared rapidly, roasting it for over ten days before flames began to disappear. Nearly another month passed before the planet gradually cooled down.

By now, the main Alliance Army had long departed, but small monitoring ships remained nearby, responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Extinction Order.

They cautiously approached without encountering any attacks.

The surface had been scorched into ruins, with only a few extremely heat-resistant building groups and facilities retaining traces of their original form. Everything else had been burnt to ashes.

The orbital Starport, Star Fortress, and Armed Space Station couldn't survive either. They were too close to the surface, and when the burning atmosphere reached a certain level, it implicated and dragged them down, crashing onto the surface one by one.

The departed Alliance Fleet headed to another place where Gu Hang had signed an Extinction Order, to execute the mission.

Following Feng Ao's destruction, the Alliance broadcasted this incident as frequently as possible to fifty nearby planets out of contact through Star Domain Broadcast.

The loyalists on those planets may be unable to contact the Alliance in space, but they will certainly receive the message.

Upon hearing Feng Ao's fate, these loyalists were extremely anxious.

No matter what they previously thought or any objective difficulties, they need to quickly make contact with the Alliance now; otherwise, they fear Feng Ao's fate might become their own.

No one wishes to accompany a group of infected to the grave.

The uncertainly loyal individuals began actively contacting the Alliance.

The loyalists in objectively challenging situations tried every means to contact the Alliance. It proves that as long as one thinks of methods, there will always be worlds without even the means to try, or where loyalist strength is extremely weak. If such a world has a dense population or a developed ecological environment, to prevent a potential threat from the Insect Swarm, Gu Hang will issue an Extinction Order. In subsequent orders, seven were signed successively.

Chapter 649, Waiting for the Right Time

What does it feel like to sign seven Extinction Orders in four days?

Gu Hang feels it is very heavy.

According to the previous standards for signing Extinction Orders, those worlds weren't just problematic; the loyalty factions there had already been unreachable, offering no assistance. Most crucially, these were core worlds with abundant populations.

Even the smallest one had a pre-war population of over five billion.

Besides population, another evaluation dimension is whether the world's orbital defense system is strong enough. If the orbital defense system is mediocre and can't defend against the Alliance fleet effectively, then Gu Hang wouldn't easily issue an Extinction Order. Instead, he would prefer dispatching ground troops, under the support of the fleet's orbits, to attack enemy forces on the surface and to search for survivors as much as possible.

The troops participating in the war might not necessarily be the Alliance's regular forces. Instead, they could mobilize local troops from some better-situated planets in the Alfonso Star Domain for combat.

For this purpose, the Alliance only needs to pay for the logistics of deploying troops and a few Escort Ships or Destroyers that can provide ground support. Even ammunition can be requisitioned from those planets for use.

The fleet would attack especially stubborn defensive areas on the ground to cooperate with ground forces. With the constantly produced virus bombs, nearly as soon as they are made, they are transported to needed places, exploiting the period before those infected individuals have time to receive information and genetically modify themselves to maximize the impact.

Thus, planets with only three to five billion, at most a dozen or two billion infected individuals, could eventually be conquered slowly. And with the virus bombs and orbital support, the cost might not be particularly high.

But if a planet's population is too large, exceeding the number of five billion, and the orbital defense is relatively intact, the cost of fleet breaching would be significantly high. The process of deploying troops

would suffer enormous losses, and ground warfare would be a huge quagmire that's difficult to resolve, even with virus bombs... This is the kind of scenario that Gu Hang targets with an Extinction Order.

Counting the seven Extinction Orders, a total of six hundred billion people will be exterminated.

Of course, Gu Hang's heaviness isn't about deciding the fate of six hundred billion people.

In reality, their fate was already determined in the process of pest-induced infection.

Gu Hang won't naively consider these infected ones as living humans.

His heaviness lies in that the loss of six hundred billion means seven worlds are entirely wasted.

Additionally, according to data models, an estimated thirty to fifty billion mentally healthy loyalty faction humans on these planets would also be lost.

All are losses.

Among the remaining forty-three disconnected worlds, seventeen were finally contacted and could stabilize planets with their help; the other twenty-six were still unreachable but were still in a manageable range, with low population or weak planetary defense systems, which could be gradually tackled.

