

## Convergences 2: Lighting the Fuse

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## Convergences 2: Lighting the Fuse

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### Summary

vents begin to unfold on Illium as Miranda begins the search for her sister, Liara prepares to deal with the Shadow Broker, V'lana and Anaya prepare for what is to come, and Shepard girds herself for an epic battle--a battle to save her soul.

## Act One

### *Liara's Office*

As the landing party rematerialized in the information broker's office, Detective Anaya exclaimed, "I don't think I'm ever going to get used to that."

"It takes practice, Detective." Garrus laughed, "You should have seen Wrex when he got beamed up."

"Yeah." V'lana laughed, "We had to put up a containment field until he finally calmed down."

"So, Lola..." Vega inquired, "What's the game plan?"

"Miranda?" V'lana prompted, turning her attention to the Australian biotic.

"My contact Lanteia is waiting to meet us at the Eternity Lounge. She'll have more details on what the situation is."

"All right." V'lana nodded her head, "You and James meet up with your contact. Anaya?"

The police detective replied, "I need to meet my informant. Might not be a bad idea for you to come with. I'm not expecting any trouble, but since we're not going into the best of neighborhoods."

"Better safe than sorry." The Romulan subcommander smirked.

"Right."

Speaking up next, Liara, turning off her monitor, announced, "I just checked my terminal and saw that one of my agents, Sekat, left a message saying that he wanted to meet me at my apartment. He had some information that could lead us to the Broker's location. With your permission, I'd like to take our team and check that out first."

"Sounds like a plan." V'lana agreed, motioning towards the door "Let's get to work."

### *James and Miranda*

"So this contact..." Vega questioned the dark haired woman walking beside him into the bar, "How well do you know her?"

"Lanteia has always been reliable." Miranda replied as the pair made their way through the bustling bar towards a back room. "She has little love for Cerberus or the Shadow Broker and has been an excellent source of intelligence while Jacob and I were evading both of them."

Passing what looked like a bachelor party currently in progress with an asari wearing a very skimpy costume dancing on a tabletop to enthusiastic cheers and catcalls, a crooked grin appeared on the Alliance marine's face as he pointed at an obviously embarrassed salarian being teased good-naturedly by the turian and human seated on either side of him. "Must be his party."

"He doesn't look too pleased by it." Miranda noted as they continued to make their way to the back.

"Heh." James laughed, "I got a feeling it wasn't his idea to begin with."

Approaching a door and opening it, Miranda whispered to her companion, "This is the place."

"Miri?" A voice called out from the shadows.

"Lanteia?" The Australian biotic responded.

"Over here." An asari woman gestured to the booth she was seated at. "Who's your friend?"

"Vega." James replied, "Don't mind me. I'm just here to keep Miranda company."

"You mentioned in your message to me that there were complications." Miranda stated as she and her escort sat down across from her asari contact. "Is Oriana okay?"

"Don't worry, Miri." Lanteia soothed, "She's fine. But that man you said you trusted..."

"Niket?"

"Right. He contacted me and warned me that the Eclipse mercenaries your father hired were preparing to make a sweep and that they've gotten some help."

"Cerberus." James growled in a low voice.

"You've got good sources." Lanteia grimly confirmed. "Niket told me that the mercs are also targeting you. He volunteered to escort Oriana and her family to the terminal instead."

“You mentioned Niket on the ship.” Vega remarked, turning to the woman seated beside him. “What’s the lowdown on him? Can he be trusted?”

“Absolutely.” Miranda immediately and emphatically responded. “We’ve been friends for a long time. He’s one of the few true friends that I have.”

“Do you want to bring in any of your other contacts?” Lanteia inquired.

“No.” Miranda shook her head, “The fewer who know the better.”

“I got a basic rundown on the mercs and Shepard’s team.” Vega declared, addressing the asari contact, “You got anything else?”

“Nothing that you don’t already know.” Lanteia replied, “The authorities aren’t going to help for two reasons: so far neither Eclipse nor Shepard and her people have done anything illegal, and two…”

“They’ve been bought off.” Vega finished, receiving a confirming head nod from the asari.

“Right. All but the precinct headed by that one detective…”

“Anaya?” Miranda interjected.

“Yes.” Lanteia verified. “And my sources tell me that she has been targeted for removal.”

“We gotta let Lola and Anaya know they got bullseyes painted on their backs.” Vega declared, Miranda quickly agreeing before saying her goodbyes to her contact.

“Thanks for your help, Lanteia. You and your people can sit the rest of this out. We’ll take care of it ourselves.”

“Good.” The asari sighed in relief, “I’ve got a feeling this game’s going to get too risky for my tastes. Good luck and take care of yourselves.”

