

Chapter 923 Breach

Ilea appeared in the outskirts of the Meadow's domain. Distant arcane lightning cracked into the wracked surface of the North.

She took in a deep breath and deactivated her Space Magic Resistance, already feeling the familiar pull of the Meadow's magic.

A moment later, she appeared. Amidst the gathered forces of the Accords.

The usually chaotic and busy headquarters was eerily quiet today, everyone waiting as people appeared on the gates or brought in by the Meadow, joining the waiting crowd near the black grass and between the pillars of stone reaching up towards the high ceiling of the cavern.

A cough here and there, and a few whispers. The air felt tense. Ilea moved past the people around, a few of them glancing her way as her attention went to the enchanted device at the center of the gathering. Floating light magic depicted the still growing map of the continent, hundreds of lines going deep into the earth, with one singular strand ending in a pulsing red dot.

Aki's search had come to an end.

They had found one of the facilities.

Ilea found Claire and made her way towards her. She gave the woman a nod, finding her responding smile strained.

Perhaps they had expected all of this to be an exercise. The warnings mere ramblings of a divination mage. But here they were. Their efforts paid off.

And the danger, was real.

"Thank you for arriving so quickly," the Meadow sent.

"Of course," Ilea answered.

Looking around, she could see Nes with Scipio, the two likely communicating through telepathy, Nes' eyes glowing bright, Scipio standing with his arms crossed in front of his chest. He wore his armor.

Vor Elenthir, the other Ascended working with the Accords, stood alone, any expression on his face of steel entirely unreadable. Evan Trayne stood nearby, glancing around as he wrote into a leather bound book, likely documenting the event.

Ohn Ika arrived with a dozen other Mava, the beings quickly adjusting to the atmosphere as they found a spot to see the map. Isalthar, Elfie, and many of the Hunters appeared, summoned by the Meadow.

"So it's true," Ilea sent to the Meadow. War machines started to crowd the domain, Dark Ones from Hallowfort appearing here and there. All were clad in their enchanted armor. *"You found a facility."*

"Part of a Mesh we do not know. Yes," the Meadow answered. Its voice sounded neutral, despite the circumstances and the likely dozens of conversations the being was having at this very moment.

She decided to wait until either the tree or Aki would address them, keeping her eye on the pulsing red dot as she vaguely noted the continuing arrivals. Catelyn with her council, Sulivhaan, Verena, Pierce, Lucas, and two dozen high level Shadows. Ormont, Hatta, and the Guilds of the Taleen. Helwart and the leaders of the Pit. Trian and Kyrian with a group of the most experienced Sentinels, some already past three hundred. Octavia stood with some of her Mind Weavers, not all of them, the others likely keeping the monsters they controlled in check.

She saw Iana and Chris, standing with a group of enchanters, humans, dwarves from Io and the Pit, Vampires from the west, and a few Mava. There were Pursuers and Executioners present, and more arriving still. She saw Alistair joining as well, with a group of Riverwatch officials.

A few whispers and hisses resounded when Nelras Ithom came out of the Soul Forge with Owl, to join the gathered forces. He wore enchanted white robes, his glowing blonde hair flowing behind. Golden eyes took in the crowd before he found Ilea and walked towards her.

He bowed his head and spoke. "Monarch." Crossing his arms, he watched the pulsing red glow on the three dimensional light illusion. "Your alliance proves impressive."

Ilea grunted. *"I hope you can follow some directions from Aki."*

He grinned. *"Coming from the Dragonslayer herself. Should I laugh, or be worried for my own sanity?"*

Ilea didn't engage. She wasn't in the mood.

Owl floated close to the former Monarch, likely instructed to do so by the leaders of the Accords.

Ilea glanced to the side where she saw a group appear on a teleportation gate. All clad in black metal armor, enchanted to the brim, and lined with silver. Rifles, shotguns, and revolvers, black leather coats, and an aura of blood.

