

## Tech System 741

Chapter 741 Improve, Die, Revive, Adapt, Die, Revive, Overcome, and Repeat.

The breaching pods launched by the stealth forces, despite being accompanied by missiles, weapons, and their own defenses, still had a very low success rate due to the advanced multi-target tracking systems of spacefaring civilizations. To counter this, the empire employed a tried-and-true strategy: overwhelming those systems with sheer numbers. This tactic was only possible thanks to their atomic printers, allowing them to mass-produce breaching pods and launch them to their almost certain destruction without risking any lives of their soldiers in such an operation.

As a result of the numerous obstacles, only an average of one percent of the breaching pods successfully penetrated ships without being destroyed. Some forces experienced a higher number of breaches, while others, like the Shadari, had almost none. The Shadari's advanced detection systems allowed them to identify the pods from a greater distance, providing a buffer zone that enabled them to intercept and eliminate all of the first waves of breaching pods before they could cause any damage.

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Ismail Maylander opened his eyes, adjusting to his newly assigned body, a robotic copy that had been activated the moment a breaching pod successfully penetrated one of the ships. With the empire's forces stretched thin, more robotic soldiers than actual imperial troops were being deployed, and soldiers like Maylander were reassigned based on availability. Thanks to the low success rate of the breaching pods, there were just enough soldiers to control their robotic counterparts and launch an immediate counterattack.

There was no time to hold back. With over a billion enemy forces swarming, restraint was unnecessary—no matter how many they killed, there would still be plenty left to interrogate later. Now, the focus was on eliminating as many invaders as possible in the chaos that had begun to unfold.

He wasted no time. Rising to his feet, Ismail Maylander quickly fell in with his new team, immediately engaging the enemy as they attempted to flush them out. Without even seeing the enemy, he fired instinctively, relying on the wealth of pre-collected data. He knew that by the time his bullets reached their destination, they would intersect with the enemy soldiers' movements.

The EMP blast that came standard with the breaching pods had wiped out most of the surveillance systems in the area, leaving the enemy to fight blindly. In contrast, Maylander and his team had the advantage of a 3D representation of their surroundings. Every movement they made was optimized, allowing them to take the path of least resistance while inflicting maximum damage on the invaders.

The enemy forces, showing their experience in space warfare, quickly adapted to the situation. After realizing that the infiltrating soldiers were far more formidable than anticipated, they shifted tactics. Instead of continuing to engage head-on, they sealed the breached section and cut off the supply of breathable air. Without hesitation, they began flooding the area with sedative gas, aiming to either incapacitate or kill the intruders.

Lacking precise knowledge of their opponents' biology to fine-tune the sedative's potency, the enemy opted for brute force, pumping as much of the gas into the compartment as possible. Their goal was simple: neutralize the threat before it could cause any more damage.

When the sedative gas failed to incapacitate the infiltrators, the enemy resorted to the most brutal yet effective option. Without hesitation, they detached the entire breached section of the ship, effectively amputating it to prevent the intruders from advancing any further.

Within moments, the detached section was detonated, obliterating everything and everyone inside, including their own soldiers. It was a cold, calculated decision—a necessary sacrifice to contain the threat and minimize further damage. For them, such measures were routine in space warfare, where survival often demanded extreme actions, even at the cost of their own.

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“Ah, shit, here we go again,” Ismail Maylander muttered as he opened his eyes once more, instantly realizing that his previous body had perished in the explosion.

Without wasting a moment, he rose to his feet, quickly acclimating to the new surroundings. He found himself on the same ship but on the opposite side from where his first body landed, far removed from the now-detonated section.

Wasting no time, they immediately started moving, tweaking their strategy based on the lessons learned just moments ago. This time, they split into teams of two, each heading in completely different directions and moving faster to prevent the enemy from realizing what was happening and prematurely detaching and detonating the section ahead of them.

In the following twenty minutes, Ismail Maylander and his team had already died five times, each death caused by the enemy's clever use of environmental control in unexpected ways.

Yet, despite these repeated setbacks, the imperial forces were making steady progress toward capturing the ship. Each encounter also added valuable data to their AI's tactical catalog, sharpening their strategies for future engagements.

The imperial breaching forces were currently operating on the ethos of: improvise, die, revive, adapt, die, revive, overcome, and repeat.

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"This star system is quite interesting," remarked a strikingly beautiful humanoid female, her body adorned with what appeared to be hundreds of thousands of independently moving scales. She glanced to her left, where a breaching pod had embedded itself in the wall, and watched as the invading forces began to emerge from it.

There was no trace of fear in her demeanor, nor any sign of reinforcements rushing in to fend off the breaching forces. It was as if her mere presence was assurance enough that she could handle the situation alone.

The soldiers poured out of the breaching pod without hesitation, immediately opening fire on the woman standing before them. They unleashed a relentless hail of bullets, aiming to turn her into a honeycomb, fully aware of the dangerous species they were up against. They knew they couldn't afford to hold back.

Yet, despite the barrage, with weapons firing at maximum power, she didn't flinch—not even an inch. She simply stood there, watching them, as though their attacks were nothing more than a fleeting inconvenience.

This relentless assault continued until some of the soldiers eventually ran out of bullets. As they moved to reload, the woman finally made her move, she took a single step from her original position—and in an instant, she vanished.

She reappeared next to the soldier who was still firing, while his teammate in the midst of reloading. Before he or anyone near him could react, her hand pierced through his chest as if it were a lance.

The soldier barely had time to register what had happened before his robotic body exploded, the force of the blast inconsequential to her as she tanked it like it was nothing more than a hit from a soft pillow.

Chapter 742 "We Only Need to Win Once"

‘This is very weird,’ Seraphina thought to herself as she gazed at the scattered remains of the enemy soldiers now littering the floor. Fragments of metal, bone, roots, and remnants of mana floated in the air, their strange compositions scattered after the soldiers had exploded. She had effortlessly eliminated each one as they emerged from the breaching pod, but something felt deeply unsettling about the encounter. It wasn’t the act of killing—she was long accustomed to that—it was the way the enemy reacted. There was no fear, no panic, almost as if they weren’t concerned about death at all. It was as though dying was a game to them.

Before Seraphina could ponder further, she was alerted to another breach elsewhere on the ship. She needed to respond immediately. Turning on her heel, wings began materializing from her back—elegant, yet powerful, forming in a mere two seconds. With a single, mighty flap, she vanished from the room. The only evidence of her presence was the aftermath: untethered objects sent flying in the opposite direction, and a gaping hole in the ship’s wall where she’d effortlessly passed through, carving the shortest path to her next destination.

After several more rapid movements, with Pythagoras’s approach guiding her, Seraphina reached her next target. The soldiers were already on the move, and it was as if they had anticipated her arrival from that specific direction. They were mid-turn, preparing to fire at her, but even their enhanced speed appeared slow to her. She had reached them before they could complete their motions, despite being aware of her approach from several hundred meters away.