“How do you want to play this Miri?” Vega inquired.

Speaking again to Lanteia, Miranda requested, “One last favor. Pass the word on to Niket to proceed as he planned.”

“Will do.”

“Thanks.” Miranda replied before laying out her plans to the marine standing beside her, “We’ll give Eclipse what it wants and act as bait to draw them off of Niket. He’ll do the rest.”

“You sure you can trust this Niket fella?” Vega asked, cocking an eyebrow in suspicion.

“Absolutely.” Miranda forcefully responded, “He helped me hide Oriana away for several years. He’s not going to turn on us.”

“Do you want to give Niket any backup?” Vega inquired.

“Hmmm…” Miranda pondered the question before responding, “Normally, I’d say that Niket could handle himself, but this time…it might not be a bad idea to have Jondum’s strike team ready…just in case.”

“Good idea, Miri.” The Alliance marine agreed with a nod of his head. “What are we waiting for? Let’s go get your sister.”

### *V’lana and Anaya*

“So…ummm…how is…” Anaya hesitatingly inquired as she and her Romulan companion rode in the taxi to the commercial spaceport.

“Kaidan?” V’lana finished before answering in a somber voice, “Not good. We can’t take him out of stasis or he’ll die, and we can’t cure him unless we get at least one…preferably two…strong telepaths. An asari matriarch might also help. That means a Betazoid, Lethian, Deltan, or Vulcan. We don’t have any Betazoids, Lethians, or Deltans in the crew and the Vulcans we do have aren’t skilled enough. Neilana’s strong enough, but for this sort of thing a delicate touch is needed, and Neilana is anything but delicate.”

“That sucks.” Anaya replied sympathetically. “I can’t point you to any telepaths, but I can steer you to a matriarch that might just fit the bill. You’ve met Aethyta, the bartender at the Eternity, right?”

“Yeah.” V’lana nodded her head, “I know she’s a matriarch, but I wasn’t sure…”

“I think she’ll help.” The police detective said with a warm grin as she placed her hand on top of that of her Romulan friend’s. “She’s kinda like me.” Anaya shrugged as her warm smile turned into a crooked grin, “She might look hardass on the outside, but inside she’s a softie.”

“Thanks.” V’lana replied in a soft voice, allowing her asari companion’s hand to remain touching hers as the pair sat quietly and enjoyed the silence while their air taxi sped to its destination.

Arriving at the police station, the two women were met by one of Anaya’s officers. “What is it, Dana?”

“Your contact wants to meet you as soon as possible at the usual place. Says its urgent.”

“Right.” Anaya nodded her head, “We’re on our way.” Turning to her Romulan companion, the asari police officer grinned, “I’d offer you a cup of coffee, but…”

Chuckling, V’lana quipped back, “Put it on the tab. So where do we meet this person?”

“A little bar near the spaceport.” Anaya answered as the pair got back in the cab. We should be safe but keep your hand near your weapons—just in case.”

“Just like Nimbus III.” V’lana quipped as the car began its ascent. Smirking at the puzzled look on her friend’s face, the lovely Romulan joked, “I’ll tell you all about it on the way over. It’s a funny story involving me while I was still a teenager, living on the streets and turning tricks, a crazy Orion stripper, and the stupid bet we made.”

“This I gotta hear.”

### *The Bridge and Coffee Club—and Garrus too*

“Someone’s been here.” Liara declared with a frown as she and her friends entered her luxurious apartment.

“How do you know?” Cilla asked, signalling Samantha and Satra who both began scanning the dwelling with their tricorders.

“Simple.” The asari information broker responded with a slight smile as she picked a slender strand off the floor. “It’s an old trick I read in a human murder mystery while I was on the *Normandy*.”

A sly grin appeared on the face of the willowy blonde standing next to Liara as she took the slender thread from her friend, “I think I read the same book.” Turning to the other members of the unofficial bridge and coffee club, the Starfleet officer inquired, “Pick up anything?”

“Faint traces of DNA.” Satra replied. “Whoever was here was good at hiding their traces. If we weren’t looking, we never would have noticed.”

“Gotta be either a Spectre or STG.” Garrus declared as he carefully inspected the apartment.

“Do you think it might be Tela Vasir?” Samantha proposed as she continued her scans.

“Most likely.” Liara replied as she carefully inspected her desk. “Whoever it was attempted to access my terminal and actually managed to get in.”

“Did they access anything important?” Cilla asked.

“Not really.” Liara smiled back. “Just routine reports. I keep my sensitive files elsewhere. Come with me.”

