

## **Arc 1 - Chapter 119 - Invisus**

Thea's heart was beating rapidly as she continued to stare at her reflection in the shard of glass, her mind racing with thoughts, fears, and possibilities.

*'What the fuck was that? That definitely wasn't me... Was it? The thing said it was more than my subconsciousness but how is that possible? What does that even mean?'*

A distant voice reached her ears, "—ea?!" before she was abruptly turned on her back, her attention clawed back from the turmoil in her mind. Her eyes met Karania's thoroughly concerned visage.

"Thea? Can you hear me?" Karania asked, her hands roaming over Thea's face, forcefully opening her right eye before shining a light in it.

"Ahh—What... What are you doing, Kara? Hey!" Thea replied, trying to scramble away from the squad medic's rough treatment. She found herself without much leverage, oddly twisted with Karania's entire weight focused on her upper chest.

"What do you mean, what am I doing? What the fuck are *you* doing? What's with that glass shard? Are you losing it?" The medic retorted, carefully repeating the process with her left eye before looking deeply into Thea's eyes. "What happened? Why did you leave the triage area?"

Thea felt extremely overwhelmed with everything happening right now, but Karania's calm, green eyes helped her focus. She wanted to look around and figure out where she was, what Karania had meant by "leave the triage area," but the medic's firm hands held her head in a vice-like grip, forcing her to answer the questions first.

"I... I was meditating, but something... There was something strange? Like a vision, maybe? There was another me inside my head, Kara! With neon-violet eyes, and she was saying that I was going to die unless I flared my Gate...? I... I needed to check my eyes, they were violet, Kara. Not cyan, but violet!" Thea tried her best to give a cohesive rundown but felt her thoughts slip through the cracks like trying to catch water with a sieve.

The two of them looked at each other for a while, Karania's eyes seeming to almost stare right into Thea's soul, before she let out a deep, soul-wrenching sigh. "Why can't you just be normal for like one fucking mission, Thea? Is it really that impossible...?"

Holding up her hands to stop Thea from protesting, Karania added, "I know it's not your fault, I'm just kidding—somewhat. I don't have the necessary information to make any informed decisions here, just like you don't have any to know what is actually going on with you. It's the UHF's fault for not briefing either of us, but we're the ones that'll have to deal with it either way."

Getting off of Thea, Karania got back on her feet and offered Thea a hand to pull her up. As Thea accepted and was pulled up, she looked around and found, much to her surprise, that she had crossed almost the entire foyer at some point.

The two of them were standing closer to the window she had used to enter from below during the firefight than the office near the reception desk where Karania had set up the triage.

*‘What the... How did I get here? And when?’* she wondered, bewildered.

As if reading her mind, as Karania generally seemed able to do, the squad medic answered, “I have no idea when you made it over here. I left you out of sight for maybe half a minute, and by the time I looked back, you were gone. I thought you had run off for whatever reason or maybe been kidnapped by an assassin or something.”

Forcefully taking Thea’s hand as one would with an unruly child, Karania led her back toward the rest of the squad and the triage office, where she gestured for Thea to sit down again.

“I’ll need you to focus now and tell me, step-by-step, exactly what happened during your meditation. Whatever this other-you might be, the first thing we should do is figure out whether or not it seems like a danger to us. So don’t leave anything out,” Karania ordered, her face hardening to drive home the seriousness of the situation.

For Thea, seeing Karania’s face like this was definitely a sobering wake-up call, and she felt her mind clear up a bit, like a jolt of adrenaline.

Taking a deep breath, Thea began recounting everything she could remember. “I started meditating to recover, and then I found myself in my old home back in Lumiosia. Everything felt so real, the sights, the smells... Then I saw this other me in the mirror. She was... *different*. Her eyes turned neon-violet, and she was... like taunting me? Saying I was blind and that I wouldn’t survive unless I paid more attention.”

Karanja listened intently, nodding occasionally as Thea continued.

