Governor 741

Chapter 741: Arrogant Then Obsequious

Luo Fei could no longer refuse.

Continuing to oppose the advancement of the "Alliance Plan" would be like trying to stop a chariot with one’s arms.

Currently, the Department of Taxation is cutting his administrative budget, which he already finds quite uncomfortable. In the Supreme Council, the other High Lords are relatively neutral, but when it comes to the budget, everyone wants a piece of the pie that the Alliance promises with its long-term projection of one to two trillion tax currency annually.

Moreover, Gu Hang has made many friends from the previous war. Both the Star Realm Army and the Navy, as well as the Interstellar Warriors and the Tribunal, have spoken on his behalf, both openly and behind the scenes.

And with the strong support from Galaraldo...

He’s been having quite a difficult time lately.

Sometimes, he couldn’t help but think, was he being too sensitive, overthinking?

If you carefully calculate, is there really any benefit to blocking the Alliance for him? Why fight over the Spiderweb Domain, a place already in ruins? Even if he gains control over it, all he would have is the power of personnel appointments in this Star Domain.

From past experiences, those appointed as Cosmic Domain Chair or Star Domain Head by him initially seem obedient, as they strongly support the Central Administrative Bureau. However, over time, as they consolidate their own forces and establish their foothold, it’s an unknown whether they will remain obedient.

Unless a rotational system is adopted, changing positions regularly. But given the current state of the Empire, that's practically unrealistic.

Of course, overall, a new Cosmic Domain brings significant benefits due to the numerous positions available. However, the political cost of fighting for all this has become excessively high, dragging on until now.

Gradually, it has left him feeling that the gains don't outweigh the losses.

Besides, there's actually a fundamental thought: to let Gu Hang, the head of a separatist regime, become a Cosmic Domain Chair while freeing his separatist faction from restraints...

No matter how you look at it, it's not a fortunate event.

Whether or not Gu Hang himself is loyal, or whether he will eventually rebel, is irrelevant. Institutionally, this situation should be avoided from occurring.

The safety of the entire Empire shouldn't hinge on one individual's whim.

As the Prime Minister of the Imperial Executive Yuan, he has always held such a belief. Therefore, he is most vigilant about Gu Hang's current situation.

However, it seems like in the High Lord Council, there are those who think like him, but these ideas usually aren't their top priority when making decisions.

Sometimes he feels a bit tired: why should I have to think this way?

Of course, at this time, he tends to selectively forget when it comes to situations where departmental or personal interests conflict with the Empire's interests, what choices would he normally make?

Anyway, now he feels exhausted.

Since none of you care, neither will I.

Whatever happens, happens.

From a profit perspective, fighting for the Spiderweb Domain may no longer be profitable; from the perspective of securing the Empire's interests, it's hardly achievable.

But these are all secondary matters.

The core blow to him lies in the Prime Minister's shifting attitude.

The Prime Minister is the one who ultimately decides everything.

When he feels like the whole world is against him, only the full support of the Prime Minister gives him the possibility to overturn Gu Hang's rule in the East.

In the past, the Prime Minister was fairly supportive of him.

Especially when he clearly explained to the Prime Minister about Gu Hang's threat in the East, Gu Hang's potential disloyalty, and how the loss of some tax currency doesn't compare to the damage to the Prime Minister's authority...

Through these arguments, he felt the Prime Minister's stance was inclined towards his own.

But he didn't know why; suddenly, the Prime Minister had a complete one-eighty turn in their attitude.

This matter couldn't proceed any further.

When someone from Gu Hang sent an invitation for him to meet, he initially wanted to refuse.

However, an order from the Prime Minister forced him to lower his head, begrudgingly meeting with Gu Hang.

He had resigned to the situation.

However, his attitude was still far from pleasant.

He was determined that during this meeting with Gu Hang, he would definitely not show a friendly face!

...

"What?! That's wonderful!"

Luo Fei smiled brightly as he raised his glass to Gu Hang and, feeling it wasn't intimate enough, moved from across the table to sit beside him, putting an arm around his shoulders.

"I knew that a person like Governor Gu Hang must be the Empire's most loyal. Solaria is already the greatest concern for the Empire. The Sun Lord's historical expedition indeed earned him widespread acclaim and brought the Empire a rare opportunity for territorial expansion, but it cost too much money, and now it's a chaotic mess."

"With your words, Governor Gu, I can set my mind at ease."

"The combat effectiveness of the Alliance Army, proven by the Iron Armor and tested by the Void Insect Species, is considered the Empire's elite. Those grandly named elite Star Realm Army Corps are all exaggerated; none are as formidable as the Alliance Army!"

"And those Battle Groups have only seen a revival with the support of the Alliance. In the past, who had even heard of Phoenix or Blood Shark?"

"With the help of the Alliance Army, Solaria is saved! Come, let's have another drink, to the Empire's tomorrow!"

...

Luo Fei’s change from arrogance to humility was almost amusing.

But Gu Hang did not underestimate him.

After Zebert’s attitude shift, the advancement of the "Alliance Plan" had become a foregone conclusion.

Given the circumstances, standing firm would only mean a loss. As long as Luo Fei was not foolish, he would not act that way.

Moreover, since things were settled, why make an enemy out of someone like Gu Hang?

Powerful, influential, with seemingly complicated relationships with the Prime Minister, and extensive connections...

Being an enemy would be far too distressing.

However, the previous conflicts lay evident, making reconciliation seemingly impossible.

Yet, during this meeting, Gu Hang did not take a victorious stance to show dominance. Instead, he earnestly discussed some human resource arrangements after the Spiderweb Domain and prospects for future development.

It was all empty talk; even if Gu Hang offered some positions within the Spiderweb Domain government and various Star Domain governments, inviting the Executive Yuan to assign personnel, the quantity was limited, and they were all marginal positions, essentially useless.

But it didn’t matter, both knew it was a way to broach the topic.

At least, Luo Fei sensed that Gu Hang was extending an olive branch.

Fine, let it be; there's a way out for everyone.

However, what Luo Fei didn't expect was that Gu Hang subsequently mentioned that the Alliance Army could enter Solaria to fight.

This was a major surprise!

Chapter 742: Unprecedented Legitimacy

The Alliance's participation in Solaria's war is certainly not free of charge.

The Executive Council needs to contribute financially, the Star Realm Army Headquarters also needs to fund it, and the Military Affairs Department must allocate funds as well.

Within the Alliance Army itself, there exists a Star Realm Army unit from the Rage Bear Legion. This unit can be utilized at this time.

Since they are participating in the war as part of the Star Realm Army, they must receive all the standard benefits that come with being in the Star Realm Army.

Costs for replenishing various equipment losses and budget allocations for the entire legion are all required.

Moreover, the prices for the Alliance must be even higher.

On one hand, the Empire needs to bear the war expenses, and now the Alliance Army has a considerable number of armored vehicles, artillery, reconnaissance system command vehicles, and more than just a gun and protective gear per soldier. There is also a large amount of individual fire support. Squads are equipped with numerous single-soldier missiles, rockets, and heavy bomb machine guns for positional warfare...

More than the average troop level.

These equipments do not require funding from the Empire, but their consumption is inevitable. Fuel, shells, and various consumables... the Alliance Army uses much more than ordinary forces.

This is an expensive component of the military budget.

The other aspect is labor costs.

The soldiers of the Alliance Army receive higher pay than ordinary Star Realm Army soldiers, from daily allowances to combat allowances, to pensions. This also constitutes a considerable sum of money.

Additionally, there is a deployment fee paid to the Alliance for the legion.

For a regular Star Realm Army corps, this money is given to the corps. For the Alliance Army, naturally, it goes to the Alliance.

These three expenses combined roughly constitute the cost of deploying the Alliance Army for war.

This is far more expensive than deploying a regular Star Realm Army corps and not much different from deploying those famous Star Realm Army corps.

However, Luo Fei does not feel it’s a loss.

Funding is not an issue since he is not the only one paying. Solaria’s budget is quite ample, and all parties are not afraid to spend money; what they fear is spending money with no results.

Instead of deploying a large wave of underperforming troops and spending money on giving compensation to low-level troops and arming them as cannon fodder, it’s better to spend on hiring truly elite troops to quell the rebellion. By securing a planet or a star sector, they can stabilize that area, begin to rebuild, and in turn, levy taxes, thus providing funds to the Empire.

The difference is significant.

Luo Fei is not afraid to spend money, but within the Empire, there aren't that many elite forces that can be easily summoned simply by spending money to go to Solaria, that quagmire.

Recruiting an additional unit of such troops is beneficial.

After realizing he couldn't oppose or stop Gu Hang, he had already adjusted his mindset accordingly, aiming to leverage Gu Hang's expansion efforts to his advantage.

Currently, this has proven to be a good start.

...

After dealing with Luo Fei, the last obstacle was essentially eliminated.

However, the Empire still operates with low efficiency.

The "Alliance Plan" documents still require further review, and by multiple departments;

Once the review is completed, the documents must be formally presented to the Supreme Council for another discussion;

After discussion, the Prime Minister needs to seal approval, and Gu Hang needs to sign. According to Prime Minister Zebert's view, they also need to conduct a ceremony, broadcast live, with at least ten High Lords attending.

Running through this entire process would take at least one and a half months, if not two.