This time, she didn’t hesitate. With swift precision, she moved through the group, obliterating them one by one. Then, without pausing, Seraphina moved to the next location, repeating the process with the same fluid precision, eliminating enemies in rapid succession more than ten times over the next few minutes.

Once Seraphina had finished clearing out all the breachers in her immediate vicinity, she opted to return to the control room. This time, she followed the designated path, which would only take a few seconds longer than her usual method of breaking through walls.

Throughout her journey, Seraphina executed what appeared to be impossible—sharp ninety-degree turns while maintaining her monstrous speed. Each turn was performed with such precision that it was only slightly slower than crashing through walls at full force, demonstrating both her agility and mastery of movement.

The moment she arrived and entered the control room, the occupants showed her the customary respect, each offering a slight bow before resuming their tasks.

Surprisingly, only a handful of her kind were present in the control room amidst a sea of diverse races. While the others diligently carried out their tasks, those of Seraphina's race merely sat idly, seemingly indifferent to the chaos unfolding outside. It was as if the turmoil beyond the walls was none of their concern, or perhaps they simply lacked any genuine interest in the ongoing situation.

“What’s on your mind, Princess?” one of her kin asked as he approached her, noticing the contemplative look on her face.

“Something that occurred during our encounter with the invading forces has caused me to reconsider a few things,” she replied, recalling the incident from just moments ago.

As Seraphina reflected on the encounter, the details came rushing back to her. From the moment she initiated her assault, she sensed something was amiss with the enemies’ eyes. Despite her incredible speed, they seemed to keep pace with her movements, their gazes tracking her even as their bodies struggled to react in time. It was a disconcerting sight; their limbs were caught in a slow-motion dance, desperately trying to respond while being utterly unable to change their fate.

With each group she encountered, their reaction times seemed to improve incrementally. The second batch she faced exhibited a slight enhancement in their movements, as if they were beginning to adapt to her pace. By the time she reached the final group, a peculiar signal flickered in her mind, and curiosity spurred her to act differently. She seized the last soldier by the neck and, momentarily halting his breath, asked, “What is wrong with your people's reaction?”

In typical scenarios, one would expect fear or desperation in the face of inevitable death. Most opponents, when confronted with a relentless foe, would wear despair on their faces, understanding that their end was nigh. Others might make a last-ditch effort, fighting back with everything they had, even if the odds were stacked against them. She thought of the Valthorins—proud warriors who masked their dread with fearlessness to preserve their honor. But these soldiers were different; they exhibited an eerie calmness, even as their brains and eyes kept up with her speed while their bodies failed to respond adequately.

It was unsettling, almost as if their faces had no ability to show or express emotions. Yet, when the man in her grasp began to speak, that assumption crumbled. “We only need to win once,” he said, laughter bubbling forth, starkly contrasting the dire situation.

Confusion swirled within her as she tried to comprehend his words. What could he possibly mean? But before she could inquire further, the soldier erupted in a fit of strange laughter, his voice dripping with conviction. “You can kill us as many times as you want; we will keep coming. We only need to kill you once. No matter how many of us die to achieve that, it will be a worthy trade.”

Before she could react, he detonated himself, a final act of defiance that left her stunned. The echoes of his laughter and the weight of his declaration lingered in her mind as she moved on, grappling with the unsettling realization that she was facing a foe whose resolve was unwavering, one that seemed prepared to sacrifice everything for a single victory.

“They are nothing but words of the weak,” the man scoffed, his arrogance unmistakable. “What makes you think about them like that? They weren’t even strong enough to warrant you using your racial powers; you dealt with them using speed—something we all have in abundance.”

Seraphina chose not to respond, her thoughts swirling with uncertainty. ‘That’s true,’ she acknowledged internally, ‘but something in me denies it, as if something isn’t right about them.’

Despite all her common sense telling her that they would never reach a level to face her as an equal foe, the lingering words of the man echoed in her mind, challenging her perceptions and attempting to dispel her confidence.

#### Chapter 743 "How Long Can We Last?"

Throughout the entire debacle, which had been raging for over half an hour, Aron remained a silent observer. His role, as always, was to step back and watch the unfolding chaos with calculated detachment. He had already given John the mental "picture" he envisioned—an abstract strategy, a broad outline of how events should transpire. It was John's job, as usual, to transform that vision into a masterpiece. For years, John's sole purpose had been to execute Aron's will with precise artistry, and he had yet to disappoint, ever since Aron had cured him a few years ago.

Meanwhile, every sensor embedded in the battlefield was constantly relaying streams of data back to the central servers for storage and analysis. Nova handled the cataloging process, ensuring that every piece of information was meticulously organized. The rest of the AIs were tasked with more direct functions, managing the countless minute details of the battlefield. The sheer scale of the conflict was something no human could ever hope to micromanage, so the AIs etched every pixel of the grand image, while John, like an artist with a palette, decided which parts needed color, directing the larger strategy with the precision only an experienced general could manage.

“How long can we sustain this constant barrage of attacks without leaving an opening for them?” Aron asked, his gaze steady as he analyzed the situation. Every citizen watching could see the empire deploying vast amounts of equipment at an astonishing rate. The sheer scale of resources being expended was enough to surprise even the most empire-sided observers, leading many to wonder just how deep their reserves truly ran.

{Due to the enemy forces being over four times our number and arriving in smaller, individual groups rather than a unified force, coupled with our over-preparation, the quantity of weapons we have in reserve should be roughly equal to theirs. It all depends on how quickly we expend our resources versus theirs. When that point comes, the confrontation will shift to direct combat, which will likely be in their favor.

However, for as long as their response mirrors ours, we can sustain this pace for about a week. From their perspective, that's probably the most they'll assume as well, even if they overestimate us—something that would actually play to our advantage.

Neither the enemy nor our own citizens have any real grasp of the rapid production capabilities we possess. The timing of when and where we deploy reinforcements will determine who comes out on top in this long-distance warfare. By the end of the week, we'll know if our strategy holds.

As for their strongest fighters, that remains a mystery. So far, the ones we've encountered handled our breaching forces too easily, never posing enough of a threat to force them to reveal their true power. So, we remain uncertain about their actual strength.

Depending on whether their elites can withstand our weaponry, the outcome of direct combat could vary dramatically.

If I were in their position, I'd deploy those stronger individuals after we've exhausted our energy and resources to deliver a decisive blow. However, given that some aspects of their culture and strategy are still unclear, we must treat this assumption with caution.}

As she engaged in conversation with Aron, explaining the situation and navigating through her tasks while managing operations in the background, her true emotions remained obscured beneath a polished facade.

To an observer, she appeared calm and focused, but only someone with direct access to her code—like Aron—would understand the excitement coursing through her system. This surge of exhilaration stemmed from the fact that she was finally facing a challenge worthy of her capabilities. For her, this wasn't just another assignment; it was an opportunity to test her limits and engage with an adversary that could truly push her boundaries.

