Governor 681

Chapter 681, Phoenix Savior

The subspace shadow that re-emerged was denser than ever before.

Gu Hang found it extremely difficult to exert Spiritual Energy upon the real universe. The Heroic Spirits that had already manifested in the real universe were also dispelled and returned to the Storm God Kingdom.

But what of it?

The outcome was already destined; in the battle at sea, that Insect Nest Fleet had no chance of a comeback.

If Gu Hang truly wanted to forcibly inject Spiritual Energy to affect the real world, it wasn't impossible. For others, the subspace shadow was an impregnable fortress, but for him, it was something that could be torn open.

Especially since the Queen, at such a distant range, and in the current area, the anchor points of the subspace shadow, which were the large numbers of the Insect Nest Fleet, were being swiftly eliminated, making the subspace shadow even more unstable.

But Gu Hang didn't force his way through.

The main reason was that it was unnecessary.

The secondary reason was he had another task to attend to.

Over an extremely vast distance, Gu Hang and the Queen exchanged a venomous glance, while he laboriously yet resolutely began tearing open the subspace shadow and the veil of reality one by one.

It was not easy, it was arduous, and he managed to open only a small crack.

The subspace shadow still greatly hindered him.

But it didn't matter, for what he intended to do was simple—he retrieved the four dead Neuron Progeny, pulled them through the small subspace tears he'd created, and consumed them into the Storm God Kingdom.

These four Neuron Progeny, struck directly by ship cannons, couldn't protect themselves or it was futile to do so, and had died; their bodies not just shattered but potentially obliterated entirely; those slain by the Interstellar Warrior and Gu Hang with thunderous methods, though also fragmented, at least had some remains.

Yet, whether the remains were intact, fragmented, or utterly absent, it didn't matter. As long as the Neuron Progeny died in this area and not long ago, their lingering subspace essence was sure to remain.

And this was what Gu Hang desired.

Neuron Progeny, or any Insect Race lifeforms possessing Spiritual Power along this line, were distinct from other insects. While lacking a soul, their Spiritual Power must come from subspace, necessitating the construction of a subspace essence.

When the Queen crafted these creatures with Spiritual Power, it required a vast amount of biomass and other materials, spending tremendous effort and time to create just one of them.

However, hatching the body of a Neuron Progeny, no matter how difficult, was merely the simplest step. The crucial part in forming a Brain Worm was to amass sufficient 'souls' and form their projection in subspace. Further advancement into Neuron Progeny adhered to similar principles, though transcending from quantitative to qualitative changes was significantly challenging.

Creating these four Neuron Progeny was, indeed, exceedingly difficult for the Queen.

The Dubo Fleet of the Alfonso Sect suffered heavy losses in terms of Spiritual Energy, and after the Alliance entered the Princess Star Domain, Gu Hang, even under the cloak of the subspace shadow, still

managed to wield Spiritual Power. Each use inflicted enormous losses upon her offspring, all of which the Queen had witnessed, thus leading her to craft these four Neuron Progeny.

Reluctant to deploy them ordinarily, this time sending them all at once to escort the support Insect Nest Fleet heading south demonstrated her seriousness toward this matter.

Nonetheless, not only did she fail to safeguard her anticipated Insect Nest Fleet laden with massive biomaterial heading south to aid, all four Neuron Progeny were lost here.

Moreover, in her boundless anger, boundless resentment, and boundless heartbreak, she watched helplessly as Gu Hang seized the soon-to-vanish Neuron Progeny.

She didn't know what Gu Hang intended to do with the Neuron Progeny's lingering subspace essence, but she could guess, and her guess was likely close to the mark.

Yet she was powerless, completely unable to stop Gu Hang even one bit.

In fact, she felt that the slow-paced manner Gu Hang now exhibited was intentionally shown for her to see, to provoke her.

This made her even angrier!

Amidst impotent rage, a sliver of fear crept in—as an insect of the Queen's caliber, she was now imbued with quite sophisticated emotions.

Her fear stemmed from her uncertainty on how to deal with Gu Hang.

She also didn't know how to resolve the predicament she currently faced.

Being smart, she could foresee several things.

For instance, what would Gu Hang do after winning this time?

Most likely, he would turn south to seek the reinforcements deployed from the Tansod battle, moving north to rendezvous with the now-destroyed support troops.

The size of that force, reaching biological battleship level, was a mere three ships, insufficient to confront the Alliance Main Fleet.

Could they escape?

The Queen had already issued orders for their retreat to return to Reiaductus, yet they might very likely be caught by Gu Hang mid-withdrawal.

The outcome would likely be far from pleasant.

And then?

Regardless of whether Gu Hang directly assaults Reiaductus or first goes further west to join forces with Salius and Matins, flanking her western defenses, either scenario would be a nightmare for her.

Chapter 681, Phoenix Savior_2

But does she have any way to stop it?

Absolutely none.

She took her eyes away, no longer looking at Gu Hang across the subspace.

It’s meaningless.

Better think about how to get through this crisis.

...

Su Lie looked at the countless burning, lifeless biological ships, and felt a little more at ease.

Earlier, while drifting through subspace, he led the remnants of the battle group with unwavering determination, no matter what hardships they faced, they always held on.

He and his fellow warriors never gave up. In the foreseeable future, they would certainly not give up.

But actually, they were falling deeper into despair day by day.

Su Lie, even if he didn't want to admit it, had to face the fact.

Gu Hang's arrival changed everything.

Although when Gu Hang first appeared on the Phoenix Crown Feathers, navigating through subspace where all outsiders should be treated as enemies, Su Lie understandably launched an attack on Gu Hang. Even later, after explaining the situation, he still remained somewhat cautious of Gu Hang.

What in subspace doesn't require caution?

But truthfully, it also sparked a glimmer of hope in his heart.

Perhaps they could be saved?

Then, with guidance, providing coordinates, sharing the current battle situation in the real universe... these pieces of information were also verified by the battle group's think tank and priests, deemed highly credible.

They indeed navigated a seemingly safer, more directed path.

All of this deepened his trust in Gu Hang until the Phoenix Crown Feathers sailed to the back of the Storm God Kingdom, thoroughly avoiding that gaze filled with malice and greed, finally allowing him some relief.

And because of this initial trust, he cautiously accepted a battle plan from Gu Hang.

However, even though Gu Hang had told him, when the Phoenix Crown Feathers emerged from subspace and appeared encircled by countless biological ships of the insect swarm, he couldn't help but panic.

In the past, he would mock, scoffing at some Imperial Fleet for treasuring their valuable, powerful ships like palm treasures. The Retribution Level was okay to talk about, but Emperor-class and even higher-level warships, in difficult battles, dared not be used, often hiding far in the rear with artillery even in normal combat, rarely venturing into peril to exert the decisive effect they ought to. In battles with even a slight disadvantage, naval commanders tend to prioritize retreating high-value ships and reconsidering later.

This situation is undoubtedly unreasonable, leading to a Navy that fears battle. However, can Su Lie himself avoid such convention?

In past battles, he dared to struggle valiantly, better than the Imperial Navy lords, but truly venturing into danger, putting the Queen of Glory-level Phoenix Crown Feathers directly into the most perilous situation, penetrating the enemy ship's core formation, he dared not.

But whether he dared or not, he had no choice. The situation had reached this point, leaving him with no options to consider.

He could only console himself—at least what Gu Hang said was true; he could finally let go of the idea that Gu Hang was an evil demon from subspace creating a scheme.

The Phoenix Crown Feathers appeared amidst the Insect Nest Fleet formation, exuding a majestic presence, delivering a decisive blow, instantly destroying two biological battleships, completely tearing

apart the Insect Nest Fleet's formation, drawing significant attention from them, providing the perfect opportunity for the trailing Alliance Main Fleet to charge.

But simultaneously, they also bore significant pressure. Extensive lone battles, enduring fierce concentrated fire, even facing direct collisions from two biological ships, one indeed hitting them.

The Void Shield was critical, the ship suffered damage, numerous Insect Race invaded the ship's interior, and the warriors valiantly eliminated the intruders...

For a moment, Su Lie felt, would the Phoenix Crown Feathers be ruined in his hands?

Would the Phoenix Legion become a newly-formed legion without the Queen of Glory? The legion's greatest Holy Artifact, which couldn't be reproduced by the entire Empire, where only the newly-formed legion preserved, would be gone?

That would indeed be quite the disaster.

Only second to the Phoenix Legion's demise under his leadership.

But fortunately, none of this happened. The Phoenix Crown Feathers' powerful performance, along with the desperate resistance of the Phoenix Warriors within the ship, ultimately withstood the pressure.

Though the ship suffered some damage, it remained within an acceptable range.

Su Lie thought, he absolutely had to thank Gu Hang.

Gu Hang saved the entire Phoenix Legion.

Not only a substantial rescue, but also a spiritual salvation.

No matter how many reasons and excuses, the collapse of the Western Front Army six years ago was a defeat for the Phoenix.

A complete defeat, nearly an annihilative defeat.

But now, the Phoenix Legion has returned. Not only in a salvaged reinstatement, but also starring as a central figure in such a pivotal and colossal battle, playing a crucial role in turning the tide.

This is vital.

In the future, the Phoenix Legion can proudly declare they are not failures.

Though they've experienced defeat, ultimately, they came back and won, playing a crucial part in a key battle!

From this perspective, he indeed needs to thank Gu Hang.

Gu Hang is the savior of the Phoenix.

In every sense.

...

While being thanked by Su Lie, Gu Hang was feasting voraciously.