As she stepped into her asari companion’s bedroom, Cilla, at once noticed the painting on the wall. “That’s a very haunting image.”

“Ilos.” Liara replied with a melancholy sigh.

“That’s the world where you found the Prothean research base—right?”

“Yes.” Liara nodded her head, “Shepard, me, and Kaidan. We encountered a Prothean VI—Vigil. It explained what the Protheans were trying to do and confirmed the Reapers’ intentions.” Shaking her head, the asari archaeologist sighed, “Of course, the Council covered everything up after Sovereign was defeated.”

“I’m sorry.” Cilla responded sympathetically.

“It’s all right.” Liara smiled back. “None of us joined Shepard expecting recognition or rewards. We accepted the fact that no one was willing to take us seriously.”

“But you followed her anyway.”

Her smile now more a winsome grin, Liara replied, “You had to know Shepard—the real Shepard to understand. She was charismatic. Committed to doing what was right regardless of what it cost her personally.”

“That she was.” Garrus proclaimed. “Those were the days…weren’t they, Liara.”

Liara smiled as her gaze fell on the turian standing at the door. “Come in, Garrus.”

“Hope I’m not interrupting anything.” The former C-Sec officer said as he entered the room.

“Oh no.” Liara shook her head, “We were just talking about what it was like on the old *Normandy*.”

The turian laughed, “This room’s a helluva lot better than our accommodations on the *Normandy*, isn’t it?”

“Sounds like room was cramped on your old ship.” Cilla remarked as she sat down on the bed.

“It was.” Liara confirmed, sitting down next to her blonde friend.

Liara chuckled as Garrus interjected, "Compared to the rest of us, T'Soni was living in the lap of luxury."

"I was assigned to an unused storage area behind medical." Liara explained, "Wrex slept in the hangar deck, and Chief Adams and the other engineers fixed a little area in engineering for Tali and hung up curtains to give her privacy."

"And I made a bed for myself on the back bench of the Mako." Garrus chuckled, his laughter joined by that of the two women with him. "I gotta admit though, the rear seat of the Mako made a better bed than seat when Shepard was driving."

"Tell me about it." Liara laughed as she resumed her scan of her room. "I think my butt is still bruised."

Changing the subject, Garrus asked in a grave tone, "So was our intruder in here?"

"That's what I'm about to find out." Liara replied as she pressed a button on the frame of a two dimensional picture of the *Normandy* sitting on an end table near the head of her bed. As the image changed to that of her mother's the asari information broker cursed, "Shit. She was here and found out where my personal files are."

"Did she access them?" Cilla inquired as Garrus's attention was drawn to the window that gave a panoramic view of Nos Astra.

Walking to the painting of Ilos, Liara pressed another button. A panel opened to reveal an OCD. Taking the disk, Liara slipped it into her terminal and carefully perused its contents. "It's a drop from my source." The information broker explained, as Samantha and Satra entered the bedroom. "His cover identity as a service technician gave him access to my apartment without anyone getting suspicious." Frowning, she muttered softly, "Looks like it's still secure...one more test to be sure." Moments later, the frown turned into a full scowl, "Fuck. She beat the encryption." Her expression now one of alarm, Liara exclaimed, "We've got to hurry! Sekat's in danger."

Observing the asari information broker's apartment from her vantage point, Tela Vasir's lips turned up in a cold smile as she hefted her Viper sniper rifle and taking aim at her target's head squeezed the trigger.

Sensing danger and catching a glimpse of light from a window, Garrus shouted as he pushed Liara and Cilla to the floor, "Sniper!"

Reacting instinctively, Liara threw up a biotic barrier just in time as three more rounds crashed through the glass.

"*Dood en ondergang.*" Cilla cursed in Dutch as she grasped her phaser, "That window!" The Starfleet tactical officer exclaimed, "The rounds had to come from there."

"Whoever the sniper is will be long gone by the time we get there." Garrus scowled, "But it still wouldn't be a bad idea to check it out. She might have left us a clue."

"No time." Liara shook her head, "She already knows where I'm supposed to meet Sekat. If we don't hurry, she'll get to him first."

"Liara's right." Cilla agreed, "Garrus? You and I will go with Liara. Satra...Samantha? Check out that apartment—but be careful. Vasir might have traps set up."

"Understood." The two lovers replied as they left to go about their task.

"Hurry up." Liara urged as she slipped her phaser into her belt. "We can catch a cab to Baria Frontiers downstairs."

"Then let's move!" Cilla exclaimed as she unconsciously grabbed Liara's hand as the trio dashed out of the apartment.

## **Jondum**

"That must be the emissary from Feros." Jondum inclined his head slightly in the direction of a green-skinned asari walking dejectedly away from another asari.

