

The Gang's Kinda All Here

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The Gang's Kinda All Here

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Summary

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Act One: Introducing Urdnot Wrex

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Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

RW Gallena

Sitting at the head of the conference room table, Subcommander Avesti addressed the group that she had assembled. “All right...our next stop is Tuchanka. So...tell me what I should expect.”

“Sand...lots of sand.” Vega quipped, “Plus assorted wild and ‘tame’ varren, klixen, the odd thresher maw, and...oh yeah...a shitload of angry krogan.”

“That pretty much sums up, Tuchanka.” Kaidan agreed with a twinkle in his eyes.

“Accurate summation of native fauna.” Mordin affirmed, “Very limited flora on planet due to radiation and climate change from nuclear wars.”

“So...what do we know about their leadership?” The subcommander inquired.

“Next to nothing.” Kaidan shook his head. “The krogan aren’t very forthcoming with outsiders about their internal politics.”

“Clans vie for control.” Mordin explained, “One clan briefly dominates and then leader is overthrown.”

“Generally killed.” Garrus interjected with a laugh.

“Correct. Krogan politics usually fatal.” Mordin asserted, “Winning side...losing side...doesn’t matter. Lots of deaths by the end.”

“And then the next round of jockeying and killing begins.” Kaidan finished somberly, shaking his head.

“Correct again.” The salarian scientist grimly affirmed.

“You’d think they’d have driven themselves to extinction living the way they do.” Tovan Kev, the warbird’s executive officer, remarked somberly.

“Parameters for genophage adjusted to account for krogan violence.” The salarian scientist responded. “Reproductive rate of fertile females adequate to maintain numbers necessary for viable population.”

Shaking her head, Satra, the *Gallena’s* science officer, rebuked. “The genophage shouldn’t have been introduced in the first place.”

“No choice.” Mordin countered defensively, “Krogan Rebellions existential threat to galaxy. Countless number of lives lost. More would have died. Something had to be done. Did not want to exterminate krogan people—that would have been a horrible crime. Genophage best solution. Preserves krogan people and society. Gives krogan opportunity to evolve into a more peaceful society that can participate fully in galactic community.”

“So...you would welcome the krogan back into your Council again if they can prove that they are willing to make peace?” Lieutenant Commander Cilla Oudekirk, the senior Starfleet officer on board, queried.

“Yes!” Mordin vehemently replied, “Krogan can make great contributions. Hopefully, current leadership will be amenable to change.”

“Let’s hope you’re right.” V’lana concluded as she rose to her feet, “If there’s nothing else...”

Raising his hand, the salarian scientist implored, “May I see you, Subcommander...in private. Delicate matter involving Tuchanka.”

Nodding her head, the subcommander agreed, “Of course, Mordin. Come with me to my ready room. We can talk there.”

“Thank you.” Mordin replied. “Will be brief.”

V’lana’s Ready Room

“Have a seat.” V’lana requested as she walked to the replicator. “Tarkalian tea. Anything for you?”

“Yes, Chamomile tea, please.” The salarian scientist replied as he sat down on the couch his lips turning up in a slight grin, “Have developed

taste for it. Soothing.”

“You should try Tarkalian tea sometime.” The subcommander replied with a grin, “I find it does the same thing. So...” She inquired, quickly getting to the point, “What do you need to talk about?”

Mordin responded after taking a sip of his tea, “Was part of STG reconnaissance team assigned to Tuchanka to monitor and evaluate genophage under Captain Kirrahe...”

“Kaidan mentioned a Captain Kirrahe who was killed at Virmire.” V’lana commented, “Are we talking about the same person?”

“Was commanding officer.” The salarian explained. “Our mission was reconnaissance. Covert operation—tissue...water analysis...studying effects of genophage. Good officer...bit of a cloaca though...Hold the line! Chest thumping...military bravado...no offense” Mordin chuckled.

“None taken.” V’lana joked back, also laughing.

Continuing, the salarian remarked, “Preferred to just get the job done and go home.”

“I know someone like that.” The lovely Romulan subcommander replied with a chuckle as she demurely crossed her legs. “He’s a good officer—maybe a little high strung sometimes, but very capable in a fight.”

“That describes Captain Kirrahe.” Mordin declared, nodding his head. “Good officer. His second in command, Commander Rentolla was also a good man. Diligent...great quartermaster. Made sure we stayed adequately supplied. Could find a use for virtually everything...no matter how inconsequential it appeared. Was a good team. Pity they all died at Virmire.”

“From what I’ve heard, a lot of good people died there.”

“Yes. Kirrahe and his team...Gunnery Chief Williams...others...could have been Urdrnot Wrex had it not been for deft touch on part of Shepard talking him down. Very nicely done.”

“Kaidan and I were talking about Chief Williams and Virmire recently.” V’lana nodded her head before taking a sip of tea. “Shepard and Kirrahe both had to make hard calls...”

“Not blaming Shepard! Please don’t think that!” Mordin held up his hand, “Did a very good job keeping deaths as low as she did. Could have been much worse.” The salarian scientist then brought the discussion back on topic, “But we were talking about my reconnaissance team...”

“Right.” V’lana replied with a single nod of her head as she probed leadingly, “I take it your survey found out something disturbing?”

“Yes.” The scientist affirmed, “Krogan were adapting to genophage. Information I am about to tell you...confidential...”

“This is why you wanted to talk to me in private rather than bringing the topic up in our conference.” V’lana concluded with a frown.

“Correct.” The salarian sighed, “Realize that you might have to inform science officer or others...wanted to talk to you first. To explain.”

“Go on...”

Mordin took a deep breath and exhaled before speaking, “Krogan Rebellions devastating—almost as destructive as Rachni wars. Could not risk an unchecked krogan population explosion, but also did not want to commit genocide.”

“So you said at the conference.” V’lana noted, “A tricky proposition...trying to keep that balance.”

“Yes.” The salarian agreed, “Had to ensure fertility levels high enough to replenish and maintain krogan numbers at a viable level, but not so high as to cause population explosion that might cause another krogan rebellion.”

“I take it you have something else to tell me...” The subcommander continued to probe.

“I do.” Mordin replied. “Purpose of team was to evaluate genophage and impact on krogan population. What we discovered after completing tests was...disturbing.”

“How so?”

“All of our tests pointed to same thing.” The salarian scientist explained, “Krogans adapting to genophage and fertility numbers slowly increasing.”

“I’m no scientist...” The subcommander admitted, “But I do know that species will adapt...and a species with the redundancies that krogan have and who are also living in the harsh environment that is Tuchanka would have to adapt...”

“Quickly.” Mordin nodded his head, “Exactly. Krogan biology adapting...fertility levels showed signs of increasing. Potential danger.”

“So what did you do?” V’lana inquired, already suspecting what the answer would be.

“We altered parameters of genophage.” Mordin flatly declared, “Re-engineered virus to bring fertility levels back in line.”

The subcommander sighed, “If this were a Starfleet vessel, the captain would probably be reading you the riot act right now and then tell you that there’s nothing that can be done to help you because of the Prime Directive.” Seeing the frown appearing on the salarian’s face, V’lana spoke quickly before he could interrupt, “Thankfully for you, you’re not on a Starfleet ship and I’m not a Starfleet captain.” Seeing the momentary relaxation of Mordin’s posture on hearing that, the subcommander quickly added, “Not that I don’t think that what you and turians

did wasn't shitty—because it was. But..." she sighed, "as you said about Shepard and Kirrahe on Vormire, it was a difficult situation and you had to make a hard choice. I can understand that. So..." She asked, cutting to the chase, "what is it that you wanted to speak to me about? Really."

"Member of team involved in altering genophage...Maelon...student of mine...good man...missing. Captured by krogans. Fear that he might have been taken to Tuchanka by clan seeking cure for genophage." Mordin frowned as he somberly concluded, "Probably being tortured and forced to work on cure as we speak."

"Do you think that he could discover a cure for the genophage on his own?" V'lana asked as she took a sip of tea.

"As I said...bright and intelligent student. Given resources and incentive..." Mordin concluded with a worried frown, "Yes."

"So...you want us to try to recover him?" V'lana inquired.

"Please." Mordin practically begged, "Feel responsible for him...does not deserve what krogan will do...are probably doing...to him."

Nodding her head, V'lana let out a breath of air. "Very well...Having been tortured and forced to do shit I didn't want to do...I don't like it when someone else has to go through the same thing. I'll talk to whoever's calling the shots down there and do what I can to find and recover him. Just..." the Romulan counseled, "don't expect miracles. While our orbital scanners should pick up on salarian life signs, we might not be able to beam him up due to the high levels of radiation on Tuchanka as well as other environmental factors. That means...provided we get permission...we're going to have to go in and get him. If he's a hostage or if they feel like they might lose him they could..."

"Kill him." Mordin nodded his head. "Understood. Would still like to...need to...try."

V'lana responded. "Very well. Once we arrive and get into standard orbit, I'll have Satra and Samantha carry out a scan for salarian life signs and krogan clan communications. I was planning on eavesdropping on their chatter anyway."

"Prudent move." Mordin agreed as a slight smile appeared on his face, "And...thank you. Even if unable to recover Maelon...appreciate effort."

"*Subcommander?*" The posh accented English voice of the *Gallena's* Alliance communications specialist sounded out from the comm speaker.

"Yes, Specialist Traynor?" V'lana replied.

"*We are approaching Tuchanka under cloak.*" Traynor reported, "*There are at least two Blood Pack frigates and a turian patrol vessel.*"

"Maintain cloak and put us in standard orbit near whatever passes for their capital and begin scans for salarian life signs as well as monitoring communications—krogan and turian. I'll be on the bridge shortly."

"*Aye, Subcommander.*"

"Well, Mordin..." V'lana declared with a wicked grin, "Time to go to work."

"Indeed." The salarian replied as a slight grin appeared on his face. "Much to do."

"Keep us cloaked." The subcommander ordered from her center chair as she observed the arid world of Tuchanka. Also on her viewscreen, she saw the turian-manned monitoring station, at least one turian patrol cruiser, and several Blood Pack frigates and transports.

"Gotta love it." Joker quipped, "Here we are right up next to them and they don't even know we're here."

"Let's keep it that way." V'lana commanded as, resting her elbow on her thigh, she cupped her chin. "What are we picking up on the comms, Samantha?"

"Routine chatter from the turian monitoring station." The communications specialist crisply responded. "The usual bluster coming from the Blood Pack although..." after a momentary pause, Samantha continued, "I am picking up something on a coded frequency from the lead Blood Pack frigate."

"Can you decrypt?"

Chuckling, the tawny-skinned science and communications expert replied, "This is Blood Pack we're talking about. Ask me to do something difficult." A smirk of triumph appearing on her face, Traynor exclaimed, "Got it!"

"*If I don't get reinforcements...*" a gruff voice declared, "*you won't be getting any platinum.*"

"*You don't need any more troops to kill a bunch of klixen, Salamul. Deal with the vermin!*"

"*Fuck you!*"

"Mmmm...wonder what that was all about?" V'lana mused and then instructed, "Keep monitoring that channel...let's see what else we can uncover."

"Aye, Subcommander." Samantha replied before commenting, "That's odd."

"What?"

"I've got a dead area on my scans due to the presence of eezo and some strange comm traffic along with...verteron radiation." Turning to her

lover, Samantha requested, “You wanna double check that for me, Sat?”

“Sure.” The Romulan science officer agreed as she joined her lover at her station. “We’re definitely picking up verteron emissions as well as high concentrations of eezo on our passive scans.”

“Play the comm traffic.” V’lana ordered as she leaned forward in her chair.

“It’s garbled.” Samantha cautioned.

“That’s all right.” The subcommander replied, “Play it anyway.”

“Arg...” then a steady stream of static, “...d...ng...us...” more static, “...lo...pro...”

“Nothing else, Ma’am.” Traynor reported.

“Pinpoint the location.” V’lana ordered. “We’ll see if we can get the clan leader’s permission to check the place out.” The subcommander further mused, “Best to descend with a cloaked shuttle, decloak once we hit atmosphere, and then land so that we can avoid attracting both the turians and the Blood Pack’s attention.” Once again addressing her communications officer, she inquired, “Did we get clearance from whatever the krogans call their ground control.”

