

Convergences 3: The Explosions Commence

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Convergences 3: The Explosions Commence

by [DavidFalkayn](#)

Summary

While Liara and her friends move against the Shadow Broker, V'lana and Anaya prepare for a fight to the finish with Shepard and her squad backed up by Eclipse mercenaries. At the same time, Miranda and Vega get ready to rescue Oriana and her family from the clutches of Henry Lawson. Lots of stuff happening as we move towards the conclusion of Book One.

Notes

One of the things I wanted to bring out in this story was how important Shepard was to everyone around her. Shepard is a major character influencing events even without her direct presence. Pretty much all of the 'loyalty' missions have gone awry--some worse than others. Zaeed, Samara, Jacob and Kasumi, Thane--all of their loyalty missions ending tragically. Garrus's mission took a dark renegade turn because Shepard was not there to talk him down. Tali's loyalty mission was, I think, bittersweet. While being disowned by her own people, she has found a new home and life with Tovan and the Romulans. Jack and Grunt also paying a high price because of the absence of Shepard.

Another theme I wanted to explore was that the Federation--even with the conflicts and struggles it is currently facing--is one where hope and optimism are once again holding sway. That's one of the reasons for the increased popularity of the TOS uniforms and of 23rd century influences in general--a hearkening back to an era of positivity and progress. As you can imagine, the Systems Alliance and Turian Hierarchy militaries will look down on and sneer at the Starfleet uniforms--particularly the minidresses worn by female Starfleet personnel--and especially the Terran Empire uniforms worn by many--most notably the crew of the Belladonna. I like using symbolism when I write--sometimes it works--sometimes it doesn't. But stuff like uniforms and hairstyles, music, and other little details can reveal a lot once you get away from the pew-pew. :)

I hope everyone enjoys this story and take care!

Act One

Baria Frontiers Office Building

Biting her lips as she and her friends rushed into the building, Liara's tears, mingling with the water from the fire suppression system, trickled down her face. Spotting a salarian moaning in pain as he laid on the floor in his own blood, she and her blonde human/Trill companion rushed up to him as the other member of their party, the turian vigilante, Garrus, also checked on the wounded and dead. Kneeling down next to the wounded salarian, Liara shook her head somberly as she whispered to her friend, "We're too late, Cilla. He just died."

Placing a gentle hand on her asari companion's shoulder as she knelt beside her, Lieutenant Commander Cilla Oudekirk, on examining the body, pointed out in her Dutch-accented voice, "He wasn't killed by the bomb blast."

Overhearing the Starfleet officer's comment, Garrus echoed, "Neither were the others. They were shot with military grade weapons."

"That means that whoever did this is probably still here." Cilla replied as she drew her phaser. Her eyes taking in the carnage, the willowy Dutch woman exclaimed in surprise, "Where are the first responders?"

"Broker's paid them off." Garrus grimly responded, "We're not going to get any help." He then shook his head in sadness at the bodies lying on the floor, "Neither are they." Heaving a mournful sigh the turian placed gentle hands on both women's shoulders, "I'm sorry. There's nothing we can do about the dead and I've got a feeling that we're going to be in for a lot of hard fighting."

"You're right, Garrus." Liara somberly agreed, "Every second we waste puts Sekat in even more danger. "We have to go."

Taking a deep breath, Cilla nodded her head, "Then let's go."

Samantha and Satra

"She's rigged the door with an explosive device." Samantha grimaced. "We open it and we'll trigger the bomb. Ideas love?"

"Hmmm..." the Romulan science officer murmured as she spied an access panel. "Let's see what's behind that panel...shall we?"

"Let's." Samantha grinned as she opened the panel to reveal a tiny object connected to several wires. "Well...well...well...what do we have here?" the dusky-skinned communications specialist drawled in her posh English accent, "Wireless detonator triggered to explode when the door opens."

"I'm no engineer..." Satra mused, "But I think I can disarm it with a low energy gravimetric pulse." Adjusting her tricorder, she pressed a button, a broad grin appearing on her face moments later, "And success. We should be able to enter now, but it wouldn't hurt to do a second scan."

"Good idea." Samantha concurred as she again scanned the door and surrounding area. "All clear. We can go in now."

Entering the room, Satra scanned it with her tricorder. "Asari DNA traces, but otherwise it's clean."

"Vasir's a SPECTRE." Samantha pointed out, "She's a pro. But still..." the communications specialist smirked as she pointed at an OSD laying on the floor next to a spent thermal clip. "Even the best make the simplest of mistakes. She must have been a hurry and it slipped."