If it can be said that since the great victory of Alamita, the situation in the Alfonso Star Domain has stabilized, then now, the situation will no longer have any fluctuations.

As long as the established strategy is advanced, battles involving tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people on the planets won't impact the general trend.

And what is the general trend?

The general trend is that the Alliance will inevitably completely control the entire Alfonso Star Domain.

Counting Matins as the commander, having captured the Thistle Muster Star Field, currently, the Alliance directly controls as many as five Star Domains.

Among them, Dragonhawk and Meng River can already be considered ’home territories.’ The Alliance’s governmental institutions are distributed on nearly every planet in these two Star Domains. The human and material resources on these planets can all be mobilized by the Alliance.

Proudclaw Cosmos is actively advancing this work at full speed.

In a state of war, the work of the Alliance Government is also exceedingly arduous.

In addition to preparations for various wars, another task is to receive all occupied areas by the Alliance.

The focus is on Proudclaw.

In many places of the Proudclaw Cosmos, military control has ended, and the commissions to local power groups concluded, shifting to establish the Alliance system.

This is the inevitable path to assimilate territories into the Alliance’s own strength.

Of course, building is always more difficult than destroying.

Transplanting the Alliance’s political system and establishing direct governance relations on many planets is not an easy task.

But despite the difficulties, it still has to progress step by step.

Currently, the Alliance has three modes of governance.

The most core one is the complete establishment of the Alliance's political system, including an official rank system, highly centralized to the government's institutions... Areas completing these political constructions can be considered the Alliance's core territories. The Alliance will develop these planets according to local conditions, and can fully mobilize all planetary resources and adjust production modes for war or development assistance.

Another is the incomplete establishment of the political system. Rank systems are only used on some people, leaving a significant portion of the population outside the system. Government institutions also directly managed by the Alliance's upper government include a considerable number of personnel with traces of old powers, which have not been fully transformed.

Chapter 649, Waiting for the Right Time_2

Places like this are currently included in the territory of the Alliance, and in Gu Hang's system interface, it is also clear that these territories are providing Gift Points. The Alliance can also mobilize human and material resources from them. The difference is that within these incorporated territories, there are quite a few negative statuses, such as unstable governance, shaky tiers, conspiratorial groups... and so on. Specifically, it manifests in numerous restraints, not being so smooth, subordinates being sycophantic and deceitful, trying to corrupt Alliance officials, with some indeed having been corrupted, colluding with local interest groups...

These things, when discovered, would fall into government reports, compiled for Gu Hang to review. Of course, there are also many that are hidden underwater, yet to be discovered.

But now, Gu Hang can't possibly focus on the status of every planet.

He can only fully trust that the many officials he has trained can complete their work on these planets according to the great strategies laid out by the Alliance.

The third kind is where the Alliance's system hasn't been fully established, and the local governance structure, government institutions, still retain the original planet's appearance. The Alliance controls these planets through commissioners, military occupation, and other means.

This is reflected in the system as vassals.

In general, all the Alliance's territories are roughly structured like this, in three layers from inside out.

Moreover, the Alliance is continuously turning direct rule areas into core territories; turning vassals into direct rule areas.

In this respect, Gu Hang has two enormous advantages that other rulers cannot possess.

The first is in the talent aspect.

With the system, Gu Hang has invested a considerable amount of Gift Points in this area.

A large number of individuals, who have undergone training from the Loyal Heir Academy, even undergone [Commissar] training, and have been enlightened by the [Hero] interface, have different but absolutely outstanding levels of performance in governance and economic construction.

These [heroes] are the driving force behind the booming development of the Alliance.

The other is that Gu Hang can see very clearly on the monthly income interface whether a planet is recognized by the system as part of the Alliance's territory.

This point is very important.

Which ruler in the real world can truly know if every piece of territory and every planet under their command genuinely follows their orders and is truly reliable?

Subordinates may be sycophantic and deceitful, may create information cocoons and illusions...

However, what Gu Hang sees on the system interface is the actual situation.