Gu Hang indeed felt a bit urgent about this.

On one hand, he feared that delays might bring unexpected twists. The political situation in Emperor Holy Terra is always so intricate and volatile; who knows what might happen in that one and a half to two months?

But there is no alternative; he can only patiently wait, reassuring himself that the wait will be worthwhile.

The more regulated the process, the stronger the "Alliance Plan" document's effectiveness becomes.

From multi-departmental review to Supreme Council discussion to the fully live-broadcasted ceremony, with over ten High Lords participating.

In this context, the legitimacy of the Alliance's rule over the East and its future expansion in the Spiderweb Domain will reach unprecedented heights.

He could even take this document and declare to any surrounding power, "I am fully supported by the Central Empire; I am the rightful authority of the Empire!"

So, he waits.

During the waiting period, Gu Hang did not waste time.

Traveling to Holy Terra is no easy feat, taking almost two years for a round trip from the Eastern Border to the Central. Now that he's here, Gu Hang takes every opportunity to meet with various factions.

He negotiates partnerships where possible, establishes connections where feasible, and, if nothing else, ensures familiarity, which is quite necessary.

Gu Hang had long recognized that when dealing with Empire matters, connections are vital.

Not only is he active, but his wife, Yelisia, as the First Lady of the Alliance, also accompanies Gu Hang at various events or ventures out independently.

A month slipped by amidst clinking glasses and dazzling lights.

During this period, two matters are worth mentioning.

Gu Hang, as expected, went to meet the Emperor's Forbidden Army Marshal, the leader of the Ten Thousand Man Team, Yan Xinzhen, who holds a very detached position in the entire Empire's political landscape.

Meeting him, Gu Hang was rather apprehensive.

Previously, during the exchange event at the Psychic Cultivator's Association, when he unleashed his spiritual energy to display power, one of his main concerns was potential trouble from the Imperial Guard.

Thankfully, the Imperial Guard was managed at the scene, but he received an invitation from Yan Xinzhen.

He was indeed worried about a potential ambush, fearing that if he attended, he might be detained for special research by the Imperial Guard.

Within the deep palace, the Imperial Guard always remains enigmatic. They seem apathetic to external affairs, as long as the conflicts don't reach Holy Terra or penetrate into the Imperial Palace, they appear indifferent.

They squat within the deep palace daily, apparently researching some mysterious matters.

Fortunately, the meeting did not unfold into the dire scenario Gu Hang anticipated.

Yan Xinzhen amiably discussed several matters about spiritual energy, how to handle high-level Psychics, and ways to train spiritual power.

He also talked about the current state of the Empire in various regions.

Gu Hang realized that this Imperial Guard Marshal is actually fairly well-informed about the Empire’s condition, not as oblivious as people imagined.

This entire conversation left Gu Hang somewhat puzzled.

It felt like small talk, but was the Imperial Guard Marshal seeking him out just for idle chit-chat?

He sensed something was off.

But Yan Xinzhen’s attitude seemed genuinely like a "let’s get acquainted since we didn’t know each other before" gesture.

It was perplexing.

However, as it currently stands, there is no adverse impact from this.

On the contrary, due to this discussion, Gu Hang’s standing in the Imperial Palace improved somewhat.

Apparently, being able to converse alone with Yan Xinzhen was quite a prestigious affair.

This kind of privilege isn’t necessarily extended to those High Lords within the Central Empire.

His status unknowingly rose a bit more.

Aside from this, another matter of note is that Zebert frequently called Gu Hang to discuss the development of the Sixth Rejuvenation Surgery techniques, confirming many details.

This was somewhat expected.

Time gradually passed; a month went by without any unforeseen events.

Until one day, an unannounced visitor arrived without prior notice.

It was a Great Sage from Mars—Kao'er.

Chapter 743: Visit from the Great Sage

The other aspect of the Imperial Double-headed Eagle is the Mechanical God Cult, which everyone must acknowledge.

Without the Sect of Mechanics, a significant portion of the Empire's Navy and Star Realm Army would lose sources for equipment and supplies; a considerable part of the battle groups would suddenly face a food shortage.

This is their most important value—the largest party for the Empire's industrial production.

Whether in technical level or productivity, this is the case.

Additionally, from the perspective of their own strength, the Mechanical God Cult also possesses powerful military might.

Within the Mechanical God Cult, the status of the Martian Sect is undoubtedly the most important.

Even though various sects exist within the Mechanical Cult, many sects are not entirely obedient towards Mars, the sect leader.

However, regardless of how covert they act, they must outwardly comply.

Plausible displayed ambitions must be hidden away, and minor actions can only be done secretly.

If not, once truly reprimanded by the sect leader, few branches of the Mechanical God Cult within the entire empire have the ability to endure it.

And within the Martian Sect, the most revered and also the leader of the Martian Sect is the Mars Founding General.

The Founding Worlds controlled by the Martian Sect are certainly not limited to just Mars; there are many. However, the most important among them is Mars. The Mars Founding General is the highest leader of the entire sect. Moreover, the high lord position of the Mechanical God Cult in the Supreme Council has always belonged to the Founding General since the council's inception ten thousand years ago, never having been relinquished.

Beneath the Founding General, the Martian Sect has the largest number of Great Sages among all the sects.

This is an existence that ranks higher than the Principal Sage.

The intelligence department of the Alliance is quite focused on the Martian Sect, especially the division of the Foreign Affairs Bureau that Salihoovich brought to Holy Terra.

Although, until now, the Alliance has hardly interacted with the Martian Sect. However, their mere existence should not be overlooked.

Of course, ultimately, the Foreign Affairs Bureau has not directly planted operatives within the Martian Sect; at most, a few dozen people have been sent under various identities to Mars. All they can do is periodically gather some routine intelligence.

In publicly searchable reports, Mars has seventeen Great Sages. It's not ruled out that there might be quite a number of Great Sages who have not been exposed.

Within these seventeen, Kao’er’s name is listed.

However, in general, he is quite a low-profile, somewhat mysterious Great Sage. He rarely makes public appearances, and it’s rare to see him at many of the Great Sage lectures on Mars. What direction of research he is currently pursuing, and what key achievements he had in the past, are all unknown.

The only thing that can be said is that this Great Sage comes from a very ancient era. It’s unknown exactly how old he is, but there are records of him at least five hundred years ago.

He might be the oldest of all the Great Sages on Mars.

Upon hearing his visit, and without prior notice, already at the door, Gu Hang pondered slightly but felt this meeting should indeed happen.

Not meeting would be inappropriate.

He couldn’t help but wonder, what is Kao’er’s purpose in seeing him?

However, it wasn’t left up to him to guess blindly.

This Great Sage, hunched over, entirely cloaked under a robe, with a mask covering the entire face, revealing all sorts of modified facial organs and hardly any skin left, directly stated his purpose once confirming there were no other people nearby after entering.

"Mr. Gu Hang, I’m here for three matters."

"Please speak." Gu Hang was not surprised by the other party’s straightforwardness.

It’s quite normal for an uninvited person to be direct.

Recently in the past month, there have been quite a lot of roundabout conversations, so a bit of direct style is well-received.

The slightly piercing electronically synthesized voice of the Great Sage continued to sound:

"Firstly, I'm here to inform you that Yasida once issued an assassination order against you to the Assassin Court."

"Hm?"

Gu Hang did not expect it to be about this matter.

This issue had always been under investigation, with Salihoovich's Foreign Affairs Bureau having a skilled team specifically responsible.

There's also a line to the Assassin Court.

However, up to now, no results have been seen. The matter is too confidential, and the Foreign Affairs Bureau simply can't uncover it; the Assassin Court strictly adheres to the rules and isn't willing to reveal anything.

Gu Hang had almost given up hope. After all, they are enemies, and they would eventually confront each other; we'll see what each side can do from then on.

Yet, unexpectedly, a lead was obtained in this manner.

Yasida, this person Gu Hang knows.

That's the Devouring Stars Sector President, currently one of the High Lords in the Imperial Supreme Council.

Cosmic Domain Chairs have the qualification to elect High Lords, but the likelihood of being elected is quite low. Among over fifty Cosmic Domain Chairs, each batch of High Lords has only one or two who are elected, and sometimes there are none.

Moreover, they are often the ones with the lowest status within the High Lords. They're often departments with the qualifications to elect; for instance, currently, the Legal Department, the Psychic Cultivator's Association, and the Imperial General Chamber of Commerce haven't obtained positions yet.

Apart from this, there might be some additional seats, but they aren't regularly established, such as the Supreme Grand Master of the Battle Nun Association, or the Sun Lord once occupied by Suo He Kaim.

Sometimes, when the personnel holding these positions or these departments themselves are too weak to assume a High Lord position, the vacant seat is filled by an elected Cosmic Domain Chair.

To put it bluntly, it's just a number among the High Lords.

However, regardless of being just a number, it's still a High Lord. Setting aside status, within the Supreme Council, one vote from them is no different from anyone else's.

Due to this, some strong High Lords, especially those whose interests are closely tied to local governments, like to support a Cosmic Domain Chair with whom they have a good relationship, one who listens to them, to enter the High Lord Council.

Is this vote not equivalent to one's own?

For instance, currently, the high lord position of the Devouring Stars Sector Chair is upheld by the Prime Minister, and when the Prime Minister needs support, the vote follows the Prime Minister.