“Aye, Subcommander. Thanks to Staff Commander Alenko. It seems that Urdnot Wrex is the clan chief and personally issued our clearance to land.” Samantha replied, “We’ve been provided coordinates to Clan Urdnot’s base.”

“Excellent.” V’lana exclaimed as she rose to her feet. “Have the Staff Commander, Solana, Liara, Garrus, Mordin, and Tali meet me on the hangar deck. We’ll be taking my gig down to the surface.” Turning to her XO, the lovely Romulan grinned, “Sorry, Big Brother, someone has to stay and manage the store.”

“Just try to keep out of trouble, Little Sister.” Tovan chuckled as his old friend entered the turbolift. Sitting down in the center chair, the Romulan officer commanded, “Maintain scans.”

Tuchanka—Clan Urdnot Base

“Approaching the landing zone.” The shuttle’s pilot, Steve Cortes, called out to his passengers in the back, joking, “If you’ll look to your left, you’ll catch a glimpse of one of Tuchanka’s friendly local wildlife.”

“Damn!” Garrus cursed, “That’s a big maw! Hope we’re not going to have to try to bring that one down.”

“I think I’ve had my fill of thresher maws.” Liara murmured as she gazed down at the giant creature moving through the sand.

Catching a glimpse of her first thresher maw, V’lana remarked, “Fuck! I thought the sandworms on Nimbus III were huge—but they’ve got nothing on that monster.”

“Remember that one we tangled with on Sparta with Jane, Garrus?” Kaidan recalled, “When we were searching for Admiral Kohoku’s scout team?”

“Yeah.” The turian vigilante responded, “That thing was tough to bring down—and we were in the Mako. Another time...” he recalled, a bittersweet quality to his voice as he spoke, “I was with Shepard and Ashley when we had to bring down a maw, only that time we were on foot. That was a hard fight...”

“I remember you all returning from that mission.” Tali recollected. “You lost almost all your armor from that thing’s acid...”

Garrus chuckled, “And Shepard got a big bruise on her...”

“Backside.” Alenko coughed as V’lana’s lips turned up in an amused smirk.

“Right.” Tali chuckled, “I think we teased her about that for at least a week.”

“What about you, ‘lana?” Kaidan inquired with a smirk, “You mentioned sand worms?”

The lovely Romulan answered back with a grin, “Nimbus III and a few other planets have these worms we call Aehalih.”

“I hate those things.” Solana grumbled. “They’re like your thresher maws in that they spit acid and pop up out of the ground. But unlike them, they usually stay in one spot. Also...” the Romulan security chief growled, “they form colonies—usually around an elder—so you’re never tackling just one.”

“I had to get up close and personal with an elder aehalih and her babies in the little playpen Hakeev had in the Nopada system.” V’lana recalled. “All I had was an Elements-damned Tzenkethi sword...”

“That’s the one you have on your wall...isn’t it, ‘lana?” Kaidan remarked.

“Yeah. Hakeev built a little arena where he liked to stage gladiatorial games.” V’lana explained, “He put in a dampening field so energy weapons and shields were useless, so I had to use a blade. Well...if you’re gonna survive on the streets of Paradise City, you better know how to use a blade, so I learned at a very early age. I chose a sword because it takes a lot of practice and training to use a bat’leth or lirpa without hurting yourself. I had to get in close and hack it to death while avoiding its teeth and acid—besides having to deal with the babies. Ended up

getting aehalih shit and guts all over me and then...to make matters worse, had to swim through even more shit in the sewer to escape. It took me a dozen sonic showers and another dozen real baths, not to mention full antibiotic and antiviral treatments before I felt clean again."

"Coming in for landing!" Cortes called out as he skillfully guided the shuttle on to the pad. After the pad elevator had lowered the shuttle to an embarkation pier, the Alliance pilot exclaimed as he opened the door, "Welcome to Tuchanka."

Exiting first, V'lana grumbled, "Damn! It's almost as hot as Vulcan." Taking a deep breath, she spied a large krogan approaching her, a scowl on his face.

"I don't recognize your species outworlder and don't care. The clan chief is expecting you. Get your business done and leave."

"We should hurry, 'lana...the clan chief's waiting." Kaidan remarked with a sly grin as he saw his Romulan lover's hand resting on the butt of her phaser pistol.

Speaking loudly enough so that the krogan captain and Blood Pack mercenaries standing by him could easily hear her words, the Romulan quipped with a malicious chuckle, "Do I look like a Klingon? You didn't really think I was going to draw my phaser and disintegrate that veruul and his pals where they stood, did you?"

"The thought did cross my mind." Kaidan snickered as he and the now chuckling Romulan walking next to him led their team up a ramp made of debris to a cleared area where they were confronted by a Clan Urdnot guard.

V'lana and her team watched as two krogans, one sitting on what was obviously a throne of some kind, and the other pacing before him, argued.

"You know what tradition demands!" The pacing krogan angrily declared, "Clan Urdnot must respond! Your reforms will not go unopposed. You risk appearing weak at a critical time."

"Wrex is the krogan with a red hump and carapace sitting on the throne." Kaidan whispered to his Romulan lover. "I don't know who the one with the yellow is."

"Other krogan Gatatog Uvenk." Mordin murmured, interjecting himself into the conversation. "Head of rival clan. Traditionalist. Seeks to topple Wrex...won't do so immediately though."

"Why not?" V'lana mouthed.

"Clan Weyrloc bigger threat." Mordin replied, "Uvenk needs Urdnot support for now."

Nudging her human companion as the large seated krogan got up from his throne, his teeth showing in a wide grin, V'lana muttered, "Looks like someone recognizes you."

"Alenko?" The large krogan called out in a deep, rich voice. "Is that you?" His smile growing wider, he stretched out his arms, "And you brought the others! Tali...Liara! It's good to see you again." Spotting his former turian comrade standing with the others, he jibed, his smile now more a wicked grin, "You too, Garrus. Last I heard you were thinning out the merc population on Omega. Thank you for taking out Garm. He was a pain in the ass. And you, Liara...you were chasing after the Shadow Broker." His attention now focused on Tali, he remarked in a grandfatherly voice, "I heard you were on that human colony that got wiped out...what was its name."

"Freedom's Progress." Tali helpfully replied.

"Right." The old krogan inclined his head, "But I lost track of you after that." He then focused his attention on the newcomers. "Who's the salarian? And these others...They look human...but I don't think I've seen humans with pointed ears." Drawing closer to the auburn haired woman wearing her usual 23rd century uniform with a maroon sash slung over one shoulder and thigh high boots, he sniffed, "There is something about your scent...it is vaguely familiar..."

"Must be my perfume." V'lana quipped, drawing a snort of laughter from the krogan warlord.

"Heh." Turning to Kaidan, Wrex remarked in a tone that was slightly reminiscent, but also somewhat winsome, "She reminds me of someone we both once knew..."

Kaidan grinned as he motioned towards the auburn haired woman standing before the krogan warlord, "This is Subcommander V'lana Avesti of the Romulan Republic."

"Romulan?"

"We're new to this part of space." V'lana replied, using their cover story, "But we have the same problem humans are having—our colony worlds are being attacked and people taken off."

"They're allies of ours, Wrex." Alenko explained to his old teammate, further recommending, "And they want to be your allies too. You might want to listen to what she has to say."

Returning to his throne, Wrex motioned for V'lana and her group to come forward as he sat back down. "It is unfortunate Shepard cannot be here with you."

Nodding his head, Kaidan agreed, his voice now taking on a more rueful tone, "Yeah. Her passing has shaken all of us up..."

"You especially, I know." The old krogan said in a surprisingly consoling voice. Then, noticing how close his old friend was standing to the alien woman he had just met, he smiled a sad grin, "But I see that you have found someone to ease your burden."

Letting out a breath, the human replied as the woman next to him took his hand and squeezed it, “V’lana is a good person, Wrex,” further cautioning, “Be careful...Cerberus has grown...manufactured...whatever...what we think might be a clone of Shepard. She’s nothing like Jane though. If you see her...don’t trust her.”

“I haven’t seen her yet.” The krogan honestly responded, “If this Shepard clone or whatever is working with Cerberus, she...it...will not be welcome in Urdnot territory—you have my word.” Heaving a sigh, Wrex mournfully explained to the Romulan standing next to his friend, “Shepard made the rise of my clan possible because of what happened at Virmire...did Alenko tell you that, Romulan?”

“Yes.” V’lana responded with a nod of her head, “He told me about Saren and his efforts to clone krogans so that he could form an army.”

“Right.” Wrex affirmed. “It was a turning point not just for me...but also my people.” He then glared at Uvenk and another krogan, “though not everyone was happy about it. Destroying Saren’s genophage cure freed us from his attempts to manipulate us. I used that to push the clans to unify under my banner.”

“You abandoned too many traditions along the way.” Uvenk declared with a dismissive wave of his hand. This is dangerous—as are your... sympathies...towards outworlders.”

In response, Wrex leaped out of his chair and, without saying a word, headbutted Uvenk in his chest, staggering and momentarily stunning his rival.

“You sure he’s not part Klingon?” V’lana whispered to her lover.

“Speak when spoken to, Uvenk.” Wrex growled as he put the other krogan in his place, “I’m going to drag your clan to glory whether it likes it or not.”

“Definitely part Klingon.” V’lana chuckled sotto voce.

Taking his seat again, Wrex motioned for Kaidan and V’lana to come forth, “So...what about Joker and the others?”

“Most of them are alive.” Kaidan responded with a grin. “Joker, Chief Adams and Dr. Chakwas are on the *Gallena*, the subcommander’s warbird.”

“Good.” Wrex inclined his head, “I am glad to hear that they are safe. I regret the loss of the *Normandy* though.” A winsome smile appeared on his face as he reminisced, “Shepard and us against whoever or whatever was stupid enough to face us, killing it with big guns. Those were good times.”

“Could you tell us more about what you’re seeking to do here?” V’lana inquired, “What sort of reforms are you trying to implement and why are some...” she glanced in the direction of the still fuming Uvenk, “opposed to them?”

“I’ve established this place as a neutral ground.” Wrex explained, “A place where all clans are welcome and fertile females can be shared. By doing this, we will strengthen the race as a whole.”

“Wise.” Mordin observed approvingly, “Not only encourages genetic diversity, it also forms blood ties between clans...weakening barriers.”

“You threaten everything that makes us strong.” Uvenk objected, “It will not last.”

“Maybe...maybe not.” Wrex countered, “Until and unless that does happen, you should consider yourself lucky that you’re a part of it.”

“It must be difficult to maintain the peace.” V’lana noted, “I know the Klingons have a system worked out to keep their houses in line on neutral ground, but that was a process of several generations of trial and error where a lot of headbutting went on.”

Laughing, the krogan clan chief replied, “I don’t know who these Klingons are, but as you saw earlier, we have our share of headbutting here.” His laughter fading, he further explained, “Any clan willing to send hostages can enter our camp. No fighting is permitted inside and each clan punishes its own criminals.”

“Permitting limited clan self-rule...again good move.” Mordin commented, “somewhat reduces other clans’ animosity at infringements to sovereignty.”

“We stop conflicts before there are deaths.” Wrex forcefully declared, “That lessens the likelihood of revenge killings. Then we present a simple choice to the parties involved: Pay a fine and deal with your problems or your clan is no longer welcome.”

“Seem pretty mild by krogan standards.” Kaidan observed as the krogan warlord let out a brief chuckle.

“Allies from other clans like what I’m doing. They’re more than happy to deal with any troublemakers. That provides an outlet so that they can release any tension.”

“Using the allied clans as a police force.” V’lana sagely commented. “It not only relieves Wrex from having to rely too much on his clan to directly enforce order, it also gives the allied clans a stake in the enterprise.”

“You’ve got yourself a smart one there, Alenko.” Wrex chuckled before continuing his explanation, “Every time I’ve declared a clan unwelcome, my allies have destroyed them. It doesn’t take much time for word to get around.”

“Keep the peace...or else.” V’lana quipped as another laugh escaped from the krogan.

“Right.”

"I'm curious..." V'lana interjected, "Where are your females? Do they have any say in this?"

