

Arc 1 - Chapter 95 - Profound

Leading Alpha Squad deeper into the service tunnels beneath the border-wall, Thea was meticulous in her approach, carefully inspecting each corner before allowing the team to proceed. Aware of the critical phase their mission had reached, she was determined not to leave anything to chance. They had navigated the most challenging parts of their operation, and now, their main objective was to seamlessly blend into the bustling life of Nova Tertius.

The silence in the tunnels was almost tangible, with the narrow passageways, just wide enough for two to walk abreast with some effort, absorbing the sounds of their movement.

This quietude lent an eerie quality to their journey, amplifying the sense of isolation from the world above.

Amid this solitude, a palpable tension enveloped the squad, a collective anticipation of what lay ahead. This apprehension served as an unspoken agreement to forego any casual banter or unnecessary noise, not that it had been required, of course. Each member was more than acutely aware of the importance of maintaining focus and discretion; no one wanted to be responsible for any slip-up that could jeopardise their careful and hard-earned progress.

As they moved swiftly through the dimly lit corridors, every step brought them closer to their goal: Emerging unnoticed into the city and finding refuge among its countless inhabitants. The mission's success now hinged on their ability to navigate these final stages with the same precision and stealth that had brought them this far.

Thea had carefully chosen their route, a winding path that meandered through the no-man's-land separating the border-wall from Nova Tertius. Her selection was deliberate, favouring the intricate, maze-like structure of these tunnels over some of the more open, direct paths.

This design allowed Alpha Squad to navigate the underground network in shorter segments, offering them more opportunities for cover and concealment, as opposed to traversing a long, exposed corridor that would strand them in a dangerous situation should they run into any obstacles.

This choice, while making their journey quite a lot longer, significantly increased their security in her mind.

Thea's vigilance was similarly unwavering in her approach to guiding the squad as she meticulously checked for traps, alarms, or guards at every corner twice over, ensuring their passage remained undetected. The role of leadership was pressing heavily on her, as she felt the need to ensure their successful completion of the mission even more thoroughly than usual.

Around another fifteen minutes into their cautious advance, they approached another critical juncture, one of several that would be coming up in their path: An intersection where five different tunnel paths converged, each leading to separate areas of the underground system.

Such intersections were inherently risky for Alpha Squad.

They were prime locations for the Stellar Republic to station guards, set up alarms, lay traps, or other deterrents for intruders, signifying an even more increased requirement for vigilance from the squad.

Recognizing the potential dangers way ahead of time, Thea signalled the squad to stop a safe distance from the intersection, two corners away.

This pause was going to be crucial for her to reassess their position.

As Thea meticulously scanned the map of the subterranean passages once more, she reaffirmed their position against the intricately mapped routes beneath Nova Tertius.

She had previously made certain that each member of Alpha Squad was well-versed in their planned path, emphasising the importance of being prepared for any contingencies, including the possibility of her being incapacitated—while she was likely more protected from a random, stray bullet taking her out thanks to her Psychic Powers, the chance was still there.

This precaution ensured that no member would find themselves lost or directionless in the labyrinthine network below the city, should they get separated as well.

Gathering the squad closely, she initiated a secure, silent briefing, leveraging the advanced direct-connection feature of their armour. By establishing physical contact, they created a seamless link among themselves, enabling the transfer of data and facilitating communication without the risk of interception. This method of briefing was crucial for maintaining stealth and avoiding detection by enemy sensors or patrols.

"We're approaching this junction right here," she conveyed through their connected interfaces, projecting the detailed layout onto their individual HUDs. "Our primary route is the north-eastern passage, labelled here as Route 3. It's our best option unless we encounter unexpected obstacles or security measures. If we do, we'll divert to Route 4, heading east. Further ahead, these paths merge at another junction, offering us some leeway in our navigation."

Thea paused, ensuring her squad had a moment to digest the briefing and voice any concerns or queries they might have. Observing their focused silence, she proceeded to elaborate on the tactical considerations of their next move.

"The upcoming area might have a guard outpost on its west," she began, indicating a peculiar anomaly in the intersection's layout displayed on their heads-up displays. "The map shows a small indentation here, possibly accommodating a guard setup. Given our intelligence, I'd estimate a small team, perhaps four or five guards, stationed at this point. It's unlikely they'd have quick reinforcement access, which works in our favour unless there's an undisclosed route we haven't accounted for."