Throughout the explanation, Aron listened intently. While he could filter the data being collected, he couldn't digest it at the same speed as her without resorting to assimilation, which was impossible to initiate in the current situation.

"Bring me the updated catalog of the top ten civilizations," Aron said, understanding that if strong individual forces were to shift the balance at the end of the long-distance conflict, it would likely be their people. He was acutely aware that the information he currently possessed was akin to what a pre-empire American might know about Somalia—heavily sensationalized and biased news. While it was better than knowing nothing, such useless information wouldn't be of any help if they were to face off in an actual confrontation.

"Here it is," she said, projecting a massive hologram filled with all the information they had gathered.

The information now at their fingertips was the culmination of various operations conducted by different groups. They had harvested brain data from enemies, infiltrated the ship's mainframe to gather intelligence before the opposing forces could detect them, and terminated programs to prevent reverse engineering that could lead to counterattacks. Additionally, they had collected DNA samples from bodies for recreation in VR, enabling further analysis and experimentation.

Despite their extensive efforts, they had only managed to gather a limited amount of information on the individuals from the top ten civilizations. Some of these races were formidable enough that not a single member of their species had been killed in the confrontations, while others had proven so resilient that their ships had remained impenetrable.

Although they were confident that they had eliminated at least a few members of these races, the circumstances surrounding those deaths left little to work with. Many of the casualties had occurred during the initial black hole attack, erasing any possibility of gathering meaningful intelligence.

Others had fallen to missile strikes, and the significant distance made it impossible to safely collect their remains, further complicating the process of information gathering

So even the current information was derived from the insights collected from various forces that struggled to resist the imperial onslaught. They passed this data through a filtering process to assess consensus on certain topics and to sift through the limited information obtained from the few individuals of the top ten civilizations they managed to encounter. Unfortunately, most of these individuals were of the lowest ranks, meaning their insights were also restricted in scope.

Despite these challenges, the amount of gathered information was sufficient to compile a basic summary of these species, including their fundamental cultures, the basic outlines of their technological advancements, and more. However, the information remained rudimentary at best and would continue to be so until they successfully acquired brain data from high-ranking individuals within these civilizations.

With the information now displayed before him, Nova accelerated his brain processing speed to the maximum limit permitted by his implants. Wasting no time he began to read the information with intense focus, absorbing every detail at an astonishing pace.

#### Chapter 744 The Top Ten of the Conclave I

The Valthorin, Shadari, Elara, Xor'Vak, Kha'Sar, Erythians, Zevlora, Trinarians, Yrral Coalition, and Glavinith were the top ten races in the Conclave. Each of these civilizations had mastered a unique specialization that allowed them to secure and maintain their position among the top ten, despite the constant influx of new civilizations joining the Conclave. These specializations were the cornerstones of their power, shaping their influence and dominance in the ever-evolving political and military landscape of the Conclave.

The Valthorins' society is built around a core philosophy called "Kairos," meaning "The Eternal Flame of Pride." This belief system determines their self-worth by how well they preserve and protect their pride in every aspect of life.

As a result, Valthorins are incredibly hard-working, relentlessly striving to elevate their status within their society.

Honor and reputation are their obsessions, driving them to excel in any field they enter. However, their unwavering loyalty to their empire limits the methods they can use to rise in status, forcing them to rely solely on legitimate means, which further sharpens their skills and perseverance.

When dealing with outsiders, however, the Valthorins feel no such restrictions. They employ every tactic necessary to achieve their goals, including manipulation and deception.

Their tireless work ethic is further motivated by the ultimate goal: gaining access to the prestigious "Pride Nexus." This sophisticated mental network, reserved for the Valthorin elite, enables seamless sharing of thoughts, ideas, and experiences, creating a collective memory of past successes, tactics, and even failures.

The Pride Nexus serves as a living archive of wisdom, amplifying their abilities and making their elite nearly unmatched in strategic fields.

If a Valthorin's honor is ever challenged or insulted, they resolve it through a ceremonial combat known as the "Duel of Retribution." This formal duel continues until one combatant either concedes or dies, ensuring that honor is defended through physical strength and unwavering resolve.

However, such duels are rare, as they issue them only to the individuals they acknowledge and consider equals. For those they deem beneath them, they will use any underhanded methods available to uphold their pride, making them a difficult civilization to challenge directly.

Nova had left only the most essential details for Aron to focus on, skipping deeper insights about the Valthorin leader and their intricate system based on honor and pride. That information could wait. For now, Aron only needed what was directly relevant in case their warriors entered the fray once both sides had exhausted their weapons.

He then moved on to the next civilization in the top ten: the Shadari, or as many referred to them, the Masters of Stealth.

The most fascinating aspect of the Shadari was that, despite the intelligence gathered being from various higher-ranking races and individuals, none of them had ever laid eyes on an actual Shadari.

They only revealed their true physical appearance to those they deemed worthy of such an honor. As a result, most of the encounters with the Shadari were done while they were shrouded in their light-absorbing cloaks, leaving their true forms shrouded in mystery.

Moreover, their technology tree had evolved not from a natural progression but as a response to the harsh conditions of their star system and the predators that roamed it. This forced adaptation made them formidable in the realm of stealth, excelling in both the use of stealth and the detection of it, turning them into true monsters when the shadows became their allies.

Typically, when a species spends millennia developing and focusing on a particular technology tree, one would expect the current imperial forces to be overwhelmed by their advancements. However, the imperial forces had countered this expectation by utilizing system-bought runic knowledge, which, despite being the most basic form of technology, proved highly effective as long as sufficient mana was provided. This allowed the young empire to reach a competitive level in stealth capabilities.

Nevertheless, the Shadari remained a step ahead in nearly every other aspect of stealth. Their true potential required close proximity to be fully realized, a situation they thankfully were not in at the moment. However, their phasing missiles presented a significant challenge, remaining currently impossible to counter effectively.

As always, Nova summarized their government system for him to review in detail later. He then moved on to the next race he needed to be most cautious about in face-to-face combat: the Xor'Vak. Known as the "Masters of Destruction," Nova had aptly dubbed them "Dragonoids" due to their resemblance to the dragons from human lore.

The Xor'Vak were renowned as the strongest race when it came to individual strength, capable of unleashing nearly unbelievable levels of destruction once they reached a certain threshold of power. This immense strength fostered a culture that revered might above all else, with their leaders selected solely based on combat prowess.



Each of the four royal clans would choose a champion to battle among themselves, and the victor would ascend to lead the entire race. This system allowed the reigning leader to be challenged every century, ensuring that only the strongest would hold power.

Due to their unwavering focus on strength and their unique power system—one that could only be accessed racially and not through other civilizations' systems—the Xor'Vak relied heavily on slavery and the labor of other civilizations. They maintained a significant number of slaves and subordinate species for menial tasks.