Verillion looked like a warrior for the first time that she had seen him. He soon found and joined her, the other vampires looking around at the gathering.

The First Vampire glanced at the Ascended, Owl, Nelras, and finally Ilea. "I knew who was part of this little circus you've built with the tree," he said, grinning at the hiss coming from Feyrair standing nearby. "But seeing everyone gathered here," he said and turned to find Erik appearing on one of the gates, the ancient mage dressed in his usual flowy clothing, an assortment of light blue and gold, bowing his head towards the Meadow before he moved to join them.

Verillion glanced his way. "Makes me think of the past."

Erik smiled and stopped. "It never felt quite like this, now did it?" He looked at the former Monarch of the Sunlight Wastes. "We were a shoddy alliance fueled by revenge and greed." He paused and spoke in a whisper. "This. Is something else entirely."

"I'm not sure I'm here for more than just revenge," Nelras Ithom spoke.

Erik glanced at him and smiled ever so slightly. "Aye, and yet you are here." His attention moved to the floating map. "Among humans and dwarves, dark ones and elves, demons, vampires, and mava."

"We are gathered," the voice of Aki resounded through the large cavern, coming from one of the Pursuers. "Representatives and allies of the Accords. I greet you. Time is of the essence, so we will skip formalities. The divination of Octavia Strand has proven accurate. We have found an unknown

Ascended facility. A facility that we assume to be a part of an Extraction mesh created by Ker Velor. The Architect.”

Whispers and murmurs were exchanged, attention moving to the two Ascended in the hall and Octavia with her mind Weavers.

“Our objective is the unseen infiltration of this facility and the gathering of information as to its purpose. We have already instructed those of you required for this operation. Once it commences, there is no turning back, until we have found and eliminated the danger of an Extraction.

“If you should raise concerns, do so now, before we vote to approve this operation, and a state of emergency that allows the movement and coordination of Accords forces and civilians by the Sentinel of Akelion and the Endless Meadow to guarantee extended oversight and high response time, with additional instructions and joint veto right of any Accord council members, to be overruled should a majority find due cause.”

The hall quieted before the first person spoke up. Nelras Ithom for that matter.

“Who is part of this infiltration team?”

“The identity of all individuals is kept secret. To increase the likely success of any tasked operation and to minimize the likelihood of sabotage. Rest assured. This team has prepared extensively and has trained against our best enchanters, hunters, divination mages, Nes Mor Atul, Vor Elenthir, and the Endless Meadow itself. They are ready.”

She didn't mind his scrutiny, knowing what it had cost him to hunt Ker Velor.

Ilea knew that she was part of the infiltration team as well. Not for the intrusion itself but she would redirect the communication they sent out, her long range telepathy and space magic cast through her marks slipping through even the Meadow's grasp.

And all of them bore her mark. She felt them, but couldn't discern their location.

“*They're here, aren't they?*” she sent to the Meadow, a slight smile coming to her face.

“*A last test,*” the being sent back.

She couldn't detect them. Not with all of her perception. It felt like the first few times she had tried to find Eve, but this wasn't just a single illusionist hiding from her sight and sphere. There were dozens of spells at play here, overlapping and shrouding each other. Any slip up would lead to detection against the present Four Marks. And yet, there was nothing.

“All representatives will be kept informed while the operation is ongoing. I ask you to remain here, so that we can coordinate our response according to what we find,” Aki spoke. “No further concerns?”

Ilea looked around, seeing the faces of familiar people, some more so than others. Apprehension, fear, and excitement. *And how do I feel?* She asked herself the question, looking at the holographic map. She was surrounded by her allies. Experienced enchanters, administrators, strategists, fighters, and mages. And she herself knew what she could do, knew the power that she wielded. Whatever happened. She felt ready.

“Then let us vote, council members of the Accords,” the Pursuer spoke, the hall quiet other than the voice of the silver machine.

