

Convergences: Clouds over Illium

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Convergences: Clouds over Illium

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Summary

A multi-part story arc where future plot threads are teased as V'lana and company return to Illium. V'lana's personal life gets a lot more complicated, some of the mysteries hidden by the Shadow Broker come to life, the Illusive Man and his allies prepare to enact the next stage of their plans, and Liara finds...well...I'll let you see for yourselves.

Act One

RRW Gallena

“Shit. I hate it when I’m right.” Detective Anaya, her image appearing on V’lana’s computer screen, frowned, “It all fits too well.”

“What happened?” V’lana asked as she sat down her cup of Tarkalian tea.

“Shepard arrived at the Nos Astra spaceport today with two freaks and another human.” Anaya responded.

“Can I see your surveillance footage?” V’lana requested with a frown.

“Sure.” Anaya replied, pressing a button. “Transmitting now.”

V’lana carefully studied the images appearing on her screen before commenting. “The redhead must be Shepard.”

“Yep.” Anaya confirmed. “That’s Shepard. She’s supposedly in charge of this little zoo.”

“Supposedly?” V’lana exclaimed, raising an eyebrow.

“Yeah.” The asari detective affirmed, “Intel I’ve picked up says otherwise. Look at the way she’s acting towards that psycho dressed in black—at how she nods her head and the way she speaks to him. That’s the look of someone who’s used to not taking orders having to take them instead of giving them—and she’s plenty pissed at it too.”

“That jibes with some of the intel reports we’ve received also.” V’lana confirmed, “We’ve heard rumors that Shepard isn’t really running the show anymore. Looks like the man in black is.”

“That’s what I’m thinking too.” Anaya agreed with a nod of her head. “You ask me, he’s got trouble written all over him.”

“If he’s who Miranda thinks he might be…” V’lana frowned worriedly, “You might be right.”

“Go on.”

“Miri thinks that he might be a Cerberus killer. Does the name Kai Leng ring any bells for you?”

“Yeah.” Anaya scowled, “All bad. You and your friend are right. According to my intel reports, he is a fucking psycho—sociopath too. If he’s running the show, then odds are we’re going to have a body count—especially with those other two assholes in their entourage. Thoughts on them?”

“Fuck me dead.” V’lana swore as she studied the other two in Shepard’s party. One, a human, her head shaven and body covered with tattoos with what appeared to be a Borg implant on her eye and another implant replacing her right hand and arm. The other freak, a giant krogan, also possessing Borg implants and what appeared to the Romulan subcommander to be grafted tissue from a Gorn.

“Other than being two ugly motherfuckers, what’s the issue with them?” Anaya nervously queried as she noticed the apprehensive look on her Romulan friend’s face.

“It’ll take too long to explain over a comm. What I can tell you right now is that we’re in deep shit.” V’lana replied. “We’re about to enter the Illium System. Once we arrive, I’ll bring you aboard my ship and we can compare notes.”

“Okay.” the asari detective drawled, “Let me know when and I’ll meet you at the docks.”

“You won’t need to do that.” V’lana answered back, “Just be alone in some place secure where no one can see you when I comm you.”

“I can arrange that.” Anaya responded. “Contact me when you arrive in system.”

“Will do. Avesti out.” Immediately after terminating the communication, V’lana tapped her comm. “Miranda? Come immediately to my ready room. I have something I want to show you.”

Illium

“Entering Illium System.” Joker reported from his position at the helm.

“Maintain cloak and begin scanning for stealthed vessels.” V’lana commanded from the warbird’s center seat.

“Expecting something, Little Sister?” Tovan inquired as Samantha began scanning the system.

“Call it playing a hunch, Big Brother.”

“Your hunch was a good one, Subcommander.” Traynor called out. “I’m reading one stealthed vessel. Frigate class. Modified *Normandy*.”

“Cerberus?” Tovan inquired with a raised eyebrow.

“That would be my guess.” V’lana replied. “The Alliance doesn’t have any frigates deployed in this sector and we know through interrogating

those prisoners that Cerberus built an improved model of the *Normandy*.”

“Bastards got no respect for the dead” Joker growled, “Request permission to shove a plasma torpedo up their asshole, Ma’am.”

“Not yet, Joker. We want to keep good relations with the locals. I don’t want any shooting in their space if we can help it.” V’lana thoughtfully replied before again addressing Samantha. “Ms. Traynor? Have Cortes and Rodek take out one of the Scorpions. I want them to monitor that frigate under cloak. The moment it does anything out of line...then have them attack.”

