

Volume 2 - Chapter 55 - Alpha Deployment

Private Nyla Dab:

"You can *feel* it.

"I don't care what anyone says—when command announces a Battlefield Ace being deployed, the whole trench just... *changes*.

"Guys who were slumped against the wall five seconds ago are suddenly re-checking their mags. Marines that required a Medic just seconds ago, get a second wind. People stop talking and start *moving*.

"It's like someone turned the dial up on the whole platoon.

"We *know* they're going to hit the enemy harder than we ever could, so we damn well make sure they've got the breathing room to do it."

—

Corporal Ilyana Serik:

"The enemy *knows*. You can see it when an Ace steps onto the battlefield.

"Their fire shifts, their lines bend. They throw bodies at the Ace's position like they think if they just bury them under enough, the fight ends.

"That's when the rest of us have to dig in *twice* as hard.

"The Ace is strong, no doubt, but never invincible. If the Republic concentrates everything on them, even the best won't last.

"So we fight harder, hold tighter, because every second we keep pressure elsewhere is another second the Ace gets to tear literal holes through their lines..."

—

Sergeant Malek Ordo:

"The strangest part is watching the flow of the battlefield simply... *change*.

"You think you know where the line is about to collapse, you've got your maps and your estimates—then the Ace appears, and everything just shifts.

"The enemy diverts, flanks twist and turn, and suddenly that weak point you were about to reinforce doesn't even matter to the enemy anymore.

"The fight's abruptly orbiting around *one* Marine's position.

"It's dangerous as fuck, but also... undeniably freeing.

"Because if you're not in their sector, you know the pressure's lighter. You know you can hit harder, move faster, because the Republic's eyes aren't on you; They're staring at the Ace."

Corporal Jace Hunn

"You instinctively start treating the battlefield differently, y'know?"

"It's not just about stayin' alive anymore, or even killin' all the enemies—it's about keepin' *them* alive as well now.

"Once an Ace is deployed, you find yourself suddenly pushin' harder, takin' more shots, tryin' to keep the enemy pinned; even more so than usual. Because you just *know*... They are both your best shot at gettin' out of this alive, but also the most vulnerable person on the entire Emperor-damned Battlefield.

"After all, one thing is always true: They can't do their job if we're not keepin' their flanks clear.

"You can think of them like the sharp tip of a spear—capable of inflictin' brutal, downright lethal wounds on the enemy—but... a spear's nothin' without the shaft behind it, guidin' its strike and makin' sure there is follow-through rather than simply snappin' upon contact."

[UHF News Net – "Echoes of the Frontline: Battlefield Ace deployment", PFC866]

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Once she made it back to East 14, Thea got to work immediately.

Her first order was for the Corporal—sending him back down to E4 to inform the Medic they had claimed E14, so Chester would know where to rejoin them once he was patched up.

It felt wrong giving that order.

A Corporal *definitely* outranked her—Privates being a bit more of a murky situation overall—but he was the only one who couldn't actually shoot out of the embrasures reliably due to a lack of heavy armour, and for reasons she still didn't fully understand, he continued to defer to her without hesitation.

'Being a Battlefield Ace is so weird...' she thought, lowering herself beside her pack and pulling it open. 'Ordering around people above my rank just feels wrong. I wonder how the Old Man dealt with stuff like this... Did he ever run into a Battlefield Ace and have to follow their orders, too...?'

Her fingers dug through the contents deep inside the pack until she found what she needed.

Setting her Gram across her lap, she slid down to sit on the dirt floor.

The steady bursts of fire from the Heavies at the embrasure filled the alcove, a semi-rhythmic pounding that weirdly soothed her nerves while she worked.

From deep in her pack, she had drawn out her multi-tool and began stripping the weapon apart with practiced ease. Over the past week, she had spent countless late nights in her quarters practicing this exact routine, breaking the Gram—all of its versions—down and rebuilding it until she could almost do it blindfolded.

Her last shopping run had left her with far more attachments and parts than she could ever realistically test in a single Digital Mission.

Still, she wasn't about to let them gather dust when they might give her an edge.

If nothing else, this was the perfect chance to try some of them out in the field, while simultaneously fixing some problems she noticed during her earlier tests.

The first piece she slotted in was a [Double-Feather Trigger].

'Honestly thought this was a waste of Credits when I bought it,' she admitted to herself, a small smile tugging at her lips. *'Guess that shows how little I still know about all this.'*

She'd nearly skipped it, along with a handful of other mods, dismissing them as gimmicks.