“She somehow... pulled herself out of the mirror? Like straight up turned from a reflection to a real thing—she felt so... physical? Then she started talking about making deals and concessions. She said I should open my Gate wide to understand what she meant, but that it had to be quick. She mentioned sharing a Soul with me, that opening the Gate wouldn’t be bad, like Soul-destroying bad, but I don’t really... Like how could I trust *that*? Then... I guess she shattered the room around us, probably by breaking my concentration or something, and I woke up here and scrambled to find the nearest reflective surface to check my eyes.”

Karanja frowned, her concern deepening. “This other-you, did she say anything else? Anything that might indicate her intentions? Or maybe where she came from? What she is?”

Thea shook her head. “She seemed annoyed and impatient, but she did say she’d be watching and waiting and that when I needed her help, I’d have to be ready to pay the price—but that also indicates that she can, somehow, help? So it doesn’t seem like she’s just a hallucination?”

Thinking back, Thea tried to remember what else Faux-Thea had said to her but couldn’t really come up with anything she hadn’t mentioned yet. “I guess... that’s about it? She mentioned being more than my subconsciousness—I thought she was, so I called her out on it, but she didn’t like that one bit. It’s what made her leave the mirror to prove that she had

more control over the meditation-induced vision than I'd expect from my own subconsciousness."

Karania turned contemplative, and Thea decided to follow her friend's example as the two of them fell into a quiet state. Thea's mind still felt slightly jumbled, like she had lost too much blood too rapidly recently, but considering that Karania wasn't pumping her full of the stuff, that was unlikely to be the case.

*'Just what was she...? She wasn't part of the strange visions when my Gate Awakened, at the very least, so hopefully that's still a one-off thing in general,'* Thea thought to herself, trying to piece together whatever information she could that might help her and Karania figure out where to go from here.

*'Can I trust Faux-Thea...? There's no chance I can, considering the risks. If I'm wrong and cause a Void-tear, I don't just die, but really, truly die. While I don't want to lose the mission and mess up my score for the assessment, that's a lot less important than not dying forever, that's for sure.'*

Thinking back to her conversation with Zach, however, she couldn't help but correlate a lot of what Faux-Thea had said to some of the advice she had received from the experienced Psyker just a little over a week ago.

According to him, there was no actual danger of anything going wrong by simply opening your Gate wider. As long as she stayed away from opening it all the way, all it would do would be a massive influx of Psychic Energy that would allow her to use her Psychic Powers more freely, as well as sending out a bit of a sonar-ping for other Psykers to latch onto.

But was Faux-Thea's plan really to just get other Psykers to approach Thea...? If so, why? Just to kill her because Psykers were the most dangerous enemy for Alpha Squad right now?

That seemed a lot more contrived than simply messing with Thea's head, assuming that Faux-Thea was capable of doing so. And even then, what would Faux-Thea even gain from that, except maybe some satisfaction from Thea dying in the assessment?

Thea sighed deeply, her thoughts a swirling mess of uncertainty and confusion. "Kara, I don't know what to do. Zach said there's no real danger in opening my Gate wider, as long as I don't open it all the way. But what if Faux-Thea has some other motive? I don't really know what that could be, since it doesn't really make much sense for her to want me to fail this mission, but I don't really know *what* to think about all this to begin with."

Shaking her head as if to try and throw the confusion out with it, Thea added, "Ahhh, whatever! There's no reason to believe that Faux-Thea was even telling the truth. I'll just ignore it, and we can move on with the mission. We're just a couple days out from completing the assessment, and then I can finally get some real answers—hopefully."

"No," Karania stated firmly, her voice surprisingly forceful.

Thoroughly taken aback, Thea took a moment to gather herself before asking, "Pardon? What do you mean, 'No,' Kara?"

"We *can't* ignore her words, Thea. Think about it: Why would she, whatever this Faux-Thea thing is, reveal herself to you like this, instead of staying hidden until you're really desperate? If she only wanted to gain power over you, that's how I would do it," Karania elaborated, getting more animated as she spoke, certainty manifesting in her voice.