“Understood, Subcommander.” Samantha acknowledged, passing on the order to the pilot and his engineer. “They’re preparing to launch.”

“Good.” V’lana nodded, “Bring us into standard orbit, Joker, but keep that cloak up. I don’t want them knowing we’re here—not just yet. Samantha? When we get into orbit, comm Detective Anaya and tell her to prepare for transport. I’ll be in transporter room one to greet our guest.”

“Aye, Subcommander.”

As the turbolift closed behind the auburn-haired subcommander, Joker quipped, “Tell someone to take Anaya’s picture.”

Illium—Hotel Azure

“This is the location.” Kai Leng announced to the redheaded clone walking beside him as they approached a door to one of the erotic hotel’s rooms. “Our contacts will meet us here.”

In an effort to assert control, Shepard took an authoritative tone as she commanded, “Open the door.”

“Of course.” The Cerberus assassin acknowledged, in a tone of voice that while not being openly defiant, was far from deferential.

Opening the door, the two Cerberus agents found themselves face-to-face with two asari and a human. While the human was clad in non-descript civilian clothing, the two asari wore combat armor, one bearing Eclipse colors. “Tela Vasir.” The asari with well-used combat armor introduced herself. “I represent one of the interested parties.”

“Who is this interested party?” Shepard inquired suspiciously.

Shaking her head, Vasir responded with just a touch of arrogance in her voice, “You don’t need to know.”

Kai Leng declared in a sneering tone of voice, “Knowledge of her employer is not germane to this mission.”

“I’ll decide...” Shepard began to object, only to be silenced by a sharp pain in her skull, forcing her to place her hand on her forehead.

“Bitch of a headache you’ve got there, tough girl.” The asari wearing Eclipse colors smirked. “Maybe you should sit this one out. Let the grownups take care of things.”

Growling, the redhead bit back, “I’m fine. Who the hell are you?”

“Captain Enyala.” The Eclipse mercenary responded. “I was contracted by Dr. Lawson.”

“And you?” Shepard queried, turning to the human.

“Niket.” The human male responded.

“He’ll be delivering the package.” Enyala declared. “I and my people will be at the extraction point.”

“Are you expecting trouble?” Shepard inquired.

“Yes.” The Eclipse mercenary answered back, “That’s where you and your team come in. A detective by the name of Anaya has been a thorn in our side long enough.”

“My employer agrees.” Vasir interjected, “She has also been interfering in his operations.”

With a snort of derision, Enyala sneered, “Anaya runs one of the few uncorrupt police districts in Nos Astra. That bitch has fucked up more of our operations than all the other cops combined.”

“I’m surprised you weren’t able to bribe one of her superiors to just remove her.” Leng mused.

“It’s not as if we haven’t tried.” Enyala replied with a frown. “The problem is that the whore has dirt on virtually anyone who can remove her. She goes down, she takes them with her.”

“While it’s true that you can get—or get away with—anything you want on Illium—provided you have the connections, there are some limits on what the ‘authorities’ will permit.” Vasir explained. “Anaya’s superiors are more useful where they are. Also, my boss wants to send out a clear message to any other cops who don’t want to...what’s the human expression?”

“Play ball.” Shepard tersely replied.

“Right.” Vasir nodded her head, “That’s why he wants this detective and every officer but one in her district eliminated. And he wants you to make it as brutal and bloody as possible. Remember, he wants to keep one cop alive to spread the word that this is what happens to anyone

who gets in our way.”

“Where can we find the target?” Leng asked, his lips turned up in a predatory smile.

“Anaya’s precinct is in the industrial district. Her headquarters is located at the commercial spaceport.”

“Her and her people are dead.” The Chinese assassin sneered.

“Good.” Vasir nodded in acknowledgement. “When you complete your task, rendezvous at this location...” She then uploaded a set of coordinates to the omnitools of the Cerberus operatives, “and we’ll transfer the package to you. Understood.”

“Clearly.” Leng responded, having taken control of the negotiations away from his nominal superior.

“Consider it done.” Shepard asserted in a vain effort to reassert her authority.

“Good.” Vasir affirmed, “Comm Enyala when you’re done. Unless there’s something else, we all have our business to take care of.”

“Time to go, Shepard.” Leng declared, his voice again not so subtly asserting authority, “We have work to do.”

As the Cerberus agents departed, Tela Vasir remarked to the asari standing beside her, shaking her head, “I never thought I’d see the day when the great Shepard was humbled.”