Chuckling again, Wrex responded, "It was our female clan leader's idea. The neutral area is safe and it encourages more female clans to ally with us."

"Your females form their own clans?" V'lana exclaimed.

"Our females live in separate clans for self-preservation. Because fertile females are few in number..." the krogan warlord spared a momentary glare at the salarian standing next to Kaidan and V'lana, "thanks to the salarian genophage...they are a valuable resource. In the past they were treated as prizes of war. Now, they live in their own clans apart from males. The females send envoys to determine who is worthy to visit them for breeding purposes and breeding alliances are formed. I can hardly do anything without Clan Leader Uta's approval. Also, to intentionally harm or kill a fertile female is the most serious crime in our society."

"Necessary precaution on part of females given nature of krogan society." Mordin noted, drawing a scowl from the krogan.

"Your salarian is correct. The preservation of our people must take priority over everything else. That is why the females support this plan. Attacks on Urdnot now threaten the females of all clans. Even those who would kill me will defend Clan Urdnot because of this fact."

"Why allow the weaker clans to continue?" The Romulan subcommander queried, "Why not simply absorb them into your clan?"

"Each clan has its own customs." Wrex explained, "Rites of passage...rules of behavior...battle songs...all unique."

"Again..." V'lana mused under her breath, "...the similarity to Klingons is astounding."

"It's that diversity that makes us great." The krogan battlemaster declared, "No one clan...not even mine...was meant to survive alone. We have to pull together—each clan making its own unique contribution to the whole."

"What sort of contributions do the clans make that are so unique?" V'lana questioned.

"We Urdnots are the best tacticians." Wrex answered back, "Jorgal has the longest breeding line. Gatatog holds the oldest settlement. All the other clans possess their own virtues that they bring to the whole."

"You seem to have put a lot of thought into this." V'lana observed.

"I did." Wrex acknowledged with a nod of his head, "Thanks to Shepard's words and example. If it weren't for her, I'd still be a mercenary or...more likely...I would be dead now." His lips curling into a sneer as he regarded the krogan standing near Uvenk, the clan chief growled, "And Wreav would be the head of the clan. Or..." his glare then turned towards the leader of Clan Gatatog, "Uvenk would be running the show." Taking a deep breath and exhaling, Wrex concluded, "We keep going as we are now...clans fighting with each other...our younger ones leaving to join the Blood Pack and other mercenary groups...all the clans will end up extinct—even Clan Urdnot. We have to rethink who and what we are. We must restart our culture."

"How's it going so far, Wrex?" Kaidan inquired.

"Better than I'd feared." Wrex responded with a shake of his head and a sigh, "Worse than I'd hoped."

"It cannot continue." Uvenk bitterly exclaimed, "You are going against what makes us strong."

"I see that not everyone agrees." Liara remarked, entering the conversation.

"Traditionalists like Uvenk and my clutch brother, Wreav, are like chained varren." Wrex bitterly complained, "They're always fighting...always guarding their pathetic stick in the ground. They refuse to see the...what do the humans call it..."

"The giant painting?" V'lana responded with a twinkle in her eyes that drew an amused smirk from the big krogan.

"Big picture. As a certain someone knows full well." Kaidan replied with a chuckle as he received a gentle poke in the ribs from the lovely Romulan standing beside him.

"Whatever." Wrex waved his hand, "When the smoke clears, I'll plant my standard on their bodies and rally the rest of the world around a new krogan order."

"It sounds like it's going to remain pretty messy even after you pull all the clans together." V'lana pointed out.

"It will be a slow and bloody process." Wrex admitted, "But I won't change what and who we are." He further explained to the two alien women, "Krogan are judged by the strength of our enemies."

"Another similarity to Klingons." Solana remarked under her breath as Wrex continued to speak.

"Our worst insult is to say someone's not worth killing." After concluding his remarks, the clan chief inquired, "So...what is it that you need, Romulan? We don't often allow aliens to do business on Tuchanka, but...thanks to the company you are with...and the fact that I'm beginning to like you...I am making an exception to that rule."

"There are two matters..." V'lana began, pausing until the krogan warlord motioned for her to continue with a slight incline of his head. "The first pertains to a missing salarian scientist. He was apparently captured by the Blood Pack and brought here."

"And the second?"

“Our ship detected verteron particles...a type of radiation...along with high concentrations of eezo...near the location of your clan base. We also intercepted a garbled transmission. I’ll play it for you.”

Wrex listened intently to the fragmented communication. “Hmmm...we have no installation at that location. It seems that an intruder has set up a base there. You mentioned eezo, but what are verteron particles? I’ve never heard of them before—but then, I’m not a scientist or engineer.”

“I’m not a scientist either.” V’lana replied as she spun a white lie, “What I do know is that they’re a recent discovery and that almost always, when we encounter them, we run into problems.”

“Clever lie.” Mordin whispered to the Romulan subcommander, “Tell portion of truth. Better than engaging in tedious and probably futile effort to explain alternate universes to krogans.”

Inclining her head slightly, the subcommander’s attention again turned to the krogan battlemaster, rising from his throne as he spoke. “If there is an off world intruder on clan lands then I will be accompanying you.”

“What about...” V’lana glanced meaningfully at Uvenk who was at that moment talking in a low voice to two of his clansmen. “Will he be a problem?”

“No.” Wrex shook his head as a wicked grin appeared on his face. “That pyjak won’t do anything without first making sure that I am dead. Now...if you’re asking whether he might try to ambush us on the way back...that’s another matter. Hope he does. I’ve been looking for an excuse to rip his hump off.”

“Welcome to the team.” The lovely subcommander responded with a smirk.

Nodding his head, Wrex spoke again, “As for the other matter...my scout commander can point you in the direction you need to go. You should be able to find him near the perimeter running target practice. Don’t take too much of his time. I need him to keep a watch on the other clans—especially since I’m going to be going with you.”

“Thank you, Wrex.” V’lana replied as the old krogan hefted his shotgun.

“Don’t thank me yet, outworlder. I am taking a chance on you in the name of an old and departed friend. Do not make me think that I made a mistake.”

“Understood.” V’lana nodded her head as she turned to her lover, “Kaidan?”

“Yeah, ‘lana?”

“Take Solana, Garrus, and Mordin and go to the scout and find out what you can from him and then take care of Mordin’s situation. I’ll go with Liara, Tali, and Wrex and deal with the other matter.”

“Right, ‘lana.” Kaidan acknowledged, adding in a low whisper, “Take care of yourself.”

“You too.” The lovely Romulan whispered back.

“If you two have finished saying your goodbyes...” Wrex urged impatiently, “We’ve got work to do.”

Chapter End Notes

What I want to try to do is showcase how important and major a character Shepard is--even in death. You see a bit of it here at the end with Mordin. Shepard could have talked him into preserving Maelon's work, but Alenko couldn't/wouldn't exercise that influence on what he would see as a personal and ethical matter that Mordin had to work out for himself. We'll see in coming episodes how big a role Shepard played in the lives of her companions by seeing what happens because she isn't there.

Act 2

Chapter Summary

The two teams proceed in their missions with V'lana's team making an ugly--and foreboding--discovery.

V'lana's Team

"I'm glad the new polyalloy weave armor breathes well in this heat." V'lana quipped as she checked her weapons out. "Otherwise, my BO would probably knock out one of those thresher maws."

"What armor?" Wrex laughed. Then, growling, he groused, "I thought you all had armor and weapons. Even if all we are running into are nothing but varren, you're dead."

"We are wearing armor, Wrex." Liara replied as she deactivated the transparency filter to reveal the skintight weave armor that she was wearing under her clothes. "It's Romulan. Light and strong. And with a very good personal shield."

"That's armor?" The big krogan laughed, "It couldn't stand up to a kiss from a pyjak."

"Wanna bet?" V'lana joked back with an impish grin. "A bottle of Romulan ale against the best booze you've got that our armor's tougher than yours."

"If you were male, I'd say you had a quad on you." Wrex chortled, "You can't handle ryncol..."

"He's right, Subcommander." Liara interjected, "I don't think even a Romulan could stomach more than a small taste of that."

"I'm not going to bet ryncol, but I will wager a bottle of human whiskey that I acquired in my mercenary days." Wrex countered with a feral grin.

"You're on." V'lana responded, extending her hand.

"Looking forward to tasting this Romulan ale." The big krogan laughed as he turned his attention to the energetic quarian seated next to him. "So, Tali...where's your shotgun?"

"Got a better one." The quarian engineer answered back as she showed her old teammate her new weapon. "It's a plasma assault rifle. Kind of like a shotgun, only it fires plasma. Fires in a conical arc and great at short range. Of course, I made a few modifications to improve the accuracy and range. It puts the old Scimitar I was using to shame."

"The Romulans and most of the species where they are from primarily use energy weapons." Liara explained as she checked her own weapon, a phaser auto-rifle.

"Hmm..." The wily krogan looked thoughtful for several seconds before speaking, "I'd like to see how they perform. But for now..." A wicked grin crossed his face as he readied his Claymore shotgun, "I'll stick with what I know."

The Romulan subcommander responded with an impish smile of her own, "We're getting close to the spot our scans pinpointed as the origin point for the verteron particles. Ready to see what's there?"

Kaidan's Team

Ignoring the glares of hostility coming from the Urdnot warriors and scouts as he and his team passed them by, Kaidan bantered in a low voice to his turian friend, "I thought you took a bath, Garrus."

"Heh." The turian vigilante joked back, "I'm surprised none of them have taken a shot at me or Mordin yet."

"Hostility of krogans regrettable...but understandable." Mordin replied in a subdued voice while Solana, trailing behind, kept a close watch on the warriors.

"I'd say their fear of what Wrex would do to any of them who did attack us is greater than their desire to provoke a fight." Solana commented.

"You're probably right." Kaidan replied, "I have a feeling if Wrex weren't in charge we wouldn't be having as easy a time of it."

"If Wrex weren't in charge..." Garrus mused, "...we wouldn't even have been allowed on the surface." Taking note of the defensive guns surrounding the perimeter, the turian weapons expert pointed out to his Romulan counterpart, "When I first saw those guns being used on varren and pyjaks, I thought they were wasting ammo, but now, I'm thinking that if these Urdnot warriors can pinpoint small mammals with these guns..."

"They can tear apart an invasion force." The Romulan security chief finished as they approached the chief scout. "Careful, Commander." She cautioned as Kaidan took the lead, "He doesn't look like he's in a very good mood and I don't want to explain to the subcommander why you're coming back missing your arms and legs."

"I don't think any of the krogan we've seen so far other than Wrex have been in a good mood." Kaidan joked back before responding in a more serious tone of voice, "I'll be careful."

As he drew closer to the scout, the burly krogan growled. "Wrex told me to be polite to you, human. He didn't say you were going to talk to me. I'm very busy so get to the point."

"We're looking for a salarian who was captured by the Blood Pack." Alenko responded, cutting to the chase. "He was last seen around here."

"I heard about the salarian." The head scout replied, "If it's Blood Pack, then Clan Weyrloc has him. I sent one of my scouts to check it out, but he hasn't reported back yet. Weyrloc probably got him too. I was told to give you one of the trucks. If you've got the quads for it, you can take it and follow the highway to the Weyrloc base."

"What have your scouts uncovered about the Weyrloc base?" Kaidan inquired as Solana and Garrus both made their way to the maintenance area to pick out a truck.

"Latest reports are that they're held up in an old hospital." The scout replied. "I didn't get close to any Weyrlocs though. If I did, I'd have taken a shot." The scout frowned at the apparent lack of armor and strange looking weapons of the human and his team, "You better get yourself some proper armor and a big gun or two. You're going to need them. That base is crawling with Blood Pack."

"Why are they holed up in a hospital?" Kaidan queried, "That doesn't seem to be a defensible position."

"Hospital has to be built to withstand enraged krogan." Mordin interjected, answering the Staff Commander's query. "When injury forces krogan to switch over to secondary organs, adrenal glands secrete hormones...higher thought processes don't always transition properly. Result...blood rage."

"What the salarian said." The scout growled, glaring at Mordin as if the scientist were nothing more than a pile of varren dung.

"Why would they go through all that trouble to capture Maelon?" Kaidan mused.