"If I were Faux-Thea and a malevolent entity, I'd keep myself hidden until you were in a really dire situation and then offer to help out, presenting a really tempting bargain for power. There's no reason for her to reveal herself now, during an assessment, where there aren't any real stakes. Sure, the first one's important for our overall standing and all, but it's not really a life-or-death situation. So why would she reveal herself, allowing you to gather intel after we're done here?"

Thea's eyes widened as the pieces of the puzzle fell into place. "... Because she's trying to build rapport by providing me with intel that I don't have."

Karania nodded gravely, her eyes meeting Thea's once again. "*Exactly*. That's the only thing that makes sense, unless she's playing a way more complicated game than we can even guess at right now. Her warning is almost definitely real and intended to make you trust her words. I doubt this will be the only instance where she shows up to give you a nudge, either, so that when she finally offers a bargain, you're predisposed to trust that she can pull through on it."

Suddenly, Karania punched the ground, her armoured fist sinking slightly into the rock-crete floor, breaking chunks out of it. "That crafty fucking bitch! Damn it!"

Thea simply stared at her friend, having never seen Karania lose her cool like this before. It was a thoroughly strange sight, both frightening and endearing.

As abruptly as it happened, however, Karania's face returned to her usual cool, calculated demeanour. There was only one other mode that Karania used more, which was the energetic, upbeat one. But the cool, calculating one seemed to be coming out more and more often as the assessment continued, Thea couldn't help but notice.

"The worst part about this whole thing," Karania continued as if the prior outburst had never happened, "is that we *lose*, no matter what we do here. Either we follow her advice, giving her exactly what she wants: rapport and potentially some unseen benefit we aren't aware of; or we don't follow her advice, and you're practically guaranteed to die—maybe even all of us..."

A grave silence spread between them, neither able to find an immediate answer to this dilemma. They sat together in this oppressive quiet for about five minutes until Thea's thoughts coalesced into an actionable plan.

"Alright, I'm making an executive decision here: we're telling Corvus and the rest. He can make the call on what we should do; he's the squad leader. If he thinks it's worth the risk, then I'll do it. If not, maybe he has another idea on how to deal with this thing. While you're extremely smart, he still has more experience with tactics and strategy, so maybe we're missing something obvious to him."

Karania stared at Thea, blinking once, twice, three times before shaking her head lightly in astonishment.

"I'm sorry, what? Did *my* Thea just advocate deferring decisions to the squad leader to think things through all the way?" she asked slowly, as if unable to truly parse what had just occurred. "Are you even still the *real* Thea?"

Rolling her eyes, Thea got up by herself and started walking toward where she assumed the rest of the squad was waiting. Behind her, she could hear Karania getting up and following.

As they arrived, Thea called the rest of the squad together and began explaining what had happened, as well as her and Karania's thoughts on the matter.

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"That's really fucked up," Isabella blurted out as Thea finished her rundown. She was the first to speak, with the rest of the squad still in contemplative silence at her words. "Doesn't sound like something we can really work around, unless the boss has a better idea?"

With Isabella deferring the decision immediately back to the squad leader, everyone's eyes landed on Corvus, who was cupping his chin while thinking about the issue.

"Hm... I think that Karania and Thea are right, to a degree," he finally stated, after a few moments of awkward silence. "We can't really trust whatever this is, but we still have to make plans regarding its warning, even if it means we might end up in danger. It would make sense for Faux-Thea to tell the truth, as the two of them outlined, but we can't simply trust that and gamble everything on Thea opening her Gate. The risk versus reward simply isn't worth it, as long as we don't know exactly what the psychic side of things entails.

"Even if Zachary mentioned it would generally be safe, there are likely a hundred and one exceptions to the rule, just like with anything in regards to the military. Until at least one of us has had a thorough briefing, or maybe even the Psychic 101 course itself, I can't, in good conscience, allow any of us to take such a risk."