“Enyala snorted contemptuously. “Shepard’s nothing more than a tool to be used and then thrown away when you’re done.”

Nodding her head in acknowledgment, Vasir agreed, sighing sorrowfully, “Yeah...you’re right. It’s just a shame. Shepard was a legend once. I have a feeling things would be very different if things had broken just a little differently at Lazarus Station.”

“Yeah.” The Eclipse mercenary captain agreed, “Our job would have been considerably tougher.”

Letting out another sigh, Vasir gestured at the door, “Time for us to get to our missions. You know our bosses don’t like failure.”

Act 2

RRW Gallena—Special Meeting of the Gallena Unofficial Bridge and Coffee Club—Cilla Oudekirk's quarters

"If this source of yours is telling the truth..." Samantha remarked, letting out a low whistle.

"He was one of my most reliable informants." Liara replied, backing up her agent's report. "Commander Shepard's murder was ordered by the Shadow Broker. The same person—or persons—who is holding my friend Feron prisoner."

"And now this Shadow Broker appears to be working with Cerberus." Satra pondered, "But why?"

"It might involve what we found on Tuchanka." Cilla speculated. "The presence of Borg implants strongly suggests the involvement of parties from our—and possibly other universes. The Shadow Broker could be working for one or more of those powers."

"Or he's attempting to play them off against each other." Satra suggested, receiving nods from her friends.

"We need to inform the Subcommander about this." Cilla decided as she rose to her feet, "Let's go."

V'lana listened intently as Cilla and the other women outlined their case before remarking thoughtfully, "Hmmm...I think this might be linked to another matter involving Miranda and Detective Anaya. I'm on my way to the transporter room to meet our asari police officer now. I have a feeling she's going to be rather..." V'lana impishly smirked, "...unsettled...by the experience."

"I think the probability of that is rather high, Subcommander." Liara mischievously responded.

"Meet us in conference room one in fifteen standard minutes. We'll compare notes and plan strategy. If I'm right, we're going to have our hands full in the coming days. Dismissed."

Rodek and Steve

"Stakeout duty." Steve quipped to the Romulan engineer seated next to him, their cloaked Scorpion fighter sitting just astern of the *Normandy* 2. "Good thing I brought this." the ace pilot grinned as he held up a thermos. "Hot coffee. Guaranteed to keep us awake."

Chuckling, Rodek responded, taking out a deck of playing cards. "Good thing I brought these too."

"Uh Uh!" Steve held up his hands, "You are not going to try to teach me Fizzbin again! The last time it took me three days to recover from the headache."

Laughing, Rodek bantered back, "Okay, no Fizzbin. How about we play a human game first and then I'll teach you a Romulan child's game?"

"Gin rummy?" Steve pleaded.

Smiling indulgently, Rodek replied, "Okay. We'll play some gin rummy first. And then I'll teach you how to play T'Venne. I promise--no headaches."

"All right!" Cortes exclaimed as he produced a pair of cups and poured some coffee out of the thermos into both cups. "Deal."

Illium—Cerberus Safe House

Entering the safe house with her minder, Shepard observed her newest recruits: the shell of a human once called Jack and the augmented krogan nicknamed Grunt. Shaking her head, she complained to the assassin standing next to her, "I don't like or trust those two freaks. They're loose cannons. Markham and Jackson believed in the mission and were loyal. It was a mistake letting them go."

"Whaley was loyal too." Leng countered pointedly reminding his nominal superior, "Besides, it's not your or my call to make. The Illusive Man assigned them to our team and we take our orders from him—understood."

"I understand." Shepard replied as her dull headache returned.

"Are you feeling well, Shepard?" The Chinese assassin queried on noticing the redhead's wince of pain.

"I'll be fine." Shepard stoically responded, "I just need to lie down for a bit. Don't worry, I'll be ready when it's time."

With a nod of his head, Leng acknowledged, "I'll awaken you in plenty of time to get ready." Turning to the team's two newest recruits, the Cerberus agent ordered, using the same voice one would use in addressing a pet, "Stay in place until I command otherwise." Closing the door to his room, the assassin activated a private comm channel through his omnitool.

"Report."

"Subject Zero and Grunt so far have been performing adequately, Sir. They perform their tasks and follow instructions. However, they lack initiative."

"We don't want them thinking for themselves, Mr. Leng." The Illusive Man responded. "As long as they carry out their assigned duties and show no rejection or resistance to their implants, that is all that is required of them. Now what is the status of Shepard?"