"It's corrupted." Satra shook her head, "But I think we can get something useful."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Samantha grinned, "Let's get to work."

Miranda and James

"Whew! That was a tough one." Vega panted as he and his companion downed the last of a company of Eclipse mercs and mechs that had met them the moment they entered the terminal complex. "We're not gonna be able to cut through these pendejos on our own, Miri."

"Agreed." The raven-haired biotic replied as she recharged her phaser. "They were pouring on so much fire that it almost got through both my biotic barrier and my personal shield."

"I'm calling in backup." James declared as he tapped his comm badge and spoke. "Hey, Bau! Can you and Gears give us a hand? That is if the two of you are done doing whatever it is you're doing."

"Will transport to your location immediately." The salarian Spectre replied, appearing moments later with his Romulan teammate. Looking at the carnage, Bau laconically remarked, "Hard fight."

"Yeah." James agreed as he kicked a dead Eclipse trooper with his toe. "The bastards are learning."

"That and/or someone is feeding them information." The astute Spectre observed.

"We do know that Cerberus is getting extra-universal help of some sort." Miranda remarked thoughtfully

“That makes the need for us to open a portal to our universe all the more urgent.” Veril pointed out before asking, “So what’s the situation?”

“Here’s what we’re facing…” James replied, briefing the new arrivals. “We know of at least two…probably three…companies of Eclipse mercs and that we’ve got a leak somewhere in Miranda’s organization.”

“Likely suspects?” Jodrum inquired.

“No one I know would betray me.” Miranda answered back forcefully. “I’ve known Niket for years and Lanteia is completely loyal.”

“The leak has to come from somewhere.” Jodrum politely but firmly pointed out. “It would have to be someone who knows about your sister and her arrival here. Who in your organization possesses that knowledge?”

Lowering her head, Miranda sighed, “Only two: Lanteia and Niket.”

“Sorry, Miri…” Vega sympathetically, yet emphatically, stated, “I know you don’t want to hear this, but it’s gotta be one or the other.”

“I know.” The Australian biotic replied, her shoulders slumped in dejection. “It’s just…I trusted both of them.”

“Who do you think is the most likely suspect?” Veril asked, “Who would gain most from betraying you?”

“That’s just it.” Miranda answered back with a frown, “I can’t think of how either one of them would benefit.”

“Credits talk.” Vega pointed out. “Wave a big enough credit stick, and you can buy almost anyone.”

Nodding his head in agreement, Bau echoed the Alliance Marine’s statement, “It wouldn’t be the first time a trusted individual turned coat for credits. Who would be the most likely?”

Covering her eyes so that no one could see her tears, Miranda replied somberly, “It’s not Lanteia. Her knowledge of the operation ended after our meeting. She knows nothing about where or when we’re supposed to meet up with Oriana and her family. There’s only one person who knows as much about this operation as me—Niket.”

“I’m sorry, Miri.” James said apologetically, “But we have to assume that he’s got your sister and is planning on turning her over to Enyala.”

“I know.” Her face now showing a mixture of anger and determination, the Australian declared in a steely voice, “We have to go now. We don’t have much time.”

V’lana and Anaya

“Gather around and quick gawking at the Romulans.” Anaya ordered, motioning the other officers as well as the newcomers to her desk. “And get Dana and her people at the Transport Hub on screen—now!”

“What’s going on, Detective?” Bellana, one of the sergeants, still stunned by the surprising arrival of Tali and the Romulan security team, asked as she entered the detective’s office.

“A shitstorm is about to land on top of us.” Anaya replied, “And we don’t have much time to get ready for it. I’ll let the Subcommander take over the briefing from here.” Turning to her Romulan companion, the asari police officer smiled, “Your show.”

“Thanks.” V’lana smiled back at her asari friend. “First off…” she addressed her audience, “Expect the mercs we’ll be facing to possess upgraded shields and weapons thanks to the technology being given to them by our enemy. As for Shepard and her team…they’ve received implants and in at least one case—the krogan’s—genetic reengineering and grafting with one or more alien species…again thanks to technology given to the Illusive Man and probably the Shadow Broker by our enemies.”

“Who are these enemies of yours?” Bellana inquired with a skeptical look on her face.

“Bad news.” Anaya interjected, further clarifying without giving away their extra-universal origins, “I’ve seen footage of them and what they can do on V’lana’s ship. They won’t give up. You can’t negotiate with them. It’s either kill them or they kill you or make you into one of them.”

