

## Chapter 924 Assault

*“What do you mean?”* Ilea sent. *“He’s ready?”*

*“Not for what he has in mind, but yes. This mesh can start an Extraction at this very moment, should the Architect wish it so,”* Vor Elenthir spoke.

*“You have the locations?”* Erik sent, his voice tense.

*“We do,”* Nes answered.

*“This complicates things,”* Vor Elenthir sent. *“But I suppose we are lucky that he developed this new method. A wish for perfection perhaps.”*

*“It may not be just that,”* Nes said. *“This realm and the Extraction have caused Ravana to be destroyed.”*

*“You suggest emotion?”* Vor asked.

*“We can discuss the motivations of your ancient acquaintances at a later time. If we have the data, we should leave, and prevent this Extraction from taking place,”* Erik sent.

*“We have what we need,”* Iana sent. *“Let us leave.”*

*“Ilea. You have the honors,”* Erik sent.

Ilea glanced at the floating data before it vanished. *It’s ready. He could just take it. Pluck a sun from the skies.* She herself could summon a storm of volcanic ash, had seen Kohr and Erendar, the astral spirits and the eclipse. She knew what powerful magic could cause, and yet it still sounded absurd to her. *“Let’s get everyone back then. And get this started.”*

Teleportation activated and the entire infiltration team appeared in the North, at the outskirts of the Meadow’s domain.

A moment later, they were moved down and into the massive meeting hall, all the representatives waiting, conversations dying down the moment they appeared.

*“Well done,”* the Meadow sent, voice tense. *“I’m receiving all the information at this moment.”*

Ilea cracked her neck. *“It seems pretty dire.”*

*“Not as dire as it could’ve been without our presence. To even entertain... such meaningless destruction of life and consciousness. We will destroy the mesh, and we will find Ker Velor.”*

Things moved fast. Ilea saw the focused expressions of everyone present, she saw the now expanding map of Elos, dozens of red dots appearing as the Ascended and Iana shared what they had found in the Varitan Sphere.

*“The mesh of Ker Velor was infiltrated successfully. There is enough mana gathered for an Extraction of our second sun. All facility locations have been found and marked. My machines are set to reach and dig down to every target on this continent. Out of one hundred and eighty three total facilities, we must destroy a minimum of twenty two or destroy the mana gathered within to make an Extraction impossible. We will aim for fifty eight, to reduce the risk of calculation errors as close to zero as possible,”* Aki spoke.

Silence followed for a moment as everyone processed what he had said. Then the first voices spoke up, silenced a moment later by the Meadow.

*“We hereby declare a threat warning of level ten. All forces of the Accords will be mobilized. All of our available and suitable resources will be focused on the destruction of these facilities. The Sentinel of Akelion will organize everyone into strike teams and will instruct you individually.*

*“I remind everyone that level ten means an existential threat to our realm. Individual security of persons and settlements is to be considered as a secondary notion. All council members retain their right to veto these decisions, but we will continue with this operation until a vote has passed, and after, with the resources available to those parties not confirming to a veto.”*

The hall exploded into motion and conversation, people moved into groups as instructed by the Executioners, more machines appearing now as mobile teleportation platforms were set up.

“What about evacuation?” Alistair shouted over the noise.

*“The Extraction can be executed at any moment, and once it starts, there is no stopping it. Detection by the Architect would be catastrophic. While it is possible but unlikely that Ker Velor has infiltrated the organizations present in this hall, the chance of detection is vastly greater when a mass evacuation is taking place. With an Extraction ready, every second is vital. We cannot take that risk.”*

Alistair stood between the rushing people, lost as he watched the chaos ensue.

*Individual peoples and settlements are secondary,* Ilea thought, her breathing picking up as she watched the map with a hundred and eighty three red dots. Many were not on the continent of Elos at all, but deep below the oceans, or faraway and likely inside of undiscovered landmasses.