"Shepard is growing more intractable by the day. She constantly fights her behavior implant and it is beginning to affect both her overall health and ability to carry out her duties. Sir. It is my opinion that it is only a matter of time before a crisis point is reached. It might be time to execute Plan Omega."

"I agree." The Illusive Man acknowledged, "Shepard is no longer of any use of us—neither is the Normandy in its current form and crew. Once this mission is complete, eliminate Shepard and return to the Normandy with Subject Zero and Grunt. Once aboard, assume command and bring the ship to Sigma Base. Those of the crew that qualify for indoctrination into the ETAP program will be sent there. Those who do not will be given to our friends for processing."

"Understood, Sir." The assassin acknowledged. "Do you have further orders?"

"Continue to monitor Shepard closely. If it appears that she is on the verge of breaking her conditioning, eliminate her immediately and complete the mission without her. Contact me when you have completed your objectives."

The transmission terminated, a cold smile appeared on the Cerberus killer's face as he caressed the hilt of his blade.

Shepard—Imprisoned

They say the dead don't dream, but that's not true. They do indeed dream and sometimes have nightmares. As she tossed and turned in her bed, Shepard dreamed.

The redhead walked alone down a dark, dank corridor lit only by torches spaced evenly apart—one to either side of the wall. On either side there were empty prison cells—their iron doors opened. She continued to walk until she heard a voice call out to her from one of the cells.

"Hey! Over here!"

Walking towards the cell, the clone realized that the door was closed. Drawing closer, she saw a woman sitting on a cot, leaning back against the wall. Looking closer at the woman, she drew back in shock at the sight that confronted her.

"See something—or someone—familiar?" The prisoner jibed with a sarcastic laugh.

"You're not me!" Shepard angrily retorted, "You're dead."

"You're not me." The prisoner shot back before admitting in a solemn tone, "But you are right...sorta." The prisoner explained, "Not all of me died. They put me in here when they were putting the finishing touches on you after I was..."

"What?"

"You ever ask yourself why you never had to learn how to do stuff like plan an operation...command a squad in battle...use your weapons...hell...speak Alliance English and use an omnitool right from the moment you opened your eyes without having to go through any sort of training?" Once again taking on a sardonic look, the prisoner declared with an elaborate bow, "Well...I'm the reason why. They pumped into you everything I knew about that sorta stuff. But..." the prisoner sighed, "in the process they took away what they didn't want you to have. Other than a few memories that are fading rapidly, there really isn't much left. Names...faces...one in particular. A lot of fragments floating around. But other than that all gone."

"Why are you still here? Why haven't you just gone away? Why have you been giving me these headaches?"

Shaking her head sympathetically, the prisoner responded, a look of pity on her face as she spoke, "I'm not the one giving you the headaches." She then pointed at a hulking shaven-haired shirtless brute standing in the shadows wielding a double-edged axe. "He's the one that's been keeping us both in line so far."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Shepard demanded as she approached the cell door only to back away when she heard a low warning growl from the brute.

"Careful." The prisoner warned, "He gets pissed really easy—as you already know. Anyway, I think he's supposed to kill us when we're no longer any use to them and..." she brushed away a tear, "I think that time's coming soon because I saw him sharpening that blade of his and when he noticed I'd seen him doing that, he gave me the most chilling glare I've ever seen." A sad smile appearing on her face, the prisoner added, "That's why your headaches have been getting worse. The more I nag at your conscience...the angrier he gets."

"So why are you doing it? Why are you torturing me like this?"

"I'm not torturing you." The prisoner shook her head, again with a look of pity on her face, "You've developed a sense of right and wrong. I'm just that little voice speaking in the back of your mind whenever you're doing the Illusive Man's dirty work." Her lips turning up in an ironic grin, she quipped, "They just didn't take into account the law of unintended consequences—that I'd be able to reach you even with me locked up in this cage and Bruno standing watch over me."

"So...why did they put you in here? Why didn't they just let you die?"

"I asked myself the same question." The prisoner pondered, "You know...after seeing through your own eyes what you did to my comrades...those innocent people...on Ferris Fields..." she shook her head sadly, "I wish they had just killed me. I hated you...hated them...hated myself...for what you did. For what they made us do. That's when I decided that if I'm going to be a ghost—then I'm going to act like one."