She then shifted the focus to a critical threat they might face. "Our main concern lies with the automated defence systems, however. These auto-turrets pose a significant risk, and understanding them is crucial."

She imparted the knowledge she had gleaned from James, who had emphasised the versatility and danger of these mechanical sentinels during her early years of training.

"They vary widely and come in all shapes and sizes, ranging from anti-armour auto-turrets to twin-linked, dual-barrel and even entire auto-turret batteries that are interlinked to fire enough bullets to create a veritable blanket, but the ones that were mostly deadly for us, as simple marines, are surprisingly enough, the bog-standard anti-infantry auto-turrets, with no bells or whistles attached."

She went on to elaborate on the exact specifications she remembered from James' tutelage.

They were small, lightweight and could be placed nearly everywhere a normal soldier or marine could traverse, which made knowing where and when they would show up almost impossible. Additionally, they were powerful enough to punch through heavy armour in just a couple of shots, as they were often used in close-medium range at most, while also having enough armour and ammunition to survive against some blind counterfire.

It required a concentrated effort or a really well-placed shot to take them down. The most dangerous aspect of them, however, was that they were fast.

Beyond fast, really.

The auto-turrets of the Stellar Republic, and the UHF as well, for that matter, used a sophisticated system of pings, visual recognition and biomarkers to determine friend from foe, which generally took less than a fraction of a second to complete, meaning that by the time a marine had realised they had ran into the field of view of an auto-turret, they had already died.

Furthermore, auto-turrets almost exclusively shot to kill.

There was no taking prisoners with them, unless specifically configured to do so, as they always aimed for what the rudimentary decision tree inside the software determined as the softest, most lethal spot on the target's armour. And unlike humans, a rigid auto-turret never had performance issues due to being surprised, scared, second-guessing its decisions or anything of the sort.

Thea's mind echoed with the lessons James had ingrained in her over the years, a constant reminder of the lethal efficiency of auto-turrets: "If you run into an auto-turret, you die. It's that simple, missy."

His advice had been backed by numerous incidents he had witnessed, where even experienced soldiers, including Majors, had been caught unawares and eliminated by these automated defences.

James' recommended strategy was clear: Avoid direct confrontations with auto-turrets at all costs.

He advised using grenades to scout suspected turret locations or positioning a large shield as a barrier. His teachings back then, were once again coming in surprisingly handy to Thea

and the rest of Alpha Squad, as it seemed that no one in the squad was thoroughly familiar with them.

Even Desmond, who had been able to handle hacking and disabling parts of the software side of the auto-turrets, was looking decidedly pale as Thea laid out the problems posed by the auto-turrets potential existence in the upcoming junction.

“What if we just throw some white-foam grenades to block their line of sight first?” Isabella chimed in, after a brief moment of contemplative silence. “If they can’t see us, they can’t shoot us, right? We can just throw grenades on them afterwards, if they are *actually* there. We have a lot more white-foam than we do explosives.”

The suggestion was sensible at first glance, but Thea knew better than that.

James’ words channelled through her once again as she explained to the rest of the squad, “Unfortunately, that won’t work. Auto-turrets generally have a specific line of sight that they are set up in. If the line of sight gets disturbed by anything that isn’t specifically registered with the turret’s software, be it biomarkers, pings or visual information, the turret will simply start firing. We might be able to briefly disrupt it or check whether there is one with the white-foam, but it wouldn’t give us cover for any meaningful length of time. Better to commit a proper grenade and take it out the first time around, before they know we’re here, I think.”

They quickly formulated a straightforward and efficient plan to neutralise the junction’s threats.

The strategy involved using two grenades—one for the west and one for the east side of the junction—where they surmised auto-turrets were most likely to be positioned.

Lucas, equipped with his Stalwart, would spearhead the operation to absorb any initial gunfire from the auto-turrets, should the grenades fail to take them out, creating a protective barrier for the team. In a single-file formation behind him, the rest of the squad would swiftly neutralise any guards caught in the grenade blasts or those who survived.

Isabella, the team’s resident expert in explosives, was assigned to handle the grenade for the west side, due to her proficiency in timing and deploying explosives. Thea initially volunteered to manage the grenade for the east side, but the squad collectively decided to delegate this task to Karania, allowing Thea to remain unencumbered and ready with her Gram.