Of course, considering one is at least at the level of a Cosmic Domain Chair, plus the identity of a High Lord in hand, they wouldn't be barked around like a dog. When there isn't a clear demand from the Prime Minister, Yasida can still vote according to his own ideas, especially concerning matters closely tied to his domain's interests.

For instance, regarding the Iron Armor War.

The Devouring Stars Sector is somewhat dissatisfied with the urgency of detonating conflicts, leading to damage to its sector.

Therefore, it seems natural for Yasida to feel some displeasure.

But would the disagreements escalate to the point of resorting to assassination?

And why is this info delivered by a Great Sage from the Mechanical God Cult?

Staring at the face that's been transformed beyond recognition, the uncertainties in Gu Hang's mind grew even more.

Chapter 744: The Final Battle?

Gu Hang's mind was filled with doubt.

He couldn't understand why Yasida would trouble him and even resort to assassination.

He was even more perplexed as to why the Mechanical God Cult, with whom he wasn't particularly close, suddenly approached him with this information.

If there are doubts, you might as well ask.

However, his questions went unanswered.

The Great Sage seemed to enter a predetermined program, merely continuing with what had been said before:

"The second thing I want to discuss with you is to hope to promote a trade agreement between the Mechanical God Cult and the Alliance. The total trade volume should reach fifty billion within three years and two hundred billion within ten years."

Gu Hang nodded slightly.

Who wouldn't want to reach a trade agreement with the Mechanical God Cult and the Martian Sect?

This is pure money.

Gu Hang became even more curious about the Great Sage's intentions.

He noticed that the other party didn't want to explain more, so he decided not to ask further and waited quietly for the third matter the Great Sage would talk about.

"The third thing I want to discuss is to hope that you, as the Chairman of the Spiderweb Domain, strive for the position of High Lord in the current re-election."

"Wait..." At this point, Gu Hang finally couldn't hold back and continued with a wry smile, "This is too incredible... The 'Union Plan' hasn't been formally signed yet, and the appointment of the Chairman of the Spiderweb Domain hasn't been officially decided, and you want me to compete for the new High Lord? Even if I participate in the competition, there needs to be a vacancy."

Gu Hang felt that what the Great Sage said was absurd.

There are only thirteen High Lord positions in total; even if Gu Hang wants to strive for one, there must be a position available.

Unless he could initiate an impeachment against a currently serving High Lord and overthrow them.

But how easy would that be?

With the signing of the ’Union Plan’ documents imminent, Gu Hang didn’t want any complications.

However, this time he got an answer.

The Great Sage said, "The position, as I mentioned before, is with the Star Devouring Cosmos; it’s one that can be vacated."

Gu Hang fell silent.

After a while, he spoke, "So, Great Sage, what about the cost? What do you need?"

The three things mentioned by Kao’er were all benefits for Gu Hang and the Alliance.

The first was purely one-sided intelligence.

The second was essentially handing over money. The Martian Sect was not lacking in trading partners.

The third was political support.

It was like receiving free lunches falling from the sky.

Gu Hang was worried.

Why?

Upon questioning, he heard Kao’er’s low laughter, "You will pay the price..."

"Great Sage, please speak clearly."

"You will be involved in a war.

A final battle concerning the survival of the entire Empire and the fate of humanity.

You will play a significant role in that war and a crucial part.

This is an unavoidable fate, or rather, no one can escape it.

And all I hope is that you will get to that key position sooner than later."

After hearing this, Gu Hang could hardly control his expression.

This is too mysterious!

From the literal meaning, Gu Hang could roughly understand some content; it talked about a future final battle, a bit like an apocalyptic theory, where he would be very important.

Such a shaman? The Sect of Mechanics, albeit a sect, does have some religious beliefs, but since Gu Hang himself isn't interested in that area, the overall atmosphere of the Alliance doesn't lean towards that. Whether for the National Church or the Mechanical God Cult, the Alliance's overall attitude is that if you want to preach, go preach; if you want support, we'll give fixed funding, but you have obligations to fulfill, and you can't make me believe in what I don't.

Gu Hang's contact with the Sect of Mechanics mainly focuses on technology, production, and development. He's had little contact with their religious side.

To the extent that, at this moment, suddenly encountering such an occult expression from a Great Sage, he felt quite uncomfortable: Aren't Great Sages supposed to be particularly rational and wise?

Why engage in 'prophecy,' which sounds so unreliable?

But speaking of prophecy, Gu Hang suddenly remembered another thing.

That was when he learned from the Alliance headquarters about the prophecy extracted from the captured Dark Spirit Race during his own investigation of the visual events.

It was a Dark Spirit Race prophecy, and it stirred clear ripples in the Subspace, displaying a clear visual portrayal.

In that portrayal, seemingly unrelated to him, the main content depicted the moment when the creator of the Infinite Corps, the Son of God, finally stood up after ages.

However, he didn't forget the fleeting star map in the prophecy, which seemed to show the entire universe burning. It was as if a superscale warfire had swept through the entire Human Empire.

If one had to speak of a final battle, what Gu Hang saw in his Divine Realm could perhaps be considered a precursor to that great war.

Warfire sweeping the Empire, heroes awakening...

Thinking to this point, Gu Hang intended to put on a smile but failed.

Kao'er's prophetic-like words seemed genuinely not just simple mysticism.

But if all this were true, it was somewhat chilling.

A war that would engulf the entire Empire and might decide the life and death of the human race: a final battle Gu Hang couldn't even imagine how terrifying it would be.

He had been through the largest-scale war, the Iron Armor Insect Swarm War, battling for fifteen years, mobilizing hundreds of billions of troops, including insects, affecting tens of thousands of worlds, with an over two trillion human deaths...

Yet, such a scale was still far from a final battle.

It couldn’t shake the Empire.

The Empire could even sustain another war, which was the turmoil in Solaria. The full-scale uprising there had lasted over thirty years, slightly less intense, unlike the Spiderweb Domain’s intense decisive battle, yet comparable in scale.

And smaller-scale wars of one or two levels were always occurring throughout the Empire.

Why else would they say the Empire’s sustainability is a pill?

Even that’s sustainable. Facing catastrophic collapse, at least now, it hasn’t been seen.

Then, a far more intense and terrifying overall war situation than now: a final battle?

If it’s real, then the Alliance can’t possibly stand aside.

Or rather, in this dark, frightening universe, no matter how problematic the Empire is, it remains humanity’s most reliable defender.

While Gu Hang was deep in thought, Kao’er’s voice rang out again, "What I need most directly from you is, after an uncertain number of years, for your Alliance to accept my call to head to the five hundred worlds of the Infinite Starfield to assist me in completing a crucial task."

Chapter 745: So They Weren’t Human After All

The Great Sage left.

Gu Hang was still deep in thought.

He neither agreed to Kao’er’s proposal nor outright refused it.

What was there to refuse? The first thing they did was give a piece of information, believe it or not.

The second matter was simply about signing a trade agreement, which for now was at most an intention. Even if it were really to be signed, it would require many rounds of negotiations, involving billions and even trillions worth of trade, with countless details to discuss.

There was no point in refusing or not refusing, business is business. Why not do it?

The third matter, there was even less to say.

They offer you a High Lord, do you not want it?

Gu Hang found that he really had no room for refusal.

And once he accepted it, the relationship between the Alliance and the Martian Sect would inevitably grow very close.

By then, Mars might very well be the Alliance’s largest trade partner, and politically, they had strongly expressed support for Gu Hang as the High Lord. In such a situation, how could the Alliance not respond when something happens?

Politically speaking, it would be unacceptable.

Of course, if one truly lacks any sense of shame, one could still refuse. After all, Gu Hang hadn’t promised anything.

But he suspected that there would always be some reason that would compel him to go when the time came.

The prophecy spoken by Great Sage Kao'er revealed some terrifying content. When it really comes to that point, it might be beyond his control.

...

Things must still be dealt with step by step.

Regarding what the Great Sage mentioned, everything else could wait, but the news that Yasida had once assigned the Assassin Court to assassinate him had to be handled.

Gu Hang didn't take Kao'er's words at face value.

Perhaps the Sect of Mechanics had just cooked up some false information to deceive him?

This had to be verified.

On one hand, the Foreign Affairs Bureau people were keeping a close watch on Yu Jinwen.

This man is Yasida's representative on Holy Terra.

As the Cosmic Domain Chair, Yasida indeed held the position of High Lord, but he couldn't possibly stay on Holy Terra all the time. The affairs of the Space Domain Government were his foundation.

It's not only the Cosmic Domain Chair acting as High Lord who does this, even representatives of Interstellar Warriors often do the same.

It's quite common for high-ranking officials, due to their responsibilities, to be unable to stay long-term on Holy Terra. Generally, such High Lords would appoint trusted aides to stay there on their behalf.

The High Lord would maintain constant communication with their trusted aide, ensuring that this representative fully executes their will.

This position is actually quite important.

In situations where the High Lord cannot be reached, this representative must autonomously make judgments and even cast critical votes according to the High Lord's intent and past protocols.

To some extent, this representative could be considered a half High Lord. If they went rogue, they could temporarily exercise all the High Lord's powers by exploiting timing and informational gaps, provided they were unconcerned about the consequences.