That I was going to haunt you...to be that conscience nagging at you and I even began to be able to manipulate things from behind the scenes. While I couldn't stop you from killing all those people on Fehl Prime...I was able to get you to drop your guard just enough to let Dixie and her new friend escape. But...after a while...I began to take pity on you. They turned us into something half living—half machine. You do realize that—don't you? You might look human...speak like a human...even have a human's emotions and feelings...but...deep down...you're a..."

"Puppet." Shepard finished, the prisoner nodding her head in confirmation.

"Yeah. I'm sorry. And now that they've gotten all the use they can get from us and since you've started waking up and are now wanting to cut the strings."

"They've decided they no longer need me...need us."

"Right." The prisoner again nodded her head in sad affirmation.

"So...what do we do?" Shepard asked, now whispering so as to avoid the guard's attention.

"We don't allow ourselves to murder those police officers and that detective just for doing their jobs and being good people." The prisoner replied in an equally low voice.

"How are we going to be able to do that with him..." Shepard's eyes momentarily glanced at their minder, "and him..." a hazy image of Kai Leng appeared and then vanished, "keeping an eye on us."

"I don't know." The prisoner responded, "But we have to at least try. Something someone...maybe it was me...I can't remember who said it now...that's one of those memories that comes and goes. But I know that we can't control how other people respond to what we do. However, we can control what we do. We have a choice to do the right thing or not. And the right thing is to keep those people alive." As a fog began to set in, the prisoner again smiled, "Don't worry...that's just your body going into a deep sleep. I won't bother you anymore tonight. I think I made my point. Good night, me. Get plenty of rest because we've got a lot of work to do in the coming days."

Gallena

"We're in standard orbit, Subcommander." Tovan announced.

"Good." V'lana acknowledged as she entered the transporter room. "Contact Anaya and let me know when you reach her."

"Aye, Subcommander." Moments later, Tovan announced through the comm, "We've contacted Anaya, I have her on the comm."

"Pipe it down to me, Big Brother." V'lana ordered as Anaya's voice came through the comm.

"Is that you, V'lana?"

"It's me." The subcommander responded, "Are you alone?"

"Yeah." The asari detective affirmed, "I'm at home. Now...can you tell me what's going on? Are you in Nos Astra?"

"Not exactly." V'lana answered back, "Take a deep breath, Anaya..." The Romulan subcommander, with a mischievous glint in her eyes, addressed the transporter technician. "Energize."

"Ener...what!" Anaya exclaimed as she felt a tingling feeling, "Oh shi...it!" The asari detective cursed, as she suddenly found herself in a strange chamber with V'lana standing next to some sort of console, another Romulan behind the console, an asari she immediately recognized as the information broker, Liara T'Soni, and a human woman, a lithe woman with long blonde hair done up in what she knew humans called a beehive and wearing a short gold dress. "Where the fuck am I and how the hell did I get here?"

"It's all right, Anaya." V'lana responded in a soothing tone, "You're on my ship and you're safe. You already know Dr. T'Soni." She then gestured at the human, "This is Lieutenant Commander Cilla Oudekirk, my second officer. We brought you onboard by what we call a transporter."

"Her people use matter teleportation to transport beings and cargo." Liara interjected, also in a calming voice. "It takes a little getting used to. But after a time or two it becomes second nature—and it really is a lot easier than having to take a shuttle."

Patting herself, the asari police officer responded, "Well...I seem to still be in one piece..."

"I'd be happy to give you a tour of the ship once we've finished our business." V'lana offered as she held out her hand to guide her guest off the pad, "But right now, we have some important business to discuss in my ready room. The others attending our little conference should already be there."

"Lead on." Detective Anaya, wide eyed and still somewhat stunned at how she had arrived on the *Gallena*, replied as she took the subcommander's hand and allowed herself to be guided off the pad.

"Damn." Anaya exclaimed as she walked down the corridor with her escort, her eyes taking in the Romulans, humans, and other races she couldn't identify carrying out their tasks. "I've never seen most of these races before. And the humans—they're definitely not Alliance or from the Terminus Systems. Are they part of this Federation I've heard about from the news feeds?"

"Yes." Cilla replied, further elaborating, "The majority of us such as myself are from Starfleet. We were assigned to the *Gallena* as part of an

exchange program with the Romulan Republic.”

“Some of our officers and crew serve on Federation vessels and some of theirs on ours.” V’lana explained as the turbolift door opened on to the bridge.

“Little Sister.” Tovan exclaimed, rising from the center chair to greet his commanding officer and her guest.

“Big Brother.” V’lana smiled back as she made introductions before inquiring, “Status of the Cerberus frigate?”