Turning towards Thea directly, he ordered, "Thea, don't open your Gate wider than it is for the rest of this assessment, that's an order."

Thea gave a quick salute to show her affirmation of the order, feeling a weight drop off her shoulders.

Not having to make the decision on this herself had definitely been the right call, rather than trying to figure it out alone. Even if it ended up getting her, and maybe the rest of the squad, killed in the assessment, it would be an outcome that the entire squad could accept; being the official orders from their squad leader.

Corvus continued, addressing the whole squad, "We will have to try our best to work around whatever it is that Thea might be missing, according to this... entity. As much as I hate to say this, we'll have to continue putting Thea right at the front, maybe even like a true scout, without Lucas. If what the entity said is true, then Thea's death is all but guaranteed considering the order I just gave.

“That means we’ll have to make sure the rest of the squad still functions even without her. To do that, we’ll need to ensure Lucas doesn’t get caught in whatever kills her—sorry, Thea,” he added with an apologetic look towards her.

Thea waved it off with a shrug, “Can’t fault you for that one. It makes strategic sense. I’m not going to resign myself to dying, though. I’ll do my absolute best to prove that Faux-Thea is full of shit, but it makes sense to focus on the squad as a unit and make the best of the situation if something *does* end up happening to me.”

“*Unless* that’s exactly what the entity expected and the reason you’ll die,” Desmond’s voice cut in, drawing everyone’s attention. “What if sending you out further ahead is what *causes* the issue in the first place? Being behind Lucas’ shield gives you a lot more protection. It only follows that you’d be more likely to die if we change our setup now. We’ve barely even trained with Thea as a sole forward scout, especially in a building.”

His words were surprisingly passionate, which seemed to catch everyone off guard. They were also surprisingly astute, Thea had to admit. There was definite merit to his objections, so their eyes naturally went back to Corvus.

Sighing, Corvus conceded the point, “You’re right, Desmond. I had hoped none of you would point this out, but I’ve already thought of that.”

Leaning back against the wall, Corvus took a deep breath before elaborating, “Much like Karania and Thea surmised, this entity has put us in a *serious* bind. Considering Thea’s own Psychic Powers, and assuming the entity inherits some of that, there’s a high likelihood that the entity is telling the truth about her death, but we don’t know the exact circumstances. Our decisions might lead to her death, but they might also not. There’s no real way to know, and thinking through every single possible scenario won’t help us. We’ll still have to make a call based on incomplete information. The option of ‘What if this is exactly what the entity wants us to do?’ will always be a factor.

“So, despite your valid objection, Desmond, my orders stand. Thea will go ahead by about five to ten metres unless we’re in a direct confrontation. If she’s hit by anything with a larger radius, we don’t immediately fail the mission. I’m sorry, Thea, but I don’t see any other way to ensure the squad can continue to function if the entity’s foresight comes to pass.”

It was clear that Corvus didn’t like making this call, but Thea could definitely see the logic behind it. The rest of the squad seemed similarly unhappy, especially Lucas, who looked like he had just been punched in the stomach by Isabella.

*‘I guess it makes sense,’* Thea thought to herself, feeling a pang of sympathy for the giant of the squad. *‘A defensive heavy’s main job is to keep everyone safe, and now he’s being told that no matter what he does, he’ll fail to keep everyone safe. That would piss me off as well.’*

The next few minutes were filled with more detailed planning and strategizing, but the overall setup didn’t change much from their previous plans.

During the hours Thea had been unconscious, Desmond had managed to locate a large portion of the remaining Stellar Republic forces.

They had congregated on the third and fourth floors, barricading themselves in, likely trying to wait out the UHF's attack and hoping their reinforcements would arrive before the advance squads could clear the entire compound.