For this reason, the representatives chosen by High Lords must be people they can trust implicitly and who would certainly not cause trouble.

Yu Jinwen is such a person to Yasida.

The Devouring Stars Sector President has served as High Lord for twenty-three years now. By comparison, he's held the position for a relatively long period among examples of Cosmic Domain Chairs serving as High Lords. And Yu Jinwen has been his representative for the past fifteen years.

If Yasida wanted to do something, it's right to keep a close watch on Yu Jinwen.

In addition to mobilizing his forces to keep an eye on people, Gu Hang also attempted to contact the Assassin Court to verify this information.

Predictably, there was no response.

Gu Hang didn't get angry.

He turned to Galaraldo to come and consult together.

Upon hearing that it was Yasida's doing, Galaraldo was quite surprised.

He proposed a very unpleasant hypothesis: Could it be that Yasida was acting under the Prime Minister's orders back then?

Everyone knows that the reason Yasida could serve as High Lord, and serve for so many years at that, is because his position was boosted by Zebert.

Given that the conflicts between Gu Hang and Yasida were not sufficient to warrant such an extreme measure as assassination, if this matter were true, it might have been commissioned by someone else.

The only person who could commission Yasida is Prime Minister Qi Bodu.

It's not impossible.

After all, the improvement in the relations between Gu Hang and the Prime Minister began only recently. When Gu Hang received the warning from the Assassin Court, the Reyadoces campaign had just concluded. At that time, it wouldn't have been impossible for Prime Minister Qi Bodu to contemplate resolving his issues.

But Gu Hang reckoned that the likelihood of this was quite low.

If Prime Minister Qi Bodu truly had such intentions at the time, why would he need Yasida to assign the task to the Assassin Court?

Not going through the Supreme Council is understandable, as bringing it to the council would make things public. However, Prime Minister Qi Bodu himself had much greater authority than Yasida to command the Assassin Court to act. If it was Qi Bodu who gave the direct order back then, what Gu Hang would have faced wouldn't have been a mere letter, but a full-scale assassination attempt from the Assassin Court.

As the two discussed it further, they found the matter increasingly thorny.

"I'll go have a chat with the Prime Minister," Galaraldo suggested, "to sound things out from his side."

"Alright," Gu Hang agreed, "but we might not get the information we want. As for Yu Jinwen, I'll put in more effort."

"You... you need to be careful."

"Don't worry, I know what I'm doing."

...

Yu Jinwen was tied to a chair, his eyes vacant.

In front of him were several members of his office's core team, who lay collapsed on the ground.

Gu Hang's foot was placed on one person's head, his smile playful.

"So... you aren't human."

The person under Gu Hang's foot squirmed, their outer skin appearing to peel away under the pressure, exposing the dermis beneath.

Gray-black in color, with long ears.

This was the Dark Spirit Race.

It was Gu Hang's first time directly dealing with the Dark Spirit Race.

He had to admit, these ancient aliens possessed unique and advanced technological prowess.

To minimize risk, they hadn't replaced Yu Jinwen himself, but instead used some method resembling but distinct from Spiritual Energy to keep him in an abnormal controlled mental state that was hard to detect. Meanwhile, they used disguising technology to replace some of the core members around Yu Jinwen for close monitoring.

The Foreign Affairs Bureau's surveillance yielded nothing for a while and even resulted in the loss of several personnel.

So Gu Hang decided to come personally.

He didn't possess any special agent skills, but he didn't need them either.

He followed and then quietly released his Spiritual Energy to carefully inspect the situation.

Honestly, at first glance, even his Spiritual Energy failed to detect anything particularly unusual. Especially with Yu Jinwen, everything seemed fine.

It wasn't until Gu Hang was very close to someone replaced by the Dark Spirit Race that he realized this was not human.

Chapter 746: Finding a Scapegoat

Gu Hang originally didn't want to take action so directly, but there was no other way.

His personal involvement was initially intended to verify the intelligence.

However, the disguise technology of the Dark Spirit Race was indeed formidable, requiring a Psychic of his level to get close enough to see through it.

This technology must be cutting-edge for the Dark Spirit Race; otherwise, it wouldn't have such an effect.

Not every Dark Spirit Race infiltrator can use this technology or possess a similar level. Otherwise, the group causing trouble in the Spiderweb Domain wouldn't have been caught so easily by the Anti-Extraterrestrial Alliance.

But precisely because he was close enough to uncover it, the Dark Spirit Race infiltrator also realized he had been discovered.

He immediately tried to flee.

Then Gu Hang had no choice but to go hands-on to catch him.

Only Gu Hang could do this.

The power level of this dark infiltrator was actually quite astonishing. Ordinary agents couldn't possibly capture him. His direct combat ability was likely on par with the Company Champion among the Interstellar Warriors, not to mention his mastery of various concealment, escape, and mind-befuddling special tactics.

To quickly and quietly resolve the target, only Gu Hang could do the job.

And once he took action, it was better to resolve everything cleanly.

That's why Gu Hang personally led the team to directly raid Yu Jinwen's residence.

Without hesitation, everyone was caught in one sweep.

The Foreign Affairs Bureau agents focused on capturing Yu Jinwen himself, while Gu Hang first did a circuit to capture all the infiltrators.

The results were very clear; a total of seventeen Dark Spirit Race infiltrators were caught by Gu Hang, all were senior aides of the High Lord Mansion.

This was the core reason why Gu Hang dared to act.

What is the Foreign Affairs Bureau? It's the intelligence department of the Alliance, subordinate to the Alliance Ambassador, stationed on Holy Terra. They simply gather intelligence, usually staying within limits, only gathering public information, doing analysis work, sometimes covertly watching people, without really crossing the line. They rarely insert spies or infiltrate other forces' interiors to barely survive, making people turn a blind eye.

They have no enforcement power on Holy Terra whatsoever.

Even targeting a civilian would be a breach of conduct, let alone raiding a High Lord representative's residence and capturing this authorized representative.

If this spreads, it will cause a great stir.

No matter how reasonable the cause, without enforcement rights, troubling a High Lord representative is considered very rebellious, with very high political risk.

Gu Hang acted partly because he was forced into a corner, unable to let those skilled in hiding Dark Spirit Race infiltrators escape, especially when they'd noticed.

Additionally, he had some remedial measures.

He had no enforcement rights, but some people did.

The Legal Department and Tribunal both could.

The former was difficult to call upon now. The Minister of Justice was currently an acting minister entirely under Zebert's influence, not part of the High Lord Council; they couldn't withstand this.

The Tribunal could withstand it, especially the specialized Anti-Extraterrestrial Alliance, most suitable for such a task. Also, Gu Hang had good relations with them, among the three Tribunal factions.

But, Gu Hang thought it over and still didn't seek their help.

Good relations are good, but not to the extent of 'being my own people.' Would the Tribunal be willing to bear the 'illegal raid on a High Lord' burden for Gu Hang?

Very unlikely.

This offends people greatly.

Even if willing, it comes with a significant political handle for the Tribunal, requiring Gu Hang to pay a hefty price, yielding considerable interests to satisfy the Tribunal's appetite.

In this regard, good relations only offer a threshold to engage with them. Others might not even cross this threshold.

The Tribunal may only serve as a backup.

Besides the Tribunal and Legal Department, the most suitable entity to bear the burden — the Imperial Forbidden Army.

This bunch of corn kernels have the hardest heads. They can bear any scandal, not afraid of trouble from anyone — because no one dares.

Elsewhere, Gu Hang couldn't approach them. The Forbidden Army has no interest in matters outside the Imperial Palace.

But Yu Jinwen, as a High Lord representative, resides within the Imperial Palace.

Logically, the entire palace's security is the Forbidden Army's responsibility. Hence, the appearance of Alien infiltrators here should be their responsibility, indisputable.

To some extent, they should be responsible.

Just no one dares to pursue this responsibility.

But after his last interaction with Marshal Yan Xinzhen, Gu Hang realized this ancient Forbidden Army Commander was quite principled, not likely to shirk responsibility.

After consideration, he made a decision and contacted the Forbidden Army.

Yan Xinzhen had given him a direct communication device.

Once connected, after a few simple words, the exchange between Gu Hang and Yan Xinzhen ended.

Moments later, golden rays appeared on the horizon.

Over twenty Imperial Guard soldiers arrived swiftly on hover vehicles and tactical hover bikes at the scene.

Following Gu Hang's arrangements, the Foreign Affairs Bureau agents yielded position early, avoiding any interaction with the Forbidden Army. Upon confirming the Forbidden Army took over the entire mansion along with all captives, without anyone troubling them, the agents quietly withdrew.

Only leaving Gu Hang himself here to welcome the numerous Imperial Guards.

This bunch of corn kernels did not trouble Gu Hang.

Two Imperial Guards came over, one guarded Yu Jinwen, the other took Gu Hang aside to wait.

Gu Hang cooperated well.

What he needed to know was already extracted from Yu Jinwen and the minds of the captured infiltrators, subdued to the point they couldn't even commit suicide. At this time, he no longer needed to do anything.

The Forbidden Army's attitude was relatively courteous, considering Gu Hang was recently invited by the Marshal to visit. Moreover, among them, the terrifying intelligence of Gu Hang's spiritual power spreads. Every member of the Forbidden Army is considered a top expert. For that reason, they are more aware of just how terrifying Gu Hang's spiritual power is.