Earlier, by slowly capturing the remnant souls of four Neuron Progenies, he was intentionally provoking the Queen.

With the Queen's attention withdrawn, Gu Hang no longer bothered with appearances, diving straight into a feast.

A substantial meal.

Even a single bite couldn't finish it all.

Earlier on, consuming a single Neuron Progeny already significantly aided Gu Hang.

A single Neuron Progeny is extraordinarily powerful, corresponding to an Alpha-level, or even stronger Psychic level in humans; in subspace, it might match a Great Demon.

Of course, a Neuron Progeny's prowess is 'man-made,' or rather concocted by the Queen. While meeting the level, their nourishment doesn't equal genuinely consuming a Great Demon.

The gains pale compared to digesting Ge Wajia earlier.

Nonetheless, that's okay.

If quality is lacking, supply it with quantity!

Eating one Neuron Progeny falls short of a Great Demon, but Gu Hang truly dared not, nor could he find a Great Demon to consume. However, by swallowing four Neuron Progenies at once, it absolutely equaled a Great Demon with spare left.

Yet, Gu Hang still couldn't finish so much in one gulp.

The four remnants were all confined together in a tower within the Storm God Kingdom.

This tower was established with the help of heroic spirits when the Great Unclean One - Ge Wajia was digested.

Gu Hang consumed one in a hurry, then hung the other three on the tower.

Within the Storm God Kingdom, lightning continuously bombarded these three hanging Neuron Progenies' remnant souls, pounding relentlessly.

Every strike, every pound knocked off a bit of nourishment from their remnant souls, inherently part of subspace, then swallowed by the entire Storm God Kingdom.

The Storm God Kingdom was growing.

This simultaneously signified Gu Hang's Spiritual Energy was expanding.

With a rough estimate, Gu Hang reckoned once he consumed and digested all four Neuron Progenies, his spiritual intensity, even without relying on the Storm God Kingdom, would reach a strong state among the Alpha-level.

And when firing on all cylinders, or if the combat erupted within the Storm God Kingdom, against an ordinary Great Demon like Ge Wajia, Gu Hang could virtually crush them.

Against creatures like Neuron Progenies, handling four simultaneously, Gu Hang wouldn't even need the thousands of Storm Mage Corps for aid, capable of solo opposition.

This marked clear strength advancement.

Long ago, on the system interface, after upgrading his Spiritual Energy level to Level 9, Gu Hang's upgrade path hit a dead end in the system. For further enhancement, it seemed consuming these top-tier spiritual entities was the only option.

The fundamental requirement was that the entity needed a sufficiently strong subspace essence to nourish the Storm God Kingdom.

Chapter 682, "Tentacles

The subsequent developments in the battle closely aligned with the Queen's estimations.

Gu Hang, leading the Alliance Main Fleet, eventually annihilated the reinforcements from the Insect Race fleet descending southward through the Lefu and Jianmen Star Domains.

In the end, only two Biological Battleships, accompanied by a few fast ships, managed to escape. The rest perished in this starry domain.

After victory, to prevent the insects from returning to utilize the remnants of these ships and transform them into biomass, the Alliance even spent extra time cleaning the battlefield.

Small fragments of ships were incinerated; larger biological ship carcasses, especially those of transport ships filled with biomass, were directly propelled into the system's star to ensure complete and irretrievable destruction.

Simultaneously, Gu Hang also led a divided section of the main fleet to intercept the Insect Swarm Fleet drawn from the Santao campaign.

Although they had been instructed to flee, they were nevertheless intercepted and eliminated.

At Santao, Marshal Xi Rui also sent a victory report.

Following the withdrawal of the Insect Swarm Fleet, he ceased the offensive.

As the mission was accomplished, there was no need for unnecessary loss of life.

Upon receiving Gu Hang's battle victory report, he decisively began the gradual withdrawal of forces from Santao.

The retreat process was relatively smooth. Although the enemy's ground forces were incredibly numerous, lacking space support meant that with a stable base ensuring the orbital path above wouldn't be hit by ground-based counter-orbital biological cannons, the main issue was resolved.

While continuously retreating troops, he also transported a precious ’Skyburn Torpedo’ to the ground.

This Skyburn Torpedo was detonated when few people remained on the planet.

Ultimately, nearly ten thousand people sacrificed themselves on the planet. After all, completely withdrawing everyone before detonating the Skyburn Torpedo was unrealistic; an unforeseen event could lead to disaster.

Detonating alongside allied forces isn’t honorable, but compared to obliterating this planet—once home to 90 billion people and now reduced to a massive biomass—it dealt a severe blow to the Insect Race, and the exchange rate was deemed worthwhile.

Why not withdraw all personnel before bombing... the core reason remained the concern that once withdrawn, without ground support while the Insect Swarm forces on the surface remained strong, if a Skyburn Torpedo dropped and was intercepted by biological cannons or flying insect demons, it would be a huge loss.

The lives of ten thousand soldiers versus a Skyburn Torpedo... obviously, the Skyburn Torpedo held much greater value.

Such is the cold calculation.

Nonetheless, Santao was destroyed. Truthful speaking, if all this biomass were collected by the Queen, it would equate to nearly half the amount brought by the reinforcement fleet from the south.

Another significant loss.

Gu Hang and Xi Rui regrouped again.

They spent about a week resting before setting off once more.

The original plan was to head west to establish contact with Salius and Matins.

But soon, they realized there was no need to do so.

The Insect Swarm itself withdrew.

The Queen recalled all available forces she could control and gather.

Those capable of hatching transport ships did so, loading them with biomass and soldier bugs, worker bugs, and fleeing; those too late to be taken were left, fully hatched into soldier bugs to trouble humans as much as possible.

She was aggressively retracting forces, almost entirely compressing into the Reya Duches Star System.

This was clearly an intention to engage humans in a protracted war on Reyadoces, the former ironclad mother star.

To wage a war of attrition.

But what is her leverage in dragging things out?

Initially, Gu Hang had only a guess without concrete evidence. But upon arriving at Reyadoces, he quickly realized what it was.

Peering intensely through the Subspace Shadow, gazing into the far reaches of the physical universe, he saw a massive Insect Nest Fleet approaching.

Not through Subspace, not via Star Realm Tunnel, but slowly traveling at sub-light speed from a distant location towards Reya Duches.

This Insect Nest Fleet, considerably large, was even larger than the Insect Swarm controlled by the Queen.

Could this be the so-called ’Duches Tendril’?

Humans refer to the upper structure of the Insect Nest Fleet as ’Tendrils’. This represents an immense level and is the largest scale Insect Race structure encountered by the Human Empire currently. When a ’Insect Tendril’ main force enters empire territory, it often results in a super large-scale disaster spanning multiple Cosmos Domains, necessitating the empire to muster an enormous force to potentially end it.

Throughout imperial history, ’Tendrils’ appeared and were successfully resisted only twice. Each occasion left a deeply profound and painful memory across the empire.

A single ’Tendril’ may consist of several Queens. They are generally equal and of the same rank among each other, but actually there’s a hierarchy based on the scope of the swarm each Queen commands. The strongest, likely the most ancient, is termed ’Mother’—in reality, Queens might have blood relations, although insects do not care for such nuances.

Since the emergence of the ’Void Wormhole’ hundreds of years ago at Reyadoces, with Insect Nest Fleets continuously appearing, imperial insectologists believed that perhaps a ’Tendril’ was advancing in this direction, moving from the physical universe layer, gradually nearing empire territory. The fleets appearing frequently were merely vanguard forces.

This potentially existent ’Tendril’ was named ’Duches Tendril’ based on geographical nomenclature.

Still, after observation, Gu Hang believed that this was not quite the Tendril’s main force.

The numbers didn’t quite match.

It seemed merely another vanguard departing from the Tendril. The Tendril’s main force was still far beyond observable range.

Nevertheless, the arrival of this Insect Race Fleet would substantially impact the battle situation.

Gu Hang observed this Insect Nest Fleet for two consecutive days, largely confirming his assumptions.

Furthermore, he analyzed a piece of information: this Insect Nest Fleet, at its current pace, would need approximately thirteen standard Tera Months to reach the Reya Duches Star System.

This meant that the human side had better resolve the Reyadoces issue in a little over a year to prevent the two sides from converging.

Time wasn't abundant; considering the Queen had consolidated so many forces, achieving victory might require protracted efforts.

But it at least provided some space for maneuvering.

An idea gradually formed in Gu Hang's mind.

Chapter 683, Seating Order

Salius strode on the Golden Pass.

Two of Otaubis' trusted aides followed behind, heads held high, eyes straight ahead; the two in front quickened their pace and pushed open the heavy doors so that Salius could stride through without stopping.

Stepping into the meeting hall, Salius swept his gaze around, and his steps involuntarily became lighter.

He saw a large meeting table, where all were people of significance.

The one seated at the head looked like an ordinary person; it was Salius's first time seeing him in person, but he had seen the portraits and images many times before.

That was Gu Hang, Marshal of the Imperial Star Realm Army, Southern Commander of the Iron Armor Campaign, Dragonhawk Star Domain Leader, Alliance Governor, and a legally recognized Alpha-class Psychic by the Imperial Psychic Association.

Seated to Gu Hang's immediate left was someone Salius also recognized.

That was his predecessor, the first Western Commander, and the Lord of the Phoenix who founded the Phoenix Legion, Su Lie.

Earlier, Salius had already received news of the Phoenix Legion's reemergence and decisive impact on the battlefield.

Salius was indeed surprised by the Phoenix Legion's return.

Though unclear how it was achieved, it was evidently credited to Gu Hang.

The second on the left was another Interstellar Warrior. He wore black power armor painted in black, with a white and black cross insignia on his shoulder.

That was Xi Rui, Fourth Fleet Marshal of the Black Cross Legion. He was the number two figure in the now-defunct Northern Line Army, second only to Marshal Le Luwa, and was the highest commander of the remaining Northern Line Army forces at the time and now.

The second seat to Gu Hang's right was occupied by the Phoenix Battalion Leader, Martins Salas, who had fought alongside him over the past year and saved his life, someone he admired greatly.

Most of the others, he didn't recognize. However, though he might not recognize the people, the symbols and decorations on them were quite obvious.

Among them were high-ranking Judgment Chiefs from the Anti-Extraterrestrial Alliance, Sisterhood leaders from the Battle Nun Association, an Imperial Navy Admiral...

The most numerous were leaders of Starfighter Battle Groups.

Such a distinguished group of leaders could actually be described as a "crowd."

Not mentioning Martins first, Blood Shark, and the Spear of the Dragon King's Battle Group Leaders, Yeerma Youyin and Tai Shichen, had all fought alongside him on the Western battlefield and were acquaintances.

Aside from that, two other Battle Group Leaders wore color schemes: the upper part in orange-red and the lower in bronze belonging to the New World's Torch, and the orange-red and black scheme of the Fury Flame Battle Group.

These groups, sentenced to penitential expeditions, now also served under the Alliance. Their Battle Group Leaders were no longer the originals but were promoted newcomers. Regardless of how inexperienced these new Battle Group Leaders were, or how low their status as Atonement Battle Groups was, the title of Battle Group Leader denoted control over an entire standard Starfighter Battle Group, already a precious force. Not to mention, they had Gu Hang's backing.

Setting everything else aside, the last point alone was enough to grant them a seat at the table.

Such a gathering already sufficed to halt Salius's wind-like steps.

The sound of Interstellar Warriors stepping on the floor was usually very heavy. They could, of course, control their steps to run quickly without making a sound during stealth operations. However, typically, they deliberately stepped heavily to assert their strength and intimidate opponents and enemies.

The same principle applied in political and military discussions.

Originally, Salius acted instinctively that way. But now, he had to relax his steps slightly.

At the same time, he noticed that there were only two vacant seats at the long table.

One was to Gu Hang's direct right.

The other was directly across from Gu Hang, at the other end of the table.

Now here was the choice before Salius.

Both seats were available to him, and he could choose either.

Choosing directly across from Gu Hang, at the other end of the table, appeared to position him as an equal to Gu Hang.

Salius had initially intended to do this.

But now, he felt some hesitation.

Should he actually sit to Gu Hang's immediate right?

The seat certainly held prestige, sitting directly across from Su Lie wouldn't undermine Salius at all. However, sitting there would implicitly suggest that after the merger of the West and South Lines, his status would be just beneath Gu Hang's, with Southern Commander Gu Hang being the one in charge, not him.

This did not align with his initial thinking.

The West Line, unlike the now-devastated and almost non-existent North Line, still retained substantial combat strength. Furthermore, speaking of achievements, the West Line eliminated the primary rebel leader in this Iron Armor uprising, Marshal Humphrey Paolo of the Iron Armor Legion himself.

Wouldn't this suffice to make the West Line equal to the South Line?

On reflection, perhaps not.

Without Martins' support, the West Line's outcome might have been slightly better than the North Line's, yet it would be limited.

If not for Martins' timely intervention during the crucial final battle, Salius himself might have fallen victim to Humphrey Paolo's blade.

Speaking of merits in the Western battle, could Salius truly claim to have achieved more than Martins?

It's hard to say so with certainty.

To exaggerate, saying it was fifty-fifty wouldn't be too far-fetched.

Under such circumstances, with Martins resting in the second seat to the right, what should Salius do?

Moreover, Martins was, in essence, still a subordinate in Gu Hang's Southern Army.

Sitting across from Su Lie, his predecessor as Western Commander and a founder of a Battle Group, wouldn't diminish him.

Salius internally debated for quite a while before finally making a decision.

He chose to sit in the first seat to Gu Hang's right, following his instincts.

"I am not acknowledging Gu Hang's absolute leadership."

"I am merely showing him respect."

"Otherwise, sitting directly opposite might seem too antagonistic, not conducive to unity..."

"With Su Lie, Xi Rui, and Martins sitting behind, me sitting in front shouldn’t appear embarrassing, right?"

In a flash, many thoughts crossed his mind, and he gradually transitioned from unease to peace of mind.

Chapter 684: Strategy for Deploying the Extinction Order

Salius’s change in mindset is quite interesting.

Although his expression had basically not changed from the time he entered until he sat down, always maintaining the poker face most commonly seen among Interstellar Warriors, Gu Hang could still roughly guess Salius’s change in mindset from the slight fluctuations in his spirit and soul, as well as the shift in his gaze when sweeping over the two seats.

He chuckled softly to himself.

Actually, it didn’t matter which position Salius chose or what mindset he adopted in facing this battle, it wouldn’t really affect the outcome. Gu Hang didn’t particularly mind.

It merely determined what attitude Gu Hang would use to confront him.

In the end, it turned out to be a good result.

Putting this little thought aside, Gu Hang cleared his throat lightly and began to speak, "Everyone is here, so let’s get started."

"First, I have some news to announce: our time to conduct the Reiaductus campaign is extremely limited. An Insect Nest Fleet is rapidly approaching Reiaductus through sub-light speed conventional navigation in the Real Universe. It’s certain that this is the reinforcements summoned by the Queen. They will arrive in a year. Once that fleet arrives, the battle situation at Reiaductus will become greatly variable. It’s best to eliminate the Queen before that happens."

"The quickest way to resolve her is clearly not by conventional warfare, which would drag on indefinitely and the victory would come in many long years later;"

"Nor by using Decapitation Tactics. Although we have the most elite warriors, the enemy's anti-air firepower and the sheer number of orbital biological fleets make it impossible to pinpoint the Queen's exact location. The loss from attempting decapitation would be very high. We can't squander the lives of these elite warriors needlessly."

"I am resolved to use the Extinction Order to completely destroy this world, which is already filled with rot and corruption."

"Regarding this matter, who agrees and who opposes?"

No one voiced any objections.

Good, it prevented Gu Hang from indulging his mischievous desires to stir up trouble.

Actually, it was quite normal.

Gu Hang's unparalleled reputation at the moment, even with Salius here, forced him to sit below submissively, acknowledging Gu Hang, a mere mortal, as the leader and commander of this campaign. So when he proposed an idea, as long as it wasn't too outrageous, who could oppose it?

Moreover, opposing it would require reasons to oppose.

What Gu Hang said was very correct.

Using the Extinction Order to strike Reiaductus would surely be the way to achieve the least cost, most thorough effect, and quickest results, if it succeeds.

And the human forces indeed have this capability.

After the Southern and Western fronts merged, all Extinction Order weapons could be combined for use. Upon entering the Princess Star Domain, quite a number of Extinction Order weapons had been

used by the forces in both fronts. Many worlds which were completely infected and held no rescue value, yet were swarming with insects, deserved to be cleansed by the Extinction Order.

However, no matter how many had been used, there were still some in reserve when the two forces combined.

Moreover, due to the particularly dire battle situation in the Princess Star Domain, Extinction Order weapons were in short supply, so quite a few were urgently transferred from surrounding Cosmos Domains.

Almost all were Skyburn Torpedoes, the most commonly seen ones.

One after another, loaded onto transport ships, were delivered to the hands of the Southern and Western Front Armies, awaiting deployment.

Now, combined, there are certainly thirty Skyburn Torpedoes. If necessary, requisitioning thirty more over the next year wouldn't be an issue.

If dozens of Skyburn Torpedoes could solve the problem, it would be undoubtedly for the best.

Though, the value of one Skyburn Torpedo is equivalent to half a cruiser. Thirty torpedoes, that value would be approaching trillions in tax currency. However, compared to the battle results achieved and costs avoided, it would still be an absolutely worthwhile endeavor.

But though it sounds easy to say, the only issue lies in how to deploy Extinction Order weapons onto Reiaductus?

Firing them directly at the surface while confronting the Insect Nest Fleet across the orbit is inadvisable. Doing so, even thirty Skyburn Torpedoes, let alone three hundred or three thousand, would be intercepted midway.

However, no one raised this issue.

The eyes of the seated big shots converged on Gu Hang.

They believed that since Gu Hang proposed this idea, there must be more to be said, and certainly, a solution.

Faced with their stares, Gu Hang, on the contrary, smiled a bit.

He said, "Why is everyone looking at me like that? I'd like to hear your thoughts."

The big shots present this time stopped looking at Gu Hang, instead they exchanged glances, yet still, no one spoke.

In their hearts, they all actually had an idea.

The realistic idea is that to implement the Extinction Order on Reiaductus, a practical approach is to take it step by step. First, suppress the biological ship fleets of the Insect Swarm on the planetary orbit, trying to carve out a space for forces to touch down.

Then, under the firepower of the enemy fleet and the ground, clear the rail cannon groups on the surface. It's not about comprehensive clearance but establishing security over at least one area.

Next, under significant losses, send troops to the ground.

Possibly ten transport ships can only manage to land one. This requires putting in resources regardless of the cost until enough troops on the ground can hold their footing temporarily and fight to destroy biological gun nests, further clearing anti-orbital firepower.

Once cleared to a certain extent, Extinction Order weapons can be deployed.

It's never possible to boost the deployment success rate to one hundred percent. After all, there'd be anti-air guns from afar and Flying Demon Worms from the Insect Swarm to attack the deployed bombs; nor are the biological ships, not wholly destroyed, only expelled on the orbit.

If there were only one or a few Extinction Order weapons, using them in a low probability situation is inadvisable. After all, if intercepted, it's all over.

But humans now have thirty.

If the deployment success probability can be higher than 3%, it seems feasible to attempt it.

And this can be calculated by the loss rate of the transport ships when earlier deploying forces to the ground.

However, doing so poses two problems:

One, before achieving a 3% success rate, how much must humans pay in losses? Rocking ground firepower to drive away Insect Swarm Fleets; under the Insect Swarm Fleet, clear ground firepower... Who knows how many warships would be lost in these steps?

If merely incurring losses, so be it. It is the final battle, regardless of the losses, as long as ultimate victory is achieved, it is all acceptable.

But the problem lies in the tremendous risk that the human fleet might be dealt a devastating defeat by an obviously inferior enemy under such extremely adverse circumstances.

Then everything would be ruined.

Compared to this issue, the second point, which is reaching a 3% success rate, may not even be real. Facing the logistics ships deploying ground forces, the Insect Swarm's interception is one intensity; facing Extinction Order weapons, their interception would inevitably be of another intensity.

Putting down all thirty Skyburn Torpedoes and failing to make one hit would be embarrassing.

These are things everyone present can think of, and are precisely why they are reluctant to speak.

To speak merely regurgitates this idea, offering nothing innovative, and certainly not any brilliant tactics.

Chapter 685

The atmosphere inside the meeting room was something Gu Hang anticipated, so he felt neither sorrow nor joy.

His fingers gently tapped on the table, and his smile faded.

"Everyone here is a commander from different fronts, most of you have rich combat experience and understand the current situation, so I won’t waste words."

"Suppress the Insect Nest Fleet, clear the orbit, clear the ground... this is our only method."

"Do not fear sacrifice, do not fear failure."

"Sacrifice is the cornerstone of the Empire, under the gaze of The Emperor we cannot fail!"

"Additionally, you all are aware that I am a decent Psychic. Even within the Subspace Shadow, I can provide some spiritual energy assistance. I cannot say it will have an absolute decisive impact, but at the very least, I can ensure that from the Brain Worm to the high-level Neuron Progeny, they will not affect our troops."

"The rest of the matters require your dedication."

"No matter where you came from, where you will go after the war, or what goals you have in the war, victory is the only way to achieve our interests, our glory. Abandon all illusions and distractions, all for victory!"

...

"All for victory!" After disembarking from the spaceship, Colonel Lin Xiaodong issued the command to all his officers under his command.

He was a division commander in the Alliance Army. His division, in principle, consisted of more than forty thousand soldiers, composed of twelve frontline combat regiments, as well as varied numbers of logistics, guards, air defense, artillery, armored soldiers, and special operations battalions belonging to the division.

Such a division, within the Alliance Army, is known as a 'large composition division', equipped with comprehensive independent combat capabilities, enough to sustain ground warfare at one surface location.

Moreover, Lin Xiaodong's division was the champion division of the respective army group, and naturally tasked with the combat mission of the first wave of ground attacks.

But in reality, Lin Xiaodong now could command only two regiments and a few division-affiliated units, totaling maybe not even five thousand people.

His entire division was devoted to this war. As for the remaining forces, they were actually shot down during the airborne process.

In the cockpit of the large transport spacecraft, he watched the ships carrying his soldiers, not far from the spacecraft he was in, exploding in mid-air. From the disintegrating spacecraft, countless soldiers' corpses, even live soldiers, fell from the sky like rain.

Each time he saw a ship explode, Lin Xiaodong's heart throbbed. He feared his own warship might also be destroyed, dying before setting forth; and felt enraged by the countless subordinates sacrificed before landing.

And when he truly landed, under his command, all forces still contactable immediately initiated actions.

The first to move were the only remaining two Armored Companies. Tanks, armored combat vehicles, stormed out in combat stance once the transport spaceship's doors were opened.

Facing the Insect Swarm already waiting near the landing point, prepared to slaughter the humans upon landing, the Armored Company charged unhesitatingly.

However, with only eight Lion Tanks, over twenty armored combat vehicles, compared to the overwhelming swarm, they were far too insignificant. Even though the Lion Tanks were large, to the swarm, they were still nothing.

The Lion's main gun and auxiliary guns fired incessantly, even ignoring concerns regarding the longevity of the gun barrels—the life span of the entire vehicle might not be long!

The mounted machine guns also fired continuously.

The incoming swarm was massed, swept down, and blown to pieces batch after batch. This included some advanced units of the Insect Race; things like warrior bugs, tank bugs, which couldn't resist the tank company's assault.

The armored unit's task was to charge the incoming swarm head-on, dispersing the massive assault to buy time for the infantry following behind to establish defensive lines and artillery positions.

However, the swarm did have elements capable of threatening armored units.

The greatest threat came from the living artillery of the swarm. Various living bombs were launched. The bone-spine bug, similar to a human mortar in terms of bombardment level, posed little threat to Lion Tanks, but still inflicted considerable damage if it hit a Strider Combat Vehicle. When it came to heavy artillery bugs, or even higher-level flame release bugs, a living bomb blow would be hard to withstand even for Lion Tanks.

Insect swarm artillery firing was different from human army operations.

They executed the most excellent infantry-artillery coordination tactics, even daring to let infantry charge within three to five meters of the artillery line.

On one hand, this was because the swarm is essentially a biological weapon, executing orders coldly and absolutely. No charging insect beast would retreat due to fear, nor advance too far due to mishap and end up getting exploded.

Of course, nothing is absolute actually. In the process of execution, many insect beasts would still be blasted by their own artillery.

Yet, they cared nothing about it.

They truly do not care about the probability of the swarm suffering friendly fire.

It matters not.

As long as they inflict enough damage on the advancing human armored units, it suffices.

Indeed, they achieved their goal.

During the assault, one combat vehicle after another was destroyed. Colonel Lin Xiaodong, sitting in the command vehicle, watched the information of friendly vehicles on the front line, every now and then, one less.

The tank company did buy them time.

But...

"How’s the artillery position coming along?!" He hoarsely yelled.

"Report, Commander! It might take a few more minutes..."

"In a few more minutes, all our tanks will be gone!" He grabbed the handheld transceiver beside him, "Security company, move out! Armored cars, full-speed ahead, support our assault troops!"

"But Commander, if the bugs get close now..."

"If the artillery position isn't built, if our line isn't held, we're finished! Why care about my safety? Execute the order!"

"Yes!"

However, the situation did not improve much.

The security company hadn't gone up before the human's tank company could no longer charge.

What now?

He couldn't think of a solution.

Was this landing doomed to fail?

How were the other divisions doing?

Hopefully, other brother units can do better and avenge them...

As such thoughts involuntarily surfaced in Lin Xiaodong's mind, he heard the adjutant's shout:

"Commander! Look! There is reinforcement!"

Chapter 686, Long Son Corps

"Reinforcements?"

Lin Xiaodong, filled with newfound hope, even stepped out of the command vehicle, holding a telescope to look into the distance.

He saw a bright red flag planted on the hilltop in the direction of the tank battalion's charge.

And from that direction came the fierce artillery fire of the Insect Swarm. The biological artillery of the Insect Nest should be located there.

Lin Xiaodong recognized whose bright red flag it was: the Long Son Corps from Frost Plain Star.

Their uniforms have always been bright red, combined with their signature long fur leather earflap hats, with the Empire's Sky Eagle insignia at the center. The personnel of this Star Realm Army Corps mostly hail from a Nest Capital World named 'Frost Plain Star' in the Imperial North Border. According to Frost Plain Star tradition, every firstborn son from the families on the planet must serve in the Corps.

Added to this are the planet's abundant geothermal energy, ore resources, and its long-term collaboration with the Sect of Mechanics, resulting in relatively developed productivity and the capability to self-produce equipment.

The relatively harsh natural environment of the planet has also cultivated the resilient quality of the Frost Plain Star People.

Combined factors make the Long Son Corps' combat power exceptionally outstanding.

Although the planet's natural environment is average, strong military power maintains fairly good stability. The large military strength also allows them to form the Star Realm Army and answer the Empire's calls for deployment.

The Long Son Corps has been active throughout the Empire for millennia, participating in many wars, earning significant military merits, obtaining numerous benefits for their home planet, and becoming a renowned Star Realm Army Corps within the entire Empire.

When the Northern Line Army was established, the Long Son Corps joined immediately; subsequently, they reinforced with more troops several times. At its peak, the Long Son Corps had as many as 50 million troops in the Northern Front Army.

Only, they should not exist now.

They should have all been lost in that naval battle of the Northern Front Army.

Frankly speaking, the Long Son Corps suffered an unfortunate defeat.

They had nothing to do with it from the start. They shouldn't have to take the fall for the naval defeat.

On the contrary, they were the biggest victims. Clearly not at fault, yet tens of millions vanished.

The Northern Front Army remnants saved by the Alliance had no Long Son Corps members. It's even less likely in this tactical action of ground landing following a massive loss.

So where did these Long Son Corps warriors, who surprised the Insect Swarm's living artillery positions on the other side of the mountain, come from?

Could they be the troops left on the ground of Reiaductus during the Northern Line Army's collapse a year and a half ago?

Did they hold out for a year and a half with no external supplies, completely out of orbital control, and continued Insect Swarm sieges?

It's too incredible.

But now is not the time to think about this.

"Tell the comrades to move faster! Don't waste the opportunity!"

"Try to make contact with the suspected Long Son Corps units ahead, confirm the situation, and discuss what to do next."

...

"Have them rapidly establish artillery positions, cooperate with us to wipe out this Insect Race unit, and then keep pace with us. Our target is an anti-air nest forty kilometers away."

The speaker was Qin Zhiping, the high-ranking Judgment Chief of the Extraplanar Tribunal. At this moment, he wore Feedback-Type Power Armor, flanked by ten warriors of the Silver Watch, fighting alongside the Long Son Corps warriors.

He had already eliminated many living artillery units and was conducting the final clean-up. The Long Son Corps' vanguard squadrons had constructed firepower positions from the mountaintop, blocking the Insect Swarm's retreat.

Once the high-ground firepower base was complete and the Alliance Army's artillery positions were also set up to provide ample firepower support, Qin Zhiping led his ten Silver Watch interstellar warriors in a sudden assault on the Insect Swarm trapped front and back, accomplishing a beheading operation.

It was an "Executioner."

This is a high-level unit within the Insect Swarm, whose prowess can even win steadily against ordinary interstellar warriors. Moreover, it serves as the highest node organism of this Insect Race unit. Once its head was severed, all adjacent lower-level insects immediately became dazed.

Although the subsequent battle lasted a while longer, the required effort was far less than the usual engagement with this Insect Race unit.

After the two units merged, the Alliance Army's Master Lin Xiaodong asked them about their situation in surprise.

Qin Zhiping didn't refuse to answer, but demanded unified command of both units to join him in attacking an anti-air nest.

After conquering it, at least the near-ground area of this region would be safer for following landing troops.

Lin Xiaodong gave some thought before agreeing.

Firstly, their mission was indeed to land and try to connect with surrounding friendly forces, establish stable ground positions, and receive subsequent landing units. Directly attacking and destroying an enemy anti-air nest is obviously a better choice.

Secondly, there's no issue in letting Qin Zhiping command them. This Judgment Chief of the Anti-Extraterrestrial Alliance holds a high status, even capable of speaking with Mr. Gu. Commanding their brigades with only a tenth of their original strength is not a problem.

Conversely, what astonished Colonel Lin more was why Qin Zhiping was here.

Though unfamiliar and vastly different in status, Lin Xiaodong, when in the sky, was aware that Qin Zhiping was a key figure among the Northern Front remnants rescued by the Alliance.

That the key figures of the Northern Front Army saved by the Alliance appeared together with the entirely vanished Long Son Corps from a year and a half ago seemed rather bizarre.

On the road, Qin Zhiping explained the reasons to Colonel Lin.

Up to now, there was no need for secrecy.

He was, in fact, among the first batch to reach the ground in this operation, much earlier than Lin Xiaodong's group.

However, they didn't descend by ship. Otherwise, deploying vital figures like Qin Zhiping and precious interstellar soldiers to the surface at such high casualty rates would be sheer waste.

They descended through Gu Hang's spiritual energy teleportation method.

In the military conference before the battle commenced, he specifically mentioned that the Northern Line Army had indeed invested substantial ground troops into Reiaductus a year and a half ago.

When the fleet collapsed later, these people were essentially abandoned.

But Qin Zhiping believed that a considerable number of them survived.

Perhaps not many, but these people shouldn't be overlooked.

If utilized, they would be far more effective than losing troops with a success rate at single digits. If they indeed exist and can be organized, they could be of tremendous assistance.

A hundred survivors could match three thousand paratroopers—owing to the mere 3% success rate for initial transport craft landings. Master Lin Xiaodong's division considered it lucky if two out of twelve regiments survived the drop. Some divisions began fully equipped but ended with no surviving landings.

His proposal gained support from Gu Hang. He wasn't one to merely make suggestions; he volunteered to be in the first batch of spiritual energy teleported to the ground, tasked with contacting any surviving Northern Front remnants.

And he truly managed to make contact.

Chapter 687, The Surviving Marshal, Reiaductus Battle (3)

Before the main human forces commence the official attack and execute large-scale air-drop operations, those who first teleported to the ground through Gu Hang's spiritual energy were few, numbering only over four hundred.

Aside from Qin Zhiping, the rest were mostly Interstellar Warriors.

Such precious teleportation slots were naturally reserved for the strongest combatants.

Gu Hang wouldn't pin all his hopes on how many of the Northern Front remnants still survived. The elite warriors teleported to the ground have the secondary task of seeking out the Northern Front remnants; what matters more is to first understand the situation in the expected airdrop zones, aiming to destroy some anti-air defenses before the air-drop begins. Even if due to insufficient manpower it cannot be achieved, they must coordinate with the landing ground forces to address these anti-air defenses as soon as the air-drop starts.

However, the condition of the Northern Front remnants on the surface was better than expected.

Contacting the remnants wasn't easy.

In the absence of supplies and orbital cover, they couldn't gather large troops, nor occupy stable surface bases... otherwise, whether it be ground assaults from the Insect Swarm or threats from Insect Race ships in orbit, they would pose devastating threats to the ground forces.

This forced the Northern Front remnants to hide. They must conserve their limited supplies as much as possible, avoid unnecessary battles, and if a battle occurs, they must give their all to eliminate the visible enemy, then swiftly relocate to prevent the Insect Swarm from tracking them along the last location of the missing troops.

After hiding, the bugs became hard to find them, yet Qin Zhiping also found it difficult to locate them.

However, since he requested Gu Hang to let him be the first wave on the ground, he naturally had some ideas on how to find those hidden Northern Front remnants.

He brought along a communication device.

During spiritual energy teleportation, portable equipment couldn't be large. Otherwise, a simple Star Language Tower would be a better choice.

But having this communication device suffices.

The channel and password were set to a highly encrypted channel for Northern Line Army use, then set to a more generalized channel. The former aimed to contact potentially surviving high-ranking remnants from the Northern Line Army, while the latter sought to expand the search scope as much as possible.

Following this, one hundred Phoenix warriors and one hundred Blood Shark warriors began preparations for subsequent large-scale air-dropping operations. As for Qin Zhiping, under the protection of two hundred Interstellar Warriors, he started vast movements to various regions in search of potential Northern Front remnants.

The warriors protecting him mostly hailed from Xi Rui's Black Cross Army, while others belonged to the Silver Vigil's warriors. A few were elite warriors drawn from various other Battle Groups.

There's a sensible reason for the Black Cross Army sending so many warriors here. After all, if the Northern Front remnants indeed existed, the majority would come from the Black Cross Army warriors. During the first Reiaductus campaign a year and a half ago, the largest landing force was the Black Cross Army. They descended about fifteen hundred warriors.

Both channels used by Qin Zhiping yielded results.

A substantial number of Northern Front remnants survived. During the first campaign, they deployed tens of millions of warriors. Though the majority perished, less than one in ten survived, amounting to several hundred thousand people.

Of course, these forces were extremely scattered. They were mostly in mountainous areas, in tunnels, in the bottom layer ruins of Nest Capital. Their conditions were dire, with a shortage of equipment, food, ammunition...

Undoubtedly, this was chronic attrition.

Yet chronic attrition is better than sudden death.

As long as they're alive, perhaps they can hold out until there's a shift in the situation.

Like now.

Some remnant forces were thus contacted by Qin Zhiping.

With this beginning, the subsequent processes became much easier. Although these struggling troops dared not show their faces, they maintained plenty of contacts amongst themselves. Contacting one allowed the extension to reach many more.

Nonetheless, Qin Zhiping couldn't save them.

Survival depended on self-rescue.

He shared the coordinates for the Empire's allied forces' upcoming large-scale air-drop location, happening a few days later, with these units.

To self-rescue, they must act immediately, taking all possible men and equipment, disregarding any ammunition expenditure, and strive to advance towards that region.

If too far from the air-drop zone, spanning thousands of kilometers, they're beyond saving; unless they can somehow traverse a thousand miles to reach the air-drop region.

But most within a thousand kilometers, or already present in this region, began to activate.

When selecting the air-drop zone, the allied forces largely retained the initial zone chosen during the first campaign by the Northern Line Army. Partly because it's indeed suitable, but also considering the remnants' most probable presence in this area.

After receiving Qin Zhiping's message, these remnants indeed began to mobilize.

Remaining inactive meant death.

Furthermore, this was a coordinated command signed by Xi Rui, Gu Hang, and Salius. Northern Line, Southern Line, and West Line commanders gathered altogether.

Moreover, Qin Zhiping utilized high-security level communications, achieving an especially large breakthrough: he contacted Leroux!

The Second Fleet Marshal of the Black Cross Army and the true commander of the North Line actually survived!

During the first campaign, Leroux's flagship exploded amidst naval combat, and afterward, he vanished, leaving Xi Rui to assume command duties.

In reality, however, during the ship's explosion, Leroux, along with some trusted aides, boarded a rescue vessel and made their way to the surface of Reiaductus amidst the naval chaos.

This wasn't an ideal choice; he would have preferred boarding other vessels if possible.

But was there really a choice?

Luckily, the anti-air defenses on Reiaductus' surface had relaxed during that time. Without these two conditions, Leroux might very well have perished while descending to the surface.

Throughout the past year and a half, Leroux wasn't inactive.

On his own, he couldn't change the tide of the war at Reiaductus but achieved some positive outcomes.

For instance, he contacted various armies, uniting numerous remnants to establish a unified command structure under these dire circumstances, preventing the remnants from becoming scattered.

Notably, large numbers of Interstellar Warriors were contacted. Though not all necessarily by his side, there were at least around five hundred warriors; additionally, more than five hundred warriors available for immediate contact and task assignment.

This was yet another significant positive news.

Chapter 688: Please Authorize, Reiaductus Battle (4)

The survival of Leroux, and the connective, cooperative, command system he established among the remnant forces of the Northern Line, was originally prepared for the entire unit to survive better and longer on Reiaductus.

After all, sometimes an isolated remnant unit, once located by the Insect Race, is doomed. But now, although still very dangerous, at least there are friendly forces that can help save them. If they lack ammunition, they can secretly transport some from brother units; where it is discovered that there are supplies left behind by planets falling into Insect Race hands, or supplies transported to the ground during the first campaign, joint actions can be taken to seize them.

In any case, Leroux's efforts over the past year and a half allowed the Northern Line remnant forces to preserve as much of their vitality as possible, and also retain a certain combat capability.

And all of this is now bursting out with power.

The rescue of Lin Xiaodong's division originated from this. Otherwise, how could nearly ten thousand Long Son Army soldiers appear on the battlefield at such a crucial time and play a pivotal role?

But rescuing some airborne army units is secondary.

Their core mission is still to destroy those anti-aircraft nests.

Although he followed Qin Zhiping, Lin Xiaodong was somewhat doubtful in his heart: Can we win with our current strength?

It’s normal for him to have doubts.

With his subordinates and the Long Son Army combined, there were less than fifteen thousand people. The Long Son Army was quite ’poor,’ needing his unit to spare some ammunition to restore a significant amount of combat power. Although the artillery was barely sufficient, the essential armored units for attacking the Insect Race’s nests were very lacking. His two Armored Companies had already been battered to a half-crippled state, and the Long Son Army didn’t even have a single tank.

In such a dire situation, can they conquer a complete anti-aircraft nest?

Even with the formidable-looking Judgment Chief Qin Zhiping leading and ten Interstellar Warriors of the Silver Vigil, he still felt it was quite precarious.

No choice is no choice, facing a higher level of combat mission, they would go forward without hesitation. But it did not prevent him from being very pessimistic about the success rate in his heart.

Of course, he did not show any of this on his face. He did not ask Qin Zhiping about any combat plans and always maintained a calm, confident demeanor in front of his subordinates.

He was prepared for the entire division, including himself, to sacrifice in battle.

However, when the troops reached the attack position and made the final battle preparations, he saw a unit that excited him greatly.

They were a group of Interstellar Warriors with black paint and a striking white cross emblem.

There were as many as a hundred of them!

With the addition of these hundred Black Cross Army, it was much more reassuring!

At the same time, Lin Xiaodong also noticed the leading Black Cross Army warrior. Not only was he equipped with magnificent Terminator Power Armor, but it was also adorned with various medals and a commander insignia.

Could he be a big shot in the Black Cross Army?

He guessed this, however, it was when Qin Zhiping later invited him to the final pre-battle meeting that he learned this Black Cross Army commander's identity was even more significant than he thought:

This was the Northern Front Army's Commander-in-Chief Marshal Le Luwa, previously presumed missing and likely already sacrificed.

He became even more confident about the upcoming battle!

...

Leroux sat amidst a ruin of flesh and blood, his black and white trimmed Power Armor covered in the green, red, and purple blood sprayed from dying Insect Races, making him look somewhat disheveled.

But in any case, the battle was won.

The Alliance Army artillery unleashed a ferocious barrage, providing strong firepower cover for the assault troops; the Long Son Army and an Alliance infantry regiment, along with the Interstellar Warriors, charged together, drawing significant attention from the extensive Insect Swarm at considerable sacrifice, playing an excellent preliminary role.

Under the guidance of Qin Zhiping, an expert against Aliens, the Black Cross Army personally led by Leroux did not take a wrong turn, charging straight into the half-underground, half-surface structure of the Insect Nest core, clearing out all the live anti-aircraft artillery.

Afterward, they intercepted the hastily returning 'Screaming Killers,' commonly known as the Executioner Tyrants, advanced units of the Insect Nest, just one rank below the Insect Nest Tyrants.

Initially, they were drawn away by the Alliance's infantry regiment. The Alliance warriors, with great sacrifice, held them off for a period, making the Black Cross Army's assault seem so smooth.

Of course, it couldn't be for too long.

But by now, it wasn't needed.

Having resolved the primary target, Leroux, who was free to face the enemy head-on, personally beheaded the powerful Insect Race node creature, securing complete victory in this battle.

Although the battle was not entirely over, with quite a few mindless bugs, having lost their node creature, still needing to be cleaned up, overall, the battle had no more variables.

Sitting in the ruins of the battlefield, Leroux was not resting.

A Technical Sergeant and a Think Tank from the battle group were right beside him, assisting him in using the already erected Star Language Tower to communicate with various units on the ground, confirming the current movement status of each unit, and sending new orders.

Chapter 688: Please Grant Authorization, Reiaductus Battle (4)_2

The makeshift Star Language Tower, over a hundred kilometers away, is equipment that the Northern Line remnants themselves possess. Once set up, it can significantly enhance communication strength among various units, eliminating the need for whispering like mice in the dark, with connections intermittently breaking.

In the past, this was because they truly were like mice. A louder sound would have resulted in being caught by a group of 'cats.'

But now, roles have reversed.

Although the ground is still dominated by the insect swarm, the human forces have already entered the phase of a major counterattack!

For the Northern Line remnants, this is the last chance after enduring for a year and a half.

There's no need to hide anything, set up the dismantled and hidden Star Language Tower, as enhancing command is more vital.

Judging from the current received information, the results they have achieved are quite impressive.

Fourteen anti-air insect nests have been destroyed; over 150,000 of the landed alliance forces are converging, including Alliance Army and the Sun Legion; a preliminary base has been established, along with some airborne and anti-air firepower that the Northern Line remnants have, preventing easy bombardment by the insect swarm — if it's a large-scale bombardment, this minimal anti-air firepower definitely wouldn't intercept them, we would still rely on the Starship in the sky for help.

Overall, there are achievements, foundation, troop assembly, and base creation... so far, the battle situation is improving.

This is the outcome that the Northern Line remnants fought with all their might. They abandoned hiding, utilizing the precious resources accumulated over a long time, allowing the ground battle to perform so well.

Without them, solely relying on the alliance forces, what's the use of landing fifteen thousand people? Even if including the four hundred interstellar warriors previously sent, such results wouldn't be achieved in a short time.

After all, this time the Northern Line remnants gradually gathered have exceeded over 500,000; the number of interstellar warriors is over a thousand.

To achieve the same effect, the Human Alliance would need to deploy twenty times this number of forces to achieve such a substantial landing, resulting in significant losses.

After defeating fourteen anti-air insect nests, at least the airborne operations in this area have become much safer.

The success rate of deploying transport ships will rise sharply from less than 5% to 20%.

Though it seems like a low number, the key issue is the interception by the insect swarm fleet cannot be ignored; near-earth orbit sections can be locked by bigger angles and anti-air fire from other directions. Only when descending to a relatively close height to the ground can it be considered relatively safe.

Nevertheless, this is quite a good number. It means not having four entire army groups airborne, with only 200,000 landing, and then fighting against a massive insect swarm in precarious circumstances, losing 50,000.

Now, with four more army groups airborne, at least 800,000 could land.

As long as continuous support to the ground is provided, under Leroux's command, he has full confidence in fulfilling Mr. Gu Hang's demands!

But... here lies the question: is Mr. Gu willing to let him be the ground commander?

Does Mr. Gu trust him?

Whether regarding trust in his ability or trust in his stance.

It's understandable if Mr. Gu doubts the former, after all, he is a failure.

Doubting the latter is even more justified. Previously, both sides were practically 'political enemies,' having criticized and argued against each other.

Now, Leroux feels apologetic for past events.

After entering the Princess Star Domain, he realized something was wrong, until all of Mr. Gu Hang's warnings were confirmed to be true, not merely seeking achievements, holding back progress, or displaying 'cowardice.'

But he was unable to turn back then.

After going through this year and a half of life and death hardships, his thoughts have changed further.

Back then, perhaps he could have turned back. Perhaps he and his Northern Line Army would have been trapped in the insect plague quagmire of Lefort and Sword Gate two star domains, but isn't the Southern Line and Western Line the same situation? Once trapped, endure patiently, spend time solving it, even request help from Southern Line Mr. Gu Hang to cooperate and solve the problem, then eventually they could unite all lines to fight this Reiaductus campaign together.

If this were the case, the Human Alliance's force would be much stronger now than it currently is.

At the very least, he wouldn't have had to endure this year and a half of hardships with his battle brothers, countless human warriors who once trusted him and fought alongside him. Even more, his battle brothers, brave warriors, wouldn't have perished in the first maritime battle of the Reiaductus campaign and been killed in the following hardships of ground combat.

This painful failure has made him reflect even more.

But does Mr. Gu Hang know his reflections, his apologies?

Even if he knows, would he accept them?

Would he let go of past grievances and confidently allow him to command ground battles?

He doesn't know.

But he decides to ask directly.

Previously, it wasn't possible to contact the sky from the ground, lacking the conditions.

But now, with the makeshift Star Language Tower set up, it’s possible. After all, the Mr. Gu Hang in the sky is a true Spiritual Master, capable of freely displaying spiritual power within the subspace shadow. As long as his Star Language Tower can send out even a tiny signal upward, even if it’s very weak, Mr. Gu can capture it to stabilize communications and establish a call.

It’s up to Mr. Gu Hang to decide.

After all, if Mr. Gu Hang didn’t want to respond, the easiest way would be not to answer the call. Later claiming signal issues, under the cover of the subspace shadow, no one could say anything.

But the communication connected smoothly.

"Mr. Gu Hang Commander?"

"It’s me, hello, Marshal Leroux."

Leroux wasn’t surprised at all that Mr. Gu Hang knew it was him on the other end.

He originally intended to start by apologizing, but, as he opened his mouth, nothing came out.

That damned pride.

Ultimately, he forced himself to say: "Mr. Gu Commander, I request authorization to be the commander of surface battles in the Reiaductus campaign. I promise I will win for the Empire."

"Alright, I grant authorization."

Hearing Mr. Gu’s decisiveness, Leroux paused for a moment.

But immediately, he responded: "I won’t fail your trust. Actually, we can now start attempting to deploy Extinction Order weapons groundward, currently near-ground safety is ensured."

His words made it clear, he wasn’t concerned about himself or the lives of his Northern Line remnants brothers.

One of his regrets over the past year and a half is not taking a gamble on deploying Extinction Order weapons groundward when conditions allowed. Although back then they had many warriors deployed, with low success rates, it was still worth a gamble. Even a failure would only result in a situation like now. If successful, the situation would have reversed.

Now, lessons must be learned, without mercy. Even with hundreds of thousands remaining on the ground, thousands of interstellar warriors, so what? If wars aren’t resolved quickly, future sacrifices will far exceed these numbers.

Mr. Gu Hang’s response was clear: "It’s not the time yet, wait a bit longer, just accomplish your tasks."

Leroux didn’t say much more, simply responding: "Understood."

...

The call between Leroux and Mr. Gu Hang was extremely brief.

In reality, if they were to talk, there were many things to discuss.

Operations plans, resource allocations...

But Mr. Gu Hang didn’t have time to personally discuss these matters with Leroux.

The purpose of the staff department is to handle this.

Mr. Gu Hang’s quick consent to Leroux was mainly due to his first sentence:

"Please authorize."

That was enough.

Chapter 689, Reiaductus Campaign (5)

If Leroux still considered himself on par with Gu Hang as the Northern Commander, then what’s the point of authorization?

There would be no need to serve as a ground battle commander; he could directly command all Imperial Army forces, wouldn’t that suffice?

He didn’t do that.

He wanted to take command, and his first reaction was to seek authorization from Gu Hang, which impressed Gu Hang greatly.

It was quite humble and fully acknowledged Gu Hang’s leadership position.

This attitude satisfied Gu Hang.

As for apologies and the like, Gu Hang didn’t particularly care.

Apologies are more about personal concession; if there’s none, there’s none. Gu Hang wouldn’t force, much less act arrogantly.

Since he had no intention of trapping Leroux to death on the surface, and Leroux’s attitude was decent, there was no need to offend the person. As long as he survived the war, when he returned, he would still be a significant figure in the Black Cross Army, ranking third in that powerful battle group.

Adding Xi Rui, who ranked in the top five, would also give Gu Hang some 'connections' in the Black Cross Army.

There was no fundamental conflict of interest between both parties. In such circumstances, having an extra friend is always better than having an extra enemy.

As for whether Leroux was suitable as the ground commander, Gu Hang believed there was no issue.

Identity-wise, it was appropriate, as the main force on the ground now was the Northern remnants who survived the first battle, which were originally under Leroux's leadership.

His experience was ample, and his abilities should be fine.

Although he had previously experienced a painful defeat, he was still capable of taking charge as an army group commander. Just as a ground battle commander, he was certainly qualified.

Moreover, if not Leroux, Gu Hang had no one else to use. Although he had some trusted individuals, like Matins, for instance... But ground battles were too risky, and one couldn't predict when the Extinction Order weapons would take effect, and by then, whoever was commanding the battle on the surface might not be able to withdraw and could die.

Sending Matins, or any other key figure, down with such risks to lead troops not belonging to him, with someone of high rank like Leroux present, and then possibly not being able to withdraw...

It's inappropriate, and Gu Hang would not bear to do so.

Letting Leroux continue in command was quite good.

As for the risk of the Extinction Order... Actually, Gu Hang lied.

He had said to Leroux that he would discuss it when the time was right, but in truth, he was eager to use Spiritual Energy to directly send the Skyburn Torpedo to the planet's surface.

Wasn’t that impossible?

Spiritual Energy teleportation not only required an outstanding Spirit Master but also had requirements for the target to be teleported. The target needed at least to be a living entity, one that could be accepted by Subspace. It meant that so-called ’without souls,’ ’unreachable’ entities couldn’t be teleported; non-living things without ’souls’ couldn’t be either.

Weapons, equipment, or even Power Armor that followed the teleported target didn’t face problems. The core reason was these were relatively small and embodied the will of the owner, which could be recognized by Subspace as part or an extension of the ’soul.’

A single Skyburn Torpedo as large as a small Starship didn’t meet the conditions for teleportation at all.

But though teleportation couldn’t be used as a convenient and quick means, when the surface battles had cleared fourteen air defense nests in the drop zone, raising the transport ships’ landing probability from less than 5% to about 20%, he had already given the order to deploy the Skyburn Torpedoes.

With the Human Fleet nearing the orbital position, enduring attacks from both ground orbital cannons and the Insect Nest Fleet, resolutely closed in, at the cost of one Lunar-Class Cruiser, they deployed eight Skyburn Torpedoes.

All were intercepted.

This was completely different from the ratio of transport ships.

By the ratio of transport ships, at least one out of eight should have landed.

Was it just pure bad luck?

No, it wasn’t.

Gu Hang noticed that every time an Extinction Order weapon was launched, the various interception methods of the Insect Race became more active.

They should have some ability to quickly discern whether the Alliance ships had dropped a regular transport ship or an Extinction Order.

Moreover, they should have reserved orbital interception capabilities. If these reserves were all deployed to destroy transport ships, they might not achieve complete interception and couldn't increase interception efficiency to a particularly high level.

Moreover, the Queen might not deem it necessary.

Even if some army troops landed, the numerical advantage of the ground Insect Swarm wouldn't be negated. Even though some anti-air nests were destroyed, which was indeed troublesome, the majority were still intact, and the Queen could still use her stored biomass, or directly digest some soldier bugs, to hatch and generate more anti-air nests.

But intercepting Extinction Orders was something that had to be done. One explosion, and it would be disastrous.

On this basis, the Queen would leave plenty of back-up measures, allowing orbital anti-air and Insect Nest Fleet interception methods to retain some capability. Upon discerning an Extinction Order deployment, they'd use all these reserved methods focusing on intercepting the Extinction Order weapon, thereby greatly improving success rates.

Chapter 689, Reiaductus Campaign (5)_2

Afterwards, Gu Hang also tried using transport ships to deliver the Extinction Order weapon to the ground.

But after three attempts, the result was the same.

Gu Hang decided not to waste any more Skyburn Torpedoes.

There was no need.

Observing the interception of the Skyburn Torpedo, it was clear the issue wasn't with the delivery method. The Insect Race wasn't distinguishing between an Extinction Order and a regular troop or supply ship by the delivery method. They must have a more efficient way to identify it.

We have to come up with other solutions.

First of all, we can't relax the ground force deployment.

There have been some gains on the ground.

We must not only hold these gains but also expand and strengthen them as much as possible.

We must be prepared for the worst-case scenario, even if it means depleting all resources against the Insect Race, even to the point where the Queen's biomass cannot keep up with consumption, we must win this war.

Of course, this is the worst plan.

In reality, we should avoid reaching this point if possible.

Gu Hang is thinking of other methods.

Subsequently, the Human Alliance attempted the Extinction Order delivery again. This time, they used an Escort Ship retrofitted with a Void Shield, charging towards the ground.

As long as it entered the atmosphere and released the Skyburn Torpedo, the mission would be considered a success. As for the millions of people on the ship... forget it, they already care little for the millions fighting on the ground with thousands of Interstellar Warriors, how could they care for others?

But this attempt also failed.

The Escort Ship was blown up.

To go further, should we sacrifice a cruiser or even higher-level ships?

No need.

Gu Hang didn't think that would work.

We need to think of another way.

However, before coming up with new methods, the ground situation improved gradually over time.

In battle, Leroux finally demonstrated his capabilities as marshal of the Black Cross Army.

The area controlled by human forces continued to expand.

They cleared all the Insect Race in a certain area.

Now, Leroux controls forces of about two million and an area exceeding fifty thousand square kilometers.

A direct indicator was that the success rate of transports landing in this designated large-scale drop zone rose dramatically to 60%.

Although the Extinction Order weapon still couldn't be delivered, this drop success rate was already quite ideal.

Yet, this was already nearing the current limits.

The main reason was that the remnants of the North Line from the first campaign had mostly gathered. Those not yet gathered either couldn't travel vast distances to break through the dense Insect Race barriers alone or were already annihilated and couldn't be counted on.

Moreover, the Insect Swarm became highly vigilant against these survivors, intensifying efforts to hunt them down in all areas.

This made gathering forces from remnants on the ground directly impossible.

At the same time, the significantly improved airdrop success rate, after dropping numerous war supplies and armored vehicles, also restored the fighting capacity of the North Line remnants.

This enhancement had reached its limits.

As for the growing scale, especially with a secure foothold, the Insect Swarm no longer needed to spread their forces thinly to guard against airdrops everywhere. Those waiting Insect Swarm armies had completed their assembly recently, launching a fierce assault on the human bases established on the Reiaductus surface.

Amidst the heroic sacrifices of human soldiers and cost-free aerial reinforcements, Leroux withstood wave after wave of attacks and maintained the base.

However, being able to do this was already the limit at present.

The number of Insect Swarms converging around was increasing significantly.

Not only were the planet's entire Insect armies gathering here, but all the hatching nests controlled by the Queen were also operating at full throttle. Masses of biomass were transformed into various types of Insect Race troops.

Their increasing speed was much faster and more direct than the human army's constant airdrops with a 40% casualty rate.

The borders spanning hundreds of kilometers around the base were ablaze with warfare, and the base was continuously subjected to various types of bombardments.

The situation had reached a stalemate.

Leroux maintaining the base was already at his utmost effort, hardly any more could be demanded.

To advance the battle further would require deploying more ground forces.

Gu Hang's answer was affirmative.

Since the second campaign on Reiaductus, the largest scale air drop operation began.

Not only did numerous transport ships descend, but also a plethora of various warplanes dominating the sky.

Wind Falcons, Qilins, Dragon Elephants... These three increasing levels of fighters were available, even though there were space and planetary versions; generally speaking, even the latter could operate in space for some time. Their pilots, the Air Knights, didn't need to risk descending with the transport ships but could strike more flexibly, even using cannons aided by high-performance servo-skulls for fire control to break through intercepting artillery.

Over a thousand warplanes successfully entered the atmosphere, quickly losing altitude, and at close range, they ascended, unloading missiles onto the charging Insect Swarm heads toward the human base. The fiercest were those dozen precious Dragon Elephants, each carrying one Scorching East Wind missile.

This L-level missile, once unleashed, could destroy not only the Insect Swarm but an entire medium to large Insect Nest.

The rest could use guns to furiously sweep the ground.

Over a thousand warplanes inflicted massive casualties on the Insect Swarm. Only when a sky-covering, manifold across dozens or even hundreds of times human numbers of flying insects swarmed did they drive them away.

Of course, those already in the atmosphere couldn't return to orbit or the ships. But, inside the base, runways and hangars were established.

Fighting while retreating back inside the base, where anti-aircraft guns sprayed one fire tongue after another, shooting down swathes of flying insects, preventing the Insect Air Force from pursuing.

This wave of offensives significantly boosted human morale!

Not only did they witness a spectacular fireworks display, but the Insect Swarm suffered severe damage, while they clearly received massive support.

During the transport ship landings, with the escort of over a thousand warplanes, the airdrop success rate substantially increased, reaching an unprecedented 75%.

Not only did over a million ground troops arrive, but they also brought numerous heavy weapons—armor and artillery.

There were over four hundred Lion King Tanks alone!

This thing was much larger and more powerful than the Lion Tank.

Additionally, more impactful was the deployment of half a Titan Legion.

Half of this Titan Legion came from Mars, brought by Salius from the Sun Star Domain; the other half was from the Alliance National Knights.

Furthermore, Gu Hang also braved the Queen's powerful Subspace Shadows and teleported five hundred Interstellar Warriors from various battle groups.

By now, Leroux possessed nearly two thousand Interstellar Warriors.

Gu Hang was quite satisfied with the ground support deployment this time.

Speaking of which, unfortunately, two secretly stowed Skyburn Torpedoes disguised as regular troop transports were still intercepted due to precise identification before reaching the ground.

Quite unfortunate.

But in any case, a rather powerful army was now on the ground.

Although the number, due to previous brutal losses, was only two million even after adding another million, elite forces were sufficient.

Gu Hang was looking forward to significant results from Leroux with the large-scale reinforcements.

Chapter 690, Insect Saint Biological Titan, Reiaductus Battle (6)

Leroux understood that Gu Hang deployed such a formidable force not merely to hold the base.

Nor was it simply to expand the base.

Achieving that would indeed count as progress, but it would certainly be disappointing.

Even Leroux would find such results unsatisfactory.

His selected target was an Insect Nest discovered through reconnaissance, located about eighty kilometers from the base.

Human defenses were, of course, never about holding the ground. Trenches have been dug along the frontier of the base, and some bunkers quickly constructed, true, but there were also some paths left open. If the Insect Race tried to charge in through these flat areas, it would be suicidal. The paths left open were key areas under heavy crossfire coverage. After a few attempts and many futile sacrifices, the Insect Race continued methodically to chip away at these firepower points.

In contrast, it was often the humans who launched assaults through these routes.

Armored units would sortie to destroy the Insect Race's biological artillery positions; elite troops took advantage of breaks between battles to carry out special operations. These missions ranged from sabotage, targeting high-value personnel, to intelligence reconnaissance, covering all types.

Reconnaissance missions were particularly frequent.

The reconnaissance spearhead detachments from various units, Stormtroopers, and Interstellar Warriors, all participated in collecting intelligence of varying values.

Leroux's selected target for this mission was one such location.

It was not merely an anti-air Insect Nest but also a massive hatchery. It hadn't been so large before, but after the human base was established, it seemed to have been selected by the Queen or some other advanced node organism as a core base of the Insect Swarm.

Its functions as a hatchery and arsenal had been greatly enhanced. Many biomass transport pipelines connected to it, and even that wasn't enough, as massive land transport organisms, nurtured by many warrior insects and specialized breeds, carried huge amounts of biomass to this nest.

At the same time, this nest hatched a large number of Insect Race organisms, becoming a key factor in exerting military pressure on human positions.

According to the Anti-Extraterrestrial Alliance's alien processing experts, based on its scale, this Insect Nest could hatch between one hundred to two hundred thousand a day, continuing to exert considerable pressure on the human base.

Eliminating it would not only destroy a large anti-air Insect Nest but also cut off the enemy's direct and rapid means of replenishing troops at the front; moreover, the vast amount of biomass contained within could be seen as potential enemies. Destroying it while it was still biomass was undoubtedly much easier than after it had been hatched into insects.

Furthermore, this biomass might have been brought over from the territories controlled by the Insect Swarm, where the consumed Insect Race armies and worker insects were digested and transported here.

The Insect Race indeed operated like this: as long as digestion, transport, and then hatching took less time and resources than moving an Insect Race army itself, they would arrange it this way.

Evidently, transporting troops from the other side of the world to this place for re-hatching was more economical than letting those Insect Race units take long journeys.

But it also provided an opportunity for human breakthroughs.

At dawn, the human army mobilized.

Dozens of Lion King Tanks blazed a trail, followed by more than ten times as many Lion Tanks, and even more armored vehicles carrying infantry set off.

Within the stronghold, human artillery briefly covered the advancing route of the armored units with tens of thousands of shells.

The Insect Swarm reacted immediately.

They had already detected the previous large-scale successful air landing and could infer that the humans were likely to launch another offensive soon after.

Yet, they still couldn't stop it.

Their proud numerical advantage couldn't be leveraged under intense bombardment; no Insect Swarm dared to show up. Following the orders of superior node organisms, they hid in tunnels and caves, or at least crouched down, avoiding the bombardment.

They weren't afraid of death, but as long as the node organisms were alive, they could determine which sacrifices were necessary and which were in vain.

Only after the bombardment ceased did the remaining Insect Swarm emerge, trying to block the armored units' advance.

But they were ruthlessly crushed by the iron torrent.

They could only clear the road, then tried flanking attacks on the advancing armored convoy.

But this was also futile; after sacrificing numerous units, the end result was still defeat.

The human armored units took about a day to break through the eighty-kilometer journey. Numerous battles took place during this time, almost all ending in human victory.

At night, forward progression largely ceased, but a significant portion of the infantry remained at work. Using engineering machinery, they quickly dug some trenches, and the self-propelled artillery, including armored guns and simpler truck artillery, entered fortified positions.

During the night, the heavily weakened Insect Swarm still launched several attacks, causing some damage. Notably, a group of burrowing serpentine insects, in conjunction with a batch of Assassin Insects, launched a dangerous raid.

However, Leroux personally led over a hundred Black Cross Army warriors to eliminate these elite Insect Race invaders. The Executioner Tyrant, acting as a node organism, was personally slain by Leroux.

By the next morning, once the human forces were ready to assault, they launched a fierce attack on the Insect Nest.

The well-rested Titan Legion moved out.

This battle could be considered the most spectacular on the surface of Reiaductus.

Throughout the entire day, the Insect Swarm felt threatened and vigorously arranged forces; the hatchery itself also did everything possible to produce a massive army, layer by layer resisting within the Insect Nest, repeatedly obstructing the advances of human forces.

Even until the afternoon, they hadn't penetrated and had lost two Warhound Titans.

By evening, a reinforcement Insect Swarm army finally arrived.

The most striking among them were several Insect Race organisms, even larger in size than the Warlord Level Titans!

Insect Saint Biological Titan!

They had four long legs supporting their massive bodies; a long cannon extended from their oral parts, capable of smashing a Lion King Tank from a distance; the uneven number of appendages extending from their bodies were the most terrifying close-range weapons.

Not only did the Insect Saint Titans appear, but also some others, smaller than the Insect Saint yet reaching a level similar to the Warhound. With two thickly curved legs supporting their bodies, their forelimbs bore two massive biological symbiotic cannons, and their mouthparts, opening wide to the extreme, almost capable of biting a Titan's upper body.

The Biological Titans of the Insect Race had emerged.