"Don't know." The scout shrugged his shoulders. "Probably wanted to bring him back for special treatment. He must have done something to really piss the Blood Pack off for them to bring him back. It would have been simpler to just kill him if they wanted him dead. Either way, I doubt your friend is enjoying himself. It doesn't matter...no skin off my hump what they do with him. Just means one less alien on Tuchanka."

"What can we expect from Clan Weyrloc?" Alenko asked as he continued to gather intelligence.

"Tough humps." The scout replied, "Don't expect a friendly welcome from them. Weyrloc started the Blood Pack. They're fanatics and totally devoted to Weyrloc Guld."

"What about the non-krogan Blood Pack members like the vorcha?"

Laughing, the scout responded, "Vorcha are just like varren except they know how to use guns and don't crap on the floor as often. The krogan are the only real members of Blood Pack. Anyone else is there just to soak up fire."

"What's so special about Guld?" Kaidan asked.

"He's got two children." The scout answered back with a touch of envy in his voice, "One of them a girl...maybe fertile. Because of that, some people think he has a destiny."

"What about you? Do you think he's destined for something?"

"Yeah." The scout snorted, "The sole of Wrex's boot on his neck." Shaking his head, the scout continued, "I had a cousin who won twenty consecutive games of quasar. He was a lucky bastard, but he didn't have some sort of great destiny. It's just luck—that's all."

Seeing that Solana and Garrus had already picked out a truck and were waiting, Kaidan ended the conversation. "I better go. My people are waiting."

"Yeah." The scout growled, "Get out of here. I've got work to do. I don't care about you and your people but be sure to bring that truck back in one piece."

"Any problems getting the truck?" Kaidan asked as he approached the other members of his team.

"Not really." Garrus replied with the turian equivalent of a smirk. "I let Solana do the talking."

"Had to promise the chief mechanic that we'd look for a salvageable combustion manifold." The Romulan security chief explained as the team embarked on to the truck, "But otherwise there was no problem in talking him into letting us take this truck. It's well armored and has a workable gun...more than I can say for the vehicle he wanted to stuff us in."

"Yeah...that was a pile of vorcha crap." Garrus quipped as Solana took the driver's seat. "So...where are we going?"

A wicked grin on his face as he doublechecked his phaser rifle, Kaidan joked back, "We're going to the hospital."

Continuing the banter as Solana drove the truck off the lot, Garrus replied, "Yeah...I got a feeling we're all going to need a hospital by the time this is over."

V'iana's Team

"My tricorder's picking up on what looks like a bunker." Tali called out, waving the rest of her team over to her. "Eezo...some verteron emissions...but not as much as I thought there'd be."

"No surprise there." V'iana explained, "They don't last long outside subspace. Most of those that we detected in orbit are probably gone by now."

"What do you think we'll find?" Liara asked as she and Wrex joined the conversation.

"Could be anything." V'iana cautioned as a piercing shriek resounded, looking up the subcommander gasped as she pointed in the air at a giant winged creature. "Damn! What the hell is that?"

"Harvester!" Wrex shouted as he readied his shotgun. "Get ready...where there's a harvester, there's klixen!"

"There they are!" Liara cried out as she launched a singularity, lifting a pair of the insectoid creatures into the air.

Firing her plasma rifle into the singularity at one of the creatures, V'iana winced slightly at the explosion. "Damn. Didn't expect that."

"You can admire yourselves later, girls." Wrex chuckled as he launched a biotic throw at an oncoming klixen, following it up with a burst from his claymore that caused the creature to explode. "We've got these to kill."

After hitting another rushing klixen with a cryogenic blast, Tali hit it with her plasma rifle, shattering it into pieces. "Like that, Uncle Urdnot?"

"That's my girl." The big krogan laughed as he brought down another charging klixen.

"Let's show them how it's done, Liara." V'iana quipped as the asari biotic launched another singularity snaring more klixen into which the Romulan tossed a grenade.

"Shit." The krogan battlemaster rumbled as the last of the insectoid intruders was killed, "What the hell was that?"

"Photon grenade." V'iana smirked, "Didn't want to toss in a plasma one...that would have been even messier."

"Hmph. Maybe you're not as weak as I thought." Wrex snorted as he kicked hard at the already battered door, easily knocking it down. "Whenever you girls are ready."

"After you. Age before beauty." V'iana quipped, earning in response a snort of laughter from the big krogan.

Entering the chamber first, the veteran battlemaster cautioned as he sniffed the air, "Something smells...wrong."

"Shit." V'iana murmured as her eyes took in the scene: smashed instrument panels, still sparking as electric fires slowly died out, mangled corpses strewn about the room amidst the lingering traces of a foul odor.

"Yeah." Wrex agreed with a snort, "Along with other smells...death...fire...some I don't recognize."

"Liara?" V'iana called out, "Any life signs?"

"The readings aren't clear... but I am picking up on some." The asari replied as she scanned with her tricorder. "Mostly native Tuchanka. Varren and what seems to be klixen, but...there's something else. "I'm picking up traces of mycelial spores...definitely not native to Tuchanka. And also krogan and a few human...but different."

"How so?" The subcommander inquired as a low, dangerous rumble escaped from Wrex.

"It's...I'm not sure." The asari shook her head.

"I'm picking up on the presence of nanites and dark energy." Tali announced as she also carried out scans with her tricorder. "No..." she shook her head in disbelief, "...that shouldn't be possible."

"What are you talking about, Tali...Liara?" Wrex growled as he sniffed the air. "What is that thing that you're using picking up on?"

"The nanites are Borg." Tali reported in a hushed voice. "But that shouldn't be possible. Borg are from..."

"My universe." V'iana finished. Approaching Liara, she asked, "Can I see those tricorder readings for a moment?"

"Sure." The asari replied in a soft voice as she handed her tricorder over to the Romulan.

As she carefully went over Liara's scans a worried frown appeared on the subcommander's face, several moments passing until Wrex's deep voice cut through the silence.

"Will someone tell me what the hell is going on here? What are Borg?" He then addressed his next question to the lovely Romulan, "And what the hell are you talking about when you say these 'Borg' are from your universe?"

"We don't have time to get into details now." V'iana replied in a grim tone of voice, "It would take too long and if what's happening is what I think is happening, then we're going to have to move very quickly, because if we don't, things are going to get very bad on Tuchanka very quickly--and before you ask--yes--it can get a lot worse." Handing the tricorder back to Liara, the subcommander declared, "It's what I was afraid of. We ran into similar readings when we busted up that Tal'Shiar research lab on Nimbus III. Elachi were there...and they were here

too.”

“Elachi and Borg...” Liara shook her head, “This could be worse than Saren...maybe even the Reapers.”

“What if they’re working with the Reapers.” Tali gasped. Then, glancing down at one of the dead humans, wearing white armor with black and gold trim, his armor cracked wide open as if it was an egg, she scowled. “Cerberus.”

Scowling, V’lana muttered, “Cerberus? Figures. That actually makes a weird sort of sense though.” She explained to the confused krogan accompanying them. “In my universe, the Tal’Shiar were messing with Borg implants and indoctrination and the Elachi were also there...” Seeing the irritated frown on the krogan’s face, she quickly apologized, “I’ll explain later, Wrex...I promise.”

“You better.” The battlemaster grumbled. “For now, I don’t care who they are or where they’re from. They’re on my world and they weren’t invited, so I’m going to kick them out or kill them.” His lips turned up in a feral grin, “Or both.”

Kneeling down to get a closer look at the corpse, V’lana gasped, “Shit.”

“What now?” Wrex grumbled as he looked down at the dead body. Seeing the ashen expressionless face and strange implants on the male corpse’s eyes and cheek, the shocked krogan exclaimed, “What the hell? They look almost like damned husks.”

“Tali?” V’lana called out, motioning for the young quarian to join them. “Scan him and then tell me you’re not picking up on your scans what I think you’re going to pick up.”

Scanning with her tricorder, Tali shook her head, “They’re Borg. But...” She added, a note of alarm in her voice, “...there are also traces of Reaper tech.”

“Even worse than I thought.” The subcommander growled, “Cerberus has found some connection with my universe and they’re trying to integrate Borg and Reaper tech.”

“Can they do that?” Liara inquired.

“Not on their own.” V’lana responded, “They have to be getting help from someone else. My guess is the Elachi...and I’ve got a bad feeling that there’s someone even more powerful pulling the Elachi’s strings.”

“What makes you say that?” Tali asked as she carefully took samples from the corpse, making sure that they were safely secured before putting them away.

“Too many coincidences.” The subcommander answered back. “The Tal’Shiar experimenting with Borg tech and indoctrination with Elachi help along with Romulan colonies being attacked in my universe and the same thing happening in yours only it’s Cerberus working with the Elachi and human colonies being attacked.”

“We can talk about all that later.” Wrex growled impatiently. “Let’s get moving.”

“Right.” V’lana nodded her head in agreement, “Let’s go and kick some ass.”

Kaidan’s Team

“Damn!” Solana shook her head, her attention focused both on the road and on the ruins that were once towering buildings and structures as she drove the truck down the highway. “No matter how many times I’ve seen what nukes can do to a planet, it never ceases to amaze me.”

“Krogan once had vibrant culture.” Mordin pointed out, “But could not keep violent nature in check. Led to nuclear war...eventually Krogan Rebellions. Now see need for genophage.”

“Are you saying that the salarians aren’t at least partially responsible?” Kaidan dissented, “Maybe if you hadn’t uplifted them from their primitive state they might have eventually evolved into a more peaceful society.”

“Fair point.” The salarian scientist reluctantly conceded before arguing vehemently, “Uplift however was necessary. Rachni on the verge of wiping out galactic civilization. Had to take action immediately. Uplifting krogan act of desperation.” Mordin finished, his voice now taking on a more somber timber.

“What about afterwards?” Kaidan countered, “Did you even bother to take into account the possible consequences?”

“Wasn’t enough time!” Mordin angrily replied, “Had to act and act now—or all was lost.”

“I can understand desperation.” Solana interjected, “It will make you grasp at anything that will save you—even something that might well kill you later.”

“The scorpion and the frog.” Kaidan muttered as they finally reached their destination, explaining the old fable to Mordin and Garrus, “A scorpion wanted to get across a river, but couldn’t because he would drown, so he asked a frog if he’d let him ride on his back. The frog told him that he didn’t want to because the scorpion would sting him and kill him with its poison. The scorpion promised he wouldn’t do that, so the frog agreed. They got to the middle of the river, then the scorpion stung the frog. The frog gasped as it was dying, ‘Why did you do that? Now, we’re both going to die.’ The scorpion apologized, saying, ‘He couldn’t help it because it was in his nature to do so.’”

As Solana brought the truck to a stop, Garrus spoke up for the first time, “This discussion’s going to have to wait for another time. We’ve got work to do.”

Exiting the vehicle, the team passed through a doorway leading them into the ruins of what was once a large compound. “Damn...this space is huge.” Solana gasped as she gazed at the mixture of cargo containers just recently placed and tangled ruins of walls.

“Has to be.” Garrus replied with a crooked grin, “It was built for krogans.”

“Durable.” Mordin noted, “Built to withstand krogan blood rage. Not hospital proper though. Just outside buildings and grounds. Hospital further up.”

“Let’s take it slow and easy.” Kaidan cautioned as he carried out a quick scan with his tricorder. “I’m picking up on life signs ahead.”

“Klixen!” Garrus cried out as he fired his plasma rifle, causing an explosion as the beam of energy detonated the klixen.

“What are those things?” Solana grimaced as she fired her plasma rifle, setting off two more charging klixen.

“Native to Tuchanka.” Mordin replied as a screeching sound was heard in the distance, “Generally accompanied by harvesters—flying creatures comparable to human tales of dragons. Do not let them close with you. Vicious claws...explode when killed.”

“So I saw.” Solana replied as she hefted her plasma rifle. “Good thing we went with plasma weapons here.”

“Yeah.” Garrus readily agreed, “They should one-shot kill any varren or vorchas and will prevent krogan from regenerating.”

“We’ve still got a lot of ground to cover...” Kaidan commanded, pointing towards the entrance to the hospital, “So...move out.”