"Looks like something the other one said upset her." Veril remarked sagely.

"The other woman must be the one who is holding the colonists to the terms of their contract." The salarian Spectre remarked as the pair overheard a conversation between two asari.

"She's such a bitch." One asari gossiped to the other.

"I know." The second asari agreed, "But then what do expect from a pureblood?"

Giggling, the first asari whispered conspiratorially, "I heard that her children were purebloods too."

"Interesting." Jondum noted as Veril looked at him with a look of puzzlement on her face.

"Why?" The Reman inquired curiously.

"It's a cultural taboo for asari to bond with each other for purposes of procreation." Jondum explained, further commenting, "The children of such unions are often looked down on in asari society and referred to in whispers as purebloods."

Shaking her head, the Reman engineer pondered, "I'm curious as to how this taboo came about. It would have to be after they made contact with other species."

“Correct.” The Spectre replied approvingly. “If you’d like, I can point you to some research sources when we return from this mission.”

Nodding her head, Veril responded positively. “Yes, I think I’d like that.”

“Consider it done.” The Spectre promised before turning his attention back to the green-skinned asari. “It would be best to speak with her first. Then we can turn our attention to the other one and hopefully resolve this dispute.” Approaching the former asari commando, Jondum introduced himself and his companion. “Please...allow us to be of assistance.”

“How can you help me or my friends?” Shiala asked, her expression one of suspicion, her voice haunted, as if something or someone was still speaking through her.

“I am a Council Spectre and my friend is an officer in the Romulan Republic.” Jondum replied, “We can provide resources that should be able to help you and your people.”

“And without the use of invasive tests.” Veril interjected.

“There is still the matter of the contract.” Shiala pointed out in that same eerie voice.

“We will take care of that.” Jondum vowed, “While Illium might be independent of Council jurisdiction, I still have resources at my disposal. I will use those resources to benefit you and your people.”

Nodding her head after carefully pondering the salarian’s offer, Shiala granted her consent. “Go ahead. If you are able to nullify the contract, I will negotiate an agreement with the Romulan Republic.”

“Shall we?” Jondum prompted as he turned his gaze in the direction of the asari businesswoman.

“Let’s.” Veril answered back.

Approaching the pureblood asari, Jondum politely introduced himself and his companion. “Jondum Bau, Council Spectre, and Lieutenant Veril of the Romulan Republic. We would like to speak to you about a business matter.”

“You’re wasting your time and breath Spectre if it concerns the contract between Baria Frontiers and the colonists of Feros. The contract was negotiated and signed on Illium which is outside Council jurisdiction and neither I nor the corporation I work for recognizes the existence of this so-called Romulan Republic.” Erinya sneered, “The humans signed the contract—they have to live by it or deal with the consequences of default.”

“A warbird parked in orbit around Feros would easily deal with any ‘consequences’ your corporation might try to carry out.” Veril bluffed in a threatening tone.

“Violence will not be necessary at this time.” Jondum interjected, deliberately playing ‘good cop’ to Veril’s ‘bad cop.’ Plastering a phony smile on his face, Jondum cautioned the bitter asari, “Romulans are as capable as the salarian STG in carrying out covert operations. Also, Romulan defense capabilities are more than able to defeat any mercenary force that Baria or you might send against them. However, use of force will not be required. Your corporation will agree to cancellation of an otherwise nonproductive and nonprofitable arrangement with the Feros colonists for reasons of self-interest.”

“Enlighten me.” Erinya replied with a scowl of derision. “Why should I or my company be afraid of a mythical Romulan Republic.”

“Your superiors will agree even if you refuse because if they fail to do so, I will use my connections as a Spectre to influence the Council to cancel all contracts with Baria Frontiers and further to embargo all commerce involving your corporation.” Jondum threatened, revealing his iron fist.

“And we will deploy cloaked defense satellites and mines around Feros and provide it with a garrison to protect it from any mercenary incursions.” Veril promised, this time not bluffing.

“So...what is your decision?” Jondum pressed, demanding an immediate response. “Do you risk the almost certain reprisals of your superiors who will be looking for a scapegoat because of their stocks tumbling? Or do you agree to an immediate cancellation of an otherwise useless contract?”

After several moments in which it almost seemed that the angry asari was going to call the Spectre and Romulan’s threats, Erinya finally sighed in resignation, “Very well...” she announced as she activated her omnitool and typed in an entry, “I have cancelled the contract. The Feros colonists are free of their obligation. They’re all yours. Now...if there is no other business to conduct...get the hell out of my office.”