*He built all of that. Himself. And he’s going for something even worse than a normal Extraction.*

She resented the fact that she had fought him before, and that she had failed to kill him.

*Next time, I won’t let you escape.*

“Ilea. You are strike team seven,” the Meadow sent into her mind.

“Who else is part of it?”

“Nobody else. Just you,” the Meadow sent. “Your copies will be strike teams nine, thirteen, and eighteen, Aki will take you through the distribution and instructions you should imbue them with.”

“How do I destroy a facility?” she sent.

“You break in, any means, find the gathered mana, and ignite it with your flames. Or you destroy enough halls and the central Varitan Sphere to either disconnect it from the mesh or damage it beyond use. We have maps of the layouts. I suggest you go for the mana, compared to most, you should survive or be able to escape an ignition.”

“Should,” Ilea sent.

“Should,” the Meadow confirmed.

Ilea cracked her knuckles. “Where to?”

*“Forces are being moved and access tunnels will be dug. We expect the operation to commence in around forty eight minutes. Aki has instructed you should collect a Watcher next to your anchor at the edge of my domain. He will guide you to your first target.”*

*“My first?”*

*“Those of the previous infiltration team who are not part of strike team themselves will be sent to additional locations. You will teleport to each one in a sequence Aki will share, to destroy additional facilities while the other strike teams attack theirs. And please set another anchor right here.*

*“How many do you expect me to destroy?”* Ilea set her last Teleportation anchor before she deactivated her resistance and was moved out.

*“As many as you can,”* the Meadow answered.

*“Ready to move, first to Iz,”* Aki spoke through the floating Watcher.

Ilea grabbed on and opened a gate. She could see as near all of her marks started moving throughout the lands, teleporting hundreds of kilometers in various directions.

Iz didn't seem any different than usual, people walking on the streets, laughter and music resounding as the strike teams gathered and moved throughout the lands, the operation unknown to the peoples of the Accords or anyone else. She saw the central sphere, golden and protected by the four mark Core Guardians.

*“Heron was with us. Does Alyris and Virilya know that this is happening?”* Ilea asked the Watcher, flying in the direction Aki indicated.

*“All allied leaders will be informed as soon as the strike teams start their assault. To prepare an evacuation in case of our failure or retaliation by Ker Velor. Heron Krahen has complied with this decision,”* Aki sent.

Ilea summoned her copies and separated them as Aki instructed her. The infusion was simple. Breach the facility, ignite the collected mana or destroy everything if such is impossible. Start when Aki tells them to start.

She stepped on the gate prepared for her, the Watcher held below her arm and her resistance disabled. *“What happens if we fail?”*

*“We won't,”* Aki sent as the gate activated.

A moment later, they appeared in the Sava desert, far in the west and south of the continent. *“Your flight speed should make this simple enough. Make sure to protect the Watcher.”*

Ilea looked out into the desert, seeing the evening suns low on the horizon. A warm breeze flowed through her hair. A moment later, her ash scale armor formed atop.

Focusing on the mark left on Felicia, she sent her message. *“Something big happening. Can't share more. Be prepared for anything, and stay safe.”*

She waited for a long moment, before the answer reached her.

*“I'm always prepared, Ilea. Don't worry about me. And dear? Show them what you can do.”*

Ilea took in a deep breath and smiled, extending her armor to the machine as she spread her wings. She ascended, magic thrumming through her ash before she flew off towards the south.

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Trian watched the hovering map, standing next to Claire as they waited. Many had remained, not powerful enough to be part of a strike team, either unable to get past the expected traps and void creatures, let alone strong enough to breach the facilities in the first place. Glowing blue dots had joined the red ones, all of them moving throughout the lands as the operation commenced.

He knew that one of them was Ilea. Three more included Sentinels. And eighteen more had Sentinels on standby, to remain nearby in case of heavy injuries. Teleportation gates would be set up at near all of the locations, and high level machines would support the teams.

He felt a hand touch his shoulder and looked at Claire.