The leading commander of the Forbidden Army soon approached Gu Hang personally.

Under his helmet, Gu Hang couldn't see his expression, but he anticipated the other party wasn't in a good mood.

Chapter 747: Even the Imperial Guard Owes Us an Apology

The mood of the Imperial Guard was understandably not good.

An alien infiltrator had appeared within the Imperial Palace!

That was a colossal scandal!

Shameful!

In Marshal Yan Xinzhen's brief conversation with Gu Hang, he spoke only a few words, in a calm tone.

But turning away, he was furious!

Immediately, the Forbidden Army Marshal gathered numerous Civilian Protectors and Golden Shield Company Commanders for a meeting.

The theme of this meeting was to scrutinize what exactly the Imperial Guard had been doing all this time. Had the Imperial Guard deteriorated? Were they no longer able to effectively fulfill their duties to protect the Imperial Palace?

Otherwise, how could there be an alien infiltrator inside the Imperial Palace?

No excuse could justify this!

As for Zhang Yulin, the Golden Shield Company Commander, he should logically be the focal point of this meeting. He and his company were in charge of the regular defense duties, including the residence of the Devouring Stars Sector President's representative. With such a massive blunder, he was the one under scrutiny.

However, just as he was preparing to attend the meeting, Commander Yan publicly told him not to come.

"Clean up your own mess, or don't bother coming back."

Hearing this, he could only head to the scene, crestfallen.

Of course, he wouldn't make a big scene by bringing along the entire Imperial Guard company. The area his company was responsible for was quite large; moving recklessly might cause further problems.

So, leading the team himself, he brought only twenty Forbidden Army Soldiers.

That sufficed.

A single Forbidden Army Soldier could match a thousand warriors, no exaggeration. This 'thousand warriors' was still compared to the elite units.

Moreover, unlike Interstellar Warriors, the Imperial Guard was not purely combat experts. As more advanced genetically modified superhumans, the Imperial Guard not only possessed bodies that barely

aged but also had strong learning abilities and even stronger psychological resilience. Beyond combat, they often had one or more other specialties.

Criminal investigation, mathematics, art, administration... all were possible.

Regardless of any situation, twenty Forbidden Army Soldiers were enough to handle it. Even if they couldn't, nothing in this world could instantly take down twenty Forbidden Army Soldiers. Within the Imperial Palace, they were fully capable of holding out until more reinforcements arrived.

But clearly, there was nothing here particularly requiring the Imperial Guard to handle.

Zhang Yulin could do nothing but engage in awkward small talk with Gu Hang.

He was quite intimidated by Gu Hang.

First, he knew how strong Gu Hang was, so strong that he might have to swallow his pride as part of the Imperial Guard and acknowledge that something in this world could instantly resolve their squad of twenty—such as Mr. Gu standing before him.

Additionally, Gu Hang received unique attention from the Marshal, even given an instrument to contact the Marshal directly.

Having already taken the blame for this massive mistake, it's possible that for decades, if not centuries, he would be unable to lift his head within the Imperial Guard because of this blemish. His thoughts were primarily on damage control, where Gu Hang's position was critical.

He was the one who discovered the problem; if he started saying things like, 'These Dark Spirit Race infiltrators are so easy to spot; I saw right through them, don't know why the Imperial Guard has tolerated them for so long,' it would spell disaster.

Zhang Yulin was honest and could not bring himself to coax Gu Hang into collusion.

However, during their conversation, Gu Hang's attitude provided a slight sense of relief.

At least, Gu Hang mentioned that the infiltration techniques of the Dark Spirit Race were extraordinarily exceptional, at a level he had never seen before, and he expressed no doubt about the Imperial Guard's capabilities.

In his speech, Gu Hang mainly expressed concern about the current condition of the Devouring Stars Sector President.

This related to a past assassination attempt that, although unsuccessful, was bizarre. The intelligence from Yu Jinwen confirmed that the assassination order was indeed issued under the guise of Chairman Yasida, addressed to the Assassin Court. But this was not his unilateral action; two factors contributed to it.

First, it was the demand from the advisory group composed of Dark Spirit Race infiltrators; also, it was indeed Yasida's command.

Aliens attempting to assassinate an Empire hero was to be expected. After all, heinous acts by aliens were normal. However, with Yasida issuing the same order, could it be inferred that Yasida himself was possibly in collusion with, or even compromised by the Dark Spirit Race?

The infiltrators around Yu Jinwen were not introduced later to replace the advisory group from the Devouring Stars Sector; they were brought in from the beginning because there was an existing problem there.

As an Imperial Guard, Zhang Yulin had a considerable sense of political sensitivity, and he immediately realized that Gu Hang was aiming to shift the flame onto High Lord Yasida.

Moreover, it seemed Gu Hang wanted the Imperial Guard to be the torchbearers of this flame.

Normally, attempts to involve the Imperial Guard in Empire politics were met with severe warnings or even direct action from the Imperial Guard. Those who tried this often found it to be a loss.

But in this matter, Zhang Yulin realized that he could only follow along with Gu Hang's words.

His confidence was insufficient.

As they conversed, waves of people arrived outside.

From the Legal Department, from the Tribunal; later, even some high officials came, along with emissaries from Prime Minister Qi Bodu.

The events happening here were destined to become the starting point of an upcoming political storm.

Yet, all investigations were blocked by the Imperial Guard.

"This matter is under the jurisdiction of the Imperial Guard, no information can be disclosed."

An uncompromising stance that efficiently repelled various inquiries. Those bigshots could only retreat in dismay.

Gu Hang was quite satisfied with this situation.

This was precisely the effect he desired.

If there's an issue, don't look for me; go to the Imperial Guard.

Still, Gu Hang could ignore others, but some attention had to be paid to Qi Bodu's side.

He proposed to Zhang Yulin, if there's nothing else, shouldn't I be departing? He had to visit the Prime Minister and give some explanation for the matters here.

Zhang Yulin thought for a moment, did not object, but asked Gu Hang to wait a little longer.

Gu Hang readily agreed without inquiring further.

He could guess.

His earlier statements were his side of the story. The Dark Spirit Race spies, along with Yu Jinwen, had been handed over to the Imperial Guard. They had ample, even mysterious methods to uncover what they wanted to know.

They needed to cross-check, even just a bit, with what Gu Hang had just mentioned.

Even if taking a step back, didn't the Imperial Guard also need to rule out the possibility that this whole affair was orchestrated by Gu Hang himself?

This kind of investigation would not be limited to alien spies or Yu Jinwen. Some plots did not necessarily require such direct directives; there could be layers and layers. Those directly caught might not even realize they were being used, very likely.

The Imperial Guard had both the means and intelligence to distinguish this.

Gu Hang was not worried; he had a clear conscience.

Investigate away.

Approximately twenty minutes later, the Golden Shield Company Commander was called outside by his colleagues. Moments later, he returned and said to Gu Hang:

"Mr. Gu, I apologize for the time you've been detained. You may leave now."

Even the Imperial Guard could apologize.

Chapter 748: The National Church Did It

After being granted permission to leave, Gu Hang elegantly bid farewell to Zhang Yulin, then promptly departed from the High Lord Mansion.

Upon exiting, leaving behind the scene of the Imperial Guard's lockdown, he stood by the roadside, motionless.

Just a minute and a half later, a hovercar descended in front of him, its side door opening, with a messenger inside saying:

"Hello, Mr. Gu, the Prime Minister is waiting for you."

Just as expected.

Gu Hang stepped into the car.

Inside the car, the messenger did not converse with Gu Hang, so he sat calmly in the back, closing his eyes to rest.

The hovercar shuttled through the vast Imperial Palace, and after more than an hour, it finally reached a platform outside a towering structure.

After parking, under the guidance of the messenger, Gu Hang entered Zebert's office.

It was called an office, but it resembled a palace hall constructed at the top of a high tower. A long red carpet with golden edges stretched from the entrance all the way to the steps. Ascending the steps, on a bejeweled throne, sat His Excellency the Prime Minister.

The hall was not short of lighting, but due to the unique architectural design and lighting arrangement, a distinct boundary between light and dark was revealed. The Prime Minister's position was on the highest, most illuminated step indoors, while Gu Hang, advancing along the long carpet, seemed to be on a journey gradually meeting the light.

This setup provided a strong psychological implication.

Gu Hang naturally wouldn't be affected by this, although at this moment, he did not posture himself pretentiously, instead adopting a more humble demeanor.

He observed that the signature amiable expression on Zebert's face was nowhere to be found; rather, it was replaced by a serious and somewhat somber look.

Zebert was indeed in a bad mood.

All he knew about today's event was that after Gu Hang had met with Great Sage Kao'er, who had made a sudden visit to Holy Terra, he arranged for people to keep an eye on Yu Jinwen. Following this, Gu Hang himself went there today. Soon after, the Imperial Guard had that area locked down.

He genuinely had no clue what had transpired.

He despised this feeling of losing control over the situation; it reminded him of the sensation when the Sun Lord was still around, some thirty to forty years ago.

Each time like this, it infuriated him.

Today was quite similar.

But despite his anger, he was not about to lose control of his expression.