Exiting the tiny kiosk, Jondum and Veril approaching Shiala, gave her the good news. “We got the contract cancelled. If you’d like, we can put you in touch with the Romulan and Federation delegates at the Citadel and they will be more than happy to negotiate an agreement with you and your people on far better terms than what you had with Baria.”

“Thank you.” Shiala replied with a smile, “With Shepard’s death, I thought all was lost. It is good to see that there is still hope. I will speak with your delegates. I hope we meet again.”

### ***Miranda’s Mission***

“It’s what we figured.” Miranda scowled as she pointed at the two armored aircraft moving towards their destination. “Eclipse gunships.

They're dropping troops in the cargo area."

"Right." Vega responded with a crooked grin. "It's a safe bet they've got a rocket launcher to take us down once we begin our landing approach, but we're going to give them a surprise."

"Oh?" The Australian biotic exclaimed, "What do you have in mind?"

"We're going to give them what they want." The Alliance marine replied, "But not the way they intended it. It's a little scheme Solana and I cooked up before leaving." The subcommander tapped her comm badge. "Legs? What are your scans picking up?"

"*Four mass effect powered aerial gunships and a dozen life signs.*" Solana responded, "*Mix of human, salarian, and asari.*"

"Can you transport us from our air car to a location behind and under cover from the mercenaries?"

"*One moment.*" The Gallena's security chief responded. "*We can, but it will call for split second timing and you're going to owe me a steak dinner when you get back.*"

"Done, chica." James quipped as their vehicle drew closer. "A little closer..." he murmured to himself as he calculated time and distances, "And...Now, Legs! Do it!"

The two passengers in the car dematerialized at the same time the missile hit the cab, sending it careening and skidding on the cargo bay floor. Rematerializing moments later behind the mercenaries, they heard a human clad in Eclipse armor command, "Search the car for survivors. The passengers are to be recovered alive if possible. Whether their limbs and bodies remain intact or not is irrelevant."

"They want us for questioning." Miranda whispered to the man crouched under cover next to her. "We hit them hard and fast."

"Don't tell me my job." Vega responded as he fired his plasma rifle, punching through the Eclipse mercenary's armor, bringing him down crying out in pain to the deck. "That got their attention."

Simultaneously, Miranda biotically slammed another mercenary to the floor before firing her phaser at a third mercenary. Frowning as the mercenary's shield absorbed the energy weapon's impact, the Australian biotic adjusted the setting and fired again, bringing the asari vanguard down. "They've done something to augment their shielding."

"No surprise there." James grimly responded as she returned the fire of an Eclipse merc. "Engineer at three o'clock."

"Got him." Miranda responded, taking down the salarian technician and then wincing slightly as her shield absorbed several kinetic rounds. "They've also upgraded their weapons. They're learning."

"They're not completely stupid." Vega replied as he brought down another mercenary with his plasma weapon. "Watch out for the heavy."

Smirking, Miranda quipped as she brought down the woman before she could launch her missile, "What heavy?"

"And that's it." James growled as he brought down the last of the mercenaries. "Let's see if we can find a live one to question."

"Good idea." Miranda acknowledged. Leaving their cover, she and her companion approached the apparent leader of the mercenary group and kneeling down next to him, smirked, "That's quite the wound you have there. My friend and I just happen to have some medigel for you...if you answer our questions." As the mercenary winced in silence, the Australian biotic commented, this time in a less humorous tone of voice, "Plasma wounds are painful. Especially if you don't receive an analgesic soon. So...what's it going to be? Medigel and you get to sleep until you wake up in a prison hospital ward? Or are you going to tough it out and experience excruciating pain?"

"Better listen to her, pendejo." Vega echoed. "She's the one who wants to give you the medigel. I'd just as soon leave you here."

"All right...All right...I'll talk." The mercenary officer replied, "But I don't know too much."

With nod of her head, Miranda gave him the medigel. "I believe you. So...what do you know?"

"Like I said." The mercenary sighed in relief as the medication began to take effect in his system, "Not a lot. Captain Enyala ordered my team to intercept you..."

"That means she had some prior knowledge that we were coming." Miranda pondered, "Do you know the name of the source?"

"No." The mercenary responded with a shake of his head, "Honest!"

"I think he's telling the truth." Vega muttered to the woman kneeling next to him. "He's too low down on the food chain. He just gets his orders and follows 'em."

"All right. I'm going to believe you." Miranda told the mercenary before further questioning him. "What can we expect inside?"

"There's at least two...maybe three...other companies." The Eclipse officer responded with a wheeze. "Enyala's at the terminal. That's where we're supposed to pick up the package and her family."

"And Vasir?" Vega queried.