This greatly reduces uncertainty. Although Gu Hang doesn't know exactly what is happening on those planets, as soon as he sees a planet's loyalty level drop, for instance, if a negative status appears, or if it

detaches from Alliance territory and becomes a vassal territory, or even a rebellion, he can immediately tell that there's a problem on that planet, and he can send people to investigate and resolve it.

And when a planet's loyalty level rises, Gu Hang also knows that whether it is the planet's officials or the Planetary Governor or government institutions, they have done well, and he can conveniently reward them accordingly.

Though it leans a little towards outcome-based reasoning, it still reflects objective reality in any case, which is far better than being fooled by subordinates with flowery words, thinking that everything is great when everything below is actually a mess, with the supreme ruler being oblivious.

Currently, Gu Hang is not easily deceived.

When government departments boast about someone's achievements or criticize someone else's failures, Gu Hang takes a glance at the system for confirmation, discerning between praise, slander, or genuine assessments.

Flattery, embellishing documents, falsification... these tricks do not work on Gu Hang. After strictly dealing with such cases a few times, the Alliance Government can largely maintain from top to bottom a relatively pragmatic atmosphere that emphasizes efficiency and results.

As the scale of governance increases, the issues of bloating and reduced efficiency are unavoidable. However, the Alliance has also implemented various strategies, such as delegating more power to local officials, allowing them to act according to circumstances.

Ordinary regimes can't easily do this. In fact, that's exactly how the Empire operates. Since it's too large, it has no choice but to delegate power as much as possible, allowing Planetary Governors to handle affairs themselves.

But this leads to excessive independence, making it difficult to operate like a finely tuned machine, relying mainly on political inertia, force oppression, and local loyalty, and primarily taxing the Empire, with additional resource support not being easy to ensure.

However, Gu Hang isn't worried about giving local officials too much independence leading to excessive autonomy. This advantage comes from the loyalty of personnel and the benefits obtained from Gu Hang being able to monitor the situation in real-time through the system interface. High independence isn't a concern; officials aren't likely to harbor dissent easily. Of course, the Loyal Heir Academy and commissar training don't completely lock minds, they merely strengthen education, making it less likely for rebellions due to strong enough loyalty. Yet, there are always a few rebels, but Gu Hang can immediately spot them from the planet's status.

Negative statuses like [Territorial Ambition], [Sycophantic and Deceitful], [Arrogant Ruler], can be identified at a glance, allowing issues to be extinguished while they are merely buds.

Being able to see "loyalty" directly is the biggest "cheat" for a ruler.

Watching as core territories and direct rule territories continually expand over time, Gu Hang feels quite satisfied.

In a sense, he even hopes this rebellion suppression war can last a bit longer. Not necessarily to conquer more land, at least to buy more time for Gu Hang to digest the areas already occupied, that would be good.

If it ends too soon, it becomes difficult for the Alliance to manage.

By then, once Gu Hang sheds his identity as Southern Commander, how will the occupied territories be considered?

The Central Empire is bound to carry out rewards based on merit, but anyway, it's impossible to give all four star domains of Meng River, Otaubis, Thistle and Mustard, and Alfonso to the Alliance.

Spanning two Cosmos Domains, totaling five star domains, with over three thousand worlds in total... too exaggerated. Some smaller Cosmos Domains with fewer colonized planets only have about that many worlds.

Giving it all to the Alliance would instantly turn it into an even more terrifying local power than the Ironclad! Even while professing loyalty, what if Gu Hang also rebels one day? The uproar could possibly be even bigger than with Ironclad!

Surely, the lords on Holy Terra wouldn't fear that after just subduing an Ironclad, they are raising a future power with even greater potential for division than Ironclad, right?

They cannot ignore this.

By then, there'll be plenty of discussion needed on the political level.

Ultimately, how much the Alliance can retain and in what manner, and what kind of relationship it will have with the Empire going forward, all remain unknown for now.

In general, Gu Hang neither wants to spit out too much of what he has acquired nor wants to fall out with the Empire, to be labeled a traitor, and then be besieged endlessly by the various factions of the Empire.