“Anaya’s right.” Tali echoed, “We ran into a krogan on Tuchanka that had been enhanced like the one on Shepard’s team.” After a momentary pause, the quarian engineer added, “We also ran into enhanced humans—thankfully they were all dead when we got there.”

“Tali and Anaya are telling the truth.” V’lana declared, “They seem to be a fusion of multiple technologies: one coming from a cybernetic race we call the Borg for obvious reasons. The other being Reaper tech. They’ve also been genetically augmented and we think they have also been exposed to Thorian spores. Make no mistake, they are dangerous.”

“Will they have energy weapons like you?” Anaya inquired with a concerned look on her face.

“The mercs probably not.” V’lana replied, “It takes some training to use one of our weapons well. You were a fast learner and picked up on using a phaser pistol pretty quick. But the more exotic of our weapons…” she shook her head, “they’ll probably stick with what they’re familiar with. But again, expect the weapons they have to be more powerful.”

“You mentioned that their shields would be stronger.” Sergeant Dana queried, her image appearing on the monitor next to a pair of Romulan security officers and an engineer. “In what ways?”

“They’ll soak up a lot more damage.” V’lana explained, “And, along with their armor, will also probably be more resistant to direct biotic attacks. On the flip side, your biotic abilities will also give you an important advantage. While kinetic attacks such as throws and pulls will be more difficult, your abilities such as...what do you call it?”

“Warp.” Anaya interjected.

“Right.” V’lana nodded her head, “That will prove helpful in disrupting their shields and armor defenses long enough for your weapons or a follow up kinetic biotic attack to have effect.”

“Those of you who are specialists and can reave, channel, or dominate...” Anaya interrupted, “you’re going to be very important. When you see an opening go for it.”

“Also...” Tali interjected, “Expect Shepard’s team’s shields, at least, to adapt to your weapons fire. Those of us using energy weapons will have frequency modulators that can adjust for their adaptations.” Addressing the subcommander, the young quarian added, “Veril and I came up with an innovation to the standard frequency modulator. We’ve adjusted it where it will randomly shift to a different frequency either on adaptation or at random intervals during a sustained fight.”

Nodding her head as a slight smile appeared on her face, V’lana replied in praise, “Nicely done, Tali. I’ll see to it that you and Veril receive full recognition for it when we get back home.”

“Okay.” Bellana inquired, “So...what do the rest of us do? Those of us without your energy weapons.”

“The best advice I can give you.” Tali replied, “Is to continually change out your ammo mods and do it in a random manner. Hopefully that will buy you some time to penetrate their shields.”

“Tali...” V’lana requested, speaking to her engineer, “I’m going to need you to set up shield and medical regenerators and a pair of phaser turrets here...” she pointed at strategic locations on a map of the police station and its immediate exterior, “and here. Also, lay down chroniton mines in front of the entrances. They won’t stop the assault...” the subcommander explained to her audience, “but they will slow it down and we want them...especially the krogan...exposed and at a distance for as long as possible. Dana?” She said to the asari police officer on the monitor, “The Romulan engineer on your team will do the same with your kiosk. I don’t expect them to come at you in the force that they’re going to come at us, but you’re most likely going to get a great deal of heat and you’re going to need every advantage you can get.”

“We’ll give them a fight to remember.” The sergeant responded.

“If they breach the perimeter and get into either the station or your kiosk, Dana...” Anaya grimly warned, “Then it’s lights out for us. Got it? Good. We don’t have much time. Let’s get to work. I want our guests to get a very hot reception when they arrive.”

Office Cleaning Courtesy of the Bridge and Coffee Club

“The fire suppression systems must have gotten knocked out in this section.” Garrus growled as a raging fire blocked the path.

Spotting a side panel, Liara shouted back, “I’ve got it!” Opening the panel, she at once spotted the problem and, after making a quick repair, restored function to the broken system. As the sprinkler systems came to life, they rained water down on the flames, creating a thick cloud of smoke as the asari information broker pointed to the stairwell on the other side of a large area dominated by office cubicles., “We have to hurry.”

Spotting movement in one of the office cubicles, Cilla called out a warning as she tossed a photon grenade, “Cover!”

Hearing her friend’s warning shout, Liara dived for cover just as a spray of mass effect projectiles flew by, embedding themselves in the wall. Taking out her phaser, she returned fire as Garrus called out triumphantly, “Scoped and dropped.”