"Don't know." The merc shook his head, "I think she's running a different operation."

"What about Shepard and her team?" Miranda inquired.

“The freak show?” The Eclipse captain answered back, “I don’t know and I didn’t wanna know. Those...things...scared the shit outta me when I saw ‘em.” Concluding, he muttered in a low whisper, “I feel sorry for whoever they’re gunning for. Can I go to sleep now?”

“Yes.” Miranda replied with a nod of her head, “We’ll notify the police to pick you and your team up.” Turning to her companion, the Australian woman announced with a worried look on her face, “We have to go—now!”

“What are we waiting for?” Vega responded, “Let’s move.”



## Act 2

### *V'lana and Anaya*

Laughing as the pair exited the cab, Anaya exclaimed, "I don't think I've heard such a funny story in my life—and I've lived a long time—at least by human standards. For an asari, I'm in my late maiden—early matron stage. For a human woman, that would probably be somewhere in her thirties." She then asked, gently prying, "Did you really live on the streets?"

"Yes." V'lana nodded her head. "After my father died, I had to look after myself and my brother—and his health was always poor. Nimbus III is an open world—the Orion Syndicate pretty much runs things there—or it did. So...you got what the Syndicate decided you could get and did what it told you to do."

"Kind of like Illium or Omega." Anaya replied sympathetically. "Take away all the gloss and glamor and Illium would be another Omega—only not as well run. Aria might be a bitch, but she keeps the outlaws in her little domain in line and does—for the most part—keep the peace." After a moment's pause, the asari detective asked, "So how did you get out of that shithole?"

Chuckling, V'lana recounted, "A certain crusty old Romulan engineer who had an even older *T'liss* class warbird came into the bar while I was working. I thought he was a mark and came up to him. Instead of doing what all the other tramps would do—take me up to his room and fuck me for a slip or two of gold pressed latinum—D'Vex made me an offer I couldn't refuse. He took out his pistol and set it on the table and told me that I could either continue the way I've been going and end up either dead or drugged out in some Orion brothel or take that pistol and save myself a lot of pain and put an end to it now or come with him to Virinat where I'd have a chance for a fresh start where no one would judge me about where I had come from or what I had done. He then told me where his ship was docked and if I was interested to meet him there. After a few minutes, I'd made my decision and called out to him just as he was walking out the door."

"Damn...that's some story." Anaya declared as the pair entered the bar, "Well...I'm glad you chose to go with him rather than blowing your brains out or hooking."

Smiling back at her asari companion, V'lana replied, "I am too."

"After we get done with this meeting, on the way back, I'll tell you the Anaya Basilea story—if you're interested?" The asari detective proposed with just a slight hitch to her voice.

"Yeah." V'lana responded with a shy grin, "I think I'd like that."

"There's our contact." Anaya inclined her head in the direction of an asari sitting alone in a corner booth.

"Is that who I think it is?"

"Wasea?" Anaya grinned, "Yeah. She cost The Reds and Eclipse a lot of credits when you busted up that little red sand, trafficking, and smuggling operation she was running. Seems they were the ones fronting her."

"I know who Eclipse is." V'lana remarked, "But who or what are the Reds?"

"A human crime syndicate." Anaya replied, further explaining, "They started off as a street gang on Earth and branched out into red sand, drugs, and sex trafficking. So now she's got both gangs gunning for her. She came to me begging for my help and told me she still had some of her contacts and promised to provide me intelligence and gave me a couple of free samples. They turned out legit and I got her into a safe house. Ever since, she's been giving me good intel, but things are getting too hot now. I need to get her off world."

"I can help you out with that." V'lana volunteered, "We can drop her off somewhere safe."

"I didn't want to ask..." the asari detective stammered, "but thanks. I appreciate it. Come on...let's see what she's got for us."

"Wasea." The asari detective said in a low voice as she and her companion sat down opposite the asari sitting in the corner booth. I believe you are acquainted with my Romulan associate."

"I never forget a foot on my throat." The former Eclipse commando grumbled, "What's she doing here?"

"Besides her being your ticket off world, she's got a stake in this." Anaya retorted, "So...if you're smart, you'll be nice to her."

"All right. I'll tell you what I know, then I want to get the hell off this planet." A more humble Wasea conceded.

"If your information is good..." V'lana vowed, "I promise we'll take you to someplace safe."

"Oh it's good." Wasea replied. "You wanted to know if the Shadow Broker and Cerberus have joined forces? According to my source—they have. Enyala is expecting a package—a family. Her orders are to turn them over to Cerberus."

"We know that." V'lana replied. "Do you have anything else?"