She smiled and moved her attention back to the map. “This is what we all built. We will not let him take anything else from this realm.”

Trian thought back to his time in Kohr. He remembered the barren landscape, the salt stone, the demons all throughout. *What had it looked like before?*

He thought about the North, and the ancient kingdoms that had once been there. Lost to ruin and history.

And yet he couldn't help but smile, despite everything. The Ascended had come here to use their technology. They had faced the Taleen, the human nations, and elven fighters, all invading their realm in retaliation. And yet around him stood those same beings, and many more, not united here to retaliate or out of fear.

*All perhaps because of you*, he thought, reminded of the first time he had met her. When he had joined the Shadow's Hand. He sighed, knowing now how little he had known. About life and about the world.

And now here he stood, among creatures he had not known existed. Elves, exiled by their brothers. Taleen, thought lost and freed again. The machines they left behind, retaken to fight this battle, and many more to come. Mava and Vampires from the west, connected to their own peoples now through the gates made by the Accords, and the Meadow. He thought about everything that could become possible in the coming years and decades. The potential of his students. The potential for humanity and all the species in the Accords.

And she would be there, at the forefront of it all.

They could not fail. Would, not fail.

“*Twenty six minutes until all strike teams should be in position,*” the Meadow's voice spoke into his mind. “*We suggest all remaining council members to return to their respective settlements and prepare. For anything.*”

Trian put on his helmet and smiled. “I suppose that's us.”

War machines moved out, Dark Ones vanishing, humans moving towards the gates.

Claire stretched before her battle armor appeared. “I never liked preparing for *anything*. It’s such a vague term.”

“And yet you’re always prepared for everything,” Trian spoke as they made their way to the gates.

“I try. But then the world always finds a way to surprise me,” Claire said.

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Ilea held on and helped as the Executioner before her dug into the sand. They soon reached rock, the sands closing in behind them.

“*Two hundred meters to go,*” Aki sent as his void magic charged.

Ilea waved her hand, Cosmic Deconstruction dissolving several meters of rock.

The green eyed machine glanced at her.

“*What?*” she sent, conjuring another wave into the rock.

“*Why am I here again?*” the Executioner sent.

Ilea still held on to the Watcher.

“*To make sure I don’t damage the facility and alert the Architect,*” Ilea sent, gesturing to send out another wave.

Aki motioned for her to do so, the two continuing for a few minutes until he stopped her.

“*Just ten meters to go. Let me excavate it. You better stay at a distance. Your insane magical presence may trigger something in itself.*”

Ilea waited, forming a solid wall of volcanic glass behind her to stop the sands from moving in. Securing everything against the walls of their makeshift cavern, she waited.

“*Let me show you the layout again,*” Aki sent, a holographic image appearing in front of the Watcher’s green eye.

“*How much time left?*” Ilea asked as she watched the Executioner cut away chunks of rock into nothing.

“*Five minutes,*” Aki sent.

She breathed in and focused on the hologram. The mana collection dome sat at the center of it all. Built not for efficient gathering like the previous mesh of the Olym Arcena, but for security.

*Fifty eight of those. And we need to destroy over twenty before Ker Velor reacts, travels here, and activates the Extraction.*

“*Are you sure this is possible? I doubt many in the Accords have the power to even break through the metal. I could teleport around and move your machines past the walls.*”

*“You’re not the only one with magic, Ilea. Getting past the walls is the main priority of most strike teams, to let in my Hunter Praetorians.”*

*“Praetorians?”*

*“Yes. Their core explosions are particularly powerful and disruptive to such a high amount of densely gathered mana.”*

She smiled. *“You’re really throwing everything in there. Didn’t expect you to use your machines as mere bombs.”*

*“A small price to pay. We have to be quick,”* the Watcher sent, just as the Executioner uncovered steel.

*All just buried in random locations throughout the world. How are we supposed to defend against this?*

Ilea focused. Her Meditation was ready, as were all of her spells.