The racial abilities of the Xor'Vak varied significantly depending on the clan they were born into, with each clan specializing in a particular elemental force: Fire, Water, Earth, or Air. These abilities were not conventional but rather unique to their lineage.

The strength of an individual's powers also hinged on bloodline purity, which determined their starting capabilities. Even those with less pure bloodlines still possessed strength that ranked among the top compared to other civilizations.

Their capacity for power growth did not depend on mana but rather on an exotic material unique to their race. This fact was a key motivator for their presence in the star system, as they sought to seize control and acquire the mana stones to exchange for resources to further enhance their strength.

One of the most striking features of the Xor'Vak was their ability to metamorphose from humanoid forms into dragon-like forms of varying sizes. The strength of the individual determined the size of their dragon form—the more powerful they were, the larger their draconic transformation. In dragon form, they could unleash devastating waves of destruction, while in humanoid form, they excelled at delivering precise and targeted damage.

## Chapter 745 The Top Ten of the Conclave II

The Symmetra were a race entirely opposite to the Xor'Vak, born with frail bodies but possessing exceptionally intelligent minds. This intellectual prowess enabled them to become unrivaled blacksmiths and weapon artisans, capable of forging weapons imbued with the essence of the void. These unique weapons exhibited adaptive, semi-sentient properties, allowing them to evolve based on their wielder's needs.

However, their weak physical forms initially limited the level of craftsmanship they could achieve. This limitation was a significant blow to a race that took immense pride in their weapon-making abilities. In response to their physical shortcomings, they made the drastic decision to remove most of their weak body parts and replace them with advanced technology. They retained only the critical parts necessary for survival, which led to an immediate enhancement in both their strength and the caliber of weapons they could produce.

This transformation, however, had dire consequences. The drastic alteration of their bodies resulted in a significant reduction in their birth rate, prompting the leadership to impose strict regulations on body modifications. Individuals were now required to have a certain number of children and attain a specific mastery level by forging at least one weapon of a particular caliber before they could undergo further enhancements. This policy helped to stave off extinction, but the Symmetra's population remained relatively small compared to other civilizations in the Conclave.

Despite their reduced numbers, the Symmetra retained their position among the top ten civilizations due to the unmatched power and capabilities of the weapons they created. Their craftsmanship

continued to be sought after, making them a formidable presence in the Conclave and ensuring their survival in a competitive universe.

In stark contrast to the Symmetra, who focused on crafting powerful metallic weapons from metals and their race-specific void energy, the Erythians dedicated themselves entirely to the creation and perfection of bioengineering. They became masters of developing organic war machines and enhancing their bodies with potent biological augmentations. This expertise allowed them to genetically modify their troops to adapt to nearly any environment or enemy, rendering them incredibly versatile in combat.

The Erythians' technology revolved around biological warfare, deploying living organisms that served both offensive and defensive purposes. Their ability to produce low-quality living weapons in abundance meant they could overwhelm their enemies with sheer numbers, swarming opponents with countless organic combatants. While they struggled against technologically advanced or mechanical systems, their strength lay in their ability to send wave after wave of these living weapons to exhaust and overwhelm the enemy.

In addition to their swarm tactics, the Erythians were capable of creating powerful living weapons that could pose a threat even to a Xor'Vak royal. However, these formidable creations required significant resources, which limited their production and availability. Despite this constraint, the Erythians' unique approach to warfare and their adaptability allowed them to secure and maintain their position among the top ten civilizations in the Conclave, proving that biological innovation could be just as effective as traditional weaponry in the right hands.

Then there are the Zelvora, also known as the Masters of Psychic Warfare. This psionically gifted race excels in psychic combat and manipulation, leveraging their unmatched mental abilities to wield formidable power. They can influence minds, create vivid illusions, disrupt communications, and generate psionic fields that either enhance or hinder those around them. Additionally, their mastery of telekinesis allows them to manipulate objects with sheer will.

A Zelvora of significant strength possesses the capability to annihilate all life on a planet within mere months, provided there are no defenses against them. However, their powers come with vulnerabilities. They face backlash when confronting individuals who can resist their mental incursions, which can lead to severe repercussions for them. Moreover, their physical bodies are comparatively frail, often relying on psionic shields to protect themselves as they navigate the world.

To further bolster their strengths, the Zelvora have developed and maintain a hive mind system that connects their entire race, enabling rapid responses to any events within their civilization. When they find themselves in areas beyond the range of their hive mind, the strongest among them creates a mini hive mind, allowing others to join under their command. This temporary network functions until they can reconnect to the main hive mind, at which point control is returned to their leader. The intricate interplay of their mental prowess and hive mind coordination makes the Zelvora a formidable force, both individually and collectively.

The Yrral Coalition stands out as the only member of the top ten civilizations formed by multiple races that united before their discovery by the Conclave. They serve as the industrial powerhouse of the empire, with their strength primarily rooted in their ability to produce goods rapidly and at scale. This coalition operates the largest number of fleets and is the most advanced in the Conclave, boasting remarkable military prowess through their mastery of logistics and fleet management.

Their strategy embodies the principle that logistics wins wars; when faced with the loss of a million ships, they can counterattack with a staggering fifty million to secure victory. This overwhelming capacity for production ensures that they can maintain a continuous supply of military assets, often outmaneuvering opponents in large-scale engagements.

Another key component of the Yrral Coalition's power is their wealth. They possess abundant resources due to their role as a production base for many civilizations that lack the capability for cost-effective, large-scale manufacturing. This financial advantage allows them to acquire a wide array of technologies, further enhancing their technological tree and overall capabilities.

As for the Trinarians, they have mastered the art of spatial manipulation, granting them the ability to temporarily fold space, create portals, and shift positions rapidly across the battlefield. Their effectiveness in this regard depends largely on their mana reserves, which determine the scale and range of their spatial abilities.

The Trinarians are also the creators of the wormhole technology utilized by all who have arrived in this area, showcasing their advanced understanding of such mechanisms. This technology, while a few centuries old, indicates that they likely possess even more sophisticated versions that they have yet to release for sale, waiting to extract the maximum potential from it.

However, the Trinarians do have weaknesses. Their abilities typically require calm and focused preparations to execute effectively, as the manipulation of space demands extensive calculations. Consequently, if opponents can disrupt their concentration or create chaos during engagements, they can significantly hinder the Trinarians' ability to utilize their spatial manipulation techniques, leading to vulnerability in battle.

#### Chapter 746 The Top Ten of the Conclave III

While several races in the Conclave embraced biological modifications, the Galvinith followed the most natural path. Their unique power system relies on biological symbiosis, forming a partnership with symbiotic organisms that enhance their physical and mental capabilities without any initial technological intervention. Each Galvinith bonds with a symbiotic creature early in life, choosing based on their highest natural affinity, which grants them specialized abilities like heightened senses, rapid regeneration, extreme agility, or other traits specific to the symbiotes within their system.

