

Chapter 925 Sun

Ilea looked at the suns.

One of them flickered yet again. She felt the winds change, a powerful breeze flowing past. She could feel the mana in the air. Thrumming. Charged.

“It’s...” the Meadow sent.

“*Tell me!*” Ilea shouted in her mind, standing now as she reached her hands up to her head.

“*The mesh is destroyed... this is... an Extraction has been initiated. It’s starting.*”

Ilea turned her Fourth Tier Meditation back on. She lowered her hands and ripped her gaze away from the suns. She felt another thrum flow through the vicinity. “*Then start the evacuation. Now!*”

“*It just started. Ilea I...*”

“*Where do I go?*” she sent and looked at her marks. A hot breeze hit her, cinders searing the ground. *Fuck it. To everyone who doesn’t know. “We failed. An Extraction has been initiated. Go to a shelter. Now. Evacuation has started. Answer for help only.”*

“*There is chaos everywhere... measurements are spiking...*” the Meadow’s words came to her mind, a rumbling noise resounding from a distant mountain.

“*Meadow. Where do I go?*”

“*Riverwatch. Then Virilya. Then Dawntree. We will use your marks to contact you as we can,*” the Meadow spoke as the ground shook. “*Good luck.*”

Ilea focused on her anchor, biting her lip and finding her breathing erratic. She forced herself to calm, taking one single long breath right before her spell activated. The air was hot. She squinted her eyes, and got to work.

Nes appeared outside of the destroyed facility, sand trickling down into the deep tunnel. Her steel showed scrapes and one deep cut. It would take time to recover. At least the Praetorians had done their job. The mana was gone. She found Scipio and the Executioner standing a dozen meters out, strong winds moving over the dunes.

The others weren’t looking at her, instead focused on the suns.

A voice spoke into her mind just as she saw one of the stars flicker. “*We failed. An Extraction has been initiated. Go to a shelter. Now. Evacuation has started. Answer for help only.*”

She stopped, Ilea's voice like an echo in her mind. Looking northwards, she could feel the pressure in the air change. A storm was coming.

We... we failed?

She looked at the flickering sun as her mind sped up. They had found the facilities, had ignited the mana. Too many were destroyed. Far more than needed. An Extraction was not possible. It wasn't. She knew it.

Her mind halted. She looked at the suns one more time. "We did not fail..." she murmured.

"No," the Executioner said.

A strong gust of wind sent sand over the dunes. Nes raised her hands as mana flowed through her, her own magic calming the winds nearby.

Scipio raised his arm to block the sand and chuckled to himself, the sound dry. "He built two. He built two of them, Nes." he glanced back at her.

Seeing the terror in his face, Nes gathered her magic.

Once more, she was glad for the Accords, their research and remaining Navuun safe for now, with the Meadow. They were looking at the start of a cataclysm.

She flew close to Scipio and grabbed his hand, then looked over to the silver machine. "Aki, where do you need us?"

Cless stood atop the northernmost mountain peak near Morhill. Before her floated a large canvas, and her arms were crossed. "Why is it so difficult to capture the vastness of the ocean?" she asked, hoping that some fae or other strange creature would deliver her an ancient secret.

It was frustrating.

Waves. Just waves, and storms. It was easy enough to paint. But to capture? No. Some of her attempts were passable. But nothing truly captured it. That feeling. She sighed and fell down onto her back, floating just before she hit the rocks. Rolling around a few times, she noticed something strange.

She sat up and held up a hand to cover her eyes.

Is the sun okay?

"Are you okay?" she shouted towards the distant star. One of them at least. Perhaps it was sick? No. stars didn't get sick, at least that's what any teacher would tell her, she knew. But perhaps they did get sick. Maybe they were just a cluster of fae clusters clustered together? Who could really know until she flew there herself and saw it.

Another flicker and she staggered back, the hairs on her neck stood up. *Something's wrong.*

She felt the air, as if it thickened. She felt the fabric. Something was strange. Wrong. Terribly wrong. And it was getting worse. She felt her throat tighten, tears welling up in her eyes. “Mom!” she called out, looking around. “Dad!” she shouted. Cless breathed fast, summoning her book and storing the canvas. *Something is happening. Something.*

She saw the distant lands. Saw the oceans rage. She stopped, holding her breath as the winds changed. A trembling roar and the lands split. A single crack, right down the middle, hundreds of kilometers away. From the coast down into the land, as if some god had struck down with an invisible sword. A vast chasm that broadened and raged, storm clouds gathering far out in the ocean. Lightning cracked. Not blue, like she had seen here before, but purple. Purple like in the north.