On one hand, this made their job easier, as they would only have to fight two more major engagements. On the other hand, it also made each engagement significantly harder, as the last attack had clearly shown. Fighting an enemy that was surprised was much easier than one that was in a fortified position, waiting for you to arrive, after all.

Finally, as the round of strategizing came to a close, Thea and Karania returned to the triage area. Karania helped Thea back into her armour, which had been fully removed via the medic override during Karania's marathon session of putting Thea back together.

With her armour back on—already fixed up with one of the armour-repair sprays they had brought—her weapons in her hands, and her backpack slung over her shoulders, Thea finally felt back in control.

She wasn't quite at 100%, as the ominous warnings of Faux-Thea still swirled inside her head, but holding her Gram gave her a definite feeling of power, allowing her to push those worries to the back of her mind.

Karania administered one last dose of double-painkiller injections and another general revitalization injection before giving Thea the all-clear to rejoin the rest of the squad. "You're not exactly healthy, but you'll be able to do what you need to do for the next few hours. I doubt you'll enjoy the time after that, once night falls, but we'll deal with that if and when we get there," she said with a crooked smile. The idea of Thea not surviving this next part of the mission clearly bothered the medic as much as it did Lucas, if not more.

"Don't worry, I got this," Thea reassured her with a confidence she didn't actually feel. "Who's to say that Faux-Thea has any idea of what we're capable of, huh? We're Alpha Squad, after all. Like we'd just roll over and die, just because a random violet-eyed bitch told us to, pah!"

With those words, the two of them rejoined the rest of the squad, readying themselves to continue clearing out the compound...

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With Thea in the lead, Alpha Squad started down the next corridor that one of Desmond's drones had confirmed led to the next major staircase up.

Desmond's preliminary scouting over the past few hours had revealed no further enemies on this floor. However, some of the squads from the third floor had pooled together to build a serious blockade in one of the conference rooms, making it their next clear target.

Lucas trailed closely behind Thea, requiring several reprimands from Corvus to keep him from pushing up too close to her. It was evident that Lucas's protective nature didn't mesh well with their current plans, but his desire to keep Thea safe meant more to her than she could express.

Being this far ahead of the rest of the squad felt odd to Thea.

While she had done solo scouting missions before, this setup, which Desmond had coined the “canary setup,” felt distinctly different. Apparently named so after a bird from Terra used to detect danger in mines, the term had earned a few dirty looks from Lucas and Karania, but Thea had found it a thoroughly apt description.

With her Gram in hand, Thea led the squad carefully through the building, passing through hallways and methodically clearing offices on either side. She kept a keen eye and ear out for anything that might indicate an enemy presence.

Despite Desmond’s drones having cleared the floor, there was a very real chance that they might have missed something or that enemies might have moved in after the drone had cleared a certain area.

Thea’s entire body and mind were tense, haunted by the ominous warnings of Faux-Thea that she was missing something obvious. This tension made her feel paranoid, but she didn’t see it as a bad thing.

The more attention she paid, the less likely she was to be surprised.

To that effect, she had fully cranked up her passive Psychic Senses to their highest level, while also focusing her Perception to ensure that no sound or movement escaped her notice.

As they advanced, the silence of the building felt downright oppressive.

Her heightened senses picked up every creak of the floorboards, every rustle of debris, and every distant echo of gunfire or explosions from the other advance squads fighting their way through the compound, all of which only served to keep her further on edge.

Each step felt heavy with the weight of potential danger, but she remained resolute, determined to keep her squad, and herself, as safe as she could manage.

She paused frequently, listening intently for any sound that might indicate an ambush.

The hallways seemed to continue to stretch endlessly, their dim lighting casting long, ominous shadows that danced eerily as they moved. Her heart pounded surprisingly hard in her chest, each beat echoing like a drum in her ears, but she pushed the feeling aside for now to focus on her movements.

She signalled for the squad to halt as she approached another intersection.

Her breaths came shallow and quick as she peeked around the corner, her Psychic Senses straining to detect any hint of danger. The continuously mounting tension was nearly unbearable by now, every fibre of her being alert to the possibility of an attack, the potential that she was missing something important.