At the time, she hadn't seen *any* situation where she'd need to fire a DMR fast enough to warrant such a thing as an entirely replaced trigger-system.

But the [Double-Feather Trigger] was quite clever, in hindsight—making every pull lighter while doubling the output. An internal engagement flap tripped the firing mechanism once at three-fifths of the pull, then again at the full press, effectively giving her two shots per trigger squeeze.

'That should make keeping the same rate of fire a lot easier on my fingers...' she thought, sliding the piece into place with a faint click. *'Or potentially even doubling the output, should I really need to dump a whole mag for whatever reason, I guess.'*

Nodding to herself as she tightened the last screws on the trigger assembly and guard, Thea moved on to the second and third alterations: [Extra-Coolant Injector] and [Focus Refractory Lense].

The first was straightforward enough.

It added an extra buffer for heat buildup—something she knew would become a problem again if she pushed the Gram the way she had during her earlier [Glimpse] use.

The weapon just wasn't meant to sustain that kind of rapid feather-fire.

The Gram itself was capacitor-based, not coolant-based like some of the other Laser rifles on the market, which usually meant heat wasn't much of an issue.

But "usually" didn't exactly cover what she was planning to put it through.

For that kind of abuse, the [Extra-Coolant Injector] acted as a secondary magazine slot, letting her load the same coolant magazines that other Laser-type DMR's would use, alongside her normal capacitor-mags.

It would make the weapon bulkier and *noticeably* heavier, sure, but for the short stretch of time left in this DM, she figured it was a fair trade.

'Now I just need to get my hands on some coolant mags once Alpha's fully assembled...' she thought, already filing it away as a priority.

The [Focus Refractory Lense] was a different story and far less invasive, weight-wise.

It gave a measurable boost to the Gram's output, increasing raw firepower and penetration, but at a steep cost: Range.

The beam lost cohesion markedly faster, bleeding off strength *well* before it normally would. That made it a poor choice for long-distance sniping—one of the reasons she usually kept it buried in her backpack rather than mounted in most situations.

But right now, range wasn't the priority at all.

They were holding a trench, the enemy pushing in close.

She didn't have infinite freedom to choose her engagement distances, which made the trade-off a lot less punishing. If anything, it was *exactly* what she needed.

While it still wouldn't make her Gram capable of punching through Super-Heavy-type armour, it would make anything short of that a lot easier to deal with. Whether she could punch through the chestplate of Heavy-type remained to be seen, but at least she wouldn't need to try to aim for weak spots on the Heavy-types any longer.

'It'll definitely punch through anything short of the chestplate for sure.'

She slotted the last piece into place and closed the rifle up again, running her hands over the frame, double-checking each connection and making sure no screws or cables had been left loose.

With the modifications complete, the Gram felt a lot heavier, but also more ready—far better suited to handle another round of her powered-up [Glimpse] bursts without cooking itself, and her, to slag in the process.

She had just finished her checks when movement caught her eye at the tunnel entrance.

The first two members of Alpha had arrived, their silhouettes cutting through the flare-light leaking in from the battlefield.

One of them was clearly a Defensive Heavy, his frame swallowed up in Super-Heavy-type armor, every plate thick enough to shrug off punishment that would flatten Thea many times over. In his hands he carried a massive Full-Cover Shield, its size reminding her of Lucas'

Stalwart, though it was clearly a different make as it was a square-profile rather than a rectangular one.

The other Marine, slightly less intimidating in his lighter gear, introduced himself as a Squad Medic.

Immediately, Thea noticed the difference between these two and the new Wellis Two she'd taken charge of earlier.

Even when their eyes behind their visors flicked to her Crysium Two-Star Medal, there was no wide-eyed awe, no moment of hesitation. If anything, they regarded her with calm professionalism, like they had seen this before and knew exactly what was expected of them.

"At last count, I've got just under five hundred Focus left from the fighting," the Medic reported when Thea asked, his tone direct. "Not counting boosters, Ma'am."

Thea gave a short nod, filing that away.

With him—and at least one, maybe two more Medics still on their way, depending on whether Kalt was giving her the bare minimum she'd requested or the full three she'd mentioned—she'd be working with roughly five times her normal Focus pool.