Felicia ground her teeth as she flew through the city. Bells rang all throughout the capital, calling for evacuation. She heard the screams and shouts from below. Panic was building. Fast. People pointed at the suns. They felt the strange magical pressure. But she was more concerned about the winds. This was just the beginning. *There are not enough shelters. Not enough people acting now, moving now.*

They needed help, but she knew that this was happening everywhere. No help would arrive. Not for some time, and she wouldn't call for Ilea, she knew she had her hands full. *Do what you can. Here and now*, she told herself and landed atop a roof near the busiest street she could find. People were staring, conversing, some shouting. Too few were running. “To the shelters!” she shouted. “Move!” She grit her teeth when too few of them reacted. Focusing on her magic, she summoned a gust and sent it through the street. Stalls moved and people ducked, a few falling. “To the shelters!” she shouted again and this time someone else picked up the call, others following.

Flying past a large plaza, she saw one of the entrances into the ground. Hundreds were arriving, people pushing and shouting, the few guards present entirely overwhelmed as the bells kept ringing. A rumbling noise resounded, making her look eastwards. A trembling wave of magic and a crash that deafened the bells. The high wall of Virilya shook, a wide vertical line webbed through its entire height, chunks of rock the size of houses falling down into the city, the impacts shaking the earth as shouts turned into screams.

They failed, she thought, her hands shaking as she watched the deep furrow in the ground move into the city, swallowing entire buildings.

They failed. The Extraction is happening.

She felt a hot breeze flow past her and trembled in the air.

A sharp breath before she closed her eyes and listened to the winds. They were distorted. Pained. Strange, and chaotic. But they were still there.

Opening her eyes, she let the winds take over, her mind sharp and focused.

“I am Felicia Redleaf. And I will not lose to despair.”

No Dragonslayer or space mage, but she was here, and she would act. The winds flowed around her before she rushed out and towards the walls, seeing dozens of Imperials doing the same.

I am Felicia Redleaf. And I will not lose to despair.

Dale ran through the streets. Shouts and screams sounded out nearby, people running towards the shelters. He saw the barrier above flare up with light, ducking as he felt the pressure of the impact. Houses shook and people fell, loose bricks smashing to the ground. He staggered up and rushed to a group of people, helping them up. “To the shelters! Run!” He didn’t watch them go, his enhancements flaring up before he ran and jumped up a nearby roof.

Hand raised to cover his eyes, he saw the flickering sun. His stomach dropped. He knew what Ilea had meant when she’d sent that message, but seeing, and feeling it. He ducked when another tremor shook the city, the barrier flaring up again. Three houses collapsed and he rushed there, looking for anyone injured or buried.

A group of Guardians arrived with him, the machines lifting bricks and jumping into the damaged structures around, a few coming out whilst carrying people. A loud tremor resounded. Dale turned and looked up. He took a step back, and felt the color drain from his face. A section of Karth had broken off. Hundreds of tons of rock sliding down towards the city. The avalanche gained speed, and then vanished into nothing, only to appear kilometers away and falling into the forests.

He breathed out. *She’s here.*

He shook his head and started towards the next street when Ilea’s flying form appeared before him.

“*I’m sorry.*” He heard the words in his mind, then appeared somewhere else. Then again. A moment later, he was standing on a crowded winding stairwell leading deep into the city, and the shelters below.

“NO!” he shouted but was pushed downwards by the masses. Another rumbling sound, dust and stone falling down from above. He lost balance and hit the wall, the air pushed out of his lungs from the impact. Most everyone around fell as well. He pushed his skills and grit his teeth, tasting blood.

“Stay calm and keep moving! Down to the shelters! Do not panic! Listen to my voice and follow! To the shelters!” He heard himself shout. A part of him felt uprooted, betrayed, as if Ilea had thrown him aside. And a part of him knew she understood what she had just done.