While they aren't restricted to their strongest affinity, attempting to bond with a symbiote for which they lack a natural connection can severely hinder their growth or even prevent the symbiosis from taking hold—leading to the host being crippled or killed.

Once the bond is established, the symbiote takes time to adapt to the host. Due to the unique nature of each symbiote, no two Galvinith are alike, and their individuality makes them powerful and unpredictable in combat.

Their greatest vulnerability lies in the symbiote itself. If the symbiote is killed or gravely injured, the host experiences a severe backlash, weakening them until they can find a new symbiote and undergo the adaptation process again. As a result, many powerful Galvinith cultivate relationships with multiple symbiotes, though this requires immense strength to meet the needs of each one without causing conflict. Only after reaching a certain level of power can a Galvinith safely host more than one symbiote.

The more symbiotes a Galvinith bonds with, the more abilities they gain, making them increasingly formidable.

Depending on which symbiotes his Galvinith opponents are bonded with the fight might be the easiest or the hardest but since there was no way for Aron to predict which symbiotes his opponents might wield, he decided to move on and examine the remaining races—all of which had one common focus: magic, a subject in which he was already highly proficient.

Although the remaining two races each specialized in magic, they pursued entirely different paths. The Elara, Xalthar's race, concentrated on using magic to enhance their physical abilities or as a means of attack through powerful spells. In contrast, the Feryn harnessed magic and mana to advance their expertise in magic engineering.

As a result, the Elara were individually powerful, with their warriors either dedicating themselves to enhancing their bodies to the extreme using mana or mastering spellcasting. They embodied the essence of what humanity refers to as knights and mages, closely aligning with those concepts but adapted for a spacefaring civilization.

In contrast, the Feryn's emphasis on magic engineering operated on an entirely different level. Their entire industrial foundation was built upon this discipline, with everything from the knives wielded by their fighters to the weaponry used by their naval fleets stemming from advanced magic engineering.

Their shift toward magic engineering instead of using mana and magic for personal enhancement stemmed from a fundamental limitation: unlike the Elara, the Feryn could not store mana within their bodies for combat or sustain themselves in low-mana environments. This weakness had proven detrimental during their ancient conflicts against the Elara, long before the establishment of the Astral Conclave. As a result, the Feryn were compelled to pivot and focus on developing powerful weapons using their expertise in mana and magic. This strategic shift ultimately enabled them to compete effectively against the Elara, which had long been their goal.

Over the course of a millennium, the paths of the Elara and the Feryn diverged significantly. The Elara continued to emphasize personal enhancement, developing intricate structures and techniques to strengthen their bodies and magical abilities. In contrast, the Feryn completely shifted their focus away from bodily enhancements and personal magic.

Instead, they immersed themselves in magic engineering, integrating it into every aspect of their society. This innovation extended even to their clothing, which featured elements of magic engineering.

As a result, their technology became highly sought after among the other members of the Conclave. Many civilizations were unable to engage in magic engineering, either due to their inability to access mana in the required manner or because they lacked the necessary knowledge, which the Feryn restricted to their own race.

This overview primarily concentrated on the individual characteristics of each race within the Conclave. While it provided some insights into the political tensions—such as the Elara's discriminatory views towards races that lacked the ability to use mana and magic—it also highlighted their belief that they were the rightful masters of these powers in the universe. This belief fueled their ongoing hatred for the Feryn, whom they saw as corrupting the sanctity of mana

and magic by imprisoning them within metals and machines. To the Elara, this practice enabled even those previously rejected by mana to wield its power, which they deemed a desecration.

However, this political context was not particularly relevant to the current situation. Such issues would only become significant once hostilities had ended, and by that time, additional information would likely have surfaced, making the effort to read about these tensions a distraction from the vigilance required in the present moment.

Having finished reviewing the updated information about the top ten civilizations, Aron returned his perception acceleration to normal. Both he and Nova understood the importance of avoiding fatigue, as he needed to maintain maximum readiness.

With his new insights, his perspective on the ongoing attacks shifted; he could now identify the unique patterns in each assault and deduce which civilization's fleet was behind them, or at least infer which civilization had supplied the weaponry used.

"Now we wait," he said, settling back into his chair. He refrained from adding anything to the plan, confident that John and the rest of the military were also briefed on the gathered intelligence. They would leverage this information to tailor their tactics to each civilization and the weapons they deployed, streamlining the process for the breaching forces, who were bearing the brunt of the danger in gathering critical data.

Within this strategy, his only reason for taking action would be if the enemy began deploying their strongest individual forces in significant numbers. Only then would he consider making a decisive move.

And he knew that with each passing second, the moment of confrontation drew closer.

Chapter 747 Nothing Unites People Faster Than Tragedy and Fear

Imperial Territory, Earth.

"Oh my god," Rosemary muttered as she watched the different footage of the ongoing fight. The Empire had made sure to keep its citizens informed, sparing none of the details, yet implementing various filters based on the viewer's age and preferences. This allowed people to tailor their experience—those squeamish about blood wouldn't see it, or would see it in a color other than the familiar red. Children were restricted to distant, animated representations of the battle, keeping them shielded from the brutality. And for those who wanted to see the unfiltered reality, every moment unfolded in its raw, true form.

"But was our military \*this\* strong?" Rosemary asked her husband, her voice tinged with disbelief as she stared at the screen.

Lucas, sitting beside her in the comfort of their home, remained calm as he watched the ongoing broadcast. "Well, it's not like we've had a situation to see the full extent of our military's might until now," he said thoughtfully. "Before this, all we had were reports and assurances, which don't really convince most people. But you have to remember, the Empire was formed \*because\* of the discovery of that oncoming alien fleet. If they couldn't stop them, the Empire would've failed at its very purpose. So, they over-prepared—and it looks like they're making good on that promise."

He glanced at his wife, still wide-eyed in awe, as he continued, "It's the first real test for them, so they're pulling out all the stops."

As they continued watching, the live streams played out almost like a blockbuster movie. The director behind the scenes wasn't a human but an advanced AI, carefully orchestrating every angle, every shot. It ensured that everything critical was visible to the public, while strategically omitting anything that might benefit the enemy if they somehow breached the Empire's network. The result was an intensely engaging experience, keeping viewers absorbed in the spectacle unfolding before them.

For many, this constant stream of action served as a strange comfort. Despite the fact that their world was at war, the absence of any immediate danger in their surroundings made it easy to detach. There were no bomb sirens, no tremors shaking their homes, just footage on a screen. In the absence of physical sensations of war, their minds treated it like another thrilling piece of entertainment. "Out of sight, out of mind," as the saying goes.

The AI, in a way, was doing more than just broadcasting—it was keeping the population calm, keeping fear at bay by wrapping the brutal reality of battle in the familiarity of cinematic storytelling.