“Ilea Spears, council member of the Accords, seat of Ravenhall. Do you approve operation Dawn? Answer yes or no,” the Meadow spoke into her mind.

“Yes,” Ilea sent.

A pause followed.

“All votes have come in. Unanimous,” the Meadow sent.

Ilea saw in her domain the determined faces of leaders, warriors, mages, scholars, and friends. She saw the faces of Erik and Verillion, Nelras Ithom, Vor Elenthir, Nes and Scipio, Evan Trayne. Beings who had been there, millennia past. When the third sun of Elos had been taken from its skies.

The Accords were ready, to poke an ancient nest deep below the earth. An ancient enemy of this realm and its peoples.

“Then we shall commence,” the Sentinel Pursuer spoke, green eyes shining bright as activity came to the hall.

Ilea took in a deep breath. She glanced at Iana, Chris, and the Ascended, all of them vanishing a moment later, herself deactivating her Resistance before she was moved as well.

Appearing deep below the domain of the Meadow and in a broad and well lit room, her resistance reactivated. The ceiling was high, the floors and walls made of stone, enchantments brimming throughout. A copy of Aki’s three dimensional map hovered above a metal contraption at the center, the light magic shifting to zoom in on the location of the facility. Deep below the northern hellscape, between Hallowfort and the Plains.

“I had hoped this day would never come,” Nes spoke, her white eyes glowing as she looked between an Executioner, Iana, Chris, Vor Elenthir, and Ilea.

“We will locate the mesh,” Iana said and smiled, her blue eyes glowing with a hundred arcane runes. “Don’t worry, Nes. We’ve prepared for this.”

“As did he,” Vor Elenthir spoke, arms behind his back as he watched the map with an attentive expression on his steel face.

“The teleportation gate has been set,” Aki spoke, the Executioner watching the map just like the others. “The team is in position.”

Ilea knew a few of them. Shadow, void, and illusion mages, some even wielding space to an extent. Their level ranges were variable, but their abilities specialized. Cerithil Hunters who had infiltrated the facilities of the One without Form. Dwarves of the Pit who had delved deep below. Scavengers of Hallowfort who had sneaked past ancient guardians, into the Descent and the ruins of Rhyvor. Vampires who had entered the Still Valley, and returned.

“No outside detection enchantments registered. Ilea, teleport to the first mark,” the Executioner spoke.

Ilea focused on the mark left on Wayland. She activated Teleportation and attached everyone in the room except for the Executioner.

A moment later, they appeared inside of a dark cavern. There was little room, a single tunnel leading nearly straight up, no light visible. On the other side was a steel wall, exposed yet

untouched. She knew they were kilometers below ground, though her other marks felt distorted, shrouded figures around her as the various spells enclosed her in shadow and illusion.

Wayland bowed his head ever so slightly.

She glanced past the other figures as the enchanters and Ascended moved closer to the steel wall. Ila was there, she saw, the former Guardian of the first layer in the Descent. She smiled, looking at the familiar black metal mask, the being of shadow giving her a slight nod. Next to him stood Erik, the real self of the Four Mark illusionist. If she hadn't known him to be part of the team, she wouldn't have doubted his earlier appearance in the domain of the Meadow.

The vampires, she did not know, nor the thin and sleek forms of three war machines, each of an unfamiliar design. One other being seemed entirely shadow itself.

Her brows rose when she glanced at the next creature. She had marked him before, but his face had been hidden. Now, it was not.

Haiden.

The unassuming barkeeper of the Abyss in Hallowfort. She smiled at the cat person and apparent illusionist.

He grinned back in a casual manner, his face shrouded a moment later.

The three elves, she had seen before, when they had broken through the barrier of Iz. And yet she had never talked to them. And last, she saw someone not part of the Accords at all, but included as an ally.

Silver embroidered gray robes. A single red rune near his chest identified him as an Imperial of Lys. Heron Krahen, of the Immortal Guard. He smiled when he saw her, though it didn't reach his eyes.