'That's... a lot,' Thea thought, a faint tension settling into her chest. The idea of that much psychic throughput made her a little uneasy. *'I honestly don't even know if my brain can keep up with that many [Glimpse]s at once. Keeping track of every movement, every timing, every possible kill path so I don't miss is way more draining than I thought it would be.'*

Her brow furrowed as she considered her options. *'Maybe instead of one massive, high-intensity [Glimpse] every minute or so, I should keep it lower-intensity and spread it out. More frequent uses, fewer all-consuming bursts...'*

Her previous tests had already suggested that was the better trade-off.

Focus-to-kill ratios had been far more efficient with lighter uses of the Power.

Still, she couldn't completely ignore the utility of a full-bore [Glimpse] for emergencies.

'Alright—low-intensity for steady clearing, high-intensity when we need to burn through Duplicators fast,' she decided. *'I can experiment a little once we're rolling, but I really can't afford to screw this up. No going overboard, Thea.'*

Over the next few minutes, the rest of Alpha trickled in one by one.

First came a second Squad Medic, his armor visibly scratched and scorched but his stance steady and no less for wear, visor sweeping the alcove for something—maybe injured—before he gave her a sharp nod.

Next was the second Defensive Heavy.

She stood out immediately to Thea—wearing standard Heavy-type armor rather than the Super-Heavy sets Thea had grown used to seeing on Marines in that Role.

Her shield was smaller too, more like a heater-shield than the massive slabs carried by most Defensive Heavies. Still, the way she moved absolutely *radiated* confidence. And if Sergeant Kalt had specifically assigned her for this mission, and by the fact that her armour was somehow practically *pristine*, Thea figured there had to be good reason.

Even if she didn't know *how* yet, the Defensive Heavy would get the job done.

Finally, the last member arrived—a Medium-type carrying what could barely be called a gun.

The weapon system strapped to his arms and shoulders looked less like a singular design and more like someone had ripped parts off a dozen different prototypes and welded them together. Wires, canisters, tubes and cooling fins meshed into a strange, hulking amalgamation that hummed faintly with energy.

'*I guess that's my Offensive Heavy,*' Thea thought, watching him set the thing down against the wall with surprising ease before starting to inspect it. She tried to parse what it might even do, but came up blank.

It was just far too alien a design.

Before she could consider asking, however, Sergeant Kalt's voice cut into her ear over a fresh comms channel specifically for Alpha and Command.

"Thea, double-check with your squad if everything's ready to go, then report back to me. Couldn't spare another Squad Medic—two's all I could get you. We need to get this show on the road as soon as possible."

She gave a sharp comms click in acknowledgment, then turned to Alpha.

"Status?"

The replies came back instantly, all five of them—the two Medics, the two Defensive Heavies, and the odd-armed, Medium-type Offensive Heavy—reporting in ready.

"Sergeant Kalt, Alpha is ready to go," Thea confirmed. "Where do you need us?"

A short pause followed, filled with the background noise of shouted orders, gunfire and explosions just beyond the embrasure's walls, before Kalt answered.

"Since I don't yet know what kind of impact to expect from you and your squad, we'll start cautiously. Head for E36—you'll be isolated for several alcoves, so enemy retaliation should be manageable. Operational procedure is up to you, McKay. I trust you know what to do with the resources you've got."

"Copy," Thea replied without hesitation.

She turned back to Alpha, gesturing sharply for them to follow.

But before she stepped out, she glanced back toward what had briefly been her Wellis Two—if it could even still be called that now that she'd once again left them with their Corporal in charge.

"Stay alive. All of you. That's an order."

A unified chorus of "Yes, Ma'am!" rang out from the alcove, the Corporal's voice loudest among them.

Satisfied, Thea nodded once and stepped into the tunnel.

She nearly collided head-on with a Marine coming in from the west, boots skidding to a stop.

Her eyes widened as she recognized him.

"Medic Chester," she said, a flicker of elated surprise in her voice. "Good to see you on your feet. I'm heading out to start pushing the enemy back... Would you care to join me? If you've got any Focus left, Alpha would be glad to have you."

Before he could answer, an errant thought slipped out with a smirk tugging at her lips. "I'll make sure you survive this one in one piece, promise."

For a moment, his expression twisted—first taken aback, then severely irritated, his jaw tightening like he wanted to argue.

But just as fast, the tension bled into a resigned smirk.

He finally gave a small nod.

"I'll manage," he said at last. "Banged up, sure, but I've still got enough left in me for a few more [Focus Link]s." His tone hardened, and his eyes locked onto hers with a seriousness that caught her off guard. "Let's fuck them up good. For Marie and Falks."