On the contrary, his current face was deliberately expressed.

He needed Gu Hang to understand the gravity of the situation clearly.

When Gu Hang reached the bottom of the steps, bowed, and greeted, Zebert slowly spoke, "What happened today? Do you have anything to explain to me?"

Gu Hang lifted his head, his expression solemn, "A major event, concerning the entire Empire, and your authority, Mr. Prime Minister!"

Raising the stakes drastically straight away, adopting a manner as if imminent doom was upon you... this routine was something Zebert had encountered countless times in his over a century in politics.

As his power grew, fewer dared speak to him in such a manner. Hearing it occasionally even seemed somewhat amusing.

Almost irritating.

If it were someone else, he would have ordered the guards to drag the person out.

But wasn't this Gu Hang?

He had to give a bit of leeway.

He opened his mouth, wanting to sneer a remark.

But Gu Hang's following words were faster than his.

And they genuinely startled him to the point he almost leaped from his seat:

"Yu Jinwen has already been beguiled and controlled by an alien. It's hard to say how much of his recent actions in Holy Terra were influenced by aliens; Yasida also likely has issues; moreover, beyond alien influence, Yasida has quite possibly aligned himself with the National Church. That attempted assassination on me two years ago was Yasida executing a covert directive from the National Church."

After hearing this, Zebert barely managed to suppress his inner anger, yet inevitably leaned forward, urging Gu Hang, "Speak in detail!"

Gu Hang was smiling inwardly, half the matter was accomplished.

Zebert did not bother to pursue why Gu Hang dared act against the High Lord's delegate using those Foreign Affairs Bureau agents, who in Holy Terra were no different from commoners. The head of the Imperial Guard is vast; no matter the hat, they can wear it. Meanwhile, Zebert was entirely drawn in by the matters Gu Hang brought up, now thinking solely about the serious issues of the High Lord he'd supported.

This was far more terrifying than a mere spontaneous incident out of Zebert's control.

This was a serious betrayal!

Despite chuckling in his heart, not a trace showed on Gu Hang's face, maintaining a severe and heavy demeanor. He carefully recounted what transpired at Yu Jinwen's Mansion.

Regarding actions, raids, and exposing undercover spies, he glossed over hastily.

Zebert didn't mind either.

Gu Hang focused on the content gleaned during the interrogation that followed.

In truth, the interrogated content couldn't definitively point out whether Chairman Yasida of the Devouring Stars Sector had been corrupted by the Dark Spirit Race.

In strict terms, it might just have been Yu Jinwen corrupted himself, with Chairman Yasida also being a victim.

But it did not prevent Gu Hang from relentlessly throwing blame onto Yasida.

This point, even if Zebert sought the Imperial Guard to verify, did not faze Gu Hang.

With Yu Jinwen compromised, the Imperial Guard naturally felt the gravity and disgrace; therefore, as the first person responsible for his corruption, the High Lord Yasida, who dispatched this troubled representative, must bear responsibility, regardless of whether he himself has issues.

In fact, if things go sideways, the Imperial Guard might address this matter personally.

Thus, Gu Hang spoke these without mental burden.

As for the part concerning the National Church, which Gu Hang had interrogated but not disclosed to the Imperial Guard.

Not telling the Imperial Guard made sense; they weren't foreign enemies. Their collusion with Yu Jinwen and Yasida was internal political strife within the Empire. The Imperial Guard wouldn't care, and informing them wouldn't change much—they'd find out themselves later.

Zebert, however, was different. Compared to the already terrible narrative of alien corruption, he cared more about the entanglement between Yasida and the National Church.

The assassination orders two years ago against Gu Hang reached the Assassin Court, a matter he was aware of, had even arranged for investigations, but found no perpetrators. Investigations continued, though in Zebert's mind, it wasn't crucial, it wasn't high on the priority list. He didn't pay much attention; subordinates checked it, and without significant findings, it naturally dawdled or even halted altogether.

Everyone is busy, after all.

Yet, he never imagined this matter was orchestrated by Yasida, and the National Church's presence was entwined!

This enraged Zebert immensely!

The dog I raised, went on to work for outsiders?

Chapter 749: High Lord's Seat

After the passing of the Sun Lord, Zebert gradually consolidated power and is now regarded as the de facto Imperial Prime Minister.

In the history of the Empire, such prime ministers are actually not many. In the power structure of the Empire, it is not easy for a power-consolidator to emerge. There have been many instances throughout history, but viewed on the scale of ten thousand years, they haven't been very long-lasting.

Usually, the departments that a prime minister can control vary. Theoretically, the four major chancellors are all his subordinates, but often powerful departments, especially the Military Affairs Department and the Legal Department, are frequently beyond the prime minister's control. A strong and capable chancellor can often pose a significant challenge to the prime minister's authority.

This is just the predicament within the Empire Government. Historically, most prime ministers are unlikely to manage everything smoothly, not to mention the many High Lord seats outside government departments, each representing a strong independent political faction.

Indeed, some prime ministers have become mere figureheads, turned into mascots by powerful departments in the Empire—not unheard of.

Zebert's journey to this point has not been easy.

Currently, he has essentially consolidated the Empire Government's power: let alone the four major chancellor departments, he has also seized control of major military departments such as the Imperial Navy and the Imperial Star Realm Army.

With these alone, he already holds seven out of the thirteen High Lord seats.

Additionally, with the support of Yasida, that makes eight seats.

This constitutes an absolute majority in the Supreme Council.

Not to mention, other High Lords, even Mars, the National Church, the Tribunal, the Assassin Court, and the like, must maintain respect toward Zebert under the current circumstances.

Calling him a rare power-consolidating prime minister is not an exaggeration.

However, within the political landscape of the Empire, even reaching a status like the Sun Lord faces challengers, let alone Zebert.

When factions grow large, internal division over interests and positions is inevitable, forming new factions. This is something Zebert has to manage as a priority.

The debate over whether the Alliance should continue hinges on this very issue.

Outside of his faction, Mars always remains independent and strong, with a closed internal environment, making it hard to intervene; the Tribunal has many mysterious internal affairs, although not entirely obedient, they take action when needed and are not inclined to challenge Zebert's authority.

For these two, Zebert maintains a polite relationship for the time being.

However, the National Church is the greatest challenge to Zebert.

Of course, saying it's the greatest challenge, realistically, the strength difference between the two sides in the Empire's political arena is significant. However, the National Church's frequent covert operations create considerable tensions.

Frankly, the National Church is not an easy target to deal with. After being weakened by historical factors, the National Church's power is nowhere near when the Pope could simultaneously serve as the Imperial Prime Minister.

Yet, this does not prevent them from being the highest spiritual rulers for much of the Empire's population today.

The Pope, long residing in the Religious World 'Minsatoria', often comes to Holy Terra. Whenever he does, it sparks massive public turnout.

Admittedly, the National Church does not directly control tangible power. Yet, they cannot be underestimated. They don't directly levy taxes, but nobility and commoners alike willingly donate money to the Church; various military groups, prompted by an Archbishop or Bishop's call for holy war, follow clergy to purge rebels.

The Church maintains close cooperation with major Tribunals and large numbers of Battle Nun Associations follow orders from both entities.

Zebert and the current Pope, Innocentius XVIII, do not have a good relationship, having clashed multiple times in the High Lord Council. The Empire Government is dissatisfied with the Church's independent actions, calling military groups, and launching so-called 'holy wars'.

Open and secret confrontations between the two are numerous.

Zebert did not expect the Church's actions to be so shocking.

At the same time, he is slightly confused.

What is Yasida's current situation? Has he been corrupted by the Aliens or co-opted by the Church?

These two pieces of information are quite contradictory.

According to the information from Gu Hang's interrogation, both seem to coexist.

The Dark Spirit Race is quite active in the Star Devouring Cosmos, and their high-level spies tirelessly infiltrate the Space Domain Government, achieving significant results.

The orchestrator is the top family in the Dark Spirit Race - Blood Curse.

They belong to the same family as the one caught by the Alliance in the Spiderweb Domain.

Gu Hang remembers their long-term goal—to besiege and harass the Infinite Corps.

As for Yasida being invited by the Church, this happened recently. To avoid exposure—the Church also has some mysterious means, and the Dark Spirit Race did not interfere in this process. Yasida accepted the Church's invitation and, according to the Church's wishes, issued an assassination order against Gu Hang through the Assassin Court.

What was the aim?

The interrogation result did not make this clear, but Gu Hang could more or less guess and embellished the details to tell Zebert.

Chapter 749: High Lord Chairmanship (Part 2)

Their core objective in doing this is to create a rift between the Alliance and the Central Empire.

They are well aware that the assassination attempt will not succeed.

The Assassin Court isn't foolish.

Even if the Assassin Court takes action, it doesn't guarantee a successful assassination.

But as long as the incident is exposed, several layers of effects will occur.

First, will Gu Hang lose trust in the Central Empire? After the assassination incident, would he dare to come to Holy Terra alone when ordered by the Central Empire?

Second, after Galaraldo stirred the situation at the Supreme Council, the already bleak outlook for the "Alliance Plan" was further overshadowed by suspicion.

Third, as long as the mastermind behind the assassination remains undisclosed, the mystery of who this person is will always linger, with Luo Fei being a prime suspect based on motive analysis. Even without evidence, Galaraldo has often used this matter to mockingly criticize at the Supreme Council, causing internal rifts within Zebert's political faction.