Beyond its role in calming the populace, the broadcast also served as a powerful unifying force for humanity. With the looming external threat, people finally found the common enemy they had long speculated about—one that transcended national borders, ideologies, and differences. The realization that they were all in this together, that the rest of the galaxy seemed intent on either killing or enslaving them, had an undeniable effect.

The empire had chosen to fully exploit the situation, knowing that while they could likely have avoided the confrontation, doing so would have required a series of humiliating compromises. Allowing the Astral Conclave's forces to enter their star system and conduct searches for the so-called mana stones would have meant submitting to invasive inspections. Worse yet, such an act might expose their advanced technologies and humanity's unique ability to awaken, likely provoking greed among the Conclave's factions. This could lead to even greater threats, as the various civilizations might turn their attention to fighting over Earth's assets, leaving the empire powerless to resist.

Rather than risk such an outcome, the empire decided it was better to fight from the start. The reasoning was simple: like dealing with a bully, showing submission would only invite more trouble, whereas standing their ground from day one might make the enemy think twice. This approach resonated with many of the empire's citizens who were watching the broadcasts on Earth. From their perspective, the plan seemed to be working as intended. The military's might was on full display, and the situation appeared manageable—as long as no unforeseen complications arose.

While the sentiment on Earth was one of cautious hope, the mood in Proxima Centauri was one of unwavering confidence. The Proximian citizens weren't the least bit worried about the empire losing the battle. Their trust in the empire was absolute, built upon the belief that even in the highly unlikely event of a loss, they were fully prepared to assist, no matter how long it would take to reach the solar system.

Had it not been for the vast distance between the two systems and the long journey required, the Proximians might have been demanding to join the fight immediately. Though not everyone in

Proxima was a soldier, every citizen had been taught to use magic in at least its basic form, ensuring that no one was completely helpless in a crisis. They were also confident that their elders—respected and wise, minus the traitor—would find a way to contribute to the war effort, even if the exact method remained unclear to them. This combination of skill, preparation, and deep-rooted faith in the empire’s strength kept any sense of panic at bay.

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Battlefield.

Despite three relentless days of fighting, nothing seemed to change. Both sides appeared confident that the other would run out of either weapons or soldiers first. However, it was the sheer number of soldiers on the empire's side that caused growing unease among the Conclave civilizations. Each time they successfully eliminated a wave of attackers, more would follow, seemingly endless and with even greater vigor than the last.

What unnerved the Conclave forces most was the unshakable enthusiasm these imperial soldiers displayed. It was as if they had no regard for their own lives, charging forward without hesitation.

The smaller civilizations and organizations that had allied with each other for a piece at the table were bearing the brunt of the empire's relentless assault. Many of them had already lost a significant number of ships to these fearless imperial soldiers. Even in cases where they managed to clear their vessels of the invaders, their ships were often left in a severely damaged state. Frequently, they were forced to decouple sections of their ships to prevent the soldiers, who were swiftly advancing toward control rooms, from taking over completely.

The insanity of these imperial troops didn’t stop there. In instances where they did gain control of a ship but couldn't use it to attack their foes, they would simply blow it up, ensuring that the Conclave forces couldn’t reclaim or reuse it. The empire's soldiers showed a terrifying disregard for life—both their own and their enemies—and they made it clear that, if they couldn’t win, they would take their opponents down with them.

The only factions managing to hold their ground amidst the chaos were the top ten civilizations, each of whom employed their own advanced methods for dealing with the relentless breachers. While they did lose a few smaller ships, these losses were inconsequential compared to the devastating damage they had taken during the initial attack, which had been five times worse. This was why they were determined to hold out; they needed to annihilate the enemy and secure their hands on the true prize.

The true prize was no longer the mana stones they had originally come for. Now, their focus had shifted to the empire’s technology, which was even more valuable. The ability to create black holes at will was an equilibrium-shattering power, a force that could be used to coerce or dominate others with little resistance. This technology held a significance comparable to the wormhole tech once pioneered by the Trinarians, a discovery that had rewritten the balance of power across the galaxy. Gaining control of such a weapon would make them unstoppable, allowing them to secure anything they desired without fear of opposition.

Chapter 748 The Voice of Reason

By the sixth day, the Empire had succeeded in obliterating many of the smaller organizations that had allied with the weaker civilizations, pushing those civilizations themselves to the brink of destruction.

However, the Empire wasn't unscathed either. They had lost nearly five hundred and fifty thousand ships, along with over seven billion breaching pods destroyed before they could even make it aboard enemy vessels.

Realizing the escalating toll, the opposition began to scale back their aggressive expenditure of weapons. It became clear that the Empire's arsenal was far from running dry—its seemingly endless supply of firepower suggested that they had prepared for a protracted conflict, and this forced the other side to reconsider their approach. Their hope of outlasting the Empire in a battle of attrition was dwindling as it became evident that they might run out of weapons before their opponent even showed signs of slowing down.

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"I think we need to act decisively, or we'll end up retreating with nothing but losses—and leaving behind an enemy with terrifying weapons," Xylor, the Zelvora fleet commander, said, his expression grim as he sifted through the six days' worth of battle data they had gathered.

The Zelvora, thanks to their unique ability to create a mental network that allowed for coordinated, unified attacks, had fared better than most. Their combined efforts had enabled them to generate a massive shield around their fleet, protecting them from much of the carnage that followed the Empire's devastating black hole attack. As a result, they were one of the few fleets that had sustained minimal losses during the brutal tit-for-tat exchanges.

"Based on their craziness, they'll destroy their entire star system before accepting defeat," Liasas remarked, recalling the extreme and reckless tactics their enemies had displayed.

"You're right," Zorvas agreed. "But from what we've seen, I actually think they might be worthy of joining the Conclave. If we can convince both sides to end the hostilities and cooperate, we can prevent them from annihilating themselves if they lose, limit our own losses, and still gain access to these so-called mana stones."

Liasas frowned. "But will they even listen? The Vlathorins will see any form of negotiation as dishonorable. And the Xor'Vak? They'll only agree if they believe the other side is strong enough to justify a treaty. Then, of course, there's the chance the Empire's leaders are just as unstable as their soldiers, and won't accept peace even if it means risking total destruction."

Her words cast a shadow over the discussion, highlighting the deep uncertainty surrounding any potential resolution.

When those in Zelvora's mental network heard her reasoning, a brief silence followed as they collectively considered how to address the potential deal-breakers. Thanks to their interconnected minds, the Zelvora were one of the few species whose entire race shared a unified sense of logic and understanding. There were no misunderstandings, distortions, or miscommunications—issues that often fractured other races. This seamless connection allowed them to always arrive at the most rational decisions, ensuring the best possible outcomes while minimizing losses.



As a result, the Zelvora had earned their reputation as the voice of reason among most Conclave members.

"How about we just give everyone what they want while also ending the conflict now, without inflicting further damage on the fleets and their people?" someone proposed in the network, breaking the momentary silence.