This position would enable her to accurately target and eliminate any high-priority threats, capitalising on her superior marksmanship compared to the rest of the squad. Desmond was positioned alongside Thea to provide additional firepower if necessary and take out any non-priority targets that Thea didn’t get around to.

This hastily constructed plan was not intricate but met their immediate needs for rapid action, effectiveness, and sufficient redundancies to be viable for not just this junction, but all the ones to come after as well.

Without much further discussion beyond that point, Alpha Squad initiated their newly laid plan.

Stealthily, they approached the junction's entrance, pausing just shy of the final bend that led to a 20-metre hallway ending at the critical crossroad.

In these moments, Thea observed as Karania and Isabella prepared their grenades, ensuring their equipment was primed for the upcoming confrontation.

Meanwhile, Thea, with practised moves, adjusted her Gram to its highest intensity. She aimed for maximum impact, intending to neutralise any threat within the close confines they were about to face, indifferent to the armour type or the precision of her shot. She had accumulated a sufficient stock of capacitor-mags by now, allowing for the luxury of using the Gram on its highest setting for likely the rest of the assessment, though she typically preferred its performance on a medium setting for general use.

The moment of action arrived swiftly.

With a silent countdown, Thea signalled the commencement of their assault with a discreet tap on Lucas' shoulder. As the count reached its silent climax, Alpha Squad started their move around the corner.

Isabella and Karania, in perfect synchrony, had already launched their grenades towards their predetermined targets at either end of the junction, each projectile arcing through the air after having been bounced off of the hallway's walls once to clear the corner.

Just as Alpha Squad fully rounded the corner, the grenades detonated with deafening roars, filling the junction with blinding flashes and sending shockwaves through the corridor. The explosions caught the Stellar Republic guards utterly off guard, their surprised shouts barely audible over the ringing in everyone's ears.

The well-coordinated assault had the element of surprise fully on its side.

Thea, with her Gram set to its lethal maximum power output, zeroed in on two of the more heavily armoured guards. Her shots were precise, each a carefully aimed beam of concentrated energy that found its mark at the necks of her targets. The guards collapsed without heads instantly, even their heavy armour unable to withstand the precise, focused assault at this close a range.

Meanwhile, Desmond, with his AR-303 at the ready, unleashed a disciplined spray of bullets.

His gunfire was methodical, each round targeting the medium-armoured guards. His efforts were efficient, quickly neutralising the immediate threat they posed with a single, continuous burst of fire that swept across the three, previously seated, guards around the only rough-hewn table in the junction.

As the immediate chaos of the firefight began to subside, Thea allowed herself a momentary sigh of relief. Their entry into the junction had been successful, and as she surveyed the area, her eyes caught sight of the east-hand side. There, amidst the smoke and debris, lay the remnants of an auto-turret—now just a heap of twisted metal and circuits, effectively neutralised by Karania's well-placed grenade.

The threat it could, and almost definitely would, have posed was now null, thanks to their preemptive strike.

This sight afforded Thea a fleeting moment of relief amidst the adrenaline of their assault.

Alpha Squad had managed to secure the junction with precision and speed, overcoming both the guards and the hidden dangers of auto-turrets. Their plan, hastily put together as it had been, had paid off in this crucial moment and proved to be effective enough for future repeats.

“Let’s move. Leave the dead.”

Heeding Thea’s command, the squad refrained from inspecting the defeated foes for potential loot, recognizing the urgency of their mission. Thea promptly guided them towards the designated pathway on the north-eastern side, propelling Alpha Squad through the dimly lit, echoing corridors of the service tunnels beneath Nova Tertius.

Their pace was brisk, an unspoken necessity due to the precarious situation they found themselves in.

Thea was acutely aware that the Stellar Republic’s response would be swift and decisive.

The brief skirmish at the junction, though victorious, was a clear signal to their enemies, and it was only a matter of time before the underground became swarming with patrols.

They could not afford to get bogged down in lengthy fights down here, as every minute they spent, the Stellar Republic could be sending soldiers into the different routes underneath the city to cut them off. While there were a lot of pathways, there were not an infinite number of them and the number of junctions was drastically lower as well.

Her focus was on navigating through this labyrinth efficiently, aiming to emerge within the city limits before the Stellar Republic could effectively seal their escape routes. The pressure to avoid entrapment within the maze-like service tunnels weighed heavily on the squad as they moved with renewed purpose towards their objective...