Nobody spoke, their spells balanced and without fluctuation. For all she knew, they were entirely invisible to anyone but themselves.

Ilea extended her telepathy to everyone present. She didn't speak, nor did anyone else, all waiting for the verdict of the enchanters.

The seconds ticked by, Ilea closing and opening her fists as she watched the steel wall. Even through all the shrouding spells, she could feel the magic within. Normally, she would've just punched or burned through to get inside, but if the Architect was willing to self destruct a facility in Kohr as a mere trap laid for her, then they had to enter entirely unnoticed.

“Enchantment density and runework suggests Ascended origin. Anti space, anti teleportation, anti shadow, anti illusion, reinforcements, impact reduction, anti mana intrusion, anti mind magic, anti blood magic, anti void magic, anti corrosion, anti curse magic, anti dark magic, anti gravity magic, anti mana drain, anti silver magic, anti gold magic, anti water magic, several layers and specializations of each, and eighteen layers of warning spells,” Iana sent to everyone present.

Ilea squinted her eyes, looking at the unassuming wall of steel.

Another few minutes passed as Iana recited each and every single enchantment layer for the waiting group, their spells kept up through it all.

“None of the prepared combinations cover this specific set,” Erik sent when she was done. *“I suggest a combination of layer seven and fifteen.”*

“Repeat the spell effects to me,” Iana sent.

Another few minutes passed as Erik spoke.

Ilea heard the names and words, each spell countering one or more of the enchantments, cascading effects countered by more spells.

Erik finished and waited for the enchanter.

More time passed.

“Confirmed,” Iana spoke finally.

“Confirmed,” Chris added.

“Confirmed,” Vor Elenthir spoke, followed by Nes repeating the same.

“The third mark will leave with you and shroud your entrance,” Erik spoke.

Wayland stepped forward and towards the group of enchanter, Ascended, and Ilea, the infiltration group leading them up and away from the steel wall before Ilea teleported out and straight back to her new anchor in the small room within the Meadow’s domain.

“Welcome back,” Aki spoke.

Wayland let go of his spell and sighed. He cracked his neck and knuckles. *“Let’s hope this works.”*

“Our calculations are accurate,” Vor Elenthir spoke, though he didn’t sound as perfectly confident as his words implied.

“Infiltration commences in three, two, one,” Aki spoke.

Silence, all eyes on the map, the glowing red dot showing the wall they had just seen.

Ilea gulped.

Aki looked at her, the green eyes glaring.

Vor looked at her as well.

Seconds ticked by.

The voice of Haiden reached her mind. *“Infiltration confirmed. Traps, too many to list. Three mark void creatures. Hundreds. Detection avoided. Delving deeper.”*

Ilea repeated the words as she received them, through telepathy.

Void creatures. Like in Rhyvor. She thought back to Tremor and the Soul Rippers she had wiped out.

One minute passed.

Then two.

Wayland stood motionless. Iana paced. The two Ascended floated just above ground, Vor with his hands clasped behind his back, Nes with hers set onto the map generator.

“Confirming enemy diversion and illusions. Detection avoided. Search continues,” another voice came to her mind and Ilea repeated the message to her allies.

Two messages down.

They waited for another five minutes until the third message came.

“Varitan Sphere located. Confirming authenticity and checking perimeter.”

Ilea repeated the words, still watching the map.

Two more minutes.

“Authenticity confirmed. Awaiting your arrival. Travel safely,” Erik’s voice resounded in her mind.

Ilea repeated the words.

“Yes!” Iana sent, punching the air before her.

“Gather around me,” Wayland sent as he activated a set of spells meant to shroud Ilea’s teleportation beyond the already minuscule chance of detection. *“Ready.”*

Ilea focused on her mark set on Erik and activated her long range Teleportation, taking the others with her through the fabric, and into the Ascended facility.