Thea blinked, but only for a heartbeat. She motioned for him to fall in with Alpha, her voice steady as he passed her. "For Marie and Falks."

They set off eastward, boots drumming the packed dirt.

By the time they reached E20, the noise of bustling Marines reached their ears—people shouting over one another, the clang of crates, and the mechanical hum of loaders at work.

A glowing holographic sign confirmed what she already suspected: **AMMUNITION DEPOT.**

'Good!' she thought.

She'd counted on being able to resupply here en-route, since the second trenchline was one of the few in this DM outfitted with depots.

Thea slowed just enough to gesture at the two Squad Medics—not including Chester.

"Fifteen capacitor mags and five coolant mags for my Gram. Each. Then catch up."

Both Medics gave quick affirmatives and split off without hesitation, weaving through the flow of Marines heading into the depot.

She wondered for half a moment whether it would have been smart to give more exact details, like the actual size and specifications for the magazines she required, but she threw out the troubling thoughts immediately.

'Competence is to be assumed at all times, until proven otherwise,' her Old Man's words echoed through her mind.

So Thea didn't stop to watch them go.

She was already moving again, her boots hitting the tunnel floor in a steady rhythm as she pressed on toward E36, Alpha falling into formation behind her.

Finally, after another minute of steady jogging through the winding tunnels, they reached E36—their first stop, and the position where Alpha would begin their push.

'Alright,' Thea told herself, letting the breath in her lungs settle as she stepped into the alcove. *'Time to put on my game face.'*

The trepidation twisting in her chest didn't vanish, but it shifted, melting into something sharper, something she knew well: Performance-bound adrenaline.

She'd learned long ago how to turn that initial sensation of performance anxiety into an advantage.

Years of high-stakes tournaments had drilled it into her—how to take the raw, nervous energy that made your hands shake and your stomach churn and turn it into focus and speed instead of hesitation.

It was all about mindset, about reframing the moment.

And the long minutes she'd spent waiting for Alpha to assemble had given her more than enough time to do just that.

This was just another high-stakes match—only this time, the arena was a trenchline, and the stakes were far higher than any tournament she'd ever played. A lot more people were counting on her to perform.

Taking position at the rightmost part of the alcove, just as she had with Wellis Squad before, Thea slung her Ballistic and Gauss Grams off her shoulder and handed them to one of the Medics with nothing but a pointed look.

The Medic took them silently, understanding the task without needing words.

"Ondis," she called, turning towards the Offensive Heavy. "Take both Defensive Heavies and one of the Medics. Move up three alcoves and shadow my shots. Kill all the Super-Heavy Armours you can, I can't deal with them efficiently. That's your only job, so make sure to do it well."

She'd made sure to pay extra close attention during the introductions and memorize all their names during the march—no sense commanding people she couldn't address properly.

Both Defensive Heavies hesitated, their helmets turning her way. She could tell what they were thinking—that leaving the so-called Battlefield Ace alone didn't seem like the smartest move.

"You're of no use to me here," Thea added sharply, cutting off their hesitation. "I need Ondis alive as long as possible, and you'll be more useful protecting him. I'll need you once we move out of the trenches, so stay the fuck alive."

The two Heavies gave curt, overlapping "Yes, Ma'am"s before moving to position. Ondis scanned the alcove for a Medic to accompany them, but Chester stepped forward immediately.

"I'll go," he said, voice steady but tired. "I've got the least Focus left, so I won't be much use to her here."

Thea met his eyes for a moment—he managed to keep the flinch to a minimum this time—and gave a small nod of approval.

"Everyone," she said, turning her focus back to the squad, "turn your environmental mufflers to *max*. If you don't have one, full-mask up and do it manually. It's going to get loud."

She took a second to confirm her own muffler was maxed out, unwilling to make the same mistake twice.

"She's not kidding," Chester added dryly, the corner of his mouth twitching in a grim smile. "Make damn sure it's at maximum... just trust me on this."

His pained look earned a few concerned glances from the rest of the squad before the team split.

Moments later, the two Medics who had gone to fetch extra ammo returned, heavy packs slung over their shoulders. Thea didn't waste time.

"Medics, listen up. When we're stationary, I want a [Focus Link] on me at all times. I'll be draining you fast, so keep a close eye on your Focus levels. No Overdraws—I don't need anyone dropping dead on me, understood?"

A quick round of affirmatives followed.