Cilla, spotting the small orb flying through the air towards their position had just enough time to shout out a warning as she dived for cover. “Grenade!” Momentarily blinded and stunned by a bright flash and sonic blast, the willowy Dutch woman didn’t see or hear the clinking sound closing on her position.

“Stay down, Cilla!” Liara called out in alarm, “YMIR approaching!”

“Do something about it!” Cilla shouted back.

“On it!” Garrus responded as he and Liara both opened fire, concentrating on the giant mech’s vulnerable points as the walking tank pumped out rockets and rapid fire mass accelerator projectiles until a lucky shot by the turian sniper managed to pierce its power core.

“It’s gonna blow!”

“Cover!”

“*Schitjen!*” Cilla shouted as the mech exploded, metallic fragments shredding her cover, but thankfully for the blonde Starfleet officer, not penetrating her shield or armor.

“Are you all right?” Liara, her face etched in concern, rushed to the side of her friend as Garrus finished off the last of their opposition.

“I’m fine.” Cilla responded, giving her asari companion a slight grin, her grey eyes showing more than a little warmth as they looked into those of her asari companion’s for several moments before the pair reluctantly broke their gaze at the sound of a clearing throat.

“Sorry...”

“Huh...” Liara, the spell between her and her willowy companion broken by Garrus’s voice, quickly turned towards her old turian friend.

“We better move.” Garrus urged, “Time’s wasting.”

Nodding her head in agreement, Cilla motioned towards a staircase. “The elevators are out. We’ll have to take the stairs.”

“We need to hurry.” Liara exclaimed as she took the lead, “Sekat might already be hurt or...”

“We’ll get there, *lieveling*.” Cilla replied, her final word an inaudible whisper.

Checking the charge to his rifle, Garrus declared confidently, “Time to kick ass.”

Family Gatherings—Miranda and James

Taking a deep breath, Miranda spoke to her gathered companions, “Before we continue...there’s something I need to explain. You know that Oriana is my genetic twin...”

“Yeah.” Vega responded, “You told us that at the briefing before we started this caper. Doesn’t matter whether she was born in a test tube or the old fashioned way. She’s still your sister.”

“She’s family.” Veril declared, echoing the Alliance marine’s words. “That is all that’s important.”

“What I didn’t tell you...” Miranda confessed, lowering her head, “Was that my father grew her to replace me. To him I was nothing more than a failed experiment to be discarded. I didn’t want the same thing to happen to Oriana if he’d have come to the same conclusion about her.”

“That doesn’t change a damned thing, Miri.” James declared, “It just means your father’s an even bigger asshole than we thought.”

“Correct.” Jodrum agreed, “This is but one more reason why your sister must be rescued.”

“We’re wasting time, Miranda.” Veril exclaimed, “Let’s get your sister.”

Unraveling Secrets—Satra and Samantha

“I think we’ve finally cracked it.” Samantha exclaimed triumphantly to her Romulan lover. “Take a look.”

“It’s broken up.” Satra remarked as she studied the distorted image on her screen. “It looks like Vasir is leaving a hotel room.”

“Hotel Azure.” Samantha noted, pointing to what appeared to be an advertisement that rezzed in and out.

“Okay...we know she was there...” The Romulan science officer commented, “But how does that help us?”

“She’s probably using it as a contact point.” Samantha postulated, tapping her cheek with her finger. “If we can determine what room...”

“Got it!” Satra grinned as she pointed to a something written in asari.

“My asari’s rusty but let me take a look.” Samantha requested. Squinting her eyes as she peered at the almost unrecognizable lettering, the human communications specialist slowly managed to make out the lettering. “Suite Exotica.” She smiled, “We should let Liara and Cilla know.”

“Good idea.” Satra replied as she tapped her comm badge. “Cilla?”

“Tell me you’ve got something.” The Trill/Dutch hybrid tactical officer responded.

“We’ve got something.” Samantha replied, explaining what she and her partner had uncovered.

“That’s good news.” Cilla answered back, further requesting. “*See if you can get Centurion Kev to loan you Solana and one other security officer and beam down to that location.*”

“Acknowledged.” Satra replied before again tapping her comm badge. “Centurion?”

“Go ahead, Satra.”

After the pair had relayed their findings and the second officer’s request to their executive officer, they heard a response.