Was Ironclad militarily unsuccessful? Of course not. They started from the Princess Star Domain, swiftly sweeping through the entire Cosmos Domain. On the battlefield, with the backing of initial formation legions and the strong support of the Tribunal, the Western Line was beaten back step by step until it collapsed. At the start, Leroux on the Northern Line was also blocked completely in front of the Insect Swarm and couldn't break through at all. Gu Hang on the Southern Line has always been quite cautious, advancing step by step, and although a series of victories were achieved, frankly, it was all about fighting Furyflame and Alfonso, not Ironclad's main force.

But so what? Victory after victory, the Empire lost one legion after another, yet the more they fought, the further they retreated. The Empire loses a legion, and they can send up two more; lose a Phoenix Legion, and they can immediately pull out an Otaubis. A fleet of the Black Cross Army can't break through, then they send another fleet. Various elite troops, like the Silver Watch and Loyal Heir Storm Corps, can be continuously supported from different places.

What does winning one, ten, or a hundred battles matter? Won't there be losses?

Lose one major battle, and the entire game is lost.

Gu Hang sees all this and is deeply wary.

Even if Gu Hang is confident, even if the two major armies of the Western and Northern Lines head south to deal with him after defeating Ironclad, he can still hold on.

But that is meaningless.

Winning would just end up like Ironclad, being completely submerged wave after wave by the continuously arriving Empire's armies.

The best state is still to hide under the Empire's grand banner, gradually developing, waiting for the right timing.

Chapter 650

In the year 10242, September, it had been over two years since the great Alamita victory.

Combat Priest Sidorov was on Planet Qitelu VI, striving to eliminate the last major stronghold of the infected.

Leading the 147th Army Group and the 301st Mechanics Division of the Alamita Corps, he fought bravely.

Truth be told, Sidorov wasn't familiar with such military formations.

Previously, the Alfonso Sect didn't organize troops in this way.

The army of the Alfonso Sect had a strong religious nature, often embellishing themselves with many elegant prefixes and suffixes, compiled in binary mechanical language, exhibiting a so-called 'mechanical beauty.'

Within the Sect of Mechanics, they referred to each other and mobilized troops using characters with 'mechanical beauty.' Externally, translated troop names were used, such as 'Precision Worm Gear Cavalry Regiment,' 'God of All Machines' Glory Gear Brigade'...

Such names seemed chaotic? So what, it's normal for an external command system to be unable to direct the Sect of Mechanics troops, isn't it? It's not smooth? Then it's not smooth. Who let you command anyway? As long as the organization within the Sect of Mechanics is smooth, it's fine.

However, in the current situation, this setup no longer worked.

Could the Alliance tolerate the local troops, established by the Alamita Sect they supported, being so disobedient and hard to direct?

Amidst the Alamita internal rebellion, the Alliance's Military and Political Department dispatched a large number of political commissars, and many army officers were reassigned to the newly formed Protection Army, reorganized according to the Alliance Army's structure, basically abandoning the old system of the Sect of Mechanics.

This actually stirred up a lot of dissatisfaction within the Alamita Sect.

Historically, we, the Sect of Mechanics, have always been on equal footing with the Empire. Isn't one of the heads of the Empire's Double-headed Eagle emblem representing our Sect of Mechanics? How could the Protectorate Army be reorganized entirely according to your army's method!

However, thinking this way was one thing, and at most, it was only spoken aloud, but their bodies obediently operated according to the Alliance's plan, didn't they?

Previously, Sidorov was like that too.

After all, the Alliance's homeland was too far from the Alfonso Star Domain, with two star domains in between, taking at least four months to traverse. Some trade exchanges were good enough, but did the Alliance really think it could directly rule the entire star domain?

In the end, wouldn't they still rely on us?

But these thoughts dramatically changed after Sidorov participated in a thought training arranged by the Alliance Military and Political Department.

He began to carefully ponder faith, the future, the people, technological development, personal aspirations...

These ideas repeatedly swirled in his mind, ultimately leading him to a profound enlightenment on the question of 'which future should be pursued?'

He should follow the Alliance, follow Gu Hang!

That was the best reflection of his faith in the God of All Machines!

After understanding these, Sidorov even felt that many gaps in his knowledge were suddenly filled.

Previously, in Alamita, he held the position of 'Combat Priest,' on par with the Mechanical Priest.