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Advancing deeper into the service tunnels, Alpha Squad’s tactics remained largely consistent, with slight modifications to enhance their approach based on the layout of each new junction encountered. This methodical progression ensured they maintained momentum, adapting on the fly to the challenges presented by the subterranean maze.

Upon reaching the third junction, however, the atmosphere shifted dramatically.

The signs of their discovered presence were unmistakable, evidenced by the escalated resistance they faced. This junction had not only been more heavily fortified, with the number of guards doubling compared to their earlier encounters, but the defenders had also been in a state of high alert. Unlike the previous junctions where the element of surprise had worked in Alpha Squad’s favour, here, their adversaries had been poised and ready for their potential approach.

Karania and Isabella's grenades, once effective tools of surprise and disorientation, were met with immediate retaliation. The guards, forewarned and prepared, managed to dodge the worst of the explosions and responded with a barrage of gunfire.

This immediate and organised counterattack forced Alpha Squad into a more drawn-out engagement than they had anticipated.

While, ultimately, Alpha Squad had come out on top and dealt with the resistance relatively swiftly, it was a definite shift in the dynamic between hunter and prey, which had previously been in their favour.

They had also not come out entirely unscathed.

Both Isabella and Lucas had taken quite a number of hits that had almost penetrated their heavy armours, the close-range of their engagements not giving them enough leeway for the armour to shrug off their attacks as they normally did.

Desmond and Karania had also taken grazing hits, leaving only Thea as the only person untouched as her Psychic Senses had once again warned her of any incoming shots that would have risked her wellbeing.

Overall, it had been a surprisingly close call, which prompted a brief moment of introspection from the squad, to reassess their plans going forward, but they had been unable to refine anything about their current approach on the fly. They'd simply have to execute better in the future, as they didn't have the luxury of time on their side, to fully re-assess and re-draw the entire plan for any upcoming junctures.

The intensity of this encounter further underscored the realisation that their infiltration was no longer a secret, even down here in the tunnels beneath the city.

The Stellar Republic's forces were now actively on the lookout for them, turning the service tunnels into an increasingly hostile environment. Each step forward became a calculated risk, with the squad fully aware that the path ahead would likely present even greater challenges as the enemy's efforts to intercept them intensified.

The glimmer of hope guiding Alpha Squad through the oppressive darkness of the service tunnels was the knowledge that they were nearing their final obstacle: One last junction before reaching their intended exit within the city.

Thea had meticulously selected this exit point based on its strategic obscurity, betting on the low probability of it being heavily guarded.

According to the detailed maps provided by Corvus, this particular exit lacked any official military presence, with no indications of outposts or even routine guard postings.

This absence of marked defences lent a cautious optimism to their approach, fostering a belief that, should they navigate this last stretch without incident, they might finally breach the city's barriers with relative ease...

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As they neared the crucial last junction, Thea signalled for a pause in their hurried advance, quickly linking up with her team through their armour's direct-connection feature to fine-tune their strategy one last time.

"Time's tight, but let's do a quick review. We're on the brink of entering the city. Any last-minute tactics or suggestions? Now's the moment to share any brain waves you've been holding back 'cause they were more of one-off ideas than anything," she urged, scanning the faces of her squad members for any spark of inspiration or innovation that might bolster their final push through the service tunnels into Nova Tertius.

The squad's brainstorming session resulted in a blend of practical and innovative tactics, culminating in a refined strategy for their final confrontation. The revised plan incorporated the following adjustments:

Alongside the standard deployment of two grenades, Desmond was assigned to launch a cluster of white-foam grenades to maximise confusion and visual obstruction within the junction.

This tactic aimed to transform the area into a bewildering maze, negating the numerical advantage of the Stellar Republic forces by severely limiting visibility. To further exploit the chaotic environment created by the white-foam, Lucas was tasked with strategically positioning his Stalwart shield at the junction's entrance.

This setup was designed to create a protective barrier that angled towards the eastern side, enabling him to effectively utilise his Havoc grenade launcher without exposing himself or the rest of the squad to direct fire from the west, which was the larger free space and more likely area for the majority of soldier to be.

The decision to employ the Havoc in such confined quarters was made after careful consideration of the structural integrity of the service tunnels.