“I’ve got point.” Solana volunteered as she took the lead. Moving cautiously from cover to cover, the Romulan security officer, spotting movement amidst the ruins, held up one hand as she tapped her communicator. “Varren. I’ve got them.” A moment later, she murmured into her comm, “I’m seeing more movement behind cover.”

“We’re moving up.” Kaidan replied in a low voice as he gestured for his team to take up positions. Moving up beside the Romulan woman along with the rest of his team, he asked, “Where are they?”

“Over there.” Solana answered back with a jerk of her head in the direction of a low wall. “They’re behind low cover in ambush positions.”

A wicked grin appearing on his face, the Alliance commando prompted as he gestured for Garrus to take up a sniping position while the salarian scientist found cover on the left flank. “Why don’t we give them a taste of their own medicine.”

“I’ll draw their fire.” Solana grinned, “Then you hit them.”

“Watch yourself.” Kaidan warned as the Romulan woman set her plasma rifle to full strength.

“Just be ready when they open up.” Solana responded with a wicked grin as she leaped over the cover and dashed towards the twisted wreckage of a tomkah, one of the giant krogan trucks, zigging and zagging to avoid the fire coming towards her, then diving for cover just in time as a pair of rockets barely missed her head.

Taking advantage of the now exposed vorchas and charging krogan, Kaidan and the rest of the team opened up in unison. The biotic hitting the charging krogan with a warp just as Mordin’s incendiary blast hit, causing the Blood Pack trooper to turn into a pile of ash on the ground. Spotting another krogan in his sights, Garrus fired his plasma sniper rifle, his mandibles flaring in the turian equivalent of a feral grin as the bolt of plasma impacted on the krogan’s skull plate, killing it instantaneously.

“That just leaves the vorchas.” Solana commed as she fired her plasma autorifle, bringing down one of the rocketeers and sending the other vorchas diving for cover.

Launching another warp at an armored vorchas as Mordin sent out an incendiary burst, burning the final vorchas trooper, Kaidan called out, “I think that’s the last of them.”

“I’m not picking up on anything else from here to the hospital.” Solana replied, then smirking, she added as she picked up a piece of machinery, “I think I found the combustion manifold that the Urndot mechanic wanted.”

“Great.” Kaidan, smiled back “That ought to buy us a little good will—with the mechanics at least.”

“I’ll take anything I can get.” Garrus chuckled as the team made their way to the hospital entrance. Gazing at the imposing structure, the turian vigilante shook his head, “This is going to be a tough nut to crack.”

Taking a deep breath, Kaidan quickly bypassed the door security system. “Then...we better get started.”

“Yes.” Mordin quickly agreed, “Must find Maelon before too late.”

Act 3

Chapter Summary

V'lana and her team comes across an ugly surprise as they go deeper in the bunker and discover some terrifying revelations while Alenko and his people come across something almost as horrifying.

V'lana's Team

"Tali..." V'lana requested, "Time for you to put that engineering kit you just got issued to work. I need you to fabricate some frequency modulators for us." After a momentary pause, the subcommander further implored, "Do you think you can adapt one of the modulators for mass effect weapons?"

After several moments of thought, the quarian engineer shook her head, "No. They're kinetic rounds."

"The Borg can adapt their shields against weapons fire." V'lana explained to the Urdnot clan chief. "That's why we use the frequency modulators that Tali's making. They vary the emission frequencies of our energy weapons."

"And you can't do that with kinetic weapons." Wrex grumbled, "So...you're saying my shotgun is useless?"

"We'd be stupid to think that the Borg would not find some means of adapting to your weapons." The subcommander concluded as she handed Wrex her rifle. "Take this." She commanded and then showed him how to operate it. "I've got my antiproton and phaser pistols."

"Here are your modulators." Tali called out, installing them into hers and her teammates' weapons.

"All right." V'lana commanded, "Let's see what's in here."

As the team moved cautiously down the corridor, Wrex pointed to the walls which now seemed to be emitting a dull green light, "What the hell?"

"I was afraid of that." V'lana muttered grimly, further explaining, "These Borg nanites assimilate anything they've been injected into, turning whoever or whatever they've infected part of the Collective.

"What about us?" The Urdnot clan chief inquired with a worried frown. "Will they infect us?"

"If they're injected into our bloodstream..." V'lana glumly replied, "Yes. And it doesn't take long for the assimilation process to work either. That's why we have to take them down from range. Don't let them get too close to you."

Spotting movement in the shadows, Tali called out, "Incoming!"

"Cover!" V'lana cried out as a volley of mass effect projectiles impacted her shields only to be stopped by the combination of shields and armor. Diving behind a low section of wall, the subcommander fired her pistol, bringing down one of the assimilated Cerberus troopers as the other two troopers dived for cover.

"This is more like it!" Wrex exulted as he fired his new plasma weapon bringing down another trooper, leaving the remaining troopers to Liara and Tali who dispatched him with a combination singularity and cryo-blast followed up by a shot from the quarian's plasma gun that shattered them into pieces.

Looking down at the bodies after the fight, V'lana remarked worriedly, "These didn't act like normal drones."

"How so?" Liara inquired as she bent down to examine one of the fallen troopers.

"They tried to use cover and I could swear I heard one of them issuing commands." The subcommander replied, "Drones don't do that. They don't have to. Because they're fully integrated into the Collective, they act as one."

"Maybe Cerberus and whoever is helping them have found a way to either permanently or temporarily control the assimilation process." Liara theorized, a frown appearing on her face as well.

"That's possible. The Tal'Shiar were working on doing something similar, so it makes sense that Cerberus would pursue similar research." V'lana mused as she tapped her communicator. "Cortes?"

"I can barely read you, Subcommander."

"I was afraid of that." V'lana replied, "The emissions coming from this bunker are fouling up our communications just like they're making it impossible for us to use the transporter. I need you to contact the *Gallena* and tell Tovan to send a shuttle to this location with security and a tri-cobalt bomb. I've got Wrex here...he'll give approval." Turning to Wrex, she informed the battlemaster, "The only way to be sure we get this off of your world is to totally obliterate it and I intend to do just that after we clear this bunker."

"Do it." Wrex decisively commanded. "Patch me through to my people."

"Done." V'lana replied, "Cortes will relay your instructions."

“Wreav!” Wrex growled, his voice a mixture of anger and contempt as he addressed his clutch brother, “The Romulans are sending another shuttle down. Do not interfere and keep our scouts clear of the area until I tell you otherwise.”

“Why? We don’t need more outworlders here.”

Wrex grumbled threateningly, “Just do what I tell you and don’t ask questions or make stupid comments!”

“All right, Wrex. I’ll do it.” Moments later, Wreav’s voice again came from the comm, as he grudgingly reported, “I’ve done as you asked. The alien ‘Centurion’ informed me that the shuttle and its ‘package’ will be ready when his superior commands.”

“Good.” Wrex replied, further instructing his clutch brother, “Don’t do anything else. Everything had better be just as I left it when I return.” After the comm channel had closed, the wizened krogan turned to the subcommander, his facial expression now showing a sarcastic grin, “Wreav might be my clutch brother, but that doesn’t change the fact that he is stupid.” Glancing in the direction of the dimly lit corridor, the clan chief quipped, “Ready when you are ladies.”

Her lips turning up in an amused smirk, V’lana jibed back, earning a chuckle from the old krogan, “Lead the way, handsome.”

Kaidan’s Team

“Repurposed krogan hospital. Sturdy. Built to withstand punishment. Has to be.” Mordin remarked as he and the rest of the team entered the building.

“Hospitals are not fun to fight through.” Garrus remarked as he surveyed the immediate area, looking for threats.

“What is?” Kaidan asked with a twinkle in his eyes.

“Gardens...electronics shops...antique stores...” Garrus joked back, “...but only if they’re classy.”

“I like fighting through casinos myself.” Solana quipped, “Ever see a Ferengi run?”

“Can’t say as I have.” Garrus bantered, “Know any good casinos?”

“A couple.” The Romulan security chief replied flirtatiously, “Maybe we can check one out sometime.”

“Whenever you two are finished planning your night out...” Kaidan chimed in with a laugh.

“Says the man who’s dating our subcommander.” Garrus smoothly riposted before remarking in a more serious voice, “But you’re right, Kaidan. We’ve got work to do.”

As the team made its way down a flight of stairs, Mordin called out, pointing at a motionless figure on the floor. “Wait. That body. Human. Need to take a look.”

Kneeling down, the salarian physician carefully examined the corpse. “Sores. Tumors. Ligatures showing restraint at wrists and ankles. Track marks for repeated injection sites. Test subject. Victim of experimentation.” The scientist concluded somberly.

“Is there any identification on him?” Kaidan inquired, “Any way to tell who he was or where he came from?”

“No tattoos or ID.” Mordin glumly shook his head. “Maybe slave or prisoner. Could be pirate or merc. Irrelevant now.”

“Not to his family or loved ones.” Kaidan responded gloomily, interrupting the salarian.

“Clearly part of krogan tests to clear genophage.” Mordin further determined, explaining why in greater detail. “Humans useful as test subjects. Genetically diverse. Enables exploration of treatment modalities.”

“V’lana told me that you said that the Collectors might have been using humans as a control group on Omega.” Kaidan mused, the salarian doctor nodding his head in affirmation.

“Correct. For same reasons. Human genetic diversity made them perfect control group.”

“Experimenting on humans.” Kaidan shook his head, “It’s shit like this that turns people towards Cerberus.”

“Never used humans myself.” Mordin emphatically stated, “Disgusting. Unethical. Sloppy. Used by brute force researchers...not thinkers. No place in proper science. Krogan use of humans unsurprising.”

“Why?” Solana inquired out of genuine curiosity.

“Krogans not scientists or creative thinkers.” Mordin answered back. “Prefer to solve problems head on...with fists. Brute force.”

“What makes humans more genetically diverse?” Solana asked, continuing her inquiry.

“More variable.” Mordin explained, “Peaks and valleys. Mutations. Adaptations. Far beyond other life. In this universe, at least. More species have great genetic diversity in yours. Vulcanoids such as yourself. Klingons. Andorians. Fascinating degree of genetic diversity. Humans useful test subjects in this universe. Larger reactions to smaller stimuli. Biotic abilities...Intelligence levels. Can look at random asari or krogan and make reasonable guess. Humans too variable to judge.” Further qualifying his explanation, the scientist pointed out, “Outliers exist in all species, of course. Geniuses...idiots. But human probability curve in this universe offers greater overall variety.”

“Did you do any live subject testing while you were developing the new genophage?” Kaidan queried, his lips turned down in a worried frown.

“No.” Mordin shook his head, “Unnecessary. Limited tests to simulations, corpses, cloned tissue samples. High level tests on varren. No tests on species with members capable of calculus. Simple rule. Never broke it.”

“Wouldn’t a species native to Tuchanka work better?” Solana queried as she glanced down at the corpse, “Like...say...varren?”

“Yes.” Mordin replied, “Human experiments strictly high level. Concept testing. Native Tuchanka fauna likely used later in development stages. Wise to delay use of varren until necessary. Powerful bite.”

“What can you tell from their experiments on him?” Kaidan asked as he glanced down at the body on the floor.

“Position of tumors suggests deliberate mutation of adrenal and pineal glands.” The salarian physician responded as he further mused, ending on a note of admiration. “Modifying hormone levels. Counterattack on glands hit by genophage. Clever.”

“Are they close to a cure?” Garrus interjected, joining the discussion.

“Can’t say.” Mordin answered back, “Need more data. Conceptually sound though. Genophage alters hormone levels. Could repair damage with hormonal counterattack.”

“Right.” Kaidan announced, ending the discussion. “Now we’ve got several reasons to shut this project down.”

“Focus on Maelon.” Mordin replied with single-minded determination, “Too late to help the dead.”

V’lana’s Team

“The walls!” Liara gasped as she gazed on the dimly greenlit assimilated walls.