"And how do you plan to accomplish that, Tylar?" Liasas inquired, acknowledging the suggester while emphasizing the hierarchy within their society. By stating his name, Liasas granted him permission to speak, a necessary protocol given the structure of the Zelvora.

In their society, names ending with -an or -en indicated low-ranking individuals, such as civilians, recruits, or workers. Those with names ending in -ar or -orn were mid-ranking skilled professionals, while -as or -or denoted high-ranking commanders and elite leaders. The suffix -ath or -is indicated noble ranks, including lords and governors, whereas -on or -yx was reserved for royal lineage or rulers, signifying ultimate authority.

This hierarchy meant that Tylar held a rank below all those currently speaking, so Liasas needed to grant him permission to share his ideas. Without such acknowledgment, Tylar would not have been allowed to continue.

"As you previously mentioned, while bringing forth this agreement seems to be the best possible outcome from this situation, limiting losses to the current ones, the two hot-headed races are unlikely to accept it as it stands. There's also a chance that the other side won't agree. What if we frame it in a way that leads to a win-win situation for everyone involved? The Valthorins would have the chance to redeem their pride, the Xor'Vaks would have the opportunity to face a formidable foe, and the opposing side would avoid the annihilation of their civilization while gaining a path to join the Conclave."

As he recounted this lengthy yet seemingly redundant analysis, no one interrupted him; they recognized this was his moment to gain recognition from the higher-ups. They allowed him to elaborate as long as he presented a solid idea at the end. However, if he wasted everyone's time with a foolish proposal, he would face the consequences.

Finally, he transitioned to his core idea. "All of these strong-headed races share a common trait: they respond to powerful individuals. So, why not establish a framework that capitalizes on this?"

"We establish an agreement that clearly outlines how the two sides will interact, covering essential aspects such as who the empire can sell the mana stones to, at what price, and other relevant terms. Most factions on our side will agree to this framework, leaving the Valthorins and Xor'Vaks in a position where they cannot refuse outright.

For these two groups, we present an opportunity to face the strongest individuals from the other side. This could serve as a means for them to redeem their honor or simply to engage with formidable opponents. In exchange, should they lose, they will have to forfeit certain benefits. However, if they emerge victorious, they will either gain equal or slightly greater benefits than the rest of us.

"Once our side has reached an agreement, we will inform the empire that we have crafted a deal beneficial for both parties. At the same time, we should issue a warning: since they possess what we desire, we will relentlessly pursue them, regardless of how many times they manage to thwart us, until we achieve their annihilation should they refuse our offer.

If they express interest in our proposal, we will present them with the initial terms, which will be slightly exploitative in nature—terms they are unlikely to accept. Once they express their unwillingness, we can then provide them with an opportunity to negotiate terms if they agree to face our chosen challengers which will be the Valthorins and the Xor’Vaks.

We can leverage the other side's lack of knowledge about the Conclave to create the impression that they stand a chance of winning or that the fight will be closely contested. This will allow them to negotiate the terms based on their potential victory or defeat, encouraging them to raise the stakes willingly.

This approach will lead them to believe that, depending on what they decide to stake, they could secure the most favorable deal if they win. While the agreement may turn more exploitative if they lose, the potential gains will likely overshadow their concerns about what they stand to lose if they fail. In either scenario, we will benefit from the arrangement, ensuring that our interests are protected regardless of the outcome.

If they agree and negotiate the rewards, we can solidify the arrangement by signing a mana oath, ensuring they cannot back out once they witness the true strength of our two races and come to realize their likelihood of losing.

That’s my proposal; feel free to use it as a template and adjust it as needed to fit the circumstances with the information you have at hand."

With that, he concluded, feeling elated at having captured the attention of everyone in the network—an achievement he could chase for the rest of his life.

#### Chapter 749 Greed: The Mother of Ruin

There was another wave of silence in the network. This time, it wasn’t due to waiting for another recommendation, but because everyone was processing how the suggested plan could be advantageous, how it might be implemented, how it could potentially backfire, what adjustments were necessary, and whether a better alternative existed.

"Although it’s crude, the plan has some usable parts that can work for now," Zorvas finally said, breaking the contemplative silence.

Following his comment, the network quickly began to generate suggestions for modifying the proposed plan. With their collective mental connection, the modifications happened at an impressive speed. Within about twenty minutes, the original plan was barely recognizable, having undergone several significant revisions.

The higher-ups then carefully reviewed the final version to ensure no critical aspects had been overlooked, although it was unlikely at this point. After the review, Liasas spoke up, "I'll take care of informing the other civilizations."

With that, she disconnected from the current mental network and created a new one. This time, her focus was on including the leadership of various fleets from other civilizations. A few minutes after

initiating the expansion, she had successfully pulled in all the key figures who could make such a significant decision without needing to report to higher authorities, as they had been granted full autonomy for long-range missions like this. As long as the objectives were met, they wouldn't face any reprimands for their actions.

"I really hate this," muttered a representative of the Shadari Forces, as he found himself suddenly pulled into a mockup meeting room. Instantly recognizing what had happened, his disdain was palpable. The Shadari, masters of stealth, loathed nothing more than being thrust into situations they did not fully control.

What made the Zelvora so dangerous—and equally unsettling to the rest of the Conclave—was their unparalleled mastery of mental warfare. Most other races in the Conclave had evolved with a focus on physical conflict, leaving them vulnerable to mental intrusions. Although countermeasures had been developed to fend off such attacks, they required immense mental fortitude to be effective. Even so, these defensive strategies only amplified one's baseline mental defenses, making those with weak minds more susceptible to being overwhelmed.

In this case, many of the representatives had been preoccupied with physical threats and the damage dealt by ongoing battles. They never anticipated an attack on their mental state during such a precarious time. As a result, they were plucked right out of their tasks and into this network without warning.

Though this forced gathering was irritating to most, they refrained from voicing their displeasure openly. The representatives knew that if the Zelvora had wanted to harm them, they could have done so by exploiting this momentary lapse. Instead, the Zelvora had simply created a private mental network, not illusions or an assault despite doing so being extremely difficult and mental energy-intensive due to the vast distance.

Those drawn into the network could leave it at any time, which tempered their irritation. After all, they knew the Zelvora only summoned these mental meetings when there was something beneficial to propose for all involved.

Even the top ten civilizations, who had more sway, opted to remain silent, knowing it would do little good to complain. They left the habitual bickering between the Shadari and the Zelvora to continue as usual.

"But why are two members missing?" an Erythian representative asked, glancing around. It was uncharacteristic not to hear complaints from the Valthorins, who often saw such mental intrusions as an affront to their honor, and the Xor'Vaks who found it disgraceful.

"We need to reach an agreement before we can contact them," Liasas stated, cutting off any potential reactions. Without waiting for their responses, she immediately began outlining the plan in full detail.