“Still maintaining station in the outer system.” Tovan replied, “Cortes is monitoring it. It’s still in stealth mode and maintaining radio silence.”

“Continue monitoring and notify me should anything change.” V’lana commanded as she guided her guest to her ready room. As they entered her office, the other conference attendees had already arrived. Making introductions, V’lana first gestured to a dark-haired human woman, “Miranda Lawson...our technical advisor on Cerberus. Jondum Bau...Council Spectre and our liaison with the Council.”

“It is a pleasure to meet you, Detective Anaya.” The salarian operative greeted the police detective with a broad grin, “Your reputation and integrity as well as that of those serving under you in the face of all the corruption on Illium is to be commended and has been noticed by the Council.”

“And this is Specialist Traynor of the Earth Alliance, and Lieutenant Satra, my chief science officer.” V’lana declared finishing the introductions as she escorted her guest to a seat. “Now...” she stated as she sat down at her desk, “Let’s get down to business. Shepard and her team’s appearance on Illium is most likely part of a much larger conspiracy. I’ll let the others explain.”

“I’m sure that you noticed the cybernetic implants and genetic alterations on these two individuals.” Satra stated as images of Jack and Grunt played on the monitor.

“Yeah.” Anaya replied with a nod of her head. “I was curious about them. I was under the impression that sort of augmentation was outlawed in Citadel space. Unfortunately, as those laws do not cover Illium, there was nothing I could do about it.”

“Augmentations of this sort are forbidden not only in Citadel space, but also by the Romulan and Federation governments.” Jondum affirmed, “These augmentations were carried out using advanced technology from several sources including Reaper, Thorian, and sources from...” on seeing V’lana’s subtle nod, the Spectre dropped the expected bombshell, “the universe the Romulans and Federation come from.”

“Universe?” Anaya exclaimed, mouth agape. “I think someone needs to explain to me what the hell is going on here.”

“This is going to take some time so make yourself comfortable.” V’lana sighed as she and the others filled the asari detective in on all of the details of the *Gallena*’s arrival in this universe and its activities to date.

“Damn.” Anaya cursed in a hushed tone, “If I hadn’t seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn’t believe it. So you’re saying that the implants those two have are from another universe?”

“Right.” V’lana confirmed, “Combined with Reaper tech.”

“We also think that they might be using other technology.” Satra interjected, Miranda quickly adding her voice to the conversation.

“Take note of the slightly greenish tint on the human—Jack.” The Australian biotic remarked, pointing at the shaven headed woman on the screen. “That bears the mark of exposure to Thorian spores.”

“As Commander Shepard found out on Feros...” Samantha chimed in, “Saren was using knowledge that he had acquired from the Thorian entity to combat Sovereign’s indoctrination.”

“Shepard also uncovered Cerberus experiments with Thorian biology and genetics when she and her team raided the facilities carrying out the research.” Miranda added.

“Hmmm...” Anaya mused, “There’s someone from Feros on Nos Astra now. Shiala—an asari with green tinted skin.”

“Is that common among your people?” Satra inquired.

“It depends on how deep the green.” Liara replied, “A bluish-green tint—while rare—has been known to happen.”

“On the rare occasions you see someone with that skin color...” Anaya interjected, “One of the parents was drell or a similar species.” The police detective commented with a derisive snort, “I’ve never accepted the idea that all the mother asari does is reshuffle the father’s genetic code. There has to be something of the father there as well—even if it is nothing more than a tinting of the skin. But...” the asari detective pondered thoughtfully, “that doesn’t apply in Shiala’s case. I called up her bio—she’s pureblood asari. While frowned on...” she shrugged her shoulders, “it’s a lot more common than people think—or want to admit to.”

“When she emerged from that pod she was put in...” Liara recalled, “her skin color was a normal deep blue. So what happened?”

“Apparently the colonists who are also suffering from the same problem signed a contract with Erinya, an agent working for Baria Frontiers for medical tests so that they could find out what was happening to them. Unfortunately...” Anaya frowned, “like so many others...they didn’t read the contract through completely as they unknowingly gave authorization for the company’s medical specialists to carry out invasive tests. Shiala’s here trying to negotiate new terms for the contract. Normally that’s not much of a problem—provided she’s got the creds to spread. But Erinya’s had a burr up her butt against non-asari in general—and humans in particular—for some time.”

“Did a human piss in her soup or something?” V’lana quipped, drawing a sly smile in response from the asari detective.

"Maybe...we don't know...she's never talked about it."