Selfish bitch! He shouted in his mind, his words to everyone around him encouraging instead. He could feel the tears rolling down his face. *She didn’t even trust me to survive.* He kept his breathing steady, trusting his skills and experience. A part of him knew that she may have been right. But she took his choice.

A dozen steps later, everything shook again, cracks showing on the walls as people started screaming once more. “Keep moving! And stay calm! Riverwatch will stand! Heed my call!” The words grounded him, made him keep moving.

He had not feared when Baralia troops lined the forests around Riverwatch. He had not feared when the flying fortress approached their city. Men and elves he could face with his sword and shield. He could not win against all, but at least he could fight.

But this. The sun taken from the skies. As if the gods themselves had come down to uproot nature itself. This was not something he could fight.

He could feel his breaths hasten, could feel the words dying in his throat as they went deeper and deeper down into the shelters only built months past. *What am I supposed to do? What can one man do against such destruction?*

He felt blame rise up and punched the wall. Why had they attacked. What had they tried to accomplish? *She said they failed. They failed us. They failed us all.* Dale bit down on his tongue, tasting the blood in his mouth as he focused. He hit the wall again, three times as he kept moving. His vision cleared. "Heed my voice!" he shouted, his voice shaking, but it was all that he had. "Heed my voice and move!"

Ilea flew past the winds as another kilometer long flare of bright light and fire lashed down and burst into the forests surrounding the city. Trees were incinerated, hundreds uprooted and flung aside as the landscape burned. Webbing cracks broke through the ground, another section hitting the city walls, bursting through with an explosion of rock as everything was swallowed into the gaping abyss.

She teleported through the city, finding another fallen and injured group of people hiding inside of a building. She opened a gate and threw them inside, careful not to kill them with the force she used. Another teleport brought her out. She no longer used her Meditation. Only thirty seconds remained, with two spikes of her perception left. She couldn't risk it, not when the Architect was out there somewhere. Flying through the city, she focused on her domain and teleported single survivors out of the rubble, healing those severely injured for a second or two before she threw them into her summoned gates. To Iz, or the Meadow. She alternated, hoping someone on the other side would move the people away, and heal them.

She grit her teeth, ignoring the guilt she felt for saving Dale. She knew he would've died for these people, but she didn't want him to. She couldn't let him die, not if she could save him. Another teleport and she sent a dozen or so people through a gate, ignoring their pleas, their screams, and shouts. There was no time, and everyone was so slow!

Another fissure broke through the walls, and this time, the barrier above shattered. Ten thousand bits of light fading into nothing. She felt her ears pop from the sudden pressure, her Fourth Tiers inactive. A few flying people in the distance fell, she saw them, and knew they had died. And still, she rushed there with her wings and sent them through her gates.

Ilea tried to find an Executioner or Watcher, but all she saw were Guardians, running through the rubble and trying to save people. Hundreds of them, hundreds crushed and broken among the rock. She turned and saw something glitter in the sky. *Another flare.*

The shields are down.

She teleported in front of the city walls, hovering hundreds of meters above ground as her flames appeared. Sunbound Creation formed in an instant as she took in a sharp breath, raising her hands as she willed the fabric before her to move.

Bright sparks exploded in a kilometer long vertical line that reached into the skies, the flare stopped and burning against her will as she saw four more lash out into the forests beyond. The ground shook once more, a dozen new fissures breaking up the land. Karth roared, a part of it the size of Riverwatch sliding off, though this one not towards the city but towards the north.

Ilea teleported and charged a wave of her space magic, using Sunbound Creation, she focused and sent out a wave just when the sliding rock crashed into the ground, the shock wave and debris slamming against her space magic to reach an equilibrium, dust and rock sent flying upwards as the forces collided.

Trian's voice resounded in her mind. *"From Aki. Iz and Pit remain untouched. Ravenhall safe. Haven stabilizing the region! Meadow is securing its domain. Stay safe!"*

Ilea felt something inside of her break. She sobbed as she flew in the air. Hearing the voice of someone she knew. Knowing that at least a few of their cities were unaffected. She shook her head and tried to focus. Guardians swarmed the city below, many of them destroyed but there were thousands now, more appearing still on the few undamaged gates. She would waste her time here.