The Medics exchanged a silent look, a wordless conversation passing between them before one—the one without the ammo packs, that had her two spare weapons slung over her shoulder—stepped forward to start.

Thea barely noticed.

Her focus was already shifting outward as she felt the faint, tingling rush of the [Focus Link] snap into place.

She crouched low, peering through the embrasure.

The night outside was chaos incarnate—tracer fire, detonations, and the glow of energy blasts rolling across the field like waves. The Stellar Republic's forces were pushing hard, surging forward out of the now-shattered first trenchline and continuing to barrel straight toward them.

Her fingers flexed around the grip of her modified Laser-type Gram. She took one slow, measured breath, feeling her heartbeat steady a little, despite the adrenaline, as the familiar calm before a fight settled in.

'Alright,' she thought, scanning the chaos through the narrow embrasure slit. 'The stage is set. Squad's as ready as they'll ever be. Testing's over—time for full performance until the end of this DM... then a long-ass nap back at the dorms.'

The thought made her lips twitch.

She was already looking forward to it—shutting off her brain, stretching out somewhere quiet, maybe even asking Kara to act as a pillow again; that one had done wonders after the Psychic lesson with the Rune priest.

As exciting as this mission had been so far—with her somehow ending up both commander of a freshly formed Alpha Squad of her own making *and* a temporary Battlefield Ace—the social part of it was already taking its toll.

Constant interaction, constant leadership... it wore on her more than any combat ever did.

She rolled her shoulders, loosening the tension building in her neck, and switched to the private command channel Sergeant Kalt had given her.

"Alpha Squad in position and ready," she said, her voice steady, professional. "On your mark, Sergeant."

A confirmation click came from her comms and she started scoping out potential pockets of targets, as she waited for Sergeant Kalt's go.

It didn't take long.

"This is a priority notice for all Marines," he announced over the public command channel, his deep-set voice ringing in every Marine's ear across the entire battlefield. "Squad designation Alpha has now been deployed to the battlefield. To all of you: Kill the Freaks with everything you got. That is all."

Thea felt the familiar wash of Sergeant Kalt's platoon-wide buff hit her—sharp, steady, the kind of edge that tightened focus and steadied hands. She wasn't sure when the last one had expired, only that the difference now was once again immediate and obvious: Sights felt clearer, breaths slower, the world narrowing to the slit of her embrasure.

“Show us what it means to be a Battlefield Ace, Thea,” Kalt said over the private channel, his tone almost clinical but with the smallest crack of something like excitement. “Kill them all. Don’t stop until the DM’s clear.”

She let her comms click once in affirmation, already too focused on the next steps she knew needed to be taken, as she simultaneously spread her Nano-Bot Swarm around the alcove.

Outside, the UHF fire picked up almost immediately, like someone had flipped a switch—tracer lines doubled, explosive thumps came harder and more quickly, and sections of the battlefield she hadn’t noticed a moment before threw themselves back into the fight.

For an instant the Stellar Republic forces wavered, as if the sudden second wind had punched a hole in their nerves. Then their response snapped into place: Bulkied Defensive Heavies clawed forward from the heart of the enemy mass, shields and Super-Heavy armour locking into several moving walls to protect the lighter troops behind them against the sudden onslaught.

Thea watched it all and let a vicious little grin pull at her lips.

Kalt’s announcement had done exactly what they wanted—forced the enemy to expose new lines and shift focus towards the western side of the trenchline.

That meant pockets of vulnerability opened up, blind spots she could fish through, and a precious few extra seconds to move unseen once the real shooting started. With the whole UHF line pouring everything into pressuring them, it would take the Republic’s command longer to parse how dangerous her own actions actually were.

That delay was going to be everything.

Keying into squad comms, Thea said just two words—calm, clipped, certain. “Go-time.”

She drew in a deep breath, lungs steadying, heart slowing to that razor focus she knew too well. Then she let it out—not as a shout, but as a raw, primal scream as hard as she could.

The Nano-Bot Swarm flared to life around her, amplifying her voice into an unholy chorus.

The air itself seemed to vibrate as the sound peaked and cracked like a million tortured speakers tearing themselves apart.

“[GLIMPSE]!”

The world bled of color in an instant, falling into that familiar monochrome haze as the Psychic Power surged through and out of her. Thea’s perception exploded outward as her awareness stretched into the Stellar Republic’s ranks.

She *felt* herself move, *watched* herself reap through their frontlines like a phantom of precision and violence.