The oppressive silence was broken only by the faint sounds of distant combat, a constant reminder of the war raging around them and the ever-present words of Faux-Thea echoing in her mind, “You are blind, darling. It will get you killed.”



Making sure the intersection was clear on both sides, she signalled for the rest of the squad to follow as she stepped around the corner to the right.

The moment she did, her foot caught on something.

Without wasting even a moment of thought, she scrambled backwards, eyes wide with terror, her own, human instincts screaming at her to move and get into cover.

When nothing happened, even four, five seconds later, she slowly rose from the ground and carefully moved back to the edge of the intersection, signalling the rest of the squad to stand by.

Carefully peeking around the corner, Thea looked at the ground and immediately found a sprung tripwire that led to a grenade.

She simply stared at the setup, her mind utterly frozen as one thought dominated her thoughts: *'How did I possibly miss this...?'*

It wasn't a particularly well-thought-out nor well-crafted trap.

It was the most rudimentary of designs, with a fairly visible tripwire even. The only reason she was alive right now was the fact that the grenade had somehow failed to go off, which only further spoke of how terrible the trap had been designed.

But missing an obvious trap like this, when she was paying this much attention? How was that even possible? A gnawing feeling of dread crept up from the depths of her psyche as Faux-Thea's words continued to echo in her mind, *"You are blind, darling. It will get you killed."*

Her heart raced, pounding like a drum in her chest as she slowly backed away from the intersection, her hands trembling.

She clenched her fists, trying to steady herself.

She took a deep breath, forcing herself to calm down.

"Tripwire trap, grenade failed to detonate," she whispered into her comm, her voice shaking slightly. "Proceed with extreme caution."

Lucas quickly moved up to her position, his face a mask of concern. "You okay?"

Thea nodded, though she didn't feel okay. She felt a deep-seated fear, a sense of inadequacy that she couldn't shake. "Yeah, just... need a moment."

He patted her on the shoulder, a gesture of reassurance. "Take your time. We'll cover you."

She nodded again, more firmly this time, and took a few steadying breaths.

She couldn't let this get to her.

It was exactly what Faux-Thea wanted, if she broke down from something as simple as two sentences. She had to stay focused, had to trust her instincts and the training her Old Man had imparted upon her.

With renewed determination, she signalled for the squad to proceed, her eyes scanning every inch of the corridor for any signs of danger, double-checking the ground and any corners for additional traps and tripwires—she would not get caught a second time.

Around ten minutes later, her renewed diligence paid off as she found another tripwire hooked around the door of a nearby office.

She informed the rest of the squad and denied Lucas' intention to come by and shield her with his Stalwart while she tried to disable it. Thea felt that the presence of him and the massive full-cover shield would cause more issues than really help.

She denied the request, and Corvus deferred to her expertise on the matter.

Carefully and slowly, Thea removed the trap and pocketed the grenade after making sure there were no further backup traps included.

She felt a surge of confidence for the first time in what felt like days.

*'Alright, I can do this,'* she thought to herself, drowning out the echoing voice of Faux-Thea's words. *'Just stay vigilant and the bitch's words won't have any power over you or your destiny. Keep it up, Thea!'*

After clearing the office, she commed in that she had successfully disabled the trap.

Feeling like she was getting back into the groove of things, she continued down the corridor once again, leading the rest of the squad to the next intersection.

The compound seemed to stretch on damn near endlessly. Before, when she had been in the confines of the squad's entire group, it had never felt this large.

But now that she was practically overcharging her Perception and Psychic Senses while clearing the entire compound ahead of the squad, it felt all the more oppressive and exhausting to her. The gnawing, ever-present feeling of dread and the echoing reminder of Faux-Thea's words did not help one bit either.

They stopped three times over the course of the first hour on their journey at Karania's behest.