“Just like the ones we saw earlier, they’ve been assimilated.” V’lana pointed out in a hushed tone as she and her team cautiously made their way down the corridor. “It looks like Cerberus made the same mistake the Tal’Shiar made. They underestimated the danger of the Borg.” Hearing a crashing sound coming from what seemed to be the central control hub, the subcommander and her squad rushed in only to come to a screeching halt as their eyes fell on the sight before them. In the middle of the chamber, surrounded by mangled corpses and smashed consoles stood an assimilated krogan warrior yelling, his scream a mixture of pain and rage. At once recognizing the intruders, the enraged krogan ripped a desk that had been bolted to the floor off and threw it at them.

“Shit!!” V’lana screamed, firing her antiproton pistol, hitting the krogan squarely in the chest, momentarily staggering him as she and the rest of her squad dived for cover. “Those motherfuckers were experimenting on an Elements damned krogan!”

Driven back by the combined attacks of V’lana and her team, the assimilated krogan picked up another table and threw it, this time at Wrex who, after knocking it aside, shouted a blood curdling oath as he fired his weapon, cursing as it bounced off the krogan’s shields.

“It’s adapted!” V’lana called out, “Adjust your frequency modulators and keep shooting at that thing! I’m gonna toss a plasma grenade!”

“Warp outgoing...stand clear!” Liara shouted as the crazed krogan charged towards Tali.

“Hitting it with incendiary.” The little quarian, cringing as the enraged giant warrior barreled towards her.

“Fuck this!” Wrex bellowed as he charged toward the krogan hoping to intercept the beast before it reached his quarian friend.

Superhot plasma, biotics, fire, and a countercharging krogan battlemaster met the assimilated krogan at nearly the same time resulting in an explosion that shook the chamber. As the dust settled. V’lana held her breath, expecting to see the Urdnot clan chief lying dead on the floor. Instead, a wide grin appeared on her face as Wrex, while battered, bruised, and knocked to the floor, struggled to his feet triumphantly shouting, “I AM KROGAN!”

“Elements damned.” V’lana let out a breath. “I’ve seen my share of badass, but that takes the prize.”

“Gonna take more than that to bring me down.” Wrex smugly declared as he spat blood on the floor.

Rushing up, Tali hugged the grizzled ex-mercenary. “Don’t you ever do that again, Uncle Urdnot.” The young quarian sobbed as she clung to the old krogan.

Liara chided with a slight smirk on her face, “You scared me out of at least two hundred years, Wrex.”

“Wasn’t gonna let it get to you, Pup.” Wrex said to the young quarian clinging closely to him, his rumbling voice taking on a grandfatherly quality.

“Liara...Tali...” V’lana commanded, “See if you can pick up anything from what’s left of that krogan. I’ll check through the computers—or rather those computers that haven’t been turned into scrap metal.” Turning to Wrex, the Romulan subcommander inquired, “Did you recognize him? Is he one of yours?”

“Yes.” The clan chief replied. “He was the scout I had sent out a few weeks ago. I had heard rumors of what was happening here and sent him to investigate.”

“Looks like he got too close and they nabbed him.” V’lana concluded as the krogan nodded his head in agreement.

“I’ve found something in one of the databanks!” Liara called out, waving her hand at V’lana and Wrex. “It looks like you were right about Cerberus trying to use Borg implants in combination with Reaper technology. The humans we ran into earlier were experimental prototypes for a program called ETAP. Unfortunately, I can’t find any more information on that program here. It looks like it self-deleted when the bunker’s alert systems were triggered.”

“I take it the krogan scout going berserk was what caused the alert.” V’lana quipped.

“Right.” Liara nodded her head. “They captured Wrex’s scout and tried to implant him, but when the nanites tried to rewire his nervous system...”

“His body switched to secondaries and he went into blood rage.” Wrex concluded, the asari scientist nodding her head in agreement.

“This confirms it.” The Romulan subcommander grimly stated, “We’ve got intruders here from my universe. Most likely Elachi and those pulling the Elachis’ strings. Something like this requires constant communication which means...”

“That there is a way for us to establish a permanent connection between our universes.” Tali concluded. “Maybe by a wormhole or something similar.”

“Possible.” V’lana mused, “We use the Bajoran wormhole in my universe to get to the Gamma Quadrant and we’ve long theorized that wormholes can lead to other dimensions or universes.”

“You ladies can talk science all you want later.” Wrex interrupted in his rumbling voice, “Right now I just want to get the hell out of here.”

“Right.” V’lana nodded her head in agreement. “We need to blow this place into a giant crater. I don’t want a single Borg nanoprobe getting out of here.”

“On that.” Wrex grunted, “We agree. Let’s move.”

Act 4

Chapter Summary

V'лана's team deals with the Cerberus base while Kaidan and his people wrap things up.

V'лана's team

As the winged shuttlecraft, its warp nacelles emitting a pale green light, smoothly landed near the bunker's location. Wrex vocalized, "Hmph. Your people got a thing for wings or something?"

"You could say that." V'лана chuckled, "When our ancestors left Vulcan, they were said to have marched under the raptor's wings. Birds of prey have always figured large in our mythology. It carries through in our warships."

Once the shuttle had safely touched down, V'лана and the others on her team approached. Her high from killing the thresher maw not completely worn down as yet, the subcommander greeted her first officer, "Hey Big Brother. Guess what we just did!"

His lips turned up in a lopsided grin as he took sight of his commanding officer, still covered in slime, Tovan Kev quipped, "It looks like you fell into an offal pit, Little Sister."

"We killed a thresher maw! Me and Wrex!" V'лана cried out triumphantly as the old krogan looked on with an amused grin on his face. "It was...Elements what a rush! Almost as good as sex!"

"Sounds like you had fun, Little Sister." The *Gallena's* executive officer remarked with a chuckle before getting down to business. "We have the warhead."

Sobering up, V'лана inclined her head in the direction of the bunker. "Good. That structure needs to be completely obliterated. It has been taken over by the Borg."

"Shit." Tovan murmured, giving Tali a worried glance. "Are all of you okay?"

"Yes." The subcommander replied. "None of us got infected by the nanites. We also found out something very disturbing. It appears that Cerberus is working with the Elachi just as the Tal'Shiar are in our universe."

"The Elachi are here?" Tovan exclaimed, a shocked look on his face.

"Apparently so, Big Brother." V'лана affirmed, gesturing for Liara to speak.

"We found mycelial spores that seem to bear out an Elachi presence." The asari scientist declared. "As well as Cerberus troopers who have been...modified...by Borg and Reaper tech. They were experimenting on a krogan, but the experiment got away from them."

"They erased much of their research, but we did pick up a few things." V'лана declared, adding, "We're also going to need to meet with the Council and Councilor Anderson, and we need to find a way back to our universe to report our findings. If my hunch is right, both universes face a common threat and will have to work together to defeat it."

"Right." Tovan nodded his head as he motioned for his team to unload the bomb. "We'll prepare the bomb for detonation on your order." Turning to the quarian engineer, the Romulan centurion's lips turned up in a welcoming smile as he requested, "Tali? I could use your help."

"Of course." Tali replied, thankful that her helmet and visor hid what was most undoubtedly furious blushing. "I'll be glad to assist in any way I can."

"There's a sonic shower in the back of the shuttle, Little Sister." Tovan not so gently hinted, "You might want to..."

"Get the thresher maw shit off me before I see Kaidan again?" V'лана interrupted with a wicked grin, joking, "And here I was thinking about sliming him by rubbing myself up against him."

"You should." Wrex joked, "I've been told it's a big turn on."

"Really?" V'лана teased, and then sighed melodramatically, "All right, Tovan. I'll hit the showers. I know better than to argue with you when you pull out the 'Older Brother' face. Comm me when you're ready to blow the bomb."

"Will do, Subcommander." Kev acknowledged as he turned to Wrex. "Would you like to come with us?"

"Wouldn't miss it for the world." The krogan battlemaster responded with a toothy grin. Then, noticing the look that the Romulan was giving his quarian protégé, warned in a tone that was both joking and warning, "That's my little girl. I wouldn't want anything bad to happen to her. Get me?"

At once picking up on the huge krogan's meaning, Tovan replied with a nod of his head, "Understood. I'll look out for her."

"Good." Wrex responded with a head nod of his own. "Now...let's blow this abomination to hell."

Several minutes later, Tovan, Wrex, Tali, and the rest of the demolition team returned. “The bomb is set.” Tovan declared, adding, “It would be a good idea for us to be in the shuttle and out of the area before setting it off.”

“Right.” V’lana, now cleaner and wearing a newly replicated uniform, acknowledged with a nod of her head. “Let’s go.”

After the shuttle had lifted off and moved to a safe distance, Tovan handed the detonator to his commanding officer who then handed it to Wrex. “Your world.” V’lana simply stated, “You should have the honor of blowing that place to oblivion.”

With a single nod of his head, the krogan clan chief pressed down on the detonator. Moments later, the shuttle, even though far away from the blast, shook violently from the explosive’s shockwave. “What sort of bomb was that?” Wrex exclaimed with a feral grin.

“Tri-cobalt bomb.” V’lana responded with a smirk. “Used when you want to make sure there’s nothing left. We’ll do a scan anyway though to make sure that we got everything. Then we’ll return to your base.”

Nodding his head in agreement, the krogan battlemaster responded, “Good. I don’t want that shit on my world. Also...I need to get back before Wreav and Uvenk decide that I’m dead and do something stupid.”

“You heard the krogan, Tovan.” V’lana quipped, “Take us to the site and then I want a full and thorough scan. After that, back to Urdnot Base.”

“Aye, Subcommander.” Tovan replied as he gave the appropriate orders to the shuttle pilot, and then, turning to Tali, he asked in a low whisper. “Dinner at the Raptor’s Nest when we get back?”

“Yes.” The youthful quarian responded softly so that no one else could hear, her visor again hiding her blushing cheeks. “I would like that.”

Kaidan’s Team

Approaching a sealed door, Kaidan motioned for his team to take positions. “On three.” He murmured, counting down, “One...two...” Opening the door, weapon drawn, the human biotic found a krogan sitting on the floor.

“Must be that scout Wrex told us was missing.” Garrus surmised as Kaidan holstered his weapon.

“Looks like.” Alenko nodded his head, approaching the krogan, who, on noticing the newcomers looked up.

“You killed the Blood Pack guards.” The scout said in a forlorn voice.

“Guess correct.” Mordin declared, “Not Blood Pack, not member of Clan Weyrloc. Clan markings...Urdnot.”

“I’m an Urdnot scout.” The krogan confirmed, “I was captured by Weyrloc guards who brought me here.”

“We were told to look for you.” Kaidan explained, “We’ve taken out the guards. You should get back to base.”

“I can’t.” The scout shook his head. “The Weyrloc did things to me. Injections. Drugs. Said that I was sacrificing myself for the good of all krogans.”

“What in the Elements did they do to you?” Solana asked, shaking her head.

“Experiments to cure the genophage.” The scout answered, “Everything’s blurry. Hard to think. I have to stay.”

“Can you do anything for him, Mordin?” Kaidan asked, “Stims? Something that would strengthen his immune system?”

“I’m not too sick to leave.” The krogan declared, “I have to stay. They’re curing the genophage! They have to keep doing the tests to make it all better!”

“Caution, Alenko.” Mordin warned in a low murmur. “Patient unstable. Brainwashed.”

“Why do you want them to keep doing the tests?” Kaidan asked in a gentle voice, as if he were talking to a child.

“It was my fault I got caught.” The scout explained. “I wasn’t strong enough. Not good enough. This is the best...all...I can do. I’m not big enough or strong enough to have a real chance with the females. I’ll never have kids of my own. But, if I help to undo the effects of the genophage, I will have mattered. My life will have meaning.”

“Honorable.” Solana nodded her head as she spoke in a low voice. “But also foolish.”

“You’re right.” Kaidan replied, speaking to the scout, “Millions of children will be born, but they’ll be Weyrloc children. Your clan...as well as all the others...will be destroyed.”

“No.” The scout shook his head in disbelief, “They said I was helping Urdnot.”

“The best way for you to help Urdnot...” Kaidan urged, “...is for you to get back there. But...it would take a real badass to do that and I don’t see any badasses here. I just see a scout who’s sitting there whining like a quarian with a stomach ache.”

“Be glad Tali’s not here.” Garrus quipped.

“I can do it!” The scout declared with renewed determination. “I’m going back and I’m going to the female camp!”