Previous engagements had demonstrated the tunnels' surprising resilience to explosive damage, suggesting that the use of Lucas's more potent ordnance would not pose a significant risk to the squad's safety.

The Havoc's enhanced firepower was expected to provide a decisive advantage, allowing them to neutralise groups of enemies even if they were concealed behind cover.

The overall formation and execution of the assault would largely follow the original plan, however, with Lucas initiating the advance shielded by his Stalwart, while Thea and Desmond, maintaining close formation behind him, focused on eliminating key targets.

As they finalised their tactical adjustments, Desmond collaborated closely with Isabella to meticulously verify the settings of the white-foam grenades, ensuring the intricacies of their planned sequenced detonations were flawlessly executed.

Concurrently, Thea made the strategic decision to reload her Gram with a fresh capacitor-mag. Up to this point, the expenditure of her shots had been conservative, yet the unpredictable scale of the impending confrontation warranted full preparedness.

The concept of "running out" was a non-issue for laser weaponry in the traditional sense, yet the effectiveness of each engagement was contingent upon the available charge.

Decisively, she discarded the partially depleted magazine into the hallway behind them.

Given the improbability of accessing a supply station in the near future, she deemed the minor reduction in weight from discarding the magazine more advantageous than retaining a few remaining shots.

In the event that her ammunition reserve was fully depleted, Thea recognized that the situation would likely be dire enough that the lack of ammunition would be the least of her concerns.

Lucas was loading his Havoc with a series of high-explosive grenades, forgoing any of the other options for the upcoming fight. While shrapnel and concussive grenades would undoubtedly be useful, especially in a cramped space, they couldn't be sure that the rest of the squad wouldn't be affected, considering the severely limited area they had to work with.

With all preparations finalised, Thea guided the squad to the brink of the pivotal junction, initiating the sequence of actions with a decisive gesture, just as she had done with the last few junctions as well.

Karania and Isabella, in seamless coordination, launched their grenades around the bend, closely followed by Desmond's meticulously prepared bundle of white-foam grenades.

As Lucas positioned himself to lead the charge, shielded by his Stalwart with Thea closely behind, an intense pang of danger surged through Thea's chest, compelling her to react instinctively. Her imperative shout, "STOP!" resonated precisely at the moment the grenades were anticipated to detonate, concealing their advance.

Instead, what followed was merely a sequence of pops and the noise of white-foam expanding, absent the awaited explosions that were supposed to clear the auto-turrets.

Lucas's momentum, already in motion, was abruptly halted by Thea's forceful intervention, preventing him from fully entering the hallway. Almost simultaneously, a burst of auto-turret gunfire erupted, targeting the space they were about to occupy.

Protected mostly by his Stalwart, Lucas was shielded from direct hits, with most gunfire targeting his centre mass. Yet, an auto-turret's precise aim exploited an opening, targeting his feet, a vulnerability exposed by Thea's rapid intervention to halt his forward momentum, to prevent him from entering the dangerous hallway fully.

High-calibre bullets shattered the rockcrete beneath and penetrated his right foot with brutal force. Lucas teetered on the brink of collapsing, his balance compromised, but Thea's forceful tug ensured he didn't tumble into exposed territory.

His agony was vocal, a stark contrast to the brief silence before, as his blood swiftly pooled from where his protected foot had been, now a grievously wounded remnant, until he was securely behind cover once more.

Thea urgently motioned for a retreat, "Back, back!"

Isabella, with her quick reflexes, immediately rushed to assist in moving Lucas away from the immediate danger zone.

Karania, having sensed the emergency as soon as Thea's command was given, prepared with two blue-foam grenades in hand, quickly threw them towards the contested hallway.

Unlike the wall-like rockcrete created by white-foam, the blue-foam rapidly expanded in all directions equally, filling the space with a dense, encapsulating mass, effectively sealing off the area and muffling the relentless gunfire from the auto-turrets.

Without delay, Karania aimed an ampule filled with a crimson liquid towards Lucas' grievously injured foot. Upon impact, the ampule broke, releasing its contents which swiftly formed a temporary, but stabilising, medical wrap around the wound, halting the bleed as they made their withdrawal back further into the hallway.

Thea's frustration reached a boiling point, her whispered curses barely audible, "Fuck, fuck, fuck!"