"Hmmm...maybe we can help." V'lana mused, turning to her science officer, "What do you think, Satra?"

"We could carry out tests that would be non-invasive that would hopefully achieve similar results." The Romulan science officer replied, pondering the question. "I'd have to consult with Doctors Aven and Chakwas to be sure."

"All right." The subcommander nodded, "Do so."

"That still doesn't get the colony out from under its contract with Baria." Anaya pointed out. "Unfortunately, it is legally binding."

"So..." V'lana concluded, "We're going to have to find some way to convince her to release the colonists from their contract."

"Right." Anaya nodded her head in affirmation, "I'm open to any suggestions."

"What sort of information can you get me on this Erinya?" V'lana inquired, "The more I know about her--the better chance I'll have in any negotiations."

"I'll get you everything I've got and can get my hands on." The police detective responded. Then, her attention once again drawn to the images on the screen, she pointed at the augmented krogan. "What's the story on him? I've never seen a krogan that huge—or ugly—before. What did they do to him?"

"The krogan has received grafts from a reptilian species in our universe called the Gorn." Satra explained, "Cerberus had a secret research facility on Tuchanka where they were experimenting with both krogan and humans. Here's the footage of what we found there."

Shocked by what she saw playing on the monitor, Anaya gasped, "Shit. They're turning these people into monsters. Have they done the same with the other races? Turians? Volus?" With a gulp in her throat, she forced herself to ask the question, "Asari?"

"We don't know." V'lana answered truthfully. "That's one thing we're hoping to find out. That's where the connection with the Shadow Broker comes in."

"It seems that the Shadow Broker and Cerberus might be working together." Jondum declared, adding pensively, "Although they've had a history of mutual antagonism prior to this."

"The Shadow Broker also wanted Shepard's body." Liara declared, joining the conversation. "Originally, we think that he had planned on delivering her to the Collectors. So I and a friend were approached by Miranda and convinced to work with her to recover Shepard's body from the Broker. My friend sacrificed himself to help us reclaim her body and escape. I'd thought Feron dead...but recently found out that the Shadow Broker has been keeping him prisoner." The asari information broker concluded on a somber note as she felt Cilla's hand on hers, "I owe it to Feron to at least try to rescue him."

After a short pause, Jondum spoke, "We uncovered evidence that an agent of the Shadow Broker killed Shepard while Ms. Lawson was attempting to...for lack of a better phrase...bring her back from the dead."

"I was the head of Project Lazarus." Miranda explained, outlining her role in the events leading up to this moment. "The Illusive Man tasked my team with restoring Shepard back to health with the goal ostensibly being to fight the Collectors and stop what was believed to be an oncoming Reaper invasion. While clinically dead when we recovered her body, she possessed limited brain function and the most crucial of her internal organs were still functional—barely—so long as she remained in stasis. After a great deal of work, enough of her organs and brain functions were restored so that she could safely be removed from stasis, although still kept under heavy sedation. All seemingly was proceeding according to plan..." the former Cerberus operative confessed, "until one of my techs, Wilson, managed to...I found out later... insert a fatal poison from an extra-universal source into Shepard's bloodstream after first removing her personality engrams. Death was instantaneous and irreversible."

"If Cerberus and the Shadow Broker were pursuing different objectives..." Anaya prompted, "Why do you think that they are now working together?"

"That's an interesting question." The asari information broker replied. "This could simply be a marriage of convenience...we don't know for sure. I'm hoping that my source will be able to tell me more. He sent me a message to contact him on arrival in Nos Astra."

"Sounds like a trap." Cilla noted, sounding a cautionary tone.

"Maybe. Probably." Liara conceded, "But we won't know until we first trigger the trap."

"There's another factor at play." V'lana pointed out, "We also think that one of the reasons why they are working together concerns Miranda's sister. I'll let her explain."

"My father raised Oriana and I from test tubes." The Australian confessed. "We were genetically engineered to be as close to human perfection as possible. I think that one—they want her as an asset for the purpose of taking advantage of her abilities..."

"And two..." V'lana interrupted, "Using her as leverage against Miranda."

"Most likely with the intention of turning Ms. Lawson into a double agent." Jondum concluded.

"My source in Eclipse backs up much of what you just said." The detective affirmed. "A unit of mercenaries under Captain Enyala has recently been hired by an off-world contractor to assist in an extraction. My people have been investigating—that's how we came up with the video of Shepard and her people arriving at the spaceport. My intelligence source also told me that Enyala and a Spectre—Tela Vasir, met with Shepard and Kai Leng at Hotel Azure recently."