"Yes." The former mercenary nodded her head, "Enyala's got a mole in the other camp. He's going to deliver that package and your friend on a silver platter to her."

"Shit." V'lana swore as she tapped her comm badge. "Miranda?"

*"Busy now. Make it quick."* The Australian biotic replied, the sound of phaser and mass effect weapons fire coming through.

"I'll keep it brief then." V'lana tersely responded, "You've got a traitor on your side. Don't know who but watch your ass."

"Understood." The Australian biotic somberly replied, the sound of combat still being heard through the comm. "I'll take care of it. Lawson out."

"Anything else?" Anaya asked.

"Yeah." Wasea replied, her eyes now focused on Anaya, "You and your officers have pissed off a lot of people Lieutenant. They've finally decided to do something about it."

A sinking feeling in her stomach, Anaya pressed, "What?"

"Shepard and the walking zoo with her..." Wasea warned in a low voice, "They're gunning for you and your people and don't even think about asking your bosses for help—they've been ordered by their bosses to look the other way."

"How soon?" Anaya asked in a hushed tone.

"Soon." Wasea replied, "I don't have a definite time, but I do know that you don't have a whole lot. Better get your people ready." After a momentary pause, she turned her attention to the Romulan woman seated next to the detective, "So do I get my ride out of here?"

"You do." V'lana responded as she again tapped her comm. "Avesti to *Gallena*. Centurion? We've got a guest. Lock on to her and beam her up. I want a security detail in the transporter room and engage biotic containment protocols."

"Do you want her confined to the brig?"

"Negative." The subcommander replied, "I think she knows better than to try anything out of line. Don't you, Wasea?"

"I won't cause any trouble." The former mercenary vowed.

"Good." The Romulan subcommander responded before once again addressing her executive officer, "Find decent quarters for her and she's to be confined to those quarters under guard until I say otherwise. Limit computer and replicator access as well. If she behaves, permit her access to the Raptor's Nest under armed escort." V'lana added, turning her gaze to Wasea, "As long as you continue to be good, I promise you'll be treated as a carefully monitored guest and not a prisoner."

Nodding her head, the former mercenary replied, "I won't cause any trouble. I just want to get off this planet before I'm killed."

"Understood, Subcommander. Any other orders?"

"Yes." V'lana replied, "Beam Anaya and I directly to her quarters and deploy security teams deployed to the following coordinates." The subcommander then passed on the locations of Anaya's headquarters and kiosks. "Tell them to maintain a low profile but be ready for trouble. Also, I want Tali to beam down with the headquarters team. I have a feeling we're going to need her engineering expertise. Finally—take position within attack range of the Cerberus frigate. When I give the order, disable and board it. I repeat...disable...do not destroy. I want prisoners."

"Aye, Subcommander." The warbird's XO acknowledged before adding in a concerned tone. "It sounds like you're expecting a battle, Little Sister."

"I am, Big Brother." V'lana replied, "Be ready."

"Always." Tovan replied, adding, "We are ready to beam up your guest on your command."

"Beam her up." V'lana ordered, her and Anaya chuckling at Wasea's alarmed exclamation as she dematerialized.

"Beam up?!"

"That was fun." Anaya laughed as Tovan's voice once again came through the comm badge.

"Our guest has arrived. So far, she's behaving herself as she promised. Preparing to beam you and Anaya to her headquarters on your word."

"Are we going to..." Anaya asked, barely repressing a shudder.

"Yup." V'lana replied.

"Better let me warn my people first." The police detective said as she delivered the news to a disbelieving sergeant concluding with a warning. "You see two columns of green light appearing in front of you—don't shoot or I'll have you walking a beat in the volus quarter."

"Ready Anaya?" The subcommander asked with a mischievous smirk.

"No...but go ahead." The detective replied as she subconsciously grabbed the other woman by the hand.

"Energize."

After a moment's pause, the Romulan centurion cautioned before giving the order to transport, "Take care of yourself Little Sister. You too, Anaya."

"Always, Big Brother. Avesti out." V'lana responded as the pair dematerialized, causing a poor waitress to drop her drink in shock,

As two green pillars of light materialized revealing her superior and the Romulan woman, Sergeant Trellessa, along with the other officers in the precinct, gasped in astonishment. “You weren’t kidding were you Detective?”

“No, I wasn’t.” Anaya replied as more pillars of light appeared, coalescing into two Romulans and a quarian. “Now.” She ordered with a grave expression, “Gather round everybody. We’ve got a lot of work to do and not a whole helluva lot time to do it in.”

### ***Farinata System: SSV Onizuka and SSV Tarawa***

“Admiral Anderson.” Captain Hannah Shepard, coming to attention, saluted the dark-skinned admiral. “I’m surprised you came personally.”