Some of these goals have had an effect, while others have been futile.

Especially when Gu Hang personally arrived at Holy Terra and forcefully pushed the "Alliance Plan," many issues were resolved.

But so what?

The cost for the National Church and Yasida to do this was not high.

The Assassin Court, due to its responsibilities and survival traditions, could not possibly betray them.

As long as they themselves did not mess up, and the news didn't leak, then the cost was almost nothing.

Yet, things went wrong.

The National Church probably did not know that the Yasida they roped in, or Yasida's confidant Yu Jinwen, had already been secretly controlled by the Dark Spirit Race.

What's even more mind-boggling is how the Great Sage Kao'er of the Mechanical God Cult learned about this matter?

Gu Hang was very curious as well.

But when this message was conveyed to Gu Hang, and Gu Hang himself took action to bring the entire incident to light, the Nation Church's biggest trouble arrived.

What was originally a small, secretive ploy had catastrophic potential once exposed.

Was the National Church prepared for such exposure?

That was no longer Gu Hang's concern.

In fact, Gu Hang didn't care much about the struggle between the Pope and the Prime Minister.

He currently portrays himself as the Prime Minister's disciple, constantly proclaiming his loyalty to Zebert, but it's just a sham.

However, fight as they may, he does not want to be used as a tool in their conflict.

If anyone involves him, he will retaliate!

This is Gu Hang's first and biggest objective.

Though he is individually strong, the Alliance he represents is not yet strong on the Empire's grand stage. When weak, it's necessary to show one's teeth and be formidable.

Appearing too weak is not being low-profile, but rather inviting trouble.

If one incident is not addressed, many will think of using the Alliance as a convenient tool thereafter.

Must strike back hard!

Cut off any hand that reaches out!

Other objectives can be considered subsequent matters.

Yasida's downfall is inevitable. In fact, Gu Hang, who controls the Spiderweb Domain and is neighbors with the Star Devouring Cosmos, must stay alert in case Yasida becomes desperate.

Gu Hang estimates Yasida won't make a significant move.

If he's merely associating with the National Church, there might be risks, but the main battleground would still be in political interest exchange. If Innocentius XVIII was determined to keep him, it would be hard to retain the High Lord position, but maybe he could hold onto the Cosmic Domain Chair.

Under such circumstances, Yasida's capability to cause trouble in the Star Devouring Cosmos could make Holy Terra cautious.

However, adding the factor of susceptibility to Dark Spirit Race corruption makes it untenable, severely reducing the ability to topple the table. Despite the Dark Spirit Race potentially infiltrating the Space Domain Government, unless it's widespread corruption from military through to grassroots citizens, rallying the Human Empire's soldiers and civilians under alien leadership to instigate a major conflict with Empire authorities is nearly impossible.

In this aspect, Void Insect Species' parasitic infection and Chaos Cult's soul corruption are terrifying entities. Once established, they can indeed corrupt entire planets and billions of people.

The Dark Spirit Race is more adept and covert in corrupting individual key figures without that mass corruption capability.

The National Church and Zebert might engage in their struggle, but they wouldn't aid in deceiving forces in the Star Devouring Cosmos to instigate rebellion while their leadership is being corrupted.

Of course, matters aren't always so absolute. What if corrupted high-level officials could deceive the middle and lower tiers, even the public, to follow suit? What if the Star Devouring Cosmos' State Church system has high-level corruption as well? What if...

The situation could be very complex.

Fortunately, the Imperial Guard reportedly intends to directly intervene. It's estimated that taking several dozen personnel with them is certain. Accompanying them would be soldiers from the Forbidden Palace Guard.

The so-called Forbidden Palace Guard refers to the Mortal Auxiliary Army personally trained by the Imperial Guard. While the Imperial Guard is powerful, numbering only a little over ten thousand, the control range is limited. Stationing can only occur at critical points. The Imperial Palace, albeit called a palace, is actually a magnificent architectural complex covering the highest plateau of Holy Terra; ten thousand people couldn't oversee the entire facility.

Just like Interstellar Warriors need auxiliary armies, so does the Imperial Guard.

Based on this, Gu Hang judged that Yasida won't be able to stir up major turmoil.

The Alliance preparing for readiness is just a precaution.

With Yasida stepping down, who will rise to the position?

Regarding the position of the Star Devouring Cosmos Chair, Gu Hang is very interested, but knows it's unlikely.

Securing real control of the Spiderweb Domain while preserving the Alliance's foundation required enormous political cost and Herculean efforts. Gaining the Star Devouring Cosmos is utterly impossible.

Thus, he seeks other alternatives.

Unable to get substantial benefits, going for illusory ones is still worthwhile.

The High Lord seat.

This is also quite challenging, but it's relatively more feasible.

Moreover, there is the Martian Sect.

Though Gu Hang still harbors concerns over Kao'er's prophecy and the costs involved in the near future, between a distant issue that's uncertain and current tangible advantages, it's better to grab the immediate opportunity.

Whether Mars truly supports him or not, he'll follow standard procedures and try; it won't hurt.

Gu Hang does not plan to invest high costs here, for obvious reasons.

If it were a position with real power and autonomy as a High Lord Chair, it would be extraordinarily valuable, influencing Central Empire policies directly, benefitting his Alliance and the Spiderweb Domain significantly.

However, he assumes that even with Mars' support, he would still need Zebert's approval. Otherwise, it would turn into a conflict between Mars and the Prime Minister's faction.

After all, the previous holder of the position, Yasida, belonged to Zebert's faction.

No matter how strong Mars is, snatching a High Lord Chair from Zebert in the Supreme Council is extremely difficult.

Even if successful, Gu Hang would be visibly marked as belonging to the Martian Sect.

This is something Gu Hang isn't keen on seeing.

Mars is too far, and too isolated in the broader imperial political scene, offering little.

He still needs Zebert's nod.

But will he approve?

...

"You want to run for High Lord?" In his contemplation, Zebert was suddenly awakened by Gu Hang's voice.

He was immediately amused, momentarily dispersing the gloomy mood brought on by Yasida's entanglement with the National Church and corruption by Dark Spirit Race.

As if Gu Hang had told him a very funny joke.

Yasida was sure to step down, and the next question was who would replace him, that was certain.

But of all the candidates Zebert considered, Gu Hang never came to mind.

The reason is simple: Gu Hang is not one of his own.

Chapter 750: Empty Fame

Zebert had no doubt about whether Gu Hang's words were true or false.

Even though these remarks were just Gu Hang's idle talk and the results of his interrogation, Zebert believed them.

It wasn't that he trusted Gu Hang; he simply thought Gu Hang wasn't stupid enough to make up lies like this.

All the content could be verified, and he would soon turn to the Imperial Guard to ask for the situation.

No matter how arrogant the Imperial Guard was, such intelligence closely related to the Prime Minister could not be concealed.

Given that the information was true, Zebert indeed needed to consider who should take this position.

The acting prime minister of the Legal Department had qualifications that were a bit too shallow, and in terms of ability and loyalty, they did not find favor with Zebert.

He was more inclined to select someone similar to Yasida from those Cosmic Domain Chairs who obeyed him.

There were many candidates in his mind; for a moment, he hesitated, unsure whom to choose.

But regardless, it would never be Gu Hang.

What did Gu Hang have to do with it?

Of course, he wanted Gu Hang to wholeheartedly become his follower. However, achieving such a state was still a long way off. Currently, Gu Hang was far from being trusted by him.

As for the exchange of interests?

In Zebert's view, the Alliance's future annual total tax revenue of 2.1 trillion tax currency had already squeezed them dry. What else could be extracted from them beyond this?

Oh, the Alliance's rather impressive military strength was quite valuable, and several Battle Groups were actually controlled by them.

The sea and land forces, along with those several Starfighter Battle Groups, were indeed quite formidable. If, in times of need, he could freely deploy this force, its value would be significant.

But the right to deploy this force rested with Gu Hang, and its value, besides personnel and equipment, included logistics support provided by the entire Alliance.

In warfare, logistics is crucial.

If deploying this force required the prime minister to pay, the army's value would be halved.

Then it comes back to whether the Alliance is willing to hand over all powers regarding their army, including supply and logistics, to the prime minister?

Certainly not.

Even if they did agree, Zebert wouldn't trust it.

They might say they've handed it over, but when it comes to actually using it, what if the Alliance starts making excuses?

This matter requires trust.

But clearly, there was a lack of trust between the two parties.

And setting aside the Alliance, what else could Gu Hang offer in exchange?

The sixth rejuvenation surgery was something Zebert cared about a lot. However, it had already been traded for the approval of the "Alliance Plan."

Was Gu Hang going to use the rejuvenation surgery to pressure Zebert into relinquishing a High Lord position?

Zebert wouldn't fall for it.

Currently, he just needed to undergo the fifth surgery; he had at least a lifespan of sixty to a hundred years left, so he wasn't in such a hurry.

In sixty years, he might be compelled to compromise.

But as for now, don't even think about it.

However, Gu Hang proposed something that somewhat brought Zebert's thoughts back.