Focusing on the mark left on Felicia, she could tell the woman was in the direction of Virilya. Teleportation activated before she vanished and appeared among screams and shaking earth. *"In here!"* she shouted to Felicia, opening a gate right before her. *"Don't move them, throw them!"*

Felicia complied, though her right arm was limp. Blood ran down the corners of her mouth. She grinned.

True Reconstruction flooded the woman, and all the other imperials she could see within her domain. A large section of the high reaching city walls had broken, an entire district flattened by the rubble. Hundreds were helping, but she knew that thousands lay buried. She saw the central district covered in a dome like barrier, still protected, but she knew it would not last. *"Go in and call for help. I'll keep the gate open!"*

Felicia locked eyes with her for a split second, then flew into the gate.

Ilea felt it then. She wanted to close it. Wanted to keep her safe.

But after Dale.

No. She couldn't.

Not her.

Her gate remained open as she flew down and teleported out the people she knew to be alive. With her space magic, she hovered them back and through the gate as the first Guardians rushed out and into the city. Centurions and Praetorians as well, fanning out as they joined the Imperials.

Two Destroyers flew out, mobile teleporters. The first landed nearby, metal moving as it set up.

Ilea blinked when she saw a flare of burning sunlight cut into the city, like a whip wielded by the gods. Houses burnt into nothing, a glowing furrow left in the rubble, crashing sounds of collapsing buildings echoing when Felicia returned.

She flew in the air and looked up, frozen in place as Ilea followed her gaze.

A storm cloud materialized.

Ilea's eyes opened wide.

No.

Not here.

Purple energies surged, a bolt of familiar arcane lightning rushing down and vanishing into one of her summoned gates. More clouds began forming above the city, lightning cracking down into the barrier of the central district.

"Everyone below three hundred, you have to leave, now," she sent out to those she could reach with her telepathy. Her eyes locked with Felicia. She saw tears in the woman's eyes.

Ilea heard herself choke. *"I'm sorry. But you will all die if you stay. Go. I will save as many as I can. I promise."* She felt the tears running down her cheeks, staying close to keep the barrier open and to protect those fleeing from the lightning, right as the first imperials, scouts, and officers alike started to break away from the rubble, some of them pulled by others as more clouds gathered above the city. Impacts of arcane lightning destroyed entire buildings, shock waves and debris spreading out.

"Through the gate! This is an order!" Felicia shouted and appeared before Ilea. A light hug. She felt so light. Like the wind itself. *"I love you,"* Felicia sent, wiping away her own tears before she smiled. *"I will wait for you,"* she said and rushed towards the slower soldiers, grabbing onto them and waiting for everyone to go through the gate as she looked back at Ilea. Then she followed.

Ilea let the gate close, despite more Guardians arriving still, the machines now decimated by the arcane lightning, fanning out to avoid the impacts.

She rushed over the debris, looking for survivors but already, most people she found were dead. Another tremor shook the town, the wall split once more, rock flung into the capital, each chunk flattening a dozen buildings. She could hear a few bells still tolling, but the thunderous arcane lightning nearly drowned them out already.

Ilea kept moving. She remembered the words of the Meadow. *Riverwatch, then Virilya, then Dawntree.*

I was too late for Virilya already.

She kept looking, and she found more survivors. Fewer now, but they were there, hiding in their homes, their cellars, crying under beds and tables. Children and their fathers, adventurers, and soldiers. Powerless against this force of nature. Powerless against the Extraction.

Ilea teleported them all into her arms, and sent them through her gates, careful not to let a stray bolt of lightning or chunk of debris fly through to reach Iz or the Meadow's domain. She teleported and flew through the city. There were still so many left, a dozen people wherever she appeared. She snapped her head northwards when she felt a pulse of magic flow through the chaos. Something new.

Void.

Looking at the roofs of the many buildings, she saw the fabric tremble, and split.

Arms and legs, long and thin pushed out through the tiny gap in space, and then the creature fell. Its skin a slight purple, its head the form of a blooming flower. Turning around, she saw dozens more fissures, all throughout the city and beyond, the first of the creatures slowly getting up.

Ilea felt her stomach tighten as she watched hundreds of monsters stepping into this reality.

She breathed in, and charged her magic.