A moment later, they appeared, entirely quiet and floating in the air, embedded in the spells of the infiltration team. The hall around them was dark, but Ilea could see the forms of a hundred purplish and malnourished creatures hanging from the steel walls and ceiling. Long limbs and no eyes, flower like growths, claws, and entirely unmoving.

She breathed in deeply, the sight unsettling despite everything she had seen and fought. She suppressed her instinct to summon her flames and burn them all away, instead reestablishing the mental link of telepathy between everyone present. Below the floating group and between a few dozen unmoving creatures of the void stood an altar of steel, hovering above, a metal sphere covered in ascended runes.

“Are we clear to close in?” Erik asked.

“Yes,” Vor Elenthir spoke and the other enchanters confirmed.

Flying closer and entirely without noise, their spells now enshrouded the sphere itself.

Ilea looked down and found a few of the long limbed monsters close enough to reach up and grab her at this point. Something deep within her screamed at the sight, but she ignored it, looking instead to the strange and moving sphere.

“She’s all yours,” said Erik, a slight smile tugging at his lips.

The Ascended and enchanters flew closer, their eyes glowing in the dark, unseen to anyone but those within the shrouding spells.

“Tampering prevention on layers four and seven,” Vor spoke.

“Three as well, and don’t miss the physical alarm set into the last layer,” Iana sent.

“He is insane,” Nes sent.

“He is cautious,” Vor sent, moving his hand slightly.

“I suggest crest runes of the blight variant,” Iana sent.

Vor looked at her for a moment, then answered. *“I agree.”*

The other two confirmed before Vor touched the sphere.

Visualized maps and data appeared before them, lists and lists, though no voice spoke to them.

Ilea checked the monsters but nothing moved.

“Accessing and collecting mesh location and mana gathering dome specifications,” Vor sent.

Some time passed as the data changed and lists scrolled past, the two Ascended and enchanters watching with their spells.

How long is this going to take.

“Locations confirmed. Accessing Extraction data,” Vor sent.

“It’s too many,” Nes sent. *“This is far beyond what is required.”*

The data stopped at a set of runes and descriptors that Ilea didn’t understand.

“For an Extraction as we know it,” Vor sent. *“Not for this.”* He didn’t keep the fascination out of his voice.

“This is…” Nes paused. Her eyes glowed brighter. She looked at Vor.

“We cannot share this data. It must be destroyed. If this goes through, this world would be left not only with one fewer suns, it would be entirely destroyed. Far beyond what we had once done to Kohr,” Vor spoke.

“What did you find?” Erik sent.

“This is not the Extraction technology that I know. The changes are vast, and the effects would be… catastrophic. To the fabric near this realm, and to the planetary object itself. Not just the surface.” More data showed as he moved his hand ever so slightly. *“When we aimed for the least amount of destabilization, he is aiming for the most.”* He paused again.

“The process would be near instantaneous,” Nes said. *“Why would he do this? The energy requirements for initiation are vastly higher.”*

“As is the yield. In theory,” Vor said.

“It betrays all the principles of the Olym Arcena. Gain through pure destruction,” Nes spoke.

“Indeed,” said Vor. *“This technology does not only mean the extraction of a Source more powerful than any one before. This would cause the annihilation of all life on this planet.”*

“How long do we have?” Erik asked.

“Accessing gathering point information,” Vor spoke as the data changed yet again.

A long moment passed as the enchanters and Ascended looked at the runes and numbers.

“Is that accurate?” Iana sent, concern apparent in her voice.

“The improved Extraction would require an additional two centuries to collect mana,” Vor sent.

“Why the concern then?” Ilea asked. *“We can just go and destroy it all.”*

“He doesn’t have to use the improved version,” said Nes. *“This facility can use the same type of Extraction we are aware of.”*

“Not precisely the same, but the point stands,” said Vor Elenthir. *“This mesh at present, is ready to gather a Source.”*