People of the Sect of Mechanics were, of course, unrelated to benevolence, but displaying cruelty and being good at combat were different things. Generally, they weren't keen on personally participating in battles but instead issued cold orders, leaving tasks to the Protectorate Army, followers, and the like to resolve.

Sidorov, however, was relatively more interested in combat and military command—at least more interested than his colleagues.

He indeed was one of the few in the Sect of Mechanics willing to join the army and command operations.

Yet, he had to admit, he couldn't compare with those true generals.

But it was precisely after attending the Alliance Military and Political Department training that he suddenly felt something clicked in his mind, and even the Machine Soul in his embedded logical chip was cheering. Many previously unclear knowledge of military command was understood in a short time.

Thanks to the God of All Machines, thanks to Mr. Gu.

From that point on, he became a staunch supporter of the Alliance within the Alamita Sect.

This identity also led to his rapid promotion.

Holding the correct stance, especially in such special times, enabled him to play a substantial role.

He was quickly promoted to 'Division Commander,' while also being granted the rank of Major in the Alliance, leading a Protectorate Army, transferred to Planet Qitelu VI to partake in the battle.

This planet was quite close to the Founding World - Feng Ao. After Feng Ao was destroyed by the Extinction Order, the once loyal faction of Qitelu VI, uninfluenced by infection, finally ceased wavering, endeavoring to break through obstacles and establish contact with the Alliance.

The newly formed Protectorate Army to which Sidorov belonged was sent here to assist in the local planetary combat.

Qitelu VI was not a very large or rich planet. It was a resource planet, with numerous power plants collecting stellar light energy, converting it into electric energy, and then into energy blocks.

The energy factories were the largest industry on Qitelu VI, with everything else built around them.

The total population of the planet was only around seven hundred million.

Three Alliance Army groups and two Alamita Protection Army army groups, totaling forty-six million troops, were deployed here. With the orbital support of a destroyer, they helped the local survivors reverse the situation over two years.

Chapter 650_2

Currently, the battle situation has become relatively stable.

Although the number of infected is estimated to be at least three hundred million, the liberated survivors have also armed themselves into an army of tens of millions. The infected individuals do not possess strength either in equipment or mutation intensity. Mere numbers don't hold much significance; their fate is inevitably to be slaughtered entirely by the Alliance Army and the Protection Army together.

There are still more than two hundred million survivors, and besides recruiting a large army, the remaining people have started to restart various energy factories, gradually reconstructing, and producing anew on the planet.

As long as things progress according to this momentum, the threat will diminish, and Planet Kirtr IV will eventually return to peace.

Sidorov has personally experienced all of this over the past two years.

He is filled with a sense of pride about it.

Since his change of perspective due to training at the Alliance Military and Political Department, he feels he's now adhering to his ideals. This brings him satisfaction and more of a conviction and devotion to all of it.

But since this morning, he has been feeling uneasy, as if something particularly significant is about to happen.

He's somewhat paranoid.

He and his troops are currently executing a mission to enter an occupied industrial area and clear out all local infected.

Such missions have been carried out many times in the past two years. There are risks and difficulties, often dealing with enemies numbering many times higher than their own... However, in terms of equipment and training level, they are untouchable by the infected. They always manage to accomplish the few against the many.

It’s not even a victory worthy of boasting.

Could there be an accident this time?

Is there an error in the intelligence? Are there more than ’no more than one hundred fifty thousand’ enemies mentioned in the data? Or are there numerous high-level infected among them? Or do they possess equipment levels beyond the norm?

Beating the drum internally, naturally, requires caution when executing the mission.

He slows the advancement of the troops and actively deploys several reconnaissance companies, either by scout vehicle or covert foot patrol, spreading out far to ensure there are no ambushes along the way; simultaneously, to scout the target area’s status and continuously report back. Once a formidable enemy unexpectedly appears, they must prepare in advance.

However, nothing happens.

The quietness is a little frightening.

On the route of the main troop’s advance, not even scattered infected can be seen.

Reports constantly coming back from the reconnaissance companies also state that they see nothing.

Incredibly unusual.

Logically speaking, in a gathering area of around one hundred fifty thousand infected, there should definitely be scattered infected encountered halfway to the proximity, it shouldn't be so quietly continuous.

What's the problem?