"Then get your ass in gear and go!" Kaidan commanded, "Get back there and show them what you're made of! Go!"

Watching as the krogan departed, Solana jibed, "Not bad, Alenko."

Laughing, Kaidan responded with a quip of his own as the scout disappeared down the corridor, "I don't know why, but I can't get the Notre Dame fight song out of my head."

"Find Maelon." Mordin urged, "Will cure earworm."

"Right." Alenko nodded his head in agreement. "Move out."

"It's over." Kaidan panted, his energy reserves nearly exhausted, his head throbbing from one of the worst migraines he had ever experienced as he looked down on the charred and battered corpse of the former leader of Clan Weyrloc, Guld.

"Helluva fight." Solana remarked as she put away her plasma rifle.

"Let's not do that again." Garrus grunted as he picked himself up from the floor, a dead krogan beside him. Glancing in Mordin's direction, the turian vigilante nodded his head in gratitude. "Thanks. He almost got me."

"Thanks not necessary." Mordin replied as he looked the former C-Sec officer over. "No major wounds. Some bruising but will heal.

"I'll be fine." Garrus answered back with another grunt, "Go see to Alenko. He needs you more."

"Medigel and pain suppressant should alleviate migraine and bruises." Mordin declared as he administered treatment to the human biotic. "Rest upon return to *Gallena*. No midnight meeting with subcommander tonight."

"What?" Kaidan groaned, "What gives you the idea that me and 'Iana are..."

"Alenko." Garrus sighed indulgently, "Everyone except maybe Veril's pet tribble knows about your midnight briefings with the subcommander in her quarters."

"Ummm..." Kaidan stammered before finally regaining composure, "We should get going. We need to find Maelon."

"Commander Alenko correct." Mordin affirmed, "Must find Maelon. Hope not too late."

Entering a spacious chamber, Mordin and the others at once spotted a salarian standing in front of a large holographic screen and console. With a note of relief in his voice, Mordin remarked on seeing his former student. "Alive. Unharmd." As he and the rest of the squad approached the other salarian, still at work, apparently paying the intruders no heed, Mordin, on closer inspection, observed, much to his confusion, "No sign of restraints. No evidence of torture. Don't understand."

Finally acknowledging his unwanted guests, Maelon sneered as he at once recognized his former teacher's voice. "You've always had a talent, Professor, for failing to see any evidence that disagreed with your prejudices. I'm here because I want to be here. Not because Weyrloc or anyone else forced me. When will you understand that?"

"I'm sorry, Mordin." Kaidan interjected, "He wasn't kidnapped or forced to work on a cure for the genophage. He's doing this of his own free will."

"Impossible!" Mordin, refusing to accept the truth, exclaimed, "Whole team agreed! Project necessary!"

"How could I dare disagree with the great Doctor Mordin Solus!" Maelon rebuked, "I was your student! I respected and looked up to you!"

His confusion now replaced by disappointment and anger, Mordin bit back, "Experiments performed here! Live subjects! Prisoners! Torture and executions! Your doing?"

"We already have the blood of millions on our hands, Doctor." Maelon lamented, "If it takes more blood to put things right, then I am willing to pay that price."

"Do you really think that what you're doing here can be justified or excused?" Kaidan exclaimed, his outrage clearly evident.

"We committed cultural genocide!" Maelon cried out, "Nothing I do will ever be justified! The experiments are monstrous because I was taught to be a monster."

"Did you ever perform experiments like that, Mordin?" Kaidan inquired with a note of suspicion in his voice.

"No." Mordin responded, shaking his head vehemently. "Never taught you this, Maelon."

Shaking his head, Maelon countered, "Are you telling me that your hands are clean, Professor? Is that what you really want to say to the millions of dead? All dead because of what we did? You're the one who taught me that the ends justified the means. I am going to undo the genophage the only way I know how."

Interjecting himself into the conversation, Garrus asked, "What happens if Mordin is right and you cure the genophage only to have the krogan expand again. Are you willing to risk that?"

"We justified our actions by saying the krogan would cause destruction and war if their population recovered." Maelon argued back, "But look at the galaxy now! Batarian attacks in the Traverse with the humans retaliating...geth attacks on the Citadel...can you really tell me the galaxy is a more peaceful place? The assault on Eden Prime might not have ever happened if we helped the krogan recover. We will never know."

“A krogan population explosion would not have done anything to stop Saren and the geth.” Kaidan shook his head, “If anything, it probably would have made matters worse.”

“An increased krogan population would have forced the Council to take steps to prevent krogan aggression.” Maelon countered. “Most likely involving colony rights in the Traverse.”

“Not necessarily.” Kaidan answered back. “Much as I personally detest the genophage...” the human biotic heaved a dejected sigh, “I saw firsthand how easily Saren and the Reapers manipulated and controlled the krogan. I don’t even want think about what they would have been able to do with an increased krogan population.”

“Got to agree with Kaidan here.” Garrus added, “I was also at Vormire and saw Saren’s cloning facilities.”

“Saren offered hope to krogan.” Maelon responded defensively, “Had the genophage already been cured, he would not have had that bait to offer. The Council could have brought the krogan over to help. Form a unified defense against the Reapers.”

“He’s got a point there.” Solana muttered to herself, staying out of what she saw as a dispute between the denizens of this universe.

“Supposition.” Mordin answered back, “Impossible to be certain. Engaging in hypotheticals without substantive evidence to support claim. Taught you better.”

“We tried to play God!” Maelon cried out, “And we failed! We made things worse and I’m going to fix it!”

“The genophage isn’t lethal.” Garrus pointed out, “It only affects fertility rates.”

Maelon responded to the turian’s argument with a counterargument, “Krogans fight over fertile females and become pirates and mercenaries because they see no alternative.”

“Jane told me that Wrex once told her pretty much the same thing.” Kaidan somberly recalled as he conceded Maelon’s point, the other salarian nodding his head. “You’re just looking at the surface, Mordin, but you’re ignoring the spin off effects of the genophage. In other words, the law of unintended consequences.”

“They would be in the midst of a cultural renaissance right now had we not decided to inflict the genophage upon them.” Maelon positively declared as Kaidan disagreed, this time getting a nod of agreement from Mordin.

“You can’t say that with absolute certainty, Maelon. Just as Mordin cannot say with absolute certainty that the krogan would have reignited the Rebellions—although I will concede that, given what we know about the krogan, Mordin’s hypothesis is the more sound one.”

“Alenko correct.” Mordin declared. “Your analysis inaccurate. Simulations all indicated increased krogan population resulted in war.”

“Why did you work with Clan Weyrloc?” Kaidan inquired, “And how were you able to access the genophage data. I thought that was top secret.”

“I had no problems accessing the data.” Maelon explained, “I still had my clearances. All I had to do was ask. As for the Weyrlocs, they were the only clan with the resources and willingness to support me in my efforts.”

“What about Clan Urdnot?” Kaidan asked, “Did you even bother to approach Wrex?”

Shaking his head, Maelon replied, “Wrex would not give me the permission to do the experiments I needed to do.”

“In other words...” Kaidan glared angrily at the younger salarian, “He would not agree to the cruel and unethical experiments you performed here.”

Shrugging his shoulders, Maelon responded bitterly, “Urdnot’s loss is Weyrloc’s gain. Their clan will be the first to recover once I cure the genophage.”

“That’s assuming you’ll have the opportunity to cure the genophage.” Garrus interjected in a low, threatening tone of voice.

Coming to a decision, Kaidan declared, “We’re shutting this lab down, Maelon. The only question now is whether you’re going to walk out or be carried out on a stretcher.”

Drawing a pistol, Maelon growled, “You can’t face the truth, can you Professor. Can’t face the fact that your actions and your brilliant mind caused you to commit an atrocity.”

Lashing out quickly, Mordin grasped the pistol from his student’s hand as he shoved him back against a wall. Pointing the barrel of the pistol at Maelon’s face, Mordin spat out angrily, “Unacceptable experiments. Unacceptable goals. Won’t change.” A note of sadness in his voice, the former STG operative passed sentence, “No choice. Have to kill you.”

“Wait, Mordin!” Kaidan interjected before the salarian could pull the trigger, “You don’t have to do this. You’re not a murderer.”

“No.” An aghast Mordin exclaimed. “I am not a murderer. Thank you, Alenko.” Turning to his student, he holstered the pistol, “Finished, Maelon. Go. No Weyrloc left. Project finished.”

“What if he talks to more krogan or tells the public about the modified genophage project?” Garrus interrupted.

Taking a deep breath, Mordin responded, “Special Tasks Group good at covering tracks. No proof. Weyrloc willingness to work with salarian unusual. Other krogan will kill him. Has nowhere to go.”

“What if he starts his research again?” Garrus persisted, still seeing the younger salarian as a potential threat.

“Locking this unit.” Mordin declared, “Special Task Group can cut off access to old data. Could start from scratch though.” The salarian scientist admitted before adding, “But will take decades of work. Didn’t teach Maelon everything I know.”

Turning his attention to Maelon, Kaidan warned, “You heard the professor. You better go now—before he or Garrus change their minds.”

“Where am I supposed to go?” Maelon, now realizing the extent of his isolation, sobbed.

“Don’t care.” Mordin answered back, “Try Omega. Can always use another clinic. Maybe do real good.”

“The krogan didn’t deserve what we did to them.” Maelon lamented in a final plea, “The genophage needs to end.”

Shaking his head, Mordin responded, “Not like this. Now...go. Last chance.”

As his former protégé walked away, the professor spoke in a low voice to the human standing beside him. “Apologies, Commander. Misunderstood mission parameters. No kidnapping. My mistake. Thank you.” Reading through his former pupil’s data, Mordin sighed, “Maelon’s research. Only loose end. Could destroy it. Closure. Security. Still valuable though.”

Shaking his head, Kaidan replied in a quiet voice, “I can’t make that call for you, Mordin. You have to decide for yourself what to do with his data.”

Taking a deep breath, the former STG operative hit the delete key. “Too dangerous. Maybe one day cure for genophage possible. But not right now.”

His facial expression a faceless mask, Kaidan commanded, “If we’re done here. Let’s get back home.”

Watching as the last of Maelon’s research was purged from the computer data banks, Mordin pressed another button. “Reformatting and rebooting system. Will clean everything. Then we can leave.” Moments later, satisfied with his data purge, the salarian scientist gestured towards the exit. “Can go now.”

Act 5: Epilogue

Chapter Summary

We wrap everything up here and get a glimpse at our next episode which will take us back to the STO universe and Drozana Station as the girls from the Spoiled Princess stumble into a mystery of their own.

Urndot Base—Wrex's Private Quarters

Speaking to V'lana, Kaidan, and the rest of his guests as he paced up and down in his quarters, the footfalls of the large krogan seemingly shaking the floor, Urndot Wrex, speaking about Maelon and the genophage, rumbled, "That little pyjak almost undid everything I had been working to do in getting the clans together when he came before me and the rest of the clan with his ideas. It was all I could do to keep Uvenk, Wreav, and the other hard humps in line when I told that salarian no."

"I have to admit to being curious." V'lana queried, "Why did you refuse him? Were the experiments the reason?"

"Yes." Wrex forcefully replied, then let out a wry chuckle, "I remember a conversation I had with Shepard...after Vormire. She was upset over losing Gunnery Chief Williams."

"Yeah." Kaidan affirmed, lowering his head for a moment, letting out a sigh as the other Normandy veterans also briefly bowed their heads, "That was hard for all of us."

"She told me that she lost one friend and could have lost two." Wrex recalled. "She also didn't try to feed me any varren shit about how sorry she was that we had to destroy those cloning facilities and that we couldn't cure the genophage. She told me the truth. That there was no way the other races in the galaxy would permit the genophage to be cured until we krogan proved that we could be trusted."

"What did you say to that?" V'lana asked.

"I told her she was right." Wrex answered back with a grunt before releasing a brief chuckle, "She then asked me what I was going to do about it."

"That's Jane all over." Garrus interjected, his mandibles forming the turian equivalent of a sad smile.

Ceasing his pacing, the old krogan looked squarely at his guests as he spoke, "That's when I decided it was time to change things here and that if no one else was willing to do the job, then I'd have to do it. And I wasn't about to let a salarian scientist seeking redemption come here and fuck that up, just like I won't let those hard humped idiots undo everything I've accomplished so far."