“*Very well. You have clearance. Solana and Hivan will meet you in the transporter room. Hurry up and finish your business. I am awaiting word from the Subcommander. Make this quick. I will need my Chief Science Officer, Communications Specialist, and Security Chief when we go after that Cerberus frigate.*”

“Understood, Sir.” Satra replied, lowering her voice, “And...thank you, Tovan.”

“*Don't mention it.*” The executive officer responded in an equally low tone. “*Take care of yourselves down there.*”

Act 2

Cleaning out the Office—Liara, Cilla, and Garrus

“Photon grenade outgoing!” Cilla shouted, popping up from cover long enough to toss her grenade, the answering fire from the mercenaries impacting hard on her shields as she dove back to cover.

On seeing her companion wincing, a scowl appeared on Liara’s face as she cast a singularity, catching the mercenary fireteam in its field. “Eat this!” The furious asari yelled, launching a warp into the singularity setting off a massive explosion that immediately killed those caught in the field and stunned the rest of the mercenaries near it.

“Scratch one engineer.” Garrus dryly commented as he brought down a salarian with his sniper rifle.

“Heavy weapons at three o’clock.” Cilla warned as she fired her phaser, tagging the rocket launching mercenary just as he was pulling the trigger to his weapon, throwing him just enough off his aim to miss her asari friend. “Are you okay, Liara?” The Dutch officer called out, her normally icy voice edged with concern.

“I’m fine.” Liara shouted back, no one hearing her inaudible murmur, “*Siha.*” Gesturing at a staircase, she shouted, raising her voice once again, “Hurry. We don’t have much time!”

Checking in to the Hotel: Satra and Samantha

“I hear the rooms here even have Volus porn.” A human man, feeling very good after several shots of tequila and a Hallex, joked with the asari woman walking arm in arm with him down the hallway to their room.

“Volus porn?” The asari woman giggled, her speech slurred thanks to one goblet too many of asari mead and also a Hallex pill, “I knew you were kinky, Frederick, but I if I’d have known that I’d have invited Dipney to join us for a threesome.”

“No thanks. I’m not that kinky.” Frederick laughed as four pillars of green light appeared in front of the inebriated couple.

“What the...” the asari woman gulped as the pillars of light materialized into four humanoid forms. Panicking the asari grabbed her human companion by the arm and, pulling him along with her, screamed at the top of her lungs as the couple ran away as fast as they could, waving their arms in panic.

Sniffing under her arm, Samantha quipped to her lover, “We showered this morning...didn’t we?”

“Yes.” Satra replied, as she repeated her lover’s gesture. Watching as the drunken couple fled, the Romulan scientist let out a breath of air. “We better get what we came for before they come back with the authorities.”

“Good idea.” Solana interjected, “The sooner we get done here the better. Now...where is Vasir’s room?”

“This way.” Samantha replied, pointing to a door on the other side of the corridor. “I recognized the lettering.”

“I’m not scanning anyone in the room.” Satra declared as the party drew closer.

“Basic lock.” Samantha announced, “But I better go ahead and check for booby traps just to be safe.” After carrying out several very careful scans, the communications specialist let out a breath of air. “She put in a sensor to notify her if the lock was broken, but I rigged a bypass where it would appear to be routine. We can enter now.”

Entering the hotel room, Solana quipped as they passed a giant wall monitor displaying an erotic movie, “Is that an elcor and a quarian? How...and more important...Why?”

“I don’t think I want to know.” Satra responded as she activated a computer terminal on the desk.

“Let’s see what’s on the communications and security logs.” Samantha urged as she joined her lover and began typing on the haptic interface. As a holographic image appeared, the pair watched while Solana and Hivan maintained watch. “It records a meeting between Vasir, Enyala, and a man who looks like Kai Leng. There’s someone else there too...in the background.”

“Shepard.” Satra noted pointing at her. “See how she’s standing somewhat apart from Leng and the others?”

“Tensions there, maybe?” Samantha hypothesized, her lover nodding in agreement.

“I think so.” The Romulan science officer replied. “Going by the expression on her face, she appears to be upset.”

“She’s not in control here.” Samantha declared as she pointed at the asari wearing plain armor. “Leng’s the one speaking with Enyala and Vasir. There must have been a power struggle and Leng won.”

“You’re right.” Satra agreed as she zoomed in on the redhead’s facial expression. “But there’s something else going on too...notice how her hand went to her forehead? It seems as if she’s rejecting her implant. If that happens and she’s not placed in immediate stasis—it could kill her.”

“We should pass that on to the subcommander and Liara.” Samantha observed, receiving in return an affirming reply from her lover. Then,

moments later, Satra uttered an especially vile Romulan obscenity.