He further slows the troops down and even requests two infantry regiments to establish a line of defense in place, ensuring stability at the rear.

And at this moment, the frontline reconnaissance company reports an intelligence that makes Sidorov's hair stand on end.

The scouts say they finally saw the enemies at the target factory area.

Their numbers are surprisingly many, yet surprisingly few.

The so-called few refers to the surrounding sentry-role infected, only numbering around ten to twenty thousand.

The scouts managed to bypass them and saw at least two hundred thousand infected gathered together. They were densely packed, orderly jumping into one after another temporary 'pond' constructed.

These ponds have murky colors, with thick green and red liquids mixed together. Those who jumped in bobbed for a while before silently being dissolved and disappeared. The dissolved biological fluid was transported through wriggling pipes to an undetermined area. That direction is toward a Nest Capital District with the highest, most concentrated number of infected on Planet Kirtr IV.

What are these infected doing?

Sidorov is not inexperienced, as a Mechanical Priest, he possesses considerable knowledge. In the era of the Alfonso sect, the knowledge most popular throughout the sect was related to the Void Insect Species.

He was not very interested in it, but he had nonetheless absorbed quite a bit.

The phenomenon now is clear: the infected are responding to a genetic call, actively being digested. Those thick liquids like that should be what's referred to as biomass.

Biomass is being concentrated, centralized to the core area of the central Nest Capital.

As for what these infected intend to do with such large amounts of biomass?

Sidorov truly cannot figure out the answer.

What use is biomass? As far as he knows, the infected cannot directly utilize biomass, they can only transform themselves into biomass. Only those with the ability to hatch from the Insect Race can utilize biomass to construct biological weapons.

Yet, in fighting on Planet Kirtr IV for two years, Sidorov has not seen legitimate Void Insect Species. According to the intelligence, this planet shouldn't have Void Insect Species.

In this situation, what are the infected transforming into biomass for?

While reporting the scouted intelligence to higher authorities, he pondered briefly and made a decision.

Whatever the enemy intends to do, they'll just have to be stopped.

Biomass is easier to deal with than infected. No matter how weak the latter are, it takes a bullet, and the opponent might have some broken guns in hand; there's always a chance our side suffers some casualties. As for biomass? It's just an amorphous liquid organism, burning it with fire at high temperatures will deactivate large areas.

While the enemy is densely gathered, with fewer guard forces, bomb them, cut off the biomass transmission channels.

The artillery deploys, launching fierce bombardment on the factory area. Artillery regiment, artillery companies of different battalions are all mobilized, over a thousand various caliber cannons opening fire crazily toward the factory area.

Those massive structures made of steel and concrete are very solid, but under intensive shelling, there will naturally be some damages and collapses.

Once a structure collapses, a digestion pool is destroyed.

Simultaneously, infantry riding armored vehicles make rapid advances, under the cover of the artillery fire, aim to eliminate the guards and ultimately blow up those structures one by one, or enter the buildings to kill all the defenseless, awaiting digestion infected inside, and then destroy the digestion pool.

Furthermore, the first-arriving reconnaissance company proposes to take action as well.

In the heat of battle, when it becomes intense, these hidden scouts cut the buried pipelines transmitting biomass to the distant central Nest Capital.

The entire battle proceeds rather smoothly. Not particularly challenging, they eliminate the enemy group.

However, Sidorov does not rejoice.

Instead, he feels a bit anxious.

New orders from superiors soon arrive.

His troops are canceled from the originally planned break time after the mission ends; the superiors demand they immediately continue onwards with the target still being a digestion pool.

Over the next seventy-two hours, Sidorov's 301 Mechanics Division hardly had any breaks. Various battalions, companies, at most had only a few hours of rotation, while several logistics camps were overwhelmed, constantly transporting ammunition, battlefield food supplies to support combat on the front lines.

By now, they have taken down many digestion pools, large and small of various categories.

Moreover, they met some other friendly forces along the way, realizing they're engaging in similar operations.

The battle is easy, but urgent, tiring, some unnecessary casualties occurred within the troops. Some command officers expressed dissatisfaction, not understanding why this is necessary, suggesting the troops should rest.

Yet, on one hand, the orders from the superiors are incredibly urgent, on the other, Sidorov himself also

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