*“Your other locations are ready as well. Nine in total, but I doubt you’ll get to all of them.”*

She just had to make sure to get rid of all the heat she generated before she teleported to the next person.

*“Two minutes.”*

Ilea cracked her neck and knuckles. She rolled her shoulders and felt her mana, her spells, and her surroundings. *“Give me the seconds once we reach ten.”*

*“Yes, ma’am.”*

She waited until the machine spoke up once more.

*“To all strike teams of the Accords. This is the Sentinel of Akelion. Gather your spells and powers. One minute until we begin our assault on the mesh of Ker Velor. Whatever you find within, whatever stands in your way. Do not fear. Do not falter. For the peoples in our homes. For all life in this realm. And for all life that will be. You are chosen. In this moment.*

*“When ten seconds have passed. Our attack begins. Ten. Nine. Eight. Seven. Six. Five. Four. Three. Two-*

Ilea activated her Fourth Tier of Meditation. True Reconstruction followed right after, as heat started to gather within her.

*“... One-”*

Ilea willed her perception to spike.

*“Start.”*

The Primordial Flame burst to life on her armor. Cosmic energies flowed through her every cell as her magic charged. Teleportation brought her past the steel wall, no enchantments present able to keep her out. She saw the hall beyond, saw as the creatures within remained motionless still, the light of her flames reaching them as the defensive enchantments burst to life all around. A second teleport brought her down into the facility. Deeper still. More traps activated, blinding light that burned against her fires with no effect. The third spell brought her out into the gathering dome, this one larger and more complex than the last few she had seen. Thousands of runes etched into the

steel walls. She felt the dense mana all around, remembering how painful it had been to channel everything through herself back in the Descent.

Ilea didn't wait. She summoned heat and fire.

The world turned white as all the gathered mana ignited in an instant, the sound deafening, the light blinding, the magic so intense even her domain did not allow her to see. She felt the heat and wild arcane powers. Deactivating most of her spells, she focused on her first mark. Teleportation activated as the edges of the gathered mana burst into fire.

Ilea appeared a moment later, her perception spike gone and another instantly following, enough time passed for her Teleportation to be back and fully charged. She didn't linger near the shrouded mage, instantly teleporting past the wall and traps, down once more into the the second dome. Fire and heat spread out, igniting the sea of mana, as if summoning a star into the darkness.

Eight seconds had elapsed when she appeared at her third facility.

Twelve seconds had passed at her fourth.

She stopped counting after six.

By now, she could tell that all of her copies had gone, likely ignited themselves.

Time and time again, she felt her own resources flash away in the fire of burning mana, and still, she had more. More to give. More to teleport. More to destroy. She reached her last mark, moved past the wall, found the sea of mana, and set it aflame.

As the light and heat engulfed her, Ilea focused on the anchor at the edge of the Meadow's domain. She appeared and felt the connection.

*"All ten ignited. Could go for more. How are we looking?"* she sent, seeing the dissipating fires around her, her ash scale armor mostly gone, her dragon set below singed but recovering.

*"Reports coming in. Two strike teams still penetrating the walls, four more were stopped before reaching the collection domes. Fifty two detonations. Confirming ignitions,"* the Meadow sent to her.

Ilea felt some of the weight fall away. The Meadow didn't even send her out again. She gulped, not sure what to do with her arms. Seconds passed, all her spells still active. She didn't dare deactivate them now. Not yet.

*"Fifty two ignitions confirmed. Last two teams have broken through as well. Ignitions imminent."*

Ilea sighed and fell down on her ass.

*"The mesh is taken out,"* the Meadow sent.

*"Well done, strike teams."*

Ilea punched the air and grinned, releasing Meditation and True reconstruction, seven arcane shields flaring to life around her. She looked at the two suns hanging in the skies. "Your asses stay up there."

She blinked her eyes.

Then squinted.

*"Meadow,"* she sent, her stomach dropping. *"Why is the sun flickering?"*