“You’ve got a good source.” V’lana complimented, receiving a slight smile from the asari police officer.

“A very good source.” Anaya confirmed, “I can tell you that she’s one hundred percent reliable. Besides having a personal ax to grind against Enyala, my source owes me—big time.”

“What’s the story on this Tela Vasir?” Cilla inquired.

“She’s a Council Spectre who has been on Illium for some time.” Liara responded, giving the blonde woman seated next to her a shy smile. “She lives in one of the more extravagant neighborhoods in Nos Astra and is noted for her extravagant manner. I suspect, to support her lifestyle, she has taken on outside contracts.”

“Some of us have suspected Vasir for some time.” Jondum confirmed, “I have long believed that she might be an agent for the Shadow Broker. While she has done nothing to overtly raise suspicions, there have been unaccounted for deposits and withdrawals from her accounts and she has been seen with Barla Von—a well-known financial consultant who has also been identified as a lower-level agent of the Shadow Broker. He is very careful to not violate the letter of the law—although he has been known to stretch that letter on occasion”

“I am acquainted with Von.” Liara interjected, “He provided assistance to Shepard on more than one occasion.”

“So…” V’lana concluded, “We have two primary objectives and at least one secondary. The first task: we have to ensure that Miranda’s sister and her family are extracted safely from Illium. The second job: to determine what exactly Cerberus and the Shadow Broker are planning and to, if possible, stop it. Our secondary task: to aid Shiala and the Feros colonists. Accomplishing the primary objectives will mean dealing with Enyala and her Eclipse mercs, probably the Shadow Broker and the Spectre, and, most likely, Shepard and her team. The situation with Shiala can be handled diplomatically. For the main objectives, three field teams would work best. I will lead the first team with Anaya. Miranda, you have the second along with Vega. Inform James that I want him ready to go in an hour.”

“I’ll take care of it, Subcommander.” Samantha replied.

“Cilla.” The subcommander addressed her second officer. “You and Liara are on the third team along with Garrus, Samantha, and Satra.”

“Aye, Sir.” The willowy Dutch/Trill officer acknowledged as she glanced shyly at the asari seated next to her. “I’ll inform Garrus that he’s up to bat.”

“He’ll be glad to hear that.” Liara responded with a demure smile at the blonde Starfleet officer’s words. “It will be good for him to return to the field.”

“Jondum.” The subcommander requested, “I’m going to ask you to assist in diplomatic efforts with Shiala and remain available as a reserve along with a strike team.”

“Understood, Subcommander.” The Spectre responded, “Will be ready if you need me.”

“Any questions?” V’lana announced, scanning the room with her eyes, “Good. Anaya? We need to get you outfitted with proper armor and then we’re going to hit the range for weapons training with a phaser and plasma pistol. The rest of you…you have one hour to prep. We’ll meet in transporter room one then. Dismissed.”

As the others filed out of her office, V’lana turned to her asari guest, “Time to get kitted and then the range.”

“No need. I’m set.” Anaya replied, shaking her head. “I’ve got armor and a sidearm.”

“Our armor’s better and you haven’t seen what a phaser or plasma pistol can do yet.” V’lana answered back with a grin, “Come on…I’ll show you. Bet you dinner that once you see, you’ll never want to go back to your old kit.”

“All right.” The police detective grinned, “You’re on.”

Their practice session over, Anaya shook her head as she looked down at the phaser in her hand, “Looks like I owe you dinner. I can’t believe that little thing packs as much of a punch as it does.”

“And we didn’t use the higher settings.” V’lana counseled. “That pistol you’re holding in your hand can punch a hole through just about any wall on Illium and totally disintegrate a sentient being with a single shot.”

“It’s not a toy.” Anaya acknowledged, “Yeah. I get it.” After a momentarily pause, the asari detective said in a soft voice, “Thank you for trusting me with it.”

“I wouldn’t have done it if I didn’t think it wouldn’t be in good hands.” V’lana replied with a grin as she placed a hand on the police officer’s shoulder, “And for the record—you did pretty damn good for your first time on the range.”

“Thanks.” Anaya grinned, “It’s still going to take a while for me to get used to this armor though. I feel like I’m naked.”

“You’ll get used to it.” V’lana laughed as she motioned to the door. “Come on. Our hour’s almost up. We need to get to the transporter room.”

“You mean I’ve gotta…” The hardened detective gulped.

“Yup.” The Romulan subcommander giggled.

“Goddess.”

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