“*Kilhe'mnhe.*”

“Damn, Satra.” Solana quipped, “I think I’ve heard you use that word maybe five times since I’ve known you.”

“I was about to say the human equivalent, but Satra beat me to the punch.” Samantha interjected with a note of alarm in her voice. “We’ve got to get this info to both the Subcommander and Liara. It describes the plan of attack on Anaya’s headquarters. It also has a possible location for the Shadow Broker’s base of operation. It’s a set of partial coordinates. Problem is...the last sequence is missing.”

“It’s probably keyed to Vasir’s biometrics.” Solana observed, “They’re going to have to get that directly from her.”

“I doubt she’s going to just hand it over to them.” Samantha noted wryly.

“Probably not.” Solana joked back, “Transmit what you have to the subcommander and Liara as soon as you can so that we can get out of here and go after that frigate.”

“Time to see whether the tinkering Tali and Veril made to the tricorders and omnitools works or not.” Samantha said as she activated her omnitool and began synching it with her tricorder while Satra contacted both V’lana and Liara to inform them of the coming transmission.

“We’re going to need a minute or so for the synching and then transmitting.” Samantha declared, receiving in response an alarm from the Romulan security chief.

“Better hurry. We’ve got company. A team of mercenaries. They’re not wearing Eclipse colors, so they probably belong to the other player.” Solana announced as she and her teammate readied their plasma rifles.

“We must have triggered an alarm.” Satra remarked dourly. “How much time, Sam?”

“A minute...maybe two.” The communications specialist responded as she and her lover furiously went to work.

“We’ll buy you the time.” Solana declared as she took aim and fired, “But do us a favor—hurry.”

“We’re going as fast as we can!” Satra shouted, trying to make herself heard over the sound of mass effect projectiles and plasma weapons fire.

“Their shielding’s tougher than last time.” Solana commented, “Concentrate on the extremities, Hivan—that seems to be where they’re weakest.” Shielding her eyes from the bright light, the Romulan security chief further cautioned, “And watch out for those fucking grenades!”

“Almost there!” Samantha hollered, “Give us another thirty seconds.”

“You’ve got fifteen!” Solana shouted back.

“Got it!” Satra crowed triumphantly, “Transmitting now!”

“Beam us up!” Solana cried out, the green light of the Romulan transporter filling the room just as a flashbang grenade went off.

Rushing into the room, the leader of the mercenary team looked about in surprise. “Where the hell are they?” He growled as he jerked his thumb at his team. “They didn’t just disappear. They have to be hiding somewhere. Search the area. I want them found and/or killed.”

V’lana and Anaya

After receiving Satra’s transmission and being informed of their successful return to the ship, V’lana commanded her executive officer. “You’ve got clearance to take that Cerberus ship, Big Brother. Try to take it intact. But if you have to...”

“*Understood, Little Sister. Leaving orbit now.*”

“Good hunting.” The subcommander then called out to the quarian engineer currently setting up the defensive turrets, “Tali? Looks like I owe you and Veril dinner and drinks at the Raptor’s Nest when we get back to the ship. Good job on synching omnitool and tricorder tech.”

“I owe you too.” Anaya concurred, “Whatever you two want—you’ve got.”

“We’ll take you up on that when we get back to the ship.” Tali laughed, “But right now...”

“Yeah.” V’lana agreed, “Get those defenses set up.” Turning to the asari detective standing next to her, she stated as she again played the transmission she had just received, “Our intel was right. Shepard’s not calling the shots anymore.”

“Right.” Anaya nodded, “Not so sure that’s a good thing though. Leng’s a psycho.” Taking a deep breath, she lowered her voice so that only the subcommander could hear, “My bosses sent me a termination notice—effective immediately. Dana knows and so do a couple other officers here. I told them I wouldn’t blame them if they decided to sit this one out, but they said...” her eyes watering as she spoke, “They said they weren’t leaving me.” Taking a deep breath, she concluded, “But the others...they haven’t found out yet. I can’t ask them to stay here and probably die without telling them the truth. I have to give them the option to leave.”

“You’re right.” V’lana replied as she took her asari friend’s hands in hers. “Go ahead. I and my people are with you all the way. And when we’re done and the smoke has cleared and we clean up the mess...” the lovely Romulan stammered, “there’s a place for you on the *Gallena*—if you want it.”