“If you’ve got what I hope you have here, Captain...” Anderson replied with a grin, “then you’ve just earned your place in the history books. It’s not every day one finds a gateway into another universe. So what have you found?”

“Our scans have located...something...on an asteroid in the outer asteroid belt of the system. Sublieutenant Rekar—our Romulan liaison—has informed me that there are traces of the particles we have been told to look for. Also, he has detected what he calls a ‘warp trail’. He thinks that ships from the other universe other than the *Gallena* have entered our universe and that they might be hostile.”

“Have you investigated that asteroid as yet?” Anderson inquired.

“We were about to when you signaled that you would be arriving in system.” Hannah replied, “I thought that you might want to be here when we go in.”

Nodding his head sagely, the grizzled admiral responded, “I appreciate that Captain. The turians, quarians, salarians, and asari are sending a ship each. We’ve also sent word to the *Gallena*. Subcommander Avesti has run into a situation on Illium that she needs to take care of but asks that we wait until she can join us. I told her we would. We’ll have to pause anyway as I don’t want to proceed without the other Council powers present and we’ll need Subcommander Avesti as a guide once we open that door.”

“Understood, Sir.”

“Don’t worry, Captain.” Anderson grinned, “We’re going to get our chance to go through the rabbit hole soon enough. The other ships should be here shortly. I’ll also be transferring my flag to your ship until the *Gallena* arrives, then I’ll be transferring over to her with the subcommander’s permission, that is, while Admiral Mikhailovich moves to your ship.”

“Aye, Sir.” Captain Shepard acknowledged with a smile of her own, “I have some coffee ready for you’d like.”

His smile broadening, the admiral replied, “Captain you just said the magic word...coffee. Let’s go get that cup.”

### ***Shepard***

“Eclipse mercenaries will be joining us on our assault on the police precinct and its kiosk in the Transportation Hub.” Shepard instructed her team after first receiving the plan of attack from her nominal executive officer. Speaking as if one would to children, the redhead relayed her orders. “Grunt and Zero—you’ll be going in first along with an Eclipse YMIR heavy mech. You are to clear out anyone between us and the station. Then we go in and finish the job.”

“By clear out and finish the job, she means kill.” Leng interrupted with a sneer, “No survivors—understood?”

“Understood.” The two semi-drones acknowledged in a flat tone of voice.

The Cerberus assassin then glared at Shepard who returned the stare.

“Don’t worry. I understand too.”

“Good.” Leng nodded once, “We go when Eclipse gives us the signal.”

After the meeting adjourned and she was left alone with her thoughts, she once again found herself in the mental dungeon she was visiting the night before. Approaching a now familiar cell, she was again confronted by the prisoner—herself.

“*We’re not going through with this.*” The prisoner declared forcefully.

“*Any ideas how to we’re supposed to stop it?*” Shepard retorted sarcastically.

“*Yes.*” The prisoner frowned, “*I do have one. But you’re not going to like it.*”

“*All right.*” Shepard replied, “*Let’s hear it.*” After the prisoner had explained her plan, she growled, “*You’re right. I don’t like it.*”

“*Yeah.*” The prisoner agreed sympathetically, “*I don’t much like it either. But we don’t have any choice if we’re going to stop all those cops from being killed.*”

“*I know.*” Shepard nodded her head, “*There’s no other way?*”

“*No.*” The prisoner responded mournfully. “*I’m sorry.*”

“*You know what this means.*” Shepard somberly stated, “*There’s a good chance that we’ll both be gone.*”

The prisoner nodded, *“I know. But we don’t have a choice.”*

Making her decision, Shepard reluctantly agreed. *“We’ll do it.”*

Nodding her head in a gesture of understanding and sympathy, the prisoner managed a sad smile, *“That’s it then. We had a great run—didn’t we?”*

*“Yeah.”* Shepard answered back, returning the prisoner’s wan smile with one of her own. *“That we did. Goodbye me.”*

*“Goodbye me.”*

### ***Nos Astra Business District***

“The main Baria Frontiers office is in here.” Liara declared, pointing at a close-by office building, “Along with the salarian embassy and other businesses. Come on...” she urged, “I want to get to Sekat before Vasir does.”

“Ready when you are.” Cilla replied as she checked her phaser.

“What are we waiting for.” Garrus agreed just before the air was filled by the sound of multiple explosions all going off at the same time. Looking up, the blonde Dutch woman exclaimed, pointing at the damaged structure, now with fire and smoke coming from the doors and windows, the turian vigilante grimly scowled, “Well...Shit.”

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