The moment they heard the plan, all their previous frustration about being pulled away from their work vanished. The Zelvora had just offered them a way out of the chaotic situation they were trapped in. They also understood why the Valthorins and Xor'Vaks were not included in the discussion. While the Valthorins were known for scheming, they would never do it openly, and in

order to protect their honor, they would likely oppose the plan. The Xor'Vaks, on the other hand, weren't as invested in such political maneuvering, but their exclusion made sense due to their predictable nature.

Seeing a path forward, the representatives quickly got to work, each eager to contribute suggestions. However, some grew greedy, attempting to shape the plan in ways that would secure more benefits for their own civilizations. In this mix of self-interest, it became clear that the most powerful factions would ultimately set the rules. After some debate and compromises among the strongest civilizations, it was agreed: that each group could send their challengers to face off against the Empire's champions. If their champions won, their civilization would gain a more favorable deal within the agreement. If they lost, they would receive the baseline benefits initially proposed.

The situation had now evolved beyond just giving the two stubborn civilizations a face-off to satisfy their egos and recover their honor. Now, any civilization that believed they had strong fighters could participate, offering their champions a chance to win additional advantages for their people.

At the same time, the deal was structured in such a way that if the Empire's champions emerged victorious overall, they would gain a massive advantage in the final agreement—as it needed to be structured that way to make it enticing enough for the Empire to agree to the terms.

While their greed opened the door for the Empire to become the largest beneficiary if things played out in a certain way, none of them believed that outcome was even remotely possible. Despite already overestimating the Empire, none of the representatives considered for a second that their civilizations could lose. They were not sending their average forces; they were sending their strongest, most elite warriors.

"Now that we have come to an agreement, I will inform our two friends and secure their acceptance before approaching the Empire," Xylor finally spoke up, breaking his silence since the start of the meeting. "Once we have their agreement, we'll entice the Empire into accepting the deal and allow for some minor adjustments on their part. After that, we can update everyone on whether the plan succeeds or not. We should have the results within a few days."

With that, the private mental network was promptly dissolved, and everyone returned to their respective tasks.

#### Chapter 750 A short meeting

The situation on the field remained largely unchanged, with both sides maintaining their strategies. The opposing forces, however, began to shift tactics, focusing on conserving their weaponry. This cautious approach lasted until the early hours of the seventh day, when an unexpected change unfolded, altering the course of the battle.

{Sir, they are attempting to initiate communications with us,} Nova's voice echoed, pulling Aron's attention away from the display tracking the war's intricate data streams.

Aron paused for a moment, processing the unexpected shift. "Okay, that wasn't on the top of my list. So, what are they trying to communicate to us?"

{They are suggesting we initiate a temporary cease-fire in order to discuss what they want to propose,} Nova replied, materializing the contract in front of him. The terms were clear: the cease-fire would take effect the moment the agreement was signed, halting all hostilities for either one week or until a settlement was reached, whichever came first.

The contract was clear-cut, leaving no visible loopholes to exploit. It even preempted the possibility of the empire dragging out the ceasefire indefinitely without resolution. Aron narrowed his eyes as he scanned the terms, considering the potential benefits and risks.

After a brief moment of contemplation, he summoned a meeting with the heads of the various ministries, intending to hear their perspectives and weigh their opinions on the proposed ceasefire before coming to a decision.

"Let's see what everyone thinks," Aron muttered to himself, preparing for the discussions that would soon follow.

"It could be that they're nearing the depletion of their weapons and trying to buy time for reinforcements. By the end of the week, it will have been two weeks—the same amount of time it took them to respond to Xalthar's call for help," Youssef speculated, thinking about how he might use this situation to his advantage.

Jeremy, who had been listening closely, countered, "But the intel we've gathered clearly shows that most of them are incapable of creating another wormhole or fielding a force of this size again in such a short period. Doing so would cripple their economies. If that's the case, only the top superpowers would benefit from a ceasefire. So why would the rest agree, when it means losing their chance to compete for the mana stones in this star system?"

Youssef, quick to follow up, said, "What if the top powers made a deal with the smaller factions? In exchange for their cooperation, they offer them a share of the star system. Given their weakened state, it might be the best proposal for those on their last legs, securing a portion of the spoils despite their current limitations."

Aron turned his attention to the man who had been managing the situation for the past three weeks. His insight carried more weight than the others due to his direct involvement.

"What do you think?" Aron asked, seeking a final perspective.

The man paused for a moment before responding. "If our concern is that they're trying to buy time for reinforcements, we can address that by shortening the time frame in the ceasefire agreement. If they resist or negotiate aggressively to extend it, we'll have a clearer sense of their intentions.

Even if they manage to bring in reinforcements, our own are already positioned and won't face trouble extending the conflict. So, from that angle, we're safe. Plus, a temporary ceasefire could benefit us as well. Our soldiers could use the recovery time and the opportunity to digest the experience they've gained from the battle. It could strengthen our position."

John's tone shifted to a more tactical consideration. "We can also address our concerns within the ceasefire contract itself—have both sides swear a mana oath and sign a runic agreement to prevent any breach of trust. This would allow us to maintain our vigilance while also gaining breathing room."

John's response balanced the concerns raised by Youssef and Jeremy, providing a clear solution for each point, while he left the final decision in Aron's hands, confident that he had accounted for all of the possible outcomes.

The two ministers nodded in agreement with John's suggestions, signaling that the proposal had solid backing. Now, it was up to Aron to give his final decision.

"Let's proceed with this plan," Aron said after a brief pause. "But leave the period at seven days."

A ripple of surprise passed through the room, visible on the faces of the human ministers. However, Aron pressed on, unfazed.

"Include clauses that ensure no new vessels or individuals from the Conclave—or anyone in contact with them—can enter this sector to provide aid during the ceasefire. The agreement will be bound by a mana oath and signed through our own means of assurance to prevent any underhanded tactics from either side."

Upon hearing Aron's reasoning and realizing they had a solid means of preventing the other side from exploiting their extensive experience with mana oaths, the ministers' earlier concerns began to fade. With their confidence restored and a clear course of action outlined, John, in conjunction with the military AIs, immediately got to work initiating the negotiation process.

It took a full day before both sides reached a temporary ceasefire agreement that they were mutually satisfied with. This lengthy negotiation underscored the reality that any proposals moving forward would likely require more than a few days to finalize. Despite that, the outcome would either be an agreement that left both sides feeling content, an outcome where one side is happy and other disgruntled or a resolution that left both slightly disgruntled.

Alternatively, they might choose to wait for the ceasefire period to expire, leading to a return to fighting until one side decides that the conflict was no longer worth the effort and either call for further negotiations, retreat, or surrender if push come to shove.

Once the terms were agreed upon, both sides had to send representatives to the center of the conflict, where hostilities had momentarily ceased to facilitate the situation. This was crucial for the swearing of the mana oath and the signing of a runic contract. The mana oath could be performed regardless of distance, allowing for a flexible assurance of commitment. However, the runic contract mandated a physical presence, as it had to be signed on a specially prepared document.