“You serious?” Anaya exclaimed, a lump coming to her throat. “What will I be doing? I...I don’t want to be just a refugee or a passenger. I want to contribute in some way or other. I’m a cop—always have been. But I’ll do anything—even clean the toilets if that’s what you need.”

Smiling, V’lana replied, “You’ll fit right into Solana’s department. She’s been looking for someone who’s good at old-fashioned police work. Most of her people are soldiers and we don’t have enough Starfleet security and the ones we do have are young. She...and I...could use an experienced cop to show them the ropes. Want the job?”

“We get out of this...” Anaya joked, “I’m going to kiss you.” Taking a deep breath, her gaze fell on her officers, “I still gotta talk to them... give them the option to walk.”

Nodding her head, V’lana responded, “Go ahead, I need to check and see how Tali’s doing anyway.”

“Thanks.” Taking another deep breath, the asari detective called her officers to her. “Listen up. I just got word from headquarters that I’ve been fired and that they’re not going to do anything to help me or anyone else still here when Shepard and her goons hit. I’m staying and fighting. I’ve put too much of my time, sweat, and blood here to just walk away. But you don’t have to stick around if you don’t want to. I can’t and won’t force you to stay and I won’t blame you in the least if you decide to walk. Some of you have bondmates and children. You should go back to them. Go...I won’t think any the less of you. That’s all I wanted to say...except...” her voice hitched, “...except...that I’m glad I served with each and every one of you.”

“I’m sorry, Anaya...” One of the officers sobbed, “But I’ve got a bondmate...two children...”

Smiling at her officer, the detective responded, “Then go to them Crysi. They need their mother.”

As Crysi and a few other officers walked away, Sergeant Bellessa declared, speaking for the officers remaining, “Where do you want us, Anaya.”

Her lips turning up in a smile as she brushed away her tears, Anaya answered back, “Take a few minutes to talk to anyone you need to, and after you’re done, report back here. Then we’re going to prepare a warm welcome for Shepard and her friends.”

Tidying up the Office—Liana, Cilla, and Garrus

“Landing party, this is the Gallena, come in.”

“Oudekirk here.” Cilla promptly replied.

“We’ve received orders to take the Cerberus frigate.” Tovan announced, *“I’m leaving a runabout and pilot in orbit should you need it before we return. Did you successfully receive Satra and Traynor’s transmission?”*

“We did and are about to examine it.” The Dutch tactical officer replied, “Did they get back to the ship safely?”

“They did.” The Romulan centurion confirmed, *“I’m sorry they can’t join you on the surface, but I’m going to need them when we take the Normandy.”*

“Understood, Sir. Please tell them we’ll see them at the usual time.”

“Will do. Gallena out.”

“Sekat must have gotten access to that last sequence.” Liana concluded as she and the others examined the information they had just received. “That’s why Vasir is after him.”

“But why blow up an entire building?” Cilla inquired, “That’s like using a tri-cobalt bomb to take out an anthill.”

“Maybe there’s something else here that Sekat had found out and she got wind of it?” Garrus speculated.

“Maybe.” Liana conceded as she checked her weapon. “We have to move. We can’t let Vasir get away. If she does...”

“We’re fucked.” Cilla concluded, “So what are we waiting for?”

“Incoming! Eyes and ears!” Garrus shouted a warning as one of the mercenaries’ flash grenades landed close to their position.

“Try this one out!” Cilla yelled at the mercs, returning the favor with a photon grenade.

“Garrus!” Liana called out to her turian friend as her singularity caught a mercenary fireteam in its field. “Noveria!”

“Right.” The former C-Sec officer grinned, firing a shot from his plasma rifle into the singularity, immediately setting it off in a biotic discharge that wiped out both mercenaries and their cover. “Never gets old.” The turian grinned as the trio, leaving their cover, moved through the rows of office cubicles to the other side of the room.

“Over there...” Liana exclaimed, pointing to a corner office with an expensive desk, “I think that might belong to the company vice-president. We should check his terminal.”

“Good idea.” Cilla agreed, “There might be something valuable on it.”

“That or Elcor porn.” Garrus chuckled as the three companions entered the office and Liara, activating her tricorder, scanned the terminal.

“Hmmm...” Liara mused as she read the information displayed on the terminal. “These log entries all pertain to the Farinata system. Reports of strange phenomena about two years ago.”

“Roughly when we arrived in your universe.” Cilla observed as she tapped the desk with her fingers.