Nodding her head in understanding and approval, V'lana declared, "If there's anything we can do to help you...short of supplying you tricobalt bombs or plasma rifles...we'll be glad to. Medical assistance...infrastructure...anything like that..."

"Thank you." Wrex replied with a toothy grin, "But we krogan have to solve our own problems. However...as I said, you and your people will always be welcome here."

"Thank you." V'lana courteously responded, "I'd like to set you up with a subspace communications system though so that you can keep in touch with us. Also...we're planning on a memorial service for Commander Shepard and the *Normandy* crew that lost their lives. The subspace communicator will allow you to participate if you wish."

The old krogan nodded his head in gratitude, "I'd like that. Much as I'd like to be there in person, I can't take risk leaving these pyjaks on their own for too long."

"Excellent." V'lana grinned, "I'll have a technician set it up for you and show you how to operate it. Until later, Urndot Wrex."

"Later, Subcommander."

RRW Gallena—Kelly Chambers' office

His eyes focused on the human counselor seated on the couch next to him, Mordin declared in a soft voice. "Should have killed him. Wanted to. Easier than listening." Shaking his head, he continued his lament, "Easier for him too. Experiments indicated how far he'd fallen. Expected it from krogan. Not one of mine."

"But you didn't kill him." Kelly pointed out.

"No. Wanted to. But Alenko correct. Am not murderer. But maybe...maybe I did make mistake."

"What was your mistake?"

"Genophage...deleting data..." Shaking his head, the salarian scientist heaved a sigh, "Not good to second guess. Krogan not ready for cure."

"When do you think they will be?" Kelly asked.

“When krogan unified and foundations laid for peaceful culture.” Mordin declared. “Urdrnot Wrex leadership promising start.”

“You could begin working on a cure here. So that you are prepared should the time come when the krogan are ready.” Kelly suggested.

A slight smile appeared on the salarian’s face as he nodded his head. “Could do that. Interesting puzzle. Starting from scratch.” He said as his enthusiasm for his new project grew. “Facilities on *Gallena* will help in recreating Maelon’s research without ethical issues that come with experimenting on live subjects. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” Kelly smiled before inquiring, “How are you feeling now?”

“Much better.” Mordin responded. “Disgusted by Maelon’s actions. Proud of his nerve though. Always thought he lacked backbone. Hope he finds something new...better. Better purpose. No torture tests.”

“You seem much more at peace now.” Kelly noted, “Are you sure you’ve sorted everything out?”

“Yes.” Mordin nodded his head. “Life...death...grieving...betrayal...anger...acceptance. Have processed. Must get to work on cure now. Much to do. Thank you again.”

As the hyperactive salarian left her office, a slight smile appeared on Kelly Chambers’ lips as she once again ruminated on how fortunate she was that she had cut her ties with Cerberus. Had she still remained, she thought gloomily to herself, she would never have had the opportunity to meet such a wide variety of life or learn to respect how each species adds its own unique charm to the universe. Had she remained in Cerberus, she would have remained trapped in the same circle of hate that even now was probably consuming her best friend and sometime lover, Vera. Sipping her tea, Kelly wondered, speaking aloud, “I wish you were here, Vera. I just hope that there’s something of you still there.”

RRW Gallena—The Raptor’s Nest

As she entered the *Gallena*’s lounge, the butterflies in Tali’s stomach grew more active as her eyes scanned the room. Immediately on seeing the warbird’s executive officer seated at a table, the young quarian’s heart skipped a beat. Nervously approaching, she sighed inwardly in relief, thankful that her visor hid the scared and nervous look on her face.

Upon seeing Tali, wearing her purple encounter suit, approach, Tovan’s lips turned up in a smile as he gestured for her to join him. Standing up, he helped the young woman to her seat before sitting down opposite her. “I hear you had quite the adventure.”

“We did.” Tali laughed nervously. “That was the first time I ever saw a Borg. Are they always so...”

“Frightening?” Tovan interjected as Tali nodded her head. “Yes.” The Romulan replied in a grave voice. “I remember our first encounter with them. We were working undercover as Tal’ Shiar and had to assist with the recovery of artifacts from a derelict Borg cube.” Shaking his head, the Romulan heaved a sigh, “What the Tal’ Shiar keep forgetting is that there is no such thing as a derelict Borg anything.”

“Like the Reapers.” Tali noted as Tovan nodded his head in agreement. “Yet fools like Cerberus and the Tal’ Shiar still insist on experimenting with them. And the experiments never go well.”

“And a lot of innocent people get hurt.” Tovan commented, his face now taking on a sad expression.

“Like your sister?”

“Yes.” Tovan confessed. “We were fortunate in finding her...but what the Tal’ Shiar did to her in the short time they had her...”

“What did they do?” Tali asked as a waiter brought their meals and drinks to them.

“Are you sure you want to hear the story?” Tovan asked, taking a sip of Romulan wine.

“Please.” Tali entreated, “I would like to hear--If you want to talk about it that is.”

“I think I would.” Tovan nodded as he gestured at two crystal goblets a large wide one and a more narrow one. “But first, have something to eat and drink. Our chef was able to replicate a dextro-safe meal for you that you can take in through your...” His lips turned up in a grin as Tali chuckled.

“Emergency induction port.”

“Right.” Tovan nodded his head as the quarian sucked the nutrient in the goblet through her straw.

“This is good.” Tali raved as she sipped some more of the colored liquid.

“Our chef was able to give it the same flavoring as Romulan mollusks with Averrian spices.” Tovan explained as he gestured towards the tall thin goblet, “And that is a dextro-safe replication of Romulan wine.”

“So...” Kev asked as his dinner date sipped her wine, “Do you still want to hear about Rina?”

“Yes.” Tali replied in a tender voice, “Please. And then, if you want, I can tell you a story about me, Shepard and Ashley and the Prothean relic we found.”

“I’d like to hear that.”

RRW Gallena—Kaidan's Quarters

"Come in." Kaidan called out as the door alert chimed and the doors to his quarters slid open to reveal the subcommander standing at the threshold wearing a cream robe.

"Hey." V'lana greeted in a soft voice as she walked over to her human lover, resting in bed. "How are you feeling?"

"Better." Kaidan replied with a grin. "Doc gave me a pain reliever and mild sedative so..."

"No Vulcan Love Slave cosplay tonight." The mischievous Romulan teased with a wicked grin as she sat down at the edge of the bed.

"Not tonight." Kaidan managed a weak chuckle as he caressed his lover's cheek. "Sorry. Promise I'll make it up to you tomorrow night."

"You better." V'lana giggled. Her laughter fading, the subcommander remarked, "I hear you had quite the adventure."

"Not as exciting as yours." Kaidan grinned, "It's not every day you kill a thresher maw on foot." The grin on his face disappearing, he added in a far more grave tone of voice, "Nor is it every day that you find out that Cerberus is experimenting with both Reaper and Borg tech. Where do you think they got hold of that? The Elachi?"

"That's our best guess." V'lana, getting back to business, replied. "Apparently subspace gives access to other universes and dimensions. But like I said at our briefing, I don't think they're the ultimate puppet masters here."

"Any ideas on who might be?"

"I've got some suspects." The lovely Romulan replied as caressed her lover's cheek. "Before getting sucked into this universe, I encountered a working Iconian gateway. Maybe there are more...maybe one or two or even more in this universe. Could be the Tholians—but I have my doubts about them. The Undine maybe. One or more of the different Mirror Universe Terran Empires...very possible. They share much of Cerberus's views on human supremacy. And I'm not ruling out the Borg acting alone. They are more than capable of doing that."

"So...we've got a big mystery to solve." Kaidan concluded.

"Right." V'lana nodded her head as her mischievous smile returned. "Now...scootch. Doctor Chakwas might have said no nookie tonight, but she didn't say anything about us sleeping together and I want cuddles."

Scotchting over to make room, Kaidan chuckled as the lovely Romulan sloughed off her robe and slipped under the sheets. Embracing his lover, he murmured in a low voice as he nuzzled her, "What 'lana wants 'lana gets."

"Damn right." V'lana murmured back in a husky voice as she snuggled closer. "And don't you ever forget it."

Cerberus Base—Undisclosed Location

"The loss of the Tuchanka facility, in and of itself, is a minor inconvenience." The Illusive man declared as he flicked ash from his cigarette into a waste receptacle. "What concerns me is the likelihood that the experiments carried out there will by now have reached Council and Alliance intelligence. Also disconcerting was the extent of the explosion. Our surveillance drones report that there is absolutely nothing there but a crater."

"The byproduct of a tricobalt bomb." The response, coming from a silhouette of a humanoid figure and scrambled by a voice synthesizer, replied. *"It would appear that there are uninvited guests. Nothing for you to concern yourself with. We will deal with them at the appropriate time."*

"I will leave it in your hands then." The Illusive Man acknowledged. "The ETAP project is proving successful and we are preparing to implement it on a wider scale."

"Good. We will be in touch with you soon."

As the holographic image disappeared, the Illusive Man turned his attention to his assistant, "Contact Shepard. I have her next mission."

Nodding her head, Agent Brooks complied, "Yes, Sir."

The Spoiled Princess—Another Universe

"Are you sure he didn't decide to slip off and go to Risa, Qwixo?"

"I'm sure, Belen." Belen's assistant manager at the Drozana Station bar responded, his image appearing on the computer monitor in Belen's quarters on the *Spoiled Princess*. *"He hasn't reported back since you left and...the blue light and ghosts are back. They're scaring our paying customers away. Can you..."*

"All right, Qwixo." Belen sighed, "I'll ask them. We'll be docking at the station in a few hours anyway. I'll meet you at the bar when we arrive."

“Thank you.”

Exiting his quarters and making his way to the lounge, the Ferengi bartender/engineer smiled as he at once recognized the lovely green Orion woman sitting at the bar nursing a drink. “Hey, Nelia!”

“Afternoon, Belen. How’s Qwixo doing?” Bar still standing?” Nelia responded with a chuckle as Ashley and Shelana sauntered in and took their places at the bar.

“Where are Twes and Rana?” Belen asked, referring to the Betazoid woman and the new asari member of the *Princess’s* crew.

“They’re still on the bridge.” Shelana, the Andorian former Starfleet tactical officer, replied with a crooked grin. “Twes was going over the astrogation sensors with Rana...they should be done soon.”

“Yeah.” Ashley Williams, the other newcomer from another universe, a former Systems Alliance marine, interjected as she fetched a beer for herself and her Andorian shipmate. “They said they were going to change clothes first though.”

“Topless...bottomless...or both?” Shelana joked as she took a sip of her beer.

“I’m betting topless.” Nelia replied with a throaty laugh, herself wearing nothing but a dress loincloth hanging from a slender gold chain and a translucent top that did nothing to hide her assets.

“Either way I win.” Belen chuckled, then his laughter fading, he relayed the contents of his recent subspace conversation with Qwixo.

“So...you think something might be wrong?” Nelia inquired as both Rana and Twesata entered the lounge, the Betazoid former Starfleet officer wearing a see through chemise and the asari scientist who had accompanied the human Alliance marine into this universe wearing nearly the same outfit.

“Maybe.” Belen affirmed, “I was hoping you girls would...”

“Check it out for you?” Twesata interrupted as she opened a tiny jewel box and sniffed, enjoying the quick rush of the drug she had just snorted as the others filled her and Rana in on Belen’s recent conversation.

“Please.” The Ferengi at the bar pleaded.

“Of course we will, Bel.” Nelia replied as the other women on the team nodded their heads in agreement.

“Yeah.” Ashley grinned, “Can’t hurt to take a look. Not like we’re going to run into a nest of Romulans...right?”

“Hope not!” Nelia laughed as Belen took his place behind the bar and freshened everyone’s drinks. “After our last meeting with the Tal’Shiar, I’m in no hurry for a return engagement.”

“I’ll drink to that!” Rana quipped as she took a sip of her Trillian aurea, following it up with a sniff from the jewelry box that her Betazoid friend handed her.

“Drink up, ladies!” The Ferengi jibed, “Drozana Station in two hours.”

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