The squad medic had claimed it was to check on Thea's injuries, but everyone, including Thea, was aware that it was mostly to give Thea a bit of moral support and a bit of a breather—which everybody tacitly agreed with.

While Thea hated being practically babied like this, she also couldn't deny that she needed it.

After the third break, which they had strategically chosen just a few intersections before the staircase itself, Thea felt a lot more relaxed and confident, both as a result of her earlier success with the trap as well as the brief respite granted by Karania's fake break.

It almost felt normal to Thea by now to lead the squad like this and reminded her somewhat of the infiltration into Nova Tertius, where she had also been the tip of the spear, so to speak.

*'It's really not that difficult. I just need to rely on my Psychic Senses and make sure my eyes and ears don't miss anything in these corridors,'* Thea thought to herself, easing her own frayed mind in the process. *'It's actually a lot less stressful than leading the squad through the city. At least I only have two or three areas to pay attention to instead of hundreds.'*

With that mindset, she managed to ignore much of the earlier tension and focus on her own movements and the world around her.

Approaching the second-to-last intersection before the staircase, she once again signalled the rest of the squad to stand by. Desmond's drone had just flown through here a few minutes prior, so they were fairly certain that there was nobody waiting in ambush around the corner, but Thea wanted to make absolutely sure they weren't missing anything.

Giving Faux-Thea the satisfaction of running into an ambush simply because she decided to trust minute-old intel from a drone was not on her list of things she really wanted to do today.

Sneaking up towards the corner, Thea carefully focused on her Psychic Senses, delving into the precognitive world for the first time today.

Since they were now dangerously close to the staircase, she felt there was no point in trying to play coy with her Resources. While they still needed to win two major engagements, not getting caught before getting to them was equally important.

Taking a quick peek into the future, Precog-Thea looked around the corner, seeing no enemies in sight.

Checking the ground, she found no tripwires or obvious traps either.

Checking behind her towards the other direction, she also found no traces of any enemies or traps.

Pulling back her focus, leaving the precognitive state, Thea felt slightly out of it, as she usually did after a precognitive vision, but quickly recovered.

Gesturing for the rest of the squad to slowly approach, Thea peeked around the right corner once again, Gram at the ready in case her Psychic Precognition had somehow managed to miss something—precognitive Thea was limited to Thea's own Perception, after all.

Checking behind her, she confirmed that the precognition was accurate and that the intersection was clear of any enemies.

Before she stepped around the corner to start scouting towards the final intersection, she quickly checked the ground—a habit now ingrained into her being over the past dozens of corners she had passed—and froze.

On the ground in front of her was another tripwire trap.

*‘H...How?’* she thought, her mind momentarily failing to process what she was seeing.

She was *absolutely* certain that she had checked this exact spot during her Psychic Precognition and hadn’t seen anything. The gnawing dread of Faux-Thea’s warnings once again came into focus, but Thea quickly shut it down as she heard the rest of the squad approach from behind her.

“I got another trap here, one second. Stay back,” she announced through the comms, suppressing the confusion and tension that she felt as best she could.

While her Psychic Precognition had somehow failed to notice it, the real version of herself had not; so she was still coming out on top.

*‘No need to panic, just focus on getting this trap disarmed and you’ll be fine.’*

As she kneeled down and started checking the trap for any hidden triggers aside from the tripwire, applying due diligence for the trap disarmament, despite the fact that she had disabled more than a few of them now, she carefully unwound the tripwire from the grenade.

*‘At least they aren’t hard to—’*

Before she could finish the thought, her heightened Perception picked up the crunch of an armoured boot around five metres in front of her. Startled, her eyes shot up and met the barrel of a gun, aimed directly at her head.

Instinctively, she activated her Signature Ability and threw herself backwards and to the side.

***‘Sensory Over—’***

As the gun’s barrel briefly illuminated the world around it, a smug voice sounded in Thea’s head, *“Told ya so, darling. Too bad ya didn’t listen...”*