Her mind ran at a pace that bordered on self-destruction—Sergeant Kalt’s Buff smoothing the edges just enough to keep her from burning herself out completely.

She tried to anchor everything she saw: Every step, every flick of her trigger finger, every ricochet and recoil, every shift in enemy posture or armor pattern. Each death seared into her consciousness as information, data, rhythm.

She was forcing herself to remember it all—not as part of the Power, or even the System itself, but sheer power of will—so she could repeat it later, faster, cleaner.

Seconds stretched into an eternity.

Her thoughts frayed under the strain of trying to hold onto everything, her head pounding, nerves screaming as the edges of her mind began to burn.

Then, finally, the monochrome world stuttered—glitched—and shattered.

Thea gasped, snapping back into reality—and the no-man's-land between the two trench lines turned red.

Her body moved before her mind fully caught up, the [Glimpse] still burning behind her eyes.

The Gram screamed in her hands, the [Double-Feather Trigger] chattering as she feathered it faster than most Marines would even dare *think* to pull. Each squeeze birthed two blinding lances of light, the air shimmering with the heat of supercharged plasma.

The first Duplicator fell before he even knew he was in danger—a Heavy-type, his thick chestplate glinting under flarelight. Her shot sliced clean through the narrow seam between his neck guard and shoulder pauldron, vaporizing bone and sinew in a flash.

The second dropped a heartbeat later. Another Heavy, ducking behind a nearby Defensive Heavy's shield, thinking he was safe. Her beam punched straight through the side of his helmet, leaving only a molten ring where the steel had been.

The third and fourth came in similarly quick succession—Medium-armored soldiers sprinting to reposition behind the Defensive Heavies' line, trying to position themselves to be better hidden from the western-front's onslaught.

One full trigger tap, two beams cutting across the night.

The first Marine's head burst into steam and red mist mid-stride; the second's chest cavity bloomed open as molten metal and flesh sprayed outward.

Both crumpled mid-step, their nearby clones following suit immediately.

Her fifth shot hit a Light-armored Scout weaving between shields and white-foam barriers. The laser pierced his torso and exploded out his back, the additional power of her modified Gram's laser allowing for a clean punch-through, spinning him violently before his body hit the mud.

Her sixth target—a sniper setting up behind a half-melted white-foam barricade—managed to align his rifle towards their side for half a moment before Thea's shot punched straight through his eye socket, turning the upper half of his head into vapor.

The seventh was a Duplicator trying to drag a wounded comrade to cover. Thea's beam caught him dead center in the abdomen, punching clean through both bodies in one continuous streak.

They dropped together, smoke rising from the clean, cauterized holes left behind.

Every movement was preordained. Every kill came exactly as she'd seen it in the [Glimpse].

Her body danced between fire and re-aim, the barrel snapping from one target to the next with machine-like precision, as she followed the exact movements she was holding in her head. The Gram glowed hot in her hands, coolant hissing as it fought to keep up with the ferocity of her firing pace.

By the time her magazine hit half-capacity, the front line of the Stellar Republic was a chaotic mess—holes torn straight through formations that had seemed untouchable minutes ago.

And still Thea kept firing, eyes cold, movements fluid, following the fading afterimage of her own future as she worked off of the memories she was desperately holding onto within her mind.

Then, finally—almost a full second after she'd triggered her [Glimpse]—it was over.

Thea's muscles trembled as she exhaled hard, the tension crashing through her all at once.

She slumped forward slightly, chest heaving as she dragged in deep, steadying breaths.

Her Gram hissed in protest, steam curling from the barrel, the scent of scorched metal and ozone thick in the air. She ejected the capacitor with a sharp click; the spent unit tumbled to the floor, glowing faintly from residual heat.

It wasn't completely drained, but close enough—she'd nearly cooked the whole thing dry in that single, blistering second of fire. Thea pulled a fresh capacitor magazine from her ammo pouch and slammed it into place, the weapon humming back to full charge.

She raised the Gram again, fingers finding the grip automatically as she drew in another slow, grounding breath. Her throat burned raw from the earlier screams, and her head throbbed from the mental strain of forcing so much information through her mind at once.

'No point holding back now, huh?' she thought, a rueful smile tugging at her lips. *'Might as well see just how far I can really push this, when needed.'*

Then she let the breath out and *screamed*.

“[GLIMPSE]!”

The Nano-Bot Swarm erupted back to life, catching and amplifying her voice until it became a deafening, electric roar that rattled the air once more...