Her mind raced with regrets—if only her reaction had been quicker, Lucas wouldn't be suffering now!

The situation seemed to spiral out of control as she struggled to devise a new strategy, feeling utterly helpless. Medical expertise was beyond her, the potential blockades of other routes unknown, and the pressing need to check for followers overwhelmed her.

She couldn't manage it all simultaneously.

Observing Karania meticulously tending to Lucas' wounded foot, with Isabella and Desmond poised to counter any immediate threat, afforded Thea a momentary pause.

This break allowed her to attempt regaining her composure.

She inhaled deeply, focusing on the act of breathing—a technique James had instilled in her years and years ago, shortly after picking her up from the streets, a method to find calm amidst chaos. Something that had been her solace during restless nights filled with haunting dreams, a method to centre herself and confront the darkness.

As Thea's breathing steadied, a wave of calm washed over her, bringing with it a sense of clarity and an inner voice that she had almost forgotten. This voice, her own internal counsel, spoke with a blend of firmness and kindness, guiding her through the tumult of her thoughts.

*'You don't have to shoulder all of this alone, Thea,' the voice reprimanded. 'Remember Corvus' advice. The countless hours spent playing team games in the arcade. A squad's strength lies in its **collective abilities**, not just in one person. You have a team, each with their own expertise, skills you may very well never surpass. It's not about outdoing each member at their best; it's about harnessing that collective best for the squad's advantage. A DPS will never outdo a healer on heals. A tank will never out-damage a DPS. A healer will never take more damage than a tank. You know this from the simplest of game trifactas, so*

why do you keep refusing this in life? Lean on them, trust in their capabilities. They're just as capable as you; even more in their areas of expertise. Embrace that!

The internal dialogue unfolding within Thea's mind felt surreal, almost like an introspective journey, yet its impact was profound. As she engaged in this self-reflection, a wave of enlightenment washed over her, bringing her thoughts into sharp focus.

'It's been so misguided,' Thea realised, the insight dawning on her with the force of a lightning bolt. *'All this time, my efforts to excel in every domain, to surpass each squad member in their area of expertise, was such a misguided waste of time, wasn't it...? I leaned on Desmond's skills to locate the Mativ, on Lucas to identify it. I let Corvus sacrifice himself, because it made sense. I relied on them through sheer instinct, logic, so why did I restrict it to just that one instance in this entire time? We are more than just individuals; we are Alpha Squad; not Thea Squad. There's no merit in trying to match Isabella in close-quarters combat; no merit in trying to outdo Kara with medicine or Desmond in tech; that's their realm of excellence. Just like mine is scouting and sniping. What have I even been attempting to prove through this kind of thinking, this entire time...?'*

Armed with this clarity, Thea's eyes snapped open, her gaze settling on the aftermath of their plan gone awry in the service tunnels. But more importantly, she saw her squad, her team, through a new lens.

Thea's next orders were crisp and decisive, reflecting her newfound clarity and understanding of her own purpose in this scenario—she was not the main character, to make the miraculous hero-play; not the medic to save a life or the heavy to hold a door.

She turned to Isabella, her voice steady, "Isabella, secure that corridor. Don't let anyone get past you. Use whatever means in your arsenal if necessary, and signal me for any additional supplies or assistance if needed." Isabella, understanding the urgency, acknowledged with a determined nod and swiftly moved into position, ready to hold their line of defence.

Next, she focused on Desmond, her instructions clear, "Desmond, launch your drones. Scan corridors 58 and 53 as designated on the map. We need an alternate route, preferably one less icky, but I'll take whatever you can give me. Keep me posted with frequent updates, every minute. Hurry it up." Desmond, momentarily surprised by Thea's assertive tone, quickly gathered his composure, nodded, and set to work, his first drone buzzing to life as it embarked on their critical reconnaissance mission, with his second getting ready.

Turning her attention to the wounded Lucas and Karania, Thea's tone softened, "Kara, Lucas is fully in your hands. Let me know immediately what you need." She knelt beside them, offering her support and readiness to assist Karania in any medical procedures that might be necessary.

This failure of the plan and subsequent ordeal wasn't about individual mistakes or heroics; it was about a mistake happening and the need to make due with what they had.

If that included Thea simply lending a helping hand while the rest of the squad exercised their respective expertises, then that wasn't a *failure* on her part; it was simply the most effective strategy for victory...