“Correct.” Liara nodded and then continued reading. “They were dismissed at first as being sensory illusions or false reports until ships started vanishing. That was approximately a year ago. Baria sent a scout ship to investigate, but it disappeared as well. However...before it vanished...it managed to transmit a few images.”

As the asari information broker displayed the images, Cilla pointed to one of the images. “That’s a *D’Deridex*. I’d say Tal’ Shiar.”

Nodding her head in agreement, Liara replied, “It would seem so. That other vessel though...” she pointed at an unusual looking vessel, “I don’t recognize it.”

“I think it’s Elachi.” Cilla conjectured. “This would seem to bear out what’s been happening recently in the Farinata System—the disappearance of that merchant ship a few months ago... disappearances of ships that were blamed on pirates or natural phenomena and the other events.”

“Like portals opening and closing.” Liara concluded as she downloaded the information on the terminal. “We should get this to Admiral Anderson when we rendezvous at the Farinata system. But first...we need to track down Vasir...find Sekat and get his information...locate the Shadow Broker...and rescue Feron.”

Garrus interjecting, pointed to the stairs. “The roof. She’s probably got a car there. We can catch her if we haul ass.”

“Then haul ass!” Liara shouted as the trio bounded up the stairs, exiting on to the roof just in time to see their quarry kneeling down next to a salarian, searching the body. Not even pausing to catch her breath, the asari archaeologist shouted “Bitch” at the top of her lungs as she launched a biotic throw, taking the Spectre by surprise, staggering her as she barely softened the blow with a biotic shield.

Reeling from the blow, Tela Vasir recovered, taunting her opponent, “You’re too late, T’Soni.”

“*Nee*.” Cilla responded, firing her phaser at the gloating Spectre, the energy beam piercing the asari’s shields and armor at a weak point, as evinced by blue blood trickling from the wound.

With a scream equal parts rage and pain, Vasir launched a powerful biotic throw sending Cilla crashing over the side of the building plummeting with a scream.

“Me or your comrade—your choice.” Vasir jeered as she limped to her car.

Without a moment’s thought or hesitation, Liara leaped into action, quickly covering the distance to the side of the building where her friend had fallen. Diving after her, Liara caught herself and the Dutch woman with her biotics, slowing their descent just enough to hit the ground with a jarring thud.

“*Siha!*” Liara screamed as she cradled the unconscious Starfleet officer’s head in her lap.

Her eyes fluttering on hearing Liara’s cry of anguish, Cilla managed to croak out in a raspy voice a single word before again falling into unconsciousness, “*Lieveling*”

Rushing to his friends, Garrus quickly took out a medical tricorder and scanned the Dutch woman. “She’ll be alright, Liara.” The turian said, speaking in a soft voice to his old friend. “She has a mild head injury, but it’s nothing the medkit can’t take care of. She’ll be fit for duty soon.” Handing over an OSD to his teammate, he suggested, “You might want to take a look at this. I think it might be a copy of the disk Vasir swiped. I found it by accident lying on the rooftop. Looks like we took her by surprise before she could properly search for any duplicates. Good thing Sekat made a copy as well. Check it out...” He urged, “I’ll take care of Cilla while you look it over.”

Making a pillow out of her carry bag, Liara gently set her companion’s head down on it before bringing a finger to her lips and placing it on the blonde woman’s forehead. Rising to her feet, she took the disc and scanned its contents into her tricorder. As she read the information that had cost her contact his life, the asari information broker’s heart raced, “It has it.” She exclaimed in a hushed voice, “The coordinates to the Shadow Broker’s ship.”

“*Wat?*” Cilla gasped in an almost inaudible whisper.

“How are you feeling, *siha?*” Liara asked, kneeling beside the Dutch/Trill woman, grasping her by the hand.

“Better.” Cilla responded as she weakly squeezed her asari companion’s hand. “Did you find it?”

“Yes.” Liara answered back, giving Garrus a questioning glance.

“She’ll be fine and ready to kick ass when we take on the Broker.”

Her heart lightening, Liara’s lips turned up in a smile as she looked down at the blonde woman. “We’re beaming up to the runabout and then you’re getting a complete examination before we get to the Shadow Broker’s ship. Then...once we get there...we kick his ass—hard. After that...” she said in a soft, shy voice, “...once we get back to the *Gallena*, I think that maybe you and I should talk...if you want to...”

“Sounds good to me, *lieveling*.” Cilla smiled back. “Let’s go.”

Tapping her comm badge, Liara called out, “T”Soni to *Telara*...beam us up.”

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