"If I, as the Spiderweb Domain Chair and the chief grand mentor of the Psychic Cultivator's Association, were elected High Lord, could the prime minister recommend a talent to serve as my representative permanently stationed at Holy Terra?"

Upon hearing this, Zebert was moved.

The representative position for the High Lord wasn't actually crucial. Essentially, it fulfills the will of the High Lord themself. All power of this representative stems from the High Lord, and they cannot act beyond the High Lord's will. The High Lord would never tolerate such behavior, so dispatching representatives, regular reporting, inspections, and periodic personnel changes were standard operations.

Under normal circumstances, it was impossible to steal High Lord's power by bribing a representative.

But what if the High Lord personally collaborated?

Gu Hang's words implied this, and Zebert understood.

He found it quite interesting.

In the past, the High Lords cultivated by him, whether someone like Yasida acting as Cosmic Domain Chair or leaders of certain departments, upon reaching the High Lord position, despite how subservient they were, they had their own dignity, their own limits, and even... some hidden ambition.

They were willing and indeed did align with Zebert in the vast majority, if not all, circumstances. Internal factional struggles were one thing, but when Zebert made a decision, no matter how displeased, they would suppress their thoughts and comply with his management.

However, these were decisions they personally made.

Zebert didn't just cast the vote directly.

That would be too much of a compromise.

But Gu Hang seemed unconcerned about it.

His representative was chosen by Zebert, which essentially meant this representative only needed to follow Zebert's commands. When necessary, they could send a report to Gu Hang, which would suffice.

Such an attitude, even Zebert's most well-trained dogs in the past never displayed.

He couldn't help but view Gu Hang differently.

After some pondering, he said: "Then let's discuss the Alliance Army. Can we...?"

...

The conditions were not agreed upon; Zebert wanted the command of the Alliance Army and wanted to insert a large number of leaders and officers into it. Gu Hang surely couldn't let him succeed.

He would rather forfeit the High Lord position.

When pushed to the limit, he could even refuse to sign the "Alliance Plan."

Military power and political power, these were Gu Hang's bottom lines.

Chapter 750: Empty Titles (2)

But in reality, he wasn't too disappointed.

Negotiations may have broken down, but as long as there's room to talk, it means there's hope on the horizon.

The bottom line Gu Hang can accept is that the Alliance Army can go beyond borders to fight for the Empire. However, the conditions should be the same as any Star Realm Army Corps conscripted by the Empire, with the Empire paying the war expenses and granting rewards. The Alliance can handle the logistics, but everything must be paid for.

Moreover, the Alliance Army must have complete autonomy in operations. They can accept assignments from higher command in joint operations, but the operational command must be decided by themselves. And if the battle is primarily led by them, then all other Imperial military units must follow the Alliance Army's command.

If this condition cannot be agreed upon, there's no need to talk further.

And once agreed, in Gu Hang's view, it's akin to securing the High Lord position at no cost.

The Alliance Army going out to fight for money, in the manner of mercenaries, is acceptable to him, and even without the matter of the High Lord, he would proactively push for it.

After all, in the three to four decades of the Alliance's development, war has taken up the majority of situations. The Alliance has both fought wars and rapidly expanded and developed.

Aside from war, nothing else could potentially allow a force to grow from a single planet to a Cosmos Domain in less than forty years.

But in the future, within the Alliance, there should be no major wars to fight. However, during past developmental processes, a vast army and military-industrial complex have been amassed.

The military-industrial complex is fine; its products, whether as Imperial Tax or as trade goods, are quite popular.

In the unsettled territories of the Empire, armaments are hard currency.

But maintaining the army itself is a problem.

Not fighting but maintaining a massive army is highly unprofitable and would severely hamper the Alliance's economic development.

Especially under tremendous tax pressure.

Using the Alliance's elite soldiers to offset taxes?

Gu Hang would not agree to that.

He would rather demobilize, let the warriors return to civilian life, which would add labor force. Paying taxes with soldiers would be an enormous loss.

But honestly demobilizing... not only is it painful, but the key issue is that prophecy of the final battle, lingering like a thorn in Gu Hang's heart, always making him uneasy.

Who knows when that prophecy will come true?

What if demobilization happens just before a major battle breaks out?

Relying on war to sustain war is a good choice.

Deploy troops, fight for the Empire. As long as a battle can be won, not only would there be no losses, there would be gains.

Gu Hang doesn't care much about how much he earns; as long as the Empire can sustain a significant part of the Alliance's army while serving as a rotation-based training ground, it's excellent.

On this basis, if this matter can be used as a bargaining chip to exchange for some political benefits, that would be a pure gain.

Promising the Executive Council that the Alliance will send troops to intervene in Solaria's chaotic war situation came from this consideration.

Being able to promise the Prime Minister to participate in various Imperial wars per his requirements is the same intention.

It all depends on whether he can gain a High Lord position.

Letting the Prime Minister Qi Bodu 'recommend' candidates, essentially handing over power, is true, but...

Firstly, without this, Gu Hang wouldn't even have the qualification to enter the arena.

Secondly, if I use your recommended person and after some years I'm dissatisfied, replacing them is also my right.

Of course, the second point should not be used easily; only when the wings are well-prepared can it be done.

Why didn't Qi Bodu think of this? Simply put, if Gu Hang breaks the tacit agreement and changes the representative, Qi Bodu would then have the ability to change the High Lord in the Supreme Council.

And to prevent such a thing from happening, the core lies in the time when Qi Bodu can't replace Gu Hang's High Lord position within the Supreme Council, which is when Gu Hang truly gains power.

This needs a process.

But even if it's a titular High Lord, it's still a High Lord, theoretically one of the thirteen most powerful in the Central Empire.

With this title, Gu Hang can have a lot of maneuvers to play, even if it's just a name.

Whether locally or in Holy Terra.

Moreover, this is a matter of dynamic balance.

There is a transitional area between a powerless title and an empowered High Lord. It's not about flipping from name to power in a moment; instead, as Gu Hang's strength grows and the rivalry with Qi Bodu unfolds, mutual interest exchange, concession, and compromise will cause the whole power peace to keep oscillating.

The center of the Empire still revolves around Holy Terra.

When Gu Hang has secured a foothold in the eastern territories, with a solid and massive force locally, he could be considered an established player in the Empire's political landscape, making his local expansion difficult to be as chaotic and aggressive as it was in the past.

He needs to find new paths.

At his level, new paths are only feasible in Holy Terra.

...

Subsequently, Gu Hang stayed calm for a few days.

Then, it was the signing ceremony of the "Alliance Plan."

The ceremony was held with great pomp, attended by people of quite high status.

On the signing side, of course, Gu Hang represented the Alliance; on the side representing the Empire Government, Qi Bodu ultimately didn't appear, but the three Empire Prime Ministers and High Lords, Luo Fei, Xu Fuzhen, and Galaraldo were present, which was of high specification.

The signed document was lifted by the four together, shown to the cameras, and broadcasted live, with the images spreading everywhere.

This matter was considered conclusive.

A week later, within the Psychic Cultivator's Association, Gu Hang received the title of Joint Great Mentor.

He didn't directly take full charge of the Psychic Cultivator's Association, but allowed the current chief, the elder Dou Zhao, to continue serving as the Chief Great Mentor and manage the association.

It was almost business as usual.

Gu Hang had many ideas for the Psychic Cultivator's Association, but he couldn't personally stay in Holy Terra to oversee their realization.

So, it's better to leave it to Dou Zhao.

When Gu Hang obtained the title of Joint Great Mentor, and with Dou Zhao fully supporting him in advancing the reforms he wanted within the Psychic Cultivator's Association, something unexpected happened; the system panel reacted.

In the [Vassal] interface, there was suddenly an entry for the [Psychic Cultivator's Association].

It was indeed a pleasant surprise.

Although the current obedience level wasn't particularly high, that's okay. No matter how Gu Hang advocated within the Psychic Cultivator's Association, saying he would lead it to greatness again, in reality, for him, the biggest value of the association was still its title.

Now that the system recognized it as a force and included it, investing a bit of resources was feasible.

According to Gu Hang's original reform intentions, the future path of the Psychic Cultivator's Association was to train more psychics, form its own armed force, and use this as a foundation to handle more psychic-related affairs within the Empire, gaining influence and funding... On this trajectory, to expand continuously, even to a revival.

When the Psychic Cultivator's Association is strong enough in the future, it might regain the 'authority over all Imperial psychics' that was lost.

At least to some extent.

The Storm Mage Corps under Gu Hang has already begun mobilizing their teams. Some construction materials are also en route.

The Psychic Cultivator's Association has also selected a group of individuals to accompany Gu Hang back to the Alliance.

The Psychic Cultivator's Association will focus on building branches in the East.

A ten-year plan has been set, including the construction of more Mage Academies in Holy Terra and throughout the Sun Star Domain.

With the support of the Alliance, the Psychic Troops will also establish themselves independently.

In the following stages, they will actively engage in all kinds of external intervention in psychic disasters, collecting psychics, providing psychic support in wars abroad.

Dedicated psychic troops will be able to openly demand payment from the Empire Government for their work.

At this point, the "Alliance Plan" is complete, the major strategy for the Psychic Cultivator's Association is set, and Gu Hang's main activities in Holy Terra have concluded.

He's ready to go home.

However, before going home, he needs to wait for the latest